COME FROM AWAY, FAR AWAY:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A PREDOMINANTLY HOMOGENEOUS HOST CULTURE

LISA MOORES

COME FROM AWAY, FAR AWAY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A PREDOMINANTLY HOMOGENEOUS HOST CULTURE

by

© Lisa Moores

A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Psychology

Department of Psychology

Memorial University of Newfoundland

October 2013

St. John's Newfoundland

Abstract

International students face a variety of challenges and triumphs over the course of their cross-cultural transitions. While a body of literature has investigated these experiences within the context of large and culturally diverse urban centres, little research has examined cross-cultural transitions in host sites that lack such diversity and resources. This paper explores the lived experience of nine international students in a small urban centre with a relatively homogeneous host culture that has not traditionally been a receiving site for international newcomers. Purposeful sampling was employed to assemble a diverse group of international undergraduate and graduate students and two in-depth individual interviews were conducted with each participant. An empirical phenomenological methodology (Colaizzi, 1978) was utilized to provide a rich description of the lived experiences of these participants as they crossed cultures. A total of 516 significant statements regarding experiences deemed important, hindering, or facilitative by the participants were extracted from individual interview transcripts. Participant checks, during which participant feedback on authenticity of findings was invited, were completed at the individual and group levels. Eight thematic clusters emerged from this data: (a) Influence of Host Environmental Context, (b) Influence of Academic Context, (c) Process of Cross-Cultural Transition, (d) Language Challenges, (e) Supportive Relationships, (f) Meeting Across Cultures, (g) Intrapersonal Factors, and (h) Personal Significance. Thirty-one themes were found within these clusters. Major findings discussed include endorsement of an immersion strategy toward acculturation, proactive and creative means of connecting with the host community, the importance of

positive experiences with locals as a facilitative factor, the personal transition accompanying cross-cultural transition, heavy academic workloads as a barrier to availing of support services, a dearth of international perspective within the host curriculum and academic environment, and an indication that international student participants at the host location may not be true sojourners (temporary residents for study purposes), but fall into a pre-immigrant category. A consideration of how this research fits with studies of international student transition in larger centres, implications for postsecondary institutions and the mental health services that support these academic sojourners, in addition to future research directions, are provided.

Dedication

To my daughter Amelie and my son Daegan

for the daily infusions of joy that sustained me throughout this program

Acknowledgements

I offer a heartfelt thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Peter Cornish, for believing in the value and importance of this work and providing me with the opportunity to conduct research in an area that is my passion. Peter, this project would not have been possible without your enthusiasm, guidance, and support. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Dr. Beth Whelan, for supporting this work and helping it move forward, and my research committee members, Dr. Martha Traverso-Yepez and Dr. Ken Fowler, for their helpful and encouraging feedback and suggestions.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous participation of the international students who shared their experiences with me. Their openness and commitment to this project went far above my expectations and the result offers members of this institution and community an opportunity for a deeper understanding of their experiences.

I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my family for their love and encouragement. To my parents and my in-laws, I thank you for the countless spaghetti bakes and chicken curries and providing me with the comfort of knowing that I was leaving my children with those who adore them. It helped me more than you will ever know. Thank you Mom and Dad, for raising me to believe in limitless possibilities. Your confidence in me was the first seed of this accomplishment. I thank my children, Amelie and Daegan, for reminding me every day of what matters most and surrounding me with their love. Many people have asked me how it was possible to complete this program with two small children, but I find myself wondering if it would have been possible otherwise. To my husband, Gord, thank you for journeying with me on this

unconventional route to the top of the mountain and never letting me give up. Your unrelenting love and encouragement has been my constant.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my PsyD cohort: Pam Button, Sarah Chaulk, Kathy Keating, Krystle O'Leary, and Heather Patterson. I could not have asked for a better support network throughout this program, nor better colleagues with whom to enter this profession. We have now truly reached "the final countdown" and have achieved so much together. I am proud that we chose support, friendship, caring, and encouragement over competition, and I believe we have reaped the rewards. I wish you all much happiness as you journey forward.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Come From Away, Far Away: The Lived Experience of International Students in a Predominantly Homogeneous Host Culture

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE; 2012), in 2011 over 239,000 international students sought an education in Canada, a 75% rise from one decade before. This marks a rapid increase in the rate of growth for this student population with the average rate of increase between 2008 and 2011 more than tripling the pace between 2001 and 2008, at 11.5% and 3.8% per year accordingly (CBIE, 2012). Should this rate of growth continue, some 350,000 international students are projected to study in Canada annually by 2015 (CBIE, 2012). Post-secondary institutions host approximately 72% of these international students with 129,281 academic sojourners attending Canadian universities in 2011 (CBIE, 2012).

Students from around the world come to pursue a North American education for many and varied reasons. Traditionally, international students have sought to attain fluency in English (Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001), which has become the global language for international commerce. Others have cited cultural fluency, an international perspective, multicultural competency, and personal development as benefits of the study abroad experience (Arthur, 2001; Hadis, 2005). Greater open-mindedness, flexibility, and emotional resilience have also been noted as benefits that can last well beyond the sojourn period (Duffy, Farmer, Ravert, & Huittinen, 2005).

The benefits of international study also extend to the host community. As local enrolment declines, international students help North American host institutions maintain the quality of the post-secondary education they provide (Gien & Law, 2009) and bolster

the student body (Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003). The cities, states, and provinces housing these institutions also stand to benefit in a number of areas. International study allows them to attract educated professionals who may fill gaps in the labour market (Duffy et al., 2005). Beyond professional skills these sojourners contribute to the economy, cultural knowledge, and diversity of the local population and their homeland (Duffy et al., 2005; Kitsantas, 2004).

International students offer an array of assets to the local academic community as well including language skills, international networks, cultural knowledge, and international perspectives that may enrich the academic experience of their domestic peers (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Gien & Law, 2009; Yoon & Portman, 2004). With regard to economic impact, it has been reported that international students residing in Canada in 2010 alone generated more than 81,000 jobs and injected $7.7 billion dollars into the economy (RKA Inc., 2012 as cited in CBIE, 2012). Closer to home, international students are anticipated to have contributed $231 million in 2008-2009 in the Atlantic province of Nova Scotia (Dalhousie University, 2009 as cited in CBIE, 2012). These appealing benefits have resulted in intense competition between host countries and institutions to attract international students (CBIE, 2012).

Although the majority of newcomers in general are found in large multicultural cities, postsecondary institutions located in small urban centres and rural areas are not exempt from this trend (Abu-Laban & Garber, 2005; CBIE, 2012). At Memorial University, located in St. John's, Newfoundland, enrolment of international students stood at an all-time high of 1694 last year, accounting for more than 9% of the student

body and more than 23% of all graduate students attending the institution (Fowler, 2012). This data indicates a 295% increase in international student enrolment between 2003 and 2012 with 2.8 times as many graduate international students and more than triple the number of undergraduate students (312%) attending the university (Fowler, 2012; Thorne, 2005). Over half of these academic sojourners originated from Asia (58%), with Sub-Saharan Africa (12.3%) and the Middle East and North Africa (11.9%) comprising the second and third place sending regions. Europe (6.7%), Latin America and the Caribbean (6.0%), North America (4.7%), and Pacific Oceania (0.006%) rounded out the home regions represented in the international student body (Fowler, 2012).

In the most recent strategic plan available from the host institution (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2007), a variety of topics salient to international student education were highlighted. The plan clearly outlined a goal to increase the numbers of international graduate and undergraduate students attending Memorial to augment the student body, contribute to its diversity, and work in concert with the provincial government to retain these students. The importance of increasing understanding of the academic needs of international students among university instructors and establishing the support services required to meet their needs was highlighted. The plan also indicated that Memorial is looking globally to increase study and work abroad opportunities, to raise the profile of the institution overseas, and to increase not only the diversity of the university community but its global awareness and international perspectives within its curriculum. Moreover, the plan highlights a goal to increase opportunities for international students to integrate into the campus and local communities.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has also recognized the potential for recruitment of international students, and retention of these individuals after graduation, to advance their goals of doubling the number of immigrants to the province and increasing retention rates to 70% (Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, 2007). The province has rolled out an incentive program for local international students who continue to work and reside in the province a year beyond receipt of permanent residency status. These individuals are eligible to receive $1000-$2500 through the initiative (Human Resources, Labour, and Employment, 2010 as cited in Anderson, 2012). Of particular interest to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador is the potential for international students to stay in the province upon completion of their studies, introducing a pool of well-educated and skilled prospective workers who may help address the shortage of professionals in a variety of areas (Duffy et al., 2005; Gien & Law, 2009).

Impact of Cross-Cultural Transition

In addition to the widespread advantages of study abroad, however, there are numerous difficulties associated with crossing cultures. International students must navigate the communal challenges also faced by domestic postsecondary students, for instance living independently and adjusting to university expectations, in addition to stressors unique to their cultural transition (Arthur, 2004; Mori, 2000). At the same time these academic sojourners lack resources like established support networks that are often readily available to their host domestic peers and they must adapt quickly to these new

demands to meet the responsibilities of their academic role (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Pedersen, 1991).

The rapid and significant growth of the international student population and the many benefits of the study abroad experience for participants, home cultures, and host communities indicate that addressing the needs of these sojourners is essential from both practical and ethical perspectives (Moores, 2008). Facilitating positive international study experiences is critical to continuing to attract quality students and fostering cross-cultural ties. Furthermore, international students contribute considerably to the revenue of postsecondary institutions and the local economy and there is an ethical responsibility to ensure that their needs are provided for (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Yeh & Yang, 2003). This point may be particularly salient for host institutions and communities that have not traditionally received large numbers of international students.

One crucial consideration in understanding the needs of this population is the impact of their cross-cultural transition. The abrupt divergence between life in home and host cultures can cause culture shock, also known as acculturative stress, which may give rise to adverse psychological and physical symptoms (Arthur, 2004; Berry, 2006; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). Serious mental health implications associated with acculturative stress have also been indicated, including depression and suicidal ideation (Furukawa, Sarason, & Sarason, 1998; Hovey, 2000; Kiang, Grzywacz, Marín, Arcury, & Quandt, 2010; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). Given this potential vulnerability it stands to reason that counselling and mental health services located on the campus they attend may be

particularly important for the international student population; however, research indicates that these sojourners tend not to make use of such resources (Mori, 2000; Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004). Moreover, conducting therapy with clients from a wide array of cultures poses considerable challenges for mental health professionals (Arthur, 2004; Marsella & Pederson, 2004; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004) and there is a paucity of information available to inform clinicians (Zhang & Dixon, 2003). In order to increase the use of psychological support services among international students who need these resources, it is essential that we expand our knowledge of how best to serve these international clients and create relevant postsecondary counselling services that are accessible to this population.

In considering the impact of this experience, the context in which cross-cultural transition occurs is also important. While the characteristics of the international student and their acculturation experience have been found to influence the degree of difficulty experienced, the characteristics of the receiving society, known as the host population or host society, is also influential. Kiang and colleagues (2010) noted that while immigration has been increasing to non-traditional areas, such as small urban centres and rural locations, there is a dearth of research focusing on this context. The same can be said for sojourners, or temporary residents, to these locations. However, traditional and non-traditional immigration areas differ in important ways, with the latter often lacking the infrastructure and social resources that can facilitate newcomer transition. Moreover, these authors suggest transition problems in these locations may be worsened as the host population is less able to manage challenges, due to lack of exposure, and the likelihood

of social conflict increases. A negative correlation has also been reported between living in an "ethnically dense community" and incidence of mental illness for newcomers (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Kiang and associates have argued that this constitutes a considerable gap in the current literature.

The context for the current study is a small city with a culturally homogeneous host population. St. John's has a very low proportion of visible minority individuals, numbering a mere 1.9% of the local population (Statistics Canada, 2009). There is a limited existing infrastructure of supports specific to internationals (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009). Furthermore, newcomers in this area have more limited access to typically helpful sources of social support as cultural subgroups are not well established and host nationals have less exposure to international cultures. Local researchers have noted the scarcity of information about the immigrant experience in the province, specifically calling for further research on international students (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009).

Key Terms

Experts within the field have highlighted a lack of agreement regarding the definition of many terms utilized in research on the international student experience (Pedersen, 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990). Key terms utilized in this study with their definitions for this document are provided below for the reader's reference and are consistent with my previous research in this area (Moores, 2008; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011):

1. *International Student*: In this study the term is used to describe individuals temporarily residing in a foreign country for the purpose of study. This thesis focuses on university students with an international student visa. It should be noted that the literature uses the terms international student and foreign student interchangeably.
2. *Sojourner:* A temporary resident who has come to the host culture for a specific purpose (e.g. not travel) such as study or work.
3. *Host National/Host Domestic*: A member of the host culture.
4. *Co-national*: An individual originally from the home culture who may or may not be an international student.
5. *Culture Shock:* The process of encountering and adjusting to a new cultural environment in the absence of familiar norms and expectations. My conceptualization of culture shock includes the potential for both negative and positive consequences.
6. *Cross-Cultural Transition*: The process of transitioning from the experience of self in the home culture to the experience of self in the host culture, encompassing change at both the environmental/external and personal/internal levels. Although frequently used interchangeably with adjustment and acculturation within the international student literature, reflected in my own literature review, I prefer the term cross-cultural transition as it emphasizes the process and developmental nature of the international student experience.

Theories of Cross-Cultural Transition

Selection of a theoretical framework has been purposefully avoided in the current investigation in line with the classic phenomenological perspective adopted. This allowed for a truly exploratory and descriptive contribution to a foundational understanding of the lived experience of international study, in a culturally homogeneous and non-traditional host location, without the preconceived structure of a chosen theory. In order to place this research in appropriate context, however, a consideration of the major theoretical influences in the prevailing literature is offered.

The commonly cited term "culture shock" was first coined by anthropologist Kalvero Oberg (Pederson, 1995; Searle & Ward, 1990) in his 1960 article entailing his observations on the expatriate/sojourner experience. Oberg (1960), in his predominantly anecdotal consideration, suggested that there were six signs associated with the culture shock response listed by Mumford (1998) as:

1. "Strain" arising from the demands of psychological adjustment
2. Feeling loss and deprivation resulting from disconnection from friends, status, role, and possessions
3. Rejecting or feeling rejected by the host culture
4. Confusion about role, role expectations, values, feelings, and self-identity
5. Surprise, anxiety and disgust in reaction to cultural differences
6. Feeling unable to cope with new environment

The process of adjustment associated with the phenomenon of culture shock, however, was first offered by Lysgaard (1955) in his U-curve model of sojourner

adjustment. Lysgaard theorized that the adjustment process of sojourners in the first year started with a positive perspective and sense of euphoria as newcomers were enveloped by the novelty and excitement of the host environment. He posited that this was followed by a period of confusion and hostility, represented by the dip in the U, as the novelty wore off and the reality of challenges associated with their cross-cultural transition sank in. Adjustment was seen to gradually rise again as sojourners found ways to successfully navigate and cope with the challenges encountered. The pattern of stress then was viewed as approximating an inverse U, with problems peaking during the most taxing period of the sojourn (Ying, 2005). The U-curve conceptualization was extended by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) to create a W-curve that incorporated an additional U-shaped adjustment when international students re-entered their home cultures.

While support for this theory of adjustment within the research literature has been weak and inconsistent (Arthur, 2004; Church, 1982; Pederson, 1991; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998), this conceptualization has persisted in influencing research and practice in this area for several decades (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). The early culture shock model has been criticized by those in the field of international student transition as unduly pathologizing culture shock as a detrimental and abnormal response (Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004), highlighted by Oberg's (1960) description of culture shock as "an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad" (p.71). Moreover, the model is seen as neglecting the impact of individual experiences (Arthur, 2001; Arthur, 2004). Oberg's concept of culture shock was branded by Searle and Ward (1990) as "a major detriment to advances

in the study of cross-cultural transitions" (p. 449). The contribution of culture shock's negative connotation to a potentially erroneous depiction of the experience of crossing cultures has also been highlighted (Adler, 1975; Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Pedersen, 1995; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

More recent theories of the process of sojourner adjustment have sought to address such concerns (Arthur, 2004). Berry (2006) proposed acculturative stress, a term that avoided the exclusively negative connotations of culture shock by acknowledging both the positive and negative aspects of stress as well as the subjective nature of the acculturation process. Berry theorizes acculturative stress as a potential result of the process of change associated with acculturation, which can manifest in deleterious physiological, psychological, and social effects. The impact of acculturative stress was seen to vary widely between individuals and a number of potential predictors such as language proficiency, openness to experience, socioeconomic status, neuroticism, adjustment difficulties, as well as social support and social connectedness have been indicated (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Kuo & Roysircar 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In their comprehensive model of the acculturation process these researchers move firmly away from an exclusive focus on the individual crossing cultures (Zhang & Goodson, 2011), instead defining acculturation as a process of change that occurs in response to direct contact between two or more cultural groups and has a bidirectional influence, impacting both the sojourner and the host community on individual and group levels (Berry, 2005; Berry, 2006; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Berry's model (2006) proposed a number of acculturation strategies based on the attitudes of the migrant and host groups. Approach to acculturation was seen as varying in relation to the value transitioning individuals placed on maintaining a connection to the home culture versus connection to and participation in the host culture. According to this theory, consideration of each of these priorities results in four primary acculturation strategies:

1. Assimilation – the individual seeks daily interaction with members of the host culture and does not seek to maintain their culture of origin
2. Integration – the person seeks to maintain the culture of origin and interact with and participate in the host culture
3. Separation – the individual seeks to maintain their culture of origin and avoid contact with the host culture and its members
4. Marginalization – the newcomer is not seeking to maintain their culture of origin nor do they desire to interact or participate within the host culture.

Berry (2006) identifies this last acculturation strategy as the most problematic and notes that it may be indicative of social and psychological difficulty. With regard to the relation of these strategies to acculturative stress, integration has been associated with the lowest level of acculturative stress, in addition to greater life-satisfaction, assimilation to a moderate level, and separation and marginalization to the most pronounced degree of acculturative stress (see Pan & Wong, 2011 for a review). Berry also specifies, however, that these categories imply the assumption that the newcomer is able to select between acculturative strategies requiring a host society that is open to diversity. When these

strategies become forced by the dominant host culture assimilation becomes known as the "pressure cooker," separation as "segregation," and marginalization as "ethnocide" (Berry, 2006). Integration within a context where diversity is encouraged by the host culture is consistent with the concept of "multiculturalism" (Berry, 2006).

Ward and her colleagues have expanded conceptualization of acculturation and offered two distinct but interconnected types of adjustment associated with crossing cultures (see Ward et al., 2001 for an overview): (a) psychological adjustment, associated with emotional challenges confronted and feelings of satisfaction or well-being, and (b) sociocultural adjustment, which involves a sense of belonging within the host culture and positive interpersonal experiences and has a strong behavioural component (Searle & Ward, 1990). These researchers argued that variations in psychological adjustment were predicted by extraversion, life changes, satisfactory relationships with host nationals, and social difficulty, while sociocultural adjustment was associated with cultural difference, expectations of difficulty, and depression (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward et al., 2001). This theory may offer an explanation for the inconsistent findings regarding factors impacting international student transition. Research conducted by Ward and colleagues has suggested that while challenges in both these areas of adjustment are most pronounced upon arrival in the host culture they decrease over time, in contrast to the U-curve model of adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1996; Ward et al., 1998). In their review of the literature on predictors of psychosocial adjustment, Zhang and Goodson (2011) indicated that the theories of Berry and colleagues and Ward and colleagues were the theoretical frameworks most utilized in recent research studies.

Impact of Acculturative Stress

A large proportion of research involving international students crossing cultures has focused on the problems associated with the transition (Arthur, 2004; Leong & Chou, 1996; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). International students confront sudden immersion in an unfamiliar culture and foreign language with limited social support and must learn to navigate social and cultural norms, academic demands, and daily living challenges (Arthur, 2004; Mori, 2000). The stress associated with the process of cross-cultural transition can result in a deterioration of physical, psychological, and social functioning (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli et al., 2004). In a review of the literature, Arthur (2004) noted academic concerns, communication issues, social support, family matters, discrimination, gender roles, and financial support as key issues during cross-cultural transition.

International students have also been widely regarded as more vulnerable to psychological problems than domestic students (Mori, 2000). According to Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), the two general causes of psychological issues are: intrapersonal factors that stem from within the individual such as sense of loss, inferiority, and lack of security, or interpersonal factors arising from the environment and situation such as communication barriers, culture shock, loss of social support, and difficulty building new support networks, as well as academic concerns. Other research has demonstrated that acculturative stress can contribute to more severe mental health issues including anxiety, depression, psychosis, and suicidality, (Furukawa et al., 1998; Lee et al., 2004; Leong & Chou, 1996; Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Baron, 1991; Wilton & Constantine, 2003).

Research has highlighted the potentially serious implications of cross-cultural transition with regard to mental health for at least some sojourners. Generally, the current literature suggests that international students are a vulnerable population who experience more problems than their peers (Arthur, 2004; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

Areas that have received much less attention in the literature are the positive aspects of cross-cultural transition and even acculturative stress. Although most international students succeed in their studies (CBIE, 2004) they tend to be depicted as a troubled population (Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Recent studies focusing on this neglected area of study (e.g. Duffy et al., 2005; Kitsantas, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), many from the perspective of the students themselves, have reported that enhanced cross-cultural skills, an international perspective, personal growth, emotional resilience, independence, open-mindedness, and having the experience of being an outsider are among the valuable gains for academic sojourners (CBIE, 2004; Duffy et al., 2005; Kitsantas, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Moreover, in their longitudinal exploration of the pre-arrival expectations and post-return evaluations of 248 international students, Martin, Bradford and Rohrlich (1995) found that the study abroad experience met or exceeded the students' expectations.

Given this diversity in findings, it is important to note that the experience and extent of acculturative stress can vary considerably across individuals and several factors have been found to hinder or facilitate the process of cross-cultural transition. Some influences that have garnered the attention of researchers are language, social support, and cultural

distance (e.g. Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Lee et al., 2004; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Misra et al., 2003; Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Yang & Clum, 1995; Ying & Liese, 1990). These factors may be particularly salient for international students coming to smaller and less multicultural centres and, therefore, will be considered here in greater detail.

Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Transition

Language. There is consensus in the field that ability to communicate effectively in the host language has considerable impact on the academic, social, and cultural adjustment of international students (Poyrazli et al., 2004). Mori (2000) has contended that "the language barrier is probably the most significant, prevalent problem for most international students" (p. 137), highlighting the fundamental impact of language skills for these academic sojourners who must live and learn in the host language. English ability impacts international students' daily life in- and outside the classroom. A series of studies have supported the relationship between English skills, both actual and perceived, and acculturation (e.g., Dao et al., 2007; Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Poyrazli et al, 2002; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Yang & Clum, 1995; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ying & Liese, 1990).

Due to the ubiquitous influence of language, it has been found to impact a number of aspects of the international student experience. As might be expected, English proficiency is critical to the academic success of these students. In a study of 149 international graduate students at five American host universities, Poyrazli and

Kavanaugh (2006) found that English proficiency was one of the factors that predicted how well participants did academically, indicated by G.P.A., as well as the degree of academic strain they experienced. The authors noted that these findings highlighted the impact that improvement of English ability could have for international students' overall academic performances as well as the potential benefit of using G.P.A. as an indicator of sojourners who may be at risk for adjustment difficulties.

Language also plays an important role in how international students connect with those around them and create new relationships and social support networks in the host environment. Lin and Betz (2009) found that Asian students' perceptions of their social self-efficacy in English was negatively associated with acculturative stress but strongly and significantly tied to their proficiency in the host language, how long they had lived in the host location, and their sense of "unconditional self-regard." A difference was also noted between how participants rated their social self-efficacy when thinking about interactions with English speakers versus members of their cultural subgroup who share the same native language, with the latter being significantly higher.

In research conducted with a large and diverse group of international students, Redmond and Bunyi (1993) examined a factor they call intercultural communication competence. The communication effectiveness reported by this sample of 644 international students was found to be the strongest predictor of their verbal and non-verbal communication proficiency, ability to handle misunderstandings, and comprehend and empathize with the perspectives of host nationals. It was also one of the strongest predictors of these participants' ability to manage stress in effective ways. Moreover,

competence in communicating across cultures, along with social integration with hosts and adaptation, was found to predict 46% of the variance in these participants' ability to manage stress. In addition to strengthening the connection between language and cultural adjustment this finding also highlights the potential psychological impact of host language proficiency and intercultural communication.

Indeed, in a later study that also used a sizeable sample of international students from 77 different countries, Yeh and Inose (2003) also found that English language fluency, as reported by participants, significantly predicted acculturative stress, with students who indicated greater comfort communicating in English, frequency of use, and fluency having lower acculturative stress. Moreover, language in general has been indicated as a factor in the mental health of academic sojourners. In a survey of 112 Taiwanese international graduate students Dao, Chang, and Lee (2007) found that the effect of acculturation on depression was mediated by the fluency of participants' English. Higher levels of depression have also been associated with lower host language ability in a large and diverse sample of international students (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004).

It is interesting to note that a number of studies investigating the role of language on international student adjustment have relied on self-reported fluency or proficiency rather than more objective measures. This suggests that these studies are capturing the impact of international students' confidence in their host language skills in these areas, which may or may not be an accurate reflection of their abilities. In their mixed methods investigation of Taiwanese graduate students' cross-cultural adjustment, Swagler and

Ellis (2003) found that international students' perceived host language proficiency and their level of confidence in speaking English were related to their adjustment although their actual host language ability was not. This finding highlights the importance of teasing apart perception and ability when it comes to language proficiency, but also the significance of how international students view their skills and their confidence in communicating.

While the aforementioned studies provide useful information on areas of international student adjustment impacted by English fluency they do not reflect the impact of language barriers according to international students themselves. In consulting the qualitative literature on this topic (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), the important challenge of expressing one's thoughts, opinions, personality, and emotions in a foreign language is highlighted. The potential contrast between confidence in one's host language skills and actual proficiency is also underscored with international students noting that a sense of comfort and ease with those around them aided communication.

It is also notable that much of the research in this area has been conducted with Asian international students. Given the considerable gap between English and Chinese dialects such as Mandarin one might question how well these results generalize to international students whose native languages have more in common with the host language, such as shared Roman alphabet or similar grammatical patterns.

Social support. Social support has been indicated as one of the few factors that have consistently and clearly predicted the adjustment of international students (Poyrazli et al., 2004), indicating the importance of this factor in the experience of cross-cultural

transition. Research has indicated that social support has indirect and direct effects on acculturative stress, buffering sojourners from stressors and allowing them a means to cope with them as well as providing a significant source of well-being (Dao et al., 2007; Furukawa et al., 1998; Lee et al., 2004; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Misra et al., 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). Socializing with host nationals, co-nationals, fellow international students from a variety of cultures, and maintaining contact with the home culture have also been shown to positively impact an individual's adjustment and levels of acculturative stress (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Misra et al., 2003; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Poyrazli et al., 2004), although results have been mixed regarding which of these sources of support is most helpful during acculturation.

In a recent survey-based study, Wang and Heppner (2012) examined the acculturative adjustment of 507 Chinese international students in the U.S. over their initial three terms of study. The authors found evidence that these sojourners fell into four divergent groups based on their pattern of acculturation. For one group considerable psychological distress was evident throughout the sojourn, for another distress was high at entry but decreased between arrival and the first semester, for a third distress peaked notably during the first and second semesters, and in a final group little distress was reported across the sojourn. This final "well-adjusted" group was found to have social support from both co-nationals and host nationals while the group that reported rising psychological distress throughout the first two terms relied heavily on their co-national peers initially. By the end of the year, however, these "culture-shocked" sojourners reported social support networks that balanced connections with host national, co-

national, and other international students, and their distress levels had decreased. These results are in line with those of Swagler and Ellis's (2003) mixed methods study of Taiwanese graduate students in which enhanced acculturative adjustment was predicted by sojourners' social networks comprised of co-nationals and host nationals. They partly challenge, however, other findings indicating that international students who mostly socialized with other internationals in general experienced greater acculturative stress (Poyrazli et al., 2004).

In comparison to studies examining co-national versus host national social connections, the role of interpersonal relationships within the international student community has received far less attention in the literature (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Based on their research, Schmitt and colleagues (Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003) proposed that as a result of the difficulties encountered in forging relationships with host nationals, and the consequent rejection some international students may feel, a strong minority group identity may be forged within the academic sojourner population. This identity was viewed as an important protective measure to buffer them from the potential deleterious effects of perceived discrimination on self-esteem that did not generalize to exclusively co-national groups, suggesting that the diverse international student population offers a uniquely valuable source of relevant support.

In their questionnaire study of 100 students from a large number of Asian countries studying in Australia, Kashima and Loh (2006) also found that international students with a greater number of social connections to host nationals reported better knowledge of the host culture and psychological adjustment, although not greater

sociocultural adjustment as anticipated. Moreover, students with more ties to fellow international student peers reported a sense of connection to their home cultures and better psychological adjustment. Although the questionnaire methodology chosen for this investigation restricts access to the meaning and experience of these supports for the students themselves, qualitative studies have supported and elaborated on this finding. In a qualitative exploration of the positive aspects of cross-cultural transition, international students identified their fellow sojourners as critical supports who offered shared interests and experiences, relevant guidance, and were often more accessible than host nationals (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). These social ties provided the added advantage of exposure to a range of cultures in addition to the host culture.

The importance of social support for students crossing cultures, as well as international students' preference for this type of support over professional resources (Heggins & Jackson, 2003), is clearly borne out by the literature. Creating social support networks and meaningful relationships in the host culture can, however, be an arduous process (Ward et al., 2001; Yoon & Portman, 2004). The gap in social support that likely results in the early stage of cross-cultural transition when these sojourners are attempting to rebuild social networks suggests a potentially critical role for relevant counselling services (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Cultural distance. Cultural distance, which links adjustment difficulties experienced by newcomers to the degree of similarity/difference between home and host cultures, spanning areas such as climate, food, religion, family structure and leisure activities (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980), has also been found to play a role in the

process of cross-cultural transition (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Redmond, 2000; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006; Suanet & van de Vijver, 2009). Babiker and his colleagues (1980) first proposed the concept of perceived cultural difference as an explanation for the variance in acculturative stress experienced by sojourners from different regions. They developed an index to measure perceived differences between social and physical aspects of home and host cultures. Since this time, evidence has indicated that perceived cultural distance is an influential factor that can help or hinder the cultural adjustment of international students (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Suanet & van de Vijver, 2009). Suanet and van de Vijver (2009) note that cultural distance can be conceptualized at both national and individual levels.

While increasing attention has been given to the diversity of experiences within the international student population, the other consideration in gauging cultural distance, the host culture, has not been given due attention. The majority of research in this area compares the sojourner's home culture to the North American or Western host culture, incorrectly implying a standard culture that exists across all English-speaking host institutions within the region. The small amount of available research comparing the cross-cultural transitions of a sojourning population in two host locations with varying degrees of cultural distance has, however, been quite valuable.

In a study entitled, "Where's the 'culture' in cross-cultural transition?" Ward and Kennedy (1993) compared the experiences of international students from Malaysia residing in Singapore and Malaysians and Singaporeans studying in New Zealand. They found that the latter group, dealing with a much larger cultural distance, experienced

more difficulty with sociocultural adjustment. In more recent work Pan and Wong (2011) continued in this comparative vein, examining the cross-cultural transitions of two groups of Chinese migrants in two different cultural settings with varying degrees of cultural distance. Some 606 Chinese graduate students studying in Australia and Hong Kong participated in this study, which focused on acculturative stressors and negative affect. Findings indicated that the students residing in Australia experienced a greater number of acculturative stressors and increased negative affect in comparison to their peers in Hong Kong, suggesting increased psychological distress and a more challenging cross-cultural transition with greater cultural distance. Cultural distance as an "acculturative hassle," however, was a significant predictor of negative affect only in the Hong Kong sample. The authors hypothesize that this may be due to an underestimation regarding the cultural distance between mainland China and Hong Kong due to an expectation that host and home cultures would be quite similar.

Mental Health Implications

The stressors confronting international students have raised concerns about mental health implications. As previously noted, international students have been considered more vulnerable to mental health concerns than domestic students (Mori, 2000). In an investigation of cross-cultural adjustment and psychological distress in 190 international postsecondary students originating from Latin America and Asia, Wilton and Constantine (2003) found that psychological distress was positively associated with both cultural adjustment and apprehension about competence across cultures for both these groups. Additionally, this relationship held even after length of time in the host environment and

racial/ethnic group were taken into account. Lee, Koeske, and Sales (2004) also found acculturative stress to be highly predictive of mental health issues. Meanwhile, in their examination of 242 Japanese international students studying across the world, Furukawa and colleagues (1998) found that 80% of participants indicated that they had experienced more than three psychiatric symptoms of emotional distress during the first six months of their study abroad experience. These figures are higher than results from comparable studies examining incidence of mental illness in overall student populations (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007). Other research, however, has suggested that the mental health needs of international students do not outweigh those of their domestic peers, casting doubt on the assumption of risk (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007). In general, research indicates psychological concerns including anxiety, depression, and loss of identity, as well as social issues such as loneliness, withdrawal, and feeling like an outsider are prevalent among the international student population (Arthur, 2004; Brinson & Kottler, 1995). These findings highlight the potential vulnerability of individuals crossing cultures and the necessity of providing psychological resources.

A recent local study holds particular relevance for the proposed investigation. In a qualitative pilot study examining the mental health needs of visible minority immigrants in St. John's, Reitmanova and Gustafson (2009) explored the factors that facilitated or impeded the well-being of immigrants and their perspectives on available resources. This study found that social support, income, employment, culture, physical environment, coping skills, gender, and availability and suitability of local mental health services were identified as determinants of mental health for visible minority immigrants. Results

suggested that the process of immigration increased the vulnerability of participants to mental health concerns. Participants also indicated that they often felt misunderstood, judged, and excluded from social activities and that their traditional attire, skin colour, and religious values, dissimilar to those of the host community, resulted in marginalization. These authors emphasized the paucity of knowledge about various immigrant communities in the province, specifically calling for further research within the international student population, as noted earlier.

Given the considerable challenges and the rapid growth of the international student population, it would seem that on-campus counselling services would be essential to these students during their cultural transition (Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Mori, 2000; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Many researchers in the field have contended that the need for counselling and support among international students is greater than that of domestic students (e.g. Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Ward et al., 2001). Despite the apparent need for counselling services among international students, considerable research indicates that such services are underused by this population. Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004), in a year-long examination of the presenting concerns of all international students attending a university counselling centre, found that only 2% of international students sought counselling services at the centre. This can be compared to utilization rates of approximately 15% for overall student populations (Eisenberg et al., 2007). Moreover, 38% of international students who attended an intake session and were referred to a therapist did not return for their first counselling session. These results also indicated an underutilization of services in comparison to domestic students from minority groups,

although return rates were comparable (Eisenberg et al., 2007). These findings are supported by a further review of university student utilization of campus counselling services (Raunic & Xenos, 2008).

