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"I Have To Be Everything" Voices of International Working Mothers: Negotiating Work-Life Balance in the United States

Qingjing Xu

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**"I HAVE TO BE EVERYTHING"
VOICES OF INTERNATIONAL WORKING MOTHERS:
NEGOTIATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE
IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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DEDICATION

For International Working Mothers

Your courage, strength, resilience, and beauty has inspired me
throughout this research project.

You have helped me grow.

Thank you.

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Though this thesis bears only my name on its cover as the author, it is the product of many minds and hands. I have said in many occasions how fortunate I have been to have Dr. Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik as my thesis advisor, and Dr. Janice Schuetz and Dr. John Oetzel as my committee members. Pam has guided me through every step of my graduate work with high expectations, heartfelt care, and constructive feedback. She is my mentor and my friend. Jan's erudite scholarship and love for students inspire me to be the kind of scholar that she is. Every page of this thesis has benefited from her insights and her advice. John has challenged me to set a high bar, and to always think about the "so what" of any research. He has always offered me timely and useful advice when I needed it. I have a "dream" committee.

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Finally, I have dedicated this thesis to the international working mothers whom I interviewed and whom I have not. Their spirit has inspired me. May this thesis underscore their importance and give their voices.

“I HAVE TO BE EVERYTHING”
VOICES OF INTERNATIONAL WORKING MOTHERS:
NEGOTIATING WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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ABSTRACT

Studies of work-life balance and intercultural adaptation have addressed the effect of work-life conflict for working adults and the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of immigrants. However, rarely does this research explore how working adults, especially women, develop solutions to those work-life tensions. Previous literature is typically silent about how international women struggle with acclimating to a different national culture while also working or going to school and parenting children. Thus, this study aims to explore the unique challenges international working mothers face as they work and live in the United States and the communicative strategies and solutions they adopt in coping with the tensions. I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with women from 10 nationalities, and the interviews resulted in over 230 single-spaced pages of transcribed data. Using David Boje's (2001) antenarrative analysis method, I analyze the data in two phases. In the first phase, I tell individual stories in the format of vignettes, a polyphonic approach. In the second phase, I summarize the similar challenges faced and solutions adopted by some women, and I list the differences at micro, meso, and macro levels. Findings reveal that international working mothers encounter unique challenges in their studies, in the workplace, in building

relationships, in childcare, and in managing intimate relationships. These challenges arise from language barriers, new work and academic environments, lack of extended family support, different cultural norms, visa limitations, and gender ideology. Solutions, while limited, arise from their family members' support, their advisors' encouragement, and their own resilient personalities. The micro-meso-macro framework helps to highlight the contextual influences of meso and macro forces on the women's daily lives and struggles. Findings confirm and extend existing literature on work-life conflict and intercultural adaptation. Findings provide theoretical implications on work-life conflict (Clark, 2000) and adaptation theories (Kim, 2005), as well as provide practical implications on government visa policies and university practices. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: work-life balance, intercultural adaptation, international working mothers, antenarrative analysis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am a graduate student, a teaching assistant, and a single mother of a four-year-old girl.... I have to be everything....sometimes it is just too much...

--- A working mother from Brazil

I do not belong to my Indian community because I am a divorced woman, and yet I do not belong to the mainstream American culture. I feel I am stuck 'in-between.'

--- A working mother from India

(Excerpts from interviews with international working mothers)

These accounts illustrate some of the challenges international working mothers face in their struggle to balance their work and their non-work lives in the United States. Despite the large influx of working women from other countries coming into the United States, research on work-life balance and intercultural adaptation have given foreign working women's plight scant attention. Social and economic developments in the past three decades have resulted in more women joining the workforce in virtually every nation (Marks, 2006), and more families with dual-career partnerships, single parenthood, and other alternative family structures (Ford, Heinen & Langkamer, 2007; Marks, 2006). Meanwhile, with globalization, the number of immigrants and international students in the United States, among which about 50% are women, has grown significantly in the past decade (Sullivan, 1994; U.S. Census, 2008).

There is a paucity of research about foreign working mothers' experiences of balancing work and non-work demands while acculturating into a different country. The purpose of my thesis research is to explore both the challenges and coping solutions these women face. Specifically, this study explores the micro-to-macro tensions and potential

solutions to manage those tensions. I do so first by reviewing current research in work-life and intercultural adaptation, and second, by conducting primary empirical research with foreign women working and studying in the United States.

The Challenges of International Working Mothers

Balancing work and non-work domains presents a number of challenges to most working adults (Kirby, Wieland, & McBride, 2006). Negotiating the tension between work and non-work lives is crucial for life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and relationships at work and in life (Barling & Macewen, 1992). Although employed women and men may have different actual and felt role demands, demands made upon women are often higher. Due to the prevailing gender ideology of women's expected role at home, women are likely to have a greater total workload, to make more sacrifices, and thus to have more difficulties in balancing work and life (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006; Milkie & Peltola, 1999).

Many working mothers not only work a paid shift during the day (first shift), they may also do a second shift of child-rearing and housework in the evening and a third shift of relationship maintenance at home with children and partners who feel neglected (Edley, 2001; Hochschild, 1997). They often feel guilty for not living up to an ideal of being a good wife or a good mother, which is partly due to lack of support from their husbands (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994; Van Meter & Agronow, 1982). The stress and pressure of trying to be everything to everyone results in an increased incidence of physical health problems (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, migraine headaches, and insomnia), negative emotions (such as depression, anger, and overall dissatisfaction with life), and related unhealthy behaviors (such as unhealthy diets,

excessive alcohol consumption, and tobacco use) (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006; Mirrashidi, 1999; Whitney, Kuszniir, & Dixie, 2002).

A mother who takes a student role risks her psychological and physical health, her marriage, her children, and her career (Egan, 2005). Many mothers who pursue PhD programs report logging more than 100 hours a week and also report a great deal of stress. Over time, the stress takes a toll and many mothers decide to set aside their goal of getting the treasured PhD in order to meet the more immediate needs of their families (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009).

Living in a country other than one's own adds another layer of complexity to women's work-life balance. As working mothers relocate to the United States to be employees or students, they venture into an unfamiliar socio-cultural terrain where many of the usual ways of doing things lose their relevance. As if juggling among the roles of mother, wife/partner, and employee in their home country is not challenging enough, they now face a new challenge—adapting to a new cultural environment. They must deal with issues such as language difficulties (Chen, 1990), adjusting to new social customs and norms, adjusting to a new educational system, homesickness, building new friendships (Church, 1982), and simply knowing how to get around.

Although work-life research can be found in a variety of disciplines (e.g., business, communication, family studies, psychology, sociology) (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Marks, 2006), most existing research addresses the antecedents to and effects of work-life conflict for working adults in the United States (Kirby et al., 2006). In this research, some shed light on gender differences (Elliot, 2008; Home, 1997; Home, 1998; Medved et al., 2006; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Tracy & Rivera, 2010), cross-national

comparisons (Galovan, Rackrell, Buswell, Jones, Hill & Carroll, 2010; Spector et al., 2004), and health risks for working women (Mirrashidi, 1999; Whitney, Kuszniir, & Dixie, 2002). Rarely does this research include information about the additional challenges women face when living and working in a foreign country while dealing with work-life tensions. Additionally, this research typically examines challenges resulting from work-life tensions but rarely explores how women develop solutions to those tensions.

Meanwhile, studies of intercultural adaptation in the U.S. often look at psychological wellbeing and sociocultural adaptation of immigrants or international students as a whole, without paying special attention to working mothers or student-mothers. This literature is replete with examples of how people adapt, including stages and different forms of adaptation (Berry, Kim, Power, Young & Bujaki, 1989; Kim, 2005), but it is typically silent about how parenting and gendered roles can deeply complicate processes of adaptation. Consequently, the voices of women who struggle with accommodating to a different national culture while also working or going to school and parenting children are practically silent. Because I am *one of them*, I feel these struggles every day.

Given the importance of the topic for international women's health and the scant attention given to these women's experiences in research on work-life and intercultural adaptation, the current study will draw scholars' attention to these women's lives as well as potentially provide these women knowledge about how they can gain modest emotional and practical support. Specifically, the study will answer two interrelated questions:

RQ1: What unique challenges do international working mothers face as they try to balance work and life demands while adapting to living in a foreign country?

RQ2: What communicative strategies and solutions do international working mothers report they use when they deal with these challenges?

Before reviewing the work-life and intercultural adaptation literature regarding these two questions, I will define the central terms used in this study.

Key Terms and Definitions

Throughout this study, I use the term *international working mothers* to depict foreign women (i.e. those who have lived most of their lives in a country other than the United States) with children who come to the United States and are working (including those working to earn college degrees). These mothers are either married or single. Among those married, some live with their husbands in the United States, and others have husbands who have remained in their home countries. I consider *student-mothers* to be working mothers for two reasons. First, the work load and work-life tensions for graduate students are as complex and demanding as are those experienced by women working other jobs (Gaffey & Rottinghaus, 2009). Second, many graduate students' education is funded through teaching or research assistantships, which require them to work part-time.

