Lived Experiences of Indian International Students: Migration, Acculturation, and Resilience

Suguna Mukthyala

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
Lived Experiences of Indian International Students:
Migration, Acculturation, and Resilience

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education Department
School of Education
Duquesne University

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

By
Suguna Mukthyala

May 2013
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Presented by:
Suguna Mukthyala, M.A.

November 26, 2012

LIVED EXPERIENCEES OF INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:
MIGRATION, ACCULTURATION, AND RESILIENCE

Approved by:

_____________________________________________, Chair
William Casile, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Counselor Education Program
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Duquesne University

_____________________________________________, Member
Jocelyn Gregoire, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Counselor Education Program
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Duquesne University

_____________________________________________, Member
Maura Krushinski, Ed.D.

_____________________________________________, Member
Lori Cangilla, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: MIGRATION, ACCULTURATION, AND RESILIENCE

By

Suguna Mukthyala

May 2013

Dissertation supervised by Dr. William Casile

The student demographics in American universities have been changing in recent years and the result is a rapidly increasing enrollment of international students. In particular, the Indian international student population has grown to be the second largest, with over 100,000 students enrolling at post-secondary educational institutions across the nation each year (Institute of International Education, 2010). However, research on the effects of migration on international students is relatively devoid of critical explorations on the resilient responses by Indian international students to the effects of acculturation.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of eight Indian international graduate students at a mid-western American university. The participants’ descriptions of their psychological, physical and behavioral adjustments in the United States provided rich information. The data was analyzed using the theoretical
underpinnings of the research that included Van Manen’s (1997) lived existentials, ecological factors of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and protective and risk factors associated with resilience (Harvey, 2007; Luther, 2006). Several primary and sub-themes emerged from a thick analysis of the data, which proved to shed light on the lived experiences of the participants.

Participants in the study typically faced challenges in adjusting to cultural differences, building relationships with domestic students, and adapting to academic expectations. However, protective factors including their positive attitudes and supportive relationships with their families, professors, and other Indian students helped them in responding resiliently to challenges related to cross-cultural transitions. In addition, hypotheses were generated and implications for education, research, and practice of counseling were discussed.

*Keywords:* Indian international students, acculturation, resilience, phenomenology, cross-cultural experience.
DEDICATION

For my father, M.N. Paul, and my mother, M. Sakkubai
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. William Casile. I have learned a lot from his expertise and honesty in research and teaching. His guidance and helpful critique is unsurpassed. I would also like to thank Dr. Maura Krushinski for serving on my committee. Not only was her input on the research invaluable; personally, I flourished with her encouragement and belief in me. I especially want to thank Dr. Lori Cangilla for being a constant support during the course of my writing process. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Jocelyn Gregoire for serving on the committee and generously sharing his knowledge and wisdom.

The Indian international students who participated in this research deserve the highest praise for their contributions. Without their unselfish willingness to share their experiences, this research would not have been possible.

I thank Shawn Klocek, who provided valuable and swift feedback on my writing style, which immensely contributed to the clarity of my work.

A special thank you to all my friends. Your love, support, and enthusiasm for life are what kept me going. You have always helped me put things in perspective.

Words fall short as I begin to thank my parents. Were it not for my mother and father, I would not be where I am. Their unwavering love, encouragement, and support continue to carry me through life. I also offer my gratitude to my dear brother and sister.

Last but not the least: Abdul, you have waited and done everything you could to support and encourage me, and for that — thank you. Most importantly, I am excited that we now have more time to discover our life together.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .............................................................................. vii

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM ............................................................................. 1

Background .................................................................................................... 5

Statement of the Problem ............................................................................. 7

Purpose of the Study .................................................................................... 9

Research Questions ...................................................................................... 9

Theoretical Framework for the Study ............................................................ 10

Hermeneutic Phenomenology .................................................................... 10

The Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development .................................. 12

Resilience in the Context of Migration ......................................................... 13

Rationale for the Study ............................................................................... 14

Significance of the Study ............................................................................ 15

Delimitations of the Study ......................................................................... 16

Definitions of Terms ................................................................................... 18

Summary ..................................................................................................... 18

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .................................................. 19

Immigration: A Life Changing Experience ................................................. 19

Migration and International Students ......................................................... 20

Impact of Globalization on International Students ..................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Cross-Cultural Transition Issues</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Differences in Acculturation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Proficiency</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation and Mental Health of International Students</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Immigrants in America</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian International Students in America</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Mental Health Services</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Counselors and Educators</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic Phenomenology</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience in the Context of Migration</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective and Risk Factors of Resilience</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY** ............................................ 53

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation of Data</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures ................................................................. 67
Ethical Considerations .................................................. 69
Chapter Summary ........................................................ 71

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS .................................................. 73
Recruitment of Participants .............................................. 73
Demographic Details .................................................... 74
Collection and Organization of the Data ......................... 77
  Collecting the Data .................................................. 77
  Organizing the Data ................................................ 78
Interviews ................................................................. 80
  Interview with Ajay ................................................ 80
  Interview with Rohan .............................................. 88
  Interview with Raj .................................................. 98
  Interview with Ganesh ............................................ 104
  Interview with Shilpa ............................................. 110
  Interview with Myna .............................................. 118
  Interview with Sachin ........................................... 124
  Interview with Suma ............................................. 133
Cross-case Analysis .................................................. 140
Summary ............................................................... 149

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION ............................................. 150
Themes ....................................................................... 151
  Lifeworld Existentials ........................................... 152
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Factors</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors of Resilience</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Factors of Resilience</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Identified Themes</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications from this Study</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Students Services</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Interview Protocol</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Informed Consent Document</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Letter Requesting Permission to Recruit Participants</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Ajay’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Rohan’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Raj’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Ganesh’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Shilpa’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Myna’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Sachin’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Themes Reflecting Suma’s Acculturation Experiences</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Categories and themes Reflecting Participants’ Experiences of the Acculturation Process</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Relationships between Research Questions and Themes</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I: The Problem

With more than one million new immigrants arriving each year, the U.S. is experiencing the largest volume of immigration in its history. It also faces the greatest diversity of color, class, and culture (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), as its immigrant population comes from 190 countries across the world (Suárez-Orezco, M & Sattin, 2007). Many of these migrants are international students; U.S. colleges and universities are experiencing an all-time surge in international student enrollments (Institute of International Education, 2010), with approximately 600,000 international students enrolling each year. Indians make up the second largest international student population in America, with over 105,000 students enrolled during the year 2010 (Institute of International Education, 2010). With an increasing number of Asian Indian students migrating to the USA, there is a greater need for understanding the acculturation process of these students (Kushner, 2010; Wang et al., 2012).

High enrollment of international students comes with some benefits as well as responsibilities for the host country. The benefits include billions of dollars in revenue each year towards economic contribution (Institute of International Education, 2010); in addition, international students provide American students with multicultural interaction. In the globalized world, multicultural interaction is an invaluable experience. The responsibilities include not only providing a safe but also a worthwhile educational experience for the international students. Most importantly, the overall experiences by immigrants in the host country affect the international relations between the nations involved (Chow & Marcus, 2007).
Immigration is often understood as a prolonged period of psychological and behavioral disorganization during which time the immigrant strives for reorganization (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). For migrants, leaving behind a familiar way of life for a better life in a foreign country leads to several adjustments. These psychological and behavioral adjustment processes are known collectively as acculturation. Acculturation typically involves awareness and development of one’s sense of self in the intercultural context (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). In addition, the intensity of the acculturation process depends on migrants’ management of multiple stressors related to familial, social, educational, financial, and cultural areas (Yafen, 2010).

Even though there are stark differences between Asian and American cultures, many migrants to a certain extent are “Americanized” owing to the wide reach of mass media such as music, popular movies, television and internet (Rumbaut, 1999). The extent to which immigrants adopt American language, music, dress, and engage in leisure time activities as their own is also dependent on socioeconomic backgrounds, levels of exposure to American culture, and the circumstances behind immigration. In addition, many studies have also found that Asian immigrants face discrimination due to some distinct physical features and cultural beliefs such as religion, family values and/or food (Hwang & Goto, 2009; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

India is the second most populous country in the world and also the second largest contributor of international students to the United States. Although, it occupies only 2.4% of the world’s land area, India supports over 15% of the world’s population. Historically, India has been subject to various invasions by the Mughals, the Persians, the Sultans and the British (InterKnowledge Corp, 2005). However, Indians have modified these
influences to produce a rich racial and cultural synthesis. Around 80% of India’s population is Hindu, and the rest of the population includes Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. Religion, caste, and language are intricately intertwined into the social, cultural, and political organization of the country. The Hindu caste system is a social stratification that divides the society into four major categories: priests (Brahmin), warriors (Kshatriya), traders or artisans (Vaishya) and farmers/laborers (Shudra) (InterKnowledge Corp, 2005). Although discrimination based on caste is officially illegal, it remains prevalent especially in rural areas of the country. Thus, caste, religion, and region of the Indian international students, apart from the family and personality characteristics, can have an impact on their acculturation process.

There is little research examining how Asian Indian students are similar to or are different from other international student groups. One of the general characteristics of the Indian international students is that a large percentage of these students come from larger cities and towns (Terrazas, 2008). About half of the Indian students come to the United States for graduate studies; perhaps, this is a trend encouraged by scholarships and financial aid availability for graduate studies (Institute of International Education, 2005). Many of these students come from middle- and upper middle-class families. Due to these and other differences, each Indian international student faces a unique set of challenges after migration. Some of the queries this study hopes to answer are: How did people decide to migrate to the United States? What kind of preconceived ideas did they have of their lives in the host country before they migrated? Have any of the preconceived ideas of life in America changed? How have their relationships changed after migration? How do they view and experience themselves and others? What new identities have they
formed? How have they adapted to a new cultural context? What type of resources have they utilized during the cultural transition?

An in-depth exploration of the Indian international student’s views of their acculturation process largely remains unexplored. This study focused on the individual experiences of Indian international graduate students attending American universities and explored the personal meanings attributed to the acculturation process by these students. The research also delved into the social, cultural and personal aspects that proved helpful or unhelpful during their acculturation processes. Furthermore, it is of great value to the field of counseling psychology to understand how international students perceived and exercised resilience — that is, how they embody flexibility and creativity in adjusting behaviorally and cognitively to the new culture. Additionally, the exploration not only gives voice to the Indian international students attending American universities but also helps find ways to better prepare future generations of Indian international students for acculturation.

This study attempted to identify the unique strengths, skills, knowledge, and resources of Indian international students that come into play in their process of acculturation. In addition, this study examined the psychological processes of Indian international students’ experience of migration from a resilience framework. Parr, Bradley, and Bingi (1992) observed some positive traits such as determination, gratitude, happiness, confidence, and cautiousness that help international students adapt to the new environment. However, research focusing specifically on Indian international students’ perceptions of acculturation is lacking. Ideally, the information gained by examining the experiences of Indian international students helped in understanding the phenomenon of
acculturation from the perspective of these students. The results helped those who work with Indian international students have insight into their lived realities. Additionally, results helped in understanding both the internal (psychological) and external (socio-cultural) factors that facilitate or impede acculturation.

**Background**

Many studies suggest that acculturative stress is a result of adaptation to a new culture (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Mori, 2000; Choi, 1997). The many challenges faced by international students that exacerbate acculturative stress include: homesickness, financial problems, racial discrimination, and adjustment to new educational and socio-cultural systems (Church, 1982; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Hwang & Goto, 2009). Studies have also shown that Asian students report more acculturative stress than their European counterparts because of a greater cultural gap between Asian and American cultures (Guclu, 1993; Yang & Clum, 1994). On the other hand, Rumbaut (1999) argues that many migrants these days are “Americanized” to varying degrees before they come to the U.S. due to easy access to popular movies, music, and internet. Young people from Asian cultures dress, eat and engage in leisure activities similar to the Americans they see in media; however, acculturation is still experienced by those who choose to migrate. Although many young Asian migrants experience American culture through media and are to some degree “Americanized” beforehand, a direct experience of adjusting to educational and socio-cultural systems inevitably leads to acculturative stress (Rumbaut 1999).

The adjustment and adaptation process of immigrants has been studied in sociology, anthropology, and to some extent in psychology. The literature on
acculturation contains a number of theories postulated by various theorists such as Berry (1989) and Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal (1997). These theories have become recognized within the acculturation literature; however, individuals who experience acculturation may not conceptualize their experiences in the same way it has been described in these theories. Researchers such as Suárez-Orezco, & Suárez-Orezco, (2002) challenge the Euro-centric models of acculturation and argue that only white immigrants have the possibility of being fully assimilated into the mainstream white American culture. These theorists credit the emerging evidence that immigrants who look physically different from the majority population in the host country find it more difficult to assimilate or are kept away by racism and discrimination (Berry, 1989).

While there is a growing amount of research being conducted on the effects of immigration and acculturation on the psychology and the physiology of immigrants, there remains little pertaining to how Asian Indian international students cope with the experience of acculturation. Several studies have examined the experiences, challenges, and rewards of immigration as a general phenomenon (Mori, 2000; Sandhu, and Asrabadi, 1994; Wang et al., 2011; Suarez-Orozco, & Saurez-Orozco, 2001). However, many of the studies have not taken into consideration the subjective or qualitative differences in individual experiences and perceptions of the acculturation process. Individuals who actually experienced acculturation will be able to provide pertinent information about this process without the potential for bias that might be present in pre-designing surveys or questionnaires. Consequently, their experiences are not compartmentalized into categories that have been developed by theorists who may or may not have experienced acculturation or who may have a Euro-centric bias. Thus,
inquiry in this research was concerned with the exploration of how Indian international graduate students attending American universities experience the phenomenon of acculturation in their everyday lives.

**Statement of the Problem**

Acculturation is an adjustment and assimilation process that occurs as a result of the interplay between the immigrants’ emotional attitudes and reactions and the attitudes of the people who make up the new environments (Berry, 2001). In other words, acculturation is psychosocial and behavioral in nature. Also, it involves adoption of culturally acceptable norms, values, attitudes and activities or behaviors by the immigrants (Berry, 2003; Kim & Abreu, 2005). In essence, acculturation permeates all dimensions of an immigrant’s life, and requires effective coping skills in negotiating the new stress inducing demands of immigration.

The effects of migration on physical health indicate increased experience of physiological illnesses such as: sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, and/or other physical ailments by all migrants and specifically international students (Takeuchi, Nolan, Hong, David et.al. 2007). In addition, many college students face mental health challenges; however, the mental health challenges experienced by international students are only compounded by their experience of dramatic changes in their psychosocial environments. In addition, feelings of alienation might cause stress, and dealing with language and cultural barriers only exacerbates the stress. Also compounding the situation for Asian students who migrate to American universities are research findings that Asian students do not ask for professional help to resolve some of the challenges they experience; instead, they depend on their family members or other Asian students.
for support (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Zhang & Dixon, 2003; Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Arnault, 2002). Furthermore, as a way to avoid social stigma associated with seeking help for psychological challenges, some international students from Asian countries find it acceptable to somaticize these challenges (Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). As for Indian international students, they share some of the characteristics of acculturation with other Asian international students; however, there needs to be more research devoted to aspects affecting Indian international student’s acculturation.

The responsibility of helping international students who struggle with mental health challenges is complex. Seeking out counseling or other resources on college campuses might be a new idea for some of these students (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Yeh, 2002). In addition, the social taboo of appearing weak in seeking professional psychological help and ultimately being unsure of how effective it will be deters many of these students. Also, little is known as to what other resources international students might seek in order to ease the stress of acculturation. Therefore, it is imperative for counseling professionals not only to be knowledgeable and inclusive of the international student’s culture but also to find ways to educate and normalize the use of mental health resources. Hence, an appropriate starting point is an examination of phenomenological experiences of migration by Indian international graduate students. Exploring these issues qualitatively and through a lens of resilience will reveal the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students and how they see themselves fitting into the host culture.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experience of Indian international graduate students attending American universities. As a way of conceptualizing the data, qualitative analysis was used to identify common themes, experiences and perceptions of Indian students regarding their acculturation experience. The acculturation experience of Indian international graduate students attending American universities was generally defined as the students’ perception of their interpersonal and intrapersonal processes associated with Van Manen’s (1997) lifeworld existentials: lived space, lived body, lived time and lived human relations. Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bio-ecological model of human development was also incorporated into this study as a means to gain a multidimensional perspective on Indian international students’ acculturation process. In addition, examining the participants’ experiences through a resilience perspective (Harvey, 2007; Ungar, 2008; Seccombe, 2002) was used to highlight important protective and risk factors associated with Indian international graduate students acculturation process.

Research Questions

The fundamental question in this study is: what are the lived experiences of an Indian international graduate student attending an American University? This is a broad question and was best examined by exploring a number of sub questions associated with: lifeworld existentials, bio-ecological model of human development, and risk and protective factors associated with resilience.

1. What are the underlying themes that describe the experience of being an Indian international graduate student at an American university?
2. What are the contexts or systems associated with the experience of being an Indian international graduate student attending an American university?

3. What are the protective and risk factors associated with the lived experience of an Indian international graduate student at an American university?

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study**

This research was a phenomenological exploration of the structure and nature of what it was like to be an Asian Indian graduate student in an American graduate program. Phenomenological exploration is a systematic approach to uncover the essence of a phenomenon. From a phenomenological perspective, the researcher is more interested in knowing about the essence of a particular experience than determining factual aspects of that experience (Van Manen, 1997). In addition, phenomenology attempts to shed light on the meanings we attach to everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1997). This phenomenological research illuminated the ways an Indian graduate student experiences the world and self after migration to study in the USA.

International students are continually adapting to the social, cultural and educational environments in the host country. The various sociocultural and educational systems that the students are a part of have an impact on how they experience themselves and the world. As a means to gain a deep understanding about Indian international students, concepts from phenomenology, psychology and the bio-ecological model of human development theories are incorporated into this research.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

This qualitative research specifically draws upon Van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a reflective discipline rooted in
philosophy (Van Manen, 1997). Lived experiences become hermeneutically significant as we assign meaning to the phenomenon of lived life through interpretive acts such as conversations or daydreams (Van Manen, 1997). According to Van Manen (1997), the aim of the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher is to remain without presuppositions and to be sensitive to the subtleties of everyday life. In other words, the researcher borrows other people’s reflections on their experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular human experience.

The hermeneutic phenomenology provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding of the phenomenon with special attention to context and culture (Patton, 2001). In addition, the hermeneutic researcher is an important part of an interpretation. The researcher must be aware that an interpretation is a product of personal and cultural history (Patton). Thus, the researcher and the researched are equally important in interpreting the meaning of a phenomenon. In other words, an interpretation can be completely different depending on the cultural contexts of both the researcher and the researched.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences of international students is further explored using Van Manen’s (1997) “lifeworld existentials” as guides to reflection on the data collected. The four lifeworld existentials are lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (communality). These fundamental existentials make up the existential ground through which human beings experience the world (Van Manen, 1997). The four lifeworld existentials will be defined further as they relate to this study under the methodology section.
The Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development

The theoretical underpinnings of this research draw from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) work related to theoretical systems and his bio-ecological model of human development. The bio-ecological theory of human development is a theoretical system that considers biopsychological changes to be integral aspects of human development. Bronfenbrenner (2005) defines the ecology of human development “as the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded” (p.107). In other words, human development is a synthesis between a person and the context that they are a part of.

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bio-ecological model of human development encompasses five interconnected systems of human development. The microsystem includes interpersonal relations, roles and activities that a person experiences; the mesosystem consists of linkages between microsystems; the exosystem comprises the environmental systems that indirectly effect a person’s development; and the macrosystem includes the societal blueprint of a particular culture. Finally, the chronosystem relates to time and offers a longitudinal perspective to the systems approach. In addition, the risk and protective factors described in the bio-ecological model were also incorporated to provide context to this research.

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) model is incorporated into this study to help structure the examination of the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students in
relation to the systems that influence them. As international students and residents in the host country, these students are influenced by systems at all levels of the bio-ecological model. These microsystems will be examined in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. The fundamental nature of Asian Indian international student’s acculturation was understood using these theoretical approaches, specifically in the context of how these persons experience themselves, their home, work and relationships in a new cultural context.

**Resilience in the Context of Migration**

Resilience as a conceptual framework was used in this study to examine and understand the Asian Indian student’s acculturation process. Resilience is a concept in psychology that has been defined as a dynamic process by which individuals adapt positively despite the experience of stressful life events (Masten, 1994; Staudinger, Marsiske & Baltes, 1995; Rutter, 1987). Demonstration of resilience by a person is a function of the person and the environment in a given situation (Harvey, 2007); for example, an Asian Indian student may show high resilience in academic adjustment and low resilience in relationship adjustment. The personality of the individual, family values, beliefs and cultural values all influence the manner in which the person navigates an environment (Ungar, 2008; Seccombe, 2002). In addition, it is also important to consider the influence of culture on the perception and expression of resilience.

The current literature contains little research on Indian international graduate students’ resilience in the context of acculturation. However, resilience as a concept has been studied in various contexts and settings (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995). Primarily, resilience has been understood as a naturally occurring phenomenon that can be
augmented by appropriate interventions and a supportive environment (Cicchetti & Cohen). Resilience is an essential human process that needs to be understood in relation to acculturation. Using the concept of resilience in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model and Van Manen’s lifeworld existentials as a framework helped in comprehending the unique ways Asian Indian graduate students adapt to their new environments. Furthermore, results of this inquiry helped clarify how Asian Indian graduate students can be supported and encouraged to be more resilient.

**Rationale for the Study**

A number of principles described in this chapter, helped guide this research. First, the literature on acculturation contains few qualitative examinations of the experiences of international students. In addition, the literature lacks research that focuses on the personal experiences and the meaning-making processes of international students who are socio-culturally and physically different from the majority population. Furthermore, there is limited literature available on Indian international students and their acculturation processes.

Another reason for conducting this study is to gain an understanding of the acculturation process experienced by Indian international students from a resilience perspective. Relocating to a new culture can be challenging to many people (Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001; Sodowsky & Lai, 1997) and these cultural adjustment challenges can contribute to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and loneliness (Sue & Sue, 2003; Uba, 1994). However, many international students successfully navigate the cultural transition process. Understanding the meaning-making processes of these students from a psychological and socio-cultural standpoint contributes
to the knowledge base that guides how successful acculturation of Indian international graduate students can be supported.

This study will analyze the relevant themes that emerge from individual interviews in order to determine the experiences of these students. These results contributed to the fields of counseling and psychology by promoting an understanding of the acculturation of Indian international graduate students through a lens of resilience. If implemented, the results can help improve counseling services offered in universities and also contribute to the knowledge base for educators and administrators who are intimately involved in the acculturation of these students. Finally, the study provides practical recommendations for preparation and support of future international students who plan to study in America.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is reflected in the growing number of international students enrolling in American universities each year. During the 2010/2011 academic year, approximately 723,000 students from across the world enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. Asian students represent 58% of all international students, followed by students from Europe (15%), Latin America (11%), Africa (6%), North America and Oceania (6%), and the Middle East (4%) (Institute of International Education, 2010). Indian students make up the second largest international student group in America with 15% or over 100,000 of all international students studying in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2010).

For professionals working in the fields of counseling, psychology and education, it is imperative to have at least a cursory understanding of international students’ psyches
in order to effectively support and help them. Thus far, acculturation has mostly been evaluated in an effort to standardize and conceptualize acculturation models. It is important to have conceptual models of acculturation. However, it is equally important to have a deeper understanding of individual experiences of the phenomenon of acculturation. Examining the phenomenon through a qualitative inquiry highlighted both the uniqueness and the commonality in experiences of acculturation.

As the number of Indian international student enrollments increases at universities, counselors and counselor educators need to have a greater understanding of the meanings Indian international students attribute to acculturation. It is also important for counselors and counselor educators to know what acculturating individuals want, instead of imposing their ideologies onto them. Informed counselors who work with international students can devise interventions within their clients’ lived realities and help to empower them. While there is evidence of the vicissitudes that the international students face in the host society, it is also true that many of them excel and thrive in the new environment. This study is a starting point in exploring the psychological effects of acculturation from an individual perspective. Furthermore, it offers a glimpse into the Indian international graduate students’ creative adaptation in the host society.

**Delimitations of the Study**

In order to examine the lived experiences of Asian Indian international graduate students, it was necessary to set parameters to explore specific elements of their experiences of acculturation. Viewed together, these elements constitute the lived experience as a whole. This study examined the essence of interpersonal and intrapersonal processes that occur during an Indian international graduate student’s
acculturation in an American university. This study described those experiences completely and thoroughly from the participant’s perspective. In other words, this study explored the meanings Indian international graduate students attribute to their acculturation processes.

Specifically, this study examined how Indian international graduate students respond to cultural, relational, and academic differences they experience in the host society. In addition, this study examined how the Indian international graduate students experience change within themselves as they navigate the cultural transition process. Furthermore, this study explored the protective and risk factors or resiliency of these students attempting to adapt to new environment.

One of the reasons for choosing Indian international graduate students is because they form the second largest international student group and yet very little is known about them (Kushner, 2010). In order to control for certain variables, the research participants were selected from this one group rather than from a sample of various national groups. Asian Indian international students share at least a common cultural tradition that is distinct from other cultural traditions. However, factors such as geographical location, caste, religion, and socioeconomic class makes members of this group very heterogeneous. However, selection of research participants from one national group and from limited universities contributed to limited generalizability of data. In addition, insights gained from one national group have limited applicability to other international student groups.
Definition of Term

Asian Indian International Graduate Student or Indian International Graduate Student: used interchangeably in this study to refer to full-time graduate students from India who have been admitted to American universities to pursue graduate studies on an “F1” or “J1” student visa. For the purposes of this study, the subject group, Indian international graduate students, were full-time students for at least one year who had completed their first year in a graduate program. In addition, it was also their first year in the United States.

Summary

Chapter I of this dissertation is a comprehensive review of the introduction, background and statement of the problem. This chapter includes the purpose and the research questions associated with the study, followed by the theoretical and conceptual framework that includes Van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development, and the risk and protective factors associated with resilience (Harvey, 2007; Seccombe, 2002). In addition, rationale, significance, and limitations of the study are discussed.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The following chapter provides a review of literature that is used as a guide to the current study on the lived experiences of international students through a lens of resilience. The review of literature includes a general overview of migration as it relates to international students, common cross-cultural transition issues, and the effects of migration on the mental health of international students. In addition, the review includes the effects of migration on Indian international students. Finally, this review focuses on the implications for counselors and counselor educators.