There are a variety of hypotheses regarding why international students do not make use of counselling services. One possible reason is that these students simply prefer to rely on informal supports such as family and friends during difficult times (Raunic & Xenos, 2008). Another possibility is that the psychological services available are not culturally appropriate or relevant for the international student population (Mori, 2000; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). This underlines the importance of ensuring that suitable services are available for these students. Yet, Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) have noted that clinician training programs rarely educate future therapists on the needs of international students. In order for counselling and support services to be effective and relevant for international students it is essential that their needs be assessed and reflected. To determine what helps international students navigate the challenges of cross-cultural transition we must allow the students themselves to educate us about their experiences. This approach is even more important in areas that have not traditionally hosted large numbers of international students, where less is known about the lived experience of these academic sojourners as they cross cultures.

The Current Study

Purpose of the study. The primary goal of the current study is to contribute to the understanding of the international student experience in the field of clinical psychology from the perspective of those who live this experience. This research study will focus on

the cross-cultural transition of international students studying at a Canadian university within a small and relatively culturally homogeneous urban centre. This population was chosen to provide information on the lived experience of university students transitioning within this uncommon context, and their views on meaningful aspects and what helps and hinders this transition. As previously noted, information on the process of acculturation within contexts that lack the cultural knowledge, diversity, and established multicultural support infrastructure of major centres is needed and this study is intended to contribute to filling this considerable gap in the literature. A second important aim is to help inform more relevant postsecondary psychological and support services and increase the understanding of all members of the university community who support these academic sojourners.

The research questions that guided this investigation are:

1) What is it like to be an international student in a small city with a predominantly homogeneous culture?

2) What experiences do these international students deem meaningful during their cross-cultural transition?

3) What hinders/facilitates these international students' cross-cultural transition?

Significance of the study. The focus of the current study is purposefully broad and exploratory in research design to provide a foundation upon which to build a body of literature on this little-researched area. Since the current research literature has focused on this experience in larger multicultural centres we cannot currently ascertain whether information gleaned applies to international students in areas that have less commonly

received international students and other newcomers. We have no idea what aspects of these experiences are common across international students studying in Canada and which are unique. As the trend toward increasingly diverse university bodies continues and expands to non-traditional study locations it is essential that psychological research keep pace with this new development.

In line with these goals, the qualitative approach chosen for this investigation is also important to recognize. It has been noted that the experience of crossing cultures is subjective and that individual experience is not easily depicted through quantitative methods (Pedersen, 1995). While quantitative research relying on surveys and questionnaires has dominated the field, providing valuable data on a variety of topics related to international student transition, such methodologies necessarily limit the data gathered to topics questioned by the measures (Moores, 2008). Furthermore, given that there is currently no basis to assume that such data generalize to the experience of international students in homogeneous host communities a quantitative approach would not meet the goals of this study. This study will have both academic value in terms of its attention to a considerable gap in the literature and applied value in relation to informing relevant clinical work with this population and development of appropriate resources.

Chapter 2: Method

The previous chapter provided the reader with an overview of the current body of psychological literature relevant to the international student experience. As noted, the paucity of research into the experience of these students in non-traditional international study locations with very limited cultural diversity presents a gap in the psychological literature.

This study utilized empirical phenomenology (Colaizzi, 1978; Wertz, 2005), a qualitative research methodology focused on the lived experience of participants, to explore the experiences of international students in St. John's, a small urban centre with a relatively homogeneous cultural composition that has not traditionally been a common receiving site for international newcomers. The phenomenon of interest was the cross-cultural transition of these students. The critical incident technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954), another method of conducting qualitative research, influenced the research questions that guided this investigation but did not direct the research method. In this chapter, the methodology of the current study will be provided. Discussion will include the influence of phenomenology and the CIT on the design of the research, background on these approaches, and the role of the qualitative researcher, including consideration of my personal biases and assumptions. Details of the participant sample, recruitment, study procedure, as well as data collection and analysis, will also be described.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research comprises an approach that makes use of real life or natural settings to explore or "make sense of" phenomena of interest in terms of what meaning they hold for those who experience them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The current study of the lived experiences of international students in a relatively homogeneous host culture was undertaken using a qualitative research methodology. This decision was made based on a number of considerations. First, as exemplified by the literature review, there is a dearth of information in the current literature regarding the experiences of international students who choose to study in areas less commonly selected for study abroad, particularly those with a relatively homogeneous host culture. Given this scarcity of research, we do not know whether research conducted with international sojourners studying in large multicultural centres can be generalized to such students. While many similarities may exist regardless of the host environment, we are not currently justified in drawing such conclusions (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009). Likewise, it would not be appropriate to conduct research with these students using tools that have been created and normed only by international students in traditional receiving sites. Research conducted to fill the considerable gap noted must be exploratory in nature, providing a foundation of information upon which a body of relevant research can be built. A qualitative research methodology is well suited to this objective.

A further consideration is that quantitative research in this area typically relies upon surveys and questionnaires, which necessarily limits the range and depth of

information gathered (Moores, 2008). As these instruments would likely be informed by the existing literature they would restrict the research to preconceived areas of significance. As a result, unique and illuminating elements of the experience could be missed. Many quantitative studies in the area have also been critiqued for using measures designed for general or minority populations rather than international students in particular (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Yoon & Portman, 2004).

A qualitative approach takes on a more open-ended perspective, permitting participants to voice their subjective experiences without the aforementioned limitations and allowing for deeper exploration of the meaning or significance attached. International students can discuss a wide array of experiences, their subjective meaning, and the degree to which they have impacted their cross-cultural transitions. The qualitative approach has been endorsed by many in the field as a fitting way to provide these students with a voice (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Pederson, 1995; Yoon & Portman, 2004). A particular advantage of using an interview-based qualitative method with the international student population is that face-to-face communication provides an opportunity to check comprehension of interview questions and provide clarification if necessary (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Additionally, the qualitative interview can provide a comfortable interpersonal environment and context that facilitates in-depth data collection. A qualitative approach was also a good fit for the applied clinical nature of this study, advancing a goal of increased understanding.

Phenomenology

The design of the current qualitative investigation is based on a phenomenological methodology (Colaizzi, 1978; Wertz, 2005). My decision to undertake a phenomenological investigation was strongly influenced by how the research questions were initially conceived. The international student population at the study institution increased significantly over a short period of time (Fowler, 2012). As a graduate student at this university, I was keenly aware of this rapid and considerable change in the cultural composition of our university community. Given my pre-existing research interest in the cross-cultural transitions of international students and knowledge of the scholarly literature, as I walked around the campus I frequently found myself asking, "What is it *like* to be an international student *here*?" Thus, from its conception this research study was phenomenological in nature.

The following sections provide further background on phenomenology as an approach to psychological research along with a rationale for its use in the current investigation, while the balance of the chapter offers descriptions of the participant group, research procedure, and analysis of the data.

Empirical and hermeneutic phenomenological approaches. Phenomenological researchers are interested in describing the lived experience of a phenomenon of interest and endeavour to achieve a greater understanding of the meaning associated with it (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 1997; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1997; Wertz, 2005). In articulating the core of phenomenological research van Manen (1997) stated, "From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way

we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p.5). In the process, experiences that are part of everyday life and often taken for granted become the focus and meanings are revealed (Laverty, 2003).

The two general approaches to phenomenological research are empirical phenomenology, often simply called phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology (Laverty, 2003). The former is associated with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), widely heralded as the pioneer of phenomenological research, while the latter evolved from the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). While both phenomenological approaches share a foundation in German philosophy, aim to gain a deeper understanding of lived experience, and reject the notion of Cartesian dualism or a clear separation of mind and body, there are also considerable differences (Laverty, 2003). Husserl's empirical phenomenology is primarily a descriptive approach that emphasizes "how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p.104) through an epistemological perspective (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Alternatively, hermeneutic phenomenology is primarily interpretive and Heidegger emphasized *being* and an ontological perspective (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

The current investigation utilizes a phenomenological research method presented by Colaizzi (1978), which prioritizes description in the Husserlian tradition. The descriptive focus of this approach complements the exploratory and foundational nature of the current investigation without trying to explain or interpret the experience. The next section will provide a more detailed description of the basic characteristics of

phenomenology as espoused by Husserl, its impact on psychology, and a consideration of Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis (1978) in particular.

Husserlian empirical phenomenology. Edmund Husserl introduced phenomenology as a philosophical foundation for research in the context of the positivist mainstream (Laverty, 2003; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989; Wertz, 2005). Questioning the prevailing scientific focus on revealing an objective reality, Husserl argued that subjective experience, and the meaning one makes from it, comprises reality for an individual and shapes their view of the world (Patton, 2002). In this way, phenomenology diverges from virtually all other sciences by endeavouring "to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (van Manen, 1997 p.9). Husserl contended that all knowledge comes through experience (Patton, 2002) and he called for a return to "the things themselves" (Valle et al., 1989) by way of focus on accurate description of the essences of such subjective experiences. As Patton (2002) succinctly noted, a phenomenological study "is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience" (p.107). This marked a considerable departure from the dominant experimental methods of the time.

Husserl maintained that by utilizing methods designed for natural science, research psychology had failed to live up to its role as a human science (Laverty, 2003). As a result of the traditionally exclusive focus on experimental psychological research, and the quest for objectivity that accompanies it, Colaizzi (1978) argued that human experience was removed from the methodology of this research, claiming: "psychology

traditionally has insisted that its method dictate what its content should be" (Giorgi, 1970, p. 51). Husserl called for an expansion to the narrow focus derived from the dominant methodology and challenged psychology to acknowledge that their human subjects came with their own context and perspectives that influenced their reality (Laverty, 2003). As explained by Polkinghorne (1989):

> The phenomenological map is not antithetical to the mainstream natural science map but it marks different features of the terrain. It locates geographical features of human awareness and reminds us that the research journey needs to attend to the configurations of experience before moving on to assumptions about independent natural objects. Because the descriptions of natural objects are derived from experience, experience itself must be clearly understood before a firm foundation can be established for the sciences studying the natural world. (p.41)

Husserl viewed this shift in focus as more in line with psychology as a science based on human experience (Laverty, 2003). Indeed, Wertz (2005) noted that those invested in furthering a phenomenological perspective produced a body of work that "was a protest against dehumanization in psychology and offered original research and theory that faithfully reflects the distinctive characteristics of human behavior and first-person experience" covering a broad array of topics within clinical psychology (p.167). The effect of this movement continues to be observed today with phenomenological investigations illuminating topics such as human development, psychopathology, and clinical practice (see Wertz et al., 2011 for a more detailed listing) and furthering a deeper sense of understanding of a variety of life experiences among clinicians (Wertz et al., 2011).

According to Giorgi (1997), phenomenological research based on the tenets of Husserl's method must comprise three steps: 1) phenomenological reduction, 2)

description, and 3) search for essences. First, the attitude of phenomenological reduction, as conceived by Husserl, involves divesting oneself of assumptions and presuppositions. Researchers are asked to *bracket* out or set aside the knowledge or biases regarding the topic of interest gained through personal and professional experiences and to engage in an open exploration, entering into the experience of those describing their lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997). The next aspect of phenomenological reduction is that the researcher must consider the phenomenon as it is presented, simply as it is given (Giorgi, 1997). Second, the researcher must fully describe what it is *like* to live a phenomenon and mine the meanings associated with it to further a deeper understanding. This step is particularly important in its contrast to other possible objectives such as explanation, interpretation, or construction, in which the Husserlian phenomenologist does not engage (Giorgi, 1997). Finally, once the experiences of individuals and their associated meanings are understood, the phenomenologist seeks to find the essences of these common experiences, the threads that run through the individual subjective descriptions, and speak to underlying essences that are "the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (Patton, 2002, p.106).

Among the phenomenological research approaches that have drawn heavily upon Husserl's legacy and provided more detailed instructions, the method developed by Colaizzi (1978) was chosen for the current study. This decision reflects a number of considerations. Importantly, it has been recommended that novice phenomenological researchers benefit from the guidance provided by a more structured approach to analysis (Creswell, 2007; Osborne, 1994), which Colaizzi provides. This method focuses on

description and understanding of lived experience and exploration of the essences of the individual and common experiences of participants. Given the dearth of information on the transition of international students in small culturally homogeneous centres this was a suitable choice to conduct foundational and exploratory research. Additionally, Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis has been commonly utilized in research that is salient to the work of therapists and clinicians encompassing areas such as self-care and depression (Vidler, 2005), intimate partner violence (Flinck & Paavilainen, 2010; Magnussen, Amundson, & Smith, 2008), and medical students' understanding of empathy (Tavakol, Dennick, & Tavakol, 2012).

Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique (CIT) was first introduced by John Flanagan (1954). A qualitative research method that is suited to exploratory research, CIT focuses on examining meaningful incidents or experiences that hinder or facilitate a particular outcome. This approach has been utilized to investigate an array of phenomenon of interest to psychologists such as psychology graduate students' ethical violations (Fly, van Bar, Weinman, Kitchener, & Lang, 1997), overcoming depression in HIV+ individuals (Alfonso, 1997), incidents that impact the transition of homeless people off the streets (Macknee & Mervyn, 2002), and what influences the preparation of breast cancer patients for surgery (Cerna, 2000). While I chose to utilize phenomenological data analysis rather than CIT to provide a richer and more in-depth description, CIT's holistic perspective did influence the research and interview questions, prompting me to ask specifically about hindering and facilitative experiences. This was viewed as increasing

the likelihood of learning more about the positive and negative experiences that are meaningful within the overall lived experience. Phenomenology and CIT have been combined in other research within the field of psychology (e.g. Borgen & Amundson, 1984).

Role of the Qualitative Researcher

An important distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is the role of the researcher. These methodologies do not merely differ with regard to the process of research and fit for the study in question, but diverge in important ways with regard to fundamental values. As such, it is important to delineate my role as a qualitative researcher conducting this study and how it impacts the research process.

The qualitative perspective holds that "there is no value free science" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.6). Since I first ventured into the area of qualitative research I have resonated with Denzin and Lincoln's representation of the qualitative researcher as "*bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts" (p.4) and their assertion that "the interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting" (p.6). As such, the qualitative researcher takes the time to examine their perspectives and biases and employs ways to remain aware of their process throughout the study.

As a former sojourner and traveller, I believe my experiences with a wide array of cross-cultural transitions have shaped my role as a researcher in this study. Furthermore, having conducted research in this area in the past I have also had to locate my position

within the current body of literature and examine how it influences me with regard to the current study. Information based on my reflections regarding my experiences will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Research Method

Participants

Participants were nine international students, five women and four men, enrolled at the host institution with at least one semester of studies completed. Six participants described themselves as single and three as married, and none had any children. The participant sample comprised four graduate students and five undergraduates. Five participants indicated their ages fell within the range of 18-25, three between 26-30, and one participant was between 36 and 40 years of age. Three participants in this study were from Asia (including the Indian subcontinent), one was from Europe, two were from Africa, two were from the Middle East, and one was from South America. Two of these students reported English as a first language and three students spoke an additional language beyond English and their native language.

With regard to time at the host institution, the range reported was from 5 to 41 months, with a reported mean of 20.5 months. For four of the participating international students this was their first time living abroad. The remaining participants reported living in a foreign country previously for periods from six weeks to two years for the purposes of study, work, extended travel, or due to a family relocation. Seven of the nine participants noted visiting other countries, with four students reporting extensive travel.

Initial recruitment of 10 participants was guided by the phenomenological literature which indicates this number as the upper limit for the type of in-depth qualitative analysis required by phenomenological research (Patton, 2002; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Efforts were made to ensure that participants represented a wide array of international student life experiences and thus a diverse participant sample was sought. One exchange student was originally included in the sample so that this experience could be represented, however, a second interview and participant check could not be arranged with this student and, thus, study criteria were not met. Initial analysis suggested a cross-cultural experience more akin to a traveller than an international student due to the defined short-term nature of this individual's sojourn. For these reasons the incomplete interview data for this tenth participant was not further analyzed or included here.

Recruitment

Purposeful and criterion sampling was used for this study in line with the qualitative research methodology chosen. In order for students to speak to the phenomenon of interest it was necessary that they had lived the experience of a local international student and had enough time in the host culture upon which to reflect. For this reason only currently enrolled international students who had completed a minimum of one semester of studies were accepted to participate. Recruitment of participants was undertaken with the assistance of the International Student Advising (ISA) office and faculty members who worked closely with the local international student population, following ethics approval from the host university. These colleagues helped me connect

with individuals who met the participation criteria and might be interested in taking part in the study.

Given the exploratory and foundational nature of the current investigation, efforts were made to recruit a diverse participant sample representing a variety of cultures and experiences including undergraduate and graduate students both single and married. Also, under the advice that international students who report positive experiences might be more likely to volunteer than those who struggle, I sought ways to invite the participation of students who experienced challenges in particular.

Two separate methods of recruitment were planned for the current study. First, a number of individuals who are involved with the international student population at the host institution were invited to nominate international students who could speak to the experience of international student transition. Following ethics approval, nominators were provided with a letter (Appendix A) outlining the nature of the study and participant criteria and asked to assist the researcher in connecting with potential participants. This recruitment method was selected to aid in assembling a diverse group of participants who would be able to provide a rich description of the lived experience of being an international student in the host location. Nominators provided the nominees with contact information for the researcher. Nominators were not informed of the nominees' decisions to participate or decline. It should also be noted that participants were not asked to cite a referral source and only one participant disclosed they had been invited by a nominator.

Secondly, at the same time emails were sent to international students via the ISA office providing general information about the study and the researcher's contact details

(Appendix B). The call for participants was also put on the ISA's Facebook page. Further recruitment plans included emails to on-campus clubs specific to cultural groups, advertisement posters to be placed around campus, and snowball sampling whereby initial participants would be invited to share information about the study with other international students who might be interested. Given the overwhelming response from initial volunteers, however, these recruitment plans were not enacted.

The response from this recruitment quickly resulted in far more interest from the prospective students than anticipated, with more than 40 students responding within 48 hours of the initial advertisement. The volunteers were very enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. Given that no plans were in place for screening I consulted with the host university's ethics office and applied for permission to ask the following screening questions in order to inform selection and maximize diversity within the participant sample:

- Are you an undergraduate or graduate student?
- What is your home country?
- How long have you been at (the host university)?

Following approval of this amendment, a diverse sample of participants was selected from those interested in taking part in the study and all those invited for an interview accepted.

Students who participated in the study interviews were compensated with a gift card of their choosing in the amount of $20 for each interview. Participants were informed that participation in the study required committing to two individual interviews,

a lengthy initial interview of about 1-1.5 hours and a briefer second interview of approximately 45 minutes. All participants were informed that participation in this study was voluntary and that if they agreed to participate they could choose to decline any interview question and could withdraw from the study at any point in time. In accordance with university regulations regarding restriction of paid compensation and employment for international students to the campus, all research interviews were completed on university grounds at the participants' convenience.

In designing this study, considerable attention was given to ethical issues specific to conducting research in collaboration with international students. English was not the first language of most of the participants so it was necessary to pay careful attention to comprehension and communication and a number of steps were taken to this end. First, research materials and interview questions were reviewed by a former English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher with experience teaching TOEFL examination preparation, the test used to assess language skills of prospective international students at the host university. Interview questions were sent to the participants in advance of our meeting to increase their comfort level and familiarity with the content and I asked them to let me know if they had any questions or required any clarification. My own skills as a former ESL instructor and clinician were helpful to facilitate communication and identify and navigate any language issues that arose. This sometimes involved providing further clarification of interview questions and comprehension checking. For the most part, however, language was not observed as a barrier during the interviews and all participants were able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences despite varying

levels of English proficiency. The open-ended nature of the interview protocol and the focus on the participants' experience facilitated a comfortable and conversational environment.

Procedure

Bracketing. A critical element of phenomenology is the researcher's ability to *bracket* or set aside their preconceived ideas about the phenomenon of interest in order to remain open to what emerges from the data (Creswell, 2007). Given my own personal experiences of cross-cultural transition and professional experience with international student research, the bracketing process was particularly important. Although I have never been an international student I spent several years working, living, and travelling overseas in more than 30 countries. As such, I have experienced many cross-cultural transitions including meaningful experiences of "culture shock," discrimination, and personal growth. These experiences were the foundation of my interest in cross-cultural transition and I wrote a master's thesis on the topic specifically examining the positive aspects of the international student experience (Moores, 2008; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

I approached bracketing by first journalling about these experiences prior to beginning data collection. I examined my own experiences and assumptions about cross-cultural transition and the international student experience and where I placed myself in the literature. I reviewed things I wrote during my travels, photos, and reflected on critical incidents that shaped my experience. I also reflected on what I have taken away from immersion in this field of research. This allowed me to arrive at a series of

assumptive statements that summarize my thoughts and views coming into this research and illuminate potential areas of bias. I found this to be an effective way of raising my awareness. I offer these statements here for transparency:

- I do not view culture shock as pathology but support the perspective that it is a part of a normal developmental process specific to the experience of crossing cultures.
- I think cultural distance can play a role in how difficult the study abroad experience can be but that challenges also exist when transitioning between two similar cultures.
- Acculturation does not necessarily follow the u-curve or w-curve patterns suggested in the classic acculturative literature, but can vary considerably across individuals.
- I think there is a layer of complexity added to the acculturative process when the individual is coming to an area that does not have a large international community and has a limited history of immigration.
- The experience of the international student as a sojourner may be very different from that of an immigrant or a traveller due to its prolonged but temporary nature.
- Cross-cultural transition is a subjective experience that varies between individuals.
- It can be difficult for those at home to understand the struggles that go along with the international study experience.

- Social support from host nationals, co-nationals, or other international students can help international students avoid some challenges and help them navigate when they do arise.
- Re-entry can be as stressful as initial entry into the host culture.
- The experiences of crossing cultures can be a powerful catalyst for personal growth and development.
- International study is not always a positive experience.
- Individuals who live cross-cultural transition may experience a sense of being between cultures, which may endure past their time in the host country.
- Fruitful phenomenological research involves letting go of the expectation that an experience has to be a certain way or involve certain elements to let the participants inform you and the data speak for itself.

I also chose not to revisit my previous research in this area or to extensively review qualitative research on the topic prior to conducting the interviews in order to avoid presumptions. My experience as a clinical psychologist-in-training was also beneficial in this regard as my clinical skills helped me maintain the same open, curious and non-judgmental stance I strive to employ in my clinical work and focus on entering the participants' subjective experiences. Given that this is consistent with my theoretical orientation, I viewed these skills as strengths for this investigation.

Data collection. Collection of participant data involved two individual interviews. Initial participant interviews were completed in May and June of 2011 and data analysis began concurrently. Prior to the interview, volunteer participants were sent

materials outlining the purpose of the study, procedure, the use of audio recording and subsequent transcription of interviews, as well as confidentiality considerations (see Appendix C). This information was reviewed at the beginning of the session and consent was discussed, with the participants signing consent forms (see Appendix D) before continuing the session. Participants were also sent the interview guide (see Appendix E) containing guiding questions so that they could read them in advance of our meeting, gain comfort with the language used, and begin to consider what information they would like to share.

Additionally, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F). This information was utilized in the beginning of the interview to gather information about the participants' backgrounds prior to commencing international study and to learn more about them as individuals. Given that the international student population at the host university is small, age ranges and region were queried and will be reported rather than specific age and home country as a further safeguard to confidentiality. As with the interview, participants were free to decline to provide any information although all students completed this form. Questionnaires were identified by participant codes but no names were noted on this document.

Participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study participation, confidentiality and compensation for their time (i.e. a $20 gift card for each interview) as explained in the study information they were sent in advance of the interview. Participants were also informed that as international students currently enrolled at the institution they could access counselling services free of charge at the university

counselling centre and that this could be a helpful resource if they were experiencing difficulties or wanted to talk more about their experiences of cross-cultural transition.

Field notes were completed directly following each interview and augmented when the audiofile of the interview was reviewed. These notes focused on my thoughts and perceptions of the environment, participants' characteristics, reactions to the content and process of the interview, feelings, and experience of the participant. I also noted any curious questions that arose. These reflective research notes helped with my awareness of any arising researcher bias and allowed me to be aware of and process my own experience. I offer an excerpt below for illustration:

> *Met with [participant code] today for our second interview/participant check. He agreed with most areas and my comprehension of the data from the interview. He said there was one area I didn't really seem to get though and he wanted to clarify it. This was around experiences of discrimination within his cultural subgroup at the host location. In my initial analysis I saw his comments as referencing people who wanted to carry over practices and ideas from home without any change, a kind of rigidity. I interpreted this as saying that the international student needs to be open-minded and flexible about the host culture and the different lifestyles and ideas. I wondered if he was saying you can't expect to maintain the exact same life in the host culture as at home. Wrong! He saw the events described as minor examples of a greater issue of discrimination that was malignant rather than benign and he worried that this could plant seeds for the kind of hatred and violence based on religion and culture he saw happening in his home region. This would ruin the quest for a peaceful life that brought him here.*
>
> *I realize now my bias as a member of my culture played a part in this misunderstanding. I had noted [participants'] concerned tone and the fears he voiced but my own values with regard to protecting religious freedom made me hesitant to approach it this way. I am more comfortable with the idea of protecting the rights of members of minority religions/cultures rather than concerned that this tolerance may have a negative impact, although of course this culture and country is not immune to the impact of extremism. This student voiced a real potential fear for international students who come from an environment where personal safety may be threatened and discrimination can be associated with serious consequences.*

The data gathering interview drew upon a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) of open-ended questions related to various aspects of the participants' lived experience of cross-cultural transition during international study in a relatively homogeneous host environment and factors that influenced this experience. Examples of questions used include: "What incidents or experiences related to your cross-cultural transition stand out for you?," "What has made your transition experience more difficult?," "What has been helpful during your transition experience?," and "How has your experience affected you personally, in terms of you own well-being?" A semi-structured interview design was chosen to allow me to follow the participants' subjective experiences and what they deemed important or meaningful rather than following an agenda based on my own presumptions or information found in the existing literature. This was particularly important given the lack of information available on international students in small centres. This design also ensured that international students were provided the opportunity to speak about a variety of salient topics and facilitated the participants' description of their experience. As such, the specific structure of the phenomenological interview was shaped by the participants and the interview guide was viewed as a description of the content areas likely to be explored. Prior to commencing data collection the interview questions were piloted during a mock interview session with a graduate student who was a newcomer to the city in order to refine the interview protocol used for the study (provided in Appendix E).

Initial interviews were approximately 1.5 to 2 hours in length. As this was longer than originally anticipated I typically updated participants regarding the time

approximately 1 to 1.5 hours into the interview but allowed them to decide the point at which their story had been told and the session was terminated. The interviews were audio recorded digitally and I later uploaded them to password-protected files on my computer and transcribed them.

Following completion of all first interview sessions, transcription of the interviews, and initial analysis of themes that emerged on an individual level, participants were emailed (see Appendix G), as agreed, a summary of research findings along with sample quotations from their own interviews and a second interview was scheduled. This second semi-structured interview acted as a participant check following initial analysis of the individual data and provided an opportunity to determine whether I had understood and presented participants' data accurately, to clarify information on either end, and to gather any supplementary information. Initially, in the research design phase, I had envisioned this interview as more focused on further data collection to ensure data saturation. In reality, the length of initial interviews and the volume and richness of data collected at this time led to data saturation in this first interview and no novel information was gleaned from the second session. The second interview did, however, help bolster the validity and rigor of the research by allowing me to conduct a participant check on data at the individual level prior to aggregating the data. I could thus ensure that my understanding was consistent with the lived experience of the participant. The participants generally agreed that the information reflected their experience but provided clarification for any points where this was required.

In this second interview and participant check, the participant and I reviewed the initial findings from their interview and I invited her/his input on each emerging theme. Finally, participants were again asked if there was any further information related to their experience as an international student in St. John's they would like to share or any outstanding questions they had. This session generally took place in-person, however, a telephone interview was utilized in one case where the participant was no longer in the country in order to maximize their role in the validation process.

In the second interview phase, one of the participants felt, after reviewing the quotations, that he/she had spoken too harshly about his/her home culture and reported feeling guilty about this. The participant asked that specific sections of quotations be changed or removed. The participant was invited to view the complete transcript and indicate any other areas they did not wish to have published, although this invitation was declined. This was in line with my commitment to participants' owning their personal information and the ongoing nature of the consent process.

All participants in the study indicated that the interviews were positive experiences and that they appreciated the opportunity to voice their experiences and help others understand what it is like to be an international student in St. John's. Most participants noted that they thought research on this topic was important and that they hoped the information would help improve supports for those here to study abroad.

Data Analysis and Assessment

Data was analyzed using Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis (1978), which is comprised of the following seven stages:

1. Acquiring a sense of each transcript
2. Extracting significant statements
3. Formulation of meanings
4. Organizing formulated meanings into clusters of themes
5. Exhaustively describing the investigated phenomenon
6. Describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon
7. Returning to the participants

In addition to the above, an additional participant check was added after initial thematic analysis of transcripts at an individual level to increase the rigor of the analysis. Each stage will be described in detail below.

1. Acquiring a sense of each transcript. The researcher should begin by getting a sense of each interview, or "protocol" as termed by Colaizzi (1978). I conducted all participant interviews so that I could draw upon this experience throughout the analysis. I listened to the audio recording of each interview as soon after the interview as feasible and within 24 hours. This allowed me to denote important impressions and ideas while the exchange was fresh in my mind. I also completed the interview transcription, which allowed me to immerse myself in the data and connect the written words to my experience of the participant in our interview. Once transcription was completed, I listened to the recordings while reading the script at least twice more. This greatly facilitated the analysis as I grew increasingly familiar with the data and was able to integrate verbal content and observation. Reactions, ideas, and potential concerns were noted throughout the analysis and salient notes were made in the transcript margins.

2. Extracting significant statements. In this second phase of analysis, significant statements were identified and highlighted in the transcript. Colaizzi (1978) describes these as "phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon" (p. 59). Considering the scope of the experience of being an international student in a homogeneous host culture I chose to cast a wide net in this regard. Criteria for significance included pertinence of the statement to the phenomenon under investigation and the research questions, significance suggested by the content (e.g. the participant denoted it as "important" or the answer was in response to a question about important experiences or factors), nonverbal indicators (e.g. tone of voice or body language), and frequency with which the topic was brought up. Significant statements were cut and pasted into a separate document. The significant statements were then reviewed again and any redundant statements were integrated or removed in line with Colaizzi's guidelines. The final number of significant statements extracted was 516.

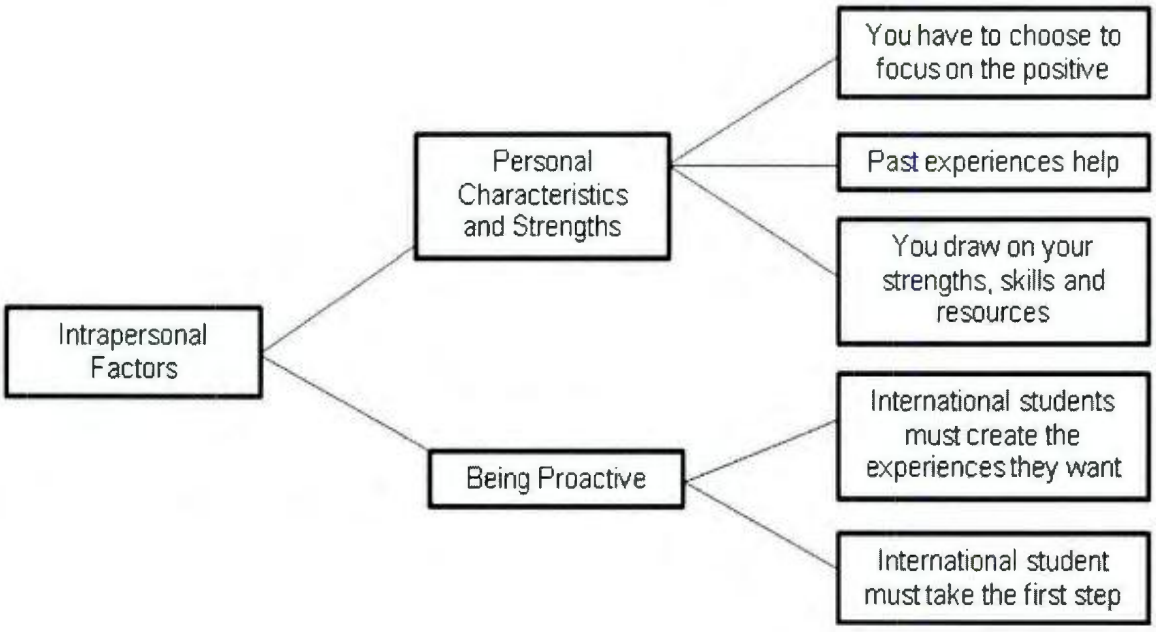
3. Formulation of Meanings. Next, the researcher formulates more general restatements or meanings from each significant statement. As Colaizzi (1978) explains, above all at this step is "the phenomenological researcher engaged in something which cannot be precisely delineated" noting that, "he must leap from what his subjects say to what they mean" (p. 59). Bracketing, as previously described, was important here. I had to suspend my own presuppositions to make sure the meaning intended by the participant was the focus. It was also important not to let pre-existing theory shape this process as Colaizzi warns against formulations that "would impose conceptual theories upon the data, and would not allow the data to speak for itself" (p. 59). This involved going back

to see the original context of the quotation to ensure fidelity. In my decision trail I also recorded my process of arriving at a formulated meaning taking into account content, nonverbal data, context, and any relevant information, elaboration, or clarification arising from the second interview. An example of this process taken directly from the decision trail is provided in Figure 1 following.

Figure 1. Example of Decision Trail from Quotation Through Analysis to Formulated Meaning

4. Organizing formulated meanings into clusters of themes. The formulated meanings that resulted were then arranged into clusters of themes. The challenges of the previous step are magnified here as we move onto themes common among participants (Colaizzi, 1978). It was important to continually refer back to the original protocols to ensure nothing in the emerging themes was unsupported by protocols and nothing in the protocols was omitted from the themes (Colaizzi, 1978). Analysis resulted in eight thematic clusters that contained 31 themes. The analytical process was again recorded in the decision trail. Colaizzi (1978) cautions the researcher that a certain tolerance of ambiguity is necessary at this stage and to avoid "ignoring" themes that seem incongruous. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the hierarchical relationship between a thematic cluster, and examples of the themes and meaning units within it.

Figure 2. Example of Thematic Cluster, Themes, and Meaning Units



5. Exhaustively describing the investigated phenomenon. The fifth step of Colaizzi's method of analysis requires the researcher to integrate data and themes into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon as described by the participants. There should be a focus on the essence of the phenomenon of interest based on the lived experiences of the participants resulting in a detailed description of the emerging data. This stage will be fulfilled by the results section of this document, which will provide an exhaustive description of all thematic clusters and the themes within them, integrating a number of participant quotations to exemplify the supporting data.

6. Describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. The researcher then reduces the exhaustive description to the essential structure of the experience of interest. In this section the resulting themes and thematic clusters are integrated into a cohesive and comprehensive description. The end result should be a concise summary of what makes the phenomenon what it is, the indispensible aspects of the lived experience. According to Colaizzi (1978), information used here must have been endorsed by more than one participant, although in this study the majority of participants were represented.

7. Returning to the participants. The final step of Colaizzi's (1978) analysis typically involves bringing the essential structural description of the experience back to the participants and requesting their feedback. Participants in this study were provided with this description and a summary of the findings including all thematic clusters and themes. This was an important step to ensure comprehension of findings given the academic tone of the essential structural description and potential for language barriers. Participants were asked "How does this description compare with your experience?" and

"Are there any important parts of your experience I have left out?" The majority of participants responded to this invitation for feedback and all respondents indicated satisfaction with the findings. Had any conflicts arisen, they would have been addressed and new information integrated into the description.