I use the terms *work-life* or *work/non-work life* to indicate the two life domains and the dialectical tensions from each that compete for women's attention and effort (Kirby et al., 2006). *Foreign country* or *host country* refers to the United States from the perspective of the international working mothers, and *home country* refers to the nation-states where the women lived prior to moving to the U.S., usually for most of their

previous lives. As a result of being from a foreign country, international working mothers are also referred to as *foreigners or immigrants*.

Challenges are the difficulties, conflicts, or tensions that arise from the dialectic demands of work and non-work domains that frequently pull women in different directions. Challenges also arise from the concurrent difficulties involved in learning cultural norms and expectations of host countries, and integrating them with norms and expectations of their home countries. *Communicative strategies* refers to social interactions, resources, networks, and other creative ways that working mothers devise to reduce the tension and stress from these conflicting demands. *Solutions* are the tactics international working mothers use to ease the family and workplace conflicts and achieve a satisfying work-life balance.

Balance is an ongoing achievement for working women and means a state of equilibrium between work and life. The term *balance* represents work and life as two equal halves of an equation, even though work only occupies approximately 40 of the total 168 hours in a week (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). As a result of improved *balance*, working mothers may experience a sense of calm, a sense of control, and greater satisfaction with their work and life.

Thesis Synopsis

I structure the thesis as follows: In Chapter 2, I begin by laying out the theoretical framework that guides my research. In particular, I draw on theories on work-life balance and inter-cultural adaptation because my research addresses the issues at the intersection of these two fields. Grounded in these theories, I review the literature that addresses the issues of work-life balance and intercultural adaptation from micro-meso-

macro perspectives and argue that current research lacks attention to the unique challenges international women face when working and parenting in a foreign country.

Following the literature review is the study's method in Chapter 3, in which I describe the study population, sampling, data gathering, and data analyses processes. In Chapter 4, I present the findings and analyses. I discuss the findings and draw theoretical and practical implications of this research in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I identify this study's limitations, suggest directions for future research, and offer conclusions.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Concepts and Literature Review

This research addresses the challenges international working women face and solutions they develop to balance their multi-faceted work and non-work lives when interacting with and adapting to a new cultural environment in the United States. In this section, I first argue for the value of a micro-meso-macro approach when examining women's issues regarding work-life balance and intercultural adaptation. Second, I lay out the theoretical foundation at the intersection of organizational studies on work-life balance and intercultural studies on adaptation. In particular, I introduce border theory (Clark, 2000) and intercultural adaptation theory (Kim, 2005) and draw in related concepts such as role conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), adaptation attitudes, and adaptation strategies (Berry, 2008). Finally, from micro-meso-macro perspectives, I review findings in these two literatures about challenges in balancing work and life and adapting to a new culture. I also review the solutions currently addressed in scholarly literature about these two issues. I begin by explaining the importance of a multi-level examination of these issues.

Micro-to-Macro: The Value of a Multi-Level Examination

To understand the work-life balance and cultural adaptation issues that international working mothers face in the United States, scholarship must move beyond examining factors at the micro level (e.g., interpersonal) to uncover systems of meaning at meso level (e.g., organizational and community) and macro level (e.g., cultural beliefs and values) that enable and constrain interactions at the micro-level (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Rinderle, 2006). At the interpersonal or micro-level, human actors, including international working mothers, most intimately *experience* their lives, in this case, the

challenges of balancing work-life at home and at work (Kirby et al., 2006). These challenges, however, are inevitably shaped by meso-level issues such as community services (e.g., childcare and school) and organizational work/life policies (Kirby et al., 2006). At a macro-societal level, cultural beliefs and values (e.g., gender ideology), host culture receptivity, technology, economy, and government policies all shape work-life internal and external struggles (Kirby et al., 2006; Kim, 2005; Oetzel et al., 2006). For example, an international working mother experiences role conflicts as a mother and as a graduate student or employee (micro level). However, her stress is caused by lack of affordable community childcare (meso-level) and a gender expectation imposed by her own culture to be a good mother and a good wife (macro-level).

A multilevel perspective uncovers these often unrecognized systemic forces and systems of meaning that drive and constrain communication at the interpersonal or micro-level. Thus by exploring these three levels regarding challenges and solutions, my research aims to offer a rich, layered picture of the phenomenon under study and highlight reciprocal contextual influences (Klein, Tosi, & Cannella, 1999; Oetzel et al., 2006). In fact, by definition, any research that focuses on a single level will underestimate the effects of other contexts (Klein et al., 1999; Rousseau & House, 1994).

Specific to this study, micro-level analysis recognizes the challenges and solutions of international working mothers at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, including personal traits, work characteristics, language competence, partner relationship, and work relationships. This is the level at which international working mothers encounter challenges and search for solutions in their daily work and family lives.

The meso-level analysis points to challenges and solutions at organizational and community levels, including organizational work-life policies, organizational cultures, community childcare services, and ethnic social group support. A supportive organizational culture allowing flex time and sick child leave will significantly reduce women's stress in work and in family. Moving from micro to meso perspective indicates recognition that coping with work-life conflict and intercultural adaptation involves more than personal strength and partner support; it requires organizational and community support.

Viewed from a bigger picture, the macro-level analysis examines cultural and historical systems of meaning that are often taken for granted (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011), including macro-level policies or immigration law, technologies, gendered view of women's and men's roles at home and at work, and nation-state cultures. Macro policies in the U.S., such as the Family Leave Act of 1993, allow women to care for a new child without losing the job. Communication technology empowers women to tele-work or to be self-employed, but at the same time it blurs the borders between work and non-work domains. Although dual-career couples have become the norm of society, traditional expectations on women to be good wives and responsible mothers still prevail, resulting in greater stress in working mothers. At the macro-level, nation-states, despite globalizing forces, still retain unique cultures. Living in a new country means the home country's usual ways of doing things become irrelevant, thus imposing additional challenges on working mothers.

These micro-to-macro factors constitute a web that as a whole affects working mothers' work-life balance in a foreign country. The importance of recognizing the

reciprocal relationship between the individual and the environment (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988) points to the importance of developing an analysis of international working mothers' lives from their own viewpoints. Taking micro-meso-macro perspectives, the following section provides an overview of the literature from communication, psychology, sociology, family studies, and business research that has responded to key questions about work-life balance and intercultural adaptation. In particular, I explore key *challenges* people face in the process of intercultural adaptation and women face regarding work-life balance as well as *solutions* women create and access to ameliorate these challenges. Border theory and intercultural adaptation theory form a starting place for understanding these multi-level processes.

Work-Life Balance Theories and Concepts

From an open-system's perspective, work-life border theory explains how individuals manage and negotiate the work and life spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance (Clark, 2000). Central to this theory are my assumptions that: (a) *work* and *life* constitute different domains that influence each other, and (b) individuals are *border-crossers* who can, to some extent, shape the nature of the work and life domains in order to create a desired balance. Border theory focuses predominantly on micro- and meso- level processes and features of social life, particularly interactions between work and life (Clark, 2000). The key concepts of border theory include *domains*, *borders*, *border-crossers*, *border-keepers* and *other domain members*.

First, work and life constitute different life *domains* in which roles, purposes, means, language, behaviors, and ways to accomplish tasks differ (Clark, 2000). The

work domain includes the roles of employee, student, supervisor and subordinate, and primarily satisfies the purpose of providing people with an income and giving a sense of accomplishment. On the other hand, life domain involves roles such as breadwinner, parent, partner and caretaker and satisfies the ends of attaining close relationships and personal happiness.

Due to finite time and energy suggested by scarcity theory (Edward & Rothbard, 2000), conflicts arise when the two domains compete for an individuals' time and energy. *Inter-role conflict* recognizes that the role pressures from work and non-work domains are mutually incompatible. That is, participation in the work roles is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family roles and vice versa (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn et al., 1964). Role conflict types include time-based conflicts, strain-based conflicts, and behavior-based conflicts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict often arises when time spent on performing one role excludes time spent on fulfilling another role. For example, excessive work hours or schedule conflicts make it difficult to participate in family or community activities (Pleck, Staines, & Lang, 1980; Voydanoff, 2004). Strain-based conflict arises when emotional strain experienced in one role affects one's performance in another role, such as stress experienced at home directly affecting the mood at work. Behavior-based conflict assumes that behavior patterns in the two domains (e.g., parenting vs. managerial styles) are incompatible. International working mothers likely will experience all three types of conflicts in work and in life.