The literature review continues with a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the research methodology and data analysis. Van Manen’s (1997) description of the hermeneutic phenomenology and the four lifeworld existentials are discussed. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development is described. In addition, some of the protective and risk factors of resilience (Ungar, 2008; Harvey, 2007; & Seccombe, 2002) in the context of migration are identified.

Immigration: A Life Changing Experience

People for centuries have migrated for various reasons. Natural and man-made disasters, the search for better lifestyle, and civil unrest have all contributed to the relocation of millions of people throughout the world in recent decades. The impact of migration is both physiological and psychological in nature (Berry, 1997). Research suggests that the experience of acculturative stress over a period of time can impair mental health, causing confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality, alienation, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms such as aches and gastrointestinal problems (Berry, 1997; Choi, 1997; Hwang & Ting, 2008). But, acculturation is not always a
negative process; it can also be a positive force that stimulates the migrant in the long-term acculturation (Beharry & Crozier, 2008). The nature of physical and psychological adjustment is strongly influenced by the migrant’s personality, the coping strategies used and available social support. Socio-cultural adaptation is further affected by factors such as length of stay, cultural knowledge, and the acculturation strategies that an immigrant employs (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In short, migrants who relocate deal with major acculturative stress, whether the decision to migrate is voluntary and planned or involuntary and forced.

The racial and cultural differences between the migrants and the members of the host country and the sudden realization of these differences can further heighten acculturative stress experienced by the migrants. Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, and Senecal, (1997) note that the majority of ‘receiving’ countries are individualistic and developed, while the majority of ‘sending’ countries are predominantly collectivist and developing. In addition, many of the migrants are not white, which makes it difficult for them to blend in. As a result, many migrants continue to be noticeable as minorities both physically and culturally in the host societies even after mastering the language and adopting aspects of the host culture (Suarez-Orozco, & Saurez-Orozco, 2001).

Migration and International Students

Crossing cultural boundaries has a profound impact on international students. During cross-cultural transitions, familiar roles, traditional relationships and social support are interrupted. In addition, exposure to new ways of living can be a source of considerable cognitive dissonance. After the migration, many international students might experience being a minority for the first time in their lives or have their minority
status exacerbated. In addition, inadequate English-language proficiency, unfamiliarity with host culture and navigation through conflicting value systems contribute to an increase in the experience of acculturative stress (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987; Barlow, 2002). During this time, due to various reasons such as exposure to contradictory value systems, many international students start to question features of both native and host cultures which can accentuate their ambiguity (Mori, 2000; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). For example, a female Asian Indian student might find a sense of freedom in asserting her individualism and at the same time experience turmoil from being cut off or alienated from her family or peers as a result of expressing individualism. In addition, pre-migratory circumstances and expectations of a better life in the host country may influence a student’s decision to migrate. For some international students, cross-cultural migration is an endeavor toward expanding their education and career opportunities, while for others migration is a reaction to undesirable circumstances in their home country, such as poverty or political turmoil.

International students also struggle with challenges related to acculturation in addition to the general academic, developmental and life stresses experienced by all university students. Mori (2000); Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994); Leong and Chou (1996) found that international students report a variety of mental health and personal concerns including language barriers, academic difficulties, financial difficulties, interpersonal problems, racial/ethnic discrimination, loss of social support, alienation, and homesickness. Regarding the impact of collectivist and individualist cultural orientations on international students’ adaptation, anxiety and overall satisfaction with life, found that students from collectivist cultures had lower levels of adaptation and satisfaction with life
and higher levels of anxiety as compared with students from individualist cultures (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001; Kinoshita & Bowman, 1998; Sam, 2001). In some cases, physical separation from their family and friends contributed to feelings of loneliness, which in turn dissuaded them from fully exploring life in the host country (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In addition, acculturation is further complicated by pre-migratory factors, cultural differences between the international students and the host society, and dynamics between the individual personalities and international students encounters.

**Impact of Globalization on International Students**

Most cultures today borrow values, beliefs and practices to varying degrees from one another and have become hybridized. Harvey (1989) explains the reciprocal relationship between globalization and culture: “globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization” (p.1). Similarly, Thompson (1995) notes that with the growth of media and travel there is an increase in an individual’s capacity to imagine oneself in new situations and contexts. With the accessibility of the Internet, individuals are able to access easily information that was previously unavailable or difficult to obtain. And while the Internet gives access to an array of cultural information, films serve to contextualize globalization (Rekha, 2011). Depending on the geographical location, viewers can watch films to learn about life abroad or can look back at the cultural heritage that they wish to preserve (Srinivas, 2005). Srinivas (2005) and Kaur (2002) have noted that many Indian films glamorized images of consumerism and convey a promise of prosperity. These stereotypes depicted in films could increase the pressure new immigrants already experience.
One of the common assumptions is that international students “become American” only after they arrive in the host country. But many international students are “Americanized” to varying degrees before their arrival to the host country either due to previous travel, cross-cultural interactions in the virtual world, or through exposure to media (Rumbaut, 1999). In a very profound way, globalization affects the way people experience life, altering their relations to the places they inhabit and the way they construct meaning. In addition, globalization also has a powerful impact on migrants’ values, desires, beliefs, hopes and fears. Hence, it is not farfetched to say that international students who are exposed to the Western culture prior to migration begin to adapt to the Western ways of life (e.g. slang, food habits and clothing) in the pre-migratory phase.

**Common Cross-Cultural Transition Issues**

Migration is often accompanied by acculturative stress, which manifests in both psychological and physiological symptoms. Psychological symptoms that arise from feelings of alienation can lead to anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, academic problems, loneliness, meaninglessness and hostility towards members of the host culture (Sato & Hodge 2009; Schmitt, Spears, & Brancombe, 2003). Physiological symptoms include sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, or other physical aches (Thomas and Althen, 1989; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). Some international students find it more acceptable to air a physical complaint, such as a headache, rather than a psychological one, such as anxiety, to avoid shame or social isolation. In essence, dealing with everyday demands of life along with psychological and physical symptoms of acculturative stress takes a toll on international students.
In addition to academic demands, international students also have to learn culturally accepted ways of interacting with other students, teachers, co-workers, and neighbors. Hsieh (2007) notes that because of the vast cultural differences, acculturation-related processes can increase the risk for maladjustment in Asian students. In addition, there are many interpersonal dynamics that impact adjustment, such as the personalities of people the international students come in contact with, as well as racism and discrimination. International students from collectivist cultures may be confused by the patterns of interaction found in cultures that are more individualistic in nature (Barker, Child, Gallios, Jones, & Callan, 1991). For example, students from collectivist cultures form friendships with fewer people, but value the stability and depth of those friendships. Arthur (1997) observed that international students are often confused and disappointed by the apparent superficiality in interactions with people from the host country. Various aspects such as an individual’s personality, coping strategies, social support, and length of stay affect the adjustment of international students.

**Gender Differences in Acculturation**

A growing body of literature suggests that female Asian students exposed to Western culture and gender roles report better adjustment than Asian males (Ying & Han, 2006). Gonzales, Ramos-Sanchez, Tran, and Roeder (2006) found that rigid adherence to stereotypical masculine roles such as emotional inexpressiveness, minimal self-disclosure, and competitiveness has a negative influence on Asian men (Min, 2001). Traditional gender roles not only constrain female international students from adjusting to the host country but also create greater conflict with role expectations. Ying and Han (2006) found female Taiwanese students to be more willing to adopt American culture
and form cross-cultural affiliations than their male counterparts. In essence, the role conflict can be both an acculturation stressor and a motivator for adjustment in the case of female international students.

But research also suggests that some Asian international female students in the United States experienced value conflicts between their culture and the U.S. culture (Inman et al., 2001). The value conflicts were found to be exacerbated with the pressure from their families to maintain and perpetuate traditional gender roles while being exposed to independence, interpersonal assertiveness, and pursuing personal goals from the dominant White society in the United States. Gender roles in American culture made female Japanese students more self-confident, self-expressive, and self-assertive (Matsui, 1995). Tang and Dion (1999); and Min (2001) found similar results to be true with Chinese and Korean female students. Gibbons, Stiles, and Shkodriani, (1991) note that female international students hold more liberal attitudes about the rights and roles of women than do male international students. Thus, the value conflicts experienced by female international students are largely due to the “old” values still held by their families and, largely, male international students.

Women who are exposed to feminism may see the potential advantages of equality for women, particularly in terms of freedom and personal rights. Males prefer the traditional gender roles partly due to the power assigned to male privilege (Matsui, 1998; Min, 2001; Tang & Dion, 1999; Ying, 2002). Although female international students experience greater role conflict, they are more willing to question social expectations and try out new ways of interacting and behaving. Conversely, adherence to conservative lifestyle that includes religion and perception of sex differences, little
contact with women of the host culture, and an unwillingness to change lifestyles have been related to high levels of acculturative stress among Asian Indian women (Naidoo, 1985; Mehta, 1998). In other words, a dimension of threat was related to men’s disfavor of a more egalitarian lifestyle. For women, however, for women a lesser extent of discrimination and sexism encouraged their support of a liberated lifestyle.

Social Support

Social support can be understood as a resource that acts as a buffer against stress (House, 1981). Social support has been divided into four types of resources: instrumental, informational, emotional and appraisal (House, 1981). The first type of social support is instrumental support, which involves the provision of material aid (House). For an international student, this would be in the form of financial support or help with a task. The second type of social support is informational support, which involves guidance or advice regarding a problem situation such as community resources or health care (House). The third type of social support is emotional support, which involves developing trusting and caring relationships in which one feels safe expressing emotions (House). Finally, the fourth type of social support is appraisal support. Appraisal support, examples of which include constructive feedback and affirmation, involves the provision of information that is useful for self-evaluation purposes (House).

Research has demonstrated a causal linkage between social support and acculturative stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Atri, Sharma, & Cottrell, 2007; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007). International students with mental health problems typically have smaller social networks, fewer relationships and lower perceived adequacy of social support (Atri, Sharma, & Cottrell, 2007; Chang & Subramaniam, 2008). Students who
reported low levels of social support also reported high levels of acculturative stress (Constantine et al., 2005; Swift & Wright 2003; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007). In addition, students who received high levels of social support during periods of acculturative stress reported fewer symptoms than those who had less social support (Hawkins, 1995; Chang & Subramaniam, 2008).

**English Language Proficiency**

Many international students fluently speak English even before their arrival in the USA, yet language difficulties are found to be the most challenging issues for the majority of the international students (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Constantine, Oksana, & Utsey, 2004). International students face various challenges due to lack of English language fluency; most will need extra time to complete assigned readings, experience difficulties in understanding class lectures and discussions, and have trouble communicating concerns and viewpoints (Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007). Lin and Betz (2009) noted that lack of fluency in English language affected international student’s personal, academic, and social areas of life. Inadequate English skills are likely to affect international students’ academic performance, and academic difficulties in turn affect their psychological adjustment. In addition, struggling with the language also hinders international students from socially interacting with and forming close relationships with other American students (Hayes & Ling, 1994; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Smith & Betz, 2000). On the other hand, Barratt and Huba (1994) found that international students who were fluent in English were more confident and better adjusted. Constantine et al. (2004) observed that lower English proficiency resulted in higher levels of depression in a large sample of African, Asian, and Latin American international students. Having a
good command over a second language helps international students with their overall comfort level in the host country.

Men and women used different strategies in the acquisition of a second language. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) and Lin and Pedersen (2007) found that female students employed more learning strategies than their male counterparts. For example, female students were more active in acquiring a new language; they engaged with the native speakers, initiated conversations in the new language and found alternative ways to express meaning. However, men used fewer social and metacognitive strategies in acquiring a second language. This gender difference in language acquisition explains some of the adjustment difficulties specific to gender. English language fluency is found to be a significant predictor of acculturative stress. Specifically, fluency level, and the degree of comfort in articulating in English are important factors in the successful adaptation of international students.

**Acculturation and Mental Health of International Students**

The impact of acculturative stress on mental health is complex and undeniable. Acculturation may be experienced at the individual psychological level where the new culture can effect the migrants’ behaviors, attitudes, cognitions, personality, language, values, and relationships, and in short their cultural identities (Berry, 2003; Kim & Abreu, 2005). Escobar (1998) notes that the increase in migrants’ exposure to acculturative stressors increased their risk for psychological maladjustment. Acculturative stress was associated with poor mental health among Asian international students (Constantine, 2004; Mori, 2000; Chae & Foley, 2010; Rahman & Rollock, 2004).
Some studies have pointed out protective factors that alleviate psychological distress caused due to acculturation. Research on Asian immigrants found that selective adherence to Asian values provided protection from acculturative stress (Gonzales, Ramos-Sanchez, Tran & Roeder, 2006; Choi, Miller, & Wilbur, 2009; Chae & Larres, 2010; Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007). However, many of these studies tended to focus on one ethnic group or a small cluster of participants and therefore cannot be generalized to all ethnic groups. In addition, low identity with native culture and less acculturated immigrants reported more mental health issues. Furthermore, Kilinc and Granello (2003) and Kim and Omizo (2005) observed that students who were less acculturated experienced significantly more difficulty in their academic life, with language, and with mental and physical health than did the students with higher levels of acculturation. Essentially, the immigrant population is more susceptible than the host population to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and higher prevalence of serious psychiatric disorders.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of empirical evidence indicating that Asian international students experience greater psychological distress than their European counterparts during their acculturation process (Hwang & Ting, 2008). Living in an unfamiliar psychosocial environment is associated with higher risk for psychopathology; uncertainties about culture, relationships, social resources, and distance from family make international students psychologically vulnerable. The migration process is unquestionably linked to major adjustment stressors. Hwang and Ting (2008) and Dao, Lee, and Chang (2007) found that having a cultural identity that is different from the mainstream U.S. culture was associated with increased psychological distress
and risk for clinical depression. At the same time, maintaining or establishing a stronger identity with one’s own culture did not result in a significant relationship with mental health outcomes (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In other words, one’s psychological wellbeing is dependent on the individual’s ability to successfully navigate in the host society.

Socio-environmental factors and numerous psychological variables play a role in the mental health of persons experiencing acculturation. However, a distinction needs to be made between those variables that were present prior to migration and the variables that developed during acculturation. Pre-migratory variables include an individual’s level of education, family history, personality, prior intercultural experiences, values, and beliefs. Also, it is essential to consider how the individual participants dealt with other life stressors such as loss and change before their migration. These variables may influence the resiliency expressed by an individual during the acculturative process. In this study, questions related to the pre-migratory factors are included. Participants’ narratives will provide some understanding into their lives prior to their cross-cultural transitions.

**Indian Immigrants in America**

Indian immigrants grew nearly 30 fold between 1970 and 2006 in America, with a recent count putting the population at 1.5 million (Migration Information, 2008). Immigrants from India are the fourth largest group after the Mexican, Filipino, and Chinese immigrant groups (Migration Information). It is important to know that even though all Indians share a common cultural heritage, there are various differences depending on the region they come from, not to mention personality and religious
orientation. Roughly 83% of Indian immigrants are Hindu, 14% are Muslim, and about three percent are from other religions (Wang et al., 2011). Other demographic features of Indian immigrants are: one quarter of Indian immigrants are not proficient in English, three in every four Indian born adults had a bachelor’s degree, and Indian immigrants are more likely to join the work force (Migration Information). In addition, more than one quarter of all Indian immigrants work in the information technology industry (Migration Information). Like many Asian families, Indian family members are highly committed and involved in each other’s lives.

**Indian International Students in America**

With close to 600,000 Indians under the age of 25 years, competition to attend prestigious Indian universities has become formidable (The New York Times, 2011). In part, this situation has lead to a high enrollment of Indian students in American colleges and universities. Indian international students comprise 15% or 105,000 of all international students attending American colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2010). As the number of Indian student population increases there is a greater need to gain knowledge about Indian international students in order to serve their unique needs.

Academic and professional achievement is highly valued in India, as it ensures social mobility and is a matter of honor to the family (Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008). Indian parents raise their children to be obedient and respectful and prioritize family needs over personal needs (Sandhu, 1997). Typically, Indian parents tend to have high expectations in the academic, professional, and financial achievements of their
children (Inman et al., 2001). Consequently, Indian parents are willing to invest in their children’s education.

Despite the fact that close ties with one’s family can act as a shield against some of the acculturative stressors, such as alienation and depression meeting such high expectations can cause psychological distress. Like many other Asian students, Indian international students are faced with academic pressures, issues with time management, and dealing with personal responsibility alongside experiencing high levels of acculturative stress. Perhaps, some of these challenges can be effectively addressed through mental health services. However, due to negative attitudes towards receiving psychological help they under utilize mental health services (Mier, Boone, & Shropshire, 2009; Wong, Brownson, & Schwing, 2011). In addition, it must be noted that studies on Indian international students are few, and it is hard to determine precisely how Indian international students are similar to or different from other international student groups. Thus, this research hopes to fill the gap in the literature and shed light on the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students.

Use of Mental Health Services

The population of international students encompasses multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, making it crucial for counselors to consider general as well as individual characteristics associated with acculturation. Asian culture has been characterized as valuing interdependence and collectivism to a greater extent (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008, p.126). The individual is a reflection of the group in collective societies. In an interdependent context, members of a group determine an individual’s feelings and behaviors (Chang & Subramaniam). Zhang and Dixon (2003); Atkinson and Gim (1989);
Arnault (2002) emphasized the complex cultural influences on the help-seeking attitudes of Asian students. International students from collectivist cultures tend to reach out to their family members for help rather than a counselor (Braun & Browne, 1998; Yeh, Inose, Konori, & Chang, 2001; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007). Psychological or physical distress can be construed as a family event and is viewed in terms of how it affects the family rather than an individual (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Yeh, 2002). Therefore, as Arnault points out, social support models that fail to account for culture do not provide participants with contextual rules for seeking and giving help.

Due to differences in culture, values, beliefs and the stigma attached to seeking psychological help, people from Southeast Asian cultures tend to somaticize psychological problems and under-utilize mental health services (Braun & Browne, 1998; Sue & Sue, 1999). Even when distress is experienced psychologically, it is expressed somatically in a culturally normalized manner of both conveying distress and seeking help (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Mier et al., 2009). In Asian cultures, people are reluctant to acknowledge psychological problems or to seek psychological help because it would imply that the person has a serious problem (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Yeh, 2002; Wong, Brownson, & Schwing, 2011). A lack of understanding of how to use psychological services and a fear of seeming weak contribute to the reluctance to seek help.

In general, Asian American college students who are acculturated to a high degree recognized their personal need for counseling, tolerated the stigma associated with counseling, and were open with counselors about their problems (Atkinson & Gim, 1989). However, research has found gender specific differences in help-seeking
behaviors. Ahmed, Shik, Vanzia, Cheung, George, and Stewart (2004) found through a qualitative research study that South Asian female international students used preventative health measures such as exercise and yoga to cope with increased stress, tension, loneliness, and depression. They also increased efforts to socialize, educate themselves about the health issues and available services. This finding is also consistent with the finding that female international students acculturate more easily in the host country. The manner in which Asian men deal with acculturative stress is different. In Asian culture, men are placed higher in the family hierarchy. Traditionally, Asian men are expected to exemplify strength of character as family protectors and providers. These traditional gender roles could have a negative influence on the help-seeking behaviors of Asian men (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2007; Yeh, 2002). In addition, Frey & Roysircar (2006) also found that South Asians’ use of help resources increased as they became more acculturated.

Most counseling research on international students is focused on mental health services, rather than the range of non traditional help resources — such as yoga, social and skills groups — that might be used by students (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, & Gould, 1995; Kilinc & Granello, 2003 and Mori, 2000). Arnault (2002) found that understanding the context of an individual’s beliefs and behaviors regarding the utilization of help resources led to more effective and culturally sensitive resources.

In addition, Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christensen, and Van Horn, (2002) suggested effective prevention strategies as international students from various countries showed a linear increase in adjustment during the first six months after their migration. Furthermore, psycho-educational groups focused on skill development were found to be
helpful to therapy-shy Indian American students (Bhat, 2005). While simplistic answers might not help in improving the resources for international students, it is important to become educated in the kinds of help international students seek in their home countries.

**Implications for Counselors and Educators**

Along with all the important on-campus resources that need to be made available to support the transition of international students, preparing prospective international students before their migration is an important step. In the preparation of future international students, some helpful resources might include web seminars and literature about the common difficulties faced by international students, stress-management techniques to reduce tension, and contact information of other international students. In addition, education of international students on discriminatory behaviors might empower them to not only recognize but also to take a stance against racism (Zhang & Dixon, 2003). Moving between cultures can contribute to high emotional arousal such as irritability, anger, and sadness. Universities in the international students’ native countries must take steps to educate prospective international students about the everyday challenges of acculturating in a new country. These measures would help the international students to be more prepared about their overall cross-cultural transition needs.

It is not just the counseling centers that need to change the way they reach out to international students, but also the various departments of which the international students are a part. Sato and Hodge (2009) conducted a qualitative research on doctoral level international students and found that these students experienced a culture of social distance, marginalized status and negative relationships with their peers. These students
felt most accepted in the doctoral programs when their advisors were satisfied with the quality of their work. Hsieh (2007) asserted that it is important for faculty to be aware of the unequal power relationships between international students and American students. The unbalanced power relationships make it harder for international students to be visible. While it is important for International students to receive cultural awareness training to understand the culture they are entering, it is equally important for faculty to be at least marginally aware of the cultural backgrounds of international students with whom they are working.

Developing culturally sensitive and effective interventions requires attention to racial, cultural, and ethnic group differences both within international students’ own cultures and within the host culture. Therapists must address the different aspects of migration and the impact it has had not only on the migrant but also on the migrant’s family. In addition, some of the South East and East Asian students view psychological services with suspicion (Frey & Roysircar, 2006); hence, it is important to reach out to such students in nontraditional ways to help them gain knowledge about psychological services. In other words, culture-based interventions must be implemented (Gloria, Castellanos, Park & Kim, 2008). Providing nontraditional support presented as informal gatherings outside of structured counseling would ensure that Asian students benefit from university resources (Gloria, Castellanos, Park & Kim).

Resilience necessary for positive intercultural transitions involves emotional maturity and self-regulation that are often overlooked by students, faculty and host families (Abarbanel, 2009). A young adult student embarking on a transcultural journey experiences developmental and emotional challenges as a part of the cultural transition.
Psychotherapy can be a meaningful contribution in the transition process of international students from diverse backgrounds (Tummala-Nara, 2007; Lightsey, 2006). In addition, Harvey (2007) notes that interventions to promote and sustain resilience must enhance the relationship between person and context.

People create meaning through belonging, doing, and understanding (King, 2004). In order to augment the benefits of counseling international students, one of the important aspects of therapy would entail exploration of different cultural meanings of resilience. Perceptions of what is and is not “resilience” might vary between individuals. Individual differences in perceptions influence whether or not one perceives oneself as being resilient. The ways in which these differences are expressed or negotiated in various social contexts will also inform the development of interventions (Kelly, 1986; Trickett, 1996; Tummala-Nara, 2007). While it is important to empathize and normalize with an Indian international student’s experiences of acculturation, it is equally important to understand the various ways the student is resilient. In other words, using a resilience lens would make a paradigm shift in viewing students or clients as creatively adapting to new life experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section reviews the theoretical underpinnings that will drive this research. A description of hermeneutic phenomenology, life world existentials (Van Manen, 1997) followed by a review of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bio-ecological model of human development are presented. Finally, literature related to protective and risk factors or resilience (Harvey, 2007; Ungar, 2008; Seccombe, 2002) is presented. Literature on
resilience and the bio-ecological model will help build an understanding of how international students develop or in this case acculturate in the context of an environment.

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is both descriptive as well as interpretive in its approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology draws attention to the seemingly ordinary dimensions of everyday life and highlights the meanings people attribute to them (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology does not provide any theory to explain the world objectively, but instead seeks to describe how one is brought in direct contact with the world through subjective experiences. In describing phenomenology, Van Manen notes that “the rigor of human science is prepared to be “soft,” “soulful,” “subtle,” “sensitive” in its effort to bring the range of meanings of life’s phenomenon to our reflective awareness (p.18).” Phenomenological research describes people’s everyday world, rather than provide explanations (Giorgi, 1985; Kruger, 1988).

Phenomenology is keenly interested in the human experience of the world and the way consciousness shapes the experience. Van Manen (1997) notes that the consciousness and the world do not exist without the reference of an experiencing person. In other words, if something is outside one’s consciousness, one cannot experience it. In addition, phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective since recollection of experiences is always on experiences that already passed.

Phenomenological research is a human scientific study of the phenomena that constitute human experience. It is systematic in that it uses practiced methods (Van Manen, 1997). It is explicit in that it tries to describe the structures of meanings in lived experiences; self-critical in that it continually examines its methods and goals and inter-
subjective in that the researcher needs another person such as the reader, in order to
develop a dialogic relation with the phenomenon under investigation (Van Manen, 1997).
Phenomenology attempts to describe the meaning structures of lived experience, which
are multi-dimensional and multilayered are multilayered because no single perspective is
absolute (Van Manen, 1997).

Phenomenological research is a practice of thoughtfulness which aims to
understand more fully the meaning of being in this world while taking into consideration
the gender, socio-cultural and historical traditions that give meaning to our ways of being
in the world (Van Manen, 1997). In other words, the aim of phenomenological research is
to obtain other people’s experience and their reflections on the experience in order to
better understand the meaning or significance of an aspect of a person’s experience in the

Lived experience consists of multiple and different life worlds, defined as the
unique experiences of different people. And yet there are some fundamental meaning
structures that are common to all lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). These
fundamental thematic structures go beyond the historical, social and cultural situations of
an experience and account for universal elements such as death, life, and being (Van
Manen, 1997). Van Manen (1997) identified four existential lifeworlds as guides for
reflection in the research process: lived space (spaciality), lived body (corporeality), lived
time (temporality), and lived human relation (communality).

Lived space is more than the general understanding of space explained in terms of
metric units; it is a fundamental way of being in a space, an environment or the world
(Van Manen, 1997). The experience of space is embedded in the socio-cultural practices
that give the experience of lived space a qualitative dimension; for example: it is common to find Indian men put hands on one another’s shoulders while walking as an expression of friendship, which could be construed by Americans as more than just casual contact and friendship. Exploration of the nature of lived space helps to uncover fundamental meaning structures of lived life.