Validation Procedure

Validation of quantitative research tends to target evaluation of validity (internal and external), reliability, and objectivity, as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Given the stark contrast in the core objectives and values of quantitative and qualitative research, as reviewed earlier in this document, it stands to reason that when applied to qualitative analyses these criteria lose their evaluative significance and do not provide appropriate standards for evaluation (Creswell 2007; Giorgi, 1997).

Based on these important considerations, standards created to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research specifically have been adopted for this study, particularly the established guidelines for qualitative rigour espoused by Creswell (2007) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) and those gleaned from the phenomenological literature specifically, as referenced throughout my description of the data analysis steps (Colaizzi, 1978). As a review, specific validation strategies employed included:

Bracketing. As previously described, bracketing allowed me to articulate my biases and presuppositions regarding the phenomenon of interest.

Diverse sample. The purposeful recruitment of international students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, ages, academic and marital statuses helped add credibility to the findings. This choice was made to enhance the likelihood that

findings would describe the essence of international students as a diverse group rather than specific cultural subgroups.

Extensive engagement with participants. The choice to incorporate two individual interviews and a final participant check over the course of a number of months provided an extended period of contact with the participants in this study. Additionally, the lengthy nature of the initial interview helped develop a collaborative relationship.

Triangulation of data. In this study, triangulation of data sources was achieved by utilizing two interviews, researcher observations recorded in field notes, and the two participant checks described, as this ensured data collection and analysis did not rely on a single contact with participants.

Detailed descriptions. Verbatim transcription of interviews and utilization of direct participant quotes helped convey the voices of the participants, offer transparency with regard to relevant data, and allow readers to make their own decisions regarding transferability of findings based on a *rich, thick description* indicated as critical for meaningful qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Consistency. Apparent in the systematic approach to data analysis, which faithfully followed the steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978) to ensure an orderly and careful consideration of each stage.

Recording of the research process. Documentation of the process provided an additional step toward trustworthiness. Throughout the data gathering and analysis phases I kept a reflexive journal where I recorded results of my bracketing exercise, thoughts and observations before and after interview sessions, and any thoughts or concerns that

arose. This reflection and articulation of process was continued with the use of a decision trail that detailed the decisions made at key phases of the analysis providing a clear trail of the research process.

Review of research/debriefing. Although intersubjective validation is not typically part of Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis (1978), favouring verification by participants instead, a collaborative review was added to the current review to further enhance the rigour. My research supervisor, who has expertise in qualitative research, reviewed 30% of the protocols all the way through the analysis. This allowed him to play the "devil's advocate" role of the debriefer espoused by Creswell (2007).

Member /participant checks. Recognized by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) requesting feedback from participants regarding the credibility and completeness of results is viewed as an essential step in phenomenological research (Colaizzi, 1978). The current study utilized two participant checks, after individual and aggregate analysis, to maximize this strategy for validation.

Viewed together these numerous steps provide a comprehensive approach to validating the results of this study.

Chapter 3: Results

This study explored the lived experience of international students studying in a small city with relatively limited cultural diversity. Goals of this research included contributing to the understanding of the international student experience in the field of clinical psychology from the perspective of the students themselves, information on the process of acculturation within culturally homogeneous and non-traditional receiving sites that lack considerable multiculturalism. The purpose of the current chapter is to present the qualitative findings of the study. It includes an account of the thematic clusters and themes that emerged from participant interviews along with a description of each thematic cluster and direct participant quotations that reflect their significance and meaning for the participants and enliven the description offered. The final section of this chapter provides a summary of the essential structure of the phenomenological experience of these nine participants.

Prior to commencing the interview sessions, all participants completed a demographic information form (relevant information reported in the previous chapter). With consideration of the small size of the host institution's international student community, and the resulting implications for maintaining the privacy of participating students, age ranges and region of nationality were recorded rather than more specific information. Additionally, the use of pseudonyms and individual participant descriptions frequently utilized in qualitative results chapters will not be presented here for the same reason. Providing participant profiles or linking numerous statements to particular pseudonyms could make it easier to identify the students who participated in this study

and, thus, compromise their privacy. Therefore, only brief participant descriptors will accompany the quotations provided.

Description of Thematic Clusters

The nine international students who participated in this study provided a total of 516 significant statements related to their lived experience of studying abroad in a small, predominantly homogeneous host culture. Eight thematic clusters were identified through extensive analysis of the meaning of these statements and all nine participants were represented within the emergent thematic clusters. These thematic clusters offer a view into the phenomenological experience of these participants and are provided in Table 1 following.

Themes also emerged within these thematic clusters and are provided in the following descriptions. Where, upon close analysis, statements fit into more than one theme they were sorted as such. The number of participant lived experiences represented within each theme were between 4/9 and 9/9, although 90% of themes represented six or more of the participants. It should be noted that all thematic clusters, regardless of number of statements or participants included, are considered meaningful with regard to the participants' lived experiences. In the interest of information and ease of organization, however, thematic clusters, numbers of significant statements, and participation rates are presented in Table 1 following. Table 2 provides a list of corresponding themes and the number of participants represented within each theme.

Table 1

Thematic Clusters, Numbers of Significant Statements, and Participant Representation Rates

Thematic clusters	Significant statements	Participants
1. Influence of host environmental context	82	100%
2. Influence of academic context	53	100%
3. Process of cross-cultural transition	80	100%
4. Language challenges	48	100%
5. Supportive relationships	127	100%
6. Meeting across cultures	74	100%
7. Intrapersonal factors	48	100%
8. Personal significance	56	100%

Table 2

Thematic Clusters, Themes within Clusters, and Participant Representation Rates

Thematic clusters	Themes	Participants
Influence of host environmental context	Characteristics of the host environment	100%
	Daily living challenges	100%
Influence of academic context	Institutional support	100%
	Student-professor relationship	78%
	Academic adjustment	100%
Process of cross-cultural transition	Pre-arrival expectations	67%
	Early phase of cross-cultural transition	78%
	Immersion	67%
	Separation/Segregation	67%
	Navigating evolving cultural identity	67%
	Choosing a life	78%
Language challenges	Language ability and improvement	78%
	Local dialect	67%
	Implications of language issues	67%
Supportive Relationships	Host national/local support	89%
	Cultural subgroup support	78%
	Support from home	78%
	Spouse/partner support	44%
	Roommate support	67%
Meeting Across Cultures	Cultural differences	78%
	Integration challenges	89%
	Sharing culture	67%
	Positive experiences with locals	89%
	Stereotypes, biases, and racism	67%
Intrapersonal Factors	Personal characteristics/strengths	78%
	Being proactive	78%
	Dealing with living alone	89%
Personal Significance	Living the life	89%
	Cultural fit/Sense of belonging	67%
	Ambassador role	56%
	Personal development	100%

Thematic Cluster 1: Influence of Host Environmental Context (82 statements)

Excerpts under this thematic cluster described the impact of the context of the host environment on the participants' lived experience of studying abroad. Significant statements fell into the themes of: (a) characteristics of the host environment, or (b) daily living challenges. All nine of the participants shared information within each of these categories, whether helpful or hindering in nature.

Characteristics of host environment. Several characteristics of the host environment featured prominently in participants' description of factors influencing their cross-cultural transition including the small size and friendly nature of the host city as well as the lack of multiculturalism. While some participants acknowledged that the size of the host city was a "disappointment" and noted the adjustment involved for those from larger centres, for the most part participants spoke of the advantages of studying in a small urban centre.

One potential advantage, for first-time international students in particular, was that St. John's seemed to be a more manageable and less overwhelming destination compared to large metropolises. As one participant stated:

> That's why I say it's a huge risk, but a risk that was definitely worth taking, coming to St. John's . . . especially because it's my first time living alone abroad. So I'd say that as an international student here, and for the first time, that was a great step for me. It's not like those big places where you meet lots of crazy people.

For others, the "quiet" and "peace" offered by a small community and the slower pace of life was a welcome break from crowded home cities. One participant remarked, "I think it's good, because I'm from a country with the most population in the world. And I don't

like a lot of people around me, it makes me very nervous. Less people is good for me," while other students noted, "This is a small place that's true, but it is quiet and peaceful and it's simple. Life is not that complicated" and:

> I went to Toronto two years ago, I didn't really like it there . . . I always wanted to come back to St. John's. . . . Because where I come from, the city is quite busy. It's like China, for example, you see everybody on the road and like everybody trying to get to work is quite busy. So, I don't know, I just like it here.

For some international students living in a small city furthered some of their goals for international study, resulting in satisfying accomplishments:

> I'd say that if I went to another city, a bigger city, it would be different. I wouldn't be at the stage that I'm at right now. . . . I wouldn't be able to achieve anything from what I have achieved here. And I've achieved really big goals I wouldn't think of, think of at all.

> I chose Newfoundland instead of Toronto or Montréal or Vancouver because this is a smaller community. The primary reason is that I don't want to go to a place where there's a lot of people from my country, because that makes no difference, right?

Students were, however, keenly aware that the advantages of a small urban centre meant a trade-off in other areas. Participants noted that they needed to find new activities and ways to cope with the slower pace of life. As one student shared, "So, I got a house downtown. Pretty much when I got here I knew that was the only place I could stay that wasn't too quiet. So when I get bored I can just walk down the [main] street."

Another characteristic of the host environment identified as important for participants was the friendliness of the local community, consistent with the reputation of the host location. Eight of the participants commented on this characteristic bringing it up numerous times throughout the interview. These international students indicated that this friendly demeanor was a positive factor and stated, "I cannot imagine people can be

nicer. Like people are really going out of their way to help you. This is so nice!," and "I think that this place is a very, very good place to adjust because people are very. . . . I found that local people are very good and friendly and also helpful . . . that part was positive for me."

The friendly atmosphere also appeared to help these academic sojourners feel more accepted and at home in the host environment with participants commenting: "People are friendly here . . . they don't make you feel as a stranger. They're really friendly, really nice." and "I'd just say people here help a lot. They're not exposed to lots of internationals but they're understanding, so . . . they don't make you feel as 'the other'."

One participant commented that this friendliness was not limited to members of the local community only but rather all host nationals, saying, "The people in St. John's like to think they're the only friendly people in Canada, but that's not true!" Overall, however, participants indicated this was a distinct characteristic of the host community, particularly in comparison to other potential study destinations:

> I would say the people of Newfoundland and St. John's in particular, are very welcoming. When you're in the cab, when you're going on the bus and everywhere. Like they want to know about you, they want to know about your culture and all that. It's not always like that everywhere.

On the other hand, several students shared that this friendliness was often "arm's-length" in nature. While locals were welcoming and pleasant in casual encounters, getting to know them personally or forging relationships across cultures was far more difficult to achieve, as exemplified in the participant comments: "First, for example for: "Hi, how are you?" they're good and very nice, but more than this I think they don't like" and:

> Well I did say that people here are friendly but at the same time. . . . Like they'd meet me, they would talk to me a little bit, and then they'd alienate me. . . . I've got nothing to talk to you about. . . . Like they would be nice to me but I'm not really welcome around them.

This finding is presented in greater detail in the *integration challenges* theme within thematic cluster 6.

A further characteristic of the host environment highlighted by participants was the lack of multiculturalism in the host community and the impact this had on the international students' experiences. A key aspect of this for the participants was the paucity of international knowledge they perceived among host nationals, with one student stating, "I think most people know hardly anything [about other countries]" and another relaying:

> I was once asked to talk about [my country] in the community, which was like really exciting for me and I was really disappointed that no one even knew where [it] is . . . not lots of people know where I'm from. So, it's like a disk, I have to repeat every time that I'm from here, it borders this and this, and no, it's not a desert.

This perceived dearth of international knowledge was also discussed within the context of the academic experience. Students were disappointed that coursework tended to focus on Canadian or North America examples with little integration of international perspectives:

> Sometimes you do use a lot of Canadian examples. Like "In Canada . . . ," it gets us really pissed. Like can't you talk about China? Can't you talk about like other places? And you have to know a lot about Canada, for example, to be able to do well here. You have to understand the culture, the way they do things and all that.

This participant went on to say that she saw this North American ethnocentric focus as contributing to cultural generalizations within academia as well, with inadequate recognition of cultural differences:

> Like I think the profs are trying but there was a time in the class . . . [the instructor] was like, "In Africa . . . ," like the example that was given, I've never seen that in my country. So they generalize everything . . . Africa is a continent! You say like, sometimes they'd be like do you know Kim, for example, she's from Zimbabwe? That is another country! That's like me saying do you know Kay; she's from Mexico? Like how would you know Kay? It's kind of a hilarious but they should try to learn about other people's cultures as well.

Additionally, participants pointed out the implications of this perceived lack of multiculturalism for their international study experience, with one participant drawing attention to the impact on potential for making connections, "St. John's people are not very international here. . . . How many St. John's people do you know that have relationships with internationals? I think it's very low." Some overlap was found between this theme and those of *stereotypes, biases, and racism* and *integration challenges*. Lack of multiculturalism was seen as fostering stereotypes and decreasing opportunities for cultural sharing that could serve to increase multiculturalism. In this way, the scarcity of international exposure within the host community created difficulty for some participants.

Finally, in describing the impact of the characteristics of the host environment participants recognized that they combined to create some unique elements. This encompassed both positive and negative aspects such as a less stressful environment than the home culture, a strong sense of isolation, and a "very private and very reserved and preserved environment." As one student said:

> St. John's is very, very different. I think I can judge that very well because I'm very well travelled. And it is definitely very interesting compared to all the other major cities in Canada, like provincial capitals for example.

The isolation of the host location was viewed as both an advantage and disadvantage for participants who stated, "[It's a] little bit isolated, but that's kind of a good thing for me too. Because the reason I want to be here is I want it to be peaceful" and "It is a small place and it is really, really isolated, it really is. And this sometimes really is an issue," with the latter participant going on to say, "When you're living [on campus] and not in town you're not spending that much time in town really. You're . . . living in a bubble." Another participant found the simpler life of the host culture was a source of satisfaction and peace noting, "The biggest feeling is that I'm more peaceful here. . . . So I'm living a more simple life and I'm dealing with mostly friendly people. I don't have a lot of complexity here in my life."

Daily living challenges. Challenges associated with daily living in the host location were overwhelmingly indicated by participants in this study and comprise the second theme related to the influence of the host environmental context. All participants cited challenges related to health care, food, weather, housing, and finances.

It is notable that, although not asked specifically about this topic, a number of participants brought up the issue of adequate health care. Students acknowledged the benefits but expressed concerns about access to doctors, saying "I find here, free healthcare is great, but what's the use of it when you don't have good doctors or you don't have doctors at all?," "Doctors here are an important problem," and "Fortunately I didn't

need a specialist, but what happens when someone needs a specialist, for example? It's a worry, always a worry."

The unavailability of international food was also indicated as a hardship for a number of participants in this study, with students describing it as "important" and the first obstacle encountered upon arrival. As one student aptly stated:

> Yeah, food is such a big issue… Like to some people it's just food, you've got everything here, why do you need your food? But it means a lot to me. So not having access to my food here is a big, was a huge disappointment.

Another participant concurred, indicating that food from the home culture was the main thing she missed:

> I didn't have a lot of homesickness, although after one year I began to miss the food from my culture. I'm not a very good cook and I cannot cook but my mom does, so I really miss that. And I cannot find the same food here… but other than that I don't have a very strong feeling of nostalgia.

For several participants, however, growing accustomed to the food of the host culture was a process of adjustment accompanying other cross-cultural transitions. One participant ceased being a vegetarian because it was "so expensive," while another noted that food is a greater hardship for those who ascribe to religious dietary specifications. Several participants stressed the necessity of being flexible around food in the host location, saying "I can eat anything" and:

> I like local food. I don't think mashed potatoes and gravy is a good food but I noticed everybody likes it here. So I've been loving that lately. Actually, some of the things are quite as good, about the same taste and all that. They are just fine. No, I don't really miss the food. I'm just not very particular when it comes to food. When I got here I felt like I really do not care much for my local food. I eat it once in a while but I find that it takes too much time and too much resources to do.

Although international food was acknowledged as somewhat scarce and expensive, some participants described considerable effort to find food from the home culture and great pleasure when successful. As one interviewee relayed, "[A friend] told me about this international market. . . . So I got products [from my country] . . . I've been making corn cakes, I started making it and also chocolate. And that was enough, you know? The chocolate and corn cake." Another noted, "You can get it from Toronto or Ottawa or Montréal, like a big city. So if you have any friends go for a conference there you can request that they bring something for you."

Given that the host location is known for its harsh climate and long winters, it is not surprising that the weather was indicated as a living challenge for international students in this study. For many students the local weather was a sharp contrast to their home climate and the challenge was particularly daunting, with one participant stating, "I remember times when I would just wake up and . . . I would just go back to sleep, I'm not going to school today. It is too cold and I have to walk in it" and another agreeing with, "[My roommate and I] don't know snow, so we're just inside looking and praying that someone will come and help us." Others who originated from colder climates were somewhat blasé about its challenges, stating, "A lot of people complain about the weather here; I really like the weather. . . . It's really not that bad compared to my hometown" and "They're complaining about the weather, but it's not unusual for me. I like winter; snow is the best. . . . The weather is, I don't think it's a problem."

It was also interesting to note that some overlap emerged between this area of challenge and positive attitude, a further theme that emerged from the analysis. One participant from a south-of-the-equator nation noted regarding a co-national:

> She told me "Enjoy winter!" And she's been the only person that's told me, because even Canadians, Canadians complain about the weather, you know? . . . So it's something like when she told me to enjoy the winter it was like wow, cool, you can! There's the skidoo, and skiing, we went to [a ski resort], and I know people who skate on some ponds around. So yes, there are things.

For another participant from a hot climate the reality of the Newfoundland winter could not measure up to the continual warnings and came to be viewed as a challenge to be overcome:

> The cold is not too bad . . . I think what prepared me was like everyone was like you're going to die! Canada is so cold! I'm like, okay, let's see. And then the cold came and I was kind of disappointed. Like is this what you're saying is cold? . . . Is this all you've got? Like there are only about six or seven snowstorms and I'm like, is this everything? . . . But it wasn't too bad actually. I found it pretty mild.

This same participant went on to highlight a greater appreciation for fine weather days in the host city:

> I do believe that you cherish when the sun comes out. But because in [my country] the sun comes out every day so I could care less if the sun comes out. But now, like when the day is so warm you just want to run in it and don't go to, I almost feel like I should not go to work when the days are nice. . . . St. John's weather is shitty usually, really shitty.

The impact of weather on freedom to get around the city was also observed, with one participant saying, "Something that I find boring is because I can't walk I have to take a bus or have to ask [my partner] to give me a ride. So that's the thing, it's very dependent on weather, highly dependent."

This introduces a greater topic of restricted freedom due to limited options for public transit found within the data. Several students expressed frustration with the poor public bus system available in the host city and how it impacted their ability to achieve greater exposure to the host community and the culture. Students expressed a particular interest in exploring areas outside the city centre but found their independence limited. One participant concisely summed up the issue saying, "I really do wish that I had a car, then I could do more. I feel like I don't do as many activities as I would like," while another added, "It's really hard to get a ride or share from the community." This issue was compounded by the exorbitant car insurance costs for arriving internationals, as one participant conveyed:

> I called the insurance company and I was like okay, I want to buy a car for $1500 and they're like oh, your insurance will be $3700. I'm like, did you hear me wrong? I said the car is worth $1500! And they said it's not about the worth of your car, it's about you being a new driver here. I don't get any credit for driving in [my country] for a long while. It's just crazy!

Financial stress was also a common topic discussed. One graduate student noted, "The price of everything goes up rapidly here. Say in terms of house rent, in terms of groceries, in terms of oil costs, everything. It's a lot of money." The hefty tuition fees shouldered by many international students contributed to this stress, an issue particularly bothersome for a European student whose home country offered free tuition:

> You pay a lot for your courses . . . it's two or three times as much as a Canadian guy pays. And this is like, you feel it's very unfair because you're sitting right next to your neighbour and you know he's from Ontario or whatever and you're like okay, we're here enjoying the same education. Why do I have to pay more?

Although it might be assumed that international students receive financial support from their families, a number of participants in this study were largely or wholly paying their own way and feeling considerable pressure around money:

> Not like I can call my mother and say I need $1000 or maybe $2000 for my tuition, could you transfer to me? I can't do that. All things I need to figure out myself. I need to figure out what I should do this summer. First of all, I need to make sure I can survive, I can have money to buy groceries, pay my rent, pay my transportation. . . . It's a lot to take and I'm very, very tired every single time.

Moreover, one student shared that in addition to supporting her own studies she was bound to provide financial support to other family members, in line with the cultural expectations of her home region:

> So all I have here is I'm living on my savings in the past and work here. So I guess that's a little bit unique. Because a lot of students . . . they have family support and I have no family support here. Instead, I have to support my family at home with what I have here.

This student was particularly discouraged by the lack of recognition of financial need by the host institution and employment limitations:

> Sometimes I feel a bit frustrated. For example, I really need financial support and I would like to have two graduate assistantships. But they gave it to another girl, who doesn't have any work experience before, rather than giving it to me who, personally I really needed it because I was supporting my [family]. . . . So I was really a little bit frustrated when I see that they decided to give this girl, who has no other needs or other work experience.

Finally, visa issues, limited shopping options, and housing were further daily challenges noted by participants. One student shared his confusion around the limited rental market in the host city, "It was crazy because it got to a point where you started to think is Kijiji real or . . . ? Because by the time you called they would say it's taken, it's spoken for. But you just posted it today!"

Thematic Cluster 2: Influence of Academic Context (53 significant statements)

The second thematic cluster that emerged from the qualitative data analysis focuses on transitions related to international students' academic experiences in particular. Themes noted within this thematic cluster were: (a) institutional support, (b) the student-professor relationship, and (c) academic adjustment.

Institutional support. The first theme, institutional support, was comprised of participant perceptions of the supports provided by the host institution and noted by all nine participants. The vast majority of statements here described the assistance offered by the university's International Student Advising office (ISA), which runs an array of programs and services for international students attending the institution. Overall, the ISA was held in high regard by the participants who said "The ISA, international student advising office, they are also trying to work hard for the students to support or to help newcomers. They may have some limitations, but they try their best" and:

> I'd say that the international student office . . . they did a really good job. They were kind of the people where I went or where I would send an e-mail to when I had questions, if I had questions. So they were definitely really good in what they were doing and . . . I personally think they do help a lot of international students. . . .They have also like a coffee club where you can go like if you want to, you know, connect to other international students.

Career support, specifically, was noted as an area of strength with regard to institutional support as well:

> Where I have been visiting a lot is career development here. I found it just great! Like in [my country] private universities have these kind of things, connections with employees and how the industry is going, how can you fit there and all this stuff. But public universities, I'm from a public university, it's like: save yourself! . . . So I find it very supportive. They have a focus on international students too… and the workshop I'm doing is for international students.

Several participants, however, particularly graduate students, stated that their schedules did not allow them to avail of helpful ISA resources. One doctoral student declared, "Graduate students don't have time to go [to the ISA]!" Other participants confirmed barriers to accessing this resource, noting, "I'm sure I would be able to gain lots of friends from there . . . it's just inconvenient for me, like for my schedule" and:

> They help a lot, they do. . . . I had a roommate that used to go and I just looked at him, like you must have a lot of time on your hands. But he's in a different boat because even during school I work, even during the semester. But he doesn't work, he just goes to school. So I think he has a lot of time. I don't have that luxury.

Other statements within this theme involved general perceptions of support from the host institution. One student indicated that a faculty member set her up with a language exchange partner, while another participant, who was an experienced traveller, was impressed by the institution's attention to providing for the basic needs of incoming international students. Another graduate level participant, however, noted that lack of financial support and employment restrictions for international students limited her ability to provide for herself and caused considerable hardship:

> The only thing that disappointed me is that a lot of people were given scholarships or fellowships before they came here, but . . . I came in May. So when I came here I was given nothing, no financial support at all. . . . The first six months we cannot work. We have to be registered as a full-time student for six months and that doesn't include the language.

Student-professor relationship. A second area of note for the participants in terms of academic experience was the student-professor relationship and how it differed from their home countries; seven out of nine participants commented under this theme. Many of these international students commented on the more casual nature of this

relationship and the greater accessibility to professors as well as their increased support, experiencing these as positive aspects of the academic experience:

> My profs have been very friendly and very helpful in every way. . . . So the communication between student and profs, it's really good and I say this is probably one of the best advantages of [the host institution]. You would not have that in Toronto or Ottawa whatsoever.

> The prof I had my first year, she was quite understanding. Like if you don't understand what she's talking about she's ready to give out extra time, extra, extra, extra time for you. She's ready to like explain to you for you to understand the assignments. Because she understands that you're coming from somewhere different and the teaching process and everything is quite different.

One graduate student's supervisor was particularly integral during the early phase of cross-cultural transition, providing accommodation so the participant could arrive before residence opened to get used to the host community, "So [my supervisor] actually picked me up at the airport. . . . Because first term . . . I wanted to come earlier . . . he and his wife made it really easier to stay my first days."

For many of the participants this was a marked departure from the relationships with faculty they were used to in their home cultures: "I realize that most professors here are very understanding and they're very patient. Because the kind of study in [my country] is very different, Africa in general is kind of different from here." Others echoed this sentiment, noting the contrast with student-professor relationships in their home countries:

> I found here that the profs are also very, very friendly. So if you don't understand anything go to them and check with them. They are really interested to teach you what you have to learn or how you have to learn. . . . Home university profs . . . there is a gap between the prof and the student in that level. . . . It's more casual here, not so friendly there.

> Moving from [my country], like being in contact with your professor is not something you do because they are not, most of the time they really do not have time for you. So for the first semester I was not in contact with any of my professors. I remember my English professor, I did know that I could go up to him and meet him and ask for stuff and everything. It was about the last class before the exam that I went to him and he was like, "You don't come at the 11th hour and ask for help!" "Okay!" I will sure be doing this next semester.

This considerable cultural difference was difficult for some students to adjust to, as described in the following quotation:

> Any of my profs that I didn't see at all from the beginning of the semester to the end of semester, I tend to do really poorly in the course. But if I go and meet you all the time, even if I understood the topic and I just want to talk about it a little bit just for me to be comfortable here, I tend to do really well in the course. . . . Sometimes they really want you to come but I feel like I am disturbing them.

For some graduate students, however, the importance of the supervisory relationship in the progress of one's academic career and the investment required for international study made this relationship an area of considerable concern, despite describing their supervisors as "kind" and "supportive." One student remarked, "I'm a little nervous when I see [my supervisor] really. . . . He's a nice person though, but I'm nervous. He's like a boss; he decides your fate." Another participant concurred, saying, "I think because I'm international . . . Canadian students have a lot of rights. . . . If my supervisor is not ok, is not ok with me . . . then what? What will be my life?," and went on to note that these worries have precluded visits home to visit family and friends:

> Graduate students always have research work. . . . I worry about my supervisor. For example, if I go home or if my supervisor wants to publish something or write a paper, if I'm gone it's not good. I'm very sensitive and stressful person and it's not good. . . . but I'd like to go and my mom and my sister are always saying, "When are you coming?"

Academic adjustment. Adjusting to the academic culture of the host institution was also noted as a challenge by all participating international students, comprising general adjustment to the academic culture, and learning and studying in English.

For some students the international study experience also marked the beginning of their postsecondary studies. These students were adjusting to both being a university student for the first time and role expectations in the host culture. One participant stated, "When I came here it took me a while to adjust, which was also because of the university experience. I've never been to university before." Even for more seasoned postsecondary students, however, there were often considerable differences from their academic experiences and expectations at home:

> The first few weeks you probably need to understand what the profs want to do, what they want to teach. . . . Still here what the prof teaches you, sometimes it goes over your head. . . . The first few weeks you figure out and try to adjust to the materials and all those things. But later on that's good.

> In my first semester I did really bad because . . . I had to register from [home] and I didn't think about, I didn't think about how to schedule my classes. . . . I had little time to study and I wasn't prepared to, I guess I did not really understand the level of study that was expected of me. . . . [My GPA increased] because I know what is expected.

The content of coursework and style of teaching was also noted as a difference for some students. One experienced student mentioned that limited background knowledge made it harder to keep up initially:

> When I'm in class and they start talking in class and he gives examples . . . either from the US or from Canada, I wouldn't be able to know what he's talking about. So I have to go back and Google what he was talking about. Oh, so that's what he was talking about. But then I get lost. So in my first two years, academic years, I fell behind, I would say because of that.

A graduate student noted that the responsibility students carry for their own learning goals was also a major departure from previous academic experiences:

> I guess what's important is what you want to learn. It's your business. And they will offer you what you want to learn, they will answer your questions, but you have to have your ideas first. That's quite different from our culture because . . . ours is mostly lectures and training.

Additionally, language was described as playing a large role in academic adjustment for participants. Going from studying English as a second language to complete immersion within the academic environment was challenging, particularly in the early weeks of their studies:

> Class? I think it's good. At the first part . . . we are just looking at the instructors and the instructor's mouth is opening and closing, opening and closing, but what are they really talking about? I'm not sure I get them 100%. But we have handouts, they have slides, and we have the topic of the course. We will know a little bit of what's going on.

> Like I've been doing well, I haven't failed any course, my average is good, but I really had difficulty with the first, one of the first courses I took. Because every week was a new topic, it was a three-hour class. So it was blah, blah, blah, blah, and I couldn't understand, I could catch words and sentences but I'm just, sometimes I just stop and ask myself, "What if someone comes and asks me what is he talking about?" I couldn't answer. I know the general topic but not what he's saying or what he is explaining.

Even international students for whom English was a first language reported some difficulty, as expressed by this participant who grew up studying in British English:

> I was kind of finding the books that we're supposed to read different. Like the way I'm supposed to analyze it and all that is quite different. When I write sometimes the prof wants to know but what is the meaning of this word? I was like: "That is an English word!" "Oh, okay, okay. That's okay. I'll just look it up."

This finding is examined more closely in thematic cluster 4, which describes language challenges.

Thematic Cluster 3: Process of Cross-Cultural Transition (80 statements)

The third thematic cluster to emerge from data provided by these study participants focuses on the process element of cross-cultural transition and statements that corresponded to its particular phases and chosen approaches to acculturation, comprising comments from seven out of nine participants. Statements within this thematic cluster are organized by: (a) pre-arrival expectations, (b) the early phase of cross-cultural transition, (c) immersion, (d) separation/segregation, (e) navigating evolving cultural identity, and (f) choosing a life.

Pre-arrival expectations. In exploring how participants made the decision to come to the host institution, data indicated that for many of the participants the host location itself was not a major consideration in the decision-making process. This is particularly interesting given that the host centre is a non-traditional receiving site for internationals. One student summed it up by saying, "I never heard of Newfoundland before I came here, as a lot of students would tell you." Graduate students explained, "We didn't know about Newfoundland. . . . Just my husband found a supervisor in his major in [the host institution) and applied and we didn't know anything about Newfoundland," "So I came to focus on the two professors . . . I didn't look at other universities" and:

> That's how I ended up here, like because of this book, then the researchers, the university, and the last thing I found out was the city, right? The last thing I knew was that I was coming to St. John's, Newfoundland, cold weather all of this.

Given the high cost of fees for international students a number of undergraduate participants also cited the relatively lower cost at the host institution as an important

incentive noting, "I met a prof from [the host institution] . . . and she basically said well, when you ever decide to study in Canada come to us, we have the cheapest tuition fees" and, "When I looked at the price of the tuition fees I fell in love with the university."

In discussing their expectations of the study abroad experience in the host country and how these expectations measured up to reality, participant statements in the study varied. One student was disappointed that reality did not measure up to expectations influenced by marketing, stating:

> There are like a few issues where I think that what I pay is not worth what I get. It's like paying a lot of money for a book and then you get like five pages. . . . When I came here my expectations were fairly high because [of how] the website looks. You know, you look at all these awesome pictures and stuff, you have great expectations.

Another participant, who shared struggles in making social connections, regretted the decision to come to a small urban centre stating:

> After I think two or three months we always said oh, we should have applied to another university in a bigger city. For example, two weeks ago we have been to Montréal. . . . And I think it was very good, better than here . . . because a lot of internationals . . . I don't know, everything I think better than here.

For other students aspects of the sojourn were disappointing, however, these concerns receded as the students adjusted or as circumstances changed. These participants stated, "I was a little disappointed that it was very small. But over time I began to like it because I normally live a quiet life" and, "The first semester I thought I made a big mistake in choosing [my program] . . . but I did learn something that could be useful."

In several cases expectations for the international study experience were met or exceeded. One graduate student stated, "When I came here I found everything just went as I imagined." Expectations regarding discrimination and racism in particular seemed to be areas where participants were pleasantly surprised:

> When I first . . . decided to come to St. John's, to Canada, or to what my mom calls "the West," she's like . . . watch out, keep your religion to yourself. They don't like Arabs there . . . you're an Arab and a Muslim too, so you've got to watch out. But when I came here I'm like - they're awesome here! What's really amazing is that you tell them you're an Arab – you're respected. You tell them you're a Muslim – they respect you more. I'm like, that's amazing! . . . I've been around Canada; it's not like that in other places in Canada.

> I helped a couple . . . they just came here from Pakistan. . . . When we were going out to look for places I kind of have my mind prepared in case we run into somebody who was a little bit . . . had a little bit of prejudice or something. . . . So I just prepared my mind to give them a little talk. . . . But I was surprised; it was fine. Okay, maybe you worry too much.

Early phase of cross-cultural transition. Regardless of expectations or preparation, participants' statements regarding the early phase of their cross-cultural transition stood out in the study data with seven participants commenting on this topic. There was considerable overlap with statements categorized under *daily living challenges*, indicating that most of the experiences cited here were negative or problematic in nature. Statements in this theme, however, referred to the initial stage of the participants' cross-cultural transitions in particular as indicated by participants themselves.

A graduate student participant spoke about the influence of early experiences on the cross-cultural transition in general, as noted later in *positive experiences with locals*:

> I guess this transition has a lot to do with your initial experience here too. But some people will not have very pleasant experiences when they first get here. And as time goes on they perhaps didn't have many more pleasant ones. And I guess in the first year, if they don't have more positive experiences than negative ones, they would develop more nostalgia and homesickness and negative feelings towards here. And sooner or later I believe they will move out of this province, even if they don't move home.

Overall, the participants in this study indicated that the initial months of their sojourn were difficult and at times overwhelming stating, "The first six months are not that positive," "So it was yeah, hard at the beginning. . . . And I was like, 'What am I doing here?'" as well as:

> Like the first time I came I was like, "So what am I doing here?" . . . I would say it was kind of hard for me here, I mean in St. John's. Because when I came at first I experienced culture shock. It was really difficult for me. It took me two years to make friends around . . . so I always wanted to go back home.