The second concept in border theory is *border*. Border is a line of boundary that occurs as a result of the two different domains. People adopt different strategies in managing the boundaries. Those who choose to separate work and family adopt a

segmentation strategy, whereas people who make no distinction between the two domains adopt an *integration* strategy. Borders can be physical (defines *where* domain-relevant behavior takes place), temporal (divides *when* work is done from when family responsibility starts) and psychological (dictates when emotions, thinking, and behavior patterns are appropriate for one domain but not the other) (Clark, 2000).

A border's strength can be determined by its flexibility, permeability, and blending. *Flexibility* is the degree to which physical, temporal and psychological borders are movable (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007). For example, the border is regarded as *flexible* if an individual can choose to work at any location and at any time. *Permeability*, associated with the notion of *spillover*, is the degree to which emotions and attitudes move from one domain to another (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007). Spillover can be both positive (e.g., a feeling of achievement at work may bring positive energy to the home), negative (e.g., a disagreement at home may affect the mood at work), and bi-directional (e.g., a new baby may make the mother tired at work but may also bring a sense of purpose to her work and life). These spillovers are also called life interference with work (*LIW*) and work interference with life (*WIL*).

Blending occurs when the border between work and family blurs, such as in the case of family-run business or an insurance agent working from home. Blending can lead to either integration or frustration (Clark, 2000). International women may feel stretched-thin between the domains of work and non-work, because at work they are expected to be good employees or students, while at home, they are expected to fulfill motherly or partner duties. A hard day's work may drain her energy at home, while an adorable kid

may give her motivation in her academic work, manifesting both positive and negative spillover.

The third concept, *border-crossers*, refers to people, such as international working mothers, who frequently transit between work and family domains. *Influence* and *identification* are two aspects affecting individual adjustment. When individuals have influence—autonomy and ability to make choices—they are better adjusted at work and at home (Repetti, 1987). When individuals identify with and find meaning in their role(s), they are more likely to improve balance.

A fourth concept, *border-keepers*, refers to people who are especially influential in defining the border and domain, such as supervisors at work and partners at home (Clark, 2000). A primary source of work-life conflict arises in the disagreement about what constitutes *work* and *life* domains between border-crossers and border-keepers. One way to alleviate such conflict is through frequent communication and showing mutual support.

Although border theory examines the micro-meso level interactions, it fails to explore, or explore fully, how meso-level forces such as organizational policies affect work-life balance. Moreover, border theory is nearly silent on macro-level forces such as global or nation-state laws, ideologies about gender, globalization, extensive use of technology, and cultural adaptation's effect on work-life balance. Border theory assumes that *work* and *life* constitute different life domains. However, technology increasingly blurs when work ends and when family life begins. The theory further assumes that individuals can create a desired balance, which in reality, might not be achieved. Finally, the theory examines the metaphorical division between *work* and *life* domains at the

domestic or micro-level, without consideration for working mothers who move across international borders, which has become increasingly prevalent due to globalizing economic forces. Intercultural adaptation theories, on the other hand, give scant attention to work-life borders or balance.

Intercultural Adaptation Theories and Concepts

Adaptation theories explain the process and structure of individuals' adaptation to a new culture from micro, meso and macro levels. When individuals cross the border of a foreign country, they have to go through the process of adaptation in order to fit into the new environment. From an open-system perspective, Kim (2005) defines adaptation as the process during which immigrants "strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (p.380). Adaptation can be a painful but rewarding journey, as is illustrated by the *stress-adaptation-growth dynamic* in a dialectic, cyclic, and continual "draw-back-to-leap" pattern (p.384).

Adaptation is a painstaking process because it requires individuals to unlearn some of the old cultural elements and to learn the new cultural system (Shibutani & Kwan, 1965). Such inner conflicts—the resistance to change and the desire to adapt to the new milieu—inevitably accompany stress. *Stress* is defined as the difficulty or culture shock people experience, manifested by uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Stress also serves as the very force that pushes the immigrants to act on and adapt to the environment (Piaget, 1963).

Through the act of adaptation, individuals find better fitness with the external realities. This *stress-adaptation-growth dynamic* is not linear, but a spiraling, upward-moving process, with each stressful experience activating adaptive energy to help

individuals “leap forward” (Kim, 2005, p.384). Consequently, individuals achieve growth. This model represents an ideal approach to adaptation in which, over time, working mothers acquire more knowledge, build new relationships, and feel more comfortable in the new place.

Immigrants face the greatest level of psychological stress (depression) and sociocultural adjustment problems at the entry stage (Ward et al., 1998). Ward et al (1998) seem to assume that the fluctuation of stress and adaptation are likely to become less intense and less severe over time. However, in reality, an international working mother likely has to deal with ongoing issues, such as child education, partner relationship, and legal status in the new environment.

Conversely, Berry, Kim, Power, Young and Bujaki (1989) argue that individuals and groups experience adaptation in different ways based on their *attitudes* toward how they wish to relate to other individuals and groups in the culturally plural society. In a study of adaptation experiences of immigrant groups in Australia and Canada, Berry et al. (1989) identify four attitudes based on orientations toward cultural maintenance of one's home culture and contact with groups in the host culture. The attitudes are: integration (maintaining one's own cultural identity while seeking to be an integral part of the larger social network), separation (holding on to one's own culture while avoiding interaction with the local), assimilation (seeking daily interaction with others while not maintaining one's own cultural identity), and marginalization (showing little interest in either maintaining one's own cultural identity or having relations with others). Berry's four-attitude model implies that individuals have the autonomy and choice to adopt an attitude

in the adaptation processes, while in reality, the choices might be limited or non-existent (Coproni, 1997; Kim, 2008).

In terms of the structure of adaptation, Kim (2005) suggests three factors that affect individuals' adaptation journey, namely, micro (individual and interpersonal), meso (social) and macro factors. At micro-level, individual factors that shape the experiences of intercultural adaptation include personality traits, cognitive competence and individual expectations (Ting-Toomey, 2005). Risk-taking individuals have a positive outlook (Kim, 2005; Ward, 2004), are willing to change their original culture habits (Tharp, 2003), and are more likely to be prepared for the challenges in the new adventure than individuals who adopt the maintenance orientation. The same can be said of immigrants who are willing to take the time to reflect and to sharpen their awareness of cross-cultural issues (Bennett, 1993). Immigrants who acquire knowledge of the host culture and language (Kim, 2005; Ward & Kennedy, 1992), who demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Kim, 2005), and who have realistic expectations before coming to a new nation (Ting-Toomey, 2005) adapt to the new environment better than those who do not.

Also at the micro level, interpersonal factors, such as the quantity and quality of host national contact, reduce psychological stress in the immigrants and can be an indicator of sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1992). International women who have more contact with local people and who build more meaningful relationships may experience less stress (Ward & Kennedy, 1992).

Meso-level factors include social events and ethnic social contact. Social communication events, such as company/department parties, state fairs, stage

performances, and mass media, such as radio, movies, TV, magazines, and newspapers provide learning opportunities for the foreigners (Kim, 2005). Foreigners who maintain contact with their national or ethnic social groups receive informational, material, and emotional help, and have access to their original cultural experiences, such as celebrating ethnic holidays. Such social contact is important, especially at the initial phase of adaptation (Kim, 2005).

Macro-level factors include the receptivity of the host culture, host conformity pressure, ethnic distance, and ethnic group strength (Kim, 2005). The more receptive the cultural climate, the more help rendered to the newcomers. The less pressure for the immigrants to act and think like a local, the easier it is for them to navigate their new culture (Kim, 2001). The more similar the cultural and economic backgrounds of the home and host cultures, the less challenging is the adaptation. The same can be said for adaptation of foreigners who belong to a strong ethnic group in the community.

Though comprehensive, Kim's micro level factors seem to imply that individuals should take the lead in reaching out to the new environment, rather than the host culture reaching out to the individuals. They also assume that individuals can acquire knowledge and skills and build new relationships as long as they make efforts. In reality, international working mothers may live in an isolated, homogeneous town, and they may find it difficult to enter into the social activities of local people due to language and cultural distances.

In an ideal situation, immigrants achieve intercultural transformation as a result of successful cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2005). Adaptation is manifested in terms of psychological, socio-cultural, and economic adaptation (Aycan & Berry, 1996). When

individuals achieve *psychological* adaptation, they have a sense of wellbeing with regard to different aspects of life and a sense of satisfaction relative to groups in the home country and host society. *Socio-cultural* adaptation emphasizes individuals' progress in acquiring the skills required to manage everyday situations (or functional fitness, according to Kim, 2005). *Economic* adaptation refers to a sense of accomplishment and full participation in the economic life in the host country. Consequently, immigrants achieve growth (Kim, 2005) and identity satisfaction (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The immigrant who has successfully adapted has a clear sense of "who I am" and "who you are" and is able to "waltz" through the dynamic adaptation and identity change process (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 230). However, this ideal state of adaptation may not be achieved by international working mothers due to personal and environmental constraints.

Micro, Meso, Macro Challenges

In the following section, I review existing literature on work-life balance and intercultural adaptation. Because a multi-level analysis provides a better understanding of these issues, I review the literature using a micro-meso-macro framework.

