

International Graduate Students' Perceptions of Academic Learning

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the degree of

Master of Education

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Abstract

The number of international students in post-secondary institutions is growing, warranting an evaluation into how academic communities capitalize on the strengths and meet the needs of this unique student group. This qualitative study examined the experiences of international graduate students and the factors that influence their academic learning using a phenomenological approach. The goal of this study was to understand international student perceptions and how students draw meaning from their experiences. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model was used to ascertain what types of skills international graduate students use to effectively navigate a new educational landscape. Findings from this study indicate that better marketing paired with adequate distribution of resources and supports would be more effective in helping students navigate academic learning environments. Some recommendations include: earmarking a specific number of jobs on campus, mandatory sessions on cultural adaptation, financial assistance, and funding opportunities.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to each of the participants for sharing their personal experiences as international graduate students. I am thankful for the support and wisdom of my committee members, Dr. Marlene Atleo and Dr. Yi Li, who helped me to recognize the importance of bringing to the forefront the voices of the participants. I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Nathalie Piquemal, whose support was integral in helping me to meet the deadlines along the way. I would also like to thank my Director, Dr. Mark Torchia, who helped me to carve out time for my writing.

On a personal level, it is important for me to recognize all of my friends and family who have supported me in various ways over the years. I am indebted to my parents who have supported my educational goals from childhood into adulthood and who instilled in me the value of education. I am thankful to my sisters who were always cheering me on along the sidelines. I am also grateful to my sons, Alexander and Gabriel, who encouraged me along the way. Finally, I am forever grateful for the unconditional support of my husband, David, whose patience and love sustained me during this journey.

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Prologue

As a child, while my playmates dreamed of becoming a ballerina, teacher, fireman, policeman, or one of the multitude of more high profile, often 'flashy' professions that are highly sought after by the ten-and-under population, I aspired to become a polyglot. After watching the film 'My Fair Lady', I was inspired to learn as many languages as I could, in hopes of one day being able to connect to people from many nations. Eventually, this childhood dream led to a degree in languages, and first-hand experience as an international student. I clearly recall my insecurities and the many struggles missing home, familiar faces, language, sounds, and smells. At the time, my impressionable, young mind, did not consider the other variables in the learning environment that played into the success or failure of Eliza Doolittle. Fast forward twenty years; I am employed at a teaching and learning centre in a post-secondary institution, overseeing a graduate student certification program in teaching and learning. In this role, I have witnessed many international students, struggling socially and academically to comprehend a new cultural milieu. My personal experiences and those of the students have prompted my inquiry into the factors which promote or hinder success in the academic learning environment for international graduate students.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the situation of international graduate students at a mid-sized, Canadian western university. It will look at the factors involved in their learning, the research questions developed for the study, their significance, and the theoretical framework that was used.

International Student Enrollment

According to Statistics Canada (2008), between 1992 and 2008, international student enrolment in Canadian post-secondary institutions increased from 36,822 to 87,798, representing 4% to 8% of enrolments. In 2008, international students represented 33% of students enrolled in a master or doctoral level program; clearly, it is important to provide adequate resources for these students to complete their program of study. This research study was conducted at an institution where the numbers were comparable to national data for the same time period. Currently more than 13% of the entire student population is comprised of international students. The international graduate students constitute 24.5% of all the students enrolled in graduate studies at the University of Manitoba (University of Manitoba Fall Term Enrolment, Summary Report, 2013). The presence of international students is not a new phenomenon, however, as their numbers continue to increase, it warrants evaluation of how to best meet their needs and capitalize on their strengths in our respective academic communities.

Factors in Learning

The ultimate goal of most institutions of higher education is to provide their students with a learning environment in which they can succeed in their academic

pursuits. In graduate studies, academic success is often equated with GPA, dissertation or publications. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the contextual and personal factors of an international graduate student's life that may influence their academic learning. The contextual factors include financial (Mori, 2000), cultural (Pedersen, 1991; Beehr et al., 2002; Dao et al., 2007; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008), structural, and pedagogical (Liu et al., 2010) climates. The personal factors include the social (Hayes and Lin, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), linguistic (Lewthwaite, 1996; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2000; Cheng et al., 2004; Martinez et al., 2004; Andrade, 2006; Wang et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2011), familial, and psychological (Tseng and Newton, 2002; Hyun et al., 2007) situations. Furthermore, the factors which influence this success are not always empirically measured as in a grade or a journal article.

Contextual factors

Within contextual factors, there is the economic challenge of limited financial aid and significantly more expensive international student fees; at the University of Manitoba, the graduate student tuition for a non-Canadian is more than double that of a Canadian (University of Manitoba Academic Calendar 2013-2014). Adaptation to a new culture with different customs, food, and perhaps a much colder climate than they are used to, can result in adjustment issues and culture shock (Dao et al., 2007; Godwin, 2009). Pedagogical differences in teaching and learning styles can vary across cultures (Park, 2000; Zhang and Brueton, 2007). In North America, there is more focus on critical thinking skills as opposed to the 'teacher being the authority' in more hierarchical societies outside of North America (Park, 2000; Kim, 2007). Students struggle with a new paradigm of thinking: challenging others' thoughts (including the teacher and

experts in the field), a different style of academic writing (Waye, 2010), different modes of assessment, and even the unaccustomed act of speaking up in class discussions (Biggs, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Park, 2000). Structural considerations can also be significant as students grasp to understand the resources available to them within the university setting and try to establish a sense of safety in unfamiliar surroundings.

Personal factors

In the context of personal factors that affect international graduate students, cultural clubs and a network of friends from the same ethnic community can provide a much needed outlet for social activities (Misra et al., 2003; Li et al., 2010). Studies show that international students are less likely to seek counselling services when dealing with psychological issues (Hyun et al., 2007; Leong, 2011). This could be because of cultural beliefs and practices around health issues from their countries of origin, lack of awareness of their needs and the resources available, and/or the stigma that is associated with mental health issues in their home countries (Zhang and Dixon, 2003; Rothstein and Rajapaksa, 2003; Hyun et al., 2007). Homesickness, loneliness, and stress can pose health-related problems (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson et al., 2000; Li et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2008) as many students face the challenges of being in a new country. The pressures of responsibility toward immediate family and perhaps aging parents as well, can have an effect on academic success (Dante et al., 2011). Because graduate students tend to be older than the more traditional 18-22 year old undergraduate student, there is a greater possibility that they have a partner/spouse and children. Some international students arrive alone and simply miss the supportive network of friends and family they leave behind when they come to study in a new country (Zhang and Brueton,

2007). As evidenced largely in the literature, linguistic challenges are commonplace for those students who are learning English as a secondary or tertiary language (Lewthwaite, 1996; Wardlow, 1999; Robertson et al., 2000; Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011). Verbal and grammatical needs can be evaluated, but the finer nuances of language acquisition such as non-verbal cues, colloquialisms, and collocations have little to do with grammar knowledge. Developing new language skills is a predominant factor in academic learning (Robertson et al., 2000). The common challenges that a graduate student might face can be compounded for an international graduate student by a host of contextual and personal factors including but not limited to these issues of financial (Mori, 2000), cultural (Pedersen, 1991; Beehr et al., 2002; Dao et al., 2007; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008), structural, and pedagogical (Liu et al., 2010) situation, and the social (Pedersen, 1991; Hayes and Lin, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997), linguistic (Lewthwaite, 1996; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2000; Cheng et al., 2004; Martinez et al., 2004; Andrade, 2006; Wang et al., 2008; Li et al., 2011), familial, and psychological (Tseng and Newton, 2002; Hyun et al., 2007) condition. There are a number of these considerations that may contribute to a more conducive learning environment for international students. The research that has already been conducted on the cultural (Pedersen, 1991; Beehr et al., 2002; Dao et al., 2007; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008), linguistic (Lewthwaite, 1996; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2000; Cheng et al., 2004; Martinez et al., 2004; Andrade, 2006; Wang et al., 2008; Li et al., 2011), and social (Pedersen, 1991; Hayes and Lin, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) challenges of international graduate students has brought about greater awareness in higher education.

Further research, however, is needed on how to maximize on the different learning styles, experiences, and cultures that these students bring with them and view them as assets that they are bringing to our institutions. In this way we can help to cultivate a deeper learning ground for our students. Rather than viewing the international students' needs as a burden that engenders deficit thinking, it is time to recognize the assets that they bring to our institutions. While the more formal educational system has stressed the skill sets and abilities that are valued by the dominant culture, by doing so, it has inadvertently undermined the values of so many other cultures. This study will begin to address the needs of our international graduate student population by examining the extent to which certain personal and contextual factors can either promote or hinder a successful academic learning environment.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore international graduate students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences at the University of Manitoba with special attention to personal and contextual factors. Specifically, I would like to learn:

1. What are the personal factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?
2. What are the contextual factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?
3. How can international graduate students' experiences and perceptions at the University of Manitoba have an impact on services intended to provide academic support?

I intend to use a qualitative approach to give voice to international graduate students and share their perspectives and experiences.

It is my expectation that the findings from this study will encourage dialogue within student support services and administration to develop programming and resources to better meet the needs of the ever-expanding international student population. As this demographic continues to grow, the need for appropriate supports will become even more evident. So it is in our best interest as a university community, to consider future implications of factors which could contribute to a more effective academic learning environment for our international students.

Context

In the context of this study, I am limiting my exploration to what constitutes a successful academic learning environment for international students to support aspects of cultural capital that they bring into the situation. Cultural capital is made up of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that are passed down in families to an individual within their sociocultural context that can be beneficial to them in an educational setting (Bourdieu, 1986). The original intent was to limit participation in this particular study to 'international students' referring to students with citizenship outside Canada who were enrolled at a Canadian institution with a study visa and non-permanent resident status (Statistics Canada, 2011). However the definition was broadened to include those who may have changed their status in the course of their studies as was the case for one of the participants.

Background

The influx of international students to our campuses has helped to advance growth on a variety of levels. First, their presence is of considerable benefit to the national economy amounting to \$5.5 billion in total expenditure in 2008 (Economic Impact of International Education in Canada, Final Report, FAIT, 2009). It also helps to further internationalization, defined by Knight (1993) as “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution” (p. 21). In addition, as these students pursue studies and conduct research in Canada, it establishes ties for a knowledge exchange equipping them for their return to their home countries with new knowledge and practices. Lastly, there are personal and professional relationships that are formed that can develop into networks for potential collaborations in future. A recent report from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada suggests that doubling the number of international students in Canada by 2022 is an attainable goal (FAIT, Chakma et al., 2012). With so many institutions being encouraged to focus on international recruitment, it necessitates an equal focus on the retention of these students and their success in the academic environment. This requires attention to the improvement of resources and supports available to these students and interventions for successful academic learning. As a recent article in University Affairs aptly suggests:

Most of all, universities need to invest in the students' success after they arrive on campus. Most universities have created some level of support, and international centres and special orientation programs are common. However, these programs vary considerably in length, resources and substance. All too often, support for

international students seems to exist outside the main academic mission of the institutions (Owram, 2010, "What international students mean to Canadian universities," para. 7).

The University of Manitoba has established a Senate sub-committee to address issues of student success and retention. These issues may differ or be magnified for international students. In this study, I will specifically address some of the linguistic, familial, social, and personal factors which contribute to a successful academic environment (Lewthwaite, 1996; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2000; Cheng et al., 2004; Martinez et al., 2004; Andrade, 2006; Wang et al., 2008; Li et al., 2011).

First and Second Language Proficiencies

High level English language test scores are often used as measures of future success for international students, not taking into consideration other language variables which may affect the outcome of a student's academic success (Andrade, 2006; Mathews, 2007; Li et al., 2010). An international student whose primary language is not English may be viewed as linguistically deficient and challenged in terms of navigating the cultural nuances of academia and life in a new country. Yet some students thrive on this kind of stress during their cultural adaptation process (Lewthwaite, 1996). Indeed, learning a new language can promote resilience and motivation, strong work ethic, and perseverance (Taylor, 1994; Ward and Kennedy, 1994; Chen et al., 1995; Yan and Berliner, 2009; Li et al., 2010).

Familial and Societal Dynamics

The familial and societal dynamics can also play a large part in determining a successful outcome for these students (Yeh et al., 2008; Li et al., 2010; Dante et al.,

2011). In various cultures, there are factors that may be considered different from what typifies the 'norm' in a family structure. Outside of Western cultures, it is not uncommon to have generational homes where there are multiple generations of a family who reside in the same house (Yeh et al., 2008). Quite often the elderly are taken care of by their children or grandchildren. This generational interconnectedness defines family life for many international students. As is the case for immigrants who must deal with the loss of a familiar support network in the process of relocation (Sluzki, 1998; Yeh et al., 2008 as cited in Yeh et al, 2009, p.6), international students too must deal with a similar loss in the process of furthering their education in a different country.

Level of Culture Shock

In addition to the arrival in a new country, a different climate, food, language, and being far from the familiar tastes, images, and sounds can lead to culture shock (Wang et al., 2008; Li et al., 2010). Kalervo Oberg's (1960) definition of culture shock has been the basis of much intercultural research over the many decades. In line with Oberg's initial idea, Triandis (1994) identifies it as follows:

Culture shock occurs when people interact with members of a very different culture and experience a loss of control. This happens when they cannot understand the behavior of the people from the other culture. Then they feel confused and develop both physical (e.g., asthma, headaches) and psychological (e.g., depression) symptoms (Oberg, 1954, 1960). (p. 239)

This culture shock that can occur during the adaptation period after arrival can be disconcerting for international students.

Social Network

One also cannot underestimate the power of a social network for international students (Andrade, 2006; Rosenthal et al., 2006). Although there are a variety of avenues through which one can develop a social connection, many international students have limited time, funds, and access to transportation. Proximity would influence where and in which manner a student chooses to pursue these relationships. Any social support that international students receive will probably come from within the institution of learning of which they are a part i.e. faculty, academic advisors, library, student services, peers, cultural or religious organizations, etc (Lewthwaite, 1996; Rosenthal et al., 2006).

Educational significance

Although all graduate students are based out of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, it is an administrative unit and it does not directly provide the resources to support student personal or academic needs. There is currently no centralized process to deal with the diverse issues ranging from challenges with visas to academic integrity that our international students face. In fact, the current decentralized approach only perpetuates the problem of identifying and resolving challenges that students face in both their personal and academic lives. This is magnified for the international graduate students who have other variables such as language, financial resources, library, mentoring, Learning Management System, and cultural issues with which to contend. The findings of this study could strengthen the current literature and be used specifically in making recommendations to the University regarding initiatives for international students on student success, retention, and the internationalization strategy. Additionally, the

participants of this study will be given the opportunity to share their experiences and enhance the supports that will contribute to a successful learning environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the concept of social and cultural capital originating in the work of Bourdieu and then refracted through the theoretical lens of critical race theorist, Tara Yosso (2005). Cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and behaviours) is used in an educational context but looks quite different depending on the cultural context. The cultural capital that students possess in their home countries may not have the same weight once they come to Canada. The assets that are considered of value by the educational system and the agents of that system are what are considered to be 'capital'. The literature on deficit model perspectives views students of colour or lower-income families as not having the means to achieve the same level of educational success as their white, middle/upper-class counterparts. This subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 2008) takes away the language, culture, and community-based identities within the framework of academic learning. International graduate students can also face a similar situation when they begin their studies abroad. Ogbu (1993) differentiates between voluntary and involuntary minorities. Voluntary minorities are seen as those who have moved to better their future opportunities, or economic and/or political situation. Involuntary minorities are those who were brought to a society through slavery, conquest, or colonization. If categorized in this manner, international students could also be considered voluntary minorities who have come to further their education for a specific period of time. This group of international students and scholars also referred to as sojourners by Zheng & Berry (1991) are here temporarily with plans to return to their homelands. The

Communities of Color are comprised of ethnic and racial groups who are considered visible minorities. Yosso challenges us to see Communities of Color not from a deficit view but as groups equally capable of contributing in a beneficial manner. Many of the Communities of Color are marginalized groups whose skill sets, knowledge, experiences, and contacts are often unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). Their cultural capital is not the 'norm' and thereby not valued or legitimized. Many of our international graduate students come from foreign lands and become racialized in the process of their international student experience. Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines the persistence of racism in society (Closson, 2010). Originally through the lens of critical race theory the framework of community cultural wealth has been developed to address the need for a paradigm shift in the traditional interpretations of cultural capital. To challenge the dominant culture mindset, Yosso (2005) developed the concept of *community cultural wealth* comprised of six forms of capital: **aspirational** capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers"; **linguistic** capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style"; **familial** capital is defined by the "cultural knowledge nurtured among the family that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition"; **social** capital "can be understood as networks of people and community resources"; **navigational** capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions"; and **resistant** capital is developed through the "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, pp.77-80).

In this study, we have examined the social, psychological, familial, linguistic, financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical aspects that could affect international graduate students' academic learning environment. In particular, this framework has been operationalized as follows: For aspirational capital, I have looked at the factors that create barriers such as feelings of isolation with specific reference to not feeling accepted in academic contexts, financial challenges, and climate differences. The factor that enabled participants to have hope is weaker but still highlighted. For linguistic capital, I have looked at the factors that create barriers such as not being understood because of accents and the complexities of academic writing issues. The factor that facilitated the students' learning lay in their competency to use their linguistic capital to complete their programs. For familial capital, I have looked at the barriers created and the affect distance has in staying in touch and providing support during times of illness; pressures to return home due to responsibilities toward parents and plans for marriage. The factor that facilitated their use of familial capital became apparent in two different ways – the participants who received encouragement from supportive families and the participants' whose families were unsupportive of their academic pursuits only fuelled their desire to prove them wrong. For social capital, I have looked at the factors that create barriers such as the lack of Canadian friendships, cultural misunderstandings, and psychological and emotional well-being. The factor that facilitated learning was the resourcefulness to turn to their respective cultural and/or ethnic communities for support. For navigational capital, I have looked mainly at the factors that create barriers such as the different educational landscape in Canada; the role of the instructor no longer as sole authority; and the helpfulness of a mentor in finding accommodations, getting to know the campus,

and finding out about funding opportunities. It seems that navigational capital was the weakest of all the capitals and the least utilized by the participants. For resistant capital, I have looked at the factors that created barriers such as the sense of belonging; learning to be your own advocate when there is perceived injustice; and inequality in the system. It is here that the resilience and the emotional fortitude of the participants seemed to stand out the most and facilitated the support for their learning.

Some of the inherent problems in the educational system are systemic and engender the inequities and dominant culture norms that hinder our international students from contributing their knowledge, skills, and resources in an equitable and valued manner. I understand the critical race theory (CRT) lens to be a way to shift the paradigm of dominant culture as the only means to obtain cultural capital. "In examining some of the under-utilized assets Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom...[Yosso] notes the potential of community cultural wealth to transform the process of schooling" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Through this framework, the international graduate students can contribute their strengths, assets, and unique cultural capital to promote a comfortable and inclusive atmosphere of learning. Rather than deficit thinking, it promotes and reinforces the resource-filled community cultural wealth mindset. So this framework of community cultural wealth can be utilized in conducting research, teaching, evaluating, assessing, and nurturing the sense of community to promote a healthy academic learning environment.