> When I first came to St. John's as an international student everything is new to me and . . . I don't know actually which one is actually good for me. At each one of the steps I have to think, I have to contact, I have to talk with somebody . . . so many decisions. Say, for example, I need to open a bank account. Which bank is good? I need to buy something for myself, which places should we go to? So many things…

For many students time and adjustment to the transition were the solutions to these issues. Some participants indicated that they relied on co-nationals for help during the initial days and weeks in the host culture. They also reported a variety of ways of coping including making sure that they kept their lives manageable as they adjusted:

> A little bit nervous in the first place, every single step I did very carefully and afterwards I know all the things going on in my life. Because my life was very simple - school, home, grocery store. . . . And when I really know about that I feel a little bit better.

Specific issues such as adjusting to local food, understanding academic expectations, and financial stress were highlighted by participants. One graduate student with an advanced level of English skill described the taxing effort involved in adjusting to daily English use:

> [My friend] brought me to his family, for the first few meetings there I just . . . dozed off when they talked about things because I didn't understand. . . . [Over time], I realized my English really improved. I can like, when I'm gathering together with [his] family I never doze off. I can understand what they're talking about.

Overall, the awareness of time as a critical element in the process of cross-cultural transition was evident within the participant interviews. While these international students identified numerous and varied challenges, particularly in the initial phase of transition, they also saw many of these challenges as ameliorated by passing time. Participants stated: "Time is so magical! For a lot of things…," "It's just: give me time," "So it takes time," and "Time will say, actually." Time was endorsed as a key factor in learning how to approach acculturation, dealing with challenges such as lack of international foods, a harsh climate, employment restrictions, academic expectations, and adjusting to the local dialect and demands of studying in English.

Immersion. Many of the participants in this study expressed an approach to acculturation that tended to be described as immersion, with six of the nine participants addressing this approach. Participants sought to immerse themselves in the host culture, including the language and the community, in order to make the most of their international study experience.

For some students selection of an immersion approach was a conscious decision. One graduate student explained, "I guess when I'm with Newfoundland people I'm taking the Newfoundland identity more" and went on to say, "I don't maintain a bi[cultural] identity . . . I'm more immersed. Even [my friend] said sometimes he doesn't realize that I'm a person [from my country]. He says I'm just like him. And I feel like that too." Others concurred that immersing themselves in the host culture allowed them to achieve a sense of belonging within the community, as further detailed in the theme of *cultural fit/sense of belonging* in thematic cluster 8. Moreover, some participants indicated that successful immersion was not as difficult as one might expect, as an undergraduate student noted, saying, "It wasn't difficult for me. . . . It would surprise you how much Newfie vocabulary I have in my repertoire. 'Yes, b'y! Geez b'y, wha?'"

Participants cited a variety of advantages to cultural immersion in the host location, suggesting a number of reasons underlying their choice of acculturation approach. One common response was a sense that the international study experience is primarily immersion-focused in nature and that the main objective of undertaking such an experience is to have an opportunity to immerse oneself within the language and culture of the host location and get to know and understand the locals. Students stated: "When you come to a new country, you don't want to hang out . . . with your people. You want to hang out with new people," and "All international students coming to study are here to learn new things basically. And there would be no point if I just come to Canada and still I'm around the same people [from my country]." These comments suggest a decision to focus on cultural learning and experience.

The decision to culturally immerse oneself was also seen as a means to an end for a number of participant goals, including a desire to increase English proficiency and build support networks:

> You know this has a lot to do with your involvement in the community. If other students don't have this opportunity to get to know other people or get to know the real people for a long time, then they don't have any chance to improve their language.

> Say in your classes, if you're doing your undergrad here, then probably you are one of only one or two students out of say 30 or 60 students. . . . So you have to adjust with those guys . . . you need to create your own environment with those guys. Otherwise, even in your study you can't get help because you are alone.

Moreover, participants encouraged international students to respect and adjust to the cultural values of the host community as part of the role of an international student. As one participant noted, "You can't say no. It's wrong from where I come from and it's got to be wrong here. You can't do that!"

Participants also spoke of how they immersed themselves in the culture and steps they took to increase their exposure to the host environment. The primary approach described by participants was to avoid relying heavily on co-nationals for socializing, not allowing themselves to speak and socialize in their native language but forcing themselves to practice their English:

> I'm training, training to speak and listen and also I don't have, I don't know a lot of [co-nationals], so I don't have any chance to talk [my language]. . . . I pretend I'm just a person in Canada. So I'm thinking in English and I'm speaking English all the time.

> And then later I moved [outside the city]. That was the turning point of all my experience here. . . . When I say it's a turning point it's because I got involved in the community . . . I even found a job in that neighbourhood.

> I think sometimes people could push themselves more. I mean I, myself, when I was travelling I always avoided [my co-nationals] because I, you know, because they want to hang out with you all the time. So I'm like well, I'm sorry but...I didn't travel thousands of kilometres to speak [my language] and hang out with [people from my country]. Sorry, nothing against you personally but that's just . . . not the point of the thing.

> A lot of people told me the best way to learn a language is to use it. Why push yourself into the corner? You will jump out, become a new person. . . . Everything I did is to jump into the new environment and do not even give myself, how do you say, swim or you will sink or something? Just jump in.

Immersion, however, was not without its sacrifices and some participants noted that absorbing oneself in the host culture lead to losses in the home culture:

> I have a friend . . . she always talks about the conflicts between her and her brother, the cultural conflict. What she cares about is so different from what they care about. And the way she speaks is so hard for them to accept.

> Sometimes you miss the really small things. . . . In my family . . . when we are away and would come back home from work or from school we kiss [my parents'] hands. . . . I remember one time I was there . . . and my brothers were there and my father comes back from [away] . . . and they all kissed his hand and I gave him a hug. . . . So he doesn't say anything about it, but my brothers they realized it and it was like well, some people forgot a few things. And it hit me back and I'm like, I felt really bad. Because it is, it's part of who I am . . . it might be the smallest thing, but it's part of who I am.

It is also of interest that the two participants who did not endorse the value of immersing oneself in the host culture as an international student, indicating instead a tendency to stay within their cultural subgroups, shared the most difficulty during their cross-cultural transitions.

Separation/Segregation. A fourth theme comprised participant comments from six individuals related to separation or segregation among international students, particularly regarding tendencies to socialize and develop relationships within the cultural

subgroup rather than venturing into the host culture. Some participants, as noted, expressed feeling more comfortable with people from their own countries or cultures and experienced major barriers to making connections with host nationals:

> I had Canadian friends but . . . I couldn't make friends, real friends with them. I'd like to be but I couldn't. . . . Some international students . . . have real friends, Canadian friends. . . . Maybe it's possible, I don't know. I haven't experienced it.

> I think, for me I'm more comfortable with Africans. Because I'm still yet to understand the Canadian culture. . . . I just like, I am very comfortable with them . . . we believe that if we are together we are like brother and sister because we are far away from home.

One student went on to say that while developing relationships with other internationals was a more accessible option, cultural differences made this less desirable and increased reliance on co-nationals:

> A lot of students [from another country are] here, in our department. So we have an opportunity to connect with them, but their culture is a little different because they are very, very friendly and we don't like. . . . We socialize just with [co-nationals].

Most of the quotations in this theme, however, involved participants' negative evaluation of segregation as an approach to acculturation. A number of participants described knowing international students who remain largely segregated from the host community and saw this as an impediment to a successful cross-cultural experience. A graduate student suggested that students from her country who stay immersed in their cultural subgroups continued to see themselves as foreigners rather than integrating into the host community, noting, "I don't know other countries' students, but a lot of people [from my country] will still think they are [their nationality] and they are different from

other people . . . especially when you're dealing mostly with your native people." Others shared similar views:

> The guys, like they've never, I don't think they've ever been . . . outside the environment they grew up with. They move the environment from back home to here and sometimes it's hard for them to accept new stuff. There's lots of situations where they say, "Why is that? Why is it like that?" They start nagging about that. Hey, you're not in [your country]. That's Canada, you've got to deal with it. . . . They really find it hard. I don't really find it hard anymore.

> People come to Canada to get the exposure that is true, but only to a certain extent. For example, if you have a look at the bigger communities, like particularly the Indian people and the Chinese people, they basically only do stuff with their kind. With people of their own . . . you have these Indian events where I'm the only guy who's not from India. . . . Wouldn't it be wonderful if you would have really people like not only me but also other Canadians and stuff, you know, get this exposure?

These participants' own decisions to choose an immersion approach and avoid segregation were indicated as a potential source of conflict in their relationships with co-nationals. One graduate-level participant described this as more prevalent in graduate students than undergraduates while another noted, "I'm actually the outsider to them, because okay, he doesn't hang out [only] with us. . . . Most of the times I'm not really welcome because I'm the traitor."

Moreover, participants indicated that they were sometimes marginalized by members of the host community despite a desire to become more immersed:

> I had a couple of friends, they're from St. John's, I met them here, but I helped them get jobs in [my home region], teaching jobs. So when we were at a restaurant they were asking where you guys are from. And I'm like we're from Canada, St. John's, Newfoundland. They look at me like *we* are from Newfoundland and *he* is from [home country]. Okay, excuse me. Sorry! . . . I know more about Newfoundland than you do! [emphasis added]

> You live in Canada but [the government] makes it clear that you don't belong to Canada. So that's, that's a bit troubling. They make it clear that you're here temporarily.

Navigating evolving cultural identity. A further set of participant responses within the influence of academic context involved these international students' awareness of their evolving cultural identity and how they navigate it. A total of six out of nine participants provided data under this theme. A notable aspect of this process appears to involve a move toward a bicultural identity (Berry, 2006), in which aspects and values of the home and host cultures are influential for the sojourner's identity, and in some cases this was clearly named. The reality of this shift toward a bicultural identity was conveyed as challenging, however, and biculturalism could be viewed as a personalized process occurring in degrees:

> I still kind of struggle with my cultural identity and which culture I should take, whether I should take a bicultural identity or something . . . I guess unconsciously I'm trying to pick up a few things from my culture and immerse it here. But mostly I'm like a Newfoundlander.

> But it's much better if I can spread my wings and learn a lot of things, learn how people live life. I just kind of see like this as the time where you just choose the life that you want for yourself and your family in the future. So I'm just beginning to, I will just take hold of this and see "Do I like this?," "No, I don't." I just kind of take it as I go. So yeah, it's been working so far.

Comments on conscious efforts to blend aspects of the home and host cultures were primarily centred around maintaining meaningful values, particularly in the areas of relationships and diet, with participants commenting, "Most important is food, I don't want to give that up" and "[A person who values family], that's who I am. You can't change that . . . that's a huge part of me. I can't get rid of that." These participants

indicated that while they were open to new cultural ideas in many areas, others were off limits:

> Obviously we want to hold some things from our culture, because we also have some good things. . . . So say that in the case of family, relationships, say the husband-wife relationship and all those things. We have some different views in our culture.
>
> I still have some like eating habits and . . . I still keep to myself and just, I have my principles. . . . I'm willing to know what's going on here and how people look at things, but I won't be on board with everything they did.

One participant noted that getting to know other internationals who had found a successful balance between embracing the host culture and maintaining valued aspects of the home culture was reassuring. This experience allowed the participant an example of how family life could look in the host environment:

> I've also found here a few families from our same community. . . . They are living here for the last 30 or 40 years. They had their kids here and they've now gotten married to local people…but still they are in touch with the family, celebrating the two different cultures and functions. And also they respect [both] these parents… So . . . multicultural, yeah.

Some participants in this study also conveyed the blending of cultural influences as a somewhat inevitable result of cross-cultural transition and awareness of this process as key:

> [My friend] is still struggling because she's holding onto [her] culture. She's older than I am. I guess, you know, the younger you are the easier for you to have that cultural transition. She's in her 50s, and that's really hard for her to give up what she had . . . for her, it's like she changed without realizing that. I changed but I know I'm changing. It's different.

For one student who experienced a lengthy cultural re-entry on an extended visit to the home country, the process of navigating cultural identity became increasingly difficult as the costs of cultural learning were recognized:

> One time I was with my family . . . and I did something, not proud to say what it was. . . . My father directly corrected me . . . he's like just to get you back on track, that's not how things go on here. You got your space, like we respect who you are, but again you are back in our house. . . . He's not the type that's "Do this and don't do that," he's just . . . respect is a huge thing back there.

This participant summed up the reality of biculturalism for those who intend to return to their home culture by saying, "And new things are good but it's always good to stick to the old. . . . I know in the end I've got to go back to what I am."

For one student hoping to stay in the host country the concept of a bicultural identity blending values of the home and host cultures provided personal benefits and guidance with regard to raising children with a multicultural mindset:

> If you want to come here and then build yourself up in your own way, adjusting this culture and your culture, then you'll know how to teach your kids, your future generations about the culture and what should be the right one.

This participant emphasized, however, that to successfully achieve this balance the international student must see the value of the host culture and approach cultural learning and experience with respect and openness, an approach that some fellow international students were perceived as rejecting:

> [They] can't accept the culture. . . . If you don't love people or human beings from your inside or from your heart, then you can't respect. If [they] are a Christian and [they] are celebrating Christmas, you can't respect that. . . . If you have kids . . . I don't want my kid to go to your home to celebrate Christmas because I don't like those things, because I only believe whatever I am doing. . . . They define the cultures in terms of religion! So that's their problem, I guess. So then you cannot expect a very good relationship in the future. . . . If you don't have [respect for others], whatever you're doing it's just acting, nothing else. And that will not make any benefits for you.

Choosing a life. The final theme that emerged within this thematic cluster centred on the idea of choosing a life. Comments from seven of the nine participants within this theme involved decisions about the future and the uncertainty that often accompanied this process.

A small but interesting subset of statements emerged with regard to whether participants undertook their international studies as sojourners, temporary residents in the host country, or pre-immigrants of sorts for whom study abroad was a first step toward immigrating to North America. Indeed, five of the nine international students who participated in this study indicated an intention to stay in the host region, either in the host province or somewhere in Canada or the United States. In comparison, three of the participants noted that they had not firmly decided whether they would return home and just one participant indicated a clear intention to go back to their home culture.

For a number of participants the decision to live and study in a foreign country was seen as a first step toward building a new life abroad. One participant in this study indicated a desire to stay in the host community, stating: "I'm staying here . . . because I love it here, in St. John's in particular." For most others, however, future plans were less clear despite a desire to immigrate:

> We have applied to stay here . . . St. John's or anywhere in Canada. It depends on actually everything – time, location, results, opportunity, all those things. . . . Because we have no option to go back home in my case. No option because the topics, right now whatever I am studying here, there is a very, very rare scope in those kind of developing countries. . . . So probably we will stay here.

It is notable that a number of these individuals identified political problems, lack of opportunity, and safety concerns in the home country as influential factors in this decision, as described more fully in the theme *living the life*.

For some, perspectives on the temporary nature of their residence abroad changed over their time in the host country:

> Before coming I always said I want to come back, I want to study and learn, but I really want to come back here and use what I learned in my own country blah, blah, blah. But when I came here I was like no, I want to stay! . . . I really like this place, and…it's been a really positive relationship with [my partner].

> I was teaching and I hoped that one day that if I go back home I can still go back to my University, because they are keeping my job for me. . . . Although after two years I have changed my mind; I think I'm going to immigrate here and find a job here instead. . . . It's a big change.

Another participant reported an intention to keep an open mind about future options, choosing not to make a decision until it was necessary to do so:

> And being in [my home country] may offer me the opportunity. I don't know yet, but it's possible I will stay and it's possible I might go back to [my country]. . . . It depends on how I feel like by the time I finish my studies and stuff.

Thoughts of the future, uncertainty, and potential issues upon re-entry to the home culture weighed heavily on the minds of several participants in this study. For a number of these international students the course of their future was ambiguous as they were interested in remaining in the host culture but were anxious about governmental regulations or family ties:

> We don't know what happens next for our life. We have to go back to our country or . . . I don't know. It feels very bad, this is bad because . . . it's stressful. . . . We always think about what will happen in our life next or we can find job or post-doc. I don't know because we are not . . . we are not very young anymore; we'd like to settle somewhere.

> I know at a certain point I will, I'm not going to stay in Canada for the rest of my life, a certain point I'm going to go back there and be with my family. So . . . unless I can get them to move here, which is out of the question. But I'm really attached to my family so I really want to go back there, but why would I go back there if I've got nothing to do there? So that was my main issue last time I was there.

Changes in the immigration process for graduate students and the task of finding employment were also highlighted as worries:

> Normally graduate students could apply for a visa, permanent resident of Canada in second year, but the rules have changed and we couldn't apply for a visa. We have to find a job and then apply, very bad for us because . . . I think most of the jobs need PR, permanent resident, and we don't have. . . . We are PhDs but we can't apply. I don't know why.

> Another difficult thing here is that, like I was a teacher, if I wanted to find a teaching job here it would be difficult for me. Because I used to teach postsecondary and here I cannot teach with what I have. . . . So perhaps I cannot, I'm not able to find a teaching job. And besides, the teaching methodologies are so different from what we have back home. I'm afraid if I apply what we did over there to here it would cause me trouble. . . . That gives me difficulty to find a job.

Students who had decided to stay in the province also expressed concerns. For a participant whose spouse intended to immigrate to the host community following completion of her program, concerns centred on adjusting to one another and rebuilding a life together:

> I guess when I immigrate and when my husband comes here, he doesn't speak English, I have to go everywhere with him. And I don't expect to have a lot of good friends or life friends with my workmates, because you know that's really difficult, right? So, I guess the future life will be just the two of us and a few good friends and that's all. And this happened in my life back home too.

Finally, participants voiced apprehension regarding re-entry to the home culture saying, "When I come back to my home culture it will be a hard time for me, to have another transition" and:

> When I go back [home] and hang out with my friends that have stayed where they are, where they were, they're my friends and everything but I can't see myself hanging out with them because I can't, I don't have anything to relate to with them. When I went abroad and suffered from being away he was home partying.

Thematic Cluster 4: Language Challenges (48 statements)

This thematic cluster refers to the impact of language on the lived experience of being an international student. Living and studying in a second language introduces a steep learning curve for many international students as they adjust to the host environment. Notably, however, international students who studied in English throughout their academic career, and/or for whom English was a first language, also noted language-related challenges as an important aspect of their international cross-cultural transition. Themes of data within this thematic cluster were: (a) language ability and improvement, (b) local dialect, and (c) language implications.

Language ability and improvement. Language emerged as an important factor in the cross-cultural transition of all seven study participants whose first languages did not include English. As one student colourfully described the frustration of starting to learn in a second language, "It's hard in the first place when I want, my brain is already thinking of a paragraph to speak but my tongue gets twisted in my mouth." Even advanced English speakers who had been studying in the host country for years were aware of the gap between their own skills and those of native speakers:

> You might say my English is good, I'm flattered, actually proud. But . . . in comparison to someone with English as a first language, my English needs lots of work. There are lots of words I don't know. I tend to use simpler words, when they go and use really big words I don't know what they're talking about.

For some students, part of the frustration stemmed from the difference between how they were trained in English and the demands of both the academic and larger host environment. As one student described her English education, "The way I'm learning it … grammar, how to spell, how they give you a long paragraph for scientific articles [and] you read it and choose your answers . . . we don't really use that [here]." Others explained that, "The challenge is someone is speaking so I have to process right away. The writing or reading I can have my time, I can take my time" and "I am very good in the written exam but in the oral exam sometimes though everything is gone from my head."

Despite the challenges, however, some participants were also excited by the progress experienced in their English proficiency and their ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language noting, "I like language, even though I'm not good at English but I like language and that feeling. Like you just use some symbols and you can express your feelings - that's excellent!" In describing how their English language skills improved participants widely reported that exposure to conversational English and helpful others provided them with the opportunity to increase their proficiency. As a result, a number of the statements in this theme overlapped with those found in *immersion* and *being proactive*. Indeed, several students described themselves as seeking ways to become immersed in the language and culture, saying, "A lot of people told me the best way to learn a language is to use it," and noting that international students who

lack interaction and communication with locals have less opportunity to advance their English ability.

Participants shared that host nationals were helpful language supports who contributed to the improvement in participants' English proficiency. For one student a supervisor's specific feedback was particularly helpful, noting, "She would explicitly say okay here, this is the past tense or something . . . like others will just make corrections on content. My supervisor will make corrections of grammar." For another participant a friend provided a reference source when language issues arose:

> Yeah, so I'm consistently learning new vocabulary words every day. And again I've got . . . one Canadian friend where I run back and say what does that mean? I was told that, what does that mean? So some people help me with that. But again there's situations where you have to know the meaning in the moment, you can't wait.

Finally, the sense of importance attached to attaining advanced language skills and getting closer to native speaker levels also came through from the interview data with one participant stating, "I'm trying to get improved because sometimes I still feel a little hard to get the way I want to speak. Yeah, but I think it's good, a big step already. So I'm really satisfied about that." Another explained:

> I'm also a language lover and I like, I like all these grammar rules and that's why I am also very concerned in English all the time. . . . Like I want to know, because I don't like to just be understood. I don't like, yes, I got your idea but the way you speak is really bad.

Local dialect. A further language challenge facing the students was the unique local dialect spoken by many members of the host community, which differs considerably from the standard Canadian dialect. This challenge was noted by six out of nine of the participants and appeared to be more of an issue for casual contact within the

community rather than within the academic environment. Participants stated, "Very difficult to hear what [locals] are saying" and:

> I had an expectation that there would be an accent. Yeah, because everybody has their own different spin to English. When I got here I found it very interesting. Because you could be on the bus and then some people would be speaking English and you would be like, "Are they speaking English?"

Participants cited a variety of ways of dealing with this challenge. They utilized cross-cultural communication skills to help with comprehension:

> When I came here it's really hard to understand my landlady's voice, because she's a Newfie and it's hard . . . her accent is really fast and difficult. So sometimes I just, just looked at her face and try to understand what she wants to say or what she wants to mean by that.
>
> Something I've learned here, which…I never knew existed, is body language. . . . If you can't understand the words you've got to read the body language. . . . It's amazing how much you can pick up from body language and gestures and little words that you catch even if you're very confused by the whole conversation. This also helped me to fit in with Canadians.

Participants also noted that many locals were considerate in their communication saying, "One thing is that a lot of people here realize that you are a foreign person and they will lessen their accent or try to speak Standard English or lower their speed of talking."

Finally, time was noted as a key factor with participants indicating that they adjusted to the local dialect, "It takes time, say after a couple of months, say six or seven months, now I understood a little bit what she wanted to say. Now it's very clear to me because it takes time." This progress was less apparent for a student who reported primarily relying on co-nationals for social support and remarked, "The way they talk normally in Canada is perfect. . . . But the Newfoundland accent, ugh. I don't, even up until now I don't know what they're saying."

Implications of language issues. Participants also provided considerable thought-provoking data on the impact of language issues on other areas of their cross-cultural transition, with six of the nine participants commenting on its implications. While related statements tend to be represented in the themes of *integration challenges* and *academic adjustment* it is interesting to note that language is a core element that ties challenges across several areas together as well.

Building relationships was a commonly noted area where language implications were observed by the participants. Some international students interviewed thought language differences deterred host nationals from making connections with internationals, remarking, "They kind of think maybe it's too much work trying to get along with an international person, because maybe language and stuff" and "Maybe our language may be bore them." Even a participant who had lived in the area for several years and reported an extensive social network commented, "Language still stands as a barrier between me and Canadians, a huge barrier." One student struggled to navigate this obstacle to make authentic connections and share her identity, noting, "I cannot tell [them] who I am. Maybe because my language . . . I cannot . . . behave."

Another participant highlighted language proficiency as an important determinant of whether international students will be able to immerse themselves in the community and make connections with local people, rather than merely preference to stay within the cultural subgroup:

> I think the language skill is the first thing to decide which community you want to be involved in, right? Although I believe a lot of international students want to get to know the community here and to know more Newfoundlanders than their

> native people, if their language is not good enough they have to rely on their natives.

Language also emerged as a factor in intimate relationships across cultures. It impacted the participants' ability to express themselves and show others their identities and also highlighted some of the differences in cultural norms regarding communication and dating, as expressed in the following quotation:

> It's the use of words, like for example in, back in [my home country] you meet a girl and you tell her I think I love you. That's the first thing you tell her. Here you don't tell her that. You tell her I think I like you. That's how it starts. And if you start the way . . . I would be in trouble here.

Another participant who began a serious relationship with a local individual described the challenge of building an important relationship while dealing with the cognitive demands of communicating in a foreign language. In retrospect, this student recognized that aspects of the early part of the relationship were lost due to the continual demands of translation:

> [What] we still have some trouble with is when I don't know the context of the conversation; I find it really hard to follow them. And sometimes actually with [my partner], speaking with him, he just starts talking about something that I might not understand and at some point I feel I don't, I can't build relationships because conversations are coming and my brain just goes out. Like my brain doesn't process all that, so it's like not having memories . . . memories with building relationships or building a life. So it's like if my brain doesn't process my conversations and things then it's empty. . . . And you need it to build on.

The participant went on to note that one way of dealing with this constant demand was to share the load, "And at some point I told him, I would like you to learn [my language], so that you can also understand me. And now he does."

The implications of language challenges for work and academic progress were also indicated. With regard to the former, one student noted that a potential employer had

been quite transparent in acknowledging the negative consequences those who do not speak English as a first language may face in the local workforce:

> One of the jobs I applied to here . . . he told me that he can't hire me, I've got the skills but he can't hire me. I asked why and he is like because English is not my first language. I'm like . . . okay. But I understand why he says that because all his customers are [rural Newfoundlanders] and he's not worried about me as much as he's worried about them.

Interestingly, the student in question spoke English at an advanced level and was noted to be very articulate and easily understood during participant interviews. Language-related challenges also had important implications for the academic experience beyond comprehension of course material:

> I want to contribute in the class, for example, but I'm like ok, I'll just stay. If I have a question like I'll just go and look for the answer myself, you know? So that didn't really help me. . . . I'm this kind of person that I have to go to class, I have to participate, I have to ask questions for me to understand whatever is being taught in class. If I don't do that it's going to be a lot of problems. . . . So it's actually brought me really down and it affected my grades as well.

Indeed, the data that emerged from the current study also indicated that the participants saw a clear difference between language ability and language confidence. Participants noted that, despite their English proficiency, they perceived their skills as varying depending on the environment and the people around them with one participant stating: "It depends on the professor; it depends on the class. It all depends on the environment, who you're around." Another student suggested that the stress of meeting with her professor resulted in a decline in her language ability:

> After my meeting I went and talked with her about what my supervisor is talking about and she tried to help me. . . . After I think two or three months I think, I could make [out] what he was saying . . . I think it's not language, it's not English, it's . . . when I went to my supervisor's office everything is so . . .

Particularly interesting was how this impacted international students who spoke English as a first language and had completed all their education in English. Despite being native English speakers, these students were still impacted by self-consciousness regarding their perception and comprehension by host nationals:

> Yeah, yeah, it's just like when you see someone for the first time, like I'm already thinking that you're thinking that I don't know how to speak English clearly. Then when I see you I start to fumble. Yeah so . . . like I don't know what to say just because I don't want to make any mistakes. And you just conclude that okay, that's what I was talking about. So . . . people are trying to be very careful. Like most people are very sensitive to such things.

> I don't know. It's very, very happy talking to you because I don't have to repeat myself. But there are times when I go somewhere and I have to repeat myself like two or three times. It makes me self-conscious and I'm not too very comfortable with that. . . . Because you know when you, when you're trying to make a contribution you don't want to, you don't want to . . . when there's so much things to think about, about your contribution, it's like pfft! I'll just keep my mouth shut.

Both of the international student participants in this study who spoke English as a first language described a tendency to keep quiet in class due to reactions they had experienced, a tendency that differed from their academic performance in the home culture:

> I don't talk very loud and I just, I have an accent . . . I noticed if I talked in class … there is this nice level of conversation but when I talk my voice kind of like shoots off. That kind of like shifts the momentum of the class somewhat and I feel that, yeah I do. But then I spoke and the girl in front of me . . . she cringed. Like . . . it was very hard for me because I was like, "Oh, did I scare her?" So I just felt like . . . I wasn't too happy. So most of the time I always refrain from talking in class as I don't want to . . . I just find that very, I don't like it.

> If it was in [my country] I would be able to express myself more. That is why most international students, very few of them you see participating in class. Because for example, when you're talking they don't want to, to feel that their opinions are not accepted. And you know sometimes when you're talking and the person is like, "Pardon me?" It's like you're not speaking English or not speaking

> clearly or because I don't have a Canadian accent? . . . So they don't want to contribute in class. They just keep quiet.

This latter participant went on to say:

> I love talking. The thing is when I get very comfortable around people they will be like "What? Like seriously, you can actually talk?" You know? . . . When I get really comfortable around people like even, I get surprised at myself. Like I didn't know I knew this much.

Thematic Cluster 5: Supportive Relationships (127 statements)

The fifth thematic cluster that emerged from this study's data comprises quotations regarding supportive others who assisted and encouraged these academic sojourners through their cross-cultural transition. Participants spoke at length regarding the importance of social and practical support in easing the challenges of adjusting to a new environment. Notable sources of support within this thematic cluster were (a) host national/local support, (b) cultural subgroup support, (c) support from home, (d) spouse/partner support and (e) roommate support.

Host national/local support. The support of host nationals and locals during the transition was noted by eight of the nine participants. Faculty members in particular were highlighted as playing an important role. One international student noted that a faculty member set her up with a language exchange partner while another's supervisor offered temporary accommodation upon arrival and ongoing social support throughout the sojourn. The support of professors was explained as helpful for academic adjustment but also in meeting more personal goals as one student described saying, "I can feel that, kind of like they really want you to be good and want you to become the person you really want." For another participant a former instructor went beyond the call of academic

support and provided a meaningful connection to the host community and a feeling of welcome:

> I kind of connected to one of my [former] profs on campus somehow. . . . And so we end up having coffees and stuff . . . we have some interests, common interests like hiking, for example. . . . He's also very, very friendly and he made me feel like really appreciated in the province. . . . So he, he was actually a like, a big deal in my kind of fitting into the province.

Peers, including other students and friends, also played an important role in providing support. Participants noted their assistance as particularly helpful in navigating academic adjustment to the host institution: "And my friend, my Canadian friend . . . she really helped me…after my meeting I went and talked with her about what my supervisor is talking about and she tried to help me." Language support was further detailed in the previous thematic cluster entailing language challenges.

One international student did, however, highlight that in his experience support from other students specifically was more available during the initial phase of transition:

> It's a student-based community here. So they may not support you or . . . if you need some initial help they just did it for you. But later on you need to figure out your own way; it's initial support only.

Participants also identified the support received from the host community in general as helpful:

> I think it's like people from here. Like I said it's really nice, they are really helpful. Like my, like my language, or other things, they really are different from theirs but they just accept with a very open mind and they accept you and involve you. Like a number of them try their best to help you.

Additionally, the importance of individuals who might best be termed "significant others" with regard to their cross-cultural transition was noted by participants in this

study. Although these individuals were not always partners they were locals who the participants identified as having a major influence on their experience in the host location. For one international student a landlord became both a close friend and a cultural guide who helped her navigate crossing cultures creating what was described as a host family environment and leading her to comment:

> I guess my experiences are different from other people because . . . he not only gave me a physically comfortable life, like he cooks for me, we eat together, we don't separate and cook our own meals. . . . He introduced me to the culture here, the food here, he brought me to all his family here. . . . He has 10 brothers and sisters and he introduced me to everyone. And he has a lot of clients and friends here, he introduced me to them and for the big events like Christmas and things he brought me with him. So I got to know a lot of people . . . he's just like family and a close friend.

For another participant the person she is dating took this role of cultural guide and provided exposure to the local culture and life in the host community:

> [My partner] knows a lot about [Newfoundland culture]. So I found it just great. He is someone that can talk about his culture, his history, his land. So it's beautiful; I love that. He's really knowledgeable . . . so someone I learn from all the time, especially from this place, right? So it's like a strong connection to this land.

Furthermore, becoming part of a faith-based community by connecting with a local church was identified as a means of support by international students who maintained such connections in their home country. One participant noted that this support was made accessible by the church's efforts to welcome newcomers and address potential barriers such as transportation, saying, "I go to church because I'm a Christian. . . . You meet a lot of people, which is very good . . . and sometimes they provide a ride for you. So they just come pick you up and take you back home." Another participant

commented that by maintaining this connection to his faith he was also able to retain an important connection to his homeland and culture, as well as his identity, and to recognize that these need not be sacrificed when crossing cultures:

> One of the things that made my transition very nice was that I was able to find a church . . . like a church becomes the family and stuff. So it's really nice to be there and to find even some other internationals there too. . . . Back in [my country] . . . I am a very good Christian. The church is like a major part of my life. So when I got here and I was still able to go to church and feel the kind of feeling that I always got [at home] it gave me a little more comfort, like I never left home.

Cultural subgroup support. The majority of participants in this study, some seven out of nine, identified co-nationals and members of their cultural subgroup, both fellow international students and internationals in general, as critical supports during their cross-cultural transition. In some cases these international peers were the majority of their social network, as expressed by one participant who stated, "We socialize just with [co-nationals]." For most participants, however, these connections provided a link to home and source of comfort in concert with other supports. Participants were aware of unique advantages such supports provided:

> Knowing another [co-nationals] here sometimes you want to sit down and share . . . it's good just to speak the language. . . . He's the only guy that is coming from the same place I am. Actually there's stuff we can both relate to. So it's, it's good; it makes you feel less like being away.

> Since we still have some community here we can exchange and we can speak our language. So in that case we're a little bit free because whenever we need to exchange our views and in our own language and in our own ways, we can do it here. . . . This is possible because there are now a few international students from the same community . . . and that will help you a lot.

One participant remarked that the support of co-nationals was particularly comforting early in the transition when language was a struggle and saw the ISA office as a helpful resource in making such connections:

> I worked for ISA as a volunteer for a couple of semesters, with the new arrival students. . . . If they have some volunteers from say each of the countries then if someone will come from India, or if someone will come . . . from Europe . . . then those guys can exchange their views in their own language and all those things, so that's an initial backup. . . . And later on you can talk with other people and you can take your time to exchange the views.

Co-nationals were also sources of information and guidance who offered vicarious learning and practical support, as noted in the participant comments, "I am so lucky in that case, I've got a few of my friends here so for the first few days I just depended on them. They just guided me to go wherever I need to go," "The inside information . . . that made it a little easier for me," and:

> I do have one friend, she came [several years ago] and she graduated, she married, she had a baby here . . . and she helps me. . . . She, I sometimes learn from her experience because she experienced the process that I will go through.

Participants reported identifying and connecting with members of their cultural subgroups in a variety of ways, citing the benefits of social media tools such as Facebook and groups in the community, in addition to the ISA office and local churches as previously mentioned. Participants noted, "I connected with this guy through the ISA coffee club . . . we ended up noticing each other and . . . we kind of liked each other . . ." and, "Here you are in a local university and the international students you see are from these large regions. So it's hard to see the ones from my country. So I think, yeah, Facebook has been very important." Other participants from cultural subgroups well

represented on campus benefitted from a built-in support network upon arrival:

> Actually, the institution from where I completed my undergrad, there are lots of students all through the world. So the friend who went to the airport to pick me up is from my same university . . . he referred those other guys and those guys were living here for a long time.

For one participant from a cultural subgroup with less representation in the host community the first meaningful connection to the home culture noted was a fellow international from another continent who had travelled extensively in her home region, highlighting the diversity of sources for this type of cultural connection:

> And I met a French guy who was in [my country] for one year. So he speaks [my language], and he knew about [my city], so it was very exciting and interesting that he was a French guy, not [a co-national] but a French guy associated with [my country]. So it was like the very first person close to my culture.