Micro-Level Work-Life Balance Challenges

Border theory suggests that work and life constitute two different domains and conflicts arise when two domains compete for an individual's time and energy (Clark, 2000). From a micro-level perspective, the challenges of work-life balance arise from bi-directional, negative spillover due to competing roles: work interference with life (WIL) and life interference with work (LIW). LIW occurs when life-role responsibilities hinder performance at work. For example, an ill child or partner prevents attendance at work

(time-based conflict), and family disagreements affect the mood at work (strain-based conflict) (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). WIL occurs when work roles impede the performance of life responsibilities and work place conditions negatively impact family interactions.

Time, energy, and psychological interference are three significant processes by which work interferes with life. Time spent at work directly reduces time spent with family (Kanter, 1977), and working long hours prevents the fulfillment of household duties (Kirby, 2000). Work creates fatigue for the individual so that she has less available energy at home. Due to job pressure (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), the individual becomes mentally occupied with work even when physically at home (Small & Riley, 1990). Furthermore, a variety of workplace conditions have negative impact on family interactions, including work overload, poor relations with peers or supervisors, lack of teamwork, job insecurities, job loss, and low earnings (Menaghan, 1991). Such negative WIL spillover affects parent-child relationships, marital relationships, leisure, and home management (Barling & Macewen, 1992). Prior research fails to recognize the negative impact on work-life particular to international working mothers who encounter additional barriers, such as language barriers and different organizational rules or practices in the new country.

Micro-Level Intercultural Adaptation Challenges

Micro-level factors affecting adaptation include personality traits, cognitive competence, individual expectations, and the quantity and quality of host national contact (Kim, 2005). Challenges for immigrants found at this level are language barriers (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Church, 1982; De Verthelyi, 1995), feelings of loss due to differences in

life quality and changes in social status (Ayan & Berry, 1996), financial constraints, homesickness (Church, 1982; De Verthelyi, 1995), women's sense of insecurity, and children's adaptation problems.

The ability to communicate in the host language is at the center of the adaptation process (Berry & Uichol, 1988; Kim, 1988). Inadequate vocabulary prevents individuals from expressing their ideas fully and precisely, thus restricting their socialization only to co-nationals and hindering participation in class (De Verthelyi, 1995). Although international working mothers usually speak fluent English in order to become qualified for graduate programs or corporate jobs, they may still find it difficult to engage in meaningful conversations because many conversational topics are culturally rooted.

Feelings of loss arise due to a change in life style and in social status. For example, with the growth of the Chinese economy, many Chinese students experience both a decreased standard of living and a lower social status as an ethnic minority in the United States (Lin, 2006). Increasing tuition costs, diminishing university funding, and the opportunity costs associated with studying abroad often make international students feel they have made financial sacrifices (De Verthelyi, 1995).

International students find it difficult to establish new friendships in a new culture and to speak a second language. And due to financial constraints, they cannot afford to visit their home country as often as they want. As a result, they experience homesickness and loneliness. Such loneliness is felt strongest during holidays when the campus is empty. Besides feeling homesick, female students feel more insecure about their academic success and self-efficacy (De Verthelyi, 1995) and suffer from more stress as a

result of the “double jeopardy” (p. 76) of being female and international at the same time (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

Children of immigrant families experience similar stresses, which include language problems, separation from former social networks, feelings of being different from the majority peers in the new country, and confusion in behavioral norms between their indigenous culture and the host culture (e.g., Aronowitz, 1984; Lee & Chen, 2000; Zhou, 1997).

Meso-Level Work-Life Balance Challenges

At the meso-level, border theory touches briefly on the importance of organizational support in individuals' work-life balance (Clark, 2000). Studies have identified two challenges: lack of community support and lack of organizational support. For example, lack of affordable childcare in the community increases time inflexibility and emotional strain for working mothers with small children. Time demands at work prevent working mothers from participating in community services, which are often an important support for them.

Organizational challenges arise from a lack of work-life policies and a lack of a supportive organizational culture. Many companies either do not have formal work-life policies or fail to implement the policies for a number of reasons (Kirby 2000; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Tracy & Rivera, 2010; Warren & Johnson, 1995). First, senior male executives think women can simply *choose* not to work (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Second, companies do not tolerate unplanned childcare leaves (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Third, supervisors often send mixed, or conflicting, messages that prevent employees from using the policies that a company has in place (Kirby, 2000). Messages could be direct

(such as allowing leave but then emphasizing deadlines), indirect (such as rewarding individuals who prioritize work over family as role models), or even contradictory (such as granting paid-leave but then encouraging workers to trade their unused leave for money). Fourth, employees are afraid that using such benefits can impact their careers (Kirby & Krone, 2002). And finally, co-workers may view employees who use benefits as slackers and resent the fact that they have to take up more work due to the absence of slackers (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

The key to putting policy into work is a supportive organizational culture, which is often missing. Without a family-friendly corporate culture, work-life policies are merely lip service (Warren & Johnson, 1995). International working mothers may find it difficult to receive community or organizational support because they may not have the same access to information within local communities, and they may not know how to go about asking for a company's support.

Meso-Level Intercultural Adaptation Challenges

Meso-level factors for adaptation include the degree to which immigrants attend social events and build social contact with local and co-nationals (Kim, 2005). Studies at this level reveal challenges for immigrants that are above and beyond social contact, including an unfamiliar educational system, a new employment environment, additional tasks, and lack of access to community and social support. Church (1982) finds that international students face great challenges in dealing with a new educational system and with continued pressures to succeed.

Students are expected to demonstrate independent and critical thinking and to participate actively in class. However, students from collective cultures may find it

uncomfortable to talk in class unless they really have a point (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). This silence may lead to misjudgment by the faculty. International students are also under pressure to graduate within a certain number of years and with a certain GPA due to visa requirements. Researchers have failed to study the extra pressure faced by international student-mothers who also have to nurture children and help with their children's schooling.

People seeking employment in a foreign country both lack work experience and have difficulty getting their credentials recognized. As a result, they are less likely to find employment at the level for which their education and training has prepared them (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Failure to obtain steady employment at a level comparable to their qualifications coupled with social isolation generates "deep-seated dissatisfaction" in immigrants (Richmond, 1974, p.47). This sense of job insecurity is stronger among international working mothers due to their immigrant status.

Foreigners living in the U.S. have to deal with miscellaneous tasks, such as applying for a Social Security number or obtaining a driver's license. Such tasks can be both time-consuming and frustrating, especially if applicants do not speak adequate English. Lack of socialized childcare could be a headache for mothers from collective cultures, such as China and Brazil, where mothers usually receive extended family support (Yang, Chen, & Zhou, 2000) or outsource childcare to affordable and accessible nannies (my own experience). Being new to a foreign country, international working mothers may not have access to information regarding local community services and social activities, which are often sources for them to use for emergency help or for learning about local traditions and culture of the host country.

Macro-level Work-Life Balance Challenges

Although border theory fails to address the issues of work-life balance at the macro-societal level, studies show a number of macro-level challenges influencing work-life balance. These challenges arise from the different gender ideology they experience at home, at work and at school, and from the macro policies of the economy, communication technologies, globalization, and national culture.

Despite the fact that women now hold half of workforce employment, society still holds the traditional gender view that women should take on more household responsibilities and that men should be the bread-winners of the family. Influenced by this gendered view at home, women are more often pressured to quit their job with the arrival of children, or to take a job that can accommodate family responsibilities (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006). Consequently, working women, especially mothers of small children, do not feel supported by their husbands, and they may not live up to their own national ideals of being a good wife or a good mother (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994; VanMeter & Agronow, 1982). Husbands who do participate in family work tend to be more critical of wives' work patterns and parenting, and wives were also more self-critical about their balance of work and family responsibilities (Baruch & Barnett, 1986).

In the workplace, although many male executives espouse gender equity and rate the family as more important than work, many view women's paid employment as optional and, in some cases, as morally inappropriate (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). In school, female graduate students report more stress, less support, and greater role strain than

males due to expectations society places on them to be good mothers, good wives or responsible daughters (De Verthelyi, 1995; Malinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

In their research about why graduate students reject the fast track, Mason et al. (2009) find that the most common reason for women shifting their career goals concerns issues related to children and the relocation of their partners. Both reasons relate to their ascribed female identity. The influence of gendered view on international working mothers is further complicated by the interplay of ideology between their home countries and the host country. However, these contextual factors are not addressed in the existing literature.

The hands-off macro policy of the U.S. government on issues, such as parental leave and childcare, creates room for “corporate colonization” of the life world-- the encroachment of corporate logic and language into the domain of everyday life (Deetz, 1992). Examples of corporate colonization can be found in organizations that take family-like roles to promote employees’ physical and mental health through wellness programs. Personal or private issues can become the purview of organizations that blur the border between work and life domains (Kirby, 2006).