Lived body refers to the notion of the embodiment of our presence in the world. Though not always consciously, lived body is the manner in which we reveal and conceal parts of who we are (Van Manen, 1997). In other words, we experience each other and ourselves in relation to our bodies. We are affected by and react to someone else’s gaze; “The person in love may incarnate his or her erotic mode of being in a subtle glow or radiant face or sometimes, under the eyes of the beloved, in a blushing response” (Van Manen, 1997, p.104). How people gesture, walk, or sit are, to a large extent culturally determined; for example, an Indian student may consider it disrespectful to show the soles of one’s feet to another and would avoid it by all means.

Lived time refers to the subjective experience of time (Van Manen, 1997). Lived time is a common way of being in the world — the transient nature of life is a common philosophical perspective that many Indians hold. As a result, Indian international students might be able to recognize that challenges of acculturation are also transient and impermanent. Temporality is also the way we relate and get to know one another. When we want to know someone we ask them about their personal history or what their plans are for the future (Van Manen, 1997). On a subjective level, temporal experiences of the past are interpreted and reinterpreted as one gathers experiences in the present and as life takes shape in the future (Van Manen, 1997).
Lived human relation refers to how we form and maintain relationships with others (Van Manen, 1997). We engage with others in an interpersonal space in a corporeal way but as we get to know the person more deeply we transcend the corporeal. In a larger existential sense, human beings seek relationships with others to understand how others perceive them, to find meaning in life, and to develop grounds for living (Van Manen, 1997). For example: One may often hear Indian international students regard the importance of their family in their professional and personal success.

**Bio-Ecological Model of Human Development**

The bio-ecological model of human development proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) sought to include features from biology and the ecological system theory into the model of human development. Essentially, there are two defining properties to this model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The first defining property states that human development throughout the life course takes place through processes known as proximal processes. Proximal processes are progressively complex interactions between the developing organism and its immediate environment. Enduring forms of interactions that occur regularly, such as feeding a baby or acquiring new skills can be effective and are known to be impetus for development. The second defining property states that form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes vary as the characteristics of the developing organism and the environment come into play in generating the nature of developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) noted that there are particular regions in the environment that are favorable or unfavorable to the development of the organism with particular personal characteristics. The presence or absence of financial resources and positive
relationships contributed to either favorable or unfavorable ecologies. Bronfenbrenner (2005) also purported that the course of development depended on the perception of the organism.

In the bio-ecological model of human development Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined development as a dynamic process: “The ecology of human development is the study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded” (p.106). In other words, development involves interaction between organism and environment, and this interaction is dynamic. In addition, regardless of the origin of the interaction, both the organism and the environment begin to be transformed (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner proposed four levels of environmental paradigms in which the human being is embedded. These four levels form a hierarchy of systems moving from the most proximal to the most distant. At the most proximal level is the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). The microsystem includes patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced directly by the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). It also includes unique physical and material characteristics such as temperament, personality and systems of beliefs of not only the developing person but also other people. One may find that many Indian international students gravitate toward other students from similar ethnic backgrounds in order to avoid tremendous socio-cultural differences.
The second level in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) human development theory is the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner (2005) defines mesosystem as a system of Microsystems. The mesosystem consists of the linkages and processes occurring between two or more settings containing the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (2005) proposed that as the developing person becomes an active participant, the interactions between Microsystems become crucial in the development. Examples of mesosystem are the relations between home and school, or home and peers. Often, female Indian students find it a challenge to follow traditional gender roles within their families and yet be independent and assertive in their work and school environments.

The third level of Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory is exosystem. Exosystems are composed of the linkages and processes that occur in two or more settings, and the developing person is not a part of at least one of them (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). However, the events that occur in the distant setting influence the immediate settings of which the person is a part. Family, socio-political and environmental changes such as births, deaths, communal turmoil, or floods in the native country intensely affect international students’ grades or psychological wellbeing.

The fourth level in the bio-ecological model of human development is the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). A macrosystem system consists of the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem. The macrosystem is all-encompassing of the dominant culture and the subcultures that are embedded in each of these systems including the belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). “The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture
or other broader social context” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 150). Thus, an international student who perceives migration as a period during which important life lessons are to be learned may be better able to endure acculturation process. In a similar manner, educational, and/or work environments, length of stay, quality of relationships, and attitudes of people would have an impact on an international student’s experience of acculturation.

Bronfenbrenner added a fifth level to the bio-ecological model called the chronosystem. The chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time, and accounts for the impact of prior life events and experiences on the person’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These events or experiences may originate within the organism (illness, menstruation) or may occur in the external environment (death of a parent, birth of a sibling). The events occur both within the organism and the external environment throughout the life course and may often be the source for developmental change. Due to the more liberal attitudes of people in the United States, a homosexual Indian international student may find that life in the United States is liberating after having experienced discrimination in India. This experience can have a positive effect on the student’s overall sense of self.

Resilience in the Context of Migration

Masten and Obradovic (2008) define resilience as the “processes for, capacity for, or patterns of positive adaptation during or following exposure to adverse experiences that have the potential to disrupt or destroy the successful functioning or development of the person” (Disaster Preparation and Recovery, para. 5). In other words, resilience can be understood as “strength awareness”, or a belief that one can endure and overcome
adverse situations (Smith, 2006). Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery noted that the interpretation of events could be more important than the events themselves (Lightsey, 2006, p. 97). Therefore, an individual’s meaning-making process that is focused on strengths rather than weaknesses; lessons learned rather than losses experienced, is essential for resilience to occur. In addition, resilience is more likely to occur when one is able to successfully navigate toward resources both internally and externally. Bradley and Davino (2007) found that three areas of resilience among a sample of incarcerated women were the integration of traumatic memories into one’s life narrative, the ability to form healthy relationships and the ability to engage in self-care activities. In addition, resilience entailed three behavioral components: the ability to adapt to negative life events; the capacity to recover and succeed in situations when negative outcomes are expected; and the capacity to engage with potential risks, rather than to avoid them altogether (Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 2000). Even though these studies are specific with respect to gender and other variables and therefore cannot be generalized, they provide pertinent information that helps clinicians in the determination of resilience in a given situation.

As a means to determine resilience in the context of migration, I opted to follow two criteria first, there needs to be a significant exposure to risk (Masten, 2001; Luthar, 2006); secondly, the person needs to overcome the odds and function effectively (Masten, 2001; Luthar, 2006). In the case of migration, significant risk factors include discrimination, loss of status, language barriers and financial hardships. For example, an Asian International student may encounter several instances of prejudice or discrimination. Even if such exposures are not very serious, they diminish the
individual’s self-esteem. Also, the student who is a new migrant does not have support systems that would lessen the negative effects of discriminatory experiences. Thus, seemingly minor experiences can have a complexly negative impact on the migrants’ development and world-view. However, many such international students adapt well in the host country and become successful in various domains of life. Hence, for the purpose of this research, resilience will be understood as a mental state and/or behavior that an individual manifests in the face of a challenge. For example, an international student will be considered resilient if he or she takes risks to connect with peers in spite of feeling alienated, discriminated or rejected. While it can be at times overwhelming to endure the acculturat

ion process, some individuals adjust psychologically and behaviorally in creative and unique ways. It is my hope to interpret different adaptive responses to acculturative stress that the international students use through a lens of resilience.

Individual differences in trauma responses and recovery not only requires the individual to access his or her resilient capabilities but are also the result of complicated interactions between event, person, and environment. Thus, in fully grasping resilience both the individual and the social context must be considered (Ungar, 2008; Seccombe, 2002; Gilligan, 2004). While it is important to know the different dimensions of resilience, it is equally important for clinicians and others who work with international students to be able to recognize the different expressions of resilience. Essentially, resilience is a product of the interactions between the individual and the environment that fosters resilience. For example, Harvey (1996, 2007) emphasizes that both traumatic events and trauma recovery occur within ecological, or socio-cultural, systems. In
essence, while the socio-cultural systems can be the source of hardship, they can also be the source of healing.

An exploration of the effects of migration on the Asian international students from a lens of resilience provides a deeper understanding of their acculturation experience. In order to understand an international student’s experience of acculturation from a resilience perspective, it is important to understand resilience as a concept that is influenced by various individual and environmental factors. To gain a deeper knowledge of an acculturation experience, it is essential to consider the individual’s cultural context as well as the personality, beliefs, values, traditions, race and ethnicity as important factors that influence an individual’s expression of resilience (Sorsoli, 2007; Bradley, & Davino, 2007; Tummala-Narra, 2007; Abarbanel, 2009; Harvey, 2007).

A particular characteristic that is seen as a resilient response in one cultural context may not be considered a resilient response in a different cultural context. For example, in collectivistic cultures such as China and India, an individual might depend on family and friends to cope with stressors. Dependence on family and coping strategies that include family wishes may be viewed as a character deficit in Western cultures. The majority of research on resilience is based on homogenous, Caucasian populations and lacks the knowledge of how other racial and ethnic groups may define resilience (Tummala-Narra, 2001; Ungar et.al, 2007). Hence, understanding the unique ways acculturation is experienced and processed by individual international students enriches counselors’ and educators’ ability to recognize resilient capacities within these individuals and provide them with the necessary support.

Research indicates the need to be inclusive of culture, context and individual
differences in understanding resilience (Ungar et. al., 2007). There is a lack of knowledge of how resilience is defined by different cultures (Ungar, 2008; Tummala-Narra, 2007). By and large, resilience is defined from a Western point of view favoring self-efficacy, secure attachments, and professional success. While self-efficacy, professional success and secure personal attachments are important aspects of resilience their relative importance might be different for people coming from non-Western cultures. In addition, years of research have established that resilience is a multidimensional process of positive adaptation; it is dependent on a human being’s biological traits as well as his or her interdependence on environments (Sorsoli, 2007; Masten & Powell, 2003; Riger, 2001; Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Laney, 1996). In essence, resilience is a result of contextual, cultural and personal factors.

Protective and Risk Factors of Resilience

In an attempt to understand the causes of psychopathology, researchers in psychiatry and psychology studied at-risk children and found that traumatic experiences and exposure to chronic adversities to be the greatest contributing factors of mental illness. However, longitudinal studies found that some of the at-risk children had remarkable successes in various domains of life. This discovery prompted the researchers to focus on the protective factors. Luthar (2006) found that attachment or positive relationships played a crucial role in the potential for resilience in young children. While resilience does not require extraordinary intelligence, these children showed a capacity to resolve conflicting emotions through the support of a reassuring and a sensitive relationship (Masten & Obradovic, 2008).
Resilience has been understood as a process whereby an individual mobilizes cultural, familial, spiritual, relational and material resources to overcome life’s challenges (Tummala-Narra, 2001). Previous research (Harvey, 2007; Tummala-Narra, 2001) also brings to light that resilience is shaped by the dynamics between the individual and the cultural context. International students become embedded in various systems as they start their migrant lives in the host country and an individual’s resilience is largely dependent on the resilience of the systems that individual enters. In addition to providing protection against risks, the health of these systems can also be causes of risks in the lives of international students. For example, minority status, low socioeconomic status, and other environmental stress factors were identified as contributing risk factors (Bhattacharya, 1998).

In the case of migration, the cultural context plays a pivotal role in how trauma and resilience are processed. The cultural context shapes and defines the specific ways individuals mobilize their internal and external resources to achieve resilience (Tummala-Narra, 2001). In addition, there are also certain protective factors embedded in cultures such as psychological, social, and material resources. In a similar way, the student’s personal and cultural — or religious and spiritual — beliefs can greatly contribute to the manner in which they acculturate (Crawford, Wright, & Masten, 2006). These protective factors help the individual adjust emotionally and behaviorally (Lee, 2005).

Asian students who migrate lose their usual roles, identities, and relationships in a familiar social network, and life in the new environment becomes unpredictable. Students who have strong attachments to their culture might experience a deeper sense of loss. Thus, the loss of culture becomes traumatic because of the individual’s dependence on
the culture (Harvey, 1996). Making sense of life in a new cultural context involves a tremendous amount of unlearning old ways to adapt to new ways of life amid new cultural demands. In spite of numerous vicissitudes such as racism and marginalization, migrants also learn resiliency by developing relationships, holding jobs, and exploring new ways of life in the host country. Much of this is a result of preserving a strong sense of belonging in their communities. These individuals rely on the support and resources that their communities offer.

Culture can be a source of resilience by providing individuals with much needed resources and support. But in some cases, culture can be an additional source of turmoil especially when there are differing attitudes between groups of people. DeVries (1996) explains: “Culture cannot prevent calamity, nor can it blunt the immediate physical power of violence and the emotional shock of betrayal. It can only help with building up resilience before such events, or with providing validation, restitution, and rehabilitation afterward” (p. 410). Every culture has its own system of ideas about how people should interact with one another, and often these ways of life are delicately interwoven into the beliefs and values of people. In the case of a traumatic life event or an adversity, customs and rituals provide a sense of security and help bring the person back to health (DeVries). In essence, culture provides a certain script to its people as to how they can respond or react to changes in life events.

Family plays a major role in how the individual from collective societies makes meaning of life experiences. Hernandez (2002) purports that consistent family support, family meanings attributed to adversity, positive outcomes, emotional expression and means of problem solving are all important forms of individual and collective resilience.
Banyard, Williams, Siegel, & West, (2002) found that support from immediate and extended family are important factors in recovery among minority women. Families can provide the support for adapting effectively to the new environment (Masten & Shaffer, 2006; Wong, 2004). In addition, spiritual beliefs passed on by family also play a positive role in the psychosocial adjustment among minority individuals in the United States (Bhattacharya, 1998; Walters & Simoni, 2002). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) found that individuals pursue different pathways to resilience and that resilience is common or normal. In addition, cultural and familial interpretations of resilience effect individual’s interpretations of resilience (Harvey, 2007). In essence, meanings attributed to life events and the different expressions of resilience are a result of one’s cultural identity, family relationships, and interactions with mainstream culture.

**Summary**

The review of related literature in this chapter elucidates the unique challenges Asian international students face as they acculturate to the host country. Many of the challenges include psychological, physiological symptoms, social withdrawal, academic problems, lack of financial resources, and family support. In spite of the compounding effects of these challenges many of the international students are resilient in that they adjust well in the host country. These challenges and unique expressions of resilience illuminate the need to explore the phenomena from a resilience lens to enhance the understanding of the experiences of international students.

This chapter reviewed the importance of gaining more knowledge about the issues surrounding migration. It is important to understand Asian international students’ acculturative experiences from a resilience perspective in order to better help them. The
chapter highlighted the need for specific training and competencies for therapists, educators and campus personnel to provide effective on-campus resources to international students. There is a lack of research pertaining to the unique and creative adaptation methods that international students employ in acculturating to the host society.

Finally, the review examined the various theories that will inform the research methodology and analysis. This chapter reviewed Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bi-ecological model of human development as it pertains to the conceptual understanding of resilience. This review also examined Van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology, as it will significantly inform the development of research methodology for this study. These models establish the theoretical framework of the research and will inform the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected.
CHAPTER III: Research Methodology

In an effort to address the purpose and the research question proposed in this study, a qualitative design was used. According to Patton (2002), qualitative and quantitative methods involve trade-offs between breadth and depth:

Qualitative methods permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance; that data collection need not be constrained by predetermined analytical categories contributes to the potential breadth of qualitative inquiry. Quantitative instruments on the other hand, ask standardized questions that limit responses to predetermined categories (less breadth and depth). This has the advantage of making it possible to measure the reactions of many respondents to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. By contrast, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases (p. 227).

The key feature of the preceding passage is the notion that freedom from predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Berg (2007) notes that qualitative research asks the question: “What is this phenomenon in its what-ness (p. 33).” In other words, understanding a phenomenon thoroughly and without preconception is at the core of a qualitative inquiry. There is a fundamental paradigmatic difference between quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative, or positivist research views the world as observable and measurable, whereas qualitative research is interpretive in nature and views the world as socially constructed, complex and evolutionary (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Furthermore, to design instruments that
measure and generalize complex, subjective, experiential realities is a difficult task (Berg, 2007). In short, a qualitative methodology was chosen because it is most appropriate to address the research purpose, research question, and theoretical underpinnings proposed for this study.

The purpose of this research was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students attending American universities. This chapter describes the theoretical underpinnings, research methods, and procedures that were used in this study. Specifically, the research design, data collection, analysis, validation and interpretation of data will be discussed.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodology that informs this research. Phenomenology is the study of the dynamic meaning-making process of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology explores the essential meaning of a person’s experience, meaning making process, and how humans transform experience into consciousness both individually and as a group. This requires rigorous methodology to carefully and thoroughly describe and capture the lived experience of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). From a phenomenological standpoint, the structures of consciousness from which a person makes meaning of an experience are more important than empirical facts that describe that experience.

Hermeneutics is another theoretical approach that informs qualitative inquiry. The hermeneutic perspective proposes that meaning is constructed in the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context in which it was interpreted (Patton, 2002). Hermeneutics offers a perspective for interpretation; further, it challenges
the assertion that any one interpretation is the most accurate representation of a reality. Hermeneutics emphasizes that an interpretation is one perspective and cannot be viewed as absolutely true or correct. Therefore, the researcher’s background, methods, and purpose combine with the subjectivity of the participants giving rise to various scenarios or interpretations.

While there are distinct philosophical differences between hermeneutics and phenomenology, Van Manen (1997) attempts to incorporate the two methodologies. In short, phenomenology describes lived experience, while hermeneutics interprets it. Hermeneutic phenomenology is both descriptive and interpretive. As Fischer (2006) points out, a phenomenological researcher is not a passive recorder of external, objective events; rather, the researcher engages with the phenomenon that is being explored. This engagement of the researcher with the phenomenon means that the experience must be interpreted to some extent.

Qualitative research is rationalistic; it assumes that human life can be understood and that human experience can be made intelligible (Van Manen, 1997). Van Manen purports that humans need knowledge, reflection, and thought in order to know themselves (p. 17). The fundamental elements of any human experience are lived time, lived space, lived body and lived human relation, and yet human experience is hard to explain. In an effort to bring the life’s complexities and intricacies to reflective awareness, the qualitative research strives for a balance between methodological rigor and situational sensitivity.

In order to interpret and analyze the data in this research several methodologies were used. Van Manen’s (1997) life world existentials were used as guides to reflection.
The four existentials are the lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (communality). For example, an international student may experience stress in his body as a nagging pain (corporeality) and consequently experience time to pass very slowly (temporality) as he becomes acutely aware of this sensation. While these sensations may not be consciously understood, examining one’s experiences through the lens of Van Manen’s existentials helps uncover basic emotional states that are latent in an individual’s experiences. Thus, the four life world existentials will help reflect on the lived experiences of international students.

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bio-ecological model of human development is another method that will be used to understand the lived experiences of international students. In an effort to understand the experiences of international students, the data will be interpreted according to the various systems in the bio-ecological model. Consider an international student who occupies several roles: student, friend, family member, employee. Each of these roles exists within a microsystem. An international student might identify himself as a student in a class but see himself primarily as a husband when at home. The mesosystem, or the interactions between several microsystems, is also of interest in order to understand the interactive nature of human development. In addition, seeing the lived reality of an international student’s migration experience as a whole through the macrosystem provides a larger context in which to understand a person.

Furthermore, the concepts of resilience (Harvey, 2007; Ungar, 2008; Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995), which includes protective and risk factors from trauma theory, was used in analyzing the data. In order to understand a person’s lived experience in an in-depth manner, attention was focused on the meaning-making process of international students.
Risk and protective factors could influence any of the roles a person assumes or systems to which a person belongs. For instance, a person might be able to deal with all the change that comes with migration in a healthy way partly because of having a very supportive family. In a similar situation, cultural norms might dissuade a person from seeking other friendships or help due to fear of rejection. In this scenario, family is a protective factor in the acculturation process of the student. Although this is not necessarily how all international students view their experiences, I intend to use the lens of resilience as a means of interpretation. For instance, it could be the trauma of migration/acculturation, or cultural meanings attributed to those events, that prevent a person from examining their experiences from a resilience perspective. International students must negotiate challenges in their environments as they adapt to the host culture, examples of which include permanent changes in their families, differences in academic environment, social relations and food habits. As international students learn to maneuver the ways of life in a new culture, they are faced with difficult situations that can give rise to stress and other socio-psycho-physiological issues. The protective and risk factors associated with resiliency will be explored as specific elements that define the acculturation experience.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used in this study to explore the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students attending American universities. While there were several research studies describing the psychological and physiological effects of migration on international students, there were none that explored the phenomenon from a resilience perspective (Kim & Abreu, 2005; Kilinc & Granello,
Thus far, there are no studies that explored the experiences of international students from India through a qualitative phenomenological perspective. In other words, this research will address the question: What is the lived experience of Asian Indian graduate international students at American universities?

A qualitative, or naturalistic, approach uses inductive logic or inductive analysis. Patton (2002) notes that inductive analysis allows important analytical dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the dimensions will be (p. 56). Therefore, it is essential for a qualitative analyst to understand the interrelationships between emerging dimensions in the study while maintaining a curious attitude. Furthermore, a researcher must be able to acknowledge biases and limitations and be open to multiple worldviews about the phenomena under study. Maintaining equanimity through the qualitative research process is necessary in acquiring an in-depth and unbiased understanding of the phenomena. Patton (2002) called this cognitive and emotional stance “empathetic neutrality,” a state in which the researcher commits to understanding the complexities and the intricacies of the phenomena as they emerge (p. 50). Neutrality is not easily attainable, and credible research strategies help the researcher become aware of personal biases, including personal and theoretical predispositions.

Role of the Researcher

The idea for this project came from both my personal experience of being a migrant/international student and from my formal education in counseling psychology, where I developed special interest in multicultural issues in counseling. For the last nine
years, as I went through my own adjustment process in the United States, I often wondered about how other international students dealt with the loss, change, and adjustment that comes as a result of migration. Apart from my personal experiences as an international student, I also had the opportunity to talk to many international students whom I befriended along the way. Additionally, my interest in this topic was further piqued as a result of other encounters with international students in my capacity as a counselor in university counseling centers.

In my experience as an international student — and I know of others who had experiences similar to mine — there was an initial period of euphoria about coming to America followed by confusion and stress. I know that I have experienced, and am confident that other international students have felt, long periods of time when feelings of loneliness and homesickness were prevailing emotional states. I am confident that many of those international students met the criteria for traumatic stress depending on the severity of the situations and the individuals’ meaning-making processes.

However, I believe that many of us adapted to the new culture and also grew as a result of our experiences. As part of my master’s and doctorate degrees, I spent close to two years working as a counselor in university settings. As a counselor, I had the opportunity to work with several international students who have struggled both personally and academically as a result of migration. I also saw some students flourish in response to the migration experiences. There were times when I felt helpless because of the unpreparedness of international students in terms of what to expect in the host country. Also, there were fewer international students who availed on-campus counseling services. Furthermore, many of these students were reluctant to discuss issues related to
migration because of the fear of how it is going to be interpreted. In addition, the staff and faculty who come in contact with them often lacked the cultural understanding that would allow them to appreciate the depth of the students’ experiences.

Because of my cultural heritage and my experiences as an Indian international graduate student who has spent eight years in two American universities, I am naturally sensitive to the research participants’ acculturation experiences. In addition, my position as an Indian International student gives me an opportunity to view research participants’ experiences from a non Euro-centric perspective as well as to gain an insider perspective into the lives of Indian international graduate students. My hope is that the research participants would feel comfortable enough with me to discuss issues that are otherwise challenging to talk about with a person of different cultural heritage.

This research is an effort to explore how migration affects Indian international graduate students, their families and their communities. While I have found several quantitative studies regarding the acculturation process of international students, much of this research lacks in-depth analysis of international students’ experiences. The rationale for this study is primarily to address the need for this type of analysis and to explore the lived experiences of Indian international students more deeply.

**Participants**

Qualitative designs focus in depth on relatively small, purposefully selected samples (Patton, 2002). Selecting information-rich cases through purposeful sampling allows for rich knowledge and in-depth understanding of the phenomena. There is no minimum number for sample of a qualitative design; in fact, Patton purports that “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do
with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical
capabilities of the researcher than the sample size (p. 245).” However, for the purpose of
this inquiry, I have selected eight international graduate students from India who
volunteered to participate in individual interviews.

In qualitative research, participants can be selected through various purposeful
sampling strategies. Intensity sampling was used in this study. Intensity sampling
involves selecting participants who have rich, but not necessarily extreme, experiences of
the phenomena of interest in the study (Patton, 2002). Also, participants were selected
based on the following criteria: 21 years or older, completion of at least one year in a
graduate program, and completion of first year of residency in the United States. The
purpose of this study was not to make generalizations about international students’
experiences but to explore the experiences related to migration and determine its impact
on them. Participants were selected with the goal of understanding the rich personal
experiences of international students from India that could illuminate their lived
experiences as students in the USA. The typical international student may have several
experiences that have had an impact on his or her life as a result of migration. Some may
have learned resilient ways of adapting to the cultural, socio-economic, and academic
demands, while others may have the opposite experience. Thus, the rationale behind
using intensity sampling helped draw reflections on the purpose of the study from the rich
experiences of the research participants.

Data Collection

In-depth individual interviewing was used to collect data in this study. Patton
(2002) notes, “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of
others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (p. 341).” There are essentially three different approaches to interviewing: the unstandardized, informal conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized, open-ended interview. The informal conversational interview relies on the spontaneous generation of questions in the interview process. The general interview guide approach uses a pre-generated list of issues to be explored. The standardized open-ended interview relies on a set of carefully crafted questions. While there are strengths and weaknesses to each of these approaches, this study will use an integrated approach to the interviewing process. In other words, this study used a semi-structured and non-directive approach with the understanding that the interview approach must adapt to the emerging data. In short, this study relied on a general interview guide containing a set of pre-interview questions while maintaining the flexibility to use unstandardized questions to clarify and probe so as to explore and understand the multi-layered experiences of the participants.

I developed the general interview guide by outlining the following broad categories under investigation: Experiences as an Indian international graduate student in an American university; life prior to migration; relationships with family members, peers, and community members; and experiences related to adjustment to life in the United States. This interview schedule was used with the ultimate goal of gathering information that will then be analyzed to provide description of the phenomenon under investigation. Open-ended questions that were straightforward, clear, and concise were developed. The structured and unstandardized questions helped elicit information from what Patton (2002) calls the six categories of interview questions: behaviors, opinions, feelings, knowledge, sensory data, and demographics. In the interview process, sequencing the
questions is essential in order to elicit information from the participants (Patton). I followed Patton’s recommendation of progressing from noncontroversial questions oriented toward present behavior to questions that address opinions and feelings with demographic questions posed strategically throughout the interview. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is a complex and multifaceted process that includes examining, comparing and interpreting patterns and themes. Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative analysis is a process of transformation, transmutation, conversion, and synthesis by which a researcher makes sense of data and reconstructs the whole from parts. In addition, data analysis in qualitative or naturalistic inquiry does not have a definite beginning. Insights about the directions for the analysis might occur while data collection is underway; while these insights are part of the fieldwork, they are also the beginning of analysis (Patton, 2002). A multilayered or thick analysis of a qualitative research is possible when the researcher is able to overlap data analysis and data collection (Miles & Huberman, 2002). In short, qualitative data analysis is a recursive process that researchers must be aware of during the data collection process.