In summary, this chapter encompasses the background to the research of exploring international graduate students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is based on Yosso's framework (2005) as guiding principles and consequently will highlight two distinct but very connected aspects of academic learning in the life of an international graduate student of colour. The first aspect will be the contextual factors which influence a student. These factors include: 1) the financial - tuition fees are higher for international students and there are considerable limitations of on-campus employment opportunities 2) the cultural - adjustment issues and possible culture shock 3) the structural - resources available and safety issues, and 4) the pedagogical - differences in learning styles and navigating a new class/lab setting with a different set of rules. The second aspect will be the personal factors which impact a student. These will include: 1) the social - a network of friends and an outlet for interaction with peers through clubs or organizations, 2) the psychological – emotional support or lack of 3) the familial - immediate family relations, responsibility to dependents, and leaving family in their home countries to come to Canada alone, and 4) the linguistic - the challenges of learning a new language and being proficient enough to function at both an academic and social level.

Yosso's community cultural wealth model has its origins in Critical Race Theory (CRT). "CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses" (Yosso, 2005, p.74). It emerged from the critics of the Critical Legal Studies movement who "questioned the role of the traditional legal system in legitimizing oppressive social structures" (p. 71). The need to validate the "lived experiences and

histories of those oppressed by institutionalized racism” (p. 71) came to the foreground and greatly diminished the CLS’ capacity to move forward within the traditional and restrictive legal framework. CRT then formed to address this need which focused initially on racial injustice within the context of Black/White issues and then expanded to include all People of Colour, women, people who had experienced discrimination due to reasons of race, gender, socio-economic class, language, and culture.

Financial Factors

Financial difficulties are experienced by many international students and these finances are a common source of insecurity and distress within this community (Lin and Yi, 1997; Khoo et al., 1994; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007; Forbes Mewett et al., 2009). Most Canadian institutions set a higher tuition fee for international students as compared to Canadian students. For example, the tuition fee for a PhD program at the University of Manitoba is approximately \$4,300 for a Canadian graduate student compared to over \$8700 for an international graduate student (University of Manitoba 2013-2014 Calendar). This however, still places the University of Manitoba at one of the more affordable tuitions across Canada. The tuition rates across Canada range from \$1943 at Memorial University to \$23, 432 at University of the Fraser Valley (Canadian Federation of Students, 2012). The average international graduate student tuition in Canada has risen to \$13, 628 (Statistics Canada, 2013). In addition to the increased tuition, students face an inordinate amount of pressure to maintain any financial support and scholarships that they may have been awarded (Svarney, 1991; Misra et al., 2003). As well, due to the restrictions of an international student study visa, students are only allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours off-campus. The opportunities for on-campus employment are

limited and highly competitive. The students who are able to find such employment are expected to maintain full-time student status (Lin and Yi, 1997; Kobayashi, 2007). At the University of Manitoba, any funding for international students is contingent on full-time enrolment status which is 80% course load or 9 credit hours. The financial strains alone or in combination with other potential stressors can affect their ability to focus on their studies and thus their overall success in their academic pursuits (Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007).

Cultural Factors

The challenges of adapting to a new environment have been shown to impact academic success (Pedersen, 1991; Beehr et al., 2002; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008; Maundeni, 2010). Few places in the world can rival the harsh Manitoba winters. In particular, students coming from tropical climates have a greater challenge in getting accustomed to such weather - weather that they may have only ever read about or seen depicted in movies. In addition, the cost of winter clothing is an expense that must be factored into the budget. Another area of adaptation is food. Cemalcilar and Falbo (2008) measured sociocultural adaptations and included questions pertaining to diet. The taste palette and *how* one eats can be a reflection of one's origins – cultures with spicy foods or cultures where one eats with fingers not utensils. Although Manitoba has become more culturally diverse in the past decade (Manitoba Immigration Facts, 2010), there is still a dearth of restaurants especially on campus which cater to international cuisine. As a result, students are relegated to change their eating to North American fare or cook their favourite dishes themselves. Because food is known to nourish both the body and mind, it would be an important aspect of providing a psycho-emotional

environment for learning and academic success. Other cultural considerations for a sojourner to Canada are new societal rules and expectations which can be difficult to understand without being told specifics and being made aware of the differences. Rules can manifest in social cues that are simply behaviours that are perceived to be acceptable or unacceptable in a particular culture. For example, burping after a meal in certain cultures clearly signifies appreciation and that one's appetite has been satiated. In Canada however, this practice would be considered rude. The idea of personal space is also different in Canada compared to other cultures. While in Canada there is an unwritten rule to stand at an arm's length from someone while speaking, those from different cultures may be more accustomed to standing much closer, making it uncomfortable for someone with a different sense of space (Hall, 1959; Beaulieu, 2004). Similarly, non-verbal communication can vary extremely from one culture to the next. Singelis claims that up to ninety-three percent of the social meaning of a message is carried through nonverbal channels (Singelis, 1994). How does this affect a student? Perhaps more importantly, how does this affect how others perceive this student? If the student is considered rude or pushy, it might cause a rift in peer relationships. This would hinder him/her from building a supportive social network which in turn would help provide a productive academic environment. If this is true, it is vital that international graduate students learn the nuances of such dialogue. According to Hofstede's (1986) cultural values framework, Canada is more of an individualistic society. In such societies, individuality, speaking up for oneself and the concept of time (i.e., punctuality) are important elements. Conversely, students who come from cultures with more collectivist orientations value the group over the individual, relationship over a

task, and have an emphasis on saving face (keeping one's honour or reputation in the presence of others) and harmony (Chase et al., 2007). They can struggle with the adjustment to a cultural shift to individualism. For example, if a student from a collectivist culture is part of a research project, the idea of a team might have a different meaning than to a student from a more individualistic culture like Canada. A team means everyone contributes to the end goal: for the former, this might mean everyone working on the project together the entire time while for the latter, each person may do their own work and then everyone comes together at the end to put everything together. This is where misunderstandings occur and the behaviours can be misinterpreted as ineffective time management, selfishness, competitiveness, etc. Different cultural values can be misread and lead to conflict and misunderstandings.

Gender roles are structured differently from one culture to the next. Culturally assigned gender roles define the attitude toward work, power, money, and household responsibilities (Kellner, 2009). For example, in many Asian cultures, the role of women is to be the primary caregivers for children and elderly. These cultures favour males to carry the lineage of the family (Hayes and Kim, 2008) and tend to relegate household responsibilities to females. In Spanish traditional culture, the main role of a woman as the wife, mother, and homemaker is centered on the family while the man generally assumes the role of family breadwinner. As a result, many women tend to identify more with family roles, and men with the work role (Sy and Brittian, 2007; Calvo-Salguero et al., 2012). In an educational context, a student who comes from a male-dominated culture can face challenges in our western culture where women and men are considered equal in status. These students may find it difficult to adapt to a woman instructing a

class, challenging thought processes, and dealing with conflict. The more familiar a student is with western cultural norms, the easier it is to deal with some of these new changes, and the more fluid the transition to academic learning.

The challenge for international students is to adapt quickly to their new environment so that they may pursue their academics with the focus that is required at the graduate level. The differences they experience in surroundings, language, and unfamiliar behaviour can cause some insecurity, uncertainty, and disorientation (Flanja, 2009; Kelley and Moogan, 2012). As mentioned earlier, there can be physical manifestations of culture shock that would likely have impact on a student's ability to study. According to Flanja (2009), culture shock happens when we are outside of our comfort zone. And this state of culture shock can last anywhere from weeks to months or even longer (Kelley and Moogan, 2012). Furnham and Bochner (1982) assert that when people move from one culture to another they often find the experience "bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety-provoking, humiliating, embarrassing and generally stressful in nature" (p. 171). It was Oberg (1960) who explained the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social interaction – to shake hands or to bow or to kiss for example - that results in culture shock. A look at culture shock as the tension and anxiety experienced whenever we face change or disruption in our lives (Bennett, 1998) can help us to see it as *transition shock*. If, as Bennett asserts, culture shock is but a mere subcategory of transition experience then it will involve loss and change. This can be viewed as an added strain that a student faces during the adaptation process. However it is through these moments of loss and change that one often becomes self-reflective and re-examines one's own values and belief systems.

Structural Factors

As guests in the country and in the local university, the international graduate student is furnished with a variety of resources. At the University of Manitoba, the language centres such as the English Language Studies program offered through the Faculty of Extended Education and the English Language Centre help to address linguistic challenges. Some of these services are an added cost to the student. This can add pressure to an international student whose tuition is already considerably higher than that of any domestic student. The Academic Learning Centre provides writing support for the entire student population but does not cater specifically to international graduate students. Graduate students in particular have a tremendous amount of writing to do for their theses and dissertations. Coupled with the fact that for most international students, English is an additional language, there are added considerations when providing writing supports for this population. The Student Advocacy and Accessibility Office provide resources for academic integrity and issues of grade and conflict challenges beyond the faculty level. For international graduate students, the notion of academic integrity, a decided individually ethical concept based in a Western academic paradigm, may be understood differently depending on the culture and value system the students come from. Often issues arising from this concept of academic integrity are only confronted when a violation of the rule has occurred and an incident has been officially reported. The International Centre for Students provides international students with assistance for visa matters, contact with other international students (perhaps from their respective countries of origin), and help in acculturation. The Libraries are utilized by students for online resources or as a place for face-to-face interactions. There is a question however

about the efficacy in which the international graduate students access the services. Student Counselling and Career Services have been developed to support students dealing with stress on a variety of levels however many international students may be unfamiliar with such a service and unaware of what it has to offer, in part because it is based on a Western individualistic paradigm. In many cultures, mental health concerns are not acknowledged because of the stigma associated to it or the lack of awareness about such issues so there is less understanding of the value of such a support services department. There are many resources available to the international graduate student population that attempt to meet a host of needs ranging from linguistic, social, academic, to emotional. These resources exist to help students function at their highest capacities and achieve success in their academic learning. Are they even aware that these resources exist? Do the students use these resources that are available to them? What will encourage them to engage with these resources? As we examine the factors that affect students' academic learning, it is important for Student Affairs personnel, faculty members, and Administration to discover how to adequately meet the needs of our international graduate students.

Safety is not constructed from only a physical place but can also be an emotional or mental state. Conflict is inevitable in any society. Providing a setting where students feel safe to deal with conflict, share ideas, raise issues, and differences of opinion is an important part of academic life. When dealing with conflict, safety is essential for any empowering environment if there is to be any dialogue and openness. Chavez' study reported that "support, trust, respect, individual dignity, respectful confrontation, an absence of judgment, power with each other rather than over each other, and

minimization of the effect of hierarchy were all expressed as essential to creating a culture of safety” (Chavez, 2007, p. 279). The sense of safety leads to empowerment which, in turn, leads to a willingness to address destructive or hurtful behaviours. It is within a learning environment where respectful conflict can and should take place. In the words of Maslow (1968, p. 204), “growth forward... requires courage, will, choice, and strength in the individual as well as protection, permission, and encouragement in the environment.” There is an inherent need for a climate of safety in order to bring about honest discussion and interactions, critical parts of graduate studies and life. People need to be able to feel safe enough to take risks, to share their ideas, and learn from each other (Chavez, 2007). By supporting students in this manner, a healthy academic learning environment can be created.

Pedagogical Factors

The cultural differences in Western and Eastern educational systems (Zhang and Xu, 2007) cannot be overlooked. Liu et al (2010) note that cultural differences exist in regards to instruction styles. Learner-centred instruction typifies Western pedagogy where interactive, participatory learning is promoted. This is not true of Eastern pedagogy with its lecture-centered focus and stress on exams as primary mode of assessment. The tensions between the inductive, Western pedagogy versus the deductive, Eastern pedagogy reveal the challenges that our international students are confronted with as they begin their studies here at the University of Manitoba. For many international students who are accustomed to more structured teaching and direction for learning, the shift in paradigm is but only one part of the many areas of their new educational landscape which they must learn to understand and navigate.

Hofstede (1986) surmised that individuals from Eastern Asian countries for example, have a propensity toward higher uncertainty avoidance in which there is an elevated level of discomfort with unstructured ideas and situations. Given this, these same students may find it challenging to embrace the more self-directed, active learning methods practiced in graduate studies in Canada. For instance, in China, the textbook embodies the highest level of knowledge of the experts. In Western society however, students are encouraged to think critically of a text and question the author(s). According to Hofstede (1986), the reliance on instructors and textbooks are indicative of the high power distance dimension of Asian cultures. In Canada, the low power distance dimension is more prevalent and allows for a less structured environment with equality in relationships – even between teachers and students.

Maundeni (2010) asserts that the curriculum and style of teaching can be a source of stress for international students. When a curriculum is limited to the social, political, and economic viewpoint of the host country, there is likely little familiarity for students who come from other nations. The underrepresentation or absence of their own cultural background within a curriculum can be perceived as the host country having more cultural value than their own (Berry, 1995; Yeh et al, 2008; Maundeni, 2010). If students are not given an opportunity to share their life experiences from their home countries, it discourages participation and engagement. It is important for students to feel that their contributions are valued and relevant.

In a qualitative study conducted by Fox (1994), some international students felt their perspective was not appreciated nor accepted. Within the context of an academic writing course, these students found it difficult to adapt to the cultural norms and

expectations that was placed on them specifically pertaining to their writing styles. Since many international graduate students hold different world views and may function under a different value system, it is important to consider how these factors influence the student's written work (Fox, 1994; Trice and Yoo, 2007). A limited vocabulary and grammar skills further contribute to the challenges of written assignments (Wang et al., 2008).

The idea of inclusivity applied to curriculum and instructional strategies allows teachers "to consider diversity in all teaching processes - in selecting learning activities, in designing supports for learning and in the choice of teaching and assessment strategies" (McLoughlin, 2001, p. 12). In doing so, students are then better equipped to transition to a new learning style, very different from anything they may have experienced thus far in their academic careers. Providing a broader perspective will also develop global citizens and

...push students beyond the limits of their own culturally bound conceptual frameworks. At the same time, an inclusive teaching approach aims to enhance learning outcomes for minority groups by encouraging respect for different values and approaches to learning, and by providing a range of flexible learning options to meet learner needs (McLoughlin, 2001, p. 12).

The importance of intercultural competence cannot be underestimated for these international graduate students. It is a key element to their learning and communication both in and outside the classroom. Intercultural scholars from around the world participated in a study to measure intercultural competence as an outcome of internationalization at various institutions. There was an 85% agreement on a statement

regarding intercultural competence as “the ability to shift one’s frame of reference appropriately, the ability to achieve one’s goals to some degree, and behaving appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). The definition of *effective* and *appropriate* (Spitzberg, 1989 as cited by Deardorff, 2006, pp. 255-256) characterize effectiveness as “the achievement of valued objectives” and appropriateness as “the avoidance of violating valued rules.” It is not surprising then that international students face challenges in attaining competency as they acclimatize to a new learning environment.

Social Factors

A network of friends for international students can be an outlet for interaction and socialization. Social support is a key facet of international student adjustment (Robertson et al., 2000; Andrade, 2006). It can enhance the academic environment. Rosenthal et al., (2006) asserted that students with a strong connection to those who share the same cultural background and citizens of the country in which they are now studying perceive their academic progress in a more positive light. Many students attribute their successful transition to the personal and academic support provided by their fellow PhD students from their own countries (Harman, 2003). Part of the challenge for international students, of joining any social organization is the limited free time these students have left after studying. This is especially true in the initial stages of adapting to the newness of culture, climate, language, foods, different modes of transportation, and sometimes even the concept of time. However, engaging in some extra-curricular activities can promote life balance and enhance the learning environment. It would be easier for students to maintain a strictly academic focus however according to Winthrop and Kirk

(2008) academic and social learning were both impactful to students' overall well-being (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008).

In the Western context, religion can be diverse, ranging from orthodox faith to non-existent faith depending on the individual. The freedom of religion that is practiced in Western society is not the norm in many other parts of the world. In addition, for many cultures, religion and culture are intricately entwined. Many students from middle-Eastern countries have endured the backlash of racism resulting from the events of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States of America. Many students of Muslim faith pray regularly throughout the day. Accommodations for religious practice would help these students to feel valued and respected. The University of Manitoba for example has a designated Muslim Prayer Room. When religion is such an integral part of one's life and schedule, then it would only enhance morale among this particular student body to provide a facility to pray in a safe environment. More than other activities, the practice of religion appears to be a common thread that enables international students to have contact with other people (Rosenthal et al., 2006).

The international graduate students who have experienced discrimination due to cultural differences have found social connections among their peer group with those who share a similar cultural background or the same language. Students may face discrimination due to the colour of their skin (Khoo et al., 1994), not having English as their first language, and differing political or religious views. In the United States, Trice and Yoo (2007) found that "contact with American students, freedom from discrimination, and favorable attitudes of American people toward their home country were statistically significant predictors of students' academic satisfaction" (p. 44). In an

Australian study of Taiwanese nursing students, two thirds of the participants experienced social isolation, racial prejudice, and negative stereotypes of international students, all of which became barriers to their learning (Wang et al., 2008). When students face discrimination, in particular if they have not experienced it before, it can cause pressures that may result in health-related problems such as depression or anxiety (Khoo et al., 1994; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007) which directly affect their ability to focus on their studies.

Psychological Factors

Stress can be a “necessary impetus for new learning” (Kim, 1994, p. 393). For new language learners, the level of stress can be particularly acute as there is urgency in their desire to communicate properly. The stress had two components: 1) the stress of mentally being focused and attentive at all times for fear of missing some slight nuance which could guide my steps in the right direction (quite literally) and 2) the stress of learning something new which would eventually be a sign of growth and accomplishment. In line with Kim (1994), stress then becomes a part of the move toward successful adaptation and growth of individuals to a new country. Indicators of stress behaviour during the acculturation process manifest in “lower mental health (anxiety and depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion” (Zheng and Berry, 1991, p. 453). Understanding this stress can equip students to deal with cultural adjustments and in turn, be more effective in their academic pursuits.

In cross-cultural interactions, high anxiety is synonymous with stress which is a common response to dealing with the unfamiliar (Barna, 1998). Gudykunst (1998)

reminds us that for effective communication to occur, our anxiety must be sufficiently low to accurately interpret and predict strangers' behaviours. The corollary is that when anxiety is too high, it is easy to be less attentive and communicate on automatic pilot. This then causes us to interpret strangers' behaviours using our own frames of reference which can lead to inaccurate interpretations and predictions (Gudykunst, 1998). Modern vernacular attaches a negative connotation to the word 'stress' whereas in the intercultural realm it does not have that same implication. It is in fact viewed as an important element of the intercultural journey of learning and awareness. Together with adaptation and growth, stress becomes a key in increasing the likelihood of more successful interactions and communication (Kim, 1994). This is a struggle international graduate students will face in and outside of the classroom environment.

International students often face feelings of isolation from local classmates and homesickness (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Lewthwaite, 1997; Robertson et al., 2000; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2003; Li et al., 2010). The homesickness that can come from being physically away in a distant country or continent can also present itself when coping with a culture that is very different from one's own (Gudykunst, 1998). Interestingly, Robertson et al (2000), finds that although dealing with homesickness is viewed as part of the cultural adjustment process, it is not diminished by language aptitude and overcoming any perceived social barriers.

Familial Factors

Graduate students who are married or have dependents must often deal with the demands on their time by family responsibilities. For many, particularly females, they

must work through their cultural identities in their roles as women and caregivers while being a student and living in a foreign country (Springer et al., 2009).

In a study conducted on undergraduate nursing students (Dante et al., 2011), students with family commitments, such as responsibilities to children or elderly were at greater risk of not succeeding academically. The time consumed by family obligations can take away from study time and class attendance. Similarly, this applies to graduate students; familial responsibilities do not end upon completion of an undergraduate degree.