In addition to the effects of gender ideology and macro-economic policies on work-life balance, access to communication technologies has changed how people work and live (Kirby et al., 2006). The Internet and wireless technology allow people to work anywhere and anytime, thus blurring the border between work and life domains. Greater globalization promotes the flow of people and trade across national borders and brings unique challenges to individuals who tele-work across international time zones. A sourcing manager for a large furniture company based in Denver may work at home in

Louisiana at night, Skyping (online telephone or voice-over-internet) her subordinates in Asia about a shipping arrangement. This employee has to split her schedule in such a way so that she could talk to Denver during the day and Asia at night.

Culture has an important influence on values about work and life (Congress & Kung, 2005). Comparative studies find that for Asians, work-related stress has more impact on psychological wellbeing than family related stress (Galovan et al., 2010; Yang, Chen, Choi & Zhou, 2000), partly because employees are expected to work long hours (Galovan et al., 2010). Differences in such values bring conflict. For example, a Singaporean-American couple may have disputes on where to draw a line between work and life.

Although much work-life balance research focuses on cross-cultural comparisons, few studies examine the work-life balance of women who are currently working or studying in the United States. Asian student-mothers, for example, may bear extra role strains in the United States because they are used to working hard, and now they have greater responsibilities living in a foreign country.

Macro-Level Intercultural Adaptation Challenges

Macro-level challenges arise from uninviting host environment (Kim, 2005), from visa and employment issues, and from economic recession. When the host environment is unfriendly, individuals find it hard to merge into the local life. As outsiders, individuals have little sense of belonging to the new cultural environment. Such social isolation takes a toll on psychological well-being. An immigrant's visa status restricts whether and where they may look for an employment and how many hours they can work (De Verthelyi, 1995), which in turn affects their financial standing and quality of life.

Additionally, economic recessions may further delay the foreigners' participation in the work force (Aycan & Berry, 1996).

I reviewed research about the challenges people face in balancing their work and life and adapting to a new culture from multiple levels. Despite an extensive body of research, to date scholars have given little attention to the unique challenges faced by international working mothers and to the intersection of culture and work-life.

Given the challenges working mothers face, one may wonder how people manage the tensions between work and life and what strategies they use or create to manage these tensions. Research also needs to examine possible solutions rather than take a predominantly problem-based reporting stance. In the following section, I examine how individuals, families, organizations, community, and society might ameliorate or cope with these challenges.

Ways to Ameliorate or Cope with the Challenges

In this section, I summarize solutions in existing literature related to work-life balance and intercultural adaptation. Solutions are likely to be imperfect, highly contextual, and deeply rooted in and contingent upon multiple micro-meso-macro factors.

Micro-level Work-Life Balance Strategies/Solutions

Micro-level solutions include individual strategies (integration and separation strategies, role identification, self-employment, and engaging private activities at work), family support and workplace support. Individuals adopt integration or separation strategies to cope with role conflicts. Some choose to be complete integrators, who prefer to intertwine work and personal life. Others are complete separators who set distinct time, space or psychological lines between work and life (Ashforth, Kreiner, &

Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Trembly & Genin, 2008). For example, a graduate student mother may choose to leave her paperwork in her office after work, and turn off her mobile phone in order to spend quality time with her daughter and her husband. This way, she manages to create physical as well as mental fences between work and life.

Women more often tend to be separators, whereas men tend to be integrators (Trembly & Genin, 2008). However, each style has its downside, as an integrator may bring confusion due to blurred boundaries, and a separator may bring a career risk due to signaling a lack of commitment to the organization. Among the equivocal views, more people are in favor of integration than of separation (Clark, 2000; Edward & Rothband, 1999; Halbesleben, Zellars, Carlson, Perrewe, & Rotondo, 2010; Kreiner, 2006).

Another individual strategy to ease the conflict is salient role identification. When individuals identify strongly with one role, they are less likely to experience inter-role conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1989), and they are likely to derive more pleasure from a role and transfer to the other (Wane, Randel & Stevens, 2006). For example, if a working mother views herself first and foremost as a mother, she will feel little conflict to skip a class in order to take care of her sick child. The joy derived from being a loving mother also motivates her to be a good worker.

A third individual strategy to negotiate the work-life balance is self-employment, which gives women more time and flexibility for childcare, and provides men with more financial gain and with a sense of control of being their own boss and (Trembly & Genin, 2008). However, due to visa limitations, international women are restricted from starting their own business in the U.S. Finally, many individuals engage in private activities at

work to balance work, home and leisure, such as reading news, making personal appointments, and organizing and planning for family vacations (D'Abate, 2005).

Family support contributes greatly to individuals' well-being, work performance, and work-life balance (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001). Such supports include an open family climate, partner support, and childcare. An open family climate allows members to share concerns about work at home, and thus brings more satisfaction at both work and home (Clark, 2002).

Partners can help buffer stresses associated with work and life. An encouraging wife and a positive husband-wife relationship help reduce men's psychological stress from work (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992; Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994). A husband's support, though not always rendered (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994), is critical to reduce a working woman's stress (Home, 1997b). Furthermore, couples who share the same values, such as family comes first, experience fewer conflicts when making decisions (Kinnier, Katz, & Berry, 1991). The same can be said of couples that share the same occupation or the same workplace (Halbesleben et al., 2010).

Childcare support from an extended family greatly eases the anxiety of dual career couples in some cultures. Affordable childcare services allow financially-sound individuals enough time flexibility so they will not sacrifice their family, but this is a luxury that many working mothers, especially single mothers, cannot afford (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992).

Workplace support arises from an understanding boss and from good supervisor/co-workers relationship. If supervisors are sensitive to employees' life situations and flexible in accommodating family needs, employees feel more positive

about their abilities to manage work and family roles (Warren & Johnson, 1995; Galinsky & Stein, 1990). Good relationships with supervisors and coworkers help both men and women moderate stress levels (Kirby et al., 2006). Talking with coworkers about family and personal life leads to greater work and life satisfaction (Clark, 2002). Although previous research has identified various individual strategies, and support from family and workplace, international working mothers may not be able to enjoy such support and may adopt different strategies to balance their work and life in the United States.

Micro-level Intercultural Adaptation Strategies/Solutions

Micro-level solutions include adopting an integration strategy, extending length of stay, improving language proficiency, building relationships with host national people, identifying salient roles, and displaying positive personality. Immigrants who adopt an integration strategy of being engaged in both their national culture and in the host society are better adapted than those who adopt either assimilation or separation (orientating themselves to one or the other) or marginalization (to neither culture) (Berry et al., 2006; Sam & Berry, 2010).

Kim (2008) further proposes that individuals both can and should embody intercultural personhood, following the examples of Yo-Yo Ma and Muneo Yoshikawa, who are able to fully embrace diversity in today's globalization. Although being fully integrated is ideal, some argue that in order to fit in the host environment, individuals have to first assimilate (Hsu, 2010; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

As length of stay increases, immigrants acquire better English proficiency and knowledge about host culture (Ye, 2006). They identify more with American culture and are willing to communicate more. Consequently, immigrants who stay longer are better

able to build new relationships, to deal with people and situations more effectively (Hsu, 2010; Kim, 2001; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006), and to cope with stress (Kim, 2005).

However, international working mothers may face new and multifaceted challenges every day, and their stress may not fade away with time.

Immigrants with salient role identification have better well-being (De Verthlyi, 1995). If a female student identifies more strongly with her motherly duties, she is not likely to push herself to get straight As as grades. However, the reverse may not hold true: she may feel guilty about putting her family aside while pursuing academic excellence. Furthermore, immigrants who display personality attributes, such as openness, resilience, and flexibility, are more successful in dealing with stress in adaptation (De verthelyi, 1995).

Meso-level Work-Life Balance Strategies/Solutions

Organizational, social, and community support provides meso-level solutions to work-life balance. Organizations assist employees to balance work and life by offering a supportive corporate culture, flexible working options, tangible supervisory support, and employee benefits (Kirby & Krone, 2002). For work-life policies to be effective, organizations must create a corporate culture signified by greater managerial support, fewer time demands, and fewer negative career consequences (Warren & Johnson, 1995).

Flexible options include time flexibility (being able to have flexible schedule), space flexibility (being able to work from home and to think about life-related issues in the work place), evaluation flexibility (performance evaluated not on face time in office but on achievement), and compensation flexibility (compensation based on outcome

rather than face time) (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001).

Tangible supervisory support, such as granting flextime and sick child days, is especially appreciated by single working mothers with small children (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994; Warren & Johnson, 1995). Some U.S. companies can afford to create a worry-free environment by offering benefits, such as on-site childcare, health clinics, and gym facilities. Other companies offer time management training programs (such as Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Successful People), wellness programs, an EAP (Employee Assistance Program), and even spiritual practices to promote employees' physical and mental health (Kirby et al., 2006). However, such "helping" roles appropriated by companies are often criticized as corporate encroachment into private lives. International working mothers, though capable and competitive, may not have the opportunity to work in such prestigious companies due to language barriers and visa.