One of the primary steps in qualitative analysis is the management of the voluminous data. Once the data collection and transcriptions are complete, checking for the quality of information collected and getting a sense of the whole is important (Patton, 2002). Fischer (2006) recommends that during the initial phase of the analysis, the narratives must be read in such a manner that the researcher aligns more empathically with the experience of the research participant. Once the transcriptions were complete
and during the first phase of analysis, I maintained an open mind so as to understand the research participant’s world-view. During the second reading of the narratives, I read through a lens of resilience as it relates to migration, life world existentials, and the bio-ecological model. In this second reading of the narratives, I also organized the text into meaning units, or MUs. MUs were used to generate themes in the narratives. In other words, organizing a narrative into MUs was a way to manage complex and overwhelming data. Finally, after the development of general themes, these themes were viewed holistically in order to synthesize the data.

During the case analysis, I employed theory triangulation by using concepts from resilience, migration, and the bio-ecological model of human development as a means for interpretation of the phenomenon. Theoretical concepts from the bio-ecological model, resilience and migration, were used to gain insights and develop a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students attending American universities. In addition, Van Manen’s (1997) life world existentials were used to give structure to the data analysis. Also, continually questioning how one participant differs from others led to a more complex, dense, and thick analysis (Fischer, 2006). Simultaneously employing various theoretical concepts in analyzing the data or using triangulation increases the credibility and validity of the results.

In essence, the content analysis in this study includes coding data, finding patterns, labeling themes, and finally, interpreting findings. Data collection and analysis is a recursive process. The circularity therefore involves collection and analysis of data simultaneously; while the comparisons, causes and relationships are drawn, data was
collected. Finally, the interpretation was considered complete once no further themes or patterns could be drawn from the data.

**Validation of Data**

The researcher is an instrument in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). As a primary investigator of this study, I brought a number of strengths to this project. As a licensed counselor, a supervisor and an educator, I have developed valuable skills in interviewing. Having practiced counseling and supervision for several years has helped me hone my skills in attuning to the other’s emotional states. Through all my professional and personal experiences I have also learned to be flexible and open-minded. Additionally, my training has given me the knowledge to be able to apply psychological theories and concepts, such as resilience, to the current study.

Going into the research, I was cognizant of my experiences as an international student from India. While my position as an international student provides a common ground with the research participants, being Indian does not mean that I know exactly what other international students from India experience. Like all other researchers, I ran the risk of projecting my perceptions of being an international student on to the research participants. Ongoing discussions with my chair and committee members, and listing all my biases, helped me bracket my subjectivity. Bracketing has a phenomenological connotation and is a process that helps a researcher avoid making assumptions that may not reflect reality. Self-awareness or reflexivity helps the qualitative researcher to be mindful of one’s own social, political, cultural and linguistic biases as well as those of the research participants.
There are a number of methods that qualitative researchers can use to strengthen research methodology, one of which — the bracketing of researcher bias through reflexivity — was employed in this study. It is extremely important for a qualitative researcher to keep the research focused on the research participants’ experiences. This is possible through employing certain self-analytical methods, such as journal keeping as a means of demonstrating reflexivity in the research. In order to enhance my reflexivity, I maintained a journal, and responded to reflective questions influenced by Glesne (2006) such as: What do I think I know and how did I come to know it? What do I observe when I observe? What do I do with what I have found? I continued to read literature related to acculturation and migration to help me not only become clear about my values and beliefs, but also appreciate other perspectives. Thus, maintaining reflexivity helped me to remain honest with the research process and my own influence on the data collected. Additionally, using reflexivity through journaling in a field log, consulting with dissertation committee members, and peer debriefing also increased the credibility of the study.

Another way to strengthen a qualitative methodology is by employing member checks. Through member checks, the research participants review the researcher’s interpretations to see if they make sense to them and fully reflect their experiences (Fischer, 2006). In most cases, member checks help to decrease incorrect interpretation of data and provide authentic data. Thus, by using member checks, I provided an opportunity for the research participants to give feedback on the research findings.

In addition, I also used triangulation to enhance the trustworthiness or credibility of this study. Triangulation helps check the consistency of the study by using different
approaches (Patton, 2002). Triangulation typically occurs in one of four ways: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation and theory triangulation. This study used theory and data triangulations. Van Manen’s (1997) four lifeworld existentials, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model, and protective and risk factors of resilience were used when analyzing and interpreting the data. In addition, triangulated, having been collected through several sources such as individual interviews, researcher notes from the interviews, and the inclusion of participant-provided material such as photographs, anecdotes and diaries. Furthermore, employing member checks (the participants gave feedback and input on my interpretations) and researcher self-reflexivity helped in providing accurate interpretations of the lived experiences of Indian international students.

**Procedures**

I contacted two mid-western universities; one of the universities was a mid-size Catholic university with a total of 10,000 graduate and undergraduate students, and the other was a large public university with a student population of over 40,000. The international student offices at two mid-western universities were contacted via email to request distribution of researcher contact information and recruitment notices (Appendix C) through international student listservs as well as international student organizations.

The recruitment notices explain the purpose of the study and researcher’s interest in obtaining participation from Indian international graduate students who have lived in the United States at least for one year and are currently attending university. While the effect of length of stay on acculturation process of international students is not clear, graduate students who have been enrolled for a year would have adequately experienced
higher educational systems in the United States. This experience possibly helps them in identifying and articulating their experiences in the host country as international students. While the general intent of this research is to provide insights into the experiences of international students, the specific focus is on graduate international students from the Indian subcontinent. While all international students share some common characteristics, selecting this group served to control for some variables such as culture and also gives voice to these students.

An attempt was made to balance gender and provide a wide range of ages. Because the focus of the study is on the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students, only participants who identify as Indian were selected. An initial email contact with prospective participants was made to ensure that the participants were over 21 years of age and had been graduate international students at one of the mid-western universities for at least one year. Once these criteria were met, a brief outline of the purpose of the study including the statement of confidentiality and consent to participate was presented to the prospective participants at the beginning of each individual interview.

One of the major goals of an initial interview is to establish rapport and build trust with the research participant for effective research partnership. Another major goal of an initial interview is to elicit informed consent. A review of the intended uses of the interview was presented to ensure that the participants fully understood the nature of the research. The initial face-to-face meeting with the research participants occurred in one of the private meeting rooms in the research participant’s university library building. Private meeting rooms in the university library were chosen for interviewing purposes because the library space represents a relatively neutral and safe environment. The
preliminary contact was followed by the in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol described in Appendix A. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was followed closely. When appropriate, follow-up questions or probing questions were asked to elicit more information. Permission was sought to digitally record the initial interviews and later be transcribed by the researcher.

Careful attention was paid in transcribing accurately what was spoken, including use of pauses and use of abbreviations in speech (Mergenthaler & Stinson, 1992). I believe that listening to the audiotapes and reading the verbatim transcriptions helped me to immerse myself in the data by paying attention to the participant’s language and style of communication as well as the content of his or her narrative. In addition, I maintained field notes to log observations that might not be captured in the audiotapes, such as nonverbal communication, participant affect and/or my own feelings. These field notes allowed me to add another layer to the thick descriptions of the participants.

After the initial analysis of the data and comparison to the field notes for accuracy, a summary of the analysis was provided to the participant for his or her feedback. This was an opportunity for the participant to accept or correct the interpretation in order to convey a more accurate interpretation. Any of the feedback from the research participants that was relevant and enriched the research was included. These procedures were followed in each interview to maintain consistency.

**Ethical Considerations**

Conducting research that ensures participants’ safety and confidentiality is essential. The development and implementation of an ethical research design is important to address the ethical challenges that arise due to the nature of the reflective process of a
qualitative interview. The use of informed consent is one of the steps that help ensure the
development of an ethical research design (Patton, 2002; Berg, 2007; Glesne & Peshkin,
1992). Participants received a document outlining the purpose of the research, issues
related to confidentiality, benefits and risks of participation, means to obtain a summary
of the results, and information regarding withdrawal from the study; participants
consented to participate in the study only after reviewing this document. A verbal
explanation of the form was provided. A copy of this document is provided in Appendix
B.

Risks associated with participation in this study were limited; the recollection of
past experiences is often suffused with emotion and could cause affective states such as
grief, anger, or sorrow. Data was collected through individual interviews and participants
were asked to be reflective as they tried to answer the interview questions. Patton (2002)
notes that phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective meaning that
lived experiences can only be synthesized through recollection of the past (Van Manen,
1997, p. 104); in other words, recollection of experiences that have already been lived
through. Thus, it is unlikely that the interview schedule will elicit unexplored thoughts or
feelings of participants. The purpose of this research was not to explore emotional
responses of the participants but to gather information on their experiences of being
international students and their meaning-making processes.

Participants were informed about the potential risks and benefits of participating
in the study. As a Nationally Certified Counselor and Approved Clinical Supervisor, I
turned to my skills in assessing the limited risk associated with this study. Participants
were informed that while they may not reap direct benefits from their participation in the
study, their participation contributes to the academic knowledge base. The results will help in providing better support to future generations of international students. While there is little anticipated risk, in case a participant experiences any emotional distress I was prepared to ask the participant if he or she wished to stop the interview. Apart from providing the participant with an opportunity to reschedule the interview, I also expressed that he or she is free to withdraw from the study at any point with no consequences. In case the participant wished to seek help, I was prepared to provide the information of the participant’s campus counseling center.

The participants were informed that their participation would be kept confidential. In order to maintain participants’ confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcriptions. In addition, all identifying information — such as the name of the participant’s academic institution and names of peers and/or colleagues — were deleted from the transcripts and the reports on the data. In addition, measures were taken to safeguard all data; taped recordings of interviews, field notes, and any other written material related to the participants was kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet. Once the transcriptions were completed all audio recordings were destroyed. All collected data, transcribed notes, and consent forms will be destroyed five years from the date of completion of this research.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students. Van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology provided the methodological framework for the study. The research incorporated the additional theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model
of human development and protective and risk factors of resilience described by Harvey (2007); Ungar (2008); and Cicchetti and Cohen (1995). This triangulation of theory helped provide structure for the research design and the analysis of data. This chapter included the procedures used to collect, analyze, and validate data collected.
Chapter IV: Results

This chapter provides an in-depth account of the processed data. The chapter begins with a description of the recruitment of participants, and their demographic characteristics. An account of the process used for data collection and organization is presented, followed by a case-by-case analysis of the eight interviews as they relate to the theoretical framework of this study described in Chapter II. Each individual case analysis includes a data display developed during the case analysis, as well as a summary. Finally, a cross-case analysis of the data is provided.

Recruitment of Participants

I started to recruit participants as soon as I received the written IRB approval from Duquesne University. Emails introducing my study and myself, along with copies of my research recruitment letter, were sent to the directors of international student services in two mid-western universities in the United States. The directors replied and informed me that they agreed to forward my recruitment letters to the Indian students attending their respective universities. The Indian international students who were interested in participating in this research got in touch with me via emails. Further emails were exchanged between the potential research volunteers and me to arrange for in-person, individual interviews. Additional Indian international graduate students who were interested but unavailable to participate in an in-person interview were not selected.

Intensity sampling was used to select information-rich that illuminated the experiences of Indian international graduate students in American universities. Information-rich cases were chosen because the extreme or deviant cases may be so unusual as to distort the appearance of the phenomenon. Since I did not know before the
individual interviews whether a volunteer participant had extreme experiences as an Indian international graduate student, I was prepared to recruit a sample that would allow me to reach data saturation without having to include cases where extreme or especially unusual experiences were included. After completion of each of the eight individual interviews, I realized that while the participants provided rich personal experiences, none reported having extreme experiences. Hence, all eight interviews were included in this study.

For this study, purposeful decisions were made to include demographic variation in terms of age, gender, number of years in the USA, and education among the participants. I interviewed a total of eight participants. Interviews with each of the participants were scheduled at mutually suitable times. All interviews were conducted in the respective university library’s graduate study rooms. The relevant data came from eight semi-structured individual interviews, all of which occurred during late summer of 2012. Each of these interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. The audio recordings, transcriptions of the interviews, and field notes supported the analysis process. Once the transcriptions were completed, as Patton (2002) suggests, I read through the information with an open-mind to best grasp the group’s collective experience and determine that data saturation had been achieved.

**Demographic Details.**

Relevant demographic information including age, marital status, specific point of origin in India, number of years in the university, and employment history, along with general information about the decision to study abroad, was collected from each of the research participants. In the interview process, I followed Patton’s (2002)
recommendation to pose demographic questions strategically throughout the interview in order to elicit rich information from the participants. In addition, I recorded my personal observations on the length and process of the interview, the demeanor and physical appearance of the participant, as well as the feelings, thoughts and impressions I had during the interview process.

Eight persons who fit the selection criteria participated in the semi-structured individual interviews. Of the eight participants, three were female and five were male. The participants were pursuing master’s and doctoral degrees in pharmacy, biotechnology, and environmental studies. One of the female participants and two of the male participants were doctoral students; the rest were enrolled in master’s degree programs. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 28 years. All three female participants identified as being involved in romantic relationships, one of which was a long distance relationship. A common aspect among all participants is that they had lived in urban settings in India. All the participants spoke at least one language other than English. All but one participant reported that English was not the language of instruction experienced until the tenth grade. However, all reported that English was the language of instruction in their undergraduate education.

Comments about the constitution of the family revealed that two of the male participants and one female participant were single children. Only one had an older sibling currently living in the United States. Two participants reported that they had cousins or other relatives in the United States. Two participants revealed that they came from joint families. A joint family is a type of extended family in India that consists of family members from three or more generations — parents, their adult children, the adult
children’s spouses, and offspring — living in a single household compound (Nandan & Eames, 1980).

All participants offered information about the occupation of their parents and siblings. Only two of the participants’ mothers worked outside of home, one as a translator and another as a federal employee. Occupations of the fathers varied; one was unemployed, one was an engineer, one was a bank manager and two were self-employed. One participant’s father was deceased. Three of the participants’ older siblings were engineers, and one was a musician. Only one of the participants reported to have worked briefly in India before migrating to the United States in pursuit of higher education.

For each participant, it was his or her first educational experience in a foreign country. All participants spent between one, and six years in the United States as Indian international graduate students. Three participants lived in India away from their families in order to pursue their undergraduate degrees. For the rest, living in the United States to pursue graduate study is their first away from home.

Information about the participant’s decision to pursue higher education in the United States varied considerably. All participants noted that their families were involved and supportive in the decision making process that led to their study abroad. Four male participants noted that their reason to study in the United States was for the quality of education. All participants acknowledged during the course of the interviews that they were pleased with their educational experience and the freedom they have to pursue their chosen research agenda.
Collection and Organization of the Data

Collecting the Data

Data collection and data analysis was guided by the research questions identified in the first chapter and the theoretical framework described in the second chapter of this study. The three research questions were: (1) What are the underlying themes that describe their view of being an Indian international graduate student at an American university? (2) What are the contexts or systems associated with their view of being an Indian international graduate student at an American university? (3) What are the protective and risk factors associated with the lived experiences of an Indian international graduate student at an American university? The corresponding theoretical frameworks used in this research were hermeneutic phenomenology as outlined by Van Manen (1997), the bio-ecological model of human development as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and the protective and risk factors of resilience noted by Harvey (2007) and Luther (2006).

This study’s theoretical framework provided the basis for the development of the interview questions (Appendix A). In order to minimize the impact of pre-determined categories or bias on the interview process and data collection process, open-ended or non-directive questions were posed to the interviewees. For example, the participants were asked to describe their experiences as graduate students in the host country rather than the challenges they faced in the United States as graduate students. This helped the participants to talk about what they thought was significant and express themselves in a way that they deemed appropriate.
Qualitative analysis is a complex, multilayered, and recursive process that involves an overlap of data collection and data analysis (Patton, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 2002). Following the recommendations of Patton (2002) and Miles and Huberman (2002), I began the data analysis process as soon as possible and while data were still being collected. The reflective process of a qualitative researcher is an important part of the research. Hence, in addition to maintaining field notes I also maintained a reflective journal before and during the data collection process. The reflective journal not only heightened my awareness of personal biases but also helped me become attuned to my personal dynamics during the interviews with each participant.

The eight individual interviews, field notes, reflective journal, and transcriptions produced voluminous data, which were analyzed in order to be used in a meaningful manner that might be of value in attempting to understand and respond appropriately to Indian international graduate students who come to the United States for graduate study.

**Organization of the Data**

As I transcribed the interviews, read the transcriptions, and listened to the digital recordings of the interviews, I started to notice a number of overarching themes. These themes were later classified into categories borrowed from the theoretical framework. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn against the backdrop of the theoretical underpinnings of this research: (1) the lived existential dimensions that consist of the lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived human relation (Van Manen, 1997); (2) the bio-ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); (3) protective and risk factors of resilience (Harvey, 1996 & Luther, 2006). The conclusions were also drawn in juxtaposition with the interviews, the transcripts, and the field notes.
A structure for the analysis as well as the presentation of collected data was developed by reflecting on Van Manen’s (1997) four lifeworld existentials including lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived human relation; Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological factors or the various systems that effected the development of an Indian international student; and protective and risk factors of resilience (Harvey, 1996 & Luther, 2006)

Transcribing the data collected allowed me to immerse myself in the subjective experiences of the Indian international students whom I interviewed. I was mindful of the risk of researcher bias because I share the same cultural background and student status with the participants. I was equally aware of the dissimilarities related to the linguistic and familial backgrounds that constitute cultural diversity, especially differences in the personal cultural experiences of each of the participants and myself. Although this group was constituted solely of Indian graduate students, each exhibited a number of cultural variations combined with unique personal experiences that added another filter. I strived to bracket my biases and maintain an open-mind throughout the data analysis process in order to keep separate the subjective responses of the participants and my own personal responses to my similar situation. Furthermore, once the transcriptions were completed, each participant was provided a copy of his or her interview for review and feedback on accuracy. As I transcribed and analyzed the data, I endeavored to capture and present the essence of the subjective experiences of the Indian international graduate students.

In this chapter, the data presentation begins with a written presentation of the categories derived from the theoretical framework, i.e. lived existentials, ecological factors, protective factors of resilience, and risk factors of resilience. The category lived
existentials encapsulates themes related to lived time, lived space, lived body and lived relation. Themes related to academic, social, cultural, and familial systems are presented under the category ecological factors. In addition, themes that emerged to support a participant’s adjustment in the host country are presented under protective factors of resilience. The category, “risk factors of resilience” consists of themes that pose potential risk to a participant’s overall adjustment in the host country. The written presentation is followed by a table of relevant themes that emerged in the accounts of the participants’ acculturation experiences as well as a summary of the interviews. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis that involves the comparison of themes from each of the eight interviews. The cross-case analysis highlights the common and uncommon themes as they reflect the acculturative experiences of the Indian international graduate students.

Interviews

Interview with Ajay

Ajay is a 23 year-old-male who lived in the United States for a little over a year. He made time during his lunch break for the interview. We met at a university library graduate study room. Ajay had received the recruitment letter and decided to participate in the research in the hopes that sharing his experiences would help other students from India. The first few minutes were spent going over the informed consent form. Ajay was initially hesitant about the audio recording, but once I assured him that all the identifying information would be kept confidential and that the recording would be destroyed once the transcription was completed, he gave permission for audio recording. With that we started the interview process. I began by asking Ajay to describe his experiences as an Indian international graduate student attending an American university. This question
opened a doorway into Ajay’s lived experiences. He described his experiences related to lived time, lived body, lived relation and lived space (Van Manen, 1997).

**Lived time:** Ajay described how he experienced time in India as an undergraduate student. He specifically talked about the long train journeys he needed to take everyday in order to attend undergraduate classes in his college. He also pointed out “You don’t have time for anything else.” Traveling everyday for two and a half hours, he said, left him with only enough time to “eat and sleep.” As he recollected his days as an undergraduate student in India, he added with a smile, “It was good.” Later, Ajay spoke about his current situation in the United States as an international student “Here, I have more time for other things.” He noted that his schedule in the United States as a student is more reasonable and elaborated on how he finds time to engage in physical activities such as biking to his classes.

Ajay, in wondering about his future, talked about his worries — specifically, about his prospects of securing a job in the future. He talked about the need to have more “industry experience” before he can get a job in his field. He went back and forth comparing job prospects in India and the United States:

Most of my seniors had to do two or three post-docs. Then they have enough industry experience. But still, pay-wise it is not a problem but career-wise it is a problem. And even in India after they do Ph.D. they have to struggle to get jobs.

In spite of the outsourcing, people in India have to struggle for jobs.

Ajay’s temporal sensitivity was reflected in his plans for the future as he talked about leaving for India after ten years. He talked about not wanting to raise a family in the United States: “Like, I don’t want to settle here; I don’t want to raise a family here.”
**Lived body:** Ajay described his busy schedule as an undergraduate student in India to be physically “very tiring.” The hectic life style left him with little physical energy to do much else. In contrast, Ajay notes that he finds more time in the United States; in a sense he experiences his body differently, exploring his environment and engaging in physical activities. Ajay talked with excitement about working out in the university gym and engaging in physical activities such as water rafting and hiking. “I got to do many things that I haven’t done before.” But that excitement did not come without a few challenges. Ajay’s challenges with physically adjusting to a new place surfaced as he talked about his food poisoning experience and its effect on his body. Ajay noted that he experienced a bad food poisoning episode the first week after he arrived in the United States. He elaborated with dismay “I lost eight Kgs.” He later said that since that experience he has kept good health.

**Lived space:** Ajay spoke about the stark differences between the life of an Indian international student in the United States and that of a student in India. He shares his apartment with two other students. Ajay does not have a room of his own but did not seem bothered by it. “It is a two bedroom apartment and I share it with one guy, and then there is another guy in the small bedroom.” He added that in order to make things comfortable a new international student has to take care of details that perhaps were overlooked previously. “Like we don’t even have a bed. We need vessels and utensils.”

It is evident that, for Ajay, a journey through lived life provided opportunities to find meaning in new ways. He was surprised that students don’t stand up to ask questions in the class, “You just start talking.” Ajay added with a smile, as if it were funny: “Students were sitting with their legs up and the professor was right there. You can never
do that in India.” Coming from a culture where elders and teachers are respected and held in high regard, talking to them while seated or pointing feet in their direction are gestures that would seem disrespectful. Although Ajay understands that these behaviors are not considered disrespectful, he could not see himself putting his legs up on the desk during a class.

Just like the academic environment, Ajay needed to get used to the physical environment. “I never experienced snow before,” he said. “I have never seen snow. So, it was a really nice experience.” As he spoke about his adjustment to the cold temperatures in the United States, Ajay noted, “I didn’t find it difficult to adjust.” Although things are cleaner and more convenient, Ajay explained that he missed the smells and the feeling of rain back in India “When it rained back home, there was a certain smell in the air, it would be dirty, but still … I miss that. Here, it gets dry so easily and rain water never gets clogged and you cannot tell if it rained.”

**Lived relation:** Migrating to the United States for higher education was the first time away from home for Ajay. He said that his parents and his extended family are very important to him. “I miss my parents and I am very close to my family.” In a very dutiful manner, Ajay tries to keep in touch with his family in order to keep them in good spirits “My mom will cry if she doesn’t talk to me … I talk on the Skype for at least 10 minutes everyday so they won’t feel that bad.” There was also a sense of loss as he explained that he missed some occasions and festivals. He said, “My cousin got married and I missed that wedding. So, that way I miss a lot.” But he showed his rakhi (Raksha Bhandan also known as rakhi is a festival observed in India to celebrate the protective relationship between brothers and sisters. The ceremony involves tying of a sacred thread by a sister
on her brother’s wrist), explaining with a smile across his face that he continues to feel involved with his family, “I got a rakhi from my sister!”

Ajay recognized the changes in friendships he shared during his undergrad days. Like him, some of his friends left India for higher education. He said that he talks with those who are in India over the weekends. He already seemed to make sense of the distance in the relationships, as he said, “Yeah, of course we can’t talk everyday.” And he seemed to be satisfied with occasional online conversations, “But … still, there is Facebook, so we can chat.”

As he settles into the rhythm of life in the United States, Ajay formed reciprocal relationships with other Indian students. As a brand new student, Ajay needed to take care of essential things, “Initially we have so many things like SSN and state ID, so they used to take me to those offices. So, that’s why I bonded so well with them.” The trust in these new relationships developed further as he continued to receive helpful hints in academic and personal areas. “When I needed money initially they helped me financially to buy things.” He explains that he has a group of six friends, with whom he shares an unspoken understanding that they would look out for each other.

As Ajay talked about his relationships with other Indian students, some of his relational struggles came to the forefront. He thought one of his roommates was “uptight,” and the other never initiated any conversations. “I can talk lots of things to him, but always I have to break the ice. Like, I have hardly seen him talk first. First I felt like he doesn’t want to talk, but then he is a very nice guy.” When asked about his relationships with domestic students, Ajay said, “In my department there are hardly any Americans. Even in my lectures, the Americans that were there were three or four years
junior to us. So, we don’t know how to talk to them that much. Like … what to talk about.” Ajay spoke positively about the freedom he experiences in his relationships with his professors in the United States. “Professors here are very nice; they are easy to approach.” He explained further that it was different in India. “If you meet a professor in India, you can never be casual with them. You cannot talk about movies; you have to talk about studies.”

Even though Ajay said that he does not have American friends, he has formed some impressions about the relationship styles in general and expressed some concerns. For instance, he explained “They are not that much connected to their parents … the bond is different.” He further added, “If I raise my family here, my kids might not know my mother tongue and it might be very difficult for them to communicate with my parents.”

It has been a year since Ajay moved to this country and he is processing information about the cultural differences.

Ecological factors: From the ecological perspective, both micro-and macro-systems influenced him. Ajay’s family, educational environment, peers and the socio-cultural environments continued to have an impact on his development. Ajay reported that the educational environment and his relationships with his professors have helped him in feeling a sense of belonging in the United States. However, since the educational systems in India and the United States are different, Ajay seemed to have had some doubts about how he would fare during his first semester.