The value of these connections with co-nationals or members of their cultural subgroup varied across this study's sample. One student strongly expressed the importance of such connections, stating:

> Well, now I can say I can survive, because I've already met them, I've already found them. But I guess, if I get here in September and it's December or January and I haven't met anyone, I will go crazy I think. I need it.

For others, however, these supports were appreciated to some degree but not seen as critical supports during the cross-cultural transition. These students emphasized that they avoided relying exclusively on support from co-nationals and, as a result, comments are shared with thematic cluster 3, in which approaches to acculturation are detailed:

> I didn't find that support [from co-nationals] very useful to me, because I don't get a lot of support from them. . . . I do have one friend [from my country] . . . other than that, I don't get, I didn't get any support from them. I don't know if this is my own personal thing or not, I don't need to find support from my native people. . . .

> I don't need to be only in that community to find comfort. I'm quite comfortable with what I am now.

Support from home. Support from loved ones was identified by seven participants as an important factor in their cross-cultural transition. The emotional support and guidance provided by these family members in particular were noted as helpful. Some participants noted that their parents had studied or lived abroad and thus had passed along an interest in and openness to experiencing new cultures, saying, "My parents are there, they already understand what's going on. . . . [My mother] doesn't really care, she can easily adjust to any kind of situation like that . . . in fact both of them. They can adjust pretty fast" and:

> I think it has a lot to do with my family. Like as I told you . . . it was their idea, it wasn't mine. . . . [My mom] has kind of a free spirit and explored the world and travel is nice and meeting new people . . . and then my dad went to [another country] for his post-grad. So both of them always said you have to go out, you have to explore, you have to. And better if it's studying because study opens your mind . . . I think they made things very easy for us. Like they are not all the time oh, I miss you and they cry or whatever and come back or when are you coming. It's like, "Hey, how's it going? How are you?" . . . So, I think my parents have also supported a lot.

Family members were also identified as helpful sources of support in difficult times, allowing participants to persevere:

> There were lots of moments when I got close to giving up. Like, I can't do that anymore. But again I've got my brothers supporting me, my parents, if I tell them I'm coming back they tell you "Okay, come back!" Still I, like whenever I think about it sometimes I tear up a bit . . . it does touch me.

> And [my husband] really gives me a lot of support. He helped me make decisions, and I guess that's really important. . . . Although every decision he helps me to make is difficult, he doesn't interfere unless it is a really important decision. . . . So he's more like a mentor to me.

Participants did, however, highlight the challenges of being so physically distant from this support. Common barriers specifically noted by international students in this study included navigating the contact needs of family members and the financial strain of maintaining contact with family and visiting home regularly:

> It's getting easier for [my mom] to get used to that. I'm away no matter where I am. . . . And she will miss me for sure sometimes, but…she will think okay, now you are doing your work, you have a chance to work and you should feel yourself very lucky. . . . My father is . . . getting used to giving me some money and getting used to accepting this fact that I'm abroad, I'm doing well, and I want to go back in a few years. So he's thinking okay, if that's good for you, that's good for me.

> When I got here, because my mom is a single parent I don't like to bother her for money and stuff. So since I got here I've just been living by my means and stuff, so I haven't been able to get a laptop. . . . When I buy calling cards . . . it's just very expensive.

> Someone was asking me, when next are you going back home? And I was like maybe after two or three years . . . because it costs about $2100 to buy a ticket to [my country] and that's so much money for two weeks. So I don't think it's worth it.

Moreover, participants were also aware that support from home was important but not always adequate in dealing with challenges in the host culture: "There's some situations where it's beyond your experience. It's beyond something you've experienced before so you don't know what to do. . . . My best friends are my parents, but . . . some things you can't talk to them about."

Spouse/partner support. Three of the nine international students in this study were married to co-nationals while one participant reported a long-term cohabitant relationship with a local. These four participants provided an interesting portrait of the

advantages and challenges associated with crossing cultures with a partner. The benefit of knowing you are not alone and sharing the ups and downs of the journey was one area highlighted by participants who said, "When [my husband] comes you have family here, that's different. It's not you struggling here by yourself. You have somebody for you" and:

> My husband when I came here and he came to the airport and picked [me] up, I think it was very easier when you have someone here. But then I think when I compared it to alone here you can experience another life. But I think it's very easier here when you have someone.

This sentiment was shared by the participant who connected with her partner in the host country, noting her openness to sharing this experience with a companion:

> Well to tell you the truth I was looking for someone, like I started thinking it would be nice. . . . So when I found him and we had too many things in common, a nice guy and everything, I said well, why not? So in some way yeah, I was like open to that.

While most of the partnered participants in this study lived with their spouses, one participant arrived ahead of his spouse and in the case of one graduate student she and her husband had decided she would finish her degree and seek work before he joined her in the host country. This was an approach questioned by many people in the participant's life but one that she described as positive:

> We have been married for [several] years and we came through a lot of difficulties together . . . I guess because of this it makes our relationship stronger. A lot of people, even our friends, will question our relationship. They say you don't see each other for two years. You don't . . . live like a couple for two years. How can you keep your relationship? And honestly, I didn't find it that hard.

While partners provided support and companionship during the cross-cultural transition participants were also aware of the unique challenges associated with sharing

this experience with a partner. One graduate student participant whose spouse is also a graduate student shared the difficulty of erecting boundaries between work and home life and the challenge of maintaining balance:

> Yeah, we always talk about in I think the first half, we always talk about our supervisor, our research, and I think it was very stressful for us. It was good . . . but, it is very bad at home to be talking about these things, these stress[ful] things. We decided to…stop that. It is good both of us are PhD students because we can understand each other . . . but also it is bad…. Before we were PhD students…we always talked about [other things].

For couples in which the partners arrived at different times, adjustments and stressors common to and distinct from the typical international student experience were identified:

> I came alone so when I came here I actually didn't know anything. I don't know where I need to go for groceries, where I need to go for this stuff, for that stuff, if I need something. I don't know which is the right place, who's the right person to contact? So once I came alone . . . I feel bad. I talked over the phone with [my wife] each day for a couple of hours or so. But I think it's better to come alone and to adjust to the environment and to make a place, to make a room. And then when your wife comes after a few months or after one year . . . once you are settled then you can just guide her. Otherwise both of them have to suffer at the same time.

> I do think when I meet [my husband] again I will have to adapt to him again. Because here, a lot of different things here. Like people here don't smoke and he is a heavy smoker. I don't know if I can get used to that smell again. And here I meet a lot of older people and he is my age. I don't know. But I believe that after a short period of another adaption or transition we will be used to each other.

An interesting comment from a participant who originated from an area where females' freedom was restricted due to safety concerns highlighted the unique implication this might have for some married international students navigating their transition to the host country:

> Here the main difference is, say you are a girl, when you grow up here you can travel everywhere, you can go here and there. But the culture of [my] country… that's not the same, right? . . . If a couple came here together then the husband or the boyfriend or whatever . . . he cannot go wherever he wished leaving his wife alone in the home.

Support from roommates. Finally, roommates were identified as a considerable source of both support and frustration for six of the nine international students in this study. Participants remarked that proximity did not always elicit connection and, as a result, people they lived with were not always viable sources of support and were sometimes sources of stress instead with students remarking "When you live with roommates that you're not friends with . . . it's a huge challenge" and:

> When I was living with the [co-national] students, they were all younger like 10 or 20 years younger than I am, so I was taking care of them and I was cooking for them and buying things for them. . . . Well I don't quite mind doing that, but when I think about I have to do this for two years it's a little bit frustrating.

Even for those who did forge a social connection, these contacts were sometimes fleeting, as articulated by one participant:

> I don't have that much contact with the students. Like it's more like . . . for example with your roommates, you do stuff with them as long as they are your roommates and then they are gone. . . . I would say it's like not a friendship for life…

In cases where students were able to connect with roommates the results were positive, however, and participants identified a sense of caring and common interests as keys to these successful roommate relationships, as articulated in the following quotation:

> I'd say for me personally the best part of housing is my friends there. So, the people you hang out with, your roommates. But if you have roommates you can't connect with, your housing experience is probably very, very poor.

In line with this, one participant described the person she rented a room from as "just like family and a close friend" while others commented:

> [My former roommate and I] became very good friends. . . . She's kind of one of my best friends and she's very busy. . . . But really every time I run into her on campus or somewhere, I'm so excited to see each other.

> I enjoyed actually, well I shouldn't say more, but I actually do. So yes! I do enjoy [living with other international students] more. . . . It takes a while, you know, you're not friends right from the first day but I'd say it's definitely an advantage to live with people from other countries. At least for me, because I'm really interested in that kind of stuff.

Thematic Cluster 6: Meeting Across Cultures (74 statements)

The sixth thematic cluster that emerged from study data spoke to the wide array of participant experiences that involved cross-cultural interactions and connections. The themes included were: (a) cultural differences, (b) integration challenges, (c) positive experiences with locals, (d) sharing culture, and (e) stereotypes, biases, and racism.

Cultural differences. The first theme under this thematic cluster involved differences in cultural norms and behaviours observed by participants in comparison to their home culture, as noted by seven of the nine participants. Many of these differences were encountered by students in the social arena and had to be navigated in order to make connections with host nationals. For instance, typical ways of socializing were indicated as a difference. One graduate student remarked that it was difficult to meet host national graduate students because there is little social time at work and "Canadian students just sit down in front of the computer until 5 p.m. and no speak and no socialize," but added that making friends with other internationals was also a challenge because "their culture is a little different."

A South American participant noted that, in her home culture, dancing is an integral part of socializing. Lacking this cultural norm in the host environment, she found it more difficult to initiate social interaction:

> So these Canadian parties, it's hard. Because everyone, everything is kind of quiet and groups of people. So when you're dancing and you're with friends, there might be groups but you can take someone from this group, if you are between friends, take this person from this group and then dance and talk. But [here] you can just sit in the group and talk and [you can't] start talking or be part of the conversation unless they are very, very good friends.

Another participant, from a predominantly Muslim culture, highlighted the prevalence of alcohol consumption in the local social scene and the hesitance some peers showed in socializing with internationals they assume do not drink:

> I would be with a couple of friends having a drink downtown and like I would see the old people I met before. And they are "Oh, you drink?" And I say, "Yes, I do." And they start inviting me to their parties. . . . It's amazing how lots of friendships, they stand on a bottle of beer. If I stopped drinking I'm sure I'll lose lots of friends. . . . I'd say that's a shame. But at the same time, lots of people got to know me as me through a bottle of beer.

Cultural differences as an issue in dating and intimate relationships specifically was also endorsed, with participants describing the challenges associated with navigating a relationship across cultures. Again, the valued way of socializing and showing interest in potential partners were notable differences:

> Well I think one thing I learned is . . . you can say it out! If you don't like that person just say no! If you like that person maybe. . . . It's hard for me because I'm from another culture. It's hard for me to just okay, I like you, could you give me your number? I couldn't do that. But I know I am eligible to do that. But in my culture maybe it's not, you need to be more shy. Like if I don't talk to you for a month you should know I don't like you, don't disturb my life. But if I really am around you every time, every minute, you should know I like you. Like that kind of culture . . . it's like behaviour language. But here it's like just you say it out.

A participant from a more conservative culture noted that the entire conceptualization of dating relationships differed in the host country compared to his home culture and this was reflected in a number of ways. He noted, "For example, relationships . . . that's really different. Like one thing [in my culture] we tend to be really protective, overly protective of our partner" and relayed an experience where he was uncomfortable with his partner's revealing outfit but told her "No, I'm joking," remarking, "I try not to show it but inside me yes, it does bother me." For this participant dating across cultures meant coming to terms with major cultural differences:

> It's normal here. Like a girl sitting on a guy's lap, to me okay, you're my girlfriend, why are you doing that? So [at home], when you date a girl . . . she kind of belongs to you and you belong to her. So here it's not that way.

Cultural differences more minor in nature were also noted by participants. One graduate student remarked, "Normally in our country we don't care about the time and punctuality." For another participant whose partner was a host national, cultural norms around meals was an area that required negotiation: "He eats a lot in the night and for lunch it's just a sandwich. Well, my custom is to have a big lunch and a small dinner" and "When we do groceries he gets his things. Like I can't eat canned food; I don't like it, or his orange juice from a bottle. No, I get the oranges, I bought my juice maker, that's what I do."

Other differences in cultural norms were, however, weightier in nature. As one participant adeptly explained the norms that provided guidance in the home culture were suddenly insufficient in the host community, leaving a sense of confusion and vulnerability:

> When I was in [my country], [I could] identify what kind of person is my kind of person and can become my friend. What kind of person, terrible person or dangerous person, you should get away from. But here it's hard to tell. . . . I don't know how to identify the person in front of my face. I don't know if the behaviour they did is normal or abnormal. So maybe I feel it's abnormal but maybe it's just because of my culture, maybe it's very normal in Canada.

Another student articulated the difficulty adjusting to the independence afforded and expected of women in the host culture for individuals arriving from areas in which the safety of women can be compromised:

> Here the main difference is, say you are a girl, when you grow up here you can travel everywhere, you can go here and there. But the culture of [my] country . . . that's not the same, right? . . . Say she wanted to travel here and there alone, she's not supposed to do that, right?

Some participants also found that locals misconstrued the cultural norms they brought with them to the host community:

> And also when we are talking we tend to touch ourselves a lot. Like "Oh [touching arm], I haven't seen you in forever, where are you?" We just talk and all that and we hug a lot. If I'm walking with my friend for example, she's a [co-national], we can hold hands when we're talking. When she's going we just hug and all that. But a lot of people, Canadians, are like, "What are they? Are they lesbians or what?"

Integration challenges. Participants also spoke at length about the obstacles involved in becoming part of the host community and eight of the nine participants commented on these challenges. As expected, there is considerable overlap between this theme and others that include more specific challenges, however, seen together the statements in this theme highlight the varied challenges faced by these international students as they try to integrate into the host community.

One perceived obstacle to integration cited by participants was a lack of interest on the part of host nationals. As noted in *characteristics of host environment*, some participants stressed that while casual encounters tended to be very friendly in nature it was far more difficult to make a true connection with host nationals and become a part of the local community:

> Most Canadian people, they are really nice. But if you want to get into their circle and become one of them, they tend to push you out. . . . So I figure it may be like this, when you really want to immerse in this community and get to know a lot of friends or become part of them, the real difficulty will come.
>
> [At home] I had a lot of friends and so I can spend my time with them when I get stressed and they will ease my stress. But here, I don't know. Sometimes I'm confused about how, why I cannot find a friend, a real friend? Because I think I'm not a bad person, I cannot tell [them] who I am.

Even participants who were successful in forging strong friendships with host nationals noted a sense of not really belonging that was sometimes encountered in interactions with local friends, as previously noted in the third thematic cluster describing the process of cross-cultural transition.

At times, feelings of not belonging lead the students to withdraw themselves from social settings:

> I don't know, I just find at times I just like to stay on my own, I guess that's what I want, but then I still don't like it, but I want it. I just like to be like by myself, just. . . . And when I just feel a little left out. . . . I'm like okay, what happened?

A female participant remarked that she found local female students particularly hard to connect with, while she saw males as more approachable:

> I would rather move with Canadian male friends than female friends. . . . I find it very hard to understand them, really hard. Because I'm trying to relate with you, just like how I relate to my [co-national] friends and you would be finding it very

> offensive. . . . But for the guys they don't mind . . . they just take it easy and that. If I'm in a class for example, I may not talk to the female Canadians but the guys are very easy-going and tend to listen to you.

A lack of cultural knowledge or skills, both on the part of the sojourner and the host nationals, was also seen as a barrier to integrating with the host community with one student commenting, "I can learn a little bit about the culture but how much can I learn in two years out of 20 years?"

Finally, the participants in this study noted a lack of opportunity to connect with members of the host community, both due to their own tendencies toward introversion or simply having few chances to make these connections. With regard to personality, one participant commented, "I'm shy in the beginning . . . I'm not this kind of person like can just start a conversation . . . I won't take the initiative," while another explained:

> I was just feeling really sad because I was wishing I had my family back here. Then I was kind of sad because I'm always indoors, I can't go out there to meet up with anybody. I was just, I don't know if you understand what I'm saying. Like I'm always indoors, I don't like going out.

Even for participants more outgoing in nature, however, limited opportunities for connection with host nationals remained a challenge to integrating within the community, with participants commenting, "If you go to a grad class, specifically in engineering, you will find that the number of local students is very small" and:

> I sometimes wish I would be more involved in town certainly . . . since the summer semester started I kind of force myself to get more into town, it's really tough. Like St. John's is not big but it's really nice, so I sometimes wish that I could . . . get more into this kind of stuff.

Sharing culture. For many of the students participating in this study the desire to share their culture and learn about other cultures was a considerable motivating force in

their decision to study abroad as represented by six out of nine study participants. As such, they expressed enthusiasm regarding opportunities that facilitated cultural sharing and learning. Participants appreciated when locals offered them a chance to experience and understand the host culture. Some participants had the support of local friends to help facilitate opportunities to experience the host culture remarking, "Whenever they've got the time they took us sightseeing to see St. John's and around St. John's, the historical places of St. John's or history of Newfoundland."

Students also highlighted that while international study provides a chance to live in and learn about the host culture it also provides exposure to a wide array of cultures through relationships with international students from all around the world. One participant earnestly stated:

> International people in St. John's or St. John's in general, I find that the best of everything is found in St. John's. Maybe that's not the case but that's what I've, well I'm glad to have met the best of everything in St. John's.

Others agreed with this sentiment saying, "I just love working with people from other cultures. You get to understand them better" and "I'd say it's definitely an advantage to live with people from other countries. At least for me, because I'm really interested in that kind of stuff."

One participant reported seeking out individuals with a common interest in cross-cultural sharing:

> I'd say the main thing with our apartment is that somebody is cooking all the time. And everyone is cooking differently . . . it's really an international flavours kind of thing. . . . We had community meals . . . where we paired up and we kind of made food for all of us. So that was really great.

For another participant the ideals of multiculturalism offered a chance to enjoy and raise one's children in a culturally rich environment that would include opportunities for cultural exchange and appreciation:

> What you can do is if you have a kid in the future . . . keep in touch with this community and also your own community and try to celebrate or try to do all the good things together. Say you also celebrate Christmas, right? Take it as a fun and social thing, you have to celebrate that one. And you can also invite your local friends to celebrate [your cultural holiday]. . . . Then you can share everything and you can understand and respect each other, no? That's what I believe actually, personally.

Along with opportunities to experience the local culture, as explained further in the next theme, participants appreciated being able to share aspects of their culture in their new home. This was quite meaningful for some participants, as expressed by one student:

> These corn cakes, everybody has living [in my country] it's not something. But now it's like a symbol, it's a symbol and it's a way to share with others. And next month [when we visit my boyfriend's family] I'm going to make corn cakes. . . . It means a lot.

Participants also appreciated when those close to them in the host culture showed an interest in learning more about their home culture:

> Actually he began to learn a little bit of [my language] . . . he's pretty good. And you know . . . if I was [his age] I wouldn't be able to remember all those things because that language is far more complicated.

> And something really nice too is that [my partner] is also willing to learn from my culture and share with my friends. So I know Canadians don't like to dance very much, but he dances. . . . He's a bit shy but he still does, he tries. Last year he took online courses for [my language]. . . . So that's another thing that has really helped me a lot, he's been with me in this.

Moreover, the appreciation of cultural sharing was not seen as one-sided. One participant noted that this reciprocal process had provided new experiences for both her and her partner as they began to look at their cultures in a new way:

> I remember my first snowstorm; it was a huge one. I was at [my partner's] place and I was just at the window staring, and snow is falling. And then he explained the snow and the clearing of the sidewalks. And at some point he said, "This is the first time I talked about how winter works!" So he also finds himself many times speaking of things he never spoke about before. Because they're always between the same people. So now with me [he] is like teaching, like I had never thought about it. And so it's cool too! . . . And now explaining to you I find it more like, again things like ah, I hadn't thought about it.

Positive experiences with locals. Building upon the theme of *sharing culture* was a further theme that involved positive experiences with locals. Statements in this theme differed due to the specific nature of the experiences described by eight out of nine participants and their identification of them as positive influences in their study abroad lives. The potential importance of such positive experiences in the overall cross-cultural transition of international students was described by a graduate student:

> I guess this transition has a lot to do with your initial experience here too. But some people will not have very pleasant experiences when they first get here. And as time goes on they perhaps didn't have many more pleasant ones. And I guess in the first year, if they don't have more positive experiences than negative ones, they would develop more nostalgia and homesickness and negative feelings towards here.

This student provided an example from personal experience, noting:

> [My landlord] gave me a very low rate . . . and what's more is he makes me more like a family here. And that's really, really important in my experience here. I guess all my experiences are positive because of him, because of that.

It is particularly interesting to note that a number of the positive experiences with locals deemed meaningful by participants took place outside the city centre. Participants valued occasions when they could encounter rural Newfoundland life and meet locals.

> We went to Gros Morne . . . it was so much fun. They can, these people here were so welcoming and they're so. . . . Like they are seeing us for the first time, because it's kind of a small community, and they were like looking at us and all that, but not in a way that you would feel bad. They just wanted to talk to us. And they were like "Wow! I love your hair!" and all that. It's good!

> They told me of this guy and I just contacted him and he, he made all the effort. He came to [the campus] and picked me up with his very own car, drove me to [his community], which was really nice for me . . . when you don't have a car. . . . So, it was really nice just you know going a little bit around the island. . . . And you know, he invited me for coffee and stuff and we somehow really liked each other . . . we were connected, which is really weird because he's probably like 75 or something. . . . I met like his family and stuff and they invited me after to dinner . . . since then we always meet, I just met him recently for coffee in town and he invited me again for dinner. This is what I really call hospitality. . . . You know it just happened out of nowhere and he is not connected in any way to the university. . . . So this is really great. I feel like this is the hospitality that St. John's is kind of famous for and it has definitely this reputation.

Opportunities to experience nature and outdoor activities in the province were also acclaimed as meaningful with participants saying, "I've been canoeing, camping, hiking, snowshoeing, all this stuff," as well as:

> Something else is for winter, last year I went to [rural Newfoundland]…and we went someplace close by skidoo. So six hours by skidoo, it was really cool. And we stopped at some spot and we made a fire in the woods over the snow. I was like this is crazy but it was really, really cool…

> On the other hand, you can really just get out there and do a hike. Whether it's a day hike, whether you want to do camping, you know, even more if you actually have a car or if you have a friend with a car. You can do so many things. So these were like very positive moments, very positive feelings I had here.

Other important positive experiences with host nationals are best described as "acts of kindness." Such gestures were meaningful to the students and remembered long throughout their sojourns:

> On my second day I was shovelling snow and my neighbour . . . knocks on the door. . . . He starts talking and I did not understand a word he said. But I do, I do remember that he said if you need anything, just knock on my door. That was really, like really huge to me. That was really amazing.

> [My friend] was very kind too because she, her parents paid half a ticket for me for Christmas when I first came. So I spent Christmas in Toronto with her and her family . . . it was really, really good. The family was just nice with me. . . . So it was a beautiful Christmas time.

> One time I just mentioned to my instructor one thing I really wanted to do, and the second day he told me, "Okay, maybe I can help you with that. . . ." Here people help other people to become the person they really want to be. That's really different, you can feel that kind of heart. So that's a good thing.

Stereotypes, biases and racism. Notwithstanding the positive experiences described by the international students who participated in the study, a number of negative experiences were recalled as well by six of the participants. Participants perceived stereotypes and biases based on their cultural or racial backgrounds as underlying such experiences in some cases, as indicated by one participant who said, "Maybe there's something in their brain about internationals are not good or are different."

Participants were sensitive to the biases and assumptions attached to their nationalities and cultural origins within the host community and experienced this as a barrier in connecting with locals. It was sometimes difficult to overcome these stereotypes, which resulted in frustration for students:

> So the way I see it is like, if only Canadians could get to know that person before judging if I want to be his friend or not. . . . It's just that once they know you're from the Middle East, they assume you're a Muslim, you are not supposed to do this and that. So they get away from you . . . they wouldn't come and get to know you. That was the main difficulty. Just to tell them hey, I'm not really what you think I am.

> I think Canadian people think about [my country], is not a good country, a poor country. And I think in their brain, oh, this person came from [that country] is very bad, is very poor country and maybe this . . . affects things in their behaviour with us and I don't like this.

Further complicating this navigation of bias and stereotype was a lack of knowledge regarding how race and culture are perceived in the host location as well as the novel experience of being a member of a minority group as noted in the comments, "Being in [a very multicultural city] . . . kind of prepared me to other cultures. So I was like ready for culture shock. But here . . . it's different being a minority here" and:

> Some people would be talking and they would refer to me as not White. Like what's White people? I am White! They're like, "No! You're not White!" but I am White. Like what am I, I do see that's White. Like do you see that's White? What am I? He's like, "No you're not, you are Middle Eastern!" Like oh, ok. I never knew that.

Participants from Africa described how host nationals generalized images of suffering, famine, and poverty, conveyed through the North American media, to international students from this continent, despite the far-ranging differences between and within nations in this region of the world:

> Whenever I come to class, most of the time everybody is just staring at me. Okay, one of those people that didn't go to school, like you are suffering and all that. And funny enough I've never seen what she was talking about from where I come from . . . most [people from my country] that are here, they are from very wealthy homes.

Moreover, an African participant highlighted how, in personal experience, skin colour seemed to trigger these stereotypes:

> I think the first thing is the colour. That is what I would say first. Because when they see an African, for example . . . we are going through a lot of stereotypes and all that. They just believe that you can't talk. There was a day, this is so hilarious, someone saw me coming. The person was already giving me sign language. I was like, "I can talk! I understand what you're saying!" Like I couldn't even understand, what are you trying to do? And he was so shocked. "You can speak English?" . . . I was like "Yeah! We were taught in English in school" and all that. He was like "Oh, okay."

Participants were also quite aware that some members of the host community appeared to be sensitive to their racial and/or cultural differences, perhaps due to the lack of multiculturalism in the host location. This was a source of great discomfort for these participants who expressed a wish that host locals could be more easygoing with internationals:

> I say that they're kind of sensitive around me, they don't want to say things that might hurt me because of my race or anything. But I – pfft! Come on! I know I'm Black, I know you're White! . . . It isn't anything to be very sensitive about.

> I realize that when I moved to Canada I became really quiet. I used to be a very good talker, I could talk for hours and I would not be tired. Like people go to sleep and I'm still talking. But when I came here I was kind of really quiet; I became really shy. . . . I think it's because of the people around me. Maybe it's a discrimination thing and all that.

> I went to Wal-mart . . . we were going around the store looking for deals and stuff. And there was a small boy, he was in his mom's shopping cart and he was like, "Oh Mommy look – he's brown!" And his mom said, "Stop!" And I'm: "Leave him! I'm brown for God's sake!" I had to give him a high five. . . . So sometimes maybe people's intentions are good, because they don't want to offend you or something, but you'd rather if people were more relaxed. I don't feel comfortable when I see that you're sensitive around me, you don't want to offend me because of that. I could care less.

While describing the impact of bias and prejudice on their experience of cross-cultural transition, many students were also aware of their own stereotypes and biases and those they encountered within the international student community. One participant acknowledged:

> It shouldn't be important . . . because people are people no matter which country [they come from]. But I know, for example, Canadians when they meet Europe[an] people or Australian people they like to have contact, they like to speak with them. But for example [Middle Easterns] or something like that . . . I think they don't. I can't say . . . I'm different from this. Maybe when I meet someone for example from Canada, just like them for Europe, I try to behave better than if I met someone from, for example, Africa or somewhere like that. It's not good but . . .

> Even up until now I believe that the United States is a very, very rough country. Like if you have to go there you will be killed and all that. But a lot of people have been there and they are like it's not like that. It's not everywhere. . . . So I think that is . . . we are just kind of myopic when it comes to other people's cultures and country and all that.

> I lived [many] years of my life in my country. I travelled in lots of places, I worked, I did my study and all those things. I had lots of friends of different religions but nobody discriminated on those kinds of things when they were staying in their country. But when they came outside the country [to Canada] they are completely different and changed . . . in many cases, they started to hate us. I don't know why.

Participants also disclosed experiences of racism, prejudice, or discrimination that were more specific in nature and related to particular incidents that occurred. Such incidents were noted in the academic realm:

> I see a difference between me and Canadians, this is annoying for me. . . . Maybe I'm wrong but I think everybody, for example supervisors . . . [really] care about Canadian students. For example, they always try to give a good project to a Canadian student. They try to . . . they always care about [if a] Canadian student is satisfied.

> There was a time I was thinking it was racism, maybe I'm just assuming in my mind. It has to do with one of my profs. Like we were having a group and all of a sudden the two Canadians in the group decided to break out, they just wanted to work on their own. These people are like behind in assignments and all that. But we're like we contribute a lot . . . we couldn't understand. Because myself and two other [international students] . . . like we were so confused. What was wrong? What went wrong? And we were all hoping that our prof would call us and ask what happened from both sides, but he didn't do that. He just said, "Oh, you're not comfortable with them? Oh it's okay, we'll just split the group."

in social interactions:

> I had a friend . . . for four months I was friends . . . we always went for a walk or something like that. Suddenly she cut our relationship. I think she didn't enjoy, I think. She was very nice and a very good person but I . . . I got that she didn't enjoy the relationship with me, international.

and with regard to work opportunities:

> Even when you're applying for a job, even if you have a work permit and you're legal to work, they wouldn't hire international students. I've seen that a lot . . . like honestly all of my friends that work off-campus, they don't have really big wage jobs. They don't, like they don't even work in sales. Most of my friends . . . janitors, security guards, chefs in restaurants. So I've realized that any job . . . where the employee gets in contact with the customer, they don't hire an international student. That's what I see.

Experiences of racism or discrimination described by the participants tended to range from covert incidents, in which the participants felt this was a factor but were uncertain about labelling them accordingly, and more obvious situations. Covert experiences were described as particularly confusing by participants as they were difficult to make sense of and left these international students wondering if they were reading too much into a somewhat ambiguous situation:

> Another small incident is . . . we met an old couple in a restaurant and I have learned to shake hands with other people, although we don't do this at home. I

> shook hands, I tried to shake hands with her but she kind of gave me a very limp touch. It seems to me that she's not very interested or she doesn't want to meet me or something. That's what I don't understand.

Other events were more overt in nature and were described as very "painful" for the participants. It is notable, however, that even in such cases participants still described a sense of ambiguity or uncertainty about how to interpret the situation or react:

> I remember being in another friend's house . . . and I just went to take something out of my bag. And they were like "Oh, you want more water?" They were just trying to figure out what I was doing. And I felt like . . . seriously? Like . . . I would steal from you? I just . . . I felt bad, yeah. But I couldn't blame them because I guess we all kind of like attach, subconsciously we attach different things to different people. But yeah, it was, it was painful.

> There was a day I was going to school and myself and a Canadian, we were about to cross. So she crossed . . . and I was going to cross. And this guy was just trying to hit me. And the people on the other side of the road they were hollering, "What's wrong with you?" Then I looked at him and he was just laughing and I'm like this is not funny. Is it because I'm African? I don't know, maybe I'm just misjudging him or something? . . . It was very, very frustrating. I was like okay then, I'm done. I'm leaving Canada. I'm going back to where I'm accepted. Like I just felt so . . . I cried actually. Because it was so painful, really painful.

One participant clarified this hesitance to interpret such incidents as racist despite experiences that might be considered clearly discriminatory in nature, saying:

> I don't like to have the impression that someone might be doing anything out of racist intentions, because of racist thinking or something. I don't want to think that thought . . . I don't entertain that kind of thinking [about racism].

Thematic Cluster 7: Intrapersonal Factors (48 statements)

A further thematic cluster found to emerge from the experiences of the participating international students highlights the attitudes and personal strengths of the participants and their sense of agency regarding their cross-cultural transition. Themes

found within this thematic cluster were: (a) personal strengths and characteristics, (b) being proactive, and (c) dealing with living alone.

Personal characteristics/strengths. The personal strengths and characteristics of these international students emerged as very important facilitative factors during their cross-cultural transitions and seven out of nine participants provided data for this theme. One of the assets perceived as most effective during cross-cultural transition by several participants was maintaining a positive attitude to cope with the associated challenges. One participant noted, "I think that's part of my adaptability. Instead of complaining all the time it's like okay, I'm enjoying it and I like it." Other participants agreed with the advantages of this perspective but noted that some international students tend to be problem-focused, stating:

> I like to be happy . . . I like to be an optimist about everything, positive about everything going on. When things go wrong there's always a positive side to look at. It's why I take it as a learning experience.
>
> Yeah actually, I believe personally that the coin has two sides, so there should be positive and negative sides. If you really want it to be good then take all of the positive things, but people have the mentality to always capture the negative one first.

and

> Maybe the international population are oh, here the locals they just smile at you, but they don't really care about you. . . . I choose not to believe that. I guess that's just how I live my life. . . . It pays to live life with a little less negativity.

Attitude also extended into how these international students approached their cross-cultural transition itself and their desire to experience and learn as much as possible from this opportunity. A participant who had been in the host culture for about a year stated excitedly, "It's like everything is possible!" while another concurred remarking:

> When I came here I came with the attitude that I want to learn, not from school, no one likes school. I had the intention to learn about what people know about me . . . as an Arab Muslim guy. . . . And coming here and seeing how people, like I got lots of respect here from people and that made me want to learn more. . . . I always want to hear what they have to say. . . . If I was still in [my home city] growing up I would never have learned that.

This attitude influenced even practical aspects of the transition such as adjusting to the local dialect, as exemplified in the quotation: "When I got here I found [the dialect] very interesting. I don't like it when things are very rigid. Maybe at times just a little twist makes it all the more interesting."

Independence was also cited as an advantageous personal characteristic by numerous participants. One student stated, "I'm an independent person, I don't like to rely on other people or depend on others." For some students this independence was fostered throughout their lives:

> I think I grew up very independent. We had very strict rules . . . but at a certain age okay, you can now go to parties, you can go now, go out in the night. . . . Mom wanted to know what were we doing, what we were up to, but nothing else.

Others described independence as thrust upon them through their cross-cultural transition or other life experiences, noting, "It's not like I don't want to depend on people, I want to depend on people but I can't. I have no choice . . . it's not what I want. I would like to have a security blanket, right?" and:

> It's not a discovery as much as you've got to be this way here. I've got no choice. . . . When I came here I needed lots of questions answered [so] I had to stand up and ask. . . . I would usually go for an easy way out with my family. . . . Here I learned that, ask for something, ask for help when you need it.

Regardless of its source, these students agreed that independence was a beneficial characteristic for the international student:

> I guess being independent from my family makes it a little bit easier for me to live here by myself. I miss my family but I'm not like other people who cannot live without them, I can. And I keep, I talk to my mom here almost four times a week. And I talk to my husband almost every day, whenever he is online. But if I don't talk to them for like three or four days, I'm okay.