Social support is a key resource from important others that addresses perceived needs (Krahn, 1993), which can foster affect in the family and better functioning at work (Wane et al., 2006). Two types of social support are identified: emotional support and instrumental support. An example of such support is the networking among multiple-role women, which helps them to develop and maintain realistic expectations for themselves and for their families (Home, 1997b). Community support, such as affordable after-school programs and childcare services, offers time flexibility to working parents. However, community childcare services are often too expensive for international student-mothers who live on a small stipend.

Meso-level Intercultural Adaptation Strategies/Solutions

Social support networks and social communication events help to ameliorate stressors, reduce cultural shock, and facilitate intercultural adaptation (Winkelman, 1994). Sources of social support include building close ties with friends in the host culture (Adelman, 1988), maintaining old ties in the home country (Ying & Liese, 1991), and the use of school programs for international students (De Verthelyi, 1995). International offices of universities may offer orientation programs, host family programs, and support groups for incoming new students (De Verthelyi, 1995) to facilitate the initial phases of cultural adaptation. However, due to their busy life, language barriers, and different cultural norms, international working mothers may find it difficult building close relationships with either locals or co-nationals, and may not have time to attend school activities.

Social communication events, such as company/department parties, state fairs, stage performances, and museum exhibitions, are learning opportunities for the immigrants (Kim, 2005). Mass media, such as radio, movies, TV, and magazines, provide immigrants with access to local news and cultural knowledge as well. However, due to time constraints or language barriers, international mothers may not be able to take advantage of the social events.

Macro-level Work-Life Balance Strategies/Solutions

Macro-level solutions arise from macro policies, communication technology, transcending existing discourses and challenging taken-for-granted corporate rules. Macro policies in the U.S., such as The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, influence the experiences and attitudes on work-lifebalance in the U.S. The FMLA is a labor law requiring larger employers to

provide employees with job-protected unpaid leave due to a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform his or her job, to care for a sick family member, or to care for a new child. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 banned oppressive child labor and set the minimum hourly wage at 25 cents, and the maximum workweek at 44 hours. Such policies change employers' practices and consequently affect individuals' lives. However, being non-citizens, international working mothers may not enjoy the equal opportunities provided to citizens. Universities also offer policies to support women students and ethnic minority students through scholarships and grant opportunities. Such financial support may be reduced due to economic recessions.

Individuals may adopt technology that allows them to tele-work; that is, to work from home while having access to office databases, which may save transportation time and create more time flexibility (Tremblay, Paquet, & Najem, 2006). Some working mothers leverage technology to do remote mothering and several shifts in parallel, checking on their children when at the office, or checking in with their employers while at home (Edley, 2001). Communication technologies empower women to develop cyborg identities without the social constraints of sex, gender, race and class (Haraway, 1991).

However, communication technology is often seen as a double-edged sword. As the physical border no longer exists, individuals may end up working at off-hours (blurring temporal borders) and bringing stress from work to life (blurring psychological borders). Technology is therefore often criticized as serving the purposes of the organization rather than serving the individual's goal of family balance (Edley, 2001;

Tremblay, Paquet, & Najem, 2006). As such, some women intentionally avoid the technology because they do not want to be controlled (Edley, 2001).

Caproni (1997), writing from feminist and critical perspectives, claims that individuals *can* achieve balance if they transcend the discourse of “living a successful life” to “living a full life.” As a mother and a tenure-track professor, she has made a conscious decision to privilege tranquility over achievement, contribution over success, and choice over status to find her own balance. Brave as they are, few working mothers have the social status and the agency to make such a bold stand.

Scholars also encourage employees to challenge existing, taken-for-granted rules set by organizations. Instead of being managed downward, employees could exercise upward influence by using a coalition strategy or making non-family requests, thus challenging and reproducing social institutions (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010). Given the fact that employees have to carefully weigh the risk of making requests (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010), and that international mothers are unfamiliar with the new workplace, the likelihood of such upward challenging is unclear.

Macro-level Intercultural Adaptation Strategies/Solutions

At macro level, immigrants are supported by a receptive host culture, strong ethnic presence, and online social networks. Immigrants feel welcome and at home living in a culturally diverse community (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Immigrants experience less fear and uncertainty if their ethnic groups have a powerful presence in the local community (Hsu, 2010; Kim, 2001, 2005).

Blessed by technology, online ethnic social groups provide immigrants with informational support such as information about housing; emotional support, such as

being picked up at the airport; and intellectual support, such as how to use American slang expressions (Lin, 2006; Ye, 2006). Such access is important, especially in the initial phase of adaptation (Kim, 2005).

Despite the abundant literature in cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2005) and work-life balance (Clark, 2000; Kirby et al., 2006), past studies fail to address the unique challenges of work-life balance faced by international working mothers and the strategies adopted to ameliorate the challenges. Earlier research also emphasizes reporting scaled measures rather than reporting the voices and situated experiences of the people who actually undergo the stressful processes. Little has been said about the experiences of international working mothers, who live and communicate at the intersections of culture, work, and life.

Above I reviewed existing research on work-life balance and intercultural adaptation. I summarized challenges faced and solutions adopted by working adults and immigrants from micro, meso and macro perspectives. I also highlighted research gaps. These gaps provide an opportunity for new perspectives. How do the challenges of living in a foreign country while parenting and working affect international working mothers' work-life balance? My critique of the assumptions and questions about claims in the existing literature originate from my own experience as a working mother, living, studying and teaching in the United States, and from my experiences in international travel and multinational organizations. Thus I became eager to explore the ways international working mothers negotiate their multifaceted lives at the crossroads of culture, work, and life.

Chapter 3: Method

In this study, I ask, “What are the unique challenges that international working mothers face in their effort to balance their work and non-work-life in the United States?” and “What communicative strategies and solutions do international working mothers use to achieve a feeling of balance?” These questions can best be answered by capturing the lived experiences of these women through their own accounts. In what follows, I first identify the methodological foundation, followed by a description of sampling and population. I then describe data collection methods and procedures. Finally, I outline the methods of data analysis.

Methodology: An Interpretive Perspective

I adopted an interpretive orientation because it “focuses on subjective experience, small-scale interactions, and understanding” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology, this interpretive approach assumes that people actively interpret their experiences through language, and that they come to understand the world by being “enmeshed within it” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). Subjective experience is therefore an important source of knowledge to understand human actors’ social reality. In the same vein, to understand what it means to live in a foreign country as a mother and an employee, one has to explore the subjective meanings from the first-hand experiences of women.

Exploratory in nature, this approach thus enabled me to understand how international working mothers balance work and life by studying their self-interpreted, lived experiences. This approach also allowed me to gain information about an area in which little is known (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) because almost no literature addresses

the work-life balance issues at the intersection of motherhood, career, and national cultures.

Antenarrative Analyses: An Alternative Narrative Method

To stay faithful to international working mothers' stories, I adopted the antenarrative analyses proposed by David Boje (2001). Traditional narrative methods try to tell stories as neat, linear, and cohesive. However, living stories are often the opposite: fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, and polyphonic, much like a "flowing soup" (Weick, 1995, p 128). For example, when one working mother recalled the challenges she had faced, she started by discussing her children's schooling, then moved on to conflicts with her advisor, and then to her partner's difficulty adapting, before finally returning to her children's schooling. Sometimes, she remembered something as if it were an afterthought. For example, when reminded if she had missed anything or anybody important, more often than not, she would say, "Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you..." Coherent storytelling becomes also impossible when the lived experiences, such as divorce, or death, are too shattering to put into words (Frank, 1995). For example, Flora, a Peruvian mother, wept through the interview because she was extremely troubled by her intimate relationship, her career, and her own health at the time of interview. She wrote back on the second day, apologizing for "not being a good interviewee."

To address the fallacies of linear approaches in traditional narrative analysis, David Boje (2001) proposes to add an antenarrative approach that allows for the full complexity of fragmented, partial, and polyphonic voices and meanings of life to be heard. He believes that narrative analysis combined with antenarrative analysis can help the communication field to be a "more multi-voiced methodology that focuses on non-

linear, unplotted storytelling” (Boje, 2001, p.1). Among the eight antenarrative approaches he proposed, I adopted the antenarrative theme analysis that allows for multiple voices and yet also captures the common themes. Specific to my study, I designed the analysis in two phases. In phase one, I reported each woman’s story in its own entirety, allowing for the polyphonic voices of participants. Then in phase two, I summarized similar and different themes related to challenges and solutions. I will explain the two-phase analysis in detail in the data analysis section.

Sampling and Population

Population and study population. The population for this research are adult women who are 21 years or older who work either full time or part time as professionals in organizations or as teaching assistants or research assistants in a university. In addition to attending to their work or study, they take care of children under age 18 at home. They come from different home countries and now live in the United States. The study population of women who meet these criteria are associated with the Office of International Program and contacted through email list-serves or through networking events. Because of the sampling frame, most will be working as students in graduate programs.