In the Latino culture, a woman's role is emphasized as the family caretaker. Even when a woman pursues higher education, the added responsibility to fulfill the obligations toward family can cause extra pressures which affect the overall learning environment. The household responsibilities, financial commitments (to one's current home and back in their home countries), and care of dependents are typically placed on the woman. In fact, the decision of how much to work or study can be influenced by these responsibilities (Sy and Brittan, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) assert in their ecological systems theory that different facets of an individual's life all inter-connect to influence the development of that person; experiences in one microsystem (i.e., family responsibilities) has some effect on the experiences in another microsystem (i.e., educational aspect of that individual's life) (Sy and Brittan, 2007). Keeping in mind this ecological theory, students with responsibilities to family members may have their time divided by a number of priorities other than their academics. The lack of time can have an influence on the outcome of the level of success in their studies.

For some international students, leaving their families and support systems behind in their native countries to study abroad can result in challenges to their adjustment to a new culture and country (Pedersen, 1991; Hayes and Lin, 1994; Harman, 2003; Maundeni, 2010). The corollary is that their studies may be affected as well. According to Maundeni's study on African students in Britain, the male students whose sponsors did not accommodate family members had to learn to manage the household duties i.e., cleaning, ironing, or cooking. These responsibilities in their cultures typically belong to females and were now relegated to them. Learning these new skills can be time-consuming and take away from study time during the initial learning process.

There are also proximity and accessibility challenges that some international students face when they have extended family i.e., grandmother, who may have raised them and who may live in rural or remote areas with little or no access to a computer or telephone. This cuts off the social, physical, and emotional support that would have been otherwise provided if the student were still in his/her home country (Lee, 1997; Maundeni, 2010). It is challenging to be in a new environment and the international students who are alone without the familial support that they are accustomed to can find their academic learning affected by the absence of this particular support network in their lives.

Linguistic Factors

An important gauge of acculturation is language competency (Huang, 1997; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mouw and Xie, 1999; Yeh and Inose, 2002; Yeh et al., 2008). The more competent the linguistic level, the easier the adjustment for a student to adapt to a new

culture, and the greater the success with which a student can perform academically.

However, this does not imply that linguistic competency will assure academic success.

Interestingly, most international students must take a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) tests to apply for graduate programs in North America. Attaining high scores in either or both these evaluation tools are not indicative of fluency in the English language. Many Chinese students for example, find that their high marks from these tests do not guarantee success in their actual spoken and written language once they arrive in the U.S., or Canada (Sun and Chen, 1997; Wan, 2001). So the dilemma becomes that an international graduate student may score adequately to gain admission into a graduate program in an English-speaking country however it may not be sufficient to aid in a smooth transition to a new culture and to their academic life abroad.

Learning a language is not without its challenges but to concurrently learn an academic or discipline-specific language only further adds to this challenge. Many international students face this challenge in graduate school where the spoken and written language is not their primary language - then to complicate matters, the academic language of a chosen field engenders even more issues of communication on both levels (Nieto and Booth, 2010).

Insufficient linguistic ability can be especially challenging when writing assignments, exams, and research papers (Lin and Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Dao et al., 2007). There are not accommodations made for extra time to read, write, or even comprehend the articles and instructions that are associated with graduate level studies.

This adds stress on the students as they cope with other stressors in their lives in their adjustment to a new culture and country.

Barletta and Kobayashi (2007) assert that language is crucial to the overall well-being of international graduate students; it is a tool to succeed in their cultural adjustment, socialization, and the adaptation to a different educational system. Those who struggle with language have greater challenges in adjusting to a new culture and environment (Hayes and Lin, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007, Wang et al., 2008) and thereby affecting their academic learning environment.

In conclusion, the literature confirms that there are contextual (financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical) and personal (social, psychological, familial, and linguistic) factors which influence international graduate students' academic learning.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative inquiry approach was selected as the method for this study due to the exploratory nature of the study. Although there is considerable research in the area of international students and their learning experiences over the last three decades, further investigation can add to the existing literature as well as inform local educational practices specifically at the University of Manitoba. The focus of this study has been restricted to international graduate students at the University of Manitoba but is not limited to participants from a specific cultural identity or country. For the purposes of this study, the premise of academic experiences will encompass more than the completion or grades obtained in their program of studies and will include contextual (financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical) and personal factors (social, psychological, familial, and linguistic).

Positioning Myself

I situate the genesis of this study within my understanding of the literature and my own preconceived ideas and biases - based on my previous experiences and those of the students that I have encountered through my work. I recognize that my interpretation of the data that I collected was shaped by these views and intend to mitigate this with member checking.

My personal experiences as an international student and the encounters that I have had with the international graduate students through my employment were the catalyst for this study. The accounts of the participants of this study will be helpful in the making of

future recommendations to enhance the support structures and services that are made available for international graduate students.

In my life, the following are aspects of my identity that often overlap: 1) my current role in working with international graduate students 2) my past, personal experiences as an international student 3) my formative years with my family upbringing and culture and 4) my ongoing role as a wife, mother, and spiritual mentor.

Over the past several years at work, there have been numerous international graduate students with whom I have spoken who have been challenged in various ways as they learned to adapt to a new school and life in Canada. I am not unaware that each person's experiences are unique and individual. Two students may experience the same situation but one will perceive it quite differently than the other. A common theme that comes out in their sharing is one of overcoming the difficulty of learning a new language and the cultural differences from their country of origin. As a former English-as-a-Second Language student, the frustrations of learning to communicate effectively in academic and social contexts resonate with me. I too recall the insecurities and isolation that they experience by not having a common first language. That is why many students when they first arrive in Canada gravitate to others who speak their first language which provides a natural, easier social network for them. Building social and work relationships can be a challenge for anyone but for an international student, the linguistic challenge only exacerbates the situation.

Studying abroad has a glamorous connotation and for that reason it attracts many students to undertake such an experience - to broaden their horizons and to see more of the world beyond where they live. In the time that I have spent on programs abroad,

there was definitely great learning and exciting experiences. However, there were also moments of financial stress, homesickness, linguistic challenges, and loneliness which coexisted with my academic studies. At times, the adaptation to new foods and language seemed much easier than the adjustment to new worldviews and cultural differences, especially during moments of illness, conflict or misunderstanding. Much like Eliza Doolittle in 'My Fair Lady', behind the excitement of learning a new language, there are the unpleasant aspects of learning in an unfamiliar culture. The students who have shared about physical or emotional challenges have had to find support outside of what they were accustomed in their home countries. This has not been easy for them – and I often wondered what more we could do to help their situations.

In my own experience of being a non-English speaker in my early childhood years, I vividly recall being in a classroom with many other students straining to understand what was being said and desperately trying to be understood. My own desperation prompted me to read a dictionary and watch an inordinate amount of television, hoping that by “osmosis” I would become fluent in this new and unfamiliar language. To this day, I find myself at times, miming the words that are uttered by a television personality while I watch a show or listen to a radio station. This is how I first learned to pronounce words in English. I am a child of immigrants. My world was that which was created for me by my family – with customs, traditions, food, and language all the same as in their country of origin. But even though we lived in Canada, it seemed that the microcosm in which I lived was situated in but not a part of the Canada that I had yet to discover. In the 70's, the ESL supports were not as established as they are now in the school system. There was no resource teacher or a separate class for extra English

language classes. I was immersed and expected to navigate my way to a successful transition to learning. Similarly international graduate students who arrive in Winnipeg are expected to navigate the university system and establish their own learning environment. They are grown adults who are fully capable and yet, I feel for their sense of loss (family, social network, language) and the fears they might face in coming to study in Canada. It is easy to draw out my own emotions due to personal biases, which at times can cause me to over identify with the students and feel critical toward what I may perceive as limited resources available to them. This may not be how the students feel but my perceptions were influenced by past experiences. I wonder if these same emotions filled my parents and grandmother's hearts, as they witnessed my struggles and hoped that I would somehow overcome the challenges and be able to embrace the educational opportunities for future success in their newly adopted home of Canada.

Finally, I want to address my role as wife, mother, and spiritual mentor. These roles co-exist and intersect in my life. My husband has a spiritual, leadership role in a non-profit organization which is what initially brought our family to Winnipeg. Along with that role, there is a parallel role of support that I have undertaken in a non-salaried capacity. The spiritual value system of this organization was not unlike that of my own cultural background which made it easier to adapt. In my own upbringing, I was taught that family was the first priority. My role as a wife and mother came above anything else – career, education, and hobbies. Although Korea has a high post-secondary educated population, it is not uncommon even today for women to forgo their careers once they marry and have children. Their new role becomes primary caregiver within the family structure. In fact, many Korean mothers move continents with their children for

educational reasons. Koreans believe it to be in the best interest of the children to not be separated from family. Since the maternal figure assumes primary responsibility as caregiver, the mother goes with the child. This is different than other cultures where an entire village raises the child and the concept of family extends beyond the nucleus. Perhaps that is why at times, I struggle to understand the students who have allowed extended family to care for their young children or in some cases, infants in order to pursue their studies at the University of Manitoba. This is not a choice in their minds but a means to an end. It is a short-term solution (loneliness, guilt, and maternal sacrifice) for a long-term gain (social status, employment opportunity, and financial advantage).

Even though my husband did not come from Korean heritage, it was easy for me to assume the roles in the manner in which I was brought up because they aligned with that of our shared, adopted spiritual value system. The first priority is to a spiritual entity greater than man, then to others, and then self. As I moved forward in the study, I expected that my paradigm of family values would conflict with some of the participants and align with others.

As I collected and analyzed the data, I had to maintain a habit of regular self-reflection. This enabled me to examine and search for moments when my own preconceived ideas and biases began to influence my interpretation of the data. Like an onion with many layers, my identity is layered by the various parts of who I am, where I come from, what I do, and how I have chosen to live my life. Although the initial disclosure of my own experiences of having been an international student was intended to bring about a relational commonality, it was clearly helpful to develop trust at the start of each interview. The participants' resonance with some layer of my identity allowed them

to share with me not as an outsider but as one of them. The story of my life was not something that could be put aside or ignored. Instead it became a link to establish a common ground between myself and the participants.

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research is typically selected to study a problem or issue for which quantitative research methods may not be suitable. The aim in a qualitative study is the “understanding of a particular situation or context much more than the discovery of universal laws or rules” (Willis, 2007, p. 99). Questions which require a qualitative research approach are those which seek to understand the issues or problems of “underrepresented or marginalized groups, whether those differences take the form of gender, race, class, religion, sexuality and geography (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005) or some intersection of these differences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 24). In doing so, it gives voice to a group of people or addresses a particular issue or phenomenon highlighting human interactions and experiences. Although the participants of this study may have one or more of the above attributes that may categorize them into an underrepresented or marginalized group, the focus of the study will pertain specifically to their status as international graduate students. Some characteristics of qualitative research are as follows:

1	Natural setting (field focused), a source of data for close interaction
2	Researcher as key instrument of data collection
3	Multiple data sources in words or images
4	Analysis of data inductively, recursively, interactively

5	Focus on participants' perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views
6	Framing of human behavior and belief within a social-political/historical context or through a cultural lens
7	Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design
8	Fundamentally interpretive inquiry - researcher reflects on her or his role, the role of the reader, and the role of the participants in shaping the study
9	Holistic view of social phenomena

Adapted from Creswell (2007) Table 3.1, p. 38

Creswell (2007) asserts that qualitative research is an opportunity to give voice to the participants in a study allowing them to share their experiences. A semi-structured interview format was selected to allow the researcher to have a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the participants. This method allowed for opinions to be expressed and personal backgrounds to be shared that might be relevant to the overall study and helpful during the analysis of the data. The stories of the students whom I had encountered through my work combined with the literature which informed me about the factors which impact and influence them, helped to formulate the research questions. The interview questions developed for this study and the factors that will be taken into consideration in understanding the experiences and perceptions of the participants are based on Yosso's model of Cultural Community Wealth – which has its origins in Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) allows us to focus on societal and cultural influence through a cross-section of fields of study ranging from race, law, and power. CRT focuses on the issues of race and racism within the context of social diversity. Following the collection of data, themes and sub-themes were identified in relation to Yosso's Cultural Community Wealth model. In this type of research, culture is not always overt so one must take note of language, behaviour, and context that could

elicit further meaning. It is not coming into the research with a theory but having the participants interpret their own experiences and make meaning of it (Clarke, 2005).

This study was informed by qualitative inquiry and guided by a phenomenological approach. Edmund Husserl is regarded as the founder of phenomenology but his ideas were developed based on Immanuel Kant's study of phenomena. The noema is the phenomenon (that which is experienced) and the noesis is the act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging (Husserl, 1964). By using the phenomenological approach to explore the shared experience of the participants, data can be collected to identify some common themes in an effort to understand the meaning behind the experiences. "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). In keeping with this definition, it seemed to direct the study to one of phenomenology with the phenomenon being the participants' status as international graduate students and data source coming from their perceptions of their academic learning experiences at the University of Manitoba. From the participants' stories and experiences, I wanted to hear their perceptions of what it meant to be an international graduate student. A phenomenological study illustrates the lived experiences of more than one individual regarding a particular concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This study was looking to transfer the information into a plan to better accommodate the needs of this particular group within the student population. Although a narrative or ethnographic study could have brought out the experience of an international student as well, I did not feel that I would have the time within the scope of a Masters level study to invest in collecting sufficient data for an ethnographic study nor

to adequately retell the participants' stories in a narrative study. The scale of an ethnographic study would have made the study more transferable but participant recruitment was a consideration. Given my personal experiences as an international student outside of Canada, I was more hesitant to try a narrative approach because I do not believe I could be completely unbiased and not allow my own experiences to influence my interpretation and retelling of the participants' stories. As well, the timeframe would have been limiting in trying to gather the richness of data that would be conducive to a narrative study. In addition, my experience as an international student was not as a graduate student and being considerably younger than the participants in this study, I was not married and did not have the same responsibilities to family or dependents. As a result, I did not feel that a narrative approach would be the best option for this study. According to Moustakas (1994), two broad but general questions are asked in a phenomenological study – what are the experiences you have had in terms of the phenomenon and what contexts or situations have influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? In this regard, the research questions seem to lend themselves to a phenomenological approach to this study.

Site Selection and Description

The University of Manitoba is a mid-sized university located in Western Canada. It has a 13% international student population with an enrolment of approximately 29,760 students. However 24.5% of the graduate student enrolment is comprised of international students (University of Manitoba, Fall Term Enrolment Report, 2013). In January 2014, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada launched a new International Education Strategy with “targets to attract more international researchers

and students to Canada, deepen the research links between Canadian and foreign educational institutions and establish a pan-Canadian partnership with provinces and territories and all key education stakeholders, including the private sector” (“Harper Government Launches,” 2014). In anticipation of this growing diversity, the university will now be forced to examine the needs of this demographic in a greater way in order to ensure retention and promote student success. The supports that are currently in place are a good starting point but will need to expand in order to adequately meet the needs of the international graduate students. One example of this would be in the area of oral language support. Currently there are four options for English language instruction offered at the University of Manitoba: 1) the Academic English Programs at the English Language Centre (Student Affairs) is responsible for teaching English as a Second Language to international students and tests English proficiency for both undergraduate and graduate students via the CanTEST 2) the Intensive English Program at Extended Education helps students build confidence in using English in academic, professional and social settings 3) International College of Manitoba (Independent Company located on university premises) offers a pathway to an undergraduate degree whereby the student can enter at the second year level of an undergraduate degree program, and 4) the SpeakEASY program funded by the Office of the Vice-Provost (Academic Affairs) focuses on comprehensibility for clearer communication (primarily for faculty members) but has a limit of five 50-minute sessions for graduate students who are teaching U of M credit-courses. In each of these situations, the support has a cost that can be prohibitive for many students who have limited financial resources. In terms of written language support provided through the Academic Learning Centre, there is no fee associated with

this resource however there is a maximum of six, thirty minute sessions guaranteed to each student due to demand. Understandably, the university must investigate means to generate more income to further support the operation of such a large organization. This does not however, eliminate the fact that there are students who are accepted into programs and require additional learning supports to help them in successfully transitioning to their academic lives in Canada. These are the costs associated with meeting the needs of our learners.

Participants and Recruitment Procedures

The participants of this study were recruited through print and electronic poster advertisement at the International Centre for Students, the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the Graduate Students' Association. The only criteria for the participants other than their status as an 'international graduate student' was that they could not be currently enrolled in the Certification in Higher Education Teaching (CHET) program offered through the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. My role as an Educational Developer at CATL may have been perceived as a position of power over any students who were recruited from the CHET program thereby compromising the integrity of the data. As a result, any graduate students currently enrolled in the CHET program who volunteered for this study were not considered as potential participants. In the end, seven international graduate students were recruited for this study.

Credibility

In this study, I conducted snowball sampling in the recruitment of its participants. As potential participants came forward, they were asked whether they might know someone who would be interested in participating in the study. As I am not part of the

international graduate student community this was an opportunity to learn of other individuals who might be willing to participate in the study. While word of mouth can be a powerful tool, a concern for recruiting participants in this manner was the possibility of having all the participants come from one specific country of origin as opposed to various countries. This would have then resulted in more commonality in the findings due to cultural similarities among the participants of the study. In the end, it was not a concern since only two of the participants originated from the same country.

Qualitative methods do not rely on the traditional validity and reliability measures but rather, rely on the credibility of the data through verification (Creswell, 2007). Eisner (1991) suggests examining the 'credibility' as opposed to the 'validation' of qualitative research. Structural corroboration of data collection allows the researcher to look for recurrent behaviours or actions under a common theme which confirm that the event is interpreted correctly and thereby establishing a level of credibility (Eisner, 1991, 1994). Regardless of the term used, it seems that to have credibility, there needs to be a level of accuracy and trustworthiness in terms of data collection and analysis. There are a number of strategies that qualitative researchers may implement to ensure credibility however for the purposes of this study I have chosen to focus on the following: 1) triangulation – the use of multiple sources to support a theme 2) clarifying researcher bias – positioning myself; sharing past experiences and bias that may influence the interpretation of the findings, and 3) member checking – allowing participants to review the transcription, interpretations, and/or conclusions to assess accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview questions were developed based on the literature regarding international students' experiences in higher education (See Appendix B). The interview was designed to take approximately one and a half hours and involved note taking and recording of the questions and responses with a digital recorder. The interviews were transcribed and the participants were given a copy of the transcription for review, feedback, and confirmation to verify that their perceptions had been adequately reflected. Once the interviews had been transcribed and member checking had been completed then common themes and sub-themes were determined. The themes and sub-themes were categorized using the Cultural Community Wealth framework by Yosso. The themes and sub-themes were placed under the following categories: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. As a novice researcher, there was some consultation with my advisor regarding data collection and analysis, to ensure that there were other sources of input and feedback. This allowed for another perspective in the interpretation of the findings.

Limitations

There were specific limitations to this study. The first was that the interview was conducted in English. For all the participants, English was not their primary language and so the social context and meaning behind the questions could have been understood differently than what was intended. Since I did not speak the same first language as any of the participants, I used active listening as a strategy to mitigate the possibility of misinterpretation of responses. Active listening involves repeating the participant's exact words, paraphrasing the participant's stories, or sharing insights from what was inferred

in the stories. Another limitation was that the small number of participants did not allow the findings to be generalizable across all institutions. However the results may be used effectively at other institutions of similar size and demographic to contribute in assessing general needs of their international graduate student populations.