Like the first semester you don’t know what is the level of other students and yours. So, when the professors give some feedback you feel like you are doing
well. I can do this. Yes, I can set in American education system because here it is
different … like assignments and semester basis.

At the macrosystem level Ajay has recognized seemingly small changes in his
personality as a result of his adjustment to cultural differences. For instance, he is a
vegetarian and he said that he is “more open to things” — meaning that he is more
tolerant of the different food habits of people around him. In addition, he highlighted with
a smile, “Being independent is really good. I mean, you don’t have to ask anyone for
permission.” The statement is an indication that he is embracing the individualistic
orientation of this country compared to the collective orientation of India.

**Protective factors:** For Ajay, both external and internal factors seem to play an important
part in his acculturation process. His excitement and positive outlook on life seem to help
him within the new environment. He noted, “I don’t take things that seriously,” and
further explained, “I don’t have any tension here.”

In addition, the supportive relationships that Ajay shares with his parents, peers
and his professors have played a chief role in his adjustment. He believes that he can talk
to his parents or peers as a means to resolve any issues. He expressed, “First, I talk to my
parents…that way I solve most of my issues.” Ajay considers his friends that he made in
the United States his family and does not mind seeking their help if he finds a need. Ajay
further noted that his relationship with his advisor is important in making him feel
comfortable “My advisor is really nice and I can talk to him about anything.” In addition
financial security through scholarships that Ajay earned also is an important protective
factor, as it brings him a great deal of freedom and relief from financial stress.
### Table 1

**Themes Reflecting Ajay’s Acculturation Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time for exploring the new environment</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility towards parents</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased physical energy</td>
<td>Adherence to native culture</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in new physical activities</td>
<td>Informality in classrooms</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td>Approachable professors and other faculty</td>
<td>A belief that life is better in the United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling respected by professors</td>
<td>A positive sense of self: Open-mindedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasonable academic demands</td>
<td>University Funding/Financial security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individualistic orientation: A sense of independence</td>
<td>Indian Students Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of the Interview with Ajay

Ajay offered insights that were reflective of his lived experiences as an Indian international student in an American university. Ajay is acutely aware of the social and cultural aspects of the American society. Because he is more efficient using time, Ajay reported enjoying physical activities like biking to school and rafting. Talking about changes in personality attributes, it appears that Ajay is embracing the individualistic
orientation of the American culture. He added that he is less judgmental about people and their habits. Regarding Ajay’s relationships with his family and friends in India, he said that he talks to them regularly to “feel involved.” In spite of a sense of awkwardness reflected in Ajay’s relations with domestic students, he draws support from his relationships with other Indian students in his department and university.

Ajay’s experiences indicate that he has been adapting well to the new educational environment. Ajay noted that he is happy with the academic demands as well as the educational environment; he reported that professors and staff are approachable and respectful of him and he enjoys the more relaxed classroom etiquette. In addition, Ajay identified receiving university funding for education as an important source of relief.

**Interview with Rohan**

Rohan is a 28-year-old Ph.D. student who has lived in the United States for six years. Rohan came on time to the library graduate study room to participate in the interview. Rohan said that he had already gone over the recruitment letter. A verbal explanation of informed consent was provided and Rohan proceeded to sign the informed consent. He asked a few questions about the data collection process of this research. Even though his questions were not relevant to the study it provided an opportunity to build rapport. After answering relevant questions, I started the interview by asking him about his experiences as an Indian international student in an American university. Rohan discussed a number of different lived experiences during the interview. Like the other interviewees, Rohan drew some comparisons between life in the United States and in India. His narration is re-arranged in the order of the four lifeworld existentials.
**Lived time:** As Rohan spoke about being an Indian international graduate student in an American university he discussed some experiences in terms of temporality. Rohan spoke rather emphatically about societal norms of structuring life events around time. Based on his account, routines around time bear certain connotations in this culture; for instance, he said:

> Even social life here is so different because everything is so structured I feel. In India you don’t have a concept of weekend. At least I never knew that. So, if there is a birthday you celebrate it on that day. Here everything is postponed to the weekend. Somebody’s birthday is on a Tuesday and you celebrate it on a Friday or a Saturday.

In addition, his temporal sensitivity was reflected in his dedication to work. He said, “like, tomorrow if I have to come at six o’clock I will come and I will stay here till 12 o’clock if my experiment goes on,” reiterating his commitment to his work regardless of the hardships. As Rohan continued to elaborate on his sensitivity to time, he talked about how little time he has to even involve himself in things other than school related activities; “actually, we don’t get a lot of free time.” However, he added that when he does have time to spare he would engage in spiritual activities related to a spiritual organization. “I spend a lot of time reading books on yoga, meditation and stuff like that,” he said.

**Lived body:** Recounting his experiences of being away from his family, Rohan talked about the recent death of his grandmother. His narrative about the recent loss revealed his dilemmas related to lived body. Talking about his grandmother’s death he said, “that’s something that shakes you off,” showing a struggle to be here in his body. Further
elaborating, he said: “It is very difficult for you to be here and realize that there is a death in the family and you cannot attend that.” All this indicates that not being physically present with his family during times of loss or celebration has a huge impact on his being.

From Rohan’s disclosures, it appears that he has thought about a number of aspects of his experiences in the host country. Rohan described about how culture has an impact on the physical aspects such as self-presentation to the world. “The way we dress changes,” he said “I think your body language changes so much.” As if making sense of the changes, he added; “Most of what we do is really an imitation; we learn from what we see and what we hear.” This implies that Rohan recognized that behavior is learned in a socio-cultural context.

Rohan’s narrative brought to light the knowledge that he had to gain as a new international student in order to be able to take care of physical needs, such as knowing how to order a meal. He explained, “I am a vegetarian and food was a major problem for me because I didn’t know where I can get vegetarian food.” In disbelief, Rohan talked about an incident when he mistakenly ate a hamburger. “In India if you say ‘chicken burger,’ it is chicken and sandwich,” he said “So, cheese burger for me meant cheese and sandwich, and I ended up eating a cheese hamburger without knowing.”

**Lived relation:** Relations seemed to be a prominent part of Rohan’s life. He spoke at length about the “difference” he feels within all his intimate relationships. He started by illustrating the manner in which even his relating style changed as a direct effect of societal norms, “Especially in India, guys — friends walk around in the streets with arms around the shoulders, and here you can’t do that, right?” “There’s a lot of difference between what my relationships were like before and what they are right now. With
everybody … with all my intimate family members.” Rohan also drew some conclusions as to why he experiences those relations differently at this point in his life. He attributed some of the “difference” in relations to the individualism he has come to embrace as a result of being a part of the American culture:

When you are here, you are very individualistic and you don’t like other’s telling you what to do. You like to make your own decisions. It could be an effect of the American society or my education program, or it could be because of my age or it could be an effect of all three.

Speaking of old friendships, he said: “To accept changes in my old friends was the most difficult to accept.” He spoke of how work culture has created a rift in his old friends: “They are competitive and also have become a little formal.” He said, for instance, that “these persons would not like spending time with you on weekdays,” construing it to be a matter of distance or disinterest by peers. This indicates that Rohan adheres to some native perceptions about closeness, as it is common for Indians to visit close friends without prior notice and is perceived as closeness.

Discussing his relationships, Rohan said: “Irrespective of nationality, friends who you make here you really don’t feel so intimate with.” Some of the relational challenges surface as he continues to talk about the presumed level of intimacy he would experience in relationships he forms here in the United States versus relationships he develops in India:

If I go to India and make a friend right now … I mean if you meet somebody and you become friends over a time, I am pretty sure that intimacy will be much
closer. We would be more intimate and much closer than a relationship formed under similar circumstances here.

As Rohan continued, it appeared that he drew little fulfillment from professional relationships. Although Rohan was appreciative of all the accolades he receives for small accomplishments, he appeared equally confused:

You know the appreciation you get when you accomplish something is a lot more here than what you get in India. Here, even if it is a small accomplishment, everybody appreciates you and they congratulate you. And you really feel fulfilled, you know as if you have achieved something. Um … but something that I have observed is that they don’t show discontentment. I don’t want to compare everything to India but in India if somebody is angry they shout at you and that’s it. You know that the person is not happy with your work. If my advisor yells at me, I know that he is not happy with my work. But here, no body shouts at me or even indicates to me that they are not happy with something. It’s only after a period of time, like three months passed by, four months passed by and when you are having a conversation you realize that that person is not happy with what happened then. And you are like: oh, had you told me then, I would have rectified it.

Wondering further about relationships with professors he said, “They don’t show that discontentment right way. That makes you feel if they are authentic in whatever they are saying.” Drawing upon an untoward incident that occurred in his laboratory during his first year as a science student in the United States, Rohan emphasized that it occurred in spite of the fact that he took necessary precautions with the equipment. Rohan said, “It
took eight months for them to react [punitively].” Rohan added that he did not perceive having an extra presentation as a “real punishment,” however it appears that the incident only made him question the authenticity in these relationships.

Ecological factors: From the ecological perspective, Rohan’s parents as well as his extended family seem to have played active roles within his microsystem in influencing his development. Talking about his family culture, Rohan identifies: “Well, the major problem was in terms of culture. When I say culture, actually I grew up in a kind of a joint family. We were all so close that I could go whenever I wanted.” After his migration, Rohan’s microsystem changed, and he wondered about the distance he feels in his relationships: “It’s a lot different here. Um … everybody is caught up in their own whatever-they-have-to-do.” Rohan further elaborated on the loss he experiences, saying, “When I came here I saw that ultimately there’s nothing. There’s so much that you lose in terms of family, culture and, yeah so for me that was difficult to adjust to.” Revealing the changes in his relationships, he added that “the level of intimacy is decreasing. It is decreasing little by little.”

Rohan stated that he has been involved with a spiritual group and meditation to a greater extent after he came to the United States. After having touched upon themes of loss and confusion, Rohan said that his membership in the spiritual group “makes him feel a lot better.” He added, “You know, I felt like I knew somebody here.”

Recognizing the macrosystem’s effect on him, Rohan talked about some of the psychological changes that he sees in himself. He said that the degree of individuality he embraces here is greater than what it was in India. He noted: “I was away for four and a half years from home. And at that time there was a certain degree of individuality in me
that arose, but then I don’t think it was so strong as it is right now.” Rohan attributes this change to being a part of American society; he noted that he is not open to receiving feedback from family and even considers it an interference “with what I am doing and with what I want to do.” Although Rohan has begun to see himself as a more individualistic person, his dedication toward his mother is unfailing. He worried about her aging. “I went to see my mother after two years and she was old.” However, with determination he added: “Yeah … it did hurt me when I saw her change so much, and she was old. And now that is one of the driving forces for me to finish and be there for her.”

Rohan briefly talked about dating and it appears that he is in the process of sifting through the cultural norms and adopting what fits. He said:

You know, this is because I am old school and that’s why I feel this way, but umm … there is so much change in terms of people switching. Like you know, like if they are dating somebody the rate of change is much faster than the change that happens in India. That’s again very difficult for me to accept.

Rohan’s wonderings about dating highlight his need to conform to values of his native culture. Perhaps, in some ways it also reveals his need to find a mate in a meaningful way in the host culture.

**Protective factors:** As Rohan continued to reveal more of his experiences in the United States as an Indian international student, it became clear that he draws some strength from his uncomplicated relationships with colleagues, advisor and staff which act as protective factors:

I think the relationships with colleagues here is a lot different. It’s much better than your relationships with your colleagues in India. In India, at least in the area
of sciences and discovery there is a lot of competition. You are competing with your neighbor who could be a very good friend of yours, you know. Here, the competition, I feel … I don’t know if that is specific to the group I am working with or if it is the same elsewhere, but the competition doesn’t jeopardize the relationship with that person.

Acknowledging that his relationship with his advisor has always been good, he said, “We have never had major issues, you know. I was never unhappy with my advisor.” Another protective factor appears to be staff in his department, whom he described as “amazingly good.”

From Rohan’s narrative, it is clear that he is proficient in English. And needless to say, language acted as a protective factor. “I don’t have an issue when talking to a professor or any general American audience. I do not have an issue talking to them. But when it comes to these youngsters …” Rohan indicated a difficulty in connecting with undergraduate students in the United States. He elaborated some observations he made when teaching undergraduate classes, especially about his Indian accent. He said: “The undergraduates really don’t understand what we are saying. When I say that, umm … it’s not just the expressions we use and the phrases we use. It’s not because that’s different from what they use, but I think it’s their mindset.” In a way, Rohan indicated a lack of reciprocity of verbal interaction with domestic students. He emphasized that the more time American students spend with international students from different parts of the world, they are better able to understand different accents.

Rohan spoke about the significant role that international student orientation played in helping him gain knowledge about what to expect as a new international
student. “They tell you that you will go through a honeymoon phase, and would actually face culture shock.” He further elaborated:

There was a time when I was discontented with everything. Like, you know … there is some kind of discomfort with anything that you do. Because you are not comfortable with something and you don’t know what it is. And at that time instead of … like whenever I would feel that way I would tell myself “oh, this is culture shock so let go, let go” so that was really helpful.

**Risk factors:** Some of Rohan’s challenges surfaced as he talked about not knowing how to help himself through some difficult emotional times. He talked about lack of trust in his relationships. “You really need somebody to talk to and I did not trust anybody here.” While he relied on spirituality for the most part however, he acknowledged that it is not enough some times. His struggle to find external resources was evident when he said:

“Usually, things don’t disturb me so much. For some time, I thought that I would go and talk to someone in the counseling center. But, then again, I did not have any trust in them.” Not knowing which way to turn, he said he spoke to friends in India, “I did talk about that to a couple of my friends in India but then they didn’t really understand the situation.” With a quiet voice, he added: “There was some time when I felt really (really) lonely.”
### Table 2

**Themes Reflecting Rohan’s Acculturation Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to time: Concept of a weekend</td>
<td>Individualistic orientation: A sense of independence</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Theme of loss: “Something that shakes you off”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility towards parents</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Superficiality in relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approachable professors and other faculty</td>
<td>Feeling respected by professors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adherence to native culture</td>
<td>University funding/Financial Security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural impact on self-presentation; Use of language</td>
<td>Positive sense of self: stable minded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informality in classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Issues with food: lack of vegetarian options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of Interview with Rohan

Rohan’s interview furnished this study with rich information. Rohan’s report of his experiences highlights some of the challenges he faced being an Indian international student. He detailed changes in his use of language, dressing and behaviors during the
course of his stay in the United States. Rohan’s dedication to work is reflected in his
willingness to work long hours.

Rohan pointed out the differences in structuring and use of time between India
and United States. Throughout the narrative, Rohan consistently emphasized the distance
and superficiality he feels in his relationships. Rohan noted that the spiritual company
and practices he keeps makes him feel at home in the host country.

**Interview with Raj**

Raj called me a day before the interview to reschedule and arrived on-time to the
rescheduled appointment. Raj was a 27-year-old Ph.D. student and has lived in the United
States for five years. The interview was held in the library graduate study room. A verbal
explanation of informed consent was also provided, after which Raj spent a few minutes
to read and sign the informed consent form. Then I asked if he had any questions; he
indicated that he had no questions and was ready to start the interview. Although he
spoke sparingly, he offered details with minimal probing. I started the interview by
asking Raj to detail his experiences of being an Indian international student in the United
States. Raj’s narrative reflected his sensitivity to temporality, spaciality and lived
relation.

**Lived time:** Raj started by saying that the educational rigor “is not that challenging.”
With a broad smile, he added that he was able to continue with his hobbies, like watching
cricket matches and also reading novels. Watching cricket matches is an important
activity for Raj. He said that “he never imagined it would be possible” when he was in
India.
Raj’s sensitivity to temporality was reflected as he spoke about his plans for the future. But his expression also shed light on his dilemma about whether to settle in the United States or in India. Raj said:

Actually, I like this place. But after I get a job if I am here I will settle here. In fact, that’s the reason I have to get out of here before that because this place is too good. So, if I stay long I will be here.

Lived space: Raj continued to appreciate the space that surrounds him in the United States “I like that it is more organized and clean.” Raj’s spacial sensitivity also includes his appreciation for the university. “This university is a nice place; even the city is very nice.” As he spoke about the differences in the climatic conditions between India and USA, he appeared to have not only adapted but grown to enjoy it. “I like cold, and so winter is not difficult for me.” The only negative note Raj made was regarding the commute to his university. “Travel is the only problem … I have to plan my work according to the bus schedule.”

Lived relation: Although his family was not quite enthusiastic about his plans to study abroad, he said he was persistent and knew that he wanted to study in the United States mainly because of the quality of education. He said that he spent seven years for his undergraduate studies away from home, which is the reason his parents were not worried about their son living away again. He acknowledged that the physical distance has actually brought him closer to his parents, saying, “With parents, long distance is more beautiful.”

Raj spoke about his friendships both back home and in the United States. He regrets that his friendships are no longer close. “We are in touch once in a while through
Facebook or something like that.” He explained that busy schedules and time difference makes it harder to maintain friendships in India. “They are busy with their life, and their day time is our night time.” As he spoke about his friendships in the United States, he acknowledged that “social life is a little decreased because friends are decreased.” Restricting his friendships to only Indians, he mainly attributes his lack of new friends to the fact that there are not many Indian students coming for graduate studies.

Upon probing he spoke about his struggles with befriending Americans, recollecting: “Before coming to the United States, I thought it would be fantastic with too many American friends, but it’s not like that …” With some disappointment and self-blame, he added:

People say that there are too many American friends and you will get to know more about their culture, eating habits and how they think. But these things you will know when you meet them and interact with them. And I don’t socialize much … so, I could not really … you know, what I have dreamt about I could not really reach.

On the whole, Raj thinks “people are more straightforward; whatever it is they say it.” Raj appreciates his professors because there is more openness in the relationships he shares with them. He thinks they do not punish. Instead, “they want us to understand.”

Ecological factors: As Raj narrated his experiences in the United States interactional influence of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem on his overall development became evident. Talking about his initial confusion, Raj said, “Like, you come to some place, you don’t know how to do and what to do. So, you are like waiting for somebody to take the initiative.” As his comfort with his environment increased, it...
appeared that he began to make sense of the cultural differences — for instance, informality in classes. “Some things that we thought were really bad in India … like you can drink whatever you want in the classes; you can chew gum. That is the best part.”

The interaction between macrosystem and microsystem is evident as Raj enjoys individualistic orientation and the freedom that comes with such an orientation.

Here you can design your life; in India, I don’t think I would have ever been a key player in my life. There are more chances that you will actually think on your feet and do whatever you like here.

He attributes developing a sense of direction in life and the ability to make small and big life decisions to not having many friends.

His reflections about the mesosystem came to the surface as he talked about freedom in research. Raj draws immense satisfaction from the fact that students in the United States are allowed to explore and learn, something that he missed in India. “If somebody is doing something in their own way, you should let them do it. So, that’s what I like about U.S.” Raj seemed financially content when talking about university funding. “It’s actually too much money.”

**Protective factors:** One of the protective factors in Raj’s narrative is that he does not find American education as challenging. “It’s actually cool; like, it’s not that challenging.” It can be an added stress if a student struggles with school assignments. In addition, Raj also appreciates the freedom in research that American education offers. The freedom allows him to be responsible. “I can do my own work, I will be more responsible and I will enjoy my work.”
Risk factors: When asked about who or what he relies on during tough times, Raj noted: “I can actually get it out without talking to friends.” Raj explained that befriending domestic students is difficult because of the socio-cultural differences. The following indicates Raj’s struggle in finding his place in the new environment:

Like my food habits are different. There are not many vegetarian food options, and that is also a reason for me in not going out so much. The vegetable names are different … I don’t like cheese, butter, or sweets and so initially I was totally an outcast.

Due to decreased social life, Raj began to rely heavily on himself. Raj noted that he enjoys solitary recreational activities, such as reading and watching cricket on the Internet.
Table 3

Themes Reflecting Raj’s Acculturation Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time for hobbies</td>
<td>Improved relationship with parents: “Physical distance a blessing.”</td>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td>Unrealized dream: Decreased social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived space: More organized and clean</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility towards parents</td>
<td>Approachable professors and other faculty</td>
<td>Alienation: Felt like an outcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td>Commute a problem</td>
<td>University funding/ Financial security</td>
<td>Informality in classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Issues with food: Specific likes and dislikes in vegetarian food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individualistic orientation: A sense of independence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Interview with Raj

Recollecting his experiences as an Indian international student, Raj spoke about his satisfaction with his education, professional relationships, finances, and lifestyle in
the United States. He pointed out the positive impact individualistic orientation has had on him; he believes it has helped him actively participate in his life.

Raj said distance proved to be a positive factor in his relationships with his parents. He described himself as responsible and self-reliant. Although he admitted to his social life “decreasing,” he noted that he enjoys watching cricket matches in his free time. The one unrealized dream, Raj noted, is not being able to form friendships with domestic students.

**Interview with Ganesh**

I met with Ganesh in the reserved graduate study room in the university library. After exchanging pleasantries, I explained the informed consent and asked Ganesh to take a few minutes to read and sign the informed consent form after which he indicated in a soft voice that he is ready to begin the interview. I turned on the recorder and started the interview. I noticed Ganesh look at his watch several times during the interview however, he did not say anything about it.

I used the same open-ended question — “tell me about your experiences of being an Indian international graduate student in an American university?” — as an opening to the interview. Key elements from Ganesh’s narrative are described below as they fit into lived dimensions of time, space and relation.

**Lived time:** As Ganesh reflected about lived time, he talked about things he likes doing during his free time. The first thing he talked about was his love for traveling. “I like traveling. If I get free time, I would invest all my time in traveling, in seeing places in the U.S.” However, he said that “with the current situation I cannot do that,” meaning that he has schoolwork to focus on. He added; “Even my friends who are in New York and other
places say that they don’t get a lot of time to see the America they dreamed of back home … obviously, it all depends on person to person like how you need to devote your time to each stuff.” Ganesh said that he reads, watches TV and movies with friends, occasionally listens to music and spends time on Facebook during his free time; talking about Facebook, he remarked: “Internet … internet is a big blessing too.”

**Lived space:** A few details about Ganesh’s lived space emerged as he continued to talk about his experiences. “I share my apartment with two more Indians.” He expressed that he and his roommates share cooking and noted: “I feel that that is one thing that is good about my stay, because you can’t have American food all the time. It’s just the taste that does not fit.” He explained that he likes Indian cuisine for the taste and not for health or nutritional benefits.

Ganesh briefly spoke about his dislike of the cold weather. “But that’s something we can’t stop … I don’t like the cold.” He elaborated about the inconveniences that he experiences during cold weather. “I mean, it becomes difficult in the snow. Traveling becomes a little difficult, if you don’t have a car and stuff and you need to wait for the bus.”

Ganesh talked about how he imagined United States to be while still in India. “Obviously, the court looks beautiful from the other end. America looks beautiful from pictures. New York looks prettier and buildings look nice.” He recounted that when one is here for education the goals are different. “I mean I have been here for two years but I have not seen most of the places around the city.”

**Lived relation.** Ganesh’s account of his experiences revealed that his unchanging sense of relations, especially with his family members, is important to him. “I mean, they are
very much supportive from the very beginning. I am an only child and irrespective of the importance given to single child in India, my parents have been very supportive.” About his friendships in India, he reflected that he is still in touch with old friends. “Obviously the frequency changes.” He determined that the changes are due to time difference or life circumstances and not because of changes in people. “I wouldn’t say people change, but circumstances change.”

Ganesh elaborated that his relationships with domestic students are “different because it would be different … There would be some difference in the way we talk to each other and in the way we talk to another person from another country.” He talked about how people’s personalities are instrumental in the quality of relationship that develops. “It all depends on you and on the opposite person.”

Ecological factors: Ganesh’s account of his experiences as an Indian international student brought to light some changing elements in his mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, and their effects on his development.

The impact that exposure to American education has had on his development was evident as he detailed his experiences. “Undergrad in India is not a very big task. We don’t give a lot of attention to it. We can do a lot being an undergrad, but we don’t do a lot as compared to undergrads in the United States.” In a softer voice, he said: “My basics would have been stronger. I am talking in terms of academics, be it research, and be it theoretical concepts or practical concepts. But, I don’t regret it completely.” As a more mature and responsible student, he understands “that your concepts should be really strong if you want to pursue something here.”

As Ganesh’s narrative progressed, some of his financial struggles surfaced. He said:
If you don’t have a scholarship when you come here from India, it’s difficult to work and study both, and being an international student we are allowed to do on-campus job only. Being on-campus job in this university is restricted to working in food service. We are not allowed to do any library work or stuff like that.

He further explained that he was left with a choice of either working in food services or tutoring. Although he would have preferred tutoring, he needed to wait for a month longer to start work as a tutor. “So, I chose the food services because that was quicker to start.” Ganesh said that he had to work in the food services for eight months before he got scholarships and assistantships. With some hesitation, he explained that it took some adjustment on his part to hold an undesirable job:

So, we have not done such kind of work. Here, the students are very much open to do such kind of work and it’s not considered that you are doing something that you are not supposed to. But, in India they see you with a different eye. It’s a little difficult in the beginning.

Although he had to overcome the negative perception about having to work in food services he later acknowledged that “if you don’t have a means of earning, then it becomes difficult. But again, everything can be worked on and you need to be a little patient.”

Talking about the individualistic orientation of the macrosystem in the United States, Ganesh said that for now he enjoys being individualistic:

Obviously you are not socially bound to other people like in India. Maybe, after five years down the lane I would hate that level of independence. But, as of now, I
don’t think I hate it. In fact, I like it. I still answer to all the questions of my parents. Obviously, the level of independence is higher. And I like that, actually.

**Protective factors:** From Ganesh’s narrative, it is evident that he had to go through adjustment as an Indian international student. “Indian students are more readily adjustable.” Perceiving other Indian students and himself as “adjustable” acts as a protective factor and helps in enduring hardships. Ganesh’s friends in the United States also provide a protective layer. Ganesh added that he has some relatives in the United States; however, he said that his “my friends are more supportive than my family that is here in the United States.”

Ganesh pointed out the important role domestic people played in his increasing sense of comfort. “The people out here are very much helpful. So … I mean, opinions vary from person to person, but I think they are more adjustable and more flexible compared to the people that I have seen in our country.” He also acknowledged the ease with which a student can approach faculty. “When it comes to faculty, the faculty here is more readily approachable as compared to the ones I have witnessed in India.”