Sampling frame. I sent advertising emails to recruit study participants (Please see Appendix B: Recruitment Email) through the Office of International Program at the university, whose list-serve reaches all international students from 89 countries (Office of International Program Report, 2009). When I received emails from respondents expressing interest, I thanked them and clarified if they were mothers, if they had jobs, and if they came from a country other than the U.S. I then invited them through email for

a face-to-face interview at a time and place that was convenient to them. I explained the length of the interview, and asked for their permission for recording in order to faithfully present their stories. This sampling frame resulted in 17 participants, most of who are international student-mothers who also work as research assistants or as teaching assistants.

Sample size. I intended to recruit about 15 women in this study, women whose lives are illustrative of international women' lived experiences. Although there are no hard and fast rules on sample size for interpretive research, I used rules of thumb to guide my sample size (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I chose this sample size for a few reasons. First, I aimed for illustrative rather than definitive samples. Second, the specific criterion set constraints on the size of the qualified participants. Further, the busy life of the international working mothers may prohibit their participation, despite their willingness to. And finally, as a graduate student, I have to complete this project within a limited time and with limited resources.

Sampling and diversity of voices. My goal is to understand the challenges international working mothers face as they balance their work and life and to identify the solutions they adopt to deal with these challenges. To these ends, I am interested in describing a diversity of voices and the processes of unique experiences, rather than working toward code saturation. When working toward saturation, a researcher stops collecting data in the field when no new insights or themes come from continued data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

From earlier informal conversations with international working mothers, I learned that each life story is unique. Two people coming from the same national culture may

face different challenges due to contextual factors such as their family situation (e.g., size of family, age of children), the types of work they do, their language competency, and their personality. For example, although all mothers with school-age children share concerns for their children's education in the United States, they show concern for different elements of education. Some were worried about their children's language skills; some about social adaptation at school; some about peer misbehaviors such as drugs and shoplifting; and others about their child's ability to reenter their home countries' education system. My sampling objective is therefore to identify international working mothers from as many different cultural backgrounds as possible, and to follow the process of their lived experiences as much as I can.

Sampling strategies. Given the goal of diversity, I used a number of strategies for sampling including criterion, snowball, and convenience sampling to recruit participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I used criterion sampling for recruiting participants based on “commonly understood definitions of the case” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). As suggested by the research question, international working mothers defines females who are from a country other than the U.S., who work or study in an organization, and who have children.

The sample was convenience and comprised of women who are available and willing to speak with me. A convenience sample is composed of the “most readily available people”—anyone I can find who is willing to participate (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Living in Albuquerque and studying in the University of New Mexico limited my contact to international working mothers in Albuquerque, but it allowed me to tap into the various university networks.

Snowball sampling yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Being an international graduate student-mother myself, I know a few people of the same background from my social network from which I obtained referrals.

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling are often criticized as not representative (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), but I argue that the experiences of international working mothers in Albuquerque do not diverge sharply from the rest of the population for three reasons. First, the international students at UNM are a culturally diverse student body that comes from 89 countries (Office of International Program Report, 2009). Second, the top four countries represented at UNM, namely, China, India, South Korea, and Mexico, are also among the top ten countries of birth for foreign-born residents in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009). Finally, the city of Albuquerque is a mainstream, middle-sized American city with a rich cultural heritage and a diverse population.

Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews. Within the interpretive paradigm, I conducted in-depth interviews to explore the processes of international working mothers' struggles to balance work and non-work-life in a foreign country and identify their coping strategies. In-depth interviews focus on individual experiences. The questions of the interview, given time and probing, can produce thick descriptions and reveal the contextualized individual experiences of interviewees (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

A woman's experience of working and living in a foreign country is complex; therefore it is difficult to capture with close-ended survey questions. Except for a few specific demographic questions (age, length of stay in the United States, size of family, and age of children), I conducted the interview with open-ended questions addressing the two research questions. In response to RQ 1, I asked "Maybe you can tell me about the challenges you've faced trying to manage your work and personal life, while also living in a foreign country?" And I asked, "How did you handle that?" to address RQ 2 (Please see Appendix A for Interview Guide). If an interviewee was uncertain of where to start her story, I suggested, "Maybe you can start with when you first came here."

In an in-depth interview with (predominantly) open-ended questions, each respondent is able to respond at her own pace about what happened at each point in her experience. I followed up with probing questions during the conversation to clarify my understanding, such as, "When you say your life here is like riding on a roller-coaster, what do you mean?" or to help interviewees retrieve information, such as, "Was there someone who was particularly helpful?" This way, I encouraged women to fill in the cracks of their understanding. Importantly, such probing questions helped me to understand the women's lived reality, as if I was there with her as she was going through this life experience.

Polyphonic interviews. The central goal of this interpretive study is letting the multiple voices of working mothers be heard with minimal interference from the interviewer. To do this I used a specific qualitative interview technique called *polyphonic interviewing* (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Tanaka & Cruz, 1998; Tanggaard, 2009). Unlike traditional techniques that aim to collapse qualitative data, find common

themes, and report the participants' voices as one, the use of polyphonic interviews permit me to report multiple voices in parallel. That is, I presented each story as a whole because I anticipated that each story would be as unique as the interviewees. In what follows, I flesh out this approach in more detail.

Based on the musical concept of polyphony, polyphonic interviews present the unique experiences and the different voices of participants as they are, rather than glossed over or collapsed into thematic categories (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Following this procedure, my primary goal is to present each individual story in its entirety, and then to compare and contrast their experiences. I used this approach because these women come from different home countries, with different family structures, socioeconomic status, career trajectory, intimate relationship, and parenting norms. By letting each character tell her own story from a personal perspective, I tried to minimize the potential for me as a researcher to interject my own points of view into the woman's story (Tanaka & Cruz, 1998). Such an approach allowed the interviewees to make sense of what happened to them in a certain cultural, social, and historical context and to report their work-life balance challenges accordingly (Tanggaard, 2009).

Human Subject Protection

Since my research concerns human subjects, I must consider the ethical issues before data collection (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Human subjects are defined as living individuals about whom a researcher obtains identifiable private information (Chapin, 2004). As a first step, I passed a web-based training program that tested my knowledge of regulations and procedures of conducting human-subject research. A second step was to obtain IRB approval to ensure that I respect the rights and the privacy of human

subjects. Before collecting data, I presented the participants with an informed consent form, which highlighted their right of voluntary participation and the potential risks and benefits of their participation.

Data Collection and Informed Consent

After the sampling was complete, the data collection came from 17 in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes, and was conducted in a private setting. With participants' permission, I recorded the conversations, and I transcribed the interviews verbatim from the tapes. I will maintain the digital recordings and the word-processed transcripts until the manuscript is submitted for publication.

I began the interviews by explaining the study's purpose, the participants' right to refuse to answer or skip any question, and reviewing all points of the informed consent process. After this introduction phase, I asked women to describe the challenges they had faced as working mothers trying to acclimate to a new country's culture as well as work and parent her children. Women's personal experiences guided the interview for the most part, with researcher-created probes if the interview strayed too far afield from the topic. In addition to asking about challenges, I asked how they had met those challenges.

Data Analysis

Following the antenarrative analysis method (Boje, 2001) and the polyphonic interviewing technique (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Tanaka & Cruz, 1998; Tanggaard, 2009), I conducted data analysis in two phases. The first is to tell each individual woman's story as a unit of analysis in its entirety. This is the key idea behind antenarrative storytelling and polyphonic interviewing. The second is to return to the interviews and identify themes of similar and divergent challenges and solutions, a thematic analysis approach.

Polyphonic content analysis. In carrying out the first phase of analysis, I followed the example of Kidd and Finlayson (2009) who studied 18 nurses with mental illness through qualitative interviews. When it came to the time of analysis, Kidd, a graduate student, struggled with working with stories in a way that meets the needs of her academic degree (i.e., to show the rigor of analysis) and with respecting the wholeness of individual stories. Life stories are messy. However the traditional method of tidying up the data by identifying common themes would inevitably exclude some important passages and impose researchers' analysis on the stories (Kidd & Finlayson, 2009). Finally, Kidd and Finlayson decided to tell individual stories in turn in the format of vignettes, complimented by thematic analysis. Doing so, Kidd and Finlayson felt that they could theorize about meaning without disregarding, disrespecting, or silencing the nurses' voices.

I followed the data interpretation method of Kidd and Finlayson (2009) because it is loyal to the participants' stories and because it is academically vigorous. The validity of gathering others' stories in research is well established because stories not only contain situated facts and events, but also contain sequences of events, emotions, beliefs, and important others who have shaped the lives of the participants and have given rise to these personal stories (Kidd & Finlayson, 2009).