The bias of the researcher can influence the interview process. It is difficult to be objective and not allow personal experiences and expectations guide the interpretations of the answers provided. Husserl first introduced the term 'bracket out' meaning to take oneself out (Husserl, 1964). The terms *bracketing*, *phenomenological reduction*, and *epoché* are often used interchangeably and refer to the process of deterring one's bias through self-reflection in order to understand the pure essence of a phenomena (LeVasseur, 2003). In particular, Moustakas defined epoché as refraining "from judgement, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" and believed this to be the important first step in the phenomenological process (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). It would seem a difficult task for a qualitative researcher to bracket personal bias especially in an interpretive study. How one views the world and interprets various events, behaviours, and meanings are influenced – even subconsciously – by previous experience. One of Husserl's students, Martin Heidegger, did not believe that it is possible to bracket prior conceptions and knowledge entirely (Heidegger, 1962). At times, it is difficult to ascertain where one's opinions stem from without reflecting on past experiences and influences. In the words of van Manen, "human life needs knowledge, reflection, and thought to make itself knowable to itself, including its complex and ultimately mysterious nature" (van Manen, 1990, p. 17). At best, my goal

as the researcher in this study was to make a concerted effort to suspend personal bias and prejudice but fully understanding the challenges associated with this task.

Another consideration was the connection between the researcher and participant. In the context of human relations, there are some participants that make a more natural connection to the researcher thereby feeling more comfortable in the interview process. The connection may be a result of personality, ethnicity, gender or other unexplained reason. This could have influenced the level of openness and honesty with which they answered the questions. Although I have experienced this type of connection before, there were no comments made to indicate that any of the participants felt a noticeable connection to me in this particular study.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, I believe my role of employment is critical to the set-up of this research. As mentioned earlier, my role in the Certification in Higher Education Teaching (CHET) program for graduate students was taken into consideration in the recruitment process. Although the program is non-credit, there could be a perceived conflict of interest and power since all the CHET students are familiar with me and my role in managing the program. As previously stated, no international graduate students currently enrolled in the CHET program were chosen to participate in this study as a matter of sample selection criteria.

The Ethics Protocol was submitted to the Ethics Review Board with the following:

1. A cover letter to all potential participants outlining a description of the study, the timeframe required for collecting data, the name of the researcher, the name of the academic advisor, and the contact information for the Research Ethics Board.

2. Written informed consent from each participant which will be stored in a secured environment for a period of seven years.
3. The recruitment poster.
4. Three letters of permission addressed to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, International Centre for Students, and Graduate Students Association to advertise the recruitment poster through email or print.
5. The interview questionnaire.
6. The certificate of completion of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Course on Research Ethics (CORE).

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore international graduate students' perceptions of their academic learning. It is their lived experiences that give life to the data. A review of the raw data highlighted certain words and phrases in the transcripts which were then coded or labelled. Using Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model as a framework, themes emerged under each of the capital in the model and another layer of sub-themes were categorized within the broader themes. I will provide excerpts of the interviews in this chapter and integrate the framework accordingly.

Participants

Three men and four women participated in this study. They are primarily in their mid to late twenties and have all come to Canada as international students to pursue graduate studies within the last five years. One of the students arrived as an international student and met her future husband during her studies. She married last year and is still completing her program. Although she is now a permanent citizen and no longer holds an international student visa status, she very much considers herself an international student in terms of her lived experiences and how she still views herself. The way she stories herself is not bound by legal status but rather, it is a part of her social identity developed during her academic studies. Initially the participants were going to be students who held an international student visa however the data brought to light the situation of students who arrive with student visas but during the course of their studies may change their status. The participants have been categorized according to their

programs and the number of years they have been in Canada. The duration of their programs - doctoral versus masters - could be a factor in the acculturation process as the students who have been in Canada for a longer period of time have more time to adjust to a new culture, language, academic expectations, and climate.

The participants' details can be summarized as follows:

Participants' Data

Name*	Country of Origin	Gender	Degree Program	Marital Status
Niloufar	Iran	Female	PhD	Married
Irena	Russia	Female	PhD	Single
Tarenah	Iran	Female	Masters	Single
Param	India	Male	Masters	Married
Lena	Ukraine	Female	Masters	Single
Madushan	Sri Lanka	Male	Masters	Single
Abid	Pakistan	Male	Masters	Single

**Note: Names have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality*

Niloufar

Niloufar is a PhD student from Iran. When she arrived in Canada, she was single and not involved in a relationship but during the course of her studies she met and married a fellow international graduate student from Iran. Although she has now received permanent resident status, she volunteered for the study because she still perceives herself to be an international graduate student in terms of everything other than her visa status. Upon meeting Niloufar, her warm and friendly disposition, and her confidence shine through clearly. She exudes a positive outlook in life and this may have

helped her from becoming embittered when dealing with difficult situations as an international graduate student. Of all the participants, Niloufar was the one who had stated that she had no financial concerns during her studies and perhaps with this pressure alleviated, she was better able to deal with her struggles as an international student. Initially, Niloufar struggled with the differences in the Canadian educational system compared to what she had known and experienced in her home country of Iran. She believes that an introductory session about cultural differences would be helpful to new international graduate students and could mitigate potential conflict and cultural misunderstandings.

Irena

Irena is a PhD student from Russia. She came to Canada in pursuit of a Masters degree but prior to completion, she transitioned directly into a PhD program. She is single and assertive in her communication style. Her petite frame belies a much stronger personality which she attributes to her cultural upbringing. She currently rents a room in a home where the homeowner resides. Irena strongly believes that this living arrangement has been beneficial to her on many levels. First, the cost of rent is significantly lower than the fees for residence on campus. Second, the homeowner or landlady has included Irena in her extended family gatherings, which has allowed her to develop connections to Canadians and helped her to become more familiar with Canadian thinking and culture. Lastly, the absence of family has been more manageable for her emotionally as she has not had to deal with loneliness and homesickness to the same extent she might have, had she not had the pseudo-family network available to her.

Tarenah

Tarenah is a Masters student from Iran. She is single and is near completion of her program. She has submitted her thesis and is awaiting her oral defense date to be set by her committee. When you first meet Tarenah, she appears almost shy and insecure. It is unclear if her demeanour is a reflection of her true personality or the result of some of the challenges she has encountered while studying in Canada. On an academic level, her studies in Canada have been filled with stressful situations that remain largely unresolved. She finds language and cultural misunderstandings to be the source of many of the challenges she faces as an international graduate student. As well, the lack of employment opportunities while studying in Canada limits her financial resources. On a personal level, Tarenah deals with issues of loneliness and depression as she faces these challenges by herself without the support structure of family and close friends in her home country. Without the proper support and resources, Tarenah feels that international graduate students are powerless to deal with perceived or real injustice that they may face.

Param

Param is a Masters student from India. He arrived to pursue his studies in Canada with his girlfriend at the time. They have since married and he eagerly anticipates his graduation this spring. At first glance, Param seems happy and content with the life he has built in Canada. It is only through the interview that he reveals disappointment about the challenges that he has faced. During the course of his studies, Param has faced multiple conflicts due to what he believes are cultural misunderstandings. He has since found resolution in those specific incidents. Unlike his peers who are single, being

married poses a different set of challenges financially. Among Param's single friends, there is little need beyond the standard bed and dresser perhaps even a couch could suffice for sleeping accommodations whereas for a married couple, there are more expectations of what a home should look like and have in it. It is at the request of Param's wife that they bought a dining table and bedroom set. Conversely, it is also Param's wife who has been steadily employed and working between 50-60 hours per week to support them financially. Although Param has worked the maximum 20 hours per week that he is permitted as an international graduate student, the lion's share of the financial stress and workload has been shouldered by Param's wife. This also leads to stress in their marriage relationship.

Lena

Lena is a Masters student from Ukraine. She is single and came to Canada because the Faculty at the institution where she obtained her undergraduate degree has a connection with the corresponding Faculty at the University of Manitoba. When you first meet Lena, she comes across confident despite English being her second language. She does not display any reticence in answering questions and is quick to offer examples from her own life. As an international graduate student, Lena is employed both on and off-campus and in her opinion, this provides her with a financial stability that many of her peers do not have. One of her greatest struggles in her initial job search was due to not knowing how to drive. In her field, having access to a vehicle and/or having a valid driver's license seems to be a requirement in a majority of the available employment opportunities. In her country of origin, there are many modes of transportation and so people do not need to drive or own a vehicle to secure a position in her field of work.

According to Lena, accessibility and mobility are perhaps more significant in Canada where there is more land and distance to cover however it is limiting for international students who come from a different culture where taking the bus, walking, or riding a bike may be more the normal means of transport.

Madushan

Madushan is a Masters student from Sri Lanka. He is single and came to Canada to specifically work under the auspices of his advisor, a leader in the field of research in which Madushan was involved back home. He is currently engaged to be married and hopes to be able to complete his studies quickly and return home to his fiancée.

Although Madushan is matter of fact in his speech, it seems conflicting with some of the frustration he experienced in his personal situation which is only revealed in later discussion. Initially, Madushan's visa application was denied twice and his funding was deferred because he could not gain entry into the country. In order to obtain a visa and facilitate the process, Madushan lived in India just prior to coming to Canada. It is in India that he first started learning to cook while living away from his family. Even with specific instructions from home, his food does not seem to taste the same as his mother's cooking. This is one of the reasons he feels homesick from time to time. Finances play a large role in Madushan's life in Canada as it does for many international graduate students. Without the funding he is receiving, he would not be able to pursue his studies in Canada.

Abid

Abid is a Masters student from Pakistan. He completed an undergraduate degree in the United States before returning to his home country to work for several years. Abid

speaks English with very little accent but still found it difficult to make friends in Canada. Similar to many other international graduate students, Abid found the climate extremely difficult and socially inhibiting as there were no other means to connect to other people without braving the cold weather and going outside. Even though he found accommodations on campus, he found it difficult to meet people and develop friendships. He feels that there are not enough organized events to bring international graduate students together in a social setting. Depression has been a factor in Abid's time in Canada and in an effort to seek help he has been seeing a counsellor to help him work through his depression while continuing with his studies. In order not to exacerbate his condition, Abid makes a concerted effort to keep himself busy with jobs, volunteering, and mentoring opportunities.

Experiences of International Graduate Students

Throughout the interviews, there are common themes that emerged across the various accounts of these international graduate students' experiences. Some of these themes reinforced the use of different capital as per Yosso's framework while others demonstrate issues of dissonance. The following themes have been highlighted and placed under the elements of the Community Cultural Wealth model:

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital as defined by Yosso (2005) is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Overall the findings show that there are different factors which create feelings of isolation for our international graduate students. It is aspirational capital that equips them to persevere during these times and continue in their studies. For many of the participants, their

studies in Canada are merely a stepping stone for other hopes and dreams for their futures. Enduring a harsh climate, finding employment to ease financial burdens while studying, or even persisting in their studies when they felt unaccepted by their Canadian peers were clearly barriers. However their hopes and dreams for the future were sustained by knowing that this is for the short-term and the road to achieving all that they desired.

Feelings of Isolation - “Work becomes your only friend”

Many of the students had experienced feelings of isolation which attributed to their loneliness, homesickness, depression, and stress levels. The reasons for the feelings of isolation were varied but the end results were similar.

Perceived Lack of Acceptance by Peers

The commonality for all students is their studies. Regardless of the discipline, international graduate students have come to Canada to pursue their education. However the students who had labs where they conducted research found themselves there for most of the day and often into the evenings. This prevented them from having the opportunity to socialize or meet other students outside of their lab. Madushan does not mind spending an inordinate amount of time working on his research. He explains that “because if I go home, I don’t have family to spend time there so I spend most of the time in the lab.” As well, with limited funding, most students work diligently to complete their thesis in a timely manner so that they will not extend their program longer than necessary or beyond their funding.

Lena describes her experience in group work as uncomfortable. Although she cannot say with certainty, she feels confident to say that her status as an international graduate student could be a factor.

They didn't really trust me in the group assignments. That they just...there can be different reason for it not necessarily because I'm an international student. It might've been because I am a person with very little experience amongst the professionals with 20 plus years of experience. Uh, but I still felt like they... were excluding me from the group and not giving me any serious work to do. In other group assignments, I also felt the students weren't willing to collaborate with me and maybe to take me in the group.

Financial Pressures

The pressures of finance can be multi-layered ranging from survival needs to socialization to career-building. In order to even socialize, there is usually a certain amount of money necessary that is spent either on food, venue, or transportation. For Param, it was quite a challenge financially when he first arrived. He recounts, "But I've seen those times I used to convert every dollar into rupees and think like that. It used to be really hard. Even for a Tim Horton's coffee, I used to think about it." When you do not have the financial means to go out with friends or acquaintances, then the feelings of isolation continue to exist and sometimes grow. Work becomes your only friend.

Niloufar is one of a small number of graduate students who was able to secure a sessional appointment while enrolled in a PhD program. In her case, it was not simply a solution to financial challenges but more so a building block to her future career – as she hoped that this would give her the necessary Canadian work experience that she, like many of her fellow international graduate students were lacking. It was much more

demanding than she had initially anticipated and definitely impacted her studies at the time.

Um, I worked um, six hours per week. Yeah. It was an intensive course. It was a five week course and I, usually I get this offer for the whole semester but because it was an intensive course, it was offered in five weeks, but two sessions per week. So each week, I taught six hours. And um, intensive um, influence on my study. At that time, I was writing my dissertation and I'm still writing my dissertation but at that time, it took me a long time to prepare for this course. So I couldn't get much done regarding my dissertation because I taught two days a week and for each day, I spent two days preparing for the course. So I taught two days. It took me two days to teach the course and two days to prepare for the course and it left just one day. And I couldn't get much done during those five weeks.

In Irena's case, she has her basic needs covered by the 'studentship' awarded by the Faculty of Graduate Studies. During her undergraduate studies, she lived in the capital city. It "was five hours flight to my hometown where I could see my family and friends. Now it's three flights and a two day trip." Initially, Irena had hopes of returning home every six months, but soon realized,

...once I got here, like, it's such a tough process of getting here. And it's so expensive. I realized that ok, it's maximum once a year. It was really hard for me... I'm really close to my family and I want to see them.

The expense of flying overseas is cost-prohibitive and adds to the feelings of isolation for students like Irena, who are unable to visit their family and friends back home.

Madushan also receives some financial support through a scholarship.

I'm receiving a scholarship from uh, through Manitoba Graduate Scholarship and that pays for my tuition and for my living... It's only covers my expenses. I'm

not facing any problems but I don't have anything to save or spend on other expenses.

He further clarifies, "To be honest... I'm talking only about the social life, because with this money, I'm unable to... I don't have extra money to go to a restaurant, go to a party or somewhere. University and home, that's my life."

In Abid's situation, he works two jobs. "I think it limits my time that I could spend on my studies. But I think I can manage." Doing research work related to your studies is quite different than a job in the Information Systems Technology (IST) department carting AV equipment from classroom to classroom.

Climate Difference

For the students who come from tropical countries, the climate can be a considerable adjustment for their bodies, their travel time to and from school, and their social activities. Madushan explains that "I really understand that during winter every one of us is confined to our four walls but that's not the case in my country. I can go anywhere, anytime, wherever I wish." The Manitoba cold is very extreme and can be overwhelming for many of our international graduate students. It is cold enough that it inhibits students from going outside at all costs. Even Abid, who had previously experienced -10C, -15C during his undergraduate studies could not comprehend -40C. "That's what really got me mad at people. When I expressed that it was cold, they were just like 'it's only -20C, wait til it's -40.'"

It is not unusual for harsh weather conditions to isolate us from others. Param describes a particularly memorable time just weeks after his arrival when the weather and financial restrictions influenced his decision not to socialize during the holiday season.

For a month, I think I didn't raise my head to see the sky. It was like I was walking like this all the time (head down)... But it, it used to absorb a lot of our energy commuting by bus because the place where we were living at wasn't frequented by buses so you have to go anywhere in the city, you have to change two or three buses, things like that. I remember we had to get groceries and it was -30C that day, and we had to walk to the stop and it was pretty far away. I had to take my glove off just for a moment to take a phone call and I got a frostbite. I was like, 'oh my God, I'm going to lose my fingers today' and uh, you know my girlfriend said we should get a taxi. And I said, 'no, I would not be spending money on a taxi, we can walk home'. And uh, experiences like those. I remember on the 31st of December that year, I went... Uh, it was New Year and we didn't have anywhere to go and we were feeling lonely. And that day probably was the wind chill was -50C.

This climate difference does reinforce the feelings of isolation that some of our international graduate students experience.

Learning to adapt to a new identity as an international student has various complexities – financial stressors, climate changes, and building new networks. It is the ability to overcome these challenges that develops the character to effectively use aspirational capital. For many who arrive in foreign lands, it is often the result of a desire to gain new experiences, an opportunity to better their life situations (education, work, or safety), or reuniting with family. Had they remained in their home countries, their characters would not be tested in the same manner and their use of aspirational capital might have been limited without ever facing these types of barriers and/or limitations.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital according to Yosso's (2005) framework "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than

one language and/or style” (p. 78). The challenges of verbal and written communication in another language are common to our international graduate students. This capital is particularly strong for these students who must attain a certain level of competence in order to complete their graduate programs. Their competence lies in the successful use of linguistic capital.

Challenges of Language – “...people don’t get what you say or don’t want to get what you say.”

Communication is a vital part of being successful at school, at the workplace, or at home. For international graduate students, this area can be one fraught with feelings of stress, insecurity, anxiety, alienation, and frustration. To communicate in a secondary or tertiary language can increase these very emotions.

Not Being Understood

It is not easy to assess one’s own speaking ability in a foreign language especially when you are still in your home country. Upon arriving in Canada, some international graduate students find that their level of spoken English seemed higher in their country of origin. Lena shares her impressions:

I know some people have a hard time with accents but to this extent, this is, sometimes it went overboard when people were looking at me so closely when I’m speaking and just looking at me and saying, “What? I don’t understand what you say.” And I was thinking, yeah, this kind of thing. I didn’t know I was so bad speaking English, at the beginning. And because they were trying so hard to understand me, they were putting so much effort in trying to understand me. And sometimes they actually didn’t. And yeah, it doesn’t feel good when someone is visibly trying to understand you. It’s basically showing you that you’re not comprehensible.

... The attitudes are when you speak and people don't get what you say or don't want to get what you say.

... sometimes I felt like people, especially when they hear the accent and when I maybe make some mistake in English and they would assume that I'm not good at speaking English - like they would spell simple words for me for example. They would spell me a word 'resolve'. I know how to write. That is really patronizing when someone is just spelling you the spelling of simple things. To me, that is they assume I don't know how to write. That's really unpleasant.

... When someone thinks that you might make a mistake in something really, really complicated and challenging but when they expect you to make a mistake in something small, simple, and down-to-earth, that's like they are assuming you are mentally incompetent.

Niloufar also shared similar feelings:

...the only thing that I struggled with was my accent because I speak English with an accent so when an English-speaking person hears me, he or she understands that English is my second language although I speak it fluently – or at least, *I* think I speak it fluently. Um, but one of the very first things that I noticed when I came to Canada was that some people didn't understand me because of my accent. And this was something that I didn't expect because I thought when I was in Iran I thought, um English, I wouldn't face any language barrier. But when I came here, I realized when some people speak very fast, I didn't understand them. It took me awhile to get used to different accents. And also, some people, especially Canadian students who haven't been in touch with um, international students, who weren't used to certain accents not foreign accents, these students, um, we had a hard time communicating with each other.

Complexities of Academic Writing

Even though Tarenah asked friends for help in writing term papers, she did seek additional support through the 'Language Centre'. She found that learning to write academically was a slow and arduous process.

For example, you ask them, 'ok, will you please review for example 30 pages and give some comment?' They say 'sure'. But you know you are there and actually that's not their fault. You're there and they are going to read three or four pages and the rest is just, you know, they endure. And when you are in a rush, it doesn't help that much.

Despite the fact that she has submitted her thesis, Tarenah's academic writing ability never quite progressed the way she had hoped.