Adaptability and temperament were further useful strengths endorsed by the participants, who described flexibility as critical to a smooth transition:

> I adapt to wherever I am very fast and I just. . . . Some people may not be that easy. I know some of my friends that are like oh, this place is so boring, this place dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. It's not so boring . . . it depends on your character and your . . . maybe your personality, yeah. How do you talk to people and how do you see people and stuff. I guess, yeah, I think that's one of the factors that's very important, like temperament or something. I happen to be like more sanguine, I'm just happy and laughing. It's not too difficult for me to move around with people... I'm very flexible.

> I very easily adapt to new places. Like, for example, some girls from [my region] they're like, I found plantain but it's not like back home. It's not like the plantain at home. And I'm like but it's what we have and it's plantain and it's still . . . so yeah it's different because it's a long way bringing from [South America] sometimes, but it's what we have and we have to enjoy it, right?

Another international student believed an easygoing nature might have provided a buffer for some of the problems associated with crossing cultures stating:

> I don't have a lot of [challenges]. . . . Perhaps it's because I'm a simple person. I'm not a very complicated person. I guess it's because of that personality. . . . That's just part of my personality. And I like simpleness in life, I don't like complicated things.

Participants also shared that tenacity and an adventurous spirit helped them endure through more difficult times noting, "It seems that there's something that pushes me to go through" and:

> I'm kind of like a dreamer and I will go after the thing I really want to do. And I'd rather to take an adventure, like that kind of thing. I really care about what I really like, what I really want to do. I take it very seriously. . . . The reason I came here is I want to feel more, I want to have more experiences.

Finally, the benefit of past life experiences and skills was also highlighted. Being older and more experienced than the average international student, for example, was viewed as a considerable strength for one graduate student returning to academia from a lengthy professional career:

> I guess it's several things working together, like my age group. I'm older than the other people, and I have some life experience and my language is a little bit better than other people. I don't have problems with communication.

This student went on to add:

> I think it is quite different if you're coming back to the University at an older age, I've found that you're in a different place in your life and different place in your development maybe than other students who are just starting off. I guess the mentality is different. . . . I benefit from my past experience.

Past academic experience was also highlighted as beneficial preparation for the challenges of international study:

> I came from . . . one of the best institutions in our country and also competitive in all of South Asia. . . . One thing that is helpful is that we know how to bear a huge load, that's one thing, because we're always under pressure over there. So that's the best thing that helps you to overcome these issues here.

Being proactive. A further intrapersonal factor was the proactive approach these participants took to their cross-cultural transition. Data from seven out of nine participants comprised this theme. Many of these international students noted that it was important to create the cross-cultural experiences they sought as sojourners rather than passively waiting for these experiences to happen. One key area where being proactive was espoused was in making cross-cultural contact with locals. Participants found creative ways to expand their opportunities for such encounters by moving outside their comfort zones and trying new things:

> I'm talking about real labour work that I did here like painting a house, . . . gardening, carpentry, geez I've done everything. Like lots of those I would go for them not because I want the money as much as I want the experience. You meet lots of interesting people through that and that's where you meet the real Newfoundlanders, which is amazing.
>
> If we are here only as a student that identity will limit our circle of friends to students only. . . . I get to know a lot of people of different professions. Although most of them are retired, they have a lot more experience to share with me, right? . . . And I get to know how people live here and everything.

It is also noteworthy that in creating opportunities to connect with locals and learn about the host culture a number of students reported needing to go against cultural and/or family expectations:

> I doubt if you see many [Africans] who like to canoe, kayak and stuff. I've been liking that! I've been canoeing, camping, hiking, snowshoeing, all this stuff. . . . I like to do something different, not to do the same thing over and over.
>
> I only worked for [a restaurant] as a cashier. That was a totally new experience in my life. I've never done that before. My mom can't imagine that I chose the kind of job at a minimum wage, right? Back home you're paid $100 for your work and here it's $10. That's so different! But I really enjoyed that work because that was the first time that I get to know a lot of younger people here.
>
> Those odd jobs, they've been a major part of my learning experience. If I go back home and tell my mom hey, I painted a house today, she wouldn't be proud. . . . She wouldn't be keen about the idea, but still I did it and I'm glad to do that. And I think if one day my children, I will let them do that because that's the way to connect with other people, to connect to different kinds of people. So that's, to me that's amazing.

Several participants were clear that they believed the onus of seeking cross-cultural experiences and opportunities to learn about the host culture was on the international student, saying, "It really depends on you, on you as a person. I'm really interested in culture so, you know, I'm asking questions all the time. As a consequence, I know a lot about cultures," and "I had a lot of chances but it depends on say . . . it

depends on the students' individual interests. . . . If I don't want to talk with other peoples then I don't have any chance to learn many things." From this point of view, it is interesting that the participants who reported the most difficulty during their cross-cultural transitions did not report efforts to be proactive in this regard. Moreover, there was considerable overlap with this theme and that of *immersion.* Choosing to immerse oneself in the local culture and community was a proactive decision on the part of numerous participants.

Proactivity also extended into self-care and participants noted the importance of international students voicing their needs and reaching out for help at times of struggle:

> When you are completely new here nobody knows about you, right? If you have any pain inside you, you need to tell it to somebody. Otherwise, you can't expect help from anybody. . . . It is you who needs to proceed forward. Otherwise, I personally think that you can't adjust. . . . You need to tell them that ok, I'm feeling not well, I need to do this kind of thing, can you please help me?

In addition to seeking help from others, students endorsed a variety of self-care strategies they used to maintain balance throughout their cross-cultural transitions, with seven out of nine participants commenting on this area. Several international students spoke of the importance of taking care of their physical health during a stressful time, with one participant describing this as a realization during the early months of the sojourn:

> To be very honest, wellness-wise I lived very unhealthy the first months here. Part of that was the food on campus. . . . I did not do a lot of sports. And then I did this . . . camping and a really big hike. And it totally shifted . . . it totally changed my life [here], absolutely to the best. . . . I'm more happy since I'm physically more active.

Other participants were aware of an increase in caring for their health since coming to the host country noting, "Physical has been real good, because in [my country] I don't go to

the gym, I barely have time to do all that kind of stuff. But here, I find you guys live a very active life," and "Physically I feel healthier. Because you have the cleanest water here and the best air here."

Attending to ones' psychological wellness was also deemed important, and for one student this included stepping beyond cultural biases regarding counselling services to seek support during a particularly difficult time:

> So you have got to go ask for help. And so that's where you come to, you say okay, I've got to go to a counsellor, I've got to go somewhere that won't be judgmental, that won't be judging of what I'm saying. . . . I was like okay, I really need serious help.

Dealing with living alone. Finally, participants spoke of the challenges of learning to live independently far away from family support and how difficult it was to miss their home and loved ones. Some eight out of nine participants addressed this challenge in their interviews. A number of international students spoke quite strongly about the hardship of suddenly becoming responsible for all aspects of their lives, saying, "Oh, it's brutal! . . . Yeah, really, really, really brutal" and "You must pay a lot to be a grown-up, but you must do it. But it's hard!" Some participants felt considerable pressure to take care of any problems that arose on their own, avoiding parental involvement:

> And now I really like take care of every single thing. . . . I won't tell them even if I have some troubles. . . . If I have a chance to chat with them I will tell them after the thing has already happened. I will tell them what works out.

This experience of being alone without the supports they were accustomed to lead participants to express a sense of vulnerability and stress while studying abroad. As one long-time international student recounted, "It is a challenge, especially when you get

sick. You would get sick for weeks and no one would ask, because no one has any interest in asking" and:

> I'm always out-of-control and I'm living under a big pressure all the time. I'm here, I'm all alone, all by myself and I have a lot of things to do. No one can help me. . . . And you can't tell your parents because they cannot help you and they will worry about it. And they will make things worse.

Sometimes the simple presence of others was missed, as one participant shared saying, "You know if you were back at home there would be somebody in the house, maybe your siblings or something." Another agreed with: "The house is really busy. You're always talking, you're always shouting at someone. But now it's so quiet by myself."

Individuals who described themselves as very close to their families, and from cultures for whom contact with family is very important, spoke of the ongoing pain of being separated regardless of whether they had lived independently before coming abroad or the length of time they had lived in the host culture, saying, "What's hard on me is leaving your family and parents, all are living far, far away. . . . The hardest thing is to be far away from your family" and:

> I'm thankful for Skype but still. . . . It's different and it's hard I'd say. Small moments are really important. . . . So it kind of hurts not being able to share those small moments, especially when I see on Facebook like they were out there. Hey, I like this restaurant, if only I could be there. . . . I would say that's the biggest disadvantage for me, especially coming from a really close family.

This student went on to express how sometimes the sense of missing family can actually be stronger on visits home when an international student realizes what they have sacrificed in terms of their relationships. One student who had been in the host country for a number of years described a sense of alienation from family:

> Lots of times I go back there and I sit down with my brothers and they would start talking. Now I've been away for a long time, and they would have inside jokes. And they would start joking and talking and I can't be part of that. . . . I'm like the black duck.

Nevertheless, some participants were also aware of advantages associated with living independently away from some distractions and obligations they might face at home, noting, "I'm the youngest and . . . you really don't have a say so, but here I can determine, I know that whatever I become is out of my own doing here. . . . The freedom to choose what you want, yeah" and "We can just focus on our studying."

Thematic Cluster 8: Personal Significance (56 statements)

Participant quotations found within this final thematic cluster focus on the personal meaning the cross-cultural transition holds for each international student. Emerging themes were: (a) living the life, (b) cultural fit/sense of belonging, (c) ambassador role, and (d) personal development.

Living the life. The first theme of data found within this thematic cluster entails how the study abroad experience allowed these international students to live the life they want and comprises comments from eight of the nine participants. Participants were able to accomplish goals or live in a way that could not be realized in the home culture. For some graduate students this was related to furthering their education with the financial support necessary to be successful: "It was peaceful because we can study here and take money and don't need to think about money. We can just focus on our studying. It is good in this way, from this view." Some had also made substantial investments and sacrifices to make their dream of studying abroad a reality, thus making the stakes for success considerable:

> Before I came here I really worked very, very hard about this going abroad thing. Because there are a lot of difficulties and troubles in the way . . . I really wanted to go. So, my dream, I got it. That's one of the things I feel really, really proud of [in] my life.
>
> That's really gambling to go abroad. If I win, I win! If I lose, I will lose all the things - no money and I will feel terrible in front of my parents and a lot of people maybe will have a joke about me. . . . So I really like here; they let me win.

There were enduring ideas of potential and freedom that participants described as meaningful. These international students were excited by the sense of possibility they associated with living and studying abroad and creating the life they want saying, "I will continue travelling for the rest of my life because I love it so much. And like for me it has something to do with freedom and being independent too" and "I just felt that over time, maybe by the time I leave school, probably I will live the kind of life that I want to live here." Students also shared:

> It's like everything is possible! I like that feeling! . . . Everything before was desperate, but everything now has potential to be done. That's really great! I like that feeling - hope. So I really appreciate it here, even in a hurricane, even the bus strike, even you know things are so expensive than the hometown. But I really like here.
>
> Since I was young I always wanted to have things go my way, do things my way. So I think coming here affords me the opportunity. I can live my life the way I want to live it. . . . Yeah, I'm very happy.

One very interesting subset of participant comments within the theme *living the life* involved some international students' views of study abroad as a healing experience. The participants who provided such quotations came from areas where there was a threat to personal safety, where personal freedoms were perceived as somewhat limited, or who had endured challenging personal experiences that left them vulnerable and seeking

change. For these students study abroad was particularly meaningful in terms of quality of life. As one student stated, "[The host institution] gave me this chance to restart my life and I really appreciate it." Participants also reported:

> [In the host community] you find a very safe, quiet. . . . Yeah, dangers are anywhere but you can, you can prevent them, right? But in [my home country], some places are just crazy…you hear of people dying all the time. And, you know, shooting people. . . . It's a beautiful country, it's a great country, beautiful people, I love it. But here you are safe . . . and you feel it. You can go out with your camera or jewellery, whatever you want to wear, and no one is going to steal from you. . . . You know it can happen but it's not all the time.

> Different communities' families are living over there, they try to torture them; they try to grab their land and properties; they try to rape their daughters and wives; sometimes they kill them. And they force you to leave the country. . . . It's bad things, issues, yeah. And for that reason, people are leaving the country . . . because if it continues in that way, you always want to live in peace.

One participant stated a common motivator for international study among this group: "Peace and freedom, yeah. So, that's one reason and . . . if your parents will live over there, your parents always expected that you should leave the country, for your betterment, for your future safety, for your freedom or whatever." This student also spoke of an underlying fear that issues related to religious and ethnic discrimination might also arise in the host culture, noting that some people carry over discriminatory beliefs that create divisions within the international student community and possibly the community at large. This was particularly disheartening for this participant, who saw such concerns as a threat to the peace sought in the host culture:

> Whenever this kind of disrespect [of other cultures] is going on to you, then probably there may develop some harmful things in your mind that will create division in the population. That will create discrimination; that will create fighting; that will create all those different things, all those different things that we don't want actually. We already say, I already told my wife we are here because we want to live in peace, that's the main target. That's why we leave our

> country. But if we will find the same thing is happening here, then where will I go?

Cultural fit/sense of belonging. A further way in which participants found personal significance during cross-cultural transition centred around a sense of belonging and cultural fit within the host community. Indeed, a number of international students who took part in this study conveyed a strong feeling of home and belonging, stating:

> I would not know how to describe it because I don't feel like I'm an international. The people here are very friendly, very, very friendly. I just feel like I've been living here all my life, actually. . . . Like I've actually, I find myself living like a townie, as we say here.

> For the first half year, I felt I was a stranger here; I was a foreigner here. After that, I felt I'm just part of Newfoundland. I don't feel like I'm singled out on the bus, I don't feel like that. I'm just like other people.

> When you come to a new place and you establish something, you've got a new place to belong to. . . . When I left [the city where my family lives] it was like okay, I'm going back home now. I'm going back to St. John's. Because now I do feel that I belong to St. John's.

Contributing to this sense of belonging was a perception of good cultural fit between the sojourners and the host culture and, in some cases, a contrasting lack of fit with the home culture. A number of participants noted that their personalities or values in key areas suited the host culture to a greater degree than the home culture. One participant remarked that his more conservative personality and lifestyle was seen as dull in his home culture but was accepted among those he spent time with in the host culture:

> I guess I'm just different. I just live differently . . . do things in a very sort of maybe reserved way. . . . Most [co-nationals] say I'm boring, but I find that when I'm with a different sort of people I'm not boring. Actually I may be a little fun . . . I don't need to be that kind of [person from my culture] that goes out, out, party, party.

For this participant in particular the host community and environment not only provided a lifestyle that matched his interests but also became a symbol that allowed him to integrate seemingly divergent aspects of his own identity:

> Yes, I like downtown. . . . I don't know there's just something I see when I go downtown. I just see, I see life as I've always dreamed of seeing it. Right? . . . I heard in downtown there are laws that guide the kind of property development and stuff you can do. It just, it's something I see that you just can still be normal, you can still have your own values in a changing world. . . . It just kind of gives me the assurance that yeah, you can be whatever you want to be. You might be a little traditional and still enjoy life and still be the same in a changing world. . . . I think St. John's kind of like matches my life, yeah, exactly. Maybe that's one of the things why I love, I did not know I loved St. John's so much!

Others also articulated key values that they felt fit better with the culture of the host country than their homeland. There was a sense that this cultural fit allowed them to live in a way that was meaningful to them and cultural values identified included gender roles, quality of life, and human rights. Participants stated, "Human rights are very important for me . . . that's the difference in our opinions. So that's one of the reasons making me go abroad" as well as:

> I didn't have a lot of support at that time. . . . In traditional opinion [in my home country], girls should be, have peaceful lives, go to school, you graduate, you find a good job, and you meet some person, you get married, you have children. . . . That's not the life I'm looking for. I don't care for that kind of thing.
>
> This is one of the reasons I came across, because I'm not used to the culture back home. It's too complicated. And here, I know that since I've been here I know it's simpler, I like the culture here. So that's why I want to be a part of it.

Another participant noted that achievement of a university education itself was a barrier to fitting with the culture in a developing nation, given the lack of available opportunity and ongoing "brain drain":

> You cannot teach whatever you have to a student or to a person who just completed their high school, right? If you tell them everything it goes over the head, right? So if you're a country leader or if you are the person who is operating most of the industry, the top positions, the big boss, if they are less educated or not highly educated then they are just thinking about the money and not about the skills.

According to participants, belonging was enhanced by a sense of being welcomed by locals that contributed to feeling at home in the host culture. For one participant this was as simple as finding a refuge during a stressful academic period:

> The mall has a coffee shop and I used to go there to write my papers. And when the exams came closer…I was there for two weeks, almost every day. . . . That was really nice because, you know after a while the people knew what I was going to order. . . . That was a very, very positive experience. Because again it gave me this kind of feeling that's close to like home even if it's entirely different. . . . This really nice warm feeling of being, you know, welcome and stuff.

Others also identified key members of the host community who reached out to extend a welcome and connect with international students. Interestingly, in a number of cases where participants specifically noted a sense of belonging the host national was an individual much older than themselves. One participant reported "I rent a room from a guy, he's older . . . he makes me more like a family here," while another noted:

> I usually feel really welcomed, kind of actually like at home when I'm with this guy who basically invites me over from time to time for dinner. . . . He picks me up with his car and he brings me back and . . . he never wants to have anything for it. And we're sitting sometimes next, like next to his house or on a bench or something, and we're just talking. And I learned a lot about the culture from him . . . so this is kind of like very positive feelings. And it feels almost like being at home, you know?

Finally, despite the advantages of a cultural fit with the host location, participants were also aware of the downside of this, particularly when they returned to their home cultures. There was a sense of being between cultures, of having one foot in the home

culture and one in the host culture. This sometimes resulted in confusion or a sense of being torn for international students.

Ambassador role. The role of ambassador was noted as a meaningful aspect of the study abroad experience and five of the nine study participants commented accordingly. Participants were excited by the idea of having formed international connections with individuals from around the world that laid the foundation for future cultural exploration:

> You know, when I'm ever going to [my friend's country] I know that I have a place to stay and when he is ever coming to [my country] the same with him. So this is another very positive experience that I want to point out. . . . He's very interested in [my country], wants to go there actually, so he has like a lot of questions about the country and . . . I appreciate that because I'm the same. I like to ask him questions about [his country].

> I look at my international friends, now I think I have a house in every one of those countries. If they are in France, if they are in Nigeria, in Cameroon, in Switzerland, in Columbia, I have a house in every place.

Participants also indicated that being able to share their culture with members of the host community was a satisfying aspect of their international study experience. They appreciated opportunities to increase their cultural knowledge:

> Here, in local areas, I also think I had quite an impact. Like on my roommates, my current roommates right now. You know you kind of talk to each other about your culture. . . . For example, [my friend], you know I think he's now more confident, or even more eager to go to [my country] after my stories. So I affected him.

> Because there are not very many [people from my country] on campus at all . . . people are really interested. . . . People just really ask about [my country], how it is . . . I'm also always happy to share this. So I think my fact is just that people get to know a little bit more and maybe, you know, maybe some people might end up going there.

These international students also articulated a desire to share the value of international and cross-cultural exposure with those at home. One participant noted that being abroad could afford the chance to influence other family members and show them new opportunities:

> Also there is a possibility that you may help your family. If in your family there are one or two persons who are really good, capable of doing something, then you can guide them to study in this way or do this work. And then you may also get a chance to come here, build up your own career, and contribute to this culture as well as your culture.

For another, sharing his passion for international travel and discovering other cultures was a meaningful part of the study abroad experience. One participant described the emergence of a sense of identity throughout the process of crossing cultures and a goal to share this with others:

> I personally actually hope, whenever I like talk to young people, like kids for example or people who just leave high school and stuff, I always want to emphasize how important it is to get to know the world, to get to know different cultures.

A participant who had acknowledged coming into the host culture with stereotypical views spoke excitedly about the possibility of exposing those at home to new ideas about other cultures and perhaps influencing a more positive view of the West:

> You can also share this to [people in] your country who are growing up and they may have a different thought, which may be changed. So they may come to know the cultural good points, a good view of this culture also. . . . You open maybe your family and your community to the idea of a different way of life. That maybe is not the one they will choose but the possibility is there.

Personal development. Every participant in the study spoke of the experience of growth and development they viewed as related to the cross-cultural transition, summed up by one student who remarked, "You can't stay what you are." Some areas of personal

development identified by participants were quite practical and adaptive in nature. For instance, learning to cook was mentioned by some participants who said, "I can cook! I don't cook before" and:

> Learning to cook, that's a huge thing too. But before I was like, oh cooking, I have to spend half an hour or one hour and then I just eat it in five seconds? It's boring! But now it's like, "What am I having today? That'll be cool!" . . . I'm enjoying everything, I enjoy it. And yeah, that's a big change. . . . And my sister replied, "So I have to go to Canada to learn cooking?" I said, "I think so!" Because yeah, because when you need it, you do it.

Other areas of development and growth were more personal in nature. A number of participants described an increasing open-mindedness over the course of their cross-cultural transition. For one participant this took the shape of greater openness to different sexual orientations, a concept that would not be accepted in his home culture:

> I discovered I'm more comfortable talking about lots of stuff. For example, one of the things is like homosexuality. I would never have thought I'd have a friend, and one of my great friends, they are homosexual and I'm totally fine with that. So that's something I wouldn't be accepting of [previously]. And that's what my other friends, like my other [co-national] friends, they don't accept that, they still don't accept it. But it's huge here so you've got to accept it. You can't say no, it's wrong from where I come from and it's got to be wrong here. You can't do that.

Further areas of personal development included increased openness and independence and a sense of growth and maturity, as expressed by one student who said, "I think I'm getting to see the real world by myself now. Because then I was seeing it through my dad's eyes and through my mom's eyes. But now I'm seeing everything real, like by myself," and in the examples below:

> I think this openness is kind of new. . . . Something also I have learned . . . was that it doesn't matter what you do, volunteer or any job, you always learn something. So now I try to read or to interact, to go to different activities. Because you never know what you'll learn, who you will meet.

> Like you get lots of ideas . . . I'd say being here made me grow a lot inside. I'd be thinking about stuff that . . . others my age would not be thinking about. . . . I've heard that from other friends that studied abroad. . . . Living abroad, being, looking at new stuff, it's what makes you grow.

One participant noted that these were not changes per se but rather areas of development in response to the challenging context of international study:

> Talking about like the changes. . . . I've changed as the employee that I was [at home], it's not the same as the employee here. The person, the boyfriend, the friend, there's lots of stuff, lots of things that have added to my personality more than they have changed. . . . There was no place for [these new characteristics] to be used . . . like those are weapons. . . . There was no necessity to use them, but here, like you've got to bring everything out.

It is perhaps not surprising that the students who expressed the greatest degree of personal development had been in the host country the longest, while the participant who had been here the shortest time noted, "I think I didn't really change. I think I felt back to myself, which is a great thing," referring to his return to international travel after a period in his home country.

Another area within the theme of personal development observed by participants was their evolving view of both their home cultures and the host culture throughout their cross-cultural transition. These international students noted their perspectives on Canada or "The West," their home country, their goals with respect to cross-cultural exchange, as well as religion and culture as areas where they perceived a difference over the course of their sojourns. In a number of cases, living and studying abroad challenged the ideas about the host culture that participants held prior to this experience and relevant quotations overlap with the theme *stereotypes, biases, and racism*. One participant noted that his pre-existing stereotypes about "the West" were contested as he built relationships

with locals who did not fit these characterizations, noting, "Once I met my landlord and landlady, at that time my thoughts completely started to change." These ideas were further challenged as the participant received increasing exposure to the host culture and began to form his own ideas about the values of host nationals that conflicted with the predominant views of those at home:

> We have some different views before coming here. So we thought that it really is not a good place, people live a more machine life, they don't have any family bonding or they just go to bars, they don't have any good relationships with people, they don't respect say family relationships, or they don't have a bond with their family, those kind of things. But after coming here I feel that no, that's not true. I feel that specifically Newfoundland, because I first came here, people have lots of family bonds.

Another participant described a similar challenge to pre-existing stereotypes with regard to the host culture, noting that she had expected to find a sense of cultural bankruptcy in North America but was pleasantly surprised to find this generalization did not apply to the host culture:

> The idea that you have about, especially about North America, like you could identify music, folklore, in Europe and Africa, but in North America something happens there, like just rock, pop, fast food. So in Newfoundland I found a very strong culture.

For one participant from a developing nation, however, the reality of living in the host culture did not live up to a perhaps romanticized notion of this industrialized region. This made her reconsider the gap she had perceived between her current and former homes and prompted her to see her own country more favourably. She noted:

> Before I came here I thought Canada is a very developed country, there is a lot of, for example, thinking of the developed countries, doctors and hospitals, health. But I saw here you know there is, there's few doctors here. . . . And now I'm thinking oh, my country was better than here. What happened?

> Before I came here I thought it was [much] better than there. . . . Now I think my country wasn't very bad, my country is very good but my government is not good. . . . Now I know my country is very . . . a lot of views is better than here but some things are annoying, there is a lot of annoying things over there in my country. So people have to move to here.

This highlights a shift in perspective regarding the home culture, which was articulated by a number of participants in this study. For the aforementioned participant the reality of living in the host region challenged her perceptions by providing an insider view of life in the West and an outsider view on her own country. Another international student noted the capacity for this shift in perspective to provide some illumination in this regard, stating:

> That's something I realized . . . the outsider knows about other people's countries more than the people in that country know. I know more about Newfoundland than lots of Newfoundlanders. And I was surprised, some people they know more about [my country] than I do. This makes me think okay, there's stuff I don't know about my country. . . . I want to get to know my country.

For yet another participant, life in the host culture provided some insight into how things could be better at home and inspiration to carry these lessons with him:

> Say from here, lots of things I learned personally . . . [host nationals] are respectful to your law, you are trying to help people. . . . And they're doing it in a nice way, in a nice presentation that you feel really good about. But in my country, probably because of high population or something else, we sometimes . . . most of the time we don't respect fully the laws, rules, and regulations. We started to forget about helping the people. So those kind of positive things you can start to learn when you're here. . . . They may have some things that are bad, keep them out. But there are lots of positive things, try to gain them.

In some cases, the advantages of the host environment helped participants envision a different future that may have been difficult or impossible to attain at home:

> I have more opinions to express myself. I have freedom, more freedom . . . that's the most important thing. Now I have freedom to express whatever I wish and I can do whatever I wish . . . that's an important thing.

> Before I will say I have to come back because [my country] has given me everything and then I have to give it back. Now it's like, I don't care! You give me everything but now I, I'm not safe. . . . Getting a job, getting a job is hard, and so no. That's not the life I want. So that's maybe the big change.

Finally, participants reported experiencing and recognizing some change with regard to how they viewed different religions, races, or culture. For one student, despite hailing from a multicultural city, the concept of racism and examining one's views of diverse others was in itself an area for personal development noting, that "it's different being a minority here" and:

> I definitely learned a lot here about different ethnicities. . . . In [my region] we don't have racism there . . . we are racists but we don't know that. . . . It just doesn't exist in our life. . . . It only exists . . . in the western world.

Another participant noted:

> I have a different view about religion now. Yeah, that has changed I think. I can think now more open. . . . In my country . . . I couldn't think more open-minded. . . . Now I can compare my religion to another religion.

In some cases, the shift of perspective on other races or religions placed participants in a difficult predicament when such views contrasted with the norm in their home region and conflicted with those of their loved ones:

> I'll give you an example that caused me a problem at that time. We were talking once and I said . . . you should try Buddhism, it's an interesting, a really nice religion. Because I said it's a really nice and interesting religion everyone like in the room, we were sitting in a big room full of people and everyone paused and was like "what did he say?" You know you're a Muslim, you're not supposed to talk like that . . ." I love my religion but I'm saying it's really interesting to learn about. He's like, "yeah, it's interesting to *learn* about." [emphasis added]

For at least one participant, however, the study abroad experience resulted in a more realistic but appreciative view of the home culture:

> It kind of made me get closer to my culture. It made me respect my culture more. It made me respect my religion more . . . I appreciate it more . . . and I go back there and learn more about it, more than just following because I was told to follow. So I've learned more. Stuff I agree with, stuff I don't.

Essential Structure

Based on the exhaustive description of the phenomenon of interest, Colaizzi's phenomenological method (1978) requires development of an essential structure of the lived experience, which is outlined below:

The lived experience of the international student in a culturally homogeneous host environment is one of multiple and continual transitions. These transitions are shaped by external factors or influences associated with the host location such as the physical, academic, and cultural environments, as well as intrapersonal considerations within the international students themselves, including their chosen approach to acculturation and their personal characteristics, skills, and experiences. Not existing in isolation, these factors can be seen to interact, ameliorating or exacerbating one another, particularly with regard to the characteristics of this uncommon study abroad location. For instance, the limited diversity, small size, and geographical isolation of the host location provide a greater test of the unrefined language ability of the newcomer even while it provides abundant opportunity for its improvement.

While there are many commonalities among the experiences of international students as a population, the student who chooses an unconventional host location

embarks upon a journey into unfamiliar territory without the benefit of a well-formed support structure or an extensive international community to guide them. In some ways this is akin to the experience of pioneers on this cross-cultural journey. In every realm – cultural, academic, social, and personal – the international student must first assess the lay of the land, observe and understand the obstacles and available resources, what can be moved and what is fixed. Where well-worn paths are lacking they must be created and individuals must discover and mobilize their strengths and find ways to gather new resources. Participants in this study were able to do this by seeking and drawing on the help and guidance of those within the local community, the international community, and support from home, utilizing formal and informal supports to fill the gaps in the existing infrastructure of supports. In doing so, however, they questioned when to share the load and when to carry it on their own. International students must generally determine how they will approach their journey, whether to immerse in unfamiliar surroundings or hold on to those they journey alongside, although this option is far more limited in a location that lacks considerable ethnic diversity. Through this process the international student is creating meaning within the study abroad experience as well as building and discovering strengths within themselves.

A number of moderating factors were also seen to influence the impact of these internal and external factors on the lived experience of international students: time and the acculturative process, social support, and language issues. Participants indicated that challenges that dominate the study abroad experience in the early phase may fade into the background later, while new challenges emerge as time goes on. In this way, the lived

experience of these students is in constant movement, always changing and shifting. The individuals who live this reality must also continue to change and adapt even while they create a life in their new home and seek a place to belong. Their lived experience exists between home and host cultures, but not quite wholly in either.

The support of a wide variety of significant others was indicated by participants as essential to navigating this fluid reality, providing practical and emotional support as well as guidance. Such support was not easy to assemble in the host environment, however, and lack of social connection appeared to have a hindering effect on student transition. Additionally, language issues, spanning from the skill and confidence of the students to the dialect of the host community, were also viewed to have a moderating influence. Higher-level English skills facilitated communication with locals, academic adjustment, and integration into the host community, providing a considerable advantage.

Finally, the lived experiences of the international student within their cross-cultural transition were instrumental. Overt and covert experiences of bias or racism provided vivid and painful reminders of their outsider status. Influential positive experiences with locals, in contrast, nourished their enthusiasm. International students who reported successful study abroad experiences were proactive in seeking and making such opportunities for positive contact, often having to move out of their comfort zone and beyond cultural expectations to do so.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The current study is noteworthy because the number of international students choosing non-traditional host locations, such as small urban centres and areas with limited cultural diversity, is rapidly increasing while information on the experience of this population is missing from the current literature. Moreover, as we actively recruit international students and benefit greatly from their educational investment, understanding and meeting the needs of these students is vital from both pragmatic and ethical viewpoints. In the current study, a descriptive phenomenological methodology was used to investigate the lived experience of nine international students in a small urban centre with a relatively homogeneous host culture. A total of 516 significant statements regarding experiences deemed important, hindering, or facilitative by the participants themselves were extracted from interview transcripts and then condensed into meaning units. Eight thematic clusters emerged from this data: (a) Influence of Host Environmental Context, (b) Influence of Academic Context, (c) Process of Cross-Cultural Transition, (d) Language Challenges, (e) Supportive Relationships, (f) Meeting Across Cultures, (g) Intrapersonal Factors, and (h) Personal Significance.

Descriptions of these thematic clusters, themes within them, and illustrative examples were provided in the results chapter. This chapter compares the results of the current study to the existing literature, including limited local studies, and indicates both consistencies with the literature in a number of areas as well as novel findings that urge new investigative pathways. Implications and recommendations for host institutions,

clinicians who work with the international student population, the limitations of the study, and directions for future research are also offered.

Findings and the Literature

In this section I offer a summary of the findings of this research. In order to structure discussion of these results they have been categorized under the broad headings of context, which includes influence of the host culture and academic contexts, process, highlighting the process of cross-cultural transition, external and interpersonal factors, comprising supportive relationships, language challenges, and meeting across cultures, as well as internal and intrapersonal factors, which details individual strengths and resources as well as personal meaning. Where possible I examine where results fit within the existing literature and highlight novel findings. It should be noted that the following headings are used strictly to organize the discussion and do not represent a further level of analysis.

Context. A number of characteristics of the host environment, including the small size of the host city and the perceived friendly nature of community members, were indicated as meaningful factors in their cross-cultural transition by participants in this study. For the most part these international students indicated that the advantages of studying in this small centre outweighed the disadvantages. They commended the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the host location and perceived it as more manageable than large urban centres. This finding suggests that smaller centres that host fewer international students may offer meaningful advantages for these sojourners in contrast to the pronounced focus on increased problems cited by those who have researched the

newcomer experience in non-traditional receiving sites (Kiang et al., 2010; Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009).

A disadvantageous characteristic was an obvious lack of cultural and ethnic diversity and cultural knowledge in the host culture. Consistent with existing local international student research (Gien & Law, 2009; Kelly, 2003; Younghusband, 2010), participants extolled the friendly nature of local host nationals and this widespread perception appeared to moderate the impact of the lack of diversity and familiarity with foreign cultures. They indicated that the friendly demeanour of host locals did not necessarily translate to opportunities to form meaningful relationships, although it did provide a general sense of feeling welcomed and accepted that was positive for these participants. This finding is particularly interesting given Berry's (2006) conceptualization of "multiculturalism" as the acculturative strategy of integration occurring within a context where the host society encourages diversity. The lived experience of these participants leads us to query the contrast between lack of acceptance from the host culture versus lack of exposure or experience with diversity. Participants indicated that many locals simply did not know much about other countries and cultures and had little experience with cross-cultural interaction, indicating that they were inexperienced but not unreceptive. This finding is backed up by other local research in which host community members have been described as "friendly" but not wanting to "be friends," a kind of "arm's-length" friendliness.

Lack of international knowledge and interest was viewed as more problematic in the academic environment. A number of these international students commented on the

dearth of international perspective in the curriculum as a challenge, a disappointment, and a lost opportunity for cultural sharing. Given that this issue was raised in local international student research over a decade ago (Kelly, 2003), it would appear that the host institution may still have a long way to go to meet its stated goal of increasing the diversity of the education and curriculum provided as well as its student body, with advances in the latter outstripping the former (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2007).