**Risk factors:** He added that it takes planning to successfully adjust in the United States. “You need to plan. You just can’t come here, thinking that U.S. is good. Be it anything, you need to plan a lot.” Ganesh acknowledged that he did not plan enough which was one of the reasons for not having received university funding. Lack of university funding and financial constraints were risk factors for Ganesh. In addition, his support network was limited; Ganesh said that he would rely on his friends in the United States if a need arose. He said:
I would not give my problems to my mom and dad — ah, at least the petty problems like getting hurt, things taking time and stuff. All this is part of life. As I said, you are independent — you can deal with it. Maximum, you can tell your friends.

From his statement, it appears that Ganesh heavily relied on himself and endured the stress of navigating a new environment.

Table 4

*Themes Reflecting Ganesh’s Acculturation Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A general sense of lack of time</td>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>University funding a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived space: Commute a problem in cold weather</td>
<td>Individualistic orientation: A sense of independence</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Undesirable work in food services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanging sense of family relations</td>
<td>Informality in classrooms</td>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulty getting used to American food</td>
<td>A positive sense of self: Self-reliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of responsibility towards parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approachable professors and other faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Interview with Ganesh

Ganesh provided a detailed account of his experiences for this research. Ganesh’s imaginations of America turned out to be different from his reality in America. For example, he said that although he loves to travel, due to lack of time he has not yet been able to visit some places in his city, even. Cold weather and commute in the cold weather were reported to be inconveniences by Ganesh. Financial hardships and undesirable work in the food services were far from his dreams about life in the United States however, Ganesh believes that, with patience, life will get better. Ganesh identified himself, other Indian students, and also Americans, as “adjustable,” which provided a protective factor in his well-being. Supportive and understanding relationships shared with his faculty provided another layer of protection. Like the other interviewees, Ganesh said he likes the individualistic orientation that he has adopted from being a part of the American culture.

Interview with Shilpa

Shilpa contacted me after receiving the recruitment letter from the international student office of her university. After reserving the venue at a mutually convenient time, I notified her. Shilpa was warm throughout the interview. After providing a verbal explanation of the informed consent and upon my request, Shilpa spent a few minutes reading and signing the informed consent. We started the interview, as she said that she did not have any questions.

As with all the other interviews, I started by asking Shilpa to describe her experiences as an Indian international student. She responded that although she did not have definite plans about study abroad, she listened to her relatives:
No, you should come. Life here is better. In terms of education, you will get good education. At least do master’s, then go back to India.’ So then, you know, it slowly started growing into me, this feeling that ‘oh yeah, maybe I should go.’ Maybe it’s better there.

Shilpa’s extended family, specifically their positive experiences of living in the United States, not only played a vital role in her decision to study abroad, but also in convincing her parents to send her abroad.

**Lived time:** I recall that a noticeable piece of Shilpa’s narrative about her experiences as an Indian international student related to her temporal sensitivity. For instance, she repeatedly said that the first six months of her stay in the United States was challenging due to the death of her grandfather, lack of preparation and lack of friends to depend on. She explained:

… And I could not contact them because my grandfather expired just a week ago in India. So, it’s like everything just added up in the last week. So, when I came here probably it was the worst time of my life. First six months … because life here is totally different; you don’t have that many friends here.

What made the first six months even more demanding were her experiences in her educational environment. “That was kind of my only bad time, and first six months are tough in lab. And, you know, the courses in the first semester are so tough and it is so difficult to understand their system, their exam patterns.” She detailed that her social life is affected due to lack of time. “Here, you don’t get time to do anything. You don’t go out, you don’t interact with people much, and things add up.”
Lived body: Experience of lived body was reflected in Shilpa’s narrative about how she reacted physically to stress. In one breath, Shipa said:

Like mood … you know, like I was stressed out so much. Then, I think I became weak. Once I got fever and it’s like so much stress and things just add up. You don’t really feel healthy and good about yourself.

To further add to her stress, she was also dealing with homesickness. “Because you miss your parents, you are away from friends, you don’t really go out.” She added: “Then you have lab work also. The lab work does not stop; even if you have an exam you have to do research.” Her comments reiterate that a constant stream of things that drained her.

Lived space: Shilpa spoke about her imagination of America when she was in India:

When I was still in India and just before coming here, it was like “oh, it would be some magical place.” That’s what people in India think, like “oh my God” … like the impression people in India have is people will be so different — like buildings will be different, cars will be like literally flying, something like that. So I was excited.

Shilpa explained that she felt lonely in the city when she arrived. “So … when I came here it was 180 degree turn because this city is a bit of a lonely place.” She noted that, there was a sense of emptiness the first few days after her arrival: “The day I landed, I think it was some kind of a holiday, then there was a weekend and then the undergrads were also not here during that time.” Some issues with her roommate and maneuvering the new environment added to her initial struggle. “The difficulty was to get groceries. Like, I didn’t have a car and our grocery store was far away so, it was difficult to carry stuff. Then traveling in winters was challenging.” She stressed that the “first six months
were difficult to … you know, get a handle of everything and adjust to the system here. I think it was the toughest part. After that, things became easy.”

**Lived relation:** Shilpa talked about the pressures of being an only child. Talking about her decision to study abroad, she said; “Yeah, I mean, I am the only child. So, it was very (very) difficult. Like the toughest thing to do was to convince them to send me away. So, yeah, it took months.” She explained that in stages, she convinced her parents to send her to the United States for higher education. She said eventually her parents agreed because “it’s like an opportunity one should not miss.”

Hinting on the feelings of guilt, Shilpa explained: “It has always been like that; pressure has always been there.” She said her pressures are different since she moved to the United States. She constantly thinks about the wellbeing of her parents back home. “I always think, ‘Oh! My parents are alone back in India.’ ” Shilpa said she calls her parents twice a day. “Like every morning and every night I talk to them.” Shilpa noted that she experiences added pressure when her parents ask her about her plans for the future, such as, where she will eventually settle, graduation, and marriage.

Since her move to the United States she said her perception of herself has changed for the better:

I feel I was like a kid; I didn’t have much focus in life. I was not very responsible. I was just a chilled-out person. But now I think I have become much more organized; I plan well. Even day-wise also, I give thought to what I am going to do. And responsibility-wise also I can take care of people rather than just taking care of myself or not doing anything.
Shilpa said that most of her friendships in India have faded because of infrequent contact; however, she has befriended a lot of Indian students in the United States. “I am not close with all of them.” At several points in the interview, Shilpa talked about her boyfriend’s support in helping her through challenging times. “The good part was my boyfriend, he was with me, so we could share things with each other.”

**Ecological factors:** Talking about the environmental differences that she experienced in the host country and their effect on her development, Shilpa said:

> Even in the university, there is so much difference in the way we treat our professors in India and the way they are treated here. That way this place is better, things like … the kind of relationship you have with your advisor or professor is completely different.

Just like all other interviewees, Shilpa identified that students and teachers in India share hierarchical relationships. She pointed out that her professors in the United States appreciated and respected her as a graduate student. “People would respect your privacy, your confidentiality and things like that. People are so cordial and you know it’s good.”

The distance Shilpa experiences in relationships surfaced as she detailed her perceptions on cultural differences:

> As in family-wise India is better. You have more of a family culture; you have festivals; you have relatives; you have people coming and taking care of you. Here, you are kind of alone. You have to figure things out on your own. Not many festivals, not many people. You won’t find so many people outside. Even neighbors — you won’t talk to your neighbors. But it’s different in India.
Navigating the new educational and cultural environments has had an impact on Shilpa’s development. As she spoke about how responsible and capable she has become, Shilpa said:

It was big! I mean, I think it completely changes a person, you know. It completely changes your perspective towards life. In India, I was like a baby, because I was the only child and I was pampered and suddenly, here, I was alone. It is difficult to handle everything. And that’s the reason I feel that like in my first semester I didn’t do so well. Like, there is so much going on, you know. Like, small things also, like, you have to think about your own laundry, bank balance, things that you need, or spend on, your lab work, then your courses. You feel homesick. It’s like everything just adds on. So, I think it changes a person.

Shilpa noted that she feels more relaxed after having succeeded at learning the system. “I am kind of in a very relaxed position right now — mentally, also not much stressed out.” In a philosophical manner, she added: “I think everything plays a part or a role you know grooming you up for things ahead.”

**Protective factors:** Pursuit of a better life in the United States appears to have greatly contributed to Shilpa’s resilience. Her goals of pursuing and successfully completing her education gave her something to work toward. Shilpa’s relationship with her boyfriend anchored her and supported her during difficult times. “I would say that my boyfriend was a big support here. Without him, things would have been much (much!) more difficult.” Although Shilpa talked in detail about the pressures of being an only child, she also shares supportive relationships with her parents that are protective factors.
**Risk factors:** One of the major risk factors for Shilpa was her continued challenge with the education system. “I think there were some courses that I had difficulty.” She added that she had to retake two important exams:

That exam is the toughest; it is very (very) demanding, and extremely tough. I did not clear it the first time and then going through it again was a very difficult part.

I also had thoughts of dropping out of Ph.D. and going back to India.

She said that her exams were stressful. “Because of those exams, I became irritated and a difficult kind of a person to handle.” She said that she stopped eating healthy food. “You eat junk. And health-wise, also, you feel very unhealthy, and uneasy.” Although Shilpa said that she went through challenging times related to her acculturation, she noted that she could have talked to her seniors about it. But, “I don’t think I really discussed this thing with anybody.”
Table 5

*Themes Reflecting Shilpa’s Acculturation Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial time of stress</td>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>Academic challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roommate issues</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility towards parents</td>
<td>Supportive advisor</td>
<td>Initial confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commute a problem</td>
<td>Issues with food: Not many options with vegetarian food</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>adjusting to the new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely in the city</td>
<td>Pressures of a single child: stress keeping in touch with parents twice daily</td>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical uneasiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>due to stress related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>eating habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A belief that life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>is better in the United</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Interview with Shilpa**

Shilpa’s narrative about her experiences provided pertinent information. Some of the themes that emerged in Shilpa’s narrative are unique, for instance Shilpa was the only participant who used the word ‘stress’ in expressing how she felt during the initial adjustment period. She remarked that she experienced academic challenges and that she even considered dropping out of her Ph.D. program. Shilpa narrated about the negative effects of stress on her mood and body. As she talked about her relationships with her parents, Shilpa said that she feels concern and pressure to be in touch with them, as she is
an only child. Several times during the interview, Shilpa said she appreciated the support and strength she gains from her boyfriend.

**Interview with Myna**

Myna and I scheduled the interview at a mutually suitable time. However, on the day of the interview Myna rescheduled to an earlier time slot, and so we met an hour earlier than originally planned. Myna had a pleasant demeanor throughout the interview. Even though she was going to miss her express bus home, Myna stayed longer than planned to give a thorough account of her experiences. Similar to the other interviews, this interview took place in the library graduate study room. The interview began after I provided a verbal explanation of the informed consent and Myna read and signed the informed consent form.

My first question, as with the other participants, was: “Tell me about your experiences of being an Indian international graduate student in an American University.” Myna recollected events that she thought were important in shaping her life experiences in the United States.

**Lived time:** For Myna, temporal being in the world was reflected in her account of how she organized her life. She recounted how she spends her evenings. “By the time I go home, it is usually 7:30 or 8. So, after going home you want to rest. You take out the laptop; you have Internet connection, unlimited opportunities to watching something.” She realized that the way she used her evening affected her next day. “By the time you are done watching, it is 10 o’clock, so you don’t generally make food. If you don’t cook in the night, you don’t have lunch for the next day; you don’t have breakfast.” It seems that what she did with her time affected her self-care routine.
As Myna talked about her temporality, she said that she was very interested in learning guitar and that she even spent weekends learning it. “I went to this school of music to ask if somebody could help me learn a guitar and I found a student teacher. I learned for about two or three months.” She added that although she wants to get back to it, she struggles with inertia. In an almost self-critical manner, she said: “I want to do a lot of things, but then my interest dies.” She added that her “interest never dies” when it comes to spending time with her friends.

**Lived space:** As Myna narrated her initial experiences in the United States, her spacial sensitivity surfaced:

I came in spring so there was nothing like an orientation in spring. So, that was the bad part. I did not know much. Even now, if you ask me to come to a certain place on the campus, I would not know because I did not get the orientation that people get when they come newly to a university.

Myna added that she missed the orientation, when generally students are taken to important places to help them familiarize with the campus. Myna said that she was confused. “I came here and everything came on to me like everybody were taking me everywhere, like the SSN office and all.” Some of this she attributes to not having a proper orientation. “I was not introduced to the university normally as I should have been.” She continued; “No orientation, I just landed and the very first day I came to the lab.”

**Lived relation:** Myna is the second interviewee who said that her relationships with her parents got better after her move to the United States. “It has gotten better. Before I came here, I would be scolded; there was no respect, but there was love.” She said that her
parents used to think that she was irresponsible; however they perceive her as being more mature now. “After I came here, after one year I went back home and I was treated like somebody grown up. It was good actually. I was pampered and also I was not being treated like a kid. It was good.”

Talking about her friendships in India, Myna said that some of them have changed. “The only reason it changes is because people are getting married.” She added that once her friends got married “they got disconnected with what it was like before. We can’t really exchange ideas, and we can’t talk because we don’t have much time.” She explained; “The only reason some friendship does not exist right now is because the friendship was not so good. But most of the good friends that I had I am still in touch with them.”

Myna said that although she developed some friendships in the United States she noted that she is still not completely secure in those relationships. She explained: “Relationships build slowly. I know that it will take some time and it happens and that is the truth. And in one year it is hard to know everything about everybody.”

**Ecological factors:** Myna’s microsystem consisted of her close relationships with her parents, especially with her father. “My father used to take care of everything. From the time I woke up in the morning to the time I slept, most of the things that I had to do my father did it for me, like making my bed or packing my lunch.” She acknowledged that she took his kindness for granted. Myna added that being responsible after she moved to the United States stirred some adjustment issues. “Seriously, I had no problems, no issues for adjusting except for the food, taking care of laundry and taking care of monthly expenses.” Myna expressed that she once had trouble with academics because she did not
study. “The mistake was mine. If I had taken care and studied, I can do anything if I want to.” This only appears to have given her the awareness of where the problem lies.

Myna detailed how her perceptions and behaviors changed after she moved to the United States. “My perceptions about things have changed a lot. Like, when I was in India I never drank. I used to hate people who drank.” She added that she even drank alcohol once, and “I started thinking that I don’t see anything wrong in being a social drinker.” Talking about smoking, she said; “I don’t see anything wrong in it.” Myna added that she does not judge other people’s behaviors. She explained that people are responsible for their behaviors. “I don’t think I should care or talk about it.” Focusing on her attitude, she said: “There are a lot of things in terms of social perceptions that have changed in me, and I like it.”

When asked if her change in perceptions had to do anything with the larger American culture’s effect on her, she said, “I would not have changed to this extent in India.” She added that the things or people in her environment never affected her attitude. “Strangely, never what the society said or what happened around me affected me, because my mind always worked like this.”

**Protective factors:** One of the protective factors for Myna was the friendliness of people in the host country. “People here are very friendly — very friendly; even the Americans I didn’t know smile at me.” Smiles from strangers made her feel more comfortable with her environment. “That was good, that people were smiling at you, talking to you and giving you importance because you are new to this university.” Another characteristic that perhaps helped Myna was her ability to make friends easily. “I am good at making friends, so I have lot of friends.”
Although Myna expressed that she initially had financial problems, she said that one of her new friends helped her, “But there was one friend who helped me out. Got me a laptop, he didn’t know me at all. Like, he just gave me money for a laptop, and I repaid him after six or seven months.” She added that during the first few months a lot of her seniors helped her as she adjusted.

Myna said that her positive attitude was helpful in adjusting in the United States. “When you are new, you always see the positive things. Everything was good — the professor was good; the staff was good; the lab was awesome.” She said that it was one year before reality set in, “It took me one year to get out of that ‘everything is good, everything is fine, everything was fun’ mentality.” Myna said that at times she is in disbelief to witness the friendliness of strangers in a city in the United States. She added that she is not used to that in India.

**Risk factors:** Myna narrated her struggles with taking care of her day-to-day needs, “Even now, it is daunting for me to do all these things, keep my key in my pocket, keep my bus pass ready. I am very forgetful. I lose a lot of things, but I get it back.” Further she noted, “Even here I am treated like a kid by my friends. Like, if I do something wrong I am reprimanded. Sometimes, I feel like I don’t get the treatment I should get for my age.” These comments highlight the question about the quality of her relationships with peers.
Table 6

Themed Reflecting Myna’s Acculturation Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life organized around time</td>
<td>Individualistic orientation</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Initial confusion adjusting to the new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion orienting self to new space</td>
<td>Excitement about education</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commute a problem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved relations with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive sense of self: Responsible, friendly, less-judgmental, capable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Students Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends a distraction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Interview with Myna

Myna’s narrative reveals rich information about her acculturation process in the United States. Although she has only lived in the United States for a little over a year, Myna has already dealt with tremendous changes. Myna reports that after moving away from an over-protective father, she learned to manage her entire life on her own. She
noted that she has gone from feeling confusion in her early days to feeling confidence as the length of her stay in the United States has increased.

Myna noted that she has become less judgmental toward others and more responsible in general. She attributes these changes in herself to reading books — not to being a part of the larger society. Myna elaborated about her friendships; while she thinks that she can befriend people easily, she added that friendships distract her from things of importance.

**Interview with Sachin**

A few minutes before the interview, Sachin informed me through a text message that he was on his way to the interview. Once we got settled in the graduate study room, I asked Sachin to take a few minutes to read through the informed consent form. After he read and signed the form, he said he did not have any questions for me and said that we could start the interview.

As with the other interviews, I started by asking Sachin: “Tell me about your experiences as an Indian international graduate student in an American university.” Upon hearing the question, Sachin paused briefly and said with a smile; “I will answer your question as best as I can.” His narrative is rearranged according to the lifeworld existentials.

*Lived time:* Sachin’s temporal sensitivity was revealed as he responded to one of the questions. The statements he made implied temporality in his life world as he projected his future in America:

I was kind of curious about how my life is going to change completely. I was curious about how it is going to happen from the time I wake up to the time I go
to bed. Whatever my professional career is going to shape. And culture-wise, of course, I knew people here but they were acquaintances. So, I will make new friends; everything will be new like the way I travel, the signals, even the roads, the street names. So yeah, I was very curious about it.

The manner in which he spends his weekends with his friends has changed in the United States. “I like drinking. So on weekends — Friday nights and sometimes even Saturday nights — some of my friends and I go out, have dinner, have some beers.”

Sachin implied that his time with friends was simpler.

When I was back in India my group of friends used to just sit down in a building just below our apartments and we used to just chat or sometimes play cricket or other things. And here, Friday evenings are mostly ‘party time’ and party is mostly friends, music, and dance I think.

Apart from spending time with friends, Sachin said that reads about international issues and watches movies and some TV shows.

**Lived body:** Sachin’s experiences with lived body surfaced as he talked about his food habits. “I would prefer to use fresh foods over frozen stuff. And I would prefer freshly made lemonade over bottled lemonade that I get here.” He continued to explain that he likes everything but the compromises he makes on food. “In India, I only ate freshly cooked food. Now, I even eat the same food next day. So, all those changes I had to adapt to.”

**Lived space:** Sachin’s spacial landscape surfaced as he reflected on how he adjusted to his new environment. He said that some of the Indian students who have already been in the United States helped him find an apartment and other day-to-day things. “They took
me to different places in the first week and showed me around. That’s how you do
groceries, and that’s how you go to a pub, and the bus system works this way and
everything.”

Sachin talked about the ease with which he was able to feel at home in the United
States in terms of fall weather. “And even the weather was similar to Mumbai in August
when I came, so it was not very difficult to get used to.” He recalled his first winter in the
United States “First winter, well … it was cold definitely. But it was not that bad because
of less snowfall, there were no storms or anything. So, I feel like I was lucky.”

**Lived relation:** Sachin said that his family was supportive in spite of changing to a field
of education that is perceived as unpopular in India.

My father always wanted me to go abroad till I left. After I came here, he felt a
little sad. My mom, though, was a little emotional. She didn’t want me to go
thinking that I would settle in the United States and I will be away from her
forever. I kind of explained to her and she realized that I have a dream.

Sachin’s lived relation was further expressed when he spoke about his efforts to keep his
family close:

I almost talk to them every alternate day for half an hour to forty-five minutes.
And whenever I don’t get a chance to chat on the video I call them and I be in
touch and keep myself updated with the things.

The physical distance has created distance in his relationships with friends in India. “But
now, since we are busy with higher studies and jobs and the timings are different, so now
we don’t talk as much.” He elaborates that infrequent communication is not a reflection
on loosening of ties with his friends. “Like, the things we talk about have changed I think. Now, we talk more about general things.”

As Sachin talked about his American peers, his relational struggles surfaced. “Initially, it was kind of a barrier because I don’t know what the reason was but I couldn’t be a friend from my side.” He added that it was easier for him to be a friend with an American once that person initiated the relationship. “One of my best friends, he lives beside me, I think he took the effort, initiative, and then we became buddies.” As he talked, it became clear that unfamiliarity about American sports and pop culture contributed to his uncertainty:

The things they talk are ice hockey, American football, and I was not familiar with those things. Now, I am obviously. So, initially I didn’t understand like what to talk with them. Everything is different, like the food habits, the jokes, the comics they read, and the comics I used to read; everything is different. So, even if we go somewhere … to give you an example, I went to a restaurant and they had a give-away night, so they asked some questions and you had to answer and stuff. I went with my American friends. All the questions and everything were related to their childhood. So, I was like why am I here what am I doing here?

He added that he is now not only aware of American sports but also feels comfortable talking to and also befriendning domestic students.

_Ecological factors:_ From Sachin’s narrative, it is evident that his relationships with people in his microsystem have furnished him with the crucial support that he needs in his adjustment process. However, his determination to be independent in choosing a field of study that is meaningful to him played a crucial role in his development.
My extracurricular activities were related to nature, animals and pollution stuff. So, I decided to convert my hobby into my professional career. In India, I found some courses, but I did not like those courses because it was fully science or fully management based. This program out here is a combination of both, so finally I decided to come here.

Apart from choosing to come to the United States for academic purposes, Sachin said that he wanted to be independent in general:

Well, to be honest, apart from the academic purpose, I wanted to go away from home for a couple of years and be on my own, be independent. In India, I could have done that but, you know, earning as a student in India is difficult. Although he is not financially self-sufficient, Sachin said: “My tuition fees are coming from India, but still on the other fronts like whatever the house hold chores I have to do or cooking and earning for living and everything.” Sachin elaborated about his work-study experience, indicating the effects the mesosystem had on his development:

I work in food service. Initially, because we are not used to such kind of working system in India for a day or two I felt like ‘oh, my god, what am I doing? Why am I working here?’ But, then as I got used to it and I understood that any work is good as far as it benefits you, I felt more comfortable.

Sachin recounted that one of the reasons for him to not have explored his environment in terms of engaging in activities is because of financial constraints. However, he added that he tries not to miss any activities sponsored by the International students association in his university:
Whatever the student associations have to offer — not just Indian student association but even the international student group — whatever they have to offer I do go there. I go to the events. Once they took us to a park. Sometimes I have to work when the events are going on, so I have to choose. I choose work over my activities.

While adapting to the host culture, Sachin has also kept in touch with Indian culture by participating in activities sponsored by the Indian students association.

Various activities are organized, so I never actually miss Indian culture over here. And my seniors in another university invite me to activities in their university. So, its like I celebrate Diwali twice — more than what I used to celebrate in India.

Even Independence Day celebration and everything goes on, so I am enjoying it.

**Protective factors:** As Sachin narrated the different aspects of his lived experiences in the United States it was evident that several elements served as protective factors. In his personal life, he had loving relationships with his parents. In addition, he said: “My elder brother who is also supporting my education financially and emotionally and in all ways.” Sachin added that studying in the United States is not a challenge for him. In spite of studying a new field, he said, “I can do it easily.”

Sachin spoke about his ability to adapt: “I consider myself adaptable.” This protective characteristic came to light as he spoke about his English language fluency and the adoption of an American accent:

Language was not a problem; I didn’t do it on purpose, but my American friends say, ‘the way you used to speak when you came and the way you speak now is a little different.’ The accent or whatever, it has come. Because if I speak like how I
used to, they won’t understand. I have to modify in order to help them understand easily.

In terms of adjusting to the educational system in the United States, his professors contributed a great deal, Sachin said. Because of the differences in the educational systems between India and the United States, Sachin needed reassurances from his professors about his performance:

In my first semester, I was always worried about how I was doing, my performance, not just the grades but also overall class participation and the quality of my work and everything. So I used to go to them and ask them directly, ‘Is there any problem or anything?’ Because I am not used to this system, so they used to be supportive always and they used to tell me ‘you are doing good; we don’t feel any difference between the other students and you, you have adjusted well.’ Whenever I needed help they were ready to support.

Sachin added that he did not think of being an only Indian student until he saw his class list. He said he remembered thinking, “Oh there are no other Indian students. Am I in the wrong field?” He noted that a number of friendly American and international students helped.

Speaking about international student orientation, Sachin said that meeting students from different countries helped him understand that he is not alone in some of his struggles.

In the orientation, I got a chance to meet students from different countries. I got to know that whoever comes here faces the same difficulties or they go through the same things more or less. Then I got a chance to interact with them and that
helped me feel more comfortable on campus. Whenever I went out on campus I used to meet one of them — not just Indian, it could be anyone from any country.

**Risk factors:** As Sachin elaborated on his experiences, he acknowledged that financial struggle was a challenge: “I think the only challenge for me was earning enough to support myself. I mean I didn’t want to go on vacation and other things — not a greed for money, but a need for money.” In spite of doing work-study, the money was not enough to pay for monthly expenses, which only added stress. “But again, that income is not enough to pay off your rent and phone bills and everything. So, sometimes I used to think, like, ‘how do I manage my finances and other stuff.’ ” He explained that not making enough money affected him in many ways. He wondered: “If I was here on stipend, my activities would have been completely different. Like, rather than being home I would go out and do something fun.” It is evident that many of Sachin’s risk factors are related to lack of financial stability.
### Themes Reflecting Sachin’s Acculturation Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in weekend activities</td>
<td>Sense of responsibility toward his family</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Limited university funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels comfortable in lived space</td>
<td>Adherence to Indian culture</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Financial stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance led to distance in some relationships</td>
<td>Issues with food: displeasure eating frozen food or foods with preservatives</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excitement about education</td>
<td>Believes that he is not alone in his struggles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A positive sense of self: Adaptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A belief that life is better in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Students Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary of Interview with Sachin

Sachin gave an in-depth account of his acculturation process. He talked about his curiosity of life in America even before migrating to this country. Sachin narrated his
initial struggles in forming relationships, especially with domestic students. However, among all the participants, he had the most success in this area. Sachin reported that his relationships with other Indian students helped in his adjustment in the new environment and also in feeling close to Indian culture. An important insight that Sachin shared was his realization that all international students in general struggle with regard to adjusting to numerous changes during their stay in the United States and that sometimes becomes a common ground to build relationships with other international students. American culture has had an immense effect on Sachin’s choices — for example, his choice of weekend activities. The majority of Sachin’s stress comes from financial hardships; however, emotional and financial support from family and “adaptable” nature help him in coping with life in the United States.