Another area of writing that seems to be a constant source of difficulty is proper referencing and citation. According to Param, he feels that international graduate students are ill-prepared for the rigours of academic writing specifically where it concerns referencing.

I think this should be a course in every department or maybe interdepartmental course that teaches international students about um, research methodology you know. This is important because we are not necessarily bad students we just come from a different culture. So once I got the background of it, I was able to get it... how to do the referencing and all that once someone made me, certain told me. If that could've been sorted out in the first couple of months, it would have had a big impact on the entire degree.

It is unfortunate that Param had not been sufficiently prepared in this area as writing is a large portion of graduate work in any discipline.

For many international students, learning English is but one of the hurdles they face in studying in Canada. The reality is that the English requirement to study in Canada is the base requirement: learning to be understood, developing relationships, and academic writing are extensions of knowing English but at a higher level of complexity. It is at this level that many of the international graduate students struggle. They are

relegated to use their linguistic capital however many never reach the level of competency that they would like and find this problematic.

Familial Capital

Familial capital is defined by the “cultural knowledge nurtured among the family that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). For the participants in this study, it was particularly important to maintain connection through the many miles that separated them from their families. As well, there were different pressures to return home for some of the students. Lastly, an issue that was raised was the need to preserve a sense of cultural identity within their new lives in Canada. This capital was strong on two levels. Some of the students consistently used their familial capital to give them the strength to persevere during times of adversity whereas for others, it was the lack of support that motivated them to prove their family wrong.

Distance Matters

A number of the interviews revealed that the participants had close relationships with their family members. It was important for them to maintain regular contact with their families. During times of hardship, the absence of family was particularly noticeable. There are also different obligations and pressures for those students who have family waiting in their home countries for their return.

Staying in Touch

It is possible to stay in touch across the miles with modern technology. Irena expresses that, “we still keep in touch but that’s different kind of connection you have

when it's long-distance." She still desires human interaction of some kind with her family.

It was really hard because I'm really close to my family. So it's not like I call them once a month and be like, "hi, mom, how's it going?" We will call each other every day and even when I was away in Moscow, we called each other every day or even twice a day. Thank God there's like Skype technology. In the end, even her relationship with her boyfriend was relegated to a virtual one due to the distance, but she was still able to maintain it across the miles.

Tarenah has few friends and has spent most of her time the past two years studying both at school and at home. She talks to her family back in Iran for an hour, sometimes two hours every day. It occupies her time and keeps her connected. This is especially important for Tarenah because she lacks the support often garnered from friendships. Unlike the telephone which is cost-prohibitive, Skype allows her to maintain her ties to her family and also receive the emotional support that she needs when studying in a foreign country.

Because home in our home country, we had our family. But here, even the emotional effect, all this stuff that we receive from our family, we expect our friends, to support us in that, which is not happening at all.

Times of Illness

It is especially difficult for international students to deal with illness or physical hardship when they are without family support. Abid shares his recent experience:

When you're by yourself, when you go to another country you're all by yourself... there comes a point when you're like, you know, what's happening, you're all by yourself, and um, sometimes you get under pressure un, let's say, especially when you get sick.

He was unable to walk for a period of time and as a result, cooking and doing dishes became quite challenging. It was at those moments when having family would have been helpful to his physical situation.

Pressures to Return Home

In our globalized world, people travel to distant lands in order to further their education or pursue new ventures. For these international graduate students, they face different pressures to return to their home countries.

Responsibilities Toward Parents

Lena shares that being an only child means that her parents “do not have anyone else to take care of them. And they are not that young anymore.” She does not have a specific timeline to return however she is aware “that is something serious that I need to consider.”

In Abid's case, his family's desire for him to return is related to their plans for the family business. He explains that it is primarily “for expansion of their business ventures. They have a couple of businesses and they wanted me to help them expand cuz they saw me as a great resource with my (previous) education and experiences.”

Irena also shares a similar experience about family who are unsupportive of her academic pursuits.

My father was really against me going here... he is a business man, he does not understand my academic aspirations. Like he doesn't think this is a way to earn money. Uh, and he owns a company and he's always had a dream of me working there. Uh, and I broke his dream.

These broken dreams add a certain pressure for Irena to be able to return to her family feeling successful not simply in her own eyes but in their eyes as well.

Plans for Marriage

There are a different set of priorities for students who have come to study in Canada without their spouse or significant other. As Madushan explains,

Yes, I should go home soon because um, I have to get married. Uh, the reason is, I had my girlfriend from my undergraduation and um, she was a student in McGill University and she completed her Masters and she's in India now waiting for me to come back there and marry her.

Even though he feels this pressure to return home, in large part, he believes it is self-imposed. In fact, Madushan's fiancée would like him to pursue his PhD or "at least start before getting married." He however feels differently. "I don't want that because she has been waiting nearly six years for me." Part of the urgency is culturally-tied to the typical age appropriate for marriage in his home country. The other part revolves around the opposition they overcame in order to receive approval from both their families and his desire to move forward. Marriage would allow his wife to be able to move in with his family, as is customary in India, and give her the proper supports while he is completing his studies in Canada.

Sense of Cultural Identity

Param believes that he will eventually return to his home country but that return may be expedited once they have children. He has witnessed friends battling the issues of maintaining a sense of identity as they raise their children. Just like his friend, Param also wonders,

How will my son communicate with my father really, with his grandfather? So those kind of little dilemmas every time you know, you're not sure whether to give your children Indian culture or Canadian culture. You know if you force them to choose a culture that they're not living in, that's not fair on them but if

you don't tell them anything about your culture, then it's not fair to you and your parents and your family.

Even though Param and his wife anticipate another ten years in Canada, he does not see himself identifying with being Canadian in that timeframe.

I still wish I would love to go back to India because I don't feel I will ever become a Canadian even if I live my whole life here. So rather than not being able to stay an Indian and not being able to be a Canadian, it's better to stay an Indian and go back to India. But not immediately, I'm comfortable here.

For the most part, Param believes that his own sense of cultural identity can be retained because he envisions eventually returning to his home country.

The familial capital was used to garner support and incentive. For those whose families were supportive, the students were able to turn to them as a resource and comfort while others whose families were unsupportive of their academic pursuits, remained undeterred and used this to remain motivated to succeed.

Social Capital

Social capital is defined "as networks of people and community resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The international graduate students are familiar with the challenges in developing new friendships, cultural misunderstandings, and psychological and emotional times. It is their ability to use their social capital to be able to work through these challenges as they occur that enables them to turn what could be perceived as weaknesses into strengths. Rather than allow the lack of social interaction with Canadian students deter or discourage them, the participants were able to seek out friendships and support within their own cultural communities.

Friendships – Lack of Social Interaction with Canadians

Interestingly, all the interviews revealed that the participants' circle of friends were other international students, often times from their own ethnic communities. Despite their varying lengths of time in Canada and their unique circumstances, it seemed that they all developed a network of friends usually of the same origin.

Niloufar's main friendships her first year in Canada were students from other countries. Although she lived in residence, she did not socialize with the other students in residence and lacked relationships at first. "So, I didn't get a chance to... to see... even when I ran into people in my residence, we just said 'hi' and that was everything. So I didn't get much chance to um, find friends..." It took Niloufar about ten months before connecting with other students of the same nationality, but still not with Canadian students.

It seems that Param is resigned to the fact that he will not make Canadian friends during his studies here.

So I mean I got socially cut off because I was never present at the university because of that (studying at home rather than at the university). I didn't make much friends even while the courses. I'm not saying that anybody is um, against me or I was like, it was some kind of bias against me. I'm not saying that or accusing anyone of that. But I feel that if you're an international student, and you're not very extrovert, you will find it very tough to make friends especially beyond your own community.

Param's reasons for not having friendships with Canadian students are attributed to his different sleep and work schedule. Additionally, he feels that his opportunities to interact with Canadian students are limited. The lab is where Param spends most of his days and it would be the most natural place to develop friendships however the other students in

his lab are all other international graduate students like himself. In fact most of Param's friends are fellow East Indian students that he met through the Indian Students' Association. He joined this organization as a way to "... Connect with Indian students, yes. That's where I met most of my friends now."

Madushan initially expresses an indifference to the question of whether he is satisfied with the level of social interaction with Canadian friends. When pressed further, he admits that he would genuinely like to have some Canadian-born friends. In his mind, if given the choice, he would welcome Canadian friendships but he does not expect it because he does not feel that it is likely to happen. He shares that "... the people are more concentrated on their work here so the time doesn't fit for both of us so I just don't want to build up anything inside me or have any expectation inside."

This dissatisfaction with the level of social interaction with Canadian friends is echoed throughout the interviews. Irena also describes her Canadian relationships more as 'colleagues'.

"... we basically, we're colleagues. Colleagues. I call it friends because we do meet outside of school and we do some things but basically we're colleagues. Like so, primarily our communication is in relation to you know, our business. And this is not quite satisfactory. I'm interested in how um, Canadians live and how they think and so on and so on. But they don't seem to open that much. I don't know if that's because I'm not a part of Canadian culture or if that's just the way they're wired. Yeah, but again, if you didn't ask, I wouldn't feel like I'm dissatisfied with it.

She further states "no, I'm not completely satisfied with... I wish there was some more interaction and I wish it were on a different level."

Cultural Misunderstandings – “We don’t see the world as it is. We see the world as we are.” (Anaïs Nin)

It is quite normal to experience cultural misunderstandings while living or studying in a foreign country. Figuring out that a misunderstanding has occurred and resolving any conflict resulting from such a misunderstanding can consume one’s time and energy. These international graduate students face this regularly and share their insights.

Tarenah explains how she discovered the norms in her culture were not the same as those in Canada.

...we call that *ta’arof* which means that for example, when you want something, you don’t... you shy to ask for that. Or for example when somebody asks you to come with them, for example somebody invites you, invites you somewhere or something like that. Um, you’d like to go there but you feel a little bit shy about that so you say ‘no’ and if they say, if they want, they really want you to join them, they insist. So it doesn’t happen here. If you say ‘no’ then they say ‘ok, that’s ok.’ And the other thing is that for example, we don’t have the culture of sharing that much that is here. For example, so going out, here you share every single you know, if you buy for example two bottle of water then you are going to share the amount with each other or something like that. Or for example, if you go out with the older people... in my home country for example, it’s a little bit rude to... to pay when you are going out with the older people. But here, no, you should.

The lack of friendships in Abid’s life, particularly with Canadian students, he directly attributed to cross-cultural miscommunication. “It’s just there’s a lack of understanding between both sides of parties. We want to be friends with them but then

we end up doing something that you know alarms them or saying something or not understanding what they're saying." He further adds,

...let's talk about sense of humour. It's... I mean, I'm not sure if that becomes a barrier that takes people away from you know making friends, making foreign friends, but let's say there are local jokes they want to talk about something. I obviously won't be aware of them and they said the joke and I wouldn't understand since I don't understand you know the local sense of humour or jokes so I ask for explanations. So then it's not funny if you do that. And the person gets embarrassed. He finds that either I have a bad sense of humour or, or I, or I'm rude.

After arriving in Canada, Irena found it quite unusual that "people were friendly for no reason." This was unfamiliar to her because in her culture, friendliness usually preceded some kind of a request. Non-verbal messages in Canada had different meaning behind their actions.

First I, I, ok they're gonna want something from me. The first week was just hilarious... Ok, they want something from me. And in Canada, people like smiling. In Russia, you do not smile. If someone smiles at you on the street, it's weird. It's really weird. Especially when a man smiles to a woman, it's flirting. [Me: Oh] So here everyone smiles. At first, I was like, 'what's wrong with me, do I have something on my nose or what, what's going on?' And then, you know, you hit someone and they say, 'oh, sorry, sorry.' It was... the first week was very confusing.

Niloufar describes an unpleasant experience that she encountered due to cultural misunderstanding. The level of emotional tone had different weight behind it in Canada.

So a number of times I expressed my views emotionally but that emotion I guess, was interpreted by a Canadian person as too strong. You know what I mean? I didn't want to be negative or anything. I was just showing emotion out of

frustration but my frustration and my struggle was interpreted very negatively by a Canadian person. So this actually caused me some misunderstandings and communication. And I felt really um, I felt, I don't know, I didn't feel good at all. Like it was very frustration for me to see myself in that situation especially because I didn't really intend to um, convey a negative message but because of this cultural, perhaps because of cultural misunderstanding, cultural differences, I don't know, but the message was communicated very differently, negatively of course. It was not a good experience at all.

She further explains that in Iran, the style of expression is much more exaggerated.

...exaggeration is not, is very common. So when you want to show your emotion, it is ok to exaggerate. And the other person understands that you are exaggerating to show the depth of the problem. So instead of interpreting your reaction as reacting too much or in a very like, negative way, most of the time, your exaggeration is understood not as negative thing.

The cultural misunderstandings that Param faced were highlighted in his working relationship with a fellow international student whose research area is similar. This fellow student and their advisor originate from the same country and speak the same first language.

We worked on the same project at Victoria Hospital initially, and he is able to communicate, I feel much more easily (with their advisor). But he struggles elsewhere because his English... I think there was a big cultural difference here. Now my professor wanted us to work together and uh, he was always looking at me as if I were a competitor. I always kept telling him that, "you know, we're not competitors, we're working on the same project and ultimately, it's *our* work that's going to get counted, not your or mine work." So but he was adamant that, "no, no, you'll take all the credit and all that" so... I think that was a cultural issue.

Param attributes the competitiveness to cultural differences. This was a very different cultural paradigm than what he was used to in his home country. He believes, "I think had it been an Indian student, instead of him, uh, I would've been able to get my point across... so culturally, yes."

Psychological and Emotional Times

Loneliness, homesickness, depression, and stress in coming to study in Canada were common experiences held by the international graduate students who were interviewed. These psychological and emotional factors relate to social capital in that they often influence the students' capacity to utilize their network of resources more effectively in their daily lives and in their studies.

The initial adjustment period to a new culture and country can vary in length depending on the person. Irena describes it as, "... just initially, the first couple of days when you're in this period of transition, your habits are broken, you need to form new ones. Like, you don't know anything about the country or city. It's all new." She acknowledges that she adjusts to new situations quite quickly so she knows that other international graduate students may take more time to adjust.

Tarenah battled depression when she struggled financially during her time in Canada and sought professional counselling but in the end felt that it was ineffective in helping her cope with the various stressors in her life. Her concerns about her finances continually weigh heavily on her mind. "I said I think I'm going to get a depression." After applying to different universities and getting rejected, her depression seemed to worsen. In Tarenah's opinion, "having more income and outcome" helps her to feel better and this comes by keeping herself busy with work and learning.

In Abid's opinion, his struggles with loneliness and depression are a result of the lack of social contacts in his life which in turn limited his social and emotional supports.

It's just a part of my personality to have people around me. I've always had not a big social circle but I've always been a part of something. It's not that I always go out and party or whatever. It's just I always had people to go to – friends, family, or any kind of business, social activities. So I've experienced loneliness, depression, all of the above (homesickness and stress included).

Since he had previously experienced the same issues, Abid decided to be pre-emptive and seek counselling services even before the first day of classes. Unfortunately, the wait time was four months. As soon as an advisor became available, he pursued this opportunity as it was the only one available to him without cost and his depression had not subsided during that time of waiting.

The struggles of loneliness and homesickness are not unfamiliar to Param even though he is married and his wife is in Canada with him.

There are many reasons for that because when you come in here especially in the middle of winter, you don't know where to go. Uh, you don't have too much money to spend so you can't really go out to a pub or a bar and you know hang out there you know relax. Any form of relaxation you might think will require some amount of money at least. I mean even if you want to go skiing, you have to buy skis. So... but I would say, yes, loneliness a lot especially in winters. Yes, even now, winters kind of scare, scare me off. Winters especially by the time it gets to February or March, it gets really boring because you have nowhere to go, nothing to do. I don't know places where I can hang out. I don't have local friends here. I have friends who are like me, who know about as much about the city as I do. So that's why you know, I do feel lonely at times.

At times, Param's wife works 50-60 hours a week which gets stressful for her. He is also working day and night trying to finish his thesis so the combined schedules can be very

stressful for their marriage – especially when two or three days pass without seeing each other. Having his wife with him helped him emotionally because he was not “completely lonely.” However it also added a different kind of stress to his life. “Though I do think had we stayed in India, we would have fought a lot less than we do right now. It’s because of the loneliness and stress and things like that.”

In Lena’s case, it was the lack of understanding of the societal norms that was a catalyst for her stress.

I was quite depressed and um, how to say, stressed by all my lack of background knowledge about certain issues in this society and what people expected of me and how people treated me. When I, by not know the general accepted attitudes, showed some maybe different point of view. I found, well, this is not a nice thing to say, but I found that the freedom of speech in Canada is really relative. But there is the general accepted point that you should convey and if you don’t then prepare to be ostracized by the group. So you’re free to speak but face the consequences. And I face the consequences.

And she goes on to share about the hidden curriculum that she discovered,

I didn’t know the custom of speaking and the custom is really... there is a strict code, how you should speak about things and I didn’t know about it so then I found that my, people in the group were not welcoming of me because of that. ... I know there are some things you shouldn’t talk about here. Now I know. I didn’t know that before.

...it was a stressful one (experience). And I felt depressed because I didn’t have anyone I could speak my mind to and I couldn’t be frank and share with someone. I could skype my boyfriend in Ukraine and I could tell him about those things so that is a great support. That always is. But I still felt depressed because I’m like, completely outside the social norm and acceptance here. And just like, there would be a circle which encompasses everyone and I am outside of it. So again, that brings us to the topic of loneliness...

For Lena, going from understanding unwritten rules of conduct in her home country to not recognizing when she was saying or doing something offensive, was quite confusing and had a negative impact on her psychological and emotional well-being.

The friendships, cultural miscommunication, and psychological stressors all play a part in the life of an international graduate student. The social capital they wield can help them in their adjustment to life in Canada and academia.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital, as defined by Yosso (2005) “refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p. 80). When international students arrive in Canada, the cultural shift makes understanding how the educational system functions slightly more challenging. Learning to navigate this new landscape helps the students have more success in adaptation and academics. Orientations are designed to help mitigate the challenges of this new landscape and to familiarize oneself with the campus. However among all the capital, navigational capital seems the weakest. The students who had someone mentoring them through the initial adjustment period had a more successful transition whereas those without the help were unable to maneuver successfully. As there is no mechanism in place for assigned mentoring, those with mentors were personal friends or family members of the students. The use of navigational capital was limited and those students without mentors felt constrained by the lack of understanding of the educational and social systems. Social institutions are culturally bound. Unless an institution offers the resources to equip students to maneuver through these social institutions, the onus is on the students to find their own way.

A Different Educational Landscape in Canada

Interestingly, Lena, Niloufar, Param, and Madushan each come from different countries but all of them mention that one of the most significant differences in studying in Canada from their home countries is the ability to select their own course work independently of the other students in their programs. All of them were accustomed to a system in their home countries whereby a program is comprised of specific course work and cohort. So essentially, your cohort becomes a natural avenue for friendship given the amount of time spent together in classes. There are no electives, no options, and no choices for different courses. The program is fixed and completed within a specific period of time.

The students and teachers in Canada have a more relaxed relationship – even addressing one another by first name. According to Param,

In India, there's only a particular way in which you can talk to your teacher. You have to give a certain sign of respect. Like here you can, to Canadian professors, you can call them by their first name and they don't mind it. They will crack a joke with you, have a laugh with you, nothing of that sort happens in India.

The system is a flatter and less hierarchical system than what they have known or experienced in the past. For the international graduate students, they are more familiar with the practice of a clear separation between student and teacher. "Professors are to be obeyed and students are to follow the rules." Coming to Canada exposes them to a new way of education and a new norm in the classroom.