International students in this study encountered considerable differences in student-professor relationships compared to home (Mori, 2000) and noted a more casual nature and greater support and accessibility (Younghusband, 2010). A number of faculty members were perceived by participants as going above and beyond their professional responsibility offering assistance, support, and time. Although generally seen as advantageous, these differences were initially confusing and uncomfortable for these students. Developing language proficiency and limited cultural knowledge of the host community and institution contributed to the intense pressure participants described when they were suddenly immersed in the university environment. Several students noted how this taxed their skills and cognitive capacity early on. The effort required for these students to keep up with historical and pop culture references made during classes, high level vocabulary, and a novel style of instruction may not be fully appreciated by faculty or peers. Some participants indicated that co-national or host national peers were helpful in navigating this transition, as were some empathetic instructors, but for the most part a "trial and error" approach was described. The lack of knowledge or preparation for the

institutional culture and expectations described by participants is noteworthy as it puts international students at a considerable disadvantage during a time when stress is already high.

While participants spoke highly of the international student advising office and other institutional supports, a number of these students did not find relevant resources accessible due to time restraints resulting from their heavy workloads or schedules, particularly graduate students. This suggests a potential quandary as international students who may require support and assistance the most, those who are struggling academically, have lower levels of English proficiency, or are isolated from the larger campus community, may not feel that they have the option to avail of services. This finding is particularly disconcerting with regard to international graduate students who make up almost a quarter of the graduate student population at the host institution. While graduate supervisors may be viewed as default mentors who can help international graduate students navigate their transitions, this relationship itself can be a considerable source of stress and conflict (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007) and participants in this study indicated particular sensitivity to the power differential evident in this hierarchical relationship, despite their positive perceptions of their supervisors as individuals. Concerns regarding the power of supervisors over their future reportedly precluded some students in this study from visiting home or were a source of ongoing stress. Despite these challenges supports tailored to the needs of graduate students specifically are uncommon. This may be partially due to the fact that these students do

not pay differential fees, although graduate students make considerable contributions to the revenue and status of the university through their research.

Finally, the context of these international students' daily lives was also highlighted. The considerable impact of daily hassles noted is consistent with literature in the field (Gaudet, Clément, & Deuzeman, 2005). The emphasis many of these students placed on the importance of finding food from their regions or maintaining their diet has also been conveyed elsewhere (Brown, Edwards, & Hartwell, 2010). The effect of the limited public transit system and the harsh winter climate, as well as the interaction between these factors was also observed by participants. Public transit in the area is restricted to a limited bus system that only services the urban area and is known to be problematic for newcomers (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009). These students felt very restricted in terms of their freedom to explore the larger host community beyond the confines of the university campus, especially during the winter when large snowfalls and uncleared sidewalks are barriers to pedestrian travel. This point is particularly salient given the large number of participant reports of positive experiences outside the host city. As such, weather and transit are issues that pose barriers to international students' opportunities for these meaningful positive experiences.

Overall, the daily living challenges offered by participants in this study support other research findings on local international students and other newcomers (Gien & Law, 2009; Kelly, 2003; Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009; Younghusband, 2010). Although cultural distance was not specifically examined as a factor in the current study, these findings are consistent with related research indicating that degree of cultural

distance in factors such as climate, food, religion, and leisure activities is associated with acculturative stress (Babiker et al., 1980; Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Redmond, 2000; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006; Suanet & van de Vijver, 2009).

Process. Interesting findings also emerged regarding the process of cross-cultural transition over time and the approach participants adopted to navigate this process. Importantly, participants reported that the host location itself factored little if at all into their decision of where to undertake international study. More affordable fees for undergraduates and availability and interest of a supervisor or program in their area of study for graduate students were the primary selection factors. This is consistent with Gien and Law's (2009) local study in which low tuition costs, acceptance to study by a professor, and availability of academic funding were the top three reasons cited for choosing to study in the province. Only after making this decision did most participants seek information on the host location and little cultural preparation was evident, which is somewhat surprising given that the location is not a traditional international study site and, as a result, lacks a well-established support structure for internationals. The lack of consideration of the host culture and environment during the decision-making phase may suggest a lack of adequate preparation or realistic expectations for incoming international students. Underestimating cultural distance has been identified as a relevant issue in other international student research (Pan & Wong, 2011) and may be a hindering factor with regard to cross-cultural transition in the current study.

The early phase of cross-cultural transition was singled out as challenging by the vast majority of participants, with the first six months noted as a particularly difficult time. This was consistent for students who reported a relatively smooth acculturation process and those who shared considerable struggles as well as across varying factors such as language proficiency, social support, and cultural distance. This finding directly contradicts the prominent model of acculturation proposed by U-curve theories (e.g. Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg 1960) and is in line with a growing body of research that identifies early transition as a frequent period of strife and adjustment difficulty that abates with time (Brown & Holloway, 2008a; Brown & Holloway, 2008b; Ward & Kennedy, 1996; Ward et al., 1998). Even participants who reported great excitement upon arrival, consistent with the upswing of the U-Curve, were strongly impacted by early stressors, as indicated elsewhere (Brown & Holloway, 2008a). Moreover, these challenges have been described as an integral part of the lived experience of international study (Brown & Holloway, 2008b; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). As these international students moved into later phases of their international study experience concerns regarding the future became prominent, indicating that cross-cultural transition is a dynamic process whereby needs and concerns evolve and change (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Brown & Holloway, 2008b; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Arguments within the field (e.g. Adler, 1975; Arthur, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Pedersen, 1991; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004) to conceptualize culture shock as an expected and important part of the developmental process rather than pathology are furthered by this information.

The approach to acculturation utilized by these international students also emerged as a major finding. Most participants in this study were proponents of immersing oneself in the host culture to absorb cultural knowledge, improve language skills, and meet their goals. This finding is particularly striking in light of Berry's (2006) often-cited work on acculturative strategies, which forms the theoretical framework of many recent studies in the area (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Participants reported that they did not completely concede important influences from the home culture (e.g. food and relationship values), in line with Berry's (2006) concept of biculturalism, which he purports as the most effective acculturative strategy. The majority of these students, however, emphasized a strategy more consistent with what Berry described as an assimilative acculturation strategy, whereby the newcomer prioritizes contact with hosts over maintenance of their culture of origin. In Berry's conceptualization this approach becomes known as the "pressure cooker" when it is a forced response to the demands of the dominant host population (Berry, 2006).

Assimilation has been identified as being moderately associated with acculturative stress and thus less effective than an integrative or bicultural approach (Berry 2006; Pan & Wong, 2011). Nevertheless, the participants in this study did not espouse the typically negative connotation of assimilation and identified immersion as a component of successful cross-cultural transition and an important strategy to get the most out of their study abroad experience. They also described this focus on immersion as strongest during the early phase and reported beginning to consider integrating aspects of the home culture into their lives abroad later in the sojourn.

These findings are particularly interesting as they do not fully support Berry's (2006) categorical description of approaches to acculturation, suggesting that acculturative strategies may not be easily sorted into clear categories but rather vary in degree or shift over time. Berry's focus on acculturation among migrants in general, rather than international students or other sojourners specifically, may partly explain this difference. The demands of their program or goals for coming abroad, along with their age, skills, and everyday interaction with local students, may make international students more motivated to dive in to the host community in comparison to immigrants or refugees. A number of participants seemed to view this immersion approach as synonymous with international study stating, "everything I did is to jump into the new environment." Also, the immersion strategy preference may reflect the impact of a homogeneous host culture and the limited international support structure found in this small centre. Immersion may allow students to be more readily accepted by a host community that lacks multicultural knowledge and experience, suggesting an adaptive component. The latter hypothesis receives some support from Anderson's (2012) study of immigration into rural Newfoundland, where positive feedback from locals was indicated when newcomers began to adopt the local accent and invest in the community through volunteering.

Alternatively, most participants indicated that they viewed segregation, avoiding contact with the host community and preference for contact with members of the cultural sub-group, as problematic for international students. Consistent with this view, the two study participants who reported co-nationals as their primary source of social support,

along with little contact or comfort with host nationals or other internationals, also reported the most difficulty during their cross-cultural transition. This finding is consistent with Berry's (2006) contention that segregation is an acculturative strategy that yields the most dissatisfaction and greatest level of acculturative stress. It also supports research indicating that primary reliance on members of their own cultural sub-group for social support results in greater acculturative stress and psychological distress for international students (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2012).

A further major finding of this study is that only one participant indicated a clear intention to return to their home culture, while five stated a desire to stay, preferably in the host province, or elsewhere in the host country, and three noted that they were not certain what they would do but were open to options. This raises questions about whether these participants actually fit the typical profile of international student as academic sojourner, temporarily residing in the host culture for educational purposes, or are more akin to pre-immigrants. The latter would suggest important potential implications as considerable differences have been found between immigrant and international student populations, for example with regard to acculturation and language use (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992), implying that generalizability of the current international student literature may be questionable. It is also interesting to note the contrast with a local study presented in 2009 (Gien & Law), in which only 13% of the international students questioned indicated an intention to stay in the province after their studies and 52% had already decided to leave Newfoundland. Given that the economy was noted as a key deterrent in Gien and Law's study, the current upturn in the local economy may have contributed to

the shift observed in this study. This finding should be of particular interest to the host province in view of current initiatives to increase newcomer retention rates.

External and interpersonal. A variety of external and interpersonal factors were indicated as facilitating or hindering cross-cultural transition in this study, providing support for existing literature and novel findings. Participants endorsed the impact of language challenges, social support, and interactions across cultures as key factors in line with the current literature. First, previous research indicating the ubiquitous impact of perceived and actual host language proficiency on the cross-cultural transition of international students was supported in this research (Constantine et al., 2004; Dao et al., 2007; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Yeh & Inose, 2003). All participants whose first language was not English endorsed language as a challenging factor in their adjustment and acculturation, impacting areas such as academic progress, creating support networks, expressing their identities, communicating with host nationals, and building relationships. The qualitative approach taken in this research, however, allowed for deeper consideration of these commonly cited influential factors providing a richer and more informative description. For instance, an intriguing finding was the impact of language confidence for participants for whom English was a first language and medium of prior academic instruction. These participants indicated that host nationals had difficulty understanding their accented English, impacting them negatively and resulting in discomfort when speaking in the classroom environment. They experienced a general assumption that they could not speak English, which impacted their ability to converse in the language they had spoken and

studied in all their lives. This finding highlights the impact of lack of intercultural experience among locals for these international students. It may also suggest the importance that confidence in one's language and communication skills holds as well as the degree to which it is impacted by context and environment. It stands to reason that these forces must be quite influential to raise doubt around language proficiency in individuals considered native speakers.

The communication challenges noted by English-speaking international students in this study partially supports the work of Lin and Betz (2009), which indicated that perceived social self-efficacy in the host language, or how individuals perceive their own competence interacting in the language, was negatively related to acculturative stress. It also suggests a potential caveat to the positive association found with English proficiency, indicating that the facilitative effect of host language ability may be tempered by the host population's appreciation of such capability. In other words, a solid command of the English language may be less beneficial when the host society fails to recognize this proficiency. This finding also offers an interesting extension of Swagler and Ellis's (2003) work, in which international students' level of confidence in speaking English and perceived language proficiency were associated with adjustment while actual host language skill was not. The lack of confidence in communicating in English described by participants who spoke English as a first language in this study may not only highlight the impact of confidence despite proficiency but also exemplify how confidence in one's own ability can be strongly influenced by external factors such as reaction from host nationals. Given that many researchers study language proficiency and

communication comfort together (e.g. Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003), the current findings suggest interesting potential for further consideration of these factors and their influences separately.

It is also interesting to consider how the current research might impact Redmond and Bunyi's (1993) concept of intercultural communication competence, a factor comprised of communication skills, knowledge of the host culture, language competence, adaptation, social integration, and communication effectiveness (Lewthwaite, 1997). The potential impact of host population perception and reaction on the communication confidence of international students suggested in this study implies that communication effectiveness may not be an exclusively internal factor but may be strongly influenced by interactions with the host society. This influence is noteworthy given that intercultural communication competence has been found to be the most significant predictor of ability to handle cross-cultural misunderstandings, verbal and non-verbal communication proficiency, and a strong predictor of ability to manage stress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993).

Additionally, as both participants who disclosed such experiences were African students and individuals of colour, the roles of racial prejudice and host expectations are called into question (DiAngelo, 2006). This finding suggests the host institution may not be fully capitalizing on the assets international students offer to enrich the education provided and a disturbing power dynamic is reflected (DiAngelo, 2006). This is concerning because it reveals a considerable barrier with regard to the meaningful contribution international students can make to the internationalization of the host university. It also suggests a substantial impediment to realizing the strategic plan

guiding the host institution (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2007) and the retention goals espoused by the provincial government (Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, 2007).

A second interpersonal factor widely accepted as influential in the literature, social support, was also clearly indicated in this study. Participants identified support from host nationals, co-nationals and members of their cultural subgroup, partners, roommates, and loved ones as influential, with receiving support identified as a facilitating factor and lack of support or frustration in availing of support as a hindering factor, adding to a large body of research pointing to the indirect and direct benefits of social support for acculturation (e.g. Dao et al., 2007; Furukawa et al., 1998; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Lee et al., 2004; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Misra et al., 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). Somewhat varied results have been reported in the literature regarding the value of host versus co-national or co-cultural support and this is reflected in the current study. The majority of participants stated that cultural subgroup support was helpful, although its value differed across participants with some recognizing it as critical while others viewed it as helpful but not vital. This appeared to be related to the acculturative strategies selected by these students as those who chose immersion reported avoiding over-reliance on co-national peers and feeling marginalized by members of their cultural subgroup for their desire to integrate.

Additionally, the importance of support from their co-nationals varied for participants in this study based on the phase of their cross-cultural transition. Assistance from those with a shared culture, particularly co-nationals with more host culture

experience, was cited as particularly helpful during the overwhelming initial phase of the sojourn. The greater acculturative stress described by participants who reported socializing primarily with other co-nationals supports similar findings in the literature (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2012). Well-rounded social groups including host nationals and co-nationals have been associated with better adjustment in other research (Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Wang et al., 2012), however, and most participants in this study reported such diverse support networks.

Interestingly, few participants in this study pointed to international students who are not co-nationals as particularly helpful social connections in contrast to research conducted in larger centres in Canada, the U.S., and overseas (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2003). While one might expect that international students residing in a homogeneous host culture could perceive considerable rejection from the host society, furthering the protective benefits of the minority group identity found among international students by Schmitt and colleagues (2003), this finding was not upheld by the current research. It is possible that despite the lack of host community diversity, these international students did not perceive the discrimination cited by Schmitt's sample. Alternatively, participants might be missing out on the potential benefits of connecting with fellow international students and have greater difficulty forming strong bonds within this community if they do not attend international student activities or live on campus. Difficulty connecting with other international students has been noted in previous local research (Kelly, 2003). Participants might also have opted not to seek support from this population in line with their immersion approach

to acculturation.

Experiences with cross-cultural interaction was a further interpersonal factor deemed meaningful by participants. They were aware of the impact of cultural differences between home and host communities and found this to be particularly influential with regard to social interaction, including dating relationships. Participants reported considerable challenges integrating into the host community and indicated a clear difference between the ease of superficial positive interactions with locals versus the concerted effort required to make deeper social connections and feel like they were part of the local community. While a number of participants were able to build strong relationships with host nationals, it is interesting to note that in several cases these were not local students but rather faculty members, host national students from other provinces, and members of the local community outside the university. A number of students commented on a perceived lack of interest among local students to become friends with international students, consistent with previous research (Younghusband, 2010). The numerous integration challenges articulated by these participants support the arduous nature of building social networks across cultures highlighted by other researchers in the field (Ward et al., 2001; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Common and problematic social concerns such as loneliness, withdrawal, loss of identity, and feeling like an outsider cited in other studies (Arthur, 2004; Brinson & Kottler, 1995) were also voiced by these international students.

The positive experiences that participants were able to have in the host culture with locals and host nationals were overwhelmingly indicated as beneficial and

meaningful to them. A number of participants engaged in volunteerism and/or part-time employment, at times in positions far below their skills and qualifications to the displeasure of their family members. Participants endorsed these opportunities as a way to get in touch with the "real" host community, to challenge their language proficiency, and to experience the local culture and way of life in a more "hands-on" way. Given the integration challenges noted, this approach highlights their resiliency and creativity with regard to realizing their goals for the study abroad experience. Several students described positive experiences with locals outside of the city in smaller communities and rural areas. They noted feeling very welcome, perceived eagerness toward cultural sharing and learning that was viewed as difficult to attain within the host city, and conveyed these experiences as meaningful parts of their cross-cultural experience. This finding highlights the potential benefits of furthering and encouraging positive contacts with locals in addition to addressing areas of concern and distress for international students. The ISA's Culture to Community Educational Outreach Program, in which international students can visit classes in the rural public school system, is an example of one initiative that could help foster such meaningful interactions.

Finally, negative experiences with stereotypes, bias, and racism, were also discussed by participants. Far more covert than overt experiences of discrimination were reported in this study and these were marked by a sense of confusion regarding intent. This may have been partly due to the contrast between such experiences and the general perception of host community members as friendly and accepting, an instance of cognitive dissonance, or a result of a more veiled expression of prejudice within the host

culture. Again, the two participants from Africa described most overt incidents of discrimination or racism. Overall, participants in the study were hesitant to identify or label negative experiences with locals as discrimination or racism both due to ambiguity and their own views, with one student clearly stating, "I don't like to have the impression that someone might be doing anything out of racist intentions . . . I don't entertain that kind of thinking." Participants were more likely to encounter a kind of passive discrimination in which their ethnicity was a barrier to connection but not a source of mistreatment. Such disconnection might be explained by Harrison and Peacock's (2010) concept of "passive xenophobia," linked to discomfort surrounding cross-cultural interaction and a "taboo" around open acknowledgement of difference. Local immigrants shared similar concerns in a qualitative study by Reitmanova and Gustafson (2009) reporting that cultural differences such as traditional clothing, skin colour, and religion resulted in feeling excluded, judged and misunderstood. While participants in this study reported a small number of comparable experiences they tended to describe them as isolated incidents rather than concerns that greatly impacted their international experience.

Internal and intrapersonal. Lastly, the intrapersonal characteristics and experiences of these international students were offered as meaningful and influential with regard to their cross-cultural transitions. Participants drew on their strengths to help them navigate challenges, specifically identifying a positive attitude as a way of coping with difficulties. They also named independence, a tendency to embrace new experiences, adaptability, flexibility, an adventurous spirit, and tenacity as important

facilitative characteristics. These findings are consistent with literature highlighting the role of personal strengths in overcoming acculturative challenges (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 2003) and characteristics of resilient individuals (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Seligman, 1992). Also in keeping with previous findings was the impact of loneliness and homesickness on the participants and the considerable sacrifice of being far away from loved ones (Arthur, 2004; Gien & Law, 2009; Kelly, 2003; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Younghusband, 2010).

As noted, participants in this study endorsed a proactive approach to cross-cultural contact commenting, "It's really up to you." This finding is not prevalent in the literature and suggests that international students in a homogeneous host culture may have to take greater initiative to meet their social goals. Several of these international students stressed that the onus of seeking opportunities to connect with host nationals was on the sojourner and that those who waited passively for such events would be disappointed. With this in mind, it is notable that the two participants who expressed the greatest difficulty during their sojourn did not report endeavoring to be proactive in the ways the other participants did. This might have been impacted by personality factors such as introversion, although relevant data is not available in the current study.

International study is a substantial investment for those who engage in it and often for loved ones who support them. Along with the associated practical benefits, such as language skill acquisition and increasing international knowledge, participants in this study spoke of pursuing a life that might not have been readily available to them at home. They were excited by the potential and opportunity associated with this life and the

freedom they felt within this experience. For some participants this achievement was aided by a sense of fit with the host culture that they may have lacked with the home culture, often contrasting with other co-nationals. This finding is consistent with the literature on cultural distance as an influential factor in acculturation, particularly the contention of Suanet and van de Vijver (2009) that along with varying by nationality, cultural distance can vary by individual. This is further supported by the within-group variation of experiences between participants from the same countries and regions in this study, indicating the importance of considering individual experiences of cross-cultural transition.

A fascinating subset of quotations within this research highlighted the healing aspect of the study abroad experience for individuals who came from regions with ongoing ethnic and religious violence, where personal safety was threatened or personal freedoms limited, or who had experienced personal traumas. These participants spoke of the sense of security that grew from residing in an area they perceived as safe and the meaning associated with having a new start and a simpler life. This security was not taken for granted, however, and concerns regarding the potential for religious extremism and intolerance to follow newcomers and take hold in the host country were voiced.

The results of this study suggest that the cross-cultural transition of international students can be accompanied by a process of personal transformation. Participants reported awareness of personal growth and development and perceiving themselves as becoming more open, tolerant, independent, and mature in response to the challenges of their international study experience. The lived experience described by these participants

support findings from other research indicating that personal growth, flexibility, enhanced international perspective and cross-cultural skills, independence, open-mindedness, emotional resilience, and shifting world perspectives are notable areas of personal development and transition for international students (CBIE, 2004; Duffy et al., 2005; Kitsantas, 2004; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). This supports Abowitz's (2004) contention that "wandering" may provide an antidote to insularity and a means of gaining a broader perspective on home and a new appreciation of its meaning. Participants in this study indicated this personal development as a meaningful and important part of their lived experience highlighting the need for further attention to this often overlooked area of study (Adler, 1975; Arthur, 2001; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Tseng & Newton, 2002).

Finally, in previous international student research conducted in a large, multicultural centre (Moores, 2008), I quoted a classic treatise by Adler (1975) who stated:

> The transitional experience is, finally, a journey into the self. Paradoxically, the more one is capable of experiencing new and different dimensions of cultural diversity, the more one learns of oneself. Such learning takes place when a person transcends the boundaries of ego, culture, and thinking. (p. 22)

This statement is equally pertinent to the current study, highlighting a core feature of the international student experience that appears to transcend specific host location. Their experiences provided these international students with an outsider view of their home culture and insider view of a foreign culture that shifted their perspectives on both. In some ways the host culture offered pleasant surprises, disputing pre-arrival stereotypes, while in other cases illusions were spoiled. Participants' views of their home country underwent change as well, posing challenges for re-entry. In many cases this was viewed

as a positive example of growth that these international students were eager to share with others in an ambassador role. They saw value in this shift in perspective and promise for expanding minds, challenging stereotypes, and creating understanding and opportunity between cultures. These findings support conclusions drawn from previous research (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011) and underscore the importance of examining the subjective nature of the experience of cross-cultural transition and the difficulty of capturing its richness through quantitative methodologies (Pedersen, 1995).

Limitations of Current Study

The current study availed of a variety of strengths including a diverse participant pool of motivated international students who wanted to increase understanding of their study abroad experiences, representation of a wide variety of characteristics and positive and negative experiences, and the interviewer's cross-cultural experience. There were, however, a number of limitations to consider. First, the qualitative, exploratory, and foundational nature of the current investigation involved advantages and limitations. This work has not been intended to actively compare or determine ways in which cross-cultural transition in a homogeneous culture is different from a diverse host culture. Although results are compared and contrasted within the context of the current literature, unearthing a number of differences that may exist and warrant further examination, the goal of the current study is simply to describe the lived experience of these students in their own words to provide a foundation upon which a largely unexamined body of literature may be built. By gathering participants' individual experiences and finding essential common threads, a rich description can be offered.

Generalization is neither a goal for qualitative research in general nor the current investigation specifically. Given the 100% representation of all nine participants in every thematic cluster and consistency with previous local research, however, it stands to reason that these findings could inform the design of further quantitative examinations conducted with the specific goal of generalization. In other words, while these rates contribute to the credibility and authenticity of essential aspects of the international student experience, quantitative examination of the reliability of such findings across larger samples would be required to indicate generalizability (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

All interviews were conducted in English, a second language for seven of the nine participants in this study. This was aided by the interviewer's prior experience working with ESL speakers, however, participants may not have been able to express their ideas to the same degree as in their mother tongue despite meeting institutional English requirements. Although host language proficiency varied considerably within the participant group, these international students were able to speak at length about their international study experience providing valuable insights with no considerable communicative difficulty experienced by the interviewer.

This research purposefully recruited international students who had difficult experiences in order to provide a more holistic consideration of the international student experience and participants were open in sharing their struggles. Nevertheless, participants in this study were volunteers and may have felt more comfortable giving positive rather than negative information about their experience to an interviewer who was a member of the host community. International students who chose to participate in

this study may also have differed from the average international student with regard to characteristics such as host language skill or extraversion, for example. Additionally, the diverse sample used represented students from various cultural subgroups and stages of transition. Different experiences might have emerged among participants who had been in the host country for similar periods of time or if the study had focused on one subgroup.

My own bias and previous experience as a long-term expatriate and sojourner is a final limitation to be considered. My personal perspective on cross-cultural transition and previous research on the topic represent challenges to setting aside preconceptions about the sojourner experience. As a result, I might be inclined to over-identify with these participants or interpret their lived experiences from my individual perspective, a potential obstacle noted for qualitative research (Josselson, 2004). In order to limit the impact of this factor, a descriptive rather than hermeneutic approach was chosen to preserve the meaning made and expressed by international students themselves where possible. I detailed my research process throughout this project and have relied heavily on the participants' own words to convey the findings. It should be acknowledged, however, that all research involves interpretation, is influenced by some degree of subjectivity, and that another researcher may have interpreted the data differently. Two member checks, at the individual and group analysis levels, were integrated into the research design to ensure rigour in terms of staying true to the lived experience of these nine international students.

Future Research Directions

One of the most gratifying aspects of conducting foundational qualitative research in an under-studied area is considering the plethora of research directions that may emerge. First, this study's findings suggested a number of subtle and prominent differences between the lived experience offered by these participants and the existing literature. To further explore these potential differences comparative studies involving collaboration between researchers in small culturally homogeneous host locations and large multicultural centres or areas that have traditionally received large numbers of international students is recommended. By collaborating on design and implementation and employing the same methods, both quantitative and qualitative, such research could offer a very enlightening look into common and unique aspects. Given that the international study experience in non-traditional host areas has been largely overlooked, replication or extension of prominent quantitative studies conducted in multicultural centres is also recommended to test if their results hold in this culturally homogeneous environment. Although such research can be neglected in favour of novel investigations, it provides an excellent means to build a more complete body of literature and aid comparison of data. Furthermore, the current study provides a foundation to inform future quantitative investigation of the lived experience of international students in a homogeneous host environment.

Interesting and uncommon findings also draw attention to the potential variation of experiences within a host country. These support extending the small number of cultural distance studies and comparison of divergent cultures within the same host

country, allowing greater exploration of host variations in cultural distance. Further examination of how host nationals experience the rapid diversification of host institutions could also provide meaningful insight into barriers for integration and ways to facilitate internationalization.

Paying greater attention to cross-cultural transition as a process and how challenges and resources may change at different points is important. Longitudinal research is recommended although challenging to undertake given the resources required. Research conducted over the course of the transition would help examine the emergence of considerable stress and concern related to re-entering the home culture or decisions for life after graduation expressed by a number of these participants, as well as the process of considering immigration or re-entry. Given the link between these areas and goals indicated by the host institution and province, investment in this type of research would provide invaluable information to guide future initiatives.

Findings of the current study also highlight graduate students as a potentially vulnerable subgroup. As previously noted, although international students comprise almost a quarter of the host institution's graduate student population resources tailored to their needs are lacking. Further research on the unique strengths and challenges of these students is recommended. A number of clinical research directions can also be gleaned from this study. The impact of previous experiences of trauma or unrest in the home culture and how this might influence the study abroad experience is suggested as an important consideration that has been virtually ignored in the current literature.

Implications

Implications and recommendations for host institutions. Advanced preparation has been acknowledged as important in the literature (Lacina, 2002); however, a pronounced thread in these interviews was consideration of affordability and academic fit above host location. As a result, in this study, students may not have been adequately prepared for the unique challenges of their chosen destination. Preparation is best started pre-arrival by providing information on the host location, webinars on what to expect in the early days, and detailed information on first steps, efforts that have been incorporated by the host institution under study. This would also be an ideal time for peer mentors to initiate contact. Online resources such as the international student portal offered by the Canadian Bureau of International Education, which includes information and a chat board, could also be beneficial.

Although postsecondary institutions typically offer orientations to incoming foreign students a number of additional considerations such as encouraging early arrival, hands-on and comprehensive orientations to the campus and the host city, and offering easily accessible support such as central information desks in the first days of classes might also be beneficial. International student offices should focus on maintaining contact with international students, particularly throughout the first term, through social media and ongoing events. Design of such services would be greatly benefitted by a longitudinal needs assessment. Central location of international student offices in busy areas of the campus such as student centres would also facilitate ease of access, opportunities for informal outreach, and would increase the profile of these key services.

Two current findings noted earlier that might be of particular interest for the local ISA office are the meaningful and positive experiences several participants reported with older host nationals and outside of the city centre. Home stays have been indicated as beneficial but expensive in local research (Younghusband, 2010). Resources such as the Home Share program, a community initiative pairing students seeking accommodation with 50+ homeowners, may provide an excellent opportunity for international students to gain such positive experiences, particularly in areas outside the city centre if transportation was available. Participation by international students could help address problems with housing, social isolation, and community integration. This study also highlighted the need for support around concerns emerging later in the cross-cultural transition for some students, such as creating more substantial relationships with host nationals and consideration of immigration or re-entry to the home culture.

Participants indicated the first six months as the most difficult period of their sojourn marked by high stress and low support, implying a particularly vulnerable stage for them. Acculturative stress was specifically tied to changing but ambiguous academic roles and expectations and was a substantial concern in the early months. Along with struggling to adjust to the demands of studying in English, participants were confused about academic responsibilities, course scheduling, workload, navigating class dynamics, student-professor relationships, and the general institutional culture. They had to quickly adjust in order to meet their role obligations in the face of overwhelming change. To foster success for these students the host institution may benefit from investing in an effective support structure that anticipates and meets their needs. It is recommended that

institutions consider examining the extent of these concerns and providing structured support to inform students about the aforementioned issues, mentor and assist them through navigating the challenges.

The host institution under study currently offers a "First Year Success" program. As part of this program, at-risk students with lower high school averages have access to supplemental instruction, regular academic advising sessions, small group tutoring and courses focusing on orientation to the facilities, development of relevant academic skills, and university writing. This program provides an excellent template for the type of well-planned and structured supports that could benefit international students and be tailored to their needs by including sessions on the institutional culture, classroom skills, the process of acculturation, and a much-needed language support component. Many participants in this study indicated that their workload eradicated any opportunity to attend international student activities or avail of supports. If this trend were found across the international student population, addressing this obstacle to healthy acculturation would be vital. By encouraging a well planned but manageable first semester for international students that provides skills training, support, and course credit, the host institution can send a clear message regarding their commitment to supporting the success of international students.

As noted previously, this study also underscored considerable challenges for international graduate students, such as decreased opportunity for social interaction and issues related to the supervisory relationship, which are strengthened by the existing literature. If such needs are found across the larger international student population, it is

particularly important that graduate students should not be excluded from the type of program proposed above. Resources that are designed for and relevant to the specific needs of international graduate students are lacking. For example, graduate students are typically not included in the peer mentorship program offered by the international student office at the host institution and might be well served by a departmental mentorship program. It is in the best interest of the host institution to consider how such gaps in support impact its self-stated goals of understanding and meeting the needs of international students (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2007) and ethical obligations (Moores, 2008; Ward et al., 2001; Yeh & Yang, 2003).

The current finding that may be of greatest interest to the host institution is the sharp contrast between diversification of the student body versus the curriculum and academic culture expressed by these international students. Participants in this study indicated that the lack of cross-cultural knowledge found in the general host community extended to the university and was more problematic and stressful in this context. An ethnocentric focus on issues pertaining to Canada and the U.S. in coursework, failure to integrate internationals into class discussions, and an assumption that international students will assimilate into the local academic environment are considerable barriers to truly internationalizing postsecondary education. The current study indicates that the strengths and perspectives of international students may not be effectively utilized and the host institution may be missing an opportunity to expand the scope of learning.

While dedicated international student services play a pivotal role in many of the recommendations cited here, it is also important to recognize that international student

offices cannot be the sole support resource for these students. Internationalization of a postsecondary institution and addressing the needs of international students must be the responsibility of all areas of the host institution including academic departments, faculty, and general student services. Many members of the university community may not be well versed in the challenges facing this population, however, or know how to provide meaningful assistance. Training and support with regard to understanding and meeting the needs of international students including identification of common challenges, gathering of resources to address these difficulties, awareness of signs that students may be struggling beyond expected acculturation, available supports, referral processes, and strategies to encourage integration within the department and student body would be important considerations, particularly for instructors who work with these individuals on a daily basis. This task might be facilitated by designating an international student contact person within each department to act as a liaison and resource and guide the department in these endeavours.

Finally, integration and multiculturalism are goals that require work on both sides of the newcomer-host relationship. The results of this study suggest that change within the host community and institution may not have kept pace with the rapidly shifting diversity of the student population. Moreover, participants perceived their local peers as often disinterested in building relationships with internationals. Social support has long been recognized as a consistent and important factor in facilitating the successful adjustment of international students. Host institutions attempt to encourage social connection through a variety of programs in which international students are paired with

language partners, mentors, and host families for holiday visits, in line with recommendations from the literature (e.g. Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Westwood and Barker, 1990). Increasing part-time jobs on campus for international students and inviting them to share their perspectives formally and informally with the campus community would provide further opportunities for cross-cultural interaction.

Cultural differences regarding social norms and expectations for relationships may hinder such programs (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), however, as does the host populations' lack of experience and comfort building relationships across cultures. Addressing such barriers directly is critical to fostering communities that value multiculturalism. This might also be achieved by creating greater "cultural curiosity" (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011) and increasing the intercultural experience of local students through study or volunteer abroad and working holiday opportunities as well as international community events. It is important to include international students themselves as key stakeholders in this process. The dozens of international students who volunteered to take part in this study were eager to help inform an understanding of their experiences, suggesting an excellent source of valuable guidance.

Clinical implications. One of the primary goals of the current research was to help inform a greater understanding of the lived experience of local international students among clinicians providing psychological services to this population. The rich, in-depth description offered by these participants allows such professionals a view into this experience and opportunity for greater awareness. The information gathered in this study, bolstered by the existing literature, indicates that these international students navigated

challenges that are common to all postsecondary students, unique concerns specific to international study, as well as difficulties owing to the uncommon context in which they study. This final consideration poses a particular challenge to postsecondary clinicians, as resources commonly found in larger centres may be unavailable in a small and non-traditional host centre. Results also highlighted a number of commonly cited issues that may present distinctively in this host environment including choice of acculturative strategy, impact of daily hassles, cultural distance, discrimination, and perception of communication ability broadened beyond language proficiency. Consideration of these differences is important with regard to evaluating the generalizability of the research literature to the current host location. The many individual differences identified also underscore the need to avoid assumptions and allow international student clients to inform us about how they experience challenges. Exploration of the meaning of the individual's international study is also recommended.