**Interview with Suma**

Like the other participants Suma also got in touch with me after she received the recruitment letter. A few minutes before the interview, Suma called me to ask if it was OK for her to bring coffee to the interview. Suma had a big smile and a cup of coffee in her hand as she entered the library graduate study room for the interview. I provided a verbal explanation of the informed consent and also asked Suma to read and sign the informed consent form. Suma had no questions about the interview process and indicated that she was ready to start the interview.

I began the interview by asking Suma, “Tell me about your experiences as an Indian international student in an American university.” Suma narrated her experiences that related to lived time, lived body and lived relation.
Lived time: Some of the items that Suma listed in response to the question about her experiences as an Indian international student exemplified the notion of her temporality. For instance, she said: “The little time we get, we friends just chill out and do some weekend get-away kind of a thing.” She elaborated about her responsibilities in her department: “You are expected to come on Saturdays and you are expected to work around 12 hours a day.” In addition, Suma explained that she has “little time” to visit her extended family in the United States. She also identified that another contributing factor for lack of time is her busy social life. “But I have mingled too much with people here that I don’t get enough time to visit my family often.”

Lived space: When asked about her first impressions of the United States, Suma said that it was not dramatic because she had travelled to another country before. But she added that the United States was a different experience:

I have travelled UK before so maybe I didn’t have that sense that I was going abroad. Because, since I visited UK, so I didn’t feel … definitely when I entered this city I felt, ‘wow,’ because US is different from UK. I don’t know, there was nothing that was that different. But the first time I came to this city, I had a different feeling. I felt ‘Oh! Wow … it is beautiful,’ but then I got used to it.

Lived body: Suma’s corporal sensitivity was reflected as she talked about her adjustment to the demands of being a student in the United States. Suma recollected that she was apprehensive about her adjustment to the demanding school schedule when she was in India but noted that she got used to it. “Somehow I just got adapted. Now even if I want, I cannot sleep beyond 7. I don’t feel bad; I feel sleepy, but it’s not that I would want to go off to sleep again.”
Suma talked about missing food. “I miss home cooked food; I don’t cook. So, I sometimes miss some dishes that my mom used to make.” She acknowledged that it was not a major problem because she had already spent a few of her undergraduate years away from home and she is accustomed to it. She said that eating out and eating unhealthy foods affect her body:

Lately, I have been eating out a lot. For the last one year, I ate out a lot. After I returned from India in March, I ate out almost every day for about two months. Obviously, that doesn’t go very well with the body.

While Suma recognizes her self-care needs, she appears to find it a challenge to balance self-care and other demands of a student life.

**Lived relation:** Suma reflected on her decision to come to the United States for master’s and Ph.D. degrees. She said the decision came about because of her friends and the better research opportunities:

I didn’t plan to come here, but, like, the reason I gave GRE is because my friends were giving. The other reason to come here was because my friends told me that the labs were better and there was more seriousness in research; which was not there in India.

Suma said that her parents are well educated and wanted her to pursue her education abroad; however, she said that her mother was emotional:

The problem was my mother; she wants my brother and me to always stay close to her. She was very afraid — not because I was going to pursue a Ph.D., but because I was going too far physically. She wanted me to come back with a
master’s when I first started out. Now, she thinks that I should finish my Ph.D. and come.

Talking about her father’s support, Suma noted: “My dad is like ‘you do anything it’s OK. You paint, it’s OK. You dance, it’s OK. But as far as you are doing something, anything is OK.’ ”

Suma said that her relationships with other Indian students in her department helps her feel at home and remarked that it is one of the reasons she didn’t make any effort to befriend domestic students. “Like, they are acquaintances like professionally … we work, but it’s strictly work and nothing personal. I don’t know … because there are too many Indians in my department.”

Suma was most appreciative of her relationship with her advisor. She recollected an incident, which left a lasting positive impression on her:

Like, my second semester was not really good academics-wise. But my professor stood like a rock. Like, sometime back I was thinking that I will not do a PhD and that is because I was fearful — because in a Ph.D. there are only ups and mountains to climb, and I was scared. And he guessed that, and he sat down with me one day for three hours and somehow he gave me the feeling that it’s going to be OK.

She remembered that although this conversation with her advisor was lengthy, it was extremely important in her feeling supported as she faced an academic challenge.

Ecological factors: From Suma’s narrative, it appears that her educational environment had an impact on her development. Suma’s experiences have made her more responsible. For instance, she said, “When I was doing bachelor’s in India, I couldn’t even imagine
waking up before nine in the morning.” She elaborated that she feels purposeful being a part of the American academia:

   After I came here, I actually liked it a lot because somehow we had something useful to do and somehow we enjoyed the coursework, and the labs. Everything was very different; I have never had the semester system before. I was used to yearly system in my college. But somehow I just got adapted.

In addition, Suma noted that she was expected to teach as a graduate student. She said that with no previous experience in teaching, she took the requirement seriously:

   There is a level of seriousness; I had to teach the students means I have to really teach them properly. I had to study and prepare well, so … I mean that was something new. It was fascinating the first and the second semesters.

Even though the initial excitement about teaching faded eventually, Suma noted that she was well-liked by her students. Suma pointed out that teaching assignments further added to her feeling purposeful as a graduate student in an American University.

**Protective factors:** A relationship with a friend she met in her undergrad provided support for Suma. Talking about her adjustment process, she said:

  It was not tough. My best friend and I came to the same university, and to the same department. So, from day-one we knew we would be roommates and we have become so used to each other now. So, I had no problem in adjusting.

In addition, she recounts that her relationships with her professors greatly helped in her adjustment process. “All the professors are very good. And the best quality in my advisor is his humility.” Suma was happy to note that her professors treated her with respect.
Suma spoke about several intrinsic and extrinsic aspects that proved to be protective factors. Hinting on her personality, Suma said: “I adapt and adjust very fast. Usually I don’t let things bother me you know.” Suma also pointed out that fluency in English language helped her with her assignments and teaching. She attributed her ease with adjusting to the easy access to Indian movies “I think that is another reason why adjustment wasn’t a problem because we live in a city. All Indian movies play in theaters.” Suma is also involved in an Indian association outside the university. She said that she gives classical music performances during the association events. In addition, Suma had already spent a few of her undergraduate years away from home, which helped her in not feeling homesick.

**Risk factors:** Like the other interviewees, Suma also talked about the stress she experienced during the first week of her life in the United States. She explained that there were many things, such as setting up her home and being oriented to the demands of her program. “Particularly the first week, I think there were so many things new coming at us. We were busy setting up the home, buying stuff, et cetera. There were so many new things to think about.”
Table 8

*Themes Reflecting Suma’s Acculturation Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Bio-ecological Aspects of Being an Indian International Student</th>
<th>Protective Factors of Resilience</th>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A general feeling of lack of time</td>
<td>Adherence to native culture</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>Academic challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy adjustment to space: Previous travel abroad and years away during undergrad</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Initial confusion adjusting to the new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating out is not good for my body</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy social life with Indian friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive sense of self: Stable minded, responsible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Indian Students Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Interview with Suma**

Suma’s account of her experiences provided rich information for this study. Suma noted that although she followed her peers in preparing to study abroad, her well-educated parents helped in her decision to study in the United States. Suma attributed her sense of comfort in adjusting to the host country to her previous travel abroad and also
time away from home during her undergraduate degree. In addition, Suma said that her relationships with other Indian students and especially her ‘best friend’ from India provide support in her acculturation process. In her educational environment, her advisor’s support was noted as important in her decision to continue with a Ph.D. program. Other than the initial days of confusion, Suma’s narrative did not bring to light any challenges in the host country.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

The cross-case analysis of the data revealed a number of themes that emerged as significant during the individual interviews with the participants in this study. These themes emphasize the role personal and cultural backgrounds played in the lives of Indian men and women as they experienced the acculturation process while pursuing a graduate education in the United States. All the main and sub-themes are listed in the table below followed by a discussion.
Table 9

*Categories and themes reflecting participants’ experiences of the acculturation process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifeworld existential: Lived time</td>
<td>• More time for exploring the new environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More time for hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sensitivity to time: Concept of weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A general feeling of lack of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time of stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Life organized around time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeworld existential: Lived space</td>
<td>• Commute a problem in cold weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Organized and clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Roommate issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lonely in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Confusion orienting self to new space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Comfortable in lived space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeworld existential: Lived body</td>
<td>• Increased physical energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engage in new physical activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eating out is not good for my body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeworld existential: Lived relation</td>
<td>• Awkwardness with domestic students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unchanging sense of relations with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved relations with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Physical distance led to distance in relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Busy social life with Indian friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological factors</td>
<td>• Adherence to native culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of responsibility towards family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Excitement about education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Issues with food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pressures of a single child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individualistic orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Approachable professors and faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informality in classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved relationship with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Impact of culture on self-presentation and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling respected by professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reasonable academic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Factors of Resilience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open-mindedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A belief that life is better in the United States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University funding/ financial security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indian Students Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive sense of self: Self-reliance, adaptable, responsible, Less-judgmental, open-minded, friendly, capable, stable-minded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Boyfriend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge that all international students struggle as they adjust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors of Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Initial confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Superficiality in relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decreased social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Undesirable work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Academic challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stress related eating habits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural influences on planning life around time were evident in some of the themes. The concept of a weekend was new for some of the participants; however, it was easy for them to get accustomed to. Many engaged in weekend activities, such as sightseeing, shopping, going to Friday-night movies, and parties. Two participants mentioned that they have more energy and were able to engage in new physical activities, such as horseback riding, rafting, and zip lining. Participants also tended to postpone celebration of birthdays or Indian festivals to the weekends. Many of them talked about using weekends to catch up with family and friends in India. At least two participants talked
about feeling relaxed about available free time over the weekends while the others complained that they did not have enough time.

Many of the participants believed that life is better in the United States. For many of these participants, momentum to study abroad was embedded in a belief that they would do better in all areas of life in the ‘land of opportunity.’ The narratives of some participants suggest that they imagined America to be thrilling, with many American friends, fast cars and tall buildings. Some of this imagery seems to have come from movies; while the reality of life in the United States is different, a hope to fulfill their dreams continues to be a driving force in their acculturation process.

The initial period after migration was riddled with confusion related to many adjustment issues. Some of the issues faced by these students were related to feeling comfortable in the new environment, self-care, and use of transportation. Even though the participants found the cities in the United States to be organized and clean, some mentioned being confused getting oriented to the space. A few of the participants talked about feeling lonely in the city. Three participants commented on the time it takes to do grocery shopping and meal planning. These participants also commented on their frequency of eating in restaurants as undesirable. At least one of them commented on restaurant food and its negative effects on her body. Only one participant noted experiencing difficulties with her roommate. Many of these participants found transportation to be problematic, especially in the winter. General dislike for cold weather coupled with waiting for public transportation was considered unbearable and time-consuming. These students would clearly prefer a warmer climate but at the same time realized that all they can do is to endure.
All participants identified forming relationships with people in the host country as a difficult matter. A sense of loss experienced as a result of migration and a decreased social life bred alienation for a few participants. The participants reported not being able to develop lasting friendships with domestic students; awkwardness in engaging with domestic students was mentioned as a hurdle by all the participants. Most of them viewed cultural differences, along with lack of relatability with American humor and conversation topics identified as issues in forming friendships. Even though two participants had tried gathering knowledge about American sports, they soon realized that there were many cultural nuances that were difficult to comprehend. However, social relationships of all participants were not restricted to Indian students. One participant who was successful in forming a trusting relationship with a domestic student noted that his friend initiated the relationship. The same participant mentioned that he was able to form lasting relationships with other international students.

Peer influence was a source for considering study abroad for two female participants; the rest talked about better education or “freedom for research” as sources for their consideration to study abroad. Even though the participants decided on their own to study abroad, all the participants talked about the involvement of their parents in their decision making process to study abroad. Parents did not appear to be overbearing; rather, they provided emotional and monetary support. In preparation to study in the United States, two female participants noted that they followed their peers in taking the GRE and applying to universities in America. Many of the participants went to the university where they are currently enrolled because students from their undergraduate colleges had gone there and had given positive reviews of the university. All participants
identified parents and Indian friends as sources of support before and after their arrival in the United States.

For all the participants, the need to do well academically was not only a personal but also a familial expectation. Participants commented on the need to adjust to the American educational system, from the yearly schedule to the semester system, as well as the learning and evaluation methods. Participants noted that they needed to get used to an evaluation system that focuses on analysis rather than memorization covering the breadth of a topic rather than the details. One participant also mentioned the extensive use of computer and Internet for assignments, saying that it takes him longer to complete assignments as he gets used to working on a computer. Only one participant commented directly on issues related to academic rigor and said it took her about a semester to get adjusted. Due to differences in the grading system and student confidentiality, some participants were unsure about their academic progress, especially in the beginning. At least half of the participants wondered about their professors’ perception of their overall academic adjustment. All the participants acknowledged having no language issues; however, one participant commented on his Indian accent posing a challenge when teaching undergraduate students.

Only the male participants remarked on the informal classroom culture as well as the relationships they shared with professors. All of them noted that although it was acceptable to be casual in the classes, they preferred not to do so. In addition, the participants found it enjoyable to be able to talk to their professors about topics unrelated to academics. The participants commented on feeling respected by their professors because of the way they were treated. In part, they were pleased by a lack of obvious
hierarchy in academia. All of the participants also valued their relationships with their advisors; they sought their advisors’ support and guidance in times of need.

One of the predominant themes in the narratives is the role of parents in the overall adjustment of the participants to their new lives in the United States. All participants indicated that frequent and regular communication with their parents is a significant aspect of their lives. The families considered frequent and regular communication important and desirable. Most participants talked about using modern technology, such as the Internet, to call and video-chat with their families. Frequent communication provided the participants with emotional support as well as a sense of feeling involved with their families in spite of the distance. One participant indicated that keeping in regular contact with her parents caused her added “pressure.” Six participants identified parents as primary sources of support; they said they would reach out to their parents for comfort during times of stress. Four of the male participants and two female participants spoke about their relationships with their mothers. Their mothers were described as being supportive and involved in their lives. A few participants attributed physical distance to improved relationships with their parents.

When discussing their futures, it is evident that the participants considered the impact of immigrating to the United States on their lives. Seven out of the eight participants expressed a desire to return to India after getting their degrees and gaining some work experience. Even though they were convinced to go back, none of them were sure of the exact point at which they would return to live in India. Two major reasons behind them wanting to go back to India eventually are a desire to be close to their parents and not wanting to raise their children in an American cultural environment.
Participants identified friendships with other Indian students as a major source of support. Many of the participants contacted other Indian students from their future universities for help with travel from the airport. In some cases, the participants lived with those Indian students until they found their own places. Some of the participants also received monetary help from other Indian students until they were able to start assistantships. The participants relied heavily on their Indian friends for social and emotional support. For many of the participants, the bonds they developed were a result of shared Indian culture and invaluable help. Three of the participants said that they consider their Indian friends in the United States as their family.

Among the Indian students, a popular on-campus resource is the Indian Students Association (ISA). It is a formal organization formed and maintained by Indian students. All the participants engaged in activities organized by the ISA, and it was a major resource for meeting and learning about other Indian students from different departments. One participant was comforted by the fact that other international students also experienced similar struggles with adjusting. Only one of the participants considered going to the counseling center for support; the other participants did not recognize the counseling center as a resource. When asked if they would seek counseling, they were hesitant about how helpful it would be for them before they said that they would consider it as a last resort. Doubt, stigma and lack of knowledge about mental health services persisted.

Participants’ adherence to native culture is further evidenced in their expression of a sense of responsibility towards their parents, developing culturally relevant friendships, and celebrating Indian culture through festivals. Individualistic orientation
was one of the end results of adjustments that these participants had made in reconciling with the host culture. The male participants, especially, realized a sense of independence and responsibility that comes with individuality. One female participant talked about individuality in terms of feeling less judgmental toward others.

While many participants recognized the influence of culture on their attitudes, only one participant pointed to the influence of culture on self-presentation and use of language. Many of these participants were also self-reliant, believing that they should be able to deal with their problems and not burden their parents. Participants also perceived themselves as being adaptable, capable, responsible, and stable; while these qualities help in acclimatizing to the new environment, they also reflect the participants’ resilience.

Most of the participants said that they would reach out to family and friends during times of distress. For any academic issues, the participants identified their advisors as sources of support. Self-reliance was also pointed to as an important element in their overall adjustment. One participant talked about membership in an Indian spiritual group as a source of support. In addition, one female participant noted that her boyfriend provided essential support during an initial period of confusion.

A more serious pragmatic issue faced by two participants was securing adequate funds for their education. In spite of their wishes to be independent, these students had to depend partially on their families for their educational expenses. The two participants commented on their issues in adjusting to working in the food services in order to sustain themselves. While working in food services was physically grueling, they also noted that they had to overcome negative attitudes towards holding jobs in food services. While one of them eventually found university funding, he identified the process of securing
university funding as frustrating. The others who found funding from the beginning commented on the satisfaction in having enough money. As the participants spoke about their general adjustment process, one of them commented on her previous travel abroad as being helpful in her easier adjustment to the new environment. Three other participants lived away from their families during their undergraduate studies; they also acknowledged those experiences as having prepared them in some ways for a student life in the United States.

**Chapter Summary**

Eight Indian international students participated in individual interviews and provided rich information. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed. I engaged in data synthesis through a process of carefully examining and coding the data. During this process, field notes and my reflective journal were reviewed before conclusions were drawn. A case-by-case analysis of the data collected is provided in this chapter. Once the individual case analyses were completed, the derived data were used to conduct a cross-case analysis to highlight emergent themes — some of which appeared universal to all participants, others unique, but all profoundly significant for Indian international students.
Chapter V: Discussion

More than 100,000 Indian students migrate to the United States for higher education each year (Institute of International Education, 2010). Volumes of scholarly work have examined the effects of migration to be both psychological and physiological in nature (Berry, 1997; Choi, 1997; Hwang & Ting, 2008). Navigating through contradictory value systems between native and host cultures is a source of stress for international students (Mori, 2000; Wang et al., 2011), and that stress is accentuated by academic and developmental challenges posed by university study (Saurez-Orozco & Saurez-Orozco, 2001; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). While the general effects of international study are known, research specifically focused on Indian international students is sparse. In addition, a gap has existed in the academic discussion of the beliefs, values, and cultural differences among Asian groups. In conducting this research, my principle purpose was to examine the lived experiences of Indian international students who have chosen to migrate to the United States for graduate study. It is my hope that the findings of this research will add to the literature on international students, information about the experiences these students face and how best to understand and support their transition. For those who come in contact with Indian international students, especially counselors, this kind of knowledge will help to foster a better understanding of these students’ unique backgrounds and particular needs.

In this research, the major questions I was interested in exploring were: (a) What are the underlying themes that describe the experience of being an Indian international student at an American university? (b) What are the contexts or systems associated with the experience of being an Indian international student at an American university? (c)
What are the protective and risk factors associated with the lived experience of an Indian international graduate student at an American university? In the previous chapter, I presented the findings related to these questions. In this chapter, I will discuss my interpretations of these findings. Following that, I will discuss limitations, recommendations for research, and implications for the preparation and practice of counselors.

**Themes**

The theoretical framework for the research and structure for data analysis was developed through a triangulation of the lifeworld existentials of Van Manen’s (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology, Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) bio-ecological model of human development, and the protective and risk factors of resilience (Harvey, 2007; Ungar, 2008; Seccombe, 2002). Analysis of the collected data produced several themes. In each interview, the themes reflecting a participant’s experiences as an Indian international graduate student were categorized into: lifeworld existentials, ecological factors, protective factors of resilience, and risk factors of resilience. Life world existentials encapsulated themes related to a participant’s experiences of lived time, lived space, lived body and lived human relation as an Indian international student. Social, cultural, academic, and familial aspects provided contexts to a participant’s experiences in the host country and were identified under the category “ecological factors.” Sources of strength vital to a participant’s adjustment process were identified as protective factors of resilience. Factors that posed on-going threats to the over-all adjustment of a participant were identified as risk factors of resilience.
Lifeworld Existentials

Many of the participants reported their sensitivity to lived time in the host country. Most got accustomed to the concept of a weekend rather effortlessly and reported engaging in extracurricular activities. One participant, however, reported a disinclination to follow the societal norm of scheduling celebratory life events during “weekends.” Rohan noted, “Here everything is postponed to the weekend. Somebody’s birthday is on a Tuesday and you celebrate it on a Friday or Saturday.” In a sense, Rohan wondered about the relevance of what is a considerable structure in the American way of life and, more importantly, how to make meaning of it.

Even though the participants enjoyed the comforts that American life had to offer, they complained about pragmatic issues they encountered in the social systems they now live within. Commuting to the university was identified as an inconvenience. For instance, Raj said, “Travel is the only problem; I have to plan my work according to the bus schedule.” Some of the participants complained about bus travel in general; having to schedule work around a bus schedule and having to wait for a bus during inclement weather were the two features they complained about the most. Ganesh, who does not like cold weather, noted, “Travelling becomes a little difficult, if you don’t have a car and stuff and you need to wait for the bus. But that’s something you can’t stop.” It must be noted that while the participants complained, they have also come to accept these changes as a way of life.

Themes related to lived body emerged from the analysis of the data collected. Participants expressed both positive and negative views on the effects of acculturation on their physical wellbeing. Wilton and Constantine (2003) found that some international
students find it more acceptable to somaticize acculturative stress. However, I did not find it to be the case with the participants in this research. What I did find was a gender difference related to this category. Generally, the male participants commented about having more energy and enjoying more physical activities in the United States, whereas the female participants spoke about the effects of stress resulting from living in a new socio-cultural environment and neglecting self-care needs.

An important theme related to lived relation was developed from numerous comments from many of the participants who reported having no friendships with domestic students. One said, “I could not achieve it;” having American friends was an unrealized dream for this participant. Although the participants reported a desire to have American friends and believed that they could learn about American culture through friendships, they reported feeling awkward in initiating or maintaining relationships with Americans. Culturally accepted ways of interacting with indigenous people posed a challenge to the overall adjustment of the participants.

Baker et al. (1991) and Arthur (1997) observed that people from collectivist cultures generally looked for depth and stability in relationships, which could be one of the reasons for the participants’ confusion and disappointment about the apparent superficiality of relations with Americans. However, instead of making themselves vulnerable in forming relationships with domestic students, these participants’ choices in developing and maintaining friendships with other Indian students also could be interpreted as a resilient response to a challenge.

The adherence to native cultural values and their impact on social adjustments in a new culture can be further witnessed in the testimony of participants as they talked
about their experiences with the Indian Students Association (ISA). King (2004) noted that people create meaning through belonging, doing, and understanding, which can be used to interpret meaning from the information shared by the participants. It was clear that the participants felt they belonged through their association with ISA. They enjoyed native food, they danced, and they practiced rituals that were familiar. Most importantly, they shared the common experience of being an Indian international student in the United States. These shared social aspects helped the participants form strong bonds with other Indian students.

**Ecological Factors**

From the data collected in the interviews, it is also evident that adopting an individualistic orientation came with its own challenges. For instance, while Rohan enjoyed his independence, he reported feeling a “distance” in his relationships perhaps as a result of feeling torn between two cultures that promote contradictory social values. Sato and Hodge (2009) observed the dynamic of “social distance” in their research, which sheds light on the challenges that some international students experience in adapting to a new culture. It can be broadly construed that while adopting intrapersonal aspects of an individualistic orientation was easy and even exciting for the participants, working through interpersonal aspects was confusing and much more complicated than expected.

For the participants in this study, adjustment in a new socio-cultural environment involved learning a myriad of new, yet simple, skills. An example of this that emerged from the interview data was learning the locally acceptable skills required when ordering food at an American restaurant. Rohan, a vegetarian, experienced psychological distress
as he inadvertently ordered and ate a meat sandwich. Such experiences not only cause international students to engage in behavior that is not consistent with their wishes but these types of pragmatic issues that cause social confusion and misunderstandings can make international students question their ability to be successful in their new social context.

A general assumption about the social context of Indian children is that they are raised to be respectful of their parents. In many instances, they learn to consider family needs before personal needs (Sandhu, 1997). The results in this research show that most of the participants maintained close ties with their parents and relied on their emotional and sometimes financial support. As in other Asian cultures, Indian culture values interdependence and collectivism (Chang & Subramaniam, 2008). This cultural value was evident in that all participants expressed a sense of responsibility and regard toward their parents. The sense of responsibility was often expressed as they talked about returning to India to live with their parents and care for their parents. It is customary for adult children, especially male children, to continue to live with their parents and serve them in their old age. However, through some narratives, it became evident that at times family expectations added psychological distress. In Raj’s case, he noted that it was “beautiful” to be away from his parents. He was happy exercising independence. Similarly, Shilpa, being an only child, felt “stressful” to be in touch with her parents twice daily. Expression of individual needs was more evident in the narratives, as American cultural influences on the participants can be traced as each of the participant’s focus shifts onto the self.
One of the themes reported by all participants was related to changes in self-perception. With their origins well-rooted in the collectivistic culture most prominent in India, the participants learned to value and hold group needs ahead of personal needs. Most of the participants noted that they have become more individualistic after their migration to the United States; they recognized the impact that the American value for individualism has had on them. For example, Raj said that individualism made him feel more responsible for his life. Other participants also reported feeling a sense of freedom and independence as a result of feeling less pressure to meet parental expectations. In other words, they noted feeling grown-up. For the first time in their lives, they were making decisions related to their work, education, money, and self-care needs — all on their own and not influenced as much by their familial affiliations.

Many of the Indian students reported that they migrated to the United States with a belief that doing so would not only ensure upward social mobility for them but also bring honor to their families. Since the participants knew little about American academia, they reported that their first step was to learn what was expected of them and how to respond appropriately to the academic demands of the university. While analyzing the data, it became clear that adjustment for these participants to American academia had three essential parts: (1) Adjustment to new academic expectations, (2) balance of work and study, and (3) comfort with classroom culture.