As Niloufar shares, "It was a big shock because I saw students eating and drinking in the class and putting their feet on the table in the class when the professor was there. And I couldn't really believe that these things were happening." Even the line

between a Masters and PhD program is distinct in Iran, India, or Russia, unlike in Canada where there can be overlap especially in terms of course work.

Although it is a bit of an adjustment to a different teaching style in Canada, Irena feels that it is a positive change. It seems more like mentoring than teaching.

I find here, they're more interactive and in particular, in a sense that an instructor does not put himself or herself on a stage. I feel like we're more of colleagues. I feel like it's more of a discussion even if it's a lecture. It's still a discussion here... Back home, it's full lecture format and there are much more people in classes there so you don't interact. You just come and listen. There's seminars but you might not even participate.

Both Abid and Irena express that the helpfulness of technology such as whiteboards and data projectors, and the calibre of textbooks available facilitate quality learning. Such resources are unavailable in the educational systems in their home countries. This is especially true of the students who come from developing nations.

Role of Instructor – Teacher as the Authority

There is a general consensus throughout the interviews that the role of the teacher or instructor is considerably different in the countries represented by the interviewees. In the various countries represented by these international graduate students, the emphasis is more on content whereas in Canada, these students have found that the focus is on learning. It is no longer just about reproducing knowledge but creating new knowledge. The student to teacher ratio is considerably higher in most of the countries represented and as a result, the examination and admissions process for entry into an institution of higher learning is highly competitive in their home countries.

Madushan believes that in Canada, teachers give more freedom to students– they may assign a topic but students are free to research any area of their choosing and interest

within that topic. During his studies here, he has been encouraged to “learn for your life and try to implement that knowledge somewhere.” This is unheard of in Sri Lanka where teachers typically provide the students with the notes for the course along with the syllabus. There is little expectation of understanding and deep learning but full expectations to be able to regurgitate information.

In addition to the friendliness of instructors in Canada, Abid is taken aback by their willingness to acknowledge and help a student in need. “Here, I’ve had a teacher carry a chair for me this one time when I suffered from my leg condition. He opened the door for me. Back home, one couldn’t even imagine that.” The line between student and teacher is defined clearly and does not allow for the interpersonal interactions that may be more common in Western cultures. For Abid, the teacher’s sole role back home is to pass on information to the students. There is little acknowledgement from teacher to students beyond the classroom.

Unlike the other interviews, Tarenah is the only one who regards the instructor’s role back home more favourably than in Canada. Although she liked her advisor, she shares, “I said that I liked my professor, she helped me a lot but she didn’t introduce any single reference (articles beyond the required reading) to me. Tarenah believes that,

...professors in my home country helped more. They are more responsible. I mean really more responsible. For example when you tell them “I’m in a rush”, they, actually... when I told my professor I was rushed to finish that, she really did her best to help me finish that.

It is difficult to assess the reasons behind why a professor might be able to meet a specific request – timing, personal relationship – but regardless of the reason, Tarenah perceives the role of instructors in her home country in a more positive light.

A Mentor Would be Helpful

It seems that the students who had the support when they first arrived had an easier time in settling into their new lives. There are no assigned mentors to international graduate students so those who did have this support found it through family or family friends within their own ethnic communities. A mentor was most helpful during the process of finding accommodations, getting to know the campus, or establishing bank accounts.

Finding accommodations

Many of the students interviewed described the challenges of finding adequate living accommodations. The high cost of on-campus living or finding a location with proximity to the university is a barrier for some students.

While still in Russia, Irena searched Kijiji unsuccessfully hoping to find a suitable accommodation prior to arriving in Canada. Eventually she found her current living arrangement through the University of Manitoba's Student Union (UMSU) website.

So it was getting really close to the school year. It was like August so I started thinking 'ok, so how do I do this?' ...I remembered there was this Kijiji site. And I started looking there for housing but ironically, I found the place where I still live, um through the UMSU website. They do have some housing options... It costs much less than I would pay for the residence.

Her primary concern was to ensure that she had "a place to sleep when I get to Canada."

Madushan can certainly relate to the urgency of having somewhere to rest his head at night. He was fortunate however to have two other people searching for housing for him.

So, um, before I come to Canada, before I arrived in Winnipeg, so, um, my supervisor introduced me to one of, other Indian, he was a PhD student in his lab

and I found my, I found myself and my girlfriend, she was in Montreal at that time so she was searching through the internet, I think Kijiji, and found a house near here, nearby the university but I didn't know much about the housing system here so I requested person, the PhD person to go and look for the house. So he spent some of his more valuable time, he was a PhD student so he's very, very busy at that time, so he spent more time, some time there to go to that place and inquire about everything.

Having other people involved in finding adequate accommodations would significantly decrease the stress level for new students.

Getting to know the campus

Not everyone is as fortunate as Niloufar and Tarenah. They each had a family member and close friend respectively come to Winnipeg to help them transition to life in Canada. It was helpful initially to have someone show them the campus facilities, how to get a university ID, how to establish a bank account, where to buy groceries, and advocate for any changes that needed to be made e.g., moving residences or switching courses.

Finding out about funding opportunities

As financial concerns are on the top of the list of challenges for most international graduate students, the information provided to them is critical to their livelihood while studying in Canada. They need transparent and accessible knowledge about funding, tuition (which is not free as most are accustomed to), and the processing time for scholarships.

Madushan gives this advice to new international graduate students.

... even if they are receiving some kind of financial assistantship from the university or from the government here or somewhere, they should be prepared to

have at least uh, \$1500 in their hands, at least \$1500. Because those money, that money is going to help them uh, for the first two months because um, even if they have all their paperworks in place, the scholarship is going to be delayed... because without funds, without scholarships, things are very costly here.

In Sri Lanka, education is free so having tuition fees and additional costs associated to their courses and programs is a new concept.

Tuition is also free in Russia. As a result, there was considerable frustration for Irena upon discovering the existence of funding possibilities and the missed application deadlines.

I missed um, a couple of um, studentship opportunities just because at the university where I studied before there's no studentship system. So there are just no studentships. It does not exist as a phenomenon. Uh, so I'm not used to monitor this kinds of thing. I'm not used to the fact there's some and then there's different deadlines for each of them and there's multiple sources for them. So I wish someone explicitly explained it to me.

...so I completely missed one opportunity and I almost missed another one – the one that supports my life right now... I know it was partly my fault because I know it's my responsibility to monitor for this opportunities but when you do know that some opportunities exist, you might not monitor them. So I wish there was like, a very explicit and clear explanation, 'ok hear this'. Especially for international graduate students, there's not so many uh, studentships for international students.

Irena, like many other international graduate students, would have benefited from finding out about funding opportunities well in advance of having arrived in Canada.

Since social institutions are culturally bound, the use of navigational capital was weaker in international students whose understanding was restricted to their own cultural contexts.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is developed through the “knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p.80). Although not uncommon for international students to face inequality, resistant capital truly highlights the strength that these students demonstrate in standing up for their own rights and the ability to challenge the people or situation at the root of the problem.

Sense of Belonging

Each person identifies uniquely with a sense of belonging. There can be so many markers of belonging and along with them, the aspects of international students' lives which reveal they come from somewhere else. Unfamiliar customs, assumptions about their residence in Canada, and their accent wield the same power to diminish their sense of belonging. Madushan shares, “So because of the climate I don't feel I belong here. I'm from a tropical climate, a tropical country.”

Lena's experiences have perpetuated feelings of not belonging in Canada.

Well, I definitely felt many times like I didn't belong. Um... there is something that sets me aside right away that maybe I'm not visible when people just look at me, they don't know where I'm from but when I start speaking, right away, they know – the accent. And I cannot move past it. I cannot change it. I just, I don't know how the actors do it but I cannot. That's right away sets me aside from anyone else. And yeah, when the people hear I am from somewhere else, they start explaining me simple things they would expect me not to know the basic geography of Winnipeg. For example, they would try not to say the place names because they would assume that I wouldn't know where that is or they would start explaining me for example where St. Vital Mall is and stuff like that. You would have to just arrive to not know that after saying that I have been living here for two years or two year and a half. Obviously I would know some major spots in

the city. But I felt too much concern for the foreigner – because they just know nothing at all. And that made me feel like I didn't belong. Exactly! Or people would ask me, "oh, did you do something for Canada Day?"

... Yeah, I don't know how to explain it but it makes you feel right away like you don't belong. Oh, and that favourite question, "when are you going back?" ...

That's how I feel when I am asked *when* I am going back. Not even *if*. When I'm asked *if* I'm going back, it kind of annoys after 100 questions being asked. Like the first, I mean when it's been the first, you're like 'oh yeah, that's a conversation starter' but when everyone starts asking you whether you're going back. You think that people are just too keen on your going back.

... And that to me means something that makes me feel like I'm expected to do that. And, why do they want to send me back so much? The question *when* you are going back assumes that I am - just asking *when*. And maybe I'm not going back you know, at all. And some people just assume I am. So that certainly makes you feel like you don't belong.

In Lena's mind, the one unchangeable element in her life, her accent, lies at the root of the various scenarios which have thwarted her sense of belonging. It is evident to others once she starts speaking that she comes from another country which leads to questions or assumptions that put her on the defensive. Lena does not feel she should have to defend or justify how long she intends to be in Canada or how well she knows the city but inevitably most conversations seem to have led to such situations.

Perceived Injustice – Learning to Be Your Own Advocate

Whether due to language limitations, racism, or lack of knowledge, when international students perceive injustice, they must confront the issue at hand and develop a sense of self advocacy. Without the support structure and knowledge of the cultural norms, if the students do not advocate for themselves then no one else will.

For Tarenah, the confusion about waiving a required course caused her financial and personal sacrifice as she had to take an additional course in the end, which cost money and time. "They forced me to take that course and I was real angry. And because of the financial situation I couldn't have job or travel to my home country so I miss my family a lot." Even though her initial request was granted verbally by her advisor and the Graduate Chair of her department, there was no physical evidence to substantiate her claim. Her decision to confront the Department Administration did not yield the desired results however she learned 'how the system works'.

The only way for Lena to secure employment within her field was to volunteer in a professional organization to gain Canadian work experience. This normative in Canada was a non-normative for Lena. She faced discriminatory remarks on a regular basis.

The clients, the guys, the adolescent guys there, they would be like "go home, go where you came from. Those immigrants, they come here and steal our rights." I don't know what he meant by that. Don't ask me. This is what he said. I was like, nonsense, but whatever. Or he would say something I wouldn't really hear. That happens to me in all languages. "Oh, sorry, what was that?" and he was like, "oh, yeah, you don't understand because you weren't born here, because you're not from here. Yeah. You would understand if you were from here but you're not." Basically you don't belong here.

Although the discrimination was witnessed by others, the problems seemed to be excused or diminished by the other workers.

Those are very explicit but uh, in social services, we do not consider the clients toward workers negative attitudes as something of a problem. We only consider worker towards client. If I would to the client that... I don't know, something bad or demeaning, if I would say to him, that would certainly be a big deal but you know, visible minority clients or Canadian clients would say I'm Ukrainian, I

don't belong, I'm not from here. They wouldn't even know where I'm from. You know, it doesn't even matter where I'm from. Some thought I'm German and would speak some fabricated German, some thought I was Swedish, some thought I was Russian, whatever. What mattered was to show me that I don't belong - explicitly. Some, uh, had the problem with me being white, saying things like "I'm not going to listen to white people and bannock is not for white people." Um, so yeah, I guess, but you know, I guess this is just trying to find something where you can be rude. Uh, just something, whatever, whatever you can find.

... [me: So not just specific to being international or an international student?] Well, that was the biggest part of it – the accent and being international. Other international employees were subjected to that too and visible minorities worse than anyone else. The visible minorities, the Africans were called the N word and those guys were really, really rude to them, especially those who were born or raised here. They were really rude to, to the African guys – even ruder than to me. And I attribute that to specifically their being a visible minority and me not being visible. That was definitely a factor. It was not like... The social worker would say that "oh, come on, they are just trying to find your weak spot to be better." Um, I don't believe so. I believe they were racist and they were xenophobic and it was stated so many times in different kind of explicit and less explicit ways that you shouldn't really deny it.

The message that was communicated to Lena was there was no expectation of respect and that bullying by clients has to be tolerated. There were clearly strong reactions against those in power in the workplace. The difficulty is that this ongoing situation may not have changed but Lena advocated for herself and spoke up against the racism she was facing.

Abid also faced a challenging predicament and pursued further action by going to the Human Rights and Advisory Services.

It was me against um, a department, Student Residences. I applied for a job out there and they turned it down immediately within a few hours they slid the rejection letter under my doorway and did not even give me a reason so I went there and asked them for a reason and they just said they had to narrow down the pool of applicants cuz they had a large pool of applicants. Um, it just didn't make sense from the environment there. And the comment from another fellow international student said, "They're just racist. I think they're just hiring white people." That kind of comment made me want to think that it might be a case of discrimination.

As it turns out, the Human Rights and Advisory Services determined it was a case of personality conflict and not racism. "Apparently, the RA's friend has a little conflict with me which influenced the decision that they took on my application."

Language Inequality in the System

For many of our international graduate students, one of the biggest hurdles is language. It is intimidating at times for students whose first language is English to facilitate a discussion or give a presentation but how much more so in a completely different language? This is what these students face throughout their education here.

Tarenah's words are descriptive.

I felt really challenged... And then we were given this presentation and I was so horrible at giving presentations, like I would rather sit with a lion in a cage than doing a presentation. And now, it's in English which isn't my first language. ... So I don't remember this ten minutes I was talking because I was so, like fear was so strong, I don't remember those ten minutes. I just felt like I could not interact. I just felt I could not fully express myself. Uh, so yeah, this was the first experience probably. But after that, it got so much better so probably just the experience of just going through it and still giving the presentation despite all your fears.

The victory is in overcoming. “But this experience was like important just going through this fear. Um, the fact of going through it and not just giving this up, I guess was the key moment.”

Param feels very strongly that the rental process in Winnipeg is peculiar and unreasonable.

I feel the structure the way upon, the way you have to get an apartment is stupid. It's downright stupid because asking for a rental history from someone who has just arrived in Canada is stupid to do. You know I'm not a thief. My country gave me passport. Your country gave me a visa because my character and my background is all good, right? That's how I've been able to come here.

Moreover if you feel that I will not pay rent and I will run away, ask for more deposit. I'll pay two months of rent in advance. I'll pay four months of rent in advance but please give me a place to stay. Getting an accommodation is overly difficulty only in the south area. I don't know if the university can do much about it but if they can either arrange accommodations such as ... maybe arrange some sort of accommodation so we can just have a place like an apartment and we can cook our own food, make our own meals and stay that way. That is the big thing. Accommodation is a big thing. I think the university can solve and must solve.

There are other avenues that Param is considering in order to battle a rental system that in his opinion has been set up unfairly for international students.

... I've come through a proper channel. Uh, so I think I should be treated that way. I think accommodation-wise, the university can solve a problem. I thought sometime back that I should write to the Premier, like a, to whatever minister or whatever elected representative you have in Winnipeg... I thought I should write to him about this thing because this is really like uh, I can pay three months rent at once and get a place to live.

The international graduate students who were best able to overcome some of the existing inequalities have done so with the help of other people and resources. The students cannot seek out the supports that are available unless they become aware of their existence. In addition, students may only look for supports when they are in need or a situation arises which cannot be resolved without outside intervention. As is the case with Param, his personal political inclinations helped him to consider writing to an elected representative about the rental policies that are biased against newcomers who have no way to present previous rental histories. The expectations of legitimacies can level the field for securing accommodations. Without knowledge of the political system and his tenure as the president of a student-run cultural association, he may not have considered this alternative.

The contrast between being an international student in a foreign land and being a student in one's home country can be quite jarring. The new experiences as an international student can cause some students to be responsive in their behaviours and attitudes – challenging both perceived and real inequality by using resistant capital effectively.

Conclusion

Heading into the study, I had anticipated that the strongest capital for international graduate students would be aspirational capital but that was not the case. This thinking was precipitated by my understanding of the challenges that needed to be overcome in the process of applying and being admitted into a graduate program abroad. With that thinking, I had surmised that this capital would be the most useful to them during their academic learning. Although a strong contender, it was not the strongest. Not

surprisingly, linguistic capital was utilized consistently among the participants. In order to complete their studies, these participants have had to master a certain level of linguistic competency. As such, all the participants have had to use their linguistic capital to accomplish speaking, writing, and functioning in English during the course of their graduate studies. Familial capital was used from two different perspectives – those who garnered support to encourage them through difficult times and those whose families were not supportive of their academic pursuits in which case, the students felt a need to prove themselves and accomplish these educational goals. Social capital was clearly the frontrunner in terms of its strength because despite the challenges that the students faced, they were able to use their personal networks of people and resources to meet their needs effectively. It is navigational capital that came out as the weakest in the sense that the students who had a mentor of some sort were the ones who seemed to be able to maneuver through the educational landscape more effectively. The students without that help faced more challenges in this regard. Finally, resistant capital truly captured the essence of the strength, resilience, and perseverance of these international graduate students. Rather than succumb to the inequalities that they faced during the course of their studies, these students demonstrated strength in challenging these inequalities. These different types of capital highlight clearly the facets of the lives of international graduate students that have an impact on their academic learning.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the significant themes that emerged from interviews with seven participants about their experiences of academic learning as international graduate students. In addition, the findings presented in Chapter Four will be discussed relative to the literature review outlined in Chapter Two and in correspondence to the research questions presented at the outset of the study. Finally the implications of this study along with further research suggestions will be discussed.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore international graduate students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences at the University of Manitoba with special attention to personal and contextual factors. Additionally, the kind of impact that these students' experiences can have on academic support services was also examined.

It is not surprising that international graduate students encounter a host of challenges in pursuing their studies in a foreign country and for the majority, not in their first language. The personal factors which include social, psychological, familial, and linguistic concerns are observed throughout the interviews. The lack of social support compared to what they had in their home countries can be quite disconcerting especially during the initial adaptation process and during times of distress. There are phases of loneliness, homesickness, depression, and stress that many of these students have experienced in coming to a new country. The family ties and obligations also rest heavily on many students' hearts as they try and balance their studies and their relationships back

home. Linguistic challenges have been the source of many of the issues that the international graduate students encounter ranging from discrimination to developing a sense of identity.

In terms of contextual factors, the financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical considerations are the areas that have been discussed throughout the interviews. These students face financial strains due to limited funding and employment opportunities resulting from their international student visa status. There is a definitive switch in cultural and societal norms which can cause misunderstandings. As well, the climate differential is considerable for the students who come from tropical climates and the acclimating process can be difficult. While there are a number of supports and resources available to international graduate students, they are underutilized because international graduate students are not made aware of them.

Overall, these students' experiences can be helpful in determining how and where to focus attention when it comes to meeting the needs of international graduate students at the University of Manitoba. Procedures provided to these supported students to permit them a quality experience by providing scaffolding supports would seem effective.

1st Question: What are the personal factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?

Personal factors (social, psychological, familial, and linguistic) which are present in the lives of the international graduate students have contributed to their adjustment to life in Canada and their academic learning (Zheng and Berry, 1991; Mori, 2000; Harman, 2003; Yeh et al., 2008).