Current findings could be utilized by psychologists working at university counselling centres to design relevant resources and highlight potential risk factors that should be carefully assessed such as lack of social support, language barriers, trauma history, and academic difficulties. International graduate students are a further subgroup that may deserve specific attention. With regard to relevant services, support groups or workshops for international students could be planned around the thematic clusters identified in this study and provide a meaningful source of social support for international students who have been struggling with their cross-cultural transition or have not yet filled gaps in their support networks. Critical incidents and vignettes describing common

international student concerns drawing on qualitative research could also be employed in such groups to help students work through effective problem-solving (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

A well-known barrier to serving this population, however, is the stigma and lack of familiarity around mental health services and international students' hesitance to seek counselling. Creativity is required to overcome this barrier and international students may be more likely to avail of resources focused on academic skills, career, or workshops pertaining to concrete skill building (Mori, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2004; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Psychoeducational and group interventions have been specifically noted as useful for international students as they provide valuable information, an opportunity for interaction and sharing of perspectives, and may also allow international students to make a positive initial contact with counselling centre staff and gain familiarity with relevant services (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Group interventions, such as the Intercultural Communication Workshop described by Brinson and Kottler (1995), can also include members of the host student population, employing content and exercises aimed at helping international and local students understand and navigate cultural differences. Given that considerable integration challenges were noted for the study location in this and other local research, groups designed for international students and Canadian students from other provinces might also hold promise to help participants find common ground among a larger population of newcomers.

Researchers have also suggested that counsellors and clinicians working with international students directly address the stigma and lack of familiarity with counselling

services commonly noted in this population. It has been recommended (Mori, 2000; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004) that university counselling centres provide brochures, handouts, presentations, and online resources explicitly addressing misperceptions regarding counselling, explaining the process and typical presenting concerns, and providing information on relevant services. As many international students indicate a preference to confide in family and friends over professional resources, a peer counselling program supported by a university counselling centre might also be suggested.

In addition to employing and tailoring typical counselling interventions, experts in the field have also called for professionals to expand their perspectives on counselling services for this population. Arthur (1997) urged counselling professionals to "be innovative and to move beyond the boundaries of traditional counselling protocol since these may be viewed as either intimidating or offensive by international clients" (p. 269). Non-traditional methods might include offering counselling outside the centre and maintaining informal contacts with this student population by attending activities and events to facilitate familiarity with counsellors on campus. The benefits of undertaking a needs assessment, in consultation with international students, to inform creation and design of relevant services have also been espoused (Mori, 2000; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Despite the rapid rise of the international student population and their potential vulnerability with regard to mental health concerns, clinicians and counsellors working with these students may have little training or guidance regarding international student

experiences. Mori (2000) has noted the "shortage of culturally knowledgeable and sensitive counsellors" as "probably the most important obstacle to international students' use of services" (p. 140). Arthur (2005 as cited in Arthur, 2008) has recommended five key areas in which counsellors and clinicians can enhance culturally responsive counselling with international students:

1. Learning about emerging theories and models of cross-cultural transitions.
2. Increasing understanding of the challenges commonly experience by international students.
3. Developing multicultural competencies focusing on self-awareness, knowledge, and skills.
4. Finding ways to facilitate international student utilization of university counselling services.
5. Developing professional roles outside the clinical context to advocate for international students and draw attention to relevant institutional obstacles and policies.

Researchers in the field have also drawn attention to the lack of training clinicians receive regarding conducting therapy across cultures (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Professional psychology training programs have a role to play in addressing this gap by educating psychologists-in-training about issues relevant to acculturation and cross-cultural counselling (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Ways of realizing this goal include specific training in cross-cultural competencies, encouraging clinical and personal experiences with diverse populations,

offering opportunities for trainees to participate in cross-cultural activities such as international study, work, or volunteer programs, and ensuring that international students within such training programs are encouraged to share their perspectives and contribute to internationalization of psychology training programs (Moores, 2008).

As noted, psychologists have a key role in meeting the needs of the international student population. Awareness of the many challenges these students face and the rapid increase in enrolment numbers suggests a responsibility to advocate for adequate and relevant supports and resources for all members of this group and spread this awareness. As Arthur (2008) points out, professionals who counsel international students play a number of different roles in addition to providing direct personal and academic counselling services. A collaborative approach across the university community is necessary to meet targets for attending to international student needs and true internationalization of the host institution. Clinicians providing on-campus counselling services are encouraged to facilitate and promote inter-professional collaboration in this area across the university community including health services, student services, residences, and faculty, in line with recommendations from the literature, and have a role in helping others understand the needs and challenges of international students and to assist with consultation and referrals (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Mori, 2000; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Design and implementation of a comprehensive program offered early in their transition, as described in the previous section, would provide an opportunity for this type of team approach. Moreover, participants in the current study indicated a positive association with the international student office at the

host institution. Ensuring that international student clients are aware of this resource and building collaborative inter-professional relationships between university counselling centres and international student offices are strongly recommended.

Finally, despite the myriad challenges faced by international students emphasized in the literature and emerging from this study, the strengths of this population were also reflected. Participants utilized past experiences and personal characteristics to navigate these challenges and generally described them as manageable and improving over time. They were also aware of developing new or previously unused skills and strengths over their study abroad experience describing considerable personal growth. Adopting a strengths-based approach that builds upon the characteristics, experiences, and resilience of this population is suggested, as is further clinical research into this area to balance the largely problem-focused nature of the current clinical literature. Furthermore, participants indicated that coping with challenges was an integral part of their study abroad experience resulting in considerable growth. It should be clarified that recommendations provided are not intended to eliminate these challenges but rather to provide guidance and support through these struggles and additional care to individuals at risk in accord with the relevant supports host institutions endeavour to provide to domestic students. Relevant and accessible counselling services aim to offer international students support and intervention in times of distress and valuable resources to make the most of their study abroad experience.

References

Abe, J., Talbot, D. M., & Geelhoed, R. J. (1998). Effects of a peer program on international student adjustment. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*(6), 539-547. Retrieved from http://www.jin.ryugaku-usa.com/pub/win.pdf

Abowitz, K.K. (2004) Starting at home, and then leaving it. *Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society, 35*, 89-100. Retrieved from http://www.ovpes.org/2004/Abowitz.pdf

Abu-Laban, Y., & Garber, J. A. (2005). The construction of the geography of immigration as a policy problem: The United States and Canada compared. *Urban Affairs Review, 40*(4), 520-561. doi:10.1177/1078087404273443

Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 15*(4), 13. doi:10.1177/002216787501500403

Adrian-Taylor, S., Noels, K. A., & Tischler, K. (2007). Conflict between international graduate students and faculty supervisors: Toward effective conflict prevention and management strategies. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 11*(1), 90-117. doi:10.1177/1028315306286313

Alfonso, V. (1997). *Overcoming depressed moods after an HIV+ diagnosis: A critical incident analysis*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. NQ25008).

Anderson, W. J. (2012). *Immigration in rural Newfoundland: Individual and community change*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of New Mexico, U.S.

Arthur, N. (1997). Counselling issues with international students. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 31*(4), 259-274. Retrieved from http://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/cjc/index.php/rcc/article/view/98/281

Arthur, N. (2001). Using critical incidents to investigate cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 25*(1), 41-53. doi:10.1016/S0147-1767(00)00041-9

Arthur, N. (2004). *Counseling international students: Clients from around the world.* New York, NY, US: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Arthur, N. (2008). Counseling international students. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.), *Counseling across cultures* (6th ed.) (pp. 275-290). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Arthur, N., & Flynn, S. (2011). Career development influences of international students who pursue permanent immigration to Canada. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 11*(3), 221-237. doi:10.1007/s10775-011-9212-5

Babiker, I. E., Cox, J. L., & Miller, P. M. (1980). The measurement of cultural distance and its relationship to medical consultations, symptomatology and examination performance of overseas students at Edinburgh University. *Social Psychiatry, 15*(3), 109-116. doi:10.1007/BF00578141

Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(6), 697-712. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013

Berry, J. W. (2006). Acculturative stress. In P. T. P. Wong, & L. C. J. Wong (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural perspectives on stress and coping. International and Cultural Psychology Series.* (pp. 287-298). Dallas, TX US: Spring Publications. doi:10.1007/0-387-26238-5_12

Borgen, W. A., & Amundson, N.E. (1984). *The experience of unemployment: Implications for counselling the unemployed.* Scarborough, Ontario, Canada: Nelson.

Brinson, J. A., & Kottler, J. (1995). International students in counseling: Some alternative models. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 9*(3), 57-70. doi:10.1300/J035v09n03_05

Brown, L., Edwards, J., & Hartwell, H. (2010). A taste of the unfamiliar: Understanding the meanings attached to food by international postgraduate students in England. *Appetite, 54*(1), 202-207. doi:10.1016/j.appet.2009.11.001

Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008a). The initial stage of the international sojourn: Excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 36*(1), 33-49. doi:10.1080/03069880701715689

Brown, L., & Holloway, I. (2008b). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university: An ethnographic study. *Journal of Research in International Education, 7*(2), 232-249. doi:10.1177/1475240908091306

Canadian Bureau for International Education. (2012). *Flagship 2012: A world of learning.* Ottawa, ON: Author.

Cerna, Z. (2001). *Psychological preparedness for breast cancer surgery.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/11338

Church, A. T. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin, 91*(3), 540-572. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.91.3.540

Colaizzi, P. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Valle & M. Kinds (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternative for psychology* (pp. 48-71). NY: Oxford University Press.

Constantine, M. G., Okazaki, S., & Utsey, S. O. (2004). Self-concealment, social self-efficacy, acculturative stress, and depression in African, Asian, and Latin American international college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74*(3), 230-241. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.74.3.230

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 124-30. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Dao, T. K., Lee, D., & Chang, H. L. (2007). Acculturation level, perceived English fluency, perceived social support level, and depression among Taiwanese international students. *College Student Journal, 41*(2), 287-295. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.biz/csj.html

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

DiAngelo, R. J. (2006). The production of Whiteness in education: Asian international students in a college classroom. *Teachers College Record, 108*(10), 1983-2000. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00771.x

Duffy, M. E., Farmer, S., Ravert, P., & Huittinen, L. (2005). International community health networking project: Two year follow-up of graduates. *International Nursing Review, 52*(1), 24-31. doi:10.1111/j.1466-7657.2004.00252.x

Duru, E., & Poyrazli, S. (2007). Personality dimensions, psychosocial-demographic variables, and English language competency in predicting level of acculturative stress among Turkish international students. *International Journal of Stress Management, 14*(1), 99-110. doi:10.1037/1072-5245.14.1.99

Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Gollust, S. E. (2007). Help-seeking and access to mental health care in a university student population. *Medical Care, 45*(7), 594-601. doi:10.1097/MLR.0b013e31803bb4c1

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin, 51*(4), 327-358. doi:10.1037/h0061470

Flinck, A., & Paavilainen, E. (2010). Women's experiences of their violent behavior in an intimate partner relationship. *Qualitative Health Research, 20*(3), 306-318. doi:10.1177/1049732309358325

Fly, B. J., van Bark, W. P., Weinman, L., Kitchener, K. S., & Lang, P. R. (1997). Ethical transgressions of psychology graduate students: Critical incidents with implications for training. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 28*(5), 492-495. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.28.5.492

Fowler, A. (2012). *Fact Book 2012*. St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning. Retrieved from Memorial University website: http://www.mun.ca/ciap/Analysis/FACT_BOOK_2012_Online.pdf

Fredrickson, B. L., Tugade, M. M., Waugh, C. E., & Larkin, G. R. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crisis? A prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(2), 365-376. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.365

Furnham, A & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London: Methuen.

Furukawa, T., Sarason, I. G., & Sarason, B. R. (1998). Social support and adjustment to a novel social environment. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 44*(1), 56-70. doi:10.1177/002076409804400106

Galchenko, I., & van de Vijver. F.J.R. (2007). The role of perceived cultural distance in the acculturation of exchange students in Russia. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 31*(2), 181-197. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2006.03.004

Gaudet, S., Clément, R., & Deuzeman, K. (2005). Daily hassles, ethnic identity and psychological adjustment among Lebanese-Canadians. *International Journal of Psychology, 40*(3), 157-168. doi:10.1080/0020759044400026

Gien, L, and Law, R. (2009). *Attracting and Retaining Immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador: Voices from the Newcomers and International Students.* Final Report

Submitted to the Harris Centre, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Retrieved from Memorial University website: http://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/research/funding/immigration/IRF_Gien_2009_8_31.pdf

Giorgi, A. (1970). *Psychology as a human science: A phenomenologically based approach*. Oxford, England: Harper & Row.

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 28*(2), 235-260. doi:10.1163/156916297X00103

Giorgi, A. P., & Giorgi, B. (2008). Phenomenological psychology. In C. Willig, & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 165-178). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues, 19*(3), 33-47. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1963.tb00447.x

Hadis, B. F. (2005). Gauging the impact of study abroad: How to overcome the limitations of a single-cell design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 30*(1), 3-19. doi:10.1080/0260293042003243869

Harrison, N., & Peacock, N. (2010). Cultural distance, mindfulness and passive xenophobia: Using integrated threat theory to explore home higher education

students' perspectives on 'internationalisation at home'. *British Educational Research Journal, 36*(6), 877-902. doi:10.1080/01411920903191047

Heggins, W. J. I.,II, & Jackson, J. F. L. (2003). Understanding the collegiate experience for Asian international students at a Midwestern research university. *College Student Journal, 37*(3), 379-391. Retrieved from http://www.cobleskill.edu/library/SB354_01.pdf

Hovey, J. D. (2000). Acculturative stress, depression, and suicidal ideation in Mexican immigrants. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 6*(2), 134-151. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.6.2.134

Hyun, J., Quinn, B., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2007). Mental health need, awareness, and use of counseling services among international graduate students. *Journal of American College Health, 56*(2), 109-118. doi:10.3200/JACH.56.2.109-118

Josselson, R. (2004). The hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion. *Narrative Inquiry, 14*(1), 1-28. doi:10.1075/ni.14.1.01jos

Kaczmarek, P. G., Matlock, G., Merta, R., Ames, M. H., & Ross, M. (1994). An assessment of international college student adjustment. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 17*(4), 241-247. doi:10.1007/BF01407740

Kagan, H., & Cohen, J. (1990). Cultural adjustment of international students. *Psychological Science, 1*(2), 133-137. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1990.tb00082.x

Kashima, E. S., & Loh, E. (2006). International students' acculturation: Effects of international, conational, and local ties and need for closure. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30*(4), 471-485. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.12.003

Kelly, K. (2003). *A guide for multicultural helpers at Memorial University.* Unpublished report, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada.

Kiang, L., Grzywacz, J. G., Marín, A. J., Arcury, T. A., & Quandt, S. A. (2010). Mental health in immigrants from nontraditional receiving sites. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16*(3), 386-394. doi:10.1037/a0019907

Kitsantas, A. (2004). Studying abroad: The role of college students' goals on the development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding. *College Student Journal, 38*(3), 441-452. Retrieved from http://journals825.home.mindspring.com/csj/html.

Kitsantas, A., & Meyers, J. (2001). Studying abroad: Does it enhance college student cross-cultural awareness? Paper presented at the combined Annual Meeting of the San Diego State University and the U.S. Department of Education Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER 2001), San Diego, CA. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/PDFS/ED456648.pdf

Komiya, N., & Eells, G. T. (2001). Predictors of attitudes toward seeking counseling among international students. *Journal of College Counseling, 4*(2), 153-160. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1882.2001.tb00195.x

Kuo, B. C. H., & Roysircar, G. (2004). Predictors of acculturation for Chinese adolescents in Canada: Age of arrival, length of stay, social class, and English reading ability. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 32*(3), 143-154. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2004.tb00367.x

Lacina, J. G. (2002). Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education. *New Directions for Higher Education,* 117, 21-28. doi:10.1002/he.43

Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(3), 21-35. Retrieved from http://wigan-ojs.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/viewFile/4510/3647

Lee, J., Koeske, G. F., & Sales, E. (2004). Social support buffering of acculturative stress: A study of mental health symptoms among Korean international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 28*(5), 399-414. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2004.08.005

Leong, F. T. L., & Chou, E. L. (1996). Counseling international students. In P. B. Pedersen, J. G. Draguns, W. J. Lonner & J. E. Trimble (Eds.) *Counseling across cultures* (4th ed.), (pp. 210-242). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage.

Lewthwaite, M. (1997). A study of international students' perspectives on cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 19*(2), 167-185. doi:10.1007/BF00114787

Lin, S., & Betz, N. E. (2009). Factors related to the social self-efficacy of Chinese international students. *Counseling Psychologist, 37*(3), 451-471. doi:10.1177/0011000009332474

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). CA, US: Sage Publications, Incorporated.

Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin, 7*(1), 45-58.

MacKnee, C. M., & Mervyn, J. (2002). Critical incidents that facilitate homeless people's transition off the streets. *Journal of Social Distress & the Homeless, 11*(4), 293-306. doi:10.1023/A:1016837231886

Magnussen, L., Amundson, M. J., & Smith, N. (2008). Through the eyes of women: Cultural insights into living as a battered woman in Hawaii. *Nursing & Health Sciences, 10*(2), 125-130. doi:10.1111/j.1442-2018.2008.00383.x

Mallinckrodt, B., & Leong, F. T. (1992). International graduate students, stress, and social support. *Journal of College Student Development, 33*(1), 71-78.

Marsella, A. J., & Pedersen, P. (2004). Internationalizing the counseling psychology curriculum: Toward new values, competencies, and directions. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 17*(4), 413-423. doi:10.1080/09515070412331331246

Martin, J. N., Bradford, L., & Rohrlich, B. (1995). Comparing predeparture expectations and post-sojourn reports: A longitudinal study of U.S. students abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 19*(1), 87-110. doi:10.1016/0147-1767(94)00026-T

Memorial University of Newfoundland. (2007, February 1). *Strategic plan and targets document 2007*. Retrieved from Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning website: http://www.mun.ca/strategicplanning/strategicplanjan25webfinal.pdf

Misra, R., Crist, M., & Burant, C. J. (2003). Relationships among life stress, social support, academic stressors, and reactions to stressors of international students in the United States. *International Journal of Stress Management, 10*(2), 137-157. doi:10.1037/1072-5245.10.2.137

Moores, L. (2008). *Positive aspects of international students' cross-cultural transition: A qualitative exploration.* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (Publication No. AAT MR46895).

Moores, L., & Popadiuk, N. (2011). Positive aspects of international student transitions: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(3), 291-306. doi:10.1353/csd.2011.0040

Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 78*(2), 137-144. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb02571.x

Mumford, D. B. (1998). The measurement of culture shock. *Social Psychiatry, 33*(4), 149-154. doi:10.1007/s001270050037

Nilsson, J. E., Berkel, L. A., Flores, L. Y., & Lucas, M. S. (2004). Utilization rate and presenting concerns of international students at a university counseling center: Implications for outreach programming. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 19*(2), 49-59. doi:10.1300/J035v19n02_05

Oberg, K. (1960). The cultural shock and the problems of adjustment to new cultural environments. *Sociologia, 22(1), 71-79.*

Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. (2007). *Diversity ~ "Opportunity and Growth": An immigration strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's, NL: Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism. Retrieved from http://www.nlimmigration.ca/media/2842/strategydoc-mar07.pdf

Oropeza, B. C., Fitzgibbon, M., & Barón, A. (1991). Managing mental health crises of foreign college students. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 69*(3), 280-284. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1991.tb01506.x

Osborne, J. W. (1994). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and other methods of psychological qualitative research. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 35*(2), 167-189. doi:10.1037/07085591.35.2.167

Pan, J., & Wong, D. F. K. (2011). Acculturative stressors and acculturative strategies as predictors of negative affect among Chinese international students in Australia and Hong Kong: A cross-cultural comparative study. *Academic Psychiatry, 35*(6), 376-381. doi:10.1176/appi.ap.35.6.376

Parr, G., Bradley, L., & Bingi, R. (1992). Concerns and feelings of international students. *Journal of College Student Development, 33*(1), 20-25.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pedersen, P. B. (1991). Counseling international students. *Counseling Psychologist, 19*(1), 10-58. doi:10.1177/0011000091191002

Pedersen, P. (1995). *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents around the world.* Westport, CT, US: Greenwood Press/Greenwood Publishing Group.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle, & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41-60). New York, NY, US: Plenum Press.

Popadiuk, N., & Arthur, N. (2004). Counseling international students in Canadian schools. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 26*(2), 125-145. doi:10.1023/B:ADCO.0000027426.05819.44

Poyrazli, S., Arbona, C., Nora, A., McPherson, R., & Pisecco, S. (2002). Relation between assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, and psychosocial adjustment among international graduate students. *Journal of College Student Development, 43*(5), 632-642. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/docview/195173696/fulltextPDF?accountid=12378

Poyrazli, S., & Kavanaugh, P. R. (2006). Marital status, ethnicity, academic achievement, and adjustment strains: The case of graduate international students. *College Student Journal, 40*(4), 767-780. Retrieved from http://www.projectinnovation.biz/csj.html

Poyrazli, S., Kavanaugh, P. R., Baker, A., & Al-Timimi, N. (2004). Social support and demographic correlates of acculturative stress in international students. *Journal of College Counseling, 7*(1), 73. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2004.tb00261.x

Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M. D. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students.

Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied, 141(3), 263-280. doi:10.3200/JRLP.141.3.263-280

Raunic, A., & Xenos, S. (2008). University counselling service utilisation by local and international students and user characteristics: A review. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 30*(4), 262-267. doi:10.1007/s10447-008-9062-0

Redmond, M. V. (2000). Cultural distance as a mediating factor between stress and intercultural communication competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*(1), 151-159. doi:10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00028-0

Redmond, M. V., & Bunyi, J. M. (1993). The relationship of intercultural communication competence with stress and the handling of stress as reported by international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 17*(2), 235-254. doi:10.1016/0147-1767(93)90027-6

Reitmanova, S., & Gustafson, D. L. (2009). Mental health needs of visible minority immigrants in a small urban center: Recommendations for policy makers and service providers. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health, 11*(1), 46-56. doi:10.1007/s10903-008-9122-x

Sandhu, D. S., & Asrabadi, B. R. (1994). Development of an acculturative stress scale for international students: Preliminary findings. *Psychological Reports, 75*(1), 435-448. doi:10.2466/pr0.1994.75.1.435

Schmitt, M. T., Spears, R., & Branscombe, N. R. (2003). Constructing a minority group identity out of shared rejection: The case of international students. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*(1), 1-12. doi:10.1002/ejsp.131

Searle, W., & Ward, C. (1990). The prediction of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 14*(4), 449-464. doi:10.1016/0147-1767(90)90030-Z

Seligman, M. E. P. (1992). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life.* New York: Knopf.

Sodowsky, G. R., & Plake, B. S. (1992). A study of acculturation differences among international people and suggestions for sensitivity to within-group differences. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 71*, 53-59. doi:10.1002/j.1556-6676.1992.tb02171.x

Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1372-1380. doi:10.1177/1049732307307031

Statistics Canada. (2009). Visible minority population, by province and territory (2006 Census). *2006 Census of Population.* Retrieved from http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/demo52a-eng.htm

Suanet, I., & van de Vijver, F.J.R. (2009). Perceived cultural distance and acculturation among exchange students in Russia. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 19*(3), 182-197. doi:10.1002/casp.988

Swagler, M. A., & Ellis, M. V. (2003). Crossing the distance: Adjustment of Taiwanese graduate students in the United States. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50*(4), 420-437. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.50.4.420

Tavakol, S., Dennick, R., & Tavakol, M. (2012). Medical students' understanding of empathy: A phenomenological study. *Medical Education, 46*(3), 306-316. doi:0.1111/j.1365-2923.2011.04152.x

Thorne, T. (2005) *Fact Book 2005*. St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning. Retrieved from http://www.mun.ca/ciap/Analysis/FACT_BOOK_2005.pdf

Tseng, W., & Newton, F. B. (2002). International students' strategies for well-being. *College Student Journal, 36*(4), 591.

Valle, R. S., King, M., & Halling, S. (1989). *An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology*. US: Springer.

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London, Ontario, Canada: Althouse.

Vidler, H. C. (2005). Women making decisions about self-care and recovering from depression. *Women's Studies International Forum, 28*(4), 289-303. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2005.04.014

Wang, K. T., & Heppner, P. P. (2012). Profiles of acculturative adjustment patterns among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(3), 424-436. doi:10.1037/a0028532

Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). New York, NY US: Routledge.

Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1993). Where's the 'culture' in cross-cultural transition? Comparative studies of sojourner adjustment. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 24*(2), 221-249. doi:10.1177/0022022193242006

Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1996). Crossing cultures: The relationship between psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment. In J. Pandey, D. Sinha & D. P. S. Bhawuk (Eds.), *Asian contributions to cross-cultural psychology*, (pp. 289-306). Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc.

Ward, C., Okura, Y., Kennedy, A., & Kojima, T. (1998). The U-curve on trial: A longitudinal study of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transition. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22*(3), 277-291. doi:10.1016/S0147-1767(98)00008-X

Wertz, F. J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 167-177. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.167

Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Westwood, M. J., & Barker, M. (1990). Academic achievement and social adaptation among international students: A comparison groups study of the peer-pairing program. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 14*(2), 251-263. doi:10.1016/0147-1767(90)90008-K

Wilton, L., & Contantine, M. G. (2003). Length of residence, cultural adjustment difficulties, and psychological distress symptoms in Asian and Latin American international college students. *Journal of College Counseling, 6*(2), 177-186. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1882.2003.tb00238.x

Yang, B., & Clum, G. A. (1995). Measures of life stress and social support specific to an Asian student population. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 17*(1), 51-67. doi:10.1007/BF02229203

Yang, R. P., Noels, K. A., & Saumure, K. D. (2006). Multiple routes to cross-cultural adaptation for international students: Mapping the paths between self-construals, English language confidence, and adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30*(4), 487-506. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.11.010

Yeh, C. J., & Inose, M. (2003). International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 16*(1), 15. doi:10.1080/0951507031000114058

Yeh, H., & Yang, S. (2003). *Listen to their voices: Expectations and experiences of Asian graduate students.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/PDFS/ED479385.pdf

Ying, Y. (2005). Variation in acculturative stressors over time: A study of Taiwanese students in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(1), 59-71. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.04.003

Ying, Y., & Liese, L. H. (1990). Initial adaptation of Taiwan foreign students to the United States: The impact of prearrival variables. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 18*(6), 825-845. doi:10.1007/BF00938066

Yoon, E., & Portman, T. A. A. (2004). Critical issues of literature on counseling international students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 32*(1), 33-44. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2004.tb00359.x

Younghusband, L. J. (2010). *International students at Memorial University: A study of their first year experiences.* Unpublished research report, Memorial University Counselling Centre, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada.

Zhang, J., & Goodson, P. (2011). Predictors of international students' psychosocial adjustment to life in the United States: A systematic review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 35*(2), 139-162. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.011

Zhang, N., & Dixon, D. N. (2003). Acculturation and attitudes of Asian international students toward seeking psychological help. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 31*(3), 205-222. doi:10.1002/j.2161-1912.2003.tb00544.x

Appendix A

Letter/Email to Nominators

Dear (Colleague),

I am contacting you to ask for your help in recruiting participants for research on the lived experience of international university students here in St. John's. I am a doctoral student studying clinical psychology here at Memorial University and my supervisor is Dr. Peter Cornish.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would pass the research invitation below along to any international students you know who are currently studying at Memorial and have completed at least one semester of studies. If you are a current international student please consider participating in this study.

Thank you for your help with this research; your support is much appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns please let me know and I will address them.

Sincerely,

Lisa Moores, M.A.
PsyD Student (Clinical Psychology)
Dept. of Psychology
Memorial University

Instructions: Please copy the invitation below, paste it into a new email, and send it to any local international university students who may be interested in sharing their experience. Thanks!

INVITATION TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Dear International Student,

My name is Lisa Moores and I am a doctoral student at Memorial University studying clinical psychology. I would like to invite you to take part in a study exploring the experiences of international university students in St. John's, a small city with limited cultural diversity. Participants will have an opportunity to share their experiences and talk about their cross-cultural transition.

You are welcome to participate in this study if you:

- Are an international student.
- Are currently enrolled at Memorial University.
- Have completed at least one semester of studies.

Students who choose to participate will be compensated with a $20 gift card following each of two interviews.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. Students will be asked to complete a short questionnaire and participate in two interviews, the first taking about 60-90 minutes and the second about 45 minutes. Interviews will take place on campus and will be scheduled at your convenience throughout the term. If you are interested in taking part in this research or would like further information please contact me at lmoores@mun.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Lisa Moores, M.A.
PsyD Student (Clinical Psychology)
Dept. of Psychology
Memorial University

Appendix B

Letter/Email to Potential Participants

Dear International Student,

My name is Lisa Moores and I am a doctoral student at Memorial University studying clinical psychology. I would like to invite you to participate in a study exploring the experiences of international university students in St. John's, a small city with limited cultural diversity. Participants will have an opportunity to share their experiences and discuss their transition to a new culture.

You are welcome to participate in this study if you:

- Are an international student.
- Are currently enrolled at Memorial University.
- Have completed at least one semester of studies.

Students who choose to take part in the study will be compensated with a $20 gift card following each of two interviews.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. Students will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and participate in two interviews, the first taking about 60-90 minutes and the second about 45 minutes. Interviews will take place on campus and will be scheduled at your convenience throughout the term. I have also attached an information letter that will provide a more detailed description of the study. If you are interested in taking part in this research or would like more information please contact me at lmoores@mun.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Lisa Moores, M.A.
PsyD Student (Clinical Psychology)
Dept. of Psychology
Memorial University

Appendix C

Information Letter

Come from away, far away: The lived experience of international students in a predominantly homogeneous host culture

Department of Psychology
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Title: Come from away, far away: The lived experience of international students in a predominantly homogeneous host culture

Researchers: Lisa Moores, M.A.
PsyD Student (Clinical)
Department of Psychology SN2051
Memorial University
St. John's, NL, Canada, A1B 3X9
Phone: 709-***-****
Email: lmoores@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Peter Cornish, R. Psych., Associate Professor & Director
University Counselling Centre
Cross-appointment: Department of Psychology
Memorial University, UC 5000
St. John's, NL, Canada, A1C 5S7
Phone: 709-***-**** Fax: 709-***-****
Email: pcornish@mun.ca

You are asked to take part in a research project titled "Come from away, far away: The lived experience of international students in a predominantly homogeneous host culture." It will explore what it is like to be an international student in a location where most members of the host community share a similar cultural background.

This form is a part of the informed consent process. It will give you some information on what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do if you participate. Please read the information below carefully. If you have any questions or if there is anything you do not understand please ask the researcher.

Participation in this research is voluntary and if you wish to leave the study at any time you may do so and there will be no negative consequences.

Purpose of study: This study seeks to explore the lived experience of international students in a host environment with limited cultural diversity. The findings will be used to contribute to a better understanding of this experience and help improve counselling services for international students.

What you will do in this study: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and take part in two one-on-one interviews. This interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. You will be asked about your experience as an international student in St. John's, a small city with limited ethnoracial and cultural diversity, and what experiences have been meaningful during your cross-cultural transition. You can choose not to answer any questions that are asked.

Length of time: The first interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes in length and the second interview is expected to take about 45 minutes.

Possible Benefits: You will have the opportunity to talk about your personal experience as an international student, which may help you understand your own transition and help improve counselling services to support international students. Participants will also be compensated with a $20 gift card for each interview.

Possible risks: There is minimal risk involved in the participation of this study, although it is sometimes uncomfortable to talk about yourself. Participants are free to choose what information they want to share and what they do not want to talk about.

Confidentiality: Your name will not appear on any forms except for the consent form and will not be documented in any reports. Throughout the research study your transcript will be identified by a code only and a false name may be used in the final written document. Any information that might identify you will also be changed to protect your confidentiality and specific information such as your age and country of origin will not be used. You may examine the transcript of your interview if you would like to and request to have information you think may identify you altered or taken out.

Storage of Data: Data will be kept in a password-protected file on the researcher's personal computer throughout the study, which is also protected with a password and encryption, and a backup will be kept in the researcher's locked filing cabinet. Following the study the data will be kept in a secure location and all information will be destroyed following the five-year period required by Memorial University in accordance with university guidelines. The audio recording of the interview will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed and the researcher has reviewed it.

Future Use of Data: The results of this study may be used in presentations or reports on the topic of international student transition, or be published in an academic journal. These works would not include any identifying information and confidentiality would be maintained as described above.

Questions: If at anytime you have any questions about the research or your participation please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or her supervisor at the contact details above.

*The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at ***-****.*

Appendix D

Consent Form

Come from away, far away: The lived experience of international students in a predominantly homogeneous host culture

Department of Psychology
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Please check the boxes if you agree

☐ I _____, agree to participate in the current study. I have read the information letter provided and I am aware of whom to contact if I have any questions or concerns. I understand that my involvement in this study is voluntary and I am able to withdraw my participation at any time with no fear of penalty or consequences to me.

☐ I _____, agree that my interview with the researcher may be audio-recorded for research purposes. The researcher has told me that this recording will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed and the researcher has reviewed it.

_____ _____

Date Participant Signature

_____ _____

Date Researcher Signature

Appendix E

Interview Guide

The interview guide is intended as a list of potential questions that may be used to guide a holistic exploration of the phenomenon of cross-cultural transition.

Before we get started, do you have any questions or concerns you'd like to discuss?

Warm-up/rapport-building question:

Can you tell me about yourself?

Questions regarding the phenomena:

What is it like to be an international student in St. John's?
Potential prompt: Can you give me an example/tell me more about that?

What incidents or experiences related to your cross-cultural transition stand out for you?
Potential prompt: What else can you tell me? Can you give some more detail?

Potential probing questions:
What has made your transition experience more difficult?
What has been helpful during your transition experience?
What feelings stand out when you think about your experience of crossing cultures?

Questions regarding context:

What places and situations have influenced your experience as an international student here?

Potential probing questions:
Can you tell me about your experiences related to your academic studies/language skills/ social interactions/relationships?

How has your experience affected you personally, in terms of your own well-being?

Are you aware of any changes in yourself?

How did the experience affect other important people in your life?

Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience as an international student or your cross-cultural transition?

Appendix F

Demographic Information Form

1. What is your gender (male/female)? _____

2. What is your age? 18-25____ 26-30 ___ 31-35 ___36-40____

   41-50 ___ over 50 ___

3. What is your marital status? single ___ married ___

4. Do you have children? Yes____ No_____ If yes how many? ____

5. In what country were you born? _____

6. In what country did you grow up? _____

7. What is your first language? _____

8. What languages do you speak? _____

9. Are you a[n] undergraduate student? ___ graduate student? ___

10. When did you come to Canada? _____

11. When did you come to Newfoundland? _____

12. How long have you studied at MUN? _____

13. Is this the first time you have lived abroad? _____

14. If no, in what other places have you lived and for how long? _____

    _____

15. What countries have you visited? _____

    _____

* These specific details will not be reported in the study to protect confidentiality, general categories only will be reported.

Appendix G

Email to Participants for Second Interview

Dear (International Student),

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our interview on (insert date). I really enjoyed talking to you and learning more about your experience as an international student.

As we discussed, this study also involves a second interview that will allow you to review a summary of the information I gathered and give your feedback on whether this information fits with your experience of crossing cultures. You can also clarify or add information if you would like to do so. Once we have set a time I will send through the information summary so that you can look it over before our interview.

Are you free for an interview on campus over the next couple of weeks? I have some appointment times free at (list available appointments) if either of those would work for you. If not, please let me know when would be convenient for you.

Thank you again for your participation in this study. I really appreciate your involvement. I look forward to hearing from you and meeting up again!

Sincerely,

Lisa Moores, M.A.
PsyD Student (Clinical Psychology)
Dept. of Psychology
Memorial University