One goal of this study is to present, in a polyphonic way, the unique story of each international working mother. Therefore, instead of starting by coding the stories, which might obfuscate a cohesive story line, I wrote vignettes of individual woman immediately after reading the transcribed stories. The narrative self represents an ongoing, fluid, and multifaceted identity (Canary, 2008). Because I am interested in exploring the unique

challenges faced by international working mothers and the strategies they adopt to cope with these challenges, I looked for specific events and key people that the women emphasize that answer the research questions.

I identified these key events and key people through examining the hows as well as the whats of storytelling (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998). Whats are the content of the story, and hows refer to the contexts, particular situations, nuances, manners, people involved (e.g., partners, bosses), and so on in which interview interactions take place (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In particular, I listened to the women's direct statements that the events were pivotal, as well as listened to the non-verbal cues that signified emotions. Such cues include the rhythm (fast, slow or change of rhythm), the vocal tones (raised or lowered), the silence, the repetition, and the weeping which indirectly indicated the significance of the events (Tinggaard, 2009).

Lived experiences are chaotic, and stories are therefore incoherent and fragmented antenarratives (Boje, 2001). As a researcher, in retelling these women's stories, I had to make them a little more linear and tidy for the sake of space. This reconfirms what Boje (2001) said, that people tell stories using antenarrative while researchers create narratives. I sketched, in a roughly chronological manner, each woman's story, highlighting the challenges she had faced and strategies she had adopted in adapting to a new culture and balancing work and life. Whenever possible, I used women's words and expressions to stay as truthful as possible to these women's experiences.

Similar and divergent stories. In the second phase of analysis, I conducted a thematic analysis that identified patterns of similarities and differences from micro, meso,

and macro perspectives. I read through the transcripts numerous times to assure accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and then used Weft QDA (a qualitative analysis software) to analyze the data. I used the general question, “What are the challenges/solutions voiced by the participants and what level do these challenges/solutions belong to, micro, meso, or macro?” to guide my analysis. First, I created six categories, namely, “Challenges-Micro,” “Challenges-Meso,” “Challenges-Macro”, “Solutions-Micro”, “Solutions-Meso,” and “Solutions-Macro.” I then marked all responses related to challenges and solutions and assigned them to the six categories. Within each of the six categories, I identified types of challenges or solutions and labeled them, such as “language barriers” and “supportive partner.” I further divided each category into “similar “ and “divergent,” resulting in 12 sub-categories, from “Challenge-Similar-Micro” to “Solutions-Divergent-Macro.” “Similar” refers to challenges or solutions mentioned by more than half of the participants, and “Divergent” refers to challenges or solutions voiced by less than half of the participants. For example, “children’s language barriers” (a micro level challenge) was mentioned by most of the working mothers, I put this particular challenge under “Challenge-Similar-Micro.” On the other hand, “Online social support” (a macro level solution) was mentioned by only a few women, I put this particular solution under “Macro-Divergent-Solution.”

The individual stories, and a summary of similar challenges and divergent solutions enhance each other (Kidd & Finlayson, 2009). Throughout the course of analysis, I juxtaposed my findings with assumptions and findings in the literature and made analytical moves that demonstrate how the current study has important implications for international working mothers’ work and non-work lives.

In this chapter, I laid down methodological foundations for this study, and I discussed the sampling frame and the data collection procedures. This sampling frame resulted in 17 participants with whom I conducted in-depth interviews. I outlined the data analysis methods that included phase one analysis: presenting individual stories, and phase two analysis: summarizing the similar and divergent challenges experienced and solutions adopted by these participants at micro, meso, and macro levels.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analyses

In this study, I asked two research questions, “What unique challenges do international working mothers face as they try to balance work and non-work life demands while adapting to living in a foreign country?” and “What communicative strategies and solutions do international working mothers report using to deal with these challenges.” To answer these questions, I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with women from 10 nationalities, including The People’s Republic of China (6, i.e., China), Taiwan (2), Peru (2), Brazil (1), India (1), Ecuador (1), Japan (1), Mexico (1), Russia (1), and Zimbabwe (1). Women were between 30 and 50 years’ old, had children between 7 months and 17 years, worked full time or part time while pursuing higher education, and had lived in the U.S. between 3 and 14 years at the time of the interview. Fourteen were married and three were single or divorced. Interviews lasted for about an hour and resulted in over 230 single-spaced pages of transcribed data.

The analysis of this data comprises two phases. In the first phase, I told individual stories in the form of vignettes, a polyphonic approach. The polyphonic vignettes help maintain the vivid “personality” of each story, and present the flow of lived experiences that are fragmented and sometimes messy (Boje, 2001). In the second phase of analysis, I conducted an antenarrative thematic analysis that identified patterns of similarities and differences from micro, meso, and macro perspectives. I summarized the similar (i.e., at least half of the participants reported these challenges) challenges faced and solutions adopted by some women, and I listed the differences (i.e., less than half of the participants reported these solutions). This antenarrative analysis allows for multiple voices, and yet also, captures the common themes.

In what follows, I present each woman's unique story in the roughly chronological manner in which each woman reported it to me, quoting her words and describing her emotions wherever possible. I have preserved much of the incohesiveness of the stories' flow, as "lived chaos makes reflection, and consequently storytelling, impossible" (Frank, 1995, p.98).

Polyphonic Vignettes

"Getting Crazy" Name: Amy; Home Country: Zimbabwe; Marital Status: Married; Children: Daughter (11 years), Son (9 years); Occupation: Teacher of Special Education; Student Status: Master Student; Years in the U.S.: 3; Visa Type: J-2 (Please see Table 1 for Visa Types)

In 2008, Amy accompanied her husband to the U.S. for his PhD study. At home she was a full time teacher. Bored with being a stay-at-home mom for a year, she decided to enter the Master of Special Education program. In addition to attending her classes, her program required that she taught cognitively disabled children in a middle school. She said she felt physically and emotionally exhausted every day, "It is so hard to juggle between the two [studying and teaching], and then I have two kids, I have a husband, I have a house to take care of, and everything." She sighed, "Oh, Lord, I was getting crazy." She said she felt guilty that she could not spend time with her children, going so far as to say, "I feel I don't know them anymore." Luckily, she said she had an understanding husband who did not "impose wifely duties" on her.

Amy said that teaching was her calling, but she was confused by the lack of respect and motivation from both students and parents. "In my country, education is a road to something better," she contrasted, but "here ...they [children] don't want to learn...they

don't respect you. That's a lot [of differences]." Despite this disconnect, teaching disabled children has inspired her to build a similar program in Zimbabwe to help cognitively disabled children.

When asked how she would describe herself, she called herself "Alien." She went on to explain, "Do you see the form that we have to fill in...your alien number? I am an alien woman." She chuckled. In terms of living in a new country, she reiterated the shock at students' disrespect and also said getting to know people had been difficult. In particular, she found it "insane" that in the U.S. she had to call someone and make an appointment to visit a friend. "Back home, you just go, when you think about them. This is typical of African culture." This difference in social rules made making new friends challenging for Amy. She said she missed her family at home where everyone was close and helpful.

To summarize, Amy's challenges included (a) role conflicts, (b) students' lack of respect for teachers, and (c) difficulties in making friends due to different cultural rules. Her solutions to these challenges included a husband who (a) shared household chores, and (b) did not impose rigid gender expectations regarding cooking and cleaning.

"It's Complicated" Name: Ann; Home Country: Peru; Marital Status: Married; Child: Daughter (2 years); Occupation: Research Assistant; Student Status: Master Student; Years in the U.S.: 7; Visa Type: F-1

In 2003, Ann followed her new husband to the U.S. for his graduate study. She started her bachelor's degree in 2006, and during her study she gave birth to a girl in 2009. Due to visa limitations, she could not take a leave of absence from school, so she had to travel back and forth between home and school every day to breastfeed her daughter.

Overwhelmed and depressed, she recalled, “I cried almost every day. I was trying to study but I felt guilty for not being with my daughter...it was very, very hard.” With her mother and her husband’s help, she graduated. When her daughter was one year old, she decided to continue with her master’s degree. Again, she felt guilty, but she was happy. “Because I am doing something for myself... I feel like I am advancing my career,” she smiled. Now, she said she has planned to enter PhD program, but she questioned herself, laughing, “How am I going to do a PhD if we want to have a second child?” “It’s complicated, it’s complicated.” She felt torn between wanting to be a “perfect mom” and a successful career woman.

Challenged by learning in a second language, she reported being unable to express herself effectively in class. She also felt a cultural barrier between her and her Asian advisor. “I find it hard to figure out why she said certain things in certain ways...” But then she became excited, “The other day...she [advisor] told me, ‘You are going to have a great future’...wow!” She was so thrilled to finally learn that her advisor cared about and thought well of her. In terms of her social life she said it was difficult to make friends, and, as a result, she felt “isolated.” Without a Peruvian ethnic community