Social Factors

A common sentiment expressed by all but one of the students was that there was little social interaction with Canadians. This lack of relationships with Canadians is something that seems to be a bit of a mystery to them. The international students feel they are open to this type of friendship but feel that the interest is not reciprocated. Their reasons vary from lack of time, to lack of opportunities to meet Canadian students, to lack of interest on the part of Canadian students. Madushan for example, spends most of his time conducting research in his lab and the other students in his lab are other international students. In his mind, that is the main reason why he does not have Canadian friends. He would like to have a friend who could show him the province and through whom he could acquaint himself with Canadian culture but has resigned himself to friendships within his own cultural community. Param also feels lonely even though he was the only one of those interviewed who came to Canada with a partner. He is clear about his feelings. "I don't have local friends here. I have friends who are like me (from the same country), who know about as much about the city as I do. So that's why you know, I do feel lonely at times." All the while, he expresses that he sees Canadians as extremely friendly people. The corollary of not having social interactions with Canadians is that they rely on the network of relationships with students from their countries of origin. It is not uncommon to hear about students developing their friend group within their own ethnic communities however the reasons may be twofold – the Canadian students are not reaching out to them or the international graduate students feel more comfortable connecting with other students who may speak the same first language or have similar cultural upbringing. As Rosenthal et al., (2006) assert students perceive

their academic progress more positively when they have a strong connection to those who share the same cultural background and citizens of the country in which they are now studying. The social supports are particularly important to students who are new to the country. The social network that international graduate students develop can enhance their academic environment.

For many of these students, the personal and academic support provided by their fellow graduate students from their own countries have attributed to their successful transitions (Harman, 2003). Of all interviewees, this was most true for Madushan. His supervisor had connected him with an Indian student in his lab prior to his arrival in Canada. So when Madushan found possible housing through Kijiji, he asked this fellow student to go by and check out the condition of the home and inquire about the rental details. This fellow student was also the one sent to meet Madushan and his girlfriend at the airport with some winter clothes for them. The transition to such an extreme climate would have been more unbearable without the assistance of this new friend. And another Sri Lankan student guided Madushan through the university registration and orientation process. She was returning the favour for the help she had received from Madushan in getting her paperwork and visa application processed while she was still back home – another connection made through their mutual supervisor.

The social capital utilized by some of the international graduate students allows the networks of people and community resources to facilitate the transition to a new culture and their new lives in Canada. In turn, this helps them in their academic lives. It seems that the students who lacked social networks were the ones who had more challenges that remained unresolved. A mentoring program could bridge the gap for

international graduate students when they first arrive providing them with the basic securities such as finding accommodations, setting up a bank account, or buying food so they could focus on studies. While an informal mentoring spread out sporadically in random departments may be in place, an organized and assigned process could facilitate a smoother transition for our students.

Psychological Factors

A number of the students shared their battles with loneliness, homesickness, depression, and stress – the psychological factors. According to Kim (1994), stress can be a “necessary impetus for new learning” (p. 393). However the level of stress can far surpass what is necessary for new learning. At times, it can exacerbate underlying mental health conditions which can even result in depression. The concept of culture shock was initially categorized under ‘cultural’ considerations within the contextual factors in Chapter Two however after interviewing the students it became clear that it would be better suited under the ‘psychological’ considerations within the personal factors section. For Irena, the initial adjustment period lasted the first few days after arriving in Canada. What she experienced was the culture shock that is consistent with Furnham and Bochner’s (1982) assertion that identifies the experience of moving to a different culture as “bewildering, confusing, depressing, anxiety-provoking, humiliating, embarrassing and generally stressful in nature” (p. 171). Since culture shock can last anywhere from weeks to months or even longer (Kelley and Moogan, 2012), the students who are able to adapt quickly to their new environment are more likely to be successful in their academic life – as was the case for Irena. Tarenah however did not fare as well. She battled depression during her time in Canada and the counselling that she received did not

assuage her symptoms. Her financial worries and the conflict with her department over course work were a constant source of stress which only further contributed to her depressive state. Similarly, Abid sought counselling for his depression but found that the waiting period was too long and the sessions were ineffective in helping him manage the symptoms. Although it is not uncommon when seeking medical attention, to be waitlisted according to severity or urgency of presenting symptoms, it is unfortunate that there is not a mechanism in place to give international graduate students extra considerations since they may lack other support systems such as family. It might also be worth the time to equip international graduate students with an awareness of the acculturation process and the stress indicators of “lower mental health (anxiety and depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion” (Zheng and Berry, 1991, p. 453). The psychological well-being of international graduate students would likely have an impact on their academic learning.

Many of the international students faced feelings of isolation from local classmates and homesickness (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Lewthwaite, 1997; Robertson et al., 2000; Rajapaksa and Dundes (2003); Li et al., 2010). Some of the students' financial restrictions limited their ability to socialize resulting in isolation and unable to make the friendships that they might otherwise have been able to have back home. As Param recounted, in the beginning, even buying a coffee at Tim Horton's caused hesitation and concern for his budget. Homesickness loomed and although many of the students would have liked to have visited family more often, the exorbitant price of tickets to fly overseas made regular trips cost-prohibitive. Skype and technology helped

some of the students connect to news and events but cannot replace the taste of mom's cooking, warm weather, and physical contact with loved ones – what the students missed most about home. As found in the literature, homesickness is an element of cultural adjustment but it is not lessened in any way by language aptitude and overcoming any social barriers (Robertson et al., 2000).

Oberg defines culture shock as the loss of familiar signs and symbols of social interaction (Oberg, 1960). For Lena, the lack of understanding of the societal norms caused undue stress during her time in Canada. What began as culture shock turned to depression because of what she felt was a lack of acceptance and constant feelings of being on the outside. For many of the students like Lena, new societal rules and expectations were particularly difficult to understand. It seemed to them that there was an unwritten codebook which delineated the rules for acceptable and unacceptable social cues or behaviours. The lessons learned came from personal experiences and a steep learning curve during her time in Canada.

I see these psychological factors embedded within two different parts of Yosso's framework. I see it belonging to the social capital of the model because the assistance needed to overcome depression, loneliness, and homesickness come from the resources and social outlets that are available to these students. Simultaneously, I see it belong to the aspirational capital of the model because the students who are successful in overcoming or at least managing the symptoms enough are able to continue with their studies and pursue their dreams of attaining a Canadian education.

Familial Factors

Students found it convenient to have modern technology such as skype and FB to aid in their efforts to stay connected with family across the miles. To actually visit regularly was cost-prohibitive but technology allowed them to overcome the distance. In some cases, the pressures to return home were not immediate nor explicitly stated as is the case with Lena whose parents are aging but are not yet in need of constant or physical care. Yet, as an only child, she feels the eventuality of having to return home to care for them. Madushan, on the other hand, feels an urgency to complete his studies so that he can return home to his fiancée. As described by Yeh et al., (2008), generational homes are not uncommon to some of the international students like Madushan. His primary concern is to get married so that he can bring his bride into his family home to be taken care of and in turn, to help take care of his family. This generational interconnectedness defines family life for some international students. The concern for his future bride's detachment from his own family is disconcerting and weighs heavily on his mind. His answer for connection comes through marriage.

It appears that the students find comfort and strength in their interactions with family. Many describe their relationships with family as 'close'. This may be referring to an emotional closeness however it could also be closeness due to the societal structure in the students' home countries where the sense of the family unit is interpreted through a collectivistic lens. A collectivistic society values the collective and the importance of the group over the individual (Hofstede, 1986). The ability to remain close is important to these students and gives them the opportunity to share their thoughts on a deeper level with family which they may not feel comfortable doing in an English-speaking

environment or with newly formed relationships. For Lena, she was able to call Ukraine regularly and get support. This offered her the chance to talk on an intimate and more authentic level, and gave her the outlet to share her frustrations and experiences.

Family may also be the motivation to strive to succeed, as is the case with Madushan. He shares how during the most challenging moments, he moves forward knowing how proud his mother will be of his accomplishments and also the memory of the sacrifices of his own parents' separation for the sake of a better future for him and his brother.

These are some examples of how "cultural knowledge nurtured among the family that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) that so many of the international graduate students bring to our institution. This sense of familial capital guides and motivates them to persevere during some of the difficult moments they encounter while studying in Canada.

Linguistic Factors

Language is crucial to the overall well-being of international graduate students; it is a tool to succeed in their cultural adjustment, socialization, and the adaptation to a different educational system (Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007). Those who struggle with language have greater challenges in adjusting to a new culture and environment (Hayes and Lin, 1994; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007; Wang et al., 2008) and thereby affecting their academic learning environment.

As evidenced by Lin and Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Dao et al., 2007, linguistic challenges are faced not just orally but in writing as well. Several of the students pointed to their perception of institutional deficiency in training international graduate students in

writing skills for academic writing and proper referencing in various styles. For many of these students, referencing was unfamiliar to them so it was often their first written assignments that brought this to their attention. In India for example, most disciplines focus on the content of the written work rather than the grammar and syntax. As a result, students do not feel equipped to write papers when they come to Canada for graduate studies especially if they come from science or engineering backgrounds. Although Param had done reasonably well on several assignments in his first course, they had not required referencing. The final paper however was full of red marks because he had not learned to use correct referencing. It was disheartening for him and the word 'plagiarism' simply scared him.

Essential to academic learning is the ability to communicate effectively. The international graduate students remarked that they were surprised with the difficulties some Canadians seemed to have with their accents. A number of the students commented that in their home countries, their English proficiency seemed more than adequate but in Canada, their accents seem to be problematic for their comprehensibility. Tarenah witnessed a professor laughing at a fellow international student because of incorrect phraseology in his speech and this affected her deeply. Such an experience by an authority and powerbroker could effectively inhibit her ability and desire to contribute to future class discussions thereby hindering her full potential for academic learning. All international graduate students must demonstrate English competency through exams like Toefl or CANtest. Additional supports for improving oral and written skills once they arrive in Canada could however go a long way in building confidence and ability thus in

turn, enhancing the students' academic learning. Differentiating between academic register English and conversational English is needed.

The intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in a new language has provided these international graduate students with the linguistic capital to be able to function more effectively while studying in Canada. Through resistant capital, the students have developed knowledge and skills to overcome some of these challenges by persevering and fighting through the situations that were clearly disadvantageous to them in their academic learning.

2nd Question: What are the contextual factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?

The contextual factors (financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical) also exist and influence international graduate students' academic learning (Lin and Yi, 1997; Beehr et al., 2002; Trice and Yoo, 2007; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008; Maundeni, 2010).

Financial Factors

The financial difficulties experienced by international students are a common source of their insecurity and distress (Khoo et al., 1994; Lin and Yi, 1997; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007; Forbes Mewett et al., 2009). There are restrictions to employment, limited funding opportunities, and higher tuition fees in place for international graduate students. As a result, most of the students have financial concerns that preoccupy their minds on a regular basis. Returning home for visits is very costly so many of the students go for extended periods of time without seeing their families. This is especially difficult because many of these students feel a close bond to their families.

Since international students are only allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours off-campus, many rely on any additional scholarships and funding to assist them with their daily living expenses. Their basic needs are covered but they have little leftover. Those who are fortunate enough to secure a job feel less constrained by their finances but still express a need to monitor their budget closely. The type of employment can also affect their studies. Param for example, had initially found employment at Staples as a sales associate but he was quickly exhausted by the physicality of standing for 8 hours at a time, trying to adjust to a different environment, and learning new terms and vernacular required for the job. When he would get home after working, he found that he was too tired to study. His next place of employment was related to his research and even allowed time for him to work on his thesis during slow times. In Param's mind, there is a direct link between a student's financial situation and academic learning. "I struggled financially and because of this, I struggled academically as well..." Tarenah, on the other hand, struggled to find employment during her studies. This became a source of great stress and perpetuated her depressive episodes. In turn, the concern for her financial state affected her studies. Her "stress became less" after winning a nominal monetary award but she "was still in stress." Lena was able to secure employment on campus and is currently working three different positions in order to sustain a comfortable but moderate lifestyle. She is not extravagant in her tastes or hobbies and she does not drive so this allows her to be frugal with her funds and stretch her dollar farther. Although many students would feel challenged to commit so many hours to a job and still maintain their studies, Lena feels differently. "So that all provided me with a decent standard and I did not consider myself struggling financially at all." She shared

that even though course readings were time-consuming, they were manageable despite the fact that she held down three jobs. Abid also works more than one job. He believes however that his two jobs limit his time to study but he perseveres because he has no choice. Similar to Param, Abid delineates that “doing research work related to your studies is quite different than a job in the Information Systems Technology department carting AV equipment from class to class.”

There are few funding opportunities for international graduate students and perhaps this is an area to investigate for the future. If the students are not informed appropriately about the funding opportunities then they cannot begin to access what little funding exists. The timing of receiving the funds can be very challenging for these students who arrive unaware that the money is only going to be processed at the start of a term or a month after registering for a program. Madushan's scholarship was not reimbursed “at the right time”, so he struggled for a month without any financial security. This would be even more difficult if the student begins studies in January and must find a way to pay for costs until the start of the academic year. Irena bitterly recalls her experience. “...so I completely missed one opportunity and I almost missed another one – the one that supports my life right now.” She does assume ownership of the missed deadline. “I know it was partly my fault because I know it's my responsibility to monitor for this opportunities but when you do not know that some opportunities exist, you might not monitor them.”

Because education was free in their home countries, some students were unaccustomed to paying for tuition and the associated fees that come with a Canadian education. Financial strains and these other potential stressors can affect their ability to

focus on their studies and their overall success in their academic pursuits (Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007). In Madushan's opinion, international students – particularly those from his home country – should not attempt to come to Canada for graduate school without some sort of scholarship and/or funding from their supervisor already in place. His recommendation to anyone coming to study in Canada is to ensure that they have a \$1500 reserve to draw from because of possible delays in funding and the initial start-up costs which cannot be put off.

Again, financial stress impacts students. Some of the international graduate students arrive in Canada with financial concerns and difficulties. Although this may be somewhat alleviated by finding employment or securing some sort of funding, it rarely eliminates the problem entirely. They use the aspirational capital that they possess to persevere despite the financial barriers that they face.

Cultural Factors

One of the more obvious contextual factors for international students is cultural consideration. Adaptation to a new culture with different customs, food, and colder climate, can cause adjustment issues and culture shock (Dao et al., 2007; Godwin, 2009). The cold climate of Manitoba is especially difficult for the students who come from warmer climates. Not only do they have to contend with the extreme temperatures, but they have to spend money on appropriate winter clothing. The cold weather becomes a deterrent to leaving their homes so consequently some international graduate students are relegated to a limited social life during the winter months. Madushan's first step off the airplane revealed a cold he had never known. It was -30C and his first thoughts were,

“oh, I shouldn’t have come here” because the cold was beyond anything he could have ever imagined.

The challenges of adapting to a new environment have been shown to impact academic success and should not be underestimated (Pedersen, 1991; Beehr et al., 2002; Cemalcilar and Falbo, 2008; Maundeni, 2010). Cultural misunderstandings are a part of the adaptation process. Cross-cultural miscommunication for example, can be very disconcerting for international graduate students who may not have had any social challenges back home but find it difficult to develop meaningful friendships in Canada. In Iran, *ta’arof* is the understood socio-cultural behaviour in which the first response to an invitation will be rejected but the subsequent invitation will be accepted. This led to many confusing and unfortunately lonely times for Tarenah as she adapted to her new life in Canada and awaited second or third invitations that never materialized. Socialization and friendship are aspects of a healthy environment which can promote academic success for our international graduate students. Anywhere up to ninety-three percent of the social meaning of a message is carried through nonverbal channels (Singelis, 1994). This highlights the importance of nonverbal communication as it seems to be a significant component of effective intercultural communication. Cultural differences can often exacerbate the miscommunication that many of our international students encounter. While a social network for international students is powerful (Andrade, 2006; Rosenthal et al., 2006), it can be accomplished in many different ways, in spite of the fact that international graduate students are often constrained by finances, time, and even access, as many do not own vehicles.

These cultural considerations highlight the role of aspirational capital of these students who endure the harsh weather in order to get the Canadian education to which they aspire. These students also draw upon their social capital in order to ascertain which networks of people and community resources are most relevant to them.

Structural Factors

Structural considerations include the configuration of resources and supports that are available to the international graduate students as well as the creation of a safe environment. These resources and supports are intended to help address the various linguistic, social, academic, and emotional needs of our student population. Students cannot achieve success in their academic learning without giving consideration to these areas of their lives. After a review of the literature, I had to bracket my assumption that international graduate students might not access certain resources such as counselling services due to a lack of awareness and perhaps the stigma associated to mental health challenges in their home countries. While many of the participants of this study indicated they had struggled with depression during their time in Canada, only two sought professional counselling. This could be attributed to a number of different explanations, but I did not pursue those reasons during the course of the interviews. Abid and Tarenah are the two who sought professional help, but both felt that their counselling did not ameliorate their conditions. Furthermore, they questioned the expertise of the counsellors specifically in the areas of intercultural sensitivity and competence. Abid in particular was dissatisfied with the four month wait period to get his initial assessment appointment. This may not be that long compared to the lengthy wait times to see medical specialists, however, it is still discouraging for the international graduate students. The mechanism

to get initial help or assessment could be re-examined to better meet the needs of these student guests of the university. As well, there could perhaps be a designated counsellor with a targeted focus on equipping international students to deal with the specific challenges they face while studying abroad. As well, perhaps the international graduate students could be given additional supports at no cost to close the gap in terms of their written and spoken work. Many of the services are free initially, but only up to a certain number of appointments. Although there are different units that provide supports to students, everything from writing to work permit/visa application to mental health promotion, the international graduate students feel that more intentionality in introducing these units is necessary for the students to become aware of their existence and utilize their services appropriately.

The one consistent comment from the international graduate students that resurfaced had to do with a mentor to guide them through the orientation to a new country and a new academic institution. Understandably, the students who had guidance in finding housing or setting up a bank account seemed to adjust more quickly than those who had to learn trial by error. Those with an identified mentor, someone who had gone before them, seemed to be an invaluable asset in navigating the new terrain. Tarenah had to move five times in the last year alone. This can be a real hardship financially and physically. She would have benefitted from a mentor who could have provided feedback on living accommodations, safer and more accessible areas of the city to live, and the university landscape.

As mentioned earlier, the sense of safety can be multi-layered and encompass a student's physical, emotional, and/or mental condition. It is important to establish the

backdrop for students to deal with conflict, share ideas, raise issues, and differences of opinion in a safe academic setting. "Support, trust, respect, individual dignity, respectful confrontation, an absence of judgment, power with each other rather than over each other, and minimization of the effect of hierarchy were all expressed as essential to creating a culture of safety" (Chavez, 2007, p. 279). This integral aspect of safety was incorporated into the structural component of contextual factors because it lays the foundation and culture of the academic environment in which the international graduate students find themselves. When students perceive or witness incidents where they or their fellow international students might be ostracized or made fun of because of an accent or grammatical gaffes then they are less likely to feel safe and will feel more inhibited to share their ideas and learn from each other. International graduate students would benefit from a respectful and safe academic learning environment.

International graduate students who are able to use their navigational capital and learn the skills to maneuver through social institutions are better able to adjust to their new academic environment which then enables success in learning. In addition, they have developed resistant capital in the process of acquiring knowledge and accessing resources that are primarily unknown to them as newcomers. Without the awareness, students are not going to know to seek out the structural mechanisms that are set up to support them.

Pedagogical Factors

Pedagogical differences were also noted throughout the interviews but not at the curricular level as was anticipated after reviewing the literature. Hofstede's (1986) concept of power distance was revealed by several students who articulated the

differences between the role of the instructor in Canada and in their home countries. The low power distance dimension of Canada brought out the equality of the teacher-student relationship as opposed to the hierarchy of the relationship that exists in many of their high power distance countries of origin. The simple act of an instructor opening the door for a student or acknowledging the student outside of a class seemed almost uncomfortable to some but the international graduate students were quickly able to embrace the paradigm shift. They feel it is easier to approach instructors in Canada. They enjoy the friendliness that many of them have experienced here during their studies. It is unclear whether their perception is relative to what they have previously experienced or if it is in fact the way it is. Taraneh was the only one who viewed the instructor's role back home more positively than in Canada. She felt that professors in Canada were not as quick to respond to timeline requests ("I'm in a rush") and did not provide additional readings beyond what was required in the course. This may have been an isolated incident among the students who were interviewed for this study however it is difficult to determine how prevalent this thinking might be in a larger population of students.