For all the participants, it was the first time in a semester system. Unlike the yearly system that the participants were familiar with in India, the semester system meant that they had to keep abreast with the course information. In other words, they could not delay learning the course material until the final exams, something they were used to in
India. Although many participants noted that the course material was not challenging, success in the classes required different skills, emphasizing, for example, critical thinking rather than rote memorization.

These participants also noted that they had to quickly adjust to balancing work and study schedules. In India, many students generally live protected lives; they live at home and they depend on their families for educational and living expenses. Affording an education in the United States was beyond the means of the participants’ families. As a result, all of the participants reported having to supplement their income through employment. For many of these participants, working while taking courses was exciting, and often interpreted as a rite of passage to being a financially independent adult.

In India, students follow strict classroom etiquette, for example, at the beginning of each class students stand to greet their professors and it is also a general expression of respect for students to stand while conversing with professors. Coming from a structured classroom environment, the participants’ attention was drawn to domestic students’ body language, such as sitting with their feet up while facing a professor and eating in class. These types of behaviors would be construed to be disrespectful according to Indian norms. One participant noted, “Funny thing I found here was that my first lecture was in a big auditorium and then students were sitting with their legs up and professor was standing right there. You can never do that in India.” Even though these were seemingly insignificant classroom norms, they were markedly different from what the participants were used to in their native country and meant that the participants had to learn to adjust psychologically and behaviorally to these differences.
Hierarchical relationships between students and their teachers in India are the norm. Many participants noted that their professors in India rarely had a sense of humor or engaged in informal conversations with students. Another dynamic that contributed to the issue was that these participants were undergraduate students in India, which meant that the student body per class was much larger than in a graduate class, making it harder for their professors to know them personally. Given the blatant power difference in the relationships, participants noted that it was harder for the participants to develop healthy and supportive relationships with their teachers in India. Many of the participants agreed that they felt “respected” when American professors engaged in informal one-on-one conversations. More so, they thought that they were treated as “human.” For example, Suma said that her professor came back to her to apologize when he recognized that he was disrespectful. These experiences can be interpreted as indications that a cordial and conducive learning environment in the United States made other adjustments tolerable for these participants.

Previous research found that lack of English language fluency caused problems in personal, social and academic areas of an international student’s life (Smith & Betz, 2000; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Although the participants in this research did not discuss issues related to language specifically, their narratives highlighted some difficulties related to Indian accents and the use of slang in their interactions with domestic students. It should be noted that having a satisfactory level of fluency in English helped these participants obtain graduate teaching assistant positions. However, language was reported as one of the reasons for the participants’ difficulties in developing meaningful relations with domestic students.
**Protective Factors of Resilience**

Resilience is strength awareness (Smith, 2006). For many of the participants, one of the primary reasons for their decision to migrate to the United States was that “life is better in the United States,” both professionally and personally. The participants as well as their parents considered it an “opportunity” to pursue higher education in the United States. As Myna and several participants noted, “positive energy” towards life had a ripple effect on all spheres of life. In many ways, a positive outlook made life manageable; which in turn helped them perceive themselves, as many described, as “adaptable,” “stable” and “adjustable.” Cognition of positive personal attributes is an essential resilient characteristic that helped in their acculturation process.

The participants in this study were all young adults who have embarked on a transcultural journey. As described previously, these participants navigated through emotional, financial and other situational challenges with the aid of notable emotional maturity and self-regulation. With few predictable and relatable aspects of life in a foreign country, all the participants needed extrinsic support that they could rely on. Their smooth transition was only possible through the support they received from their families, peers, advisors, and spiritual practice.

For many of the participants, family remained a vital source of support. In spite of the distance, most of them looked to their families for regular emotional support and sometimes for financial help. Furthermore, the participants’ families, including siblings, played a vital role in their decisions to study abroad. To some extent, turning to their families became easier due to technology. All the participants used Skype and on-line chats as a means to keep their families involved in all spheres of their lives. However,
one cannot make the generalization that all Indian students keep their families closely involved in their lives. Among the participants, some noted that they did not want to burden their families with their life problems. One participant, who has lived in the United States for the longest, thought that his mother could not have advised him on a professional issue he was facing. In these cases, perhaps, the age of the student and length of stay in the United States are factors that affect the level of involvement with his or her family.

Peers were also vital sources of strength in the adjustment process of the participants. Most often, participants befriended other Indian students who were classmates or people they met through the Indian Student Association. These individuals have had similar experiences as the participants’ and were therefore in a better position to understand, give advice, and provide support. Stronger bonds also developed not only because of a common cultural background but also through a shared experience of living abroad. Although a few expressed trust issues with their peers, the participants still depended on their peers when they needed someone to rely on. In addition, the participants also identified their peers in India as sources of support. Even though there was geographical distance, those peers in India were still trusted to provide support during times of need.

In the participants’ network of support were also their advisors. All the participants sought their advisors for academic direction. For example, Suma said “humility” was the most notable aspect of her advisor who took time to guide her through her decision to continue with her Ph.D. program. After that, instead of thinking of
dropping out when she faced some academic challenges, she learned to trust in her capabilities.

One participant identified affiliation with a spiritual group as a source of strength. Rohan, “felt at home” in the United States after he joined a spiritual group. He draws continued support through regular group meetings. Rohan also identified his practice of meditation as another means of strength. Essentially, I found through this research that relationships provided major sources of support to the participants. Participants reported that these relationships provided social, emotional, and financial support and aided in their resilient responses to the acculturation process.

**Risk Factors of Resilience**

Due to their student visa statuses, international students can only take up on-campus jobs, and finding university funding can be a difficult task in many cases. Most of the participants in this study found on-campus jobs in their departments at the beginning of their first semesters, for which they were grateful. However, two of them had to take up jobs in the food services. These participants took time to adjust to their jobs because of negative beliefs that were deeply entrenched in their minds. Since India is segregated in terms of class, it is considered undesirable for an educated person, from a respectable family background to work in the food services. Functioning from class-conscious mindsets, the participants took time to adjust psychologically to their jobs.

Navigating an unfamiliar social, cultural, and academic environment is associated with major adjustment stress (Hwang & Ting, 2008) and Shilpa’s mention of her struggle during the initial phase of her migration is an indication of her experience of acculturative stress. For example she said, “When I came here probably was the worst time of my life.
First six months … because life here is totally different.” Shilpa repeatedly noted during the interview that the first six months after her migration to the United States were especially stressful in adjusting to the new academic and social environments.

Acculturation typically involves awareness and development of a sense of self in an intercultural context (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Participants accounts of feelings of loss and alienation in the new environment is evidence of their vulnerability as they navigate through a confusing period of intercultural transition. Their internal psychological distress is accentuated by external factors such as financial stress, decreased social life, and superficiality in relationships, which posed potential risks to the well-being of the participants.

**Research Questions and Identified Themes**

A discussion of the relationship between the research questions and the identified themes is presented in this section. In doing this, my quest is to highlight how, substantially, the themes answer the research questions. Each of the identified themes are not listed below. Instead, they are collapsed into groups for brevity. For instance, relationships with parents, peers, and advisors were all recognized as protective factors by many of the participants; however, in this section they are all identified under “supportive relationships.”

The first question in this research was: What are the underlying themes that describe the experience of being an Indian international student at an American university? The themes that best answer this question were related to a participant’s adjustment to a new socio-cultural environment, awareness of self and others in a new socio-cultural environment, and adjustment to a new academic environment. Each of
these themes highlights not only the participant’s attitude towards life but also how life experiences in the new environment have shaped his or her self-perception.

The second research question was: What are the contexts or systems associated with the experience of being an Indian international student at an American university? The themes that best answer this research question are associated with the participant’s physical, intercultural, relational, and academic contexts. The participants described their experiences related to physical, social, cultural and academic contexts in their their lives. While parts of their narratives highlighted struggles, others showed their creative means of adaptation.

The third question in this research was: What are the protective and risk factors associated with the lived experience of an Indian international graduate student at an American university? The following themes identified by the participants provide an answer to this question. Supportive relationships ranked highest among the participants’ protective factors. Among other themes that added layers of protection for participants were: participation in organizations such as Indian Student Association; engagement in spirituality; and development of a positive sense of self. In other words, acculturative stress that the participants experienced was bearable as a result of the protective factors. Some of the participants who did not find sufficient university funding to cover educational and living expenses reported that financial stress and undesirable work in food services were potential risk factors. In addition, some of the female participants, in particular, identified academic challenges and decreased self-care, which pose reasonable health risks. Initiating, developing, and maintaining relationships with American students were reported to be challenges.
The themes related to these three research questions collectively portray the lived experiences of the eight Indian international students who participated in this research. Participants described various aspects of their lives in the United States. It is certain that these experiences have had a positive effect on their development. While there are risks inherent in any transcultural transition, these participants’ overall outlook towards life has helped them to draw strength from protective factors in their process of acculturation. In short, it is evident that the potential for resilient adaptation is significant among Indian international graduate students studying in the United States.

Table 10 provides an illustration of the relationship between the research questions and the identified themes.
Table 10

*Relationship between research questions and themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Related Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the underlying themes that describe the experience of being an Indian</td>
<td>• Adjustment to a new socio-cultural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international student at an American university?</td>
<td>• Awareness of self and others in a new socio-cultural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adjustment to a new academic environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the contexts or systems associated with the experience of being an</td>
<td>• Physical context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian international student at an American university?</td>
<td>• Intercultural context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relational context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the protective and risk factors associated with the lived experience of</td>
<td>• Supportive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an Indian international graduate student at an American university?</td>
<td>• Participation in organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive sense of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Undesirable work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decreased self-care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationships with American students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations of the Study**

Although I endeavored to develop a trustworthy research study that was grounded in theory, this study has some unavoidable limitations. The first was related to the sample. Eight Indian international graduate students from one mid-western American university participated in this study. In addition, most of the participants came from two
major cities in India. This would limit the effect of diversity on the participants’
worldviews since the sample’s geographical distribution did not reflect the cultural
diversity found within the Indian culture. In addition, the participants were also chosen
from one mid-western university. Even though it would have been ideal to draw
participants from several universities to represent a more diverse set of experiences, the
scope and resources available to conduct this study dictated that a convenience sample be
utilized. Perhaps there would have been a greater diversity of lived experiences among
Indian international graduate students had the participants been chosen from different
universities.

The richness and depth of knowledge gained through this qualitative exploration
of the eight individual experiences does not permit generalizability in the traditional
sense. However, the knowledge gained through this study can be partially applied to
better conceptualize the phenomenon experienced by similar Indian international students
and other groups of international students who migrate from Asian countries to the
United States for graduate study. In addition, the knowledge gained through this research
can provide a useful basis for future research in this area.

The researcher is an intrinsic part and an instrument of any qualitative research
(Patton, 2002). In conducting this research, I have taken several precautions to bracket
my ideas and opinions and keep them separated from the participants for example,
maintaining a reflective journal to maintain “empathetic neutrality” (Patton). As a result,
I believe that I operated as much as possible from a neutral and objective position during
the data collection and analysis processes. In order to keep the research focused on the
experiences of the participants, taking precautions to bracket my biases was especially
germane and important because of my personal experiences as an Indian international graduate student. In addition, the quality of participants’ responses depended on variables that were beyond my control, such as the comfort of the participant in sharing personal experiences. A hesitancy strongly rooted in cultural belief that personal issues must only be discussed with family members could have been a contributing factor in some of the participant’s resistance to offer more personal information. In addition, for all the participants, this was the first time partaking in research of this sort.

**Implications from this Study**

**Research**

The results of this research indicate that various relationships have provided protection to the participants against the risks related to acculturative stress. However, many of the participants found it difficult to develop relationships with domestic students. One participant said, “I felt like an outcast,” about not being able to form relationships with domestic students. Another participant sensed a “distance” in those relationships he shared with domestic students. To some extent, the differences in personalities and culture explain Indian international students’ challenges in developing relationships with domestic students. But could it also mean that the participant expressed feeling discrimination? What needs to be explored further is the role of race, status, and other characteristics in the formation of these relationships. Coming from a highly structured and hierarchical Indian social system, the Indian international students might internalize challenges in developing relationships with domestic students as rejection, which in turn could have a unique effect on their acculturation process. Indian students have limited skills to even identify some of the socio-cultural issues that affect them in
personal ways. Investigations focused on the role that race and status might play in the Indian student’s ability to develop relationships with American students would help in furthering the understanding of Indian international students adjustment to study at American universities.

In addition, this research highlighted the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students studying at an American university located in an urban area. Partly, their adjustment was aided with easy access to Indian movies, Indian food, and other cultural activities. However, there is a need for future research to focus on comparative studies exploring whether Indian international students adapt to universities in urban settings more easily than universities in rural areas of the United States. This would help in the continuation of the discourse on the acculturation process of Indian international students. In addition, repeating this study with a different, more broadly representative sample would help capture as much of the diversity of the phenomenon as possible.

Graduate education in the United States can be a life altering experience for many Indian international graduate students. However, unpredictable events like the recession, and post-education job prospects can have a far-reaching influence on Indian international students’ desire to study in the United States. Future studies that focus on the effects of such events on the students’ mobility would emphasize the need to prepare students for global competencies.

**Higher Education**

American universities actively recruit international students and thus have a responsibility to support their cultural transition in order to increase their probability of success. One reason for the intent to recruit international students is to increase diversity
on campuses. Often international students are expected to provide cross-cultural experiences to domestic students. However, equal responsibility should be placed on the American students to be interested in and learn about the international students enrolled with them. In this respect, incorporating a department-level mentor program in which an international student is paired with a culturally sensitive domestic student during the initial months would ensure an easier academic and cultural assimilation.

It is also important for faculty to be aware of the unequal power relationships between international students and American students (Hsieh, 2007). Encouraging relationships between international students and domestic students can help everyone involved to engage in a more authentic multicultural experience where all students will learn to understand and tolerate differences. However, in order to foster this type of student interaction, university instructors and staff who are themselves comfortable dealing with international students must be willing to model and facilitate positive relationships between international students and American students.

American universities need to be pro-active in supporting the development of these relationships. Since relationships with peers and advisors were identified as protective factors that supported the acculturation of Indian international students in this study, the preparedness of academic and student support staff in higher education to create opportunities for all students to be successful is crucial, as it can have a ripple effect in the students’ lives. Positive multicultural experiences will help students feel more prepared to deal with multicultural challenges in the globalized world.

Relationships with professors and advisors played a vital role for most of the participants in this research. The participants credited their advisors for their academic
adjustment. Sato and Hodge (2009) pointed out that international students felt most accepted when their advisors were satisfied with the quality of their work. The research indicates that every effort must be made by professors and staff to provide appropriate encouragement and support to the international students in order to mitigate the negative effects of cross-cultural transition.

**International Students Services**

The university office of international students and other organizations responsible for providing international student services must offer coaching for international students to prepare them for cross-cultural transition. In many ways, timing is important. Even before their migration, prospective international students receive basic literature on culture shock; however, it is of little use because they are not in a position to fathom the impact their cross-cultural transition entails. My recommendation is to provide the relevant information more gradually, as the students experience their host culture. The preparation should include detailed information about pragmatic issues that are encountered first, including where to shop, transportation information, and issues related to safety. Next, information regarding the academic environment and procedures should be provided. Later, in a few weeks, information about more serious topics such as acculturation, effects of culture on self, developing a sense of self in a transcultural environment, and the role of race and status in relationships must be provided.

From this research it is evident that, in the beginning, all the participants were dealing with pragmatic issues such as: Where to live? How to buy groceries? How to ride a bus? How to work on assignments? Some of the participants even described this period as “confusing” because there were “too many things to attend to.” This state of being
confused or overwhelmed suggests that they are not in an ideal position to learn new information that would support their successful acculturation. Therefore, the International Students Services would best serve these students by providing small amounts of relevant information several times during their first semester on an American campus. Initial rounds of information provided during the orientation must pertain to more practical concerns of new international students. Information about issues related to the stress, management, effects of culture, race, beliefs, and values on their acculturation process could be provided at a later point to best cater to their needs.

International students showed a linear increase in adjustment during the first six months after their migration (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Effective prevention strategies must be introduced throughout this period. Some of the relevant information can be presented through short videos or films. Small groups of international students can view these videos followed by a facilitated discussion. These discussions will cater to the different learning styles of students and also have the potential to draw out even those students who are shy. During the initial acculturative process, such interactive learning would support international students’ exploration of themselves in a new socio-cultural environment. Subsequently, such interactive learning environments could include domestic students to benefit all students in experiencing authentic multicultural interactions.

Finally, it is my supposition that international students would benefit abundantly if the International Students Services were more involved on a regular basis. The first six months to a year after migration is the most challenging period of adjustment in the lives of the international students. Finding meaningful ways to provide support throughout the
course of an international student’s life at a university is necessary to encourage feelings of belonging among these students.

**Counseling**

It is well known that Asian international students under-utilize traditional psychological help due to differences in culture, values, beliefs and stigma (Sue & Sue, 1999; Braun & Brown, 1998). The question is: How can universities provide culturally relevant resources to these students? When probed, many participants in this research said counseling would be their last resort. They said that they could not think of a problem in their lives that could be helped through counseling. This highlights once again that counseling in the traditional sense is not relevant to this group of Indian students. New ways of reaching out to these students must be explored.

Traditional services are not sufficient or attractive resources for international students. Thinking beyond the box is what is required to address the well-researched problem of Asian students under-utilization of on-campus psychological services. One of the answers for Indian international students could be in the Indian Students Association (ISA), as it was a place of solace for many of the participants. They felt they belonged, as they shared experiences and gathered information on how to effectively navigate in the new environment. In this study, the data suggests that the ISA can be used as a resource to reach out to Indian international students. Bhat (2005) found psycho-educational and skill development groups to be helpful to therapy-shy Indian students. University counseling and advisement services could be more effective if they used the ISA to co-sponsor these types of psycho-educational services such as stress management techniques.
and skills groups and cultural competence groups with a plan to use them as a mechanism to introduce reluctant students to the benefits of other counseling services.

Asian international students’ misperceptions and suspicions of psychological services and their lack of knowledge about the benefits of these services was found to be a major reason for their reservations about counseling (Frey & Roysircar, 2006). I found this to be the case with Indian international students who participated in this research as well. The analyses of the data indicated that only one participant considered counseling, and none actually used counseling. In some cases, they said that they might consider it as a last resort. Tummala-Narra (2007) and Lightsey (2006) suggest that proactive measures must be taken to demystify and de-stigmatize counseling services. Apart from university counseling centers’ collaborations with Indian Students Association and International Student Services, a diverse group of therapists who are skilled in areas related to international study and cross-cultural adjustment are much needed to make counseling relevant to international students.

The results of this research highlight the need for counselors to become cross-culturally competent. In addition to addressing the multicultural competencies, the results of this research also suggest that the training of counselors to work with international graduate students must address the development of an understanding of the specific context and basis of an individual’s beliefs (Suarez-Orezco & Saurez-Orezco, 2002). For example, each region in India is unique in its differences of language, culture, and customs. It would be a difficult task to be well aware of all the nuances of this culture. However, an understanding of certain core values of the Indian culture — such as the respect for elders and the importance of family, and the value of collectivism — would
enable counselors who work with Indian international students to understand them within a broad cultural context and provide more effective help. Furthermore, developing collaborative relationships with these students is crucial for counseling professionals to learn about the individual student’s personal response to cultural and academic challenges. While empathizing and normalizing with an Indian international student’s cross-cultural transition takes precedence, counselors must also see these clients as creatively adapting to a new socio-cultural environment (Kelly, 1986; Trickett, 1996; Tummala-Narra, 2007). Ultimately, counselors working with international students must guide them to understand and verbalize how migration has shaped their lives with a greater goal of reducing dissonance in their transcultural narratives.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this research has been to explore the lived experiences of Indian international graduate students at an American university. The thick descriptions provided by eight Indian international graduate students about their acculturative experiences that ensued after attending graduate school in the United States offered a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

The consistent findings that emerged from the collected data indicate that the Indian international students’ struggles of acculturation affected all spheres of their lives. Even though all participants experienced academic, relational, financial, and socio-cultural challenges in the new environment, the intensity of those challenges and the adaptation methods each used differed.

A noticeable common experience for the participants in this research is their persistent and creative adaptation to cross-cultural transition challenges.
Correspondingly, successful navigation through cross-cultural issues helped many of the participants develop a positive sense of self. Yet, the participants lacked skills and resources to address some issues effectively. It is also apparent from the participant’s descriptions that the difficulties they encountered making the necessary adaptations to become successful could have been mitigated with more appropriate contextual supports.

For counseling professionals and university personnel, the task of finding, fine-tuning, and providing relevant resources to international students remains an important responsibility.


Cunningham, C.G. (1991). The integration of international students on Canadian post-
secondary campuses. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Bureau for International Education.


changing face of politics in the 1990s. (pp. 76-93). London: Lawrence and Wishart.


Klineberg, O., & Hall, W. (1979). *At a foreign university: An international study of*


Kushner, K. A. (2010). Indian international students in American higher education: An
analysis of India’s cultural and socioeconomic norms in light of the international student experience. *Journal of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association, 43*, 17-25.


Misra, R., Crist, M., & Burant, C.J. (2003). Relationship among life stress, social support,


of cross-cultural distress. In A. Booth, A.C. Crouter, & N. Landale (Eds.),


Ying, Y.W., & Han, M. (2006). The contribution of personality, acculturative stressors, and social affiliation to adjustment: A longitudinal study of Taiwanese students in


APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol
A. Guiding question: What have been your experiences as an Indian international graduate student attending an American University?

Possible follow-up questions to elicit information in the following areas:

I. Experiences as an Indian international graduate student in an American university.
   a. Probe to elicit additional information, specific opinions, values, feelings, related to the participant’s experiences.

II. Life prior to migration.
   a. Tell me about your perceptions of life in the United States before you migrated.
   b. Tell me about your decision to study in the United States.
   c. Probe to elicit additional information, specific opinions, values, feelings, related to the participant’s experiences.

III. Relationships with family members, peers and community members.
   a. Tell me how your relationships with your family members/peers/or others has been affected by your migration.
   b. Probe to elicit additional information, specific opinions, values, feelings, related to the participant’s experiences.

IV. Life experiences related to adjustment in the United States.
   a. Tell me about the challenges you faced/faced in adjusting to life in the United States.
   b. What factors helped you successfully meet the challenges you faced?
   c. What factors made it more difficult for you to successfully meet these challenges?
   d. Probe to elicit additional information, specific opinions, values, feelings related to the participant’s experiences.

B. Demographic information, specifically the participant’s age, gender, year in graduate school, and marital status will be confirmed during the interview process.

C. Concluding question: Is there anything else that you would want to add that has not been covered in the interview so far?
APPENDIX B: Consent to Participate in a Research Study
TITLE: Lived Experiences of Indian International Students: Migration, Acculturation, and Resilience.

INVESTIGATOR: Dr. William Casile  
Associate Professor, School of Education  
412-396-6112

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR: Suguna Mukthyala, MA, NCC, ACS  
Doctoral Candidate  
Dept of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Edu.  
513-546-4398

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision (ExCES) at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: This study explores the experiences related to the migration and acculturation of Indian international graduate students attending American universities. This research seeks to answer questions related to how Indian international students perceive their lives in the host country and the impact migration has had on them. As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview for approximately one and a half hours. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your experiences as an international student in America and the impact this has had on you. Specifically, you will be asked to describe your experiences as an Indian international graduate student in an American university, life prior to migration, relationships with family members, peers and community members, and life experiences related to
adjustment in the United States. The interview will be audio recorded and the student investigator will take filed notes. The audio recordings will be transcribed. In addition, you may be asked to review the student investigator’s recording and analysis of your interview for accuracy and clarity in a follow-up meeting or phone call.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

While you might not benefit directly, your participation in this research may provide for a better understanding of the experiences of international students, which may lead to recommendations for improved support for international students studying at American universities.

While it is not likely, it is possible that during the interview you may realize that recollecting and discussing some of the experiences reveals that they have been unpleasant or traumatic for you. At times, reliving these experiences may cause psychological distress. During or following the interview, if you feel uncomfortable, you may want to contact counseling services available on your campus or in the community. I will be available to assist you in this process by providing you with the names and numbers of professionals who can be of support.

**COMPENSATION:**

You will not be compensated for your participation in the study. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you either.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your participation in this research will be kept confidential. Only investigators will have access to the data. You will not be identified in the data analysis. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will identify your response(s) in the data summaries and any references you make to other people or places will be deleted or disguised. All written materials and recorded media as well as any artifacts provided by you will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the student researcher’s home. Once the transcriptions are completed all audio recordings will be destroyed. All collected data, transcribed notes, and consent forms will be
destroyed five years after completion of the research.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Simply notify me of your desire to end your participation and have your data removed from this study.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of this research will be provided to you upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Suguna Mukthyala, Doctoral Candidate, at 513-546-4398; Dr. William Casile, Advisor, at 412-396-6112; or Dr. Joseph Kush, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412-396-6326.

___________________________________  __________________
Participant's Signature  Date

___________________________________  __________________
Researcher's Signature  Date
APPENDIX C: Letter to Prospective Participants
July 26, 2012

Duquesne University
600 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15282

Dear International Student,

My name is Suguna Mukthyala, and I am a doctoral candidate at Duquesne University in the Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program. I am conducting this research on the lived experiences of international students in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree. Specifically, I am seeking to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students of Indian origin who have chosen to attend an American university.

This qualitative study will require each of the participants to engage in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. These interviews should last approximately one and a half hours. The purpose of these interviews is to gain an understanding of the everyday experiences of international students, as well as how they make meaning of these experiences. All information gathered during the research process will be kept confidential. No information that would directly identify the participants, their family, friends or colleagues or institutions they attend will be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used in place of any potentially identifying information.

Each interview will be audio recorded, and transcribed for analysis. These materials, along with the consent form, the student investigator’s field notes and participant provided artifacts, will be maintained in a locked file cabinet in the investigators home during the study. The audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed. All collected data, transcribed notes, and consent forms will be destroyed five years after completion of the research. Participation in this research is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Any data collected from a participant who has withdrawn consent will be destroyed immediately.

If you are interested in volunteering to participate in this study, or if you have any questions, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to further discuss the research with you. You can reach me at 513-546-4398 or mukthyalas@duq.edu. You may also reach my dissertation committee chair, Dr. William Casile, at 412-396-6112 or by email at: casile@duq.edu.

Sincerely,

Suguna Mukthyala, M.A., N.C.C., A.C.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education, Duquesne University