Many of the international graduate students in this study come from educational systems where the programs have specific course requirements, few electives if any, and a cohort with whom you go through the entire program. In Canada, the freedom that they are given to choose their research topic and select courses of interest is quite foreign to them. For Irena, the vast number of courses that were available made the selection process more challenging. She found courses that interested her across the disciplines and even though she would have liked to have taken certain courses, she found it limiting because of prerequisite demands. This disappointment was new to her since she never

had those choices before – now that she had the freedom to choose, she felt disappointed when she could not get into those courses.

It is conceivable that many international graduate students' writing will be influenced by different world views and value systems (Fox, 1994; Trice and Yoo, 2007). Moreover, Wang et al. (2008) assert that the challenges of writing in a second language only further contribute to the difficulties of written assignments. Adding to this challenge is the lack of understanding when it comes to citing references properly. For some, this is more than just references – it is about making the material one's own and still being able to cite it appropriately. This issue was brought up repeatedly throughout the interviews and clearly delineates the students' concerns about the lack of adequate instruction in this area of writing and citing. There are workshops offered through the Academic Learning Centre on this topic however they are not mandatory. A few of the students expressed a need to have writing instruction including referencing embedded into the course work so that it lays the proper foundation for all academic writing.

Learning to navigate different educational landscapes has equipped these international graduate students with the ability to overcome some of the challenges they have faced in the classroom and with their studies in general. Although the students notice differences in the educational systems, for the most part, they have been able to adapt and use this knowledge to their advantage.

3rd Question: How can international graduate students' experiences and perceptions at the University of Manitoba have an impact on services intended to provide academic support?

As the number of international graduate students continues to climb, it is important to assess whether the services provided institutionally truly reflect the needs of these students. If we want to have adequate support for our students, we must discover what our students' experiences and perceptions are in order to identify the areas that require improvement or changes. The experiences of the participants spoke to an underlying issue of unmet expectations that remains unresolved for many of these international graduate students. One voice can easily represent the voice of many. Each of the students who shared their experiences and perceptions of academic learning at the University of Manitoba are pieces to a puzzle. That puzzle is the world at-large. As an institution of higher learning, our overarching goal is to educate our students to become contributing citizens of this world. The university's mission statement speaks to this and reads, "To create, preserve and communicate knowledge, and thereby, contribute to the cultural, social and economic well-being of the people of Manitoba, Canada and the world." We must be able to use the voices of these graduate students to evaluate and make the appropriate changes that will better support international graduate students in their academic learning.

Institutional Level

International graduate students' tuition fees contribute to the economic health of the university. They pay double the tuition fees of a Canadian student. What do they get in return? The resources and supports that exist currently have restrictions that limit the

students' access. Could there be a program designed for international graduate students to be able to get consistent writing assistance with regular timeslots allotted for international students? Could there be a job bank on campus that is earmarked for international students? Even if there are champions at the faculty level, true institutional change can only occur at the Administrative decision-making level. Resources and supports need to stay current with the needs and the trends. For example, mental health issues are a prevalent concern among universities and in that regard, we have added a mental health consultant and health and wellness educator to the roster of counselling services in the last year. They could easily serve those who are not in crisis thereby cutting down the wait times to see other professional counsellors. Specific cross-cultural training could be helpful in identifying areas of concern and sensitizing staff when dealing with international graduate students.

Faculty Level

At the Faculty level, there does not seem to be an orientation for international students to promote some of the existing services and inform them of cultural adjustments and academic differences in Canada. Although the International Centre for Students does provide some services, participation is voluntary. Shortly after arrival, most students are quickly immersed into their course work and research within their respective faculties. The students feel that issues of plagiarism and improper referencing could be alleviated by instruction within their courses. Could one class out of an entire course be devoted to literature reviews and proper referencing for academic papers? Often students are unaware of the issues until it is addressed at which point, it is likely

from feedback on an already submitted assignment. This is neither pre-emptive nor helpful.

Individual or Personal Level

At the individual or personal level, students will choose their own friend group and develop their own sense of community within the institution. What we can offer are options for them to develop in the areas that might be helpful as they pursue their studies at the university. According to Winthrop & Kirk (2008), both academic and social learning were impactful to students' overall well-being. Several of the students had indicated that they go to the gym or participated in clubs (tennis, bike, or photography) and these social outlets can be a great avenue for balancing their lives. It might be worth investigating and developing programming that would be of specific interest to our international graduate students. There are currently many cultural clubs and hobby clubs. What might be helpful are organized tours and outings for students to have an opportunity to explore this city and province. Under whose portfolio should this fall? That is questionable. As well, this notion of a buddy system seems like it would be effective however I do see it is a resource-consuming endeavour.

I do not want to be resigned to the fact that international graduate students' experiences will not have any profound impact on services that are designed to provide academic support. But that is a possibility. I would like to believe that perhaps shedding light on some of the findings could lead to an open door if presented to the right people at the right time.

Conclusion

After the literature review, there was a need for me to bracket my assumptions of what the students would have experienced during their studies in Canada. I found it particularly difficult when students shared about their lack of social interaction with Canadian students because I felt it was a poor reflection on me. How often had I interacted with international students in my graduate courses? Did I miss the subtle cues of social interaction and nonverbal communication that had occurred unnoticed right before my eyes? As I reflect on this, it is convicting to think that I pride myself on advocating for international graduate students yet miss the very message that they have been communicating to others during the course of their studies. This only points to a need for other Canadians to acknowledge the apathy that can consume our lives and cause indifference toward others who come from different places. If the resources and supports that are provided could encompass additional considerations for international graduate students, it would go a long way in helping them establish a healthy, academic learning environment. It is important to address the disparity between the increasing international recruitment efforts of our university versus the stagnant development of the resources for those international students. Our general programming and resources may be increasing but for this growing population of the student body, there is room to expand the options specifically available to them.

One finding that was somewhat curious was the area of discrimination. Interestingly, with the exception of Lena, most of the students did not believe they had encountered any discrimination. Even Abid's initial claims of discriminatory practices in his residence were eventually resolved as personality conflict. I cannot confirm either

way but I do wonder if it is easier for students who face discrimination to relegate it to other reasons as a way of dealing with it. In a study conducted in the United States, Trice and Yoo (2007) found that “contact with American students, freedom from discrimination, and favorable attitudes of American people toward their home country were statistically significant predictors of students’ academic satisfaction.” In a similar study conducted in Australia by Wang et al (2008), two thirds of the participants experienced social isolation, racial prejudice, and negative stereotypes of international students, all of which became barriers to their learning. Some students may never have dealt with discrimination in their home countries because they do not have any distinguishing attributes such as an accent or different skin colour. As a result, when faced with it in Canada, they may be unfamiliar with the actions and the words that are involved. It could instead be easily dismissed as personal characteristics or cultural differences. The pressures of dealing with discrimination can be disheartening but may also result in health-related problems such as depression or anxiety (Khoo et al., 1994; Barletta and Kobayashi, 2007) which directly affect the students’ ability to focus on their studies.

The personal factors which include social, psychological, familial, and linguistic concerns influence academic learning for international graduate students. Social outlets both organized and personal provide a venue to develop friendships thus contributing to a healthy learning environment. Psychological challenges seem to be a barrier to learning as it impedes the functioning and motivation of the students. Familial contact seems to be an important facet in the lives of the international graduate students and their continued presence adds stability and comfort thus helping them focus on studies.

Linguistic concerns have presented a challenge for international students and created a barrier that has not been helpful in their learning.

In terms of contextual factors, the financial, cultural, structural, and pedagogical considerations are also areas that affect international graduate students' learning. The financial burdens carry a heavy weight on their minds and consume many hours of their time when it comes to employment. This proves to be a barrier for them since for the most part, it takes away from their time to study. The cultural challenges that the students face can be a barrier also, especially when it causes a sense of isolation as is the case with the lack of social interaction or cultural misunderstandings. This can be a catalyst for other issues in the future if not addressed properly. The structural considerations can definitely facilitate the academic learning environment in which international students can thrive. The duality of that is the fact that they may not be able to access the structural mechanisms properly or feel safety within, in which case this would be a barrier to their learning environment. Lastly, the pedagogical differences that most of the international graduate students face in coming to Canada, such as the role of the teacher, are viewed positively and seem to facilitate their learning.

Implications

Understood through this community cultural wealth model, the international graduate students can contribute their perspective and unique capitals to promote a more inclusive atmosphere of learning. The framework embodies the understanding that the *whole* person is important – their aspirations, linguistic competence, family unit, social connections, ability to navigate a new educational and cultural landscape, and the fortitude to advocate for oneself. To truly build a successful learning environment and

help international graduate students succeed academically, there must be adequate supports and resources available for the whole person. Many of the resources available have a timeline (maximum of 'x' appointments) or a cost associated to them. This seems to prevent students from fully benefitting from such support. Equitable financial support specific to international graduate students can be provided through a variety of means: 1) earmarking a specific number of jobs on campus 2) providing sessions to learn about financial assistance and internal funding opportunities 3) mandatory orientation to the services available on campus 4) assigning mentors to direct the students on where and how to find accommodations, register for courses, and establish bank accounts 5) mandatory sessions on cultural adaptation and the Canadian classroom.

The first suggestion can be accomplished simply by setting aside a portion of jobs for international students. Employment opportunities are typically at the discretion of the employer so to set aside 15-20% of on campus jobs or workable hours for international graduate students seems reasonable given that it is comparable to the percentage of students they represent. The second suggestion can be addressed by facilitating well-advertised workshops at the beginning of each term specifically to review funding opportunities for international graduate students. There are a number of internal funding and financial assistance opportunities available however the mechanism to apply for such funding is not transparent. Providing information on a website does not ensure that international graduate students will know of its existence or how to research the information. Since many of the participants came from countries where the education is free, to actively search for funding is quite foreign to them. The third suggestion would need to occur at the faculty or preferably the institutional level. Although orientations do

exist at the university, it is not mandatory. If students do not attend, they may remain unaware of particular resources that might be helpful to them during the course of their studies. Similar to paying all library fines in order to graduate, perhaps an orientation before the start of classes could be a prerequisite to starting their programs. There could also be follow-up workshops on more specific topic areas (i.e., visa, writing, academic integrity) offered at various times throughout the year as not all students begin their studies in September. The fourth suggestion to have assigned mentors can be done within the individual departments. Perhaps other international graduate students who have previously gone through similar experiences can be asked to mentor a new student through the initial stages of getting settled into life and school in Canada. The fifth suggestion is one that would align with the needs of international graduate students who have just arrived in Canada. The understanding of a new cultural context would be most helpful but by making it mandatory, it would equip every student with the tools to better adapt to their new lives. Also if the sessions could be considered as professional development on the co-curricular records then that would be an additional benefit.

Higher education has become engulfed in international recruitment efforts but has not allocated resources commensurate to the growing population. It is worthwhile in terms of cost benefit to have international graduate students choose to study at the University of Manitoba. However, these students add much more than economic value, they add a depth and diversity which would be lost without their presence. If the existing structural inequality of international graduate student recruitment efforts is not properly addressed, the students will not have the mechanisms in place to support them during

their studies. I wonder then how we can in good conscience invite international students to our institution given the resource implications.

These findings add to the current literature. Additionally, these findings may be considered by the University of Manitoba for future initiatives for international students on student success, retention, and the internationalization strategy.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study examined the experiences of a number of international graduate students from different cultural backgrounds. Many of the variables through a lens of community cultural wealth have been revealed to have impacted their academic experience. In future, it may be beneficial to look at a larger population or a select group from one country of origin or students who have been in Canada for less than a certain number of years. Results from more specifically targeted participants might give deeper insight into areas that are underutilized at our institution. Such results could indicate which resources need to be redirected to more adequately meet the needs of our international graduate student population. Ultimately this framework of community cultural wealth can be utilized in conducting research and has been seen to be useful to assess international graduate student perceptions of their sense of community cultural wealth to promote a healthier academic learning environment.

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Author/Editor	John Creswell
The standard identifier	N/A
Title	Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches
Publisher	SAGE Publications
Expected publication date	Jun 2014
Estimated size (pages)	125
Total (may include CCC user fee)	0.00 USD
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Appendix B

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. What is your country of origin?
2. Why did you choose to come to Canada for your graduate studies?

Aspirational Capital

3. Was there ever a time that you were struggling financially, academically, or socially? How did you overcome it?
4. What do you hope to do with your degree? What is your greatest challenge as an international graduate student?
5. Are you currently receiving any financial assistance, scholarship, or grant money toward your studies? How does this affect your day-to-day life?
6. Do you have any form of employment either on or off campus? If so, how many hours per week do you work and how does that affect your studies, if at all?
7. What was the feeling you had when you first came to study in Canada – landing at the airport, first day of classes, meeting your advisor, first assignment, or first group project?
8. Have you experienced loneliness, homesickness, depression, or stress in coming to study in Canada? Please describe your experience.

Linguistic Capital

9. Can you provide an example of an experience that you have had as a student where you felt challenged because of language? How did you overcome this?
10. Is English your first language? If not, what other languages do you speak?
11. Have you had an experience where a second or third language has been an asset? What were the specific circumstances?

Familial Capital

12. Do you have family in Winnipeg? If so, what is it like to move here with family? If not, what is your experience moving here without family?
13. Do you face any pressure to return home to family? Why is that?

Social Capital

14. Can you tell me about how you made friends in a new country? Was it different than how you make friends in your home country? If so, how?
15. Are your friends other international graduate students? If so, why do you think that is?
16. Are you satisfied with the level of social interaction you have with Canadian friends? What does that look like? And what makes you satisfied?
17. Are you involved in any co-curricular activities? If so, why did you join these organizations?
18. Can you recall an instance when you had a misunderstanding due to cultural differences? How did you feel in the situation?

19. What does your typical day look like – at school and outside of school?

Navigational Capital

20. When you first arrived in Canada, how did you know where to find housing, set up your lab or get your university id, etc.?

21. What types of resources do you access as an international graduate student?

22. How did you become aware of the resources available to you (e.g., peers, department staff, other students from the same country of origin, posters, etc.)?

23. What kinds of resources and supports at the university do you feel would benefit an international student in adapting to a new culture and academic life?

24. Are there any differences in studying in Canada compared to your home country?

25. What is the role of the teacher in your home country and how is that similar or different in Canada?

26. Do you remember a time when you felt there were different expectations of you as an international graduate student than that placed on domestic graduate students? If so, please explain how you made sense of this experience.

Resistant Capital

27. Can you tell me about a moment when you felt you belonged or did not belong (in Canada)? How did you make sense of what you were feeling?

28. Have you personally experienced any form of discrimination? If so, in what way?
29. Can you provide an example of a time when you overcame a specific hardship?
30. What kinds of advice would you give to a new, international graduate student?

Appendix C

CORE Certificate



Appendix D

Information Letter



UNIVERSITY
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Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Erica Jung, and I am a Master's Student at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. My advisor is Dr. Nathalie Piquemal in the Department of Educational Administration, Foundations & Psychology, Faculty of Education, at the University of Manitoba. Currently, I am writing my thesis for which I have chosen to conduct a qualitative research study guided by a phenomenological framework. My research study is entitled **International Graduate Students' Perceptions of Academic Learning at the University of Manitoba**. I am requesting your voluntary participation in this project. The purpose of this research is to ask international graduate students about their perceptions of their academic learning experiences at the University of Manitoba. I intend to use a qualitative approach to give voice to international students and articulate their perspectives and experiences at the University of Manitoba. I hope to use the research findings to help identify some of the academic learning supports would be useful to the international graduate student body at the University of Manitoba.

The research will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the personal factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?
2. What are the contextual factors that facilitate or create barriers for international graduate students' academic learning?

3. How can international graduate students' experiences and perceptions at the University of Manitoba have an impact on services intended to provide academic support?

The interview is designed to take approximately one and a half hours. During the interview, I will be taking notes, and also recording the questions and responses with a digital recorder. After collecting the data, I will transcribe the interviews. You will be given a copy of the transcription for review. At that time, you will be invited to provide feedback, and confirmation to verify that your voice has been adequately reflected.

Research will take place over a time period of three months from July to September 2013.

The study results will be disseminated to the broader community via a public thesis defense and possible workshops, published articles, and conference presentations.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or at any point during the study. I would be pleased to share the summary report with you after the research is completed. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only I, as the researcher will know your identity. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time by notifying Mrs. Erica Jung, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you decide to participate in the study, please read and sign the attached consent form.

Appendix E

Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Research Study Title: International Graduate Students' Perceptions of Academic Learning at the University of Manitoba

Researcher: Erica Jung, Master's student, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research is to explore international graduate students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences at the University of Manitoba. I intend to use a qualitative approach to give voice to international graduate students and explore their perspectives and experiences at the University of Manitoba. I hope to use the research findings to help identify some of the academic learning supports which would be useful to the international graduate student body at the University of Manitoba.

The study results will be disseminated to the broader community via a public thesis defense and possible workshops, published articles, and conference presentations.

You will be asked to volunteer to participate in an interview designed to take approximately one and a half hours. During the interview, I will be taking notes, and also recording the questions and responses with a digital recorder. After collecting the data, I will transcribe the interviews. You will be given a copy of the transcription for review. At that time, you will be invited to provide feedback, and confirmation to verify that your voice has been adequately reflected. Research will take place over a time period of three months from July to September 2013.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the learning experiences of international students at the University of Manitoba. Direct quotations from the data may be used in reporting the findings.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved. After the interviews have been transcribed, your name will be replaced by a unique identifier or coding system. To further ensure confidentiality, all data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, in a locked room. The legend containing the names and corresponding identifiers/codes will be secured separately from the data as another precautionary measure. Both the legend and the data will be destroyed after a period of six years. As a graduate student, I may need to consult with my advisor for the purposes of analyzing the data. The data collected for this research will be used to inform my Master's thesis work, public presentations, possible journal articles and conference presentations.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or at any point during the study. I would be pleased to share the summary report with you after the

research is completed. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only I, as the researcher will know your identity.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time by notifying Mrs. Erica Jung, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at:

Researcher: Mrs. Erica Jung, 204-474-7025, Erica.Jung@ad.umanitoba.ca

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Nathalie Piquemal, 204-474-7032,

Nathalie.Piquemal@ad.umanitoba.ca

Research Ethics Board: Ms. Maggie Bowman, 204-474-7122,

Margaret.Bowman@ad.umanitoba.ca

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

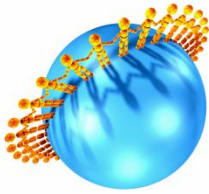
Date

___ I prefer to receive my interview transcript via e-mail: address

___ I prefer to receive my interview transcript in print copy: address

Appendix F

Recruitment Poster



Attention: International Graduate Students

Seeking volunteers for a study on the experiences and factors that affect academic learning for international graduate students at the University of Manitoba. Eligible participants for this study will be international graduate students enrolled at the University of Manitoba and **not** currently involved in the *Certification in Higher Education Teaching* (CHET) program offered through the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning.

The interviews will take one and a half hours and will be conducted at the University of Manitoba by September 30, 2013.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Erica Jung at Erica.Jung@ad.umanitoba.ca or (204) 474-7025.

This study has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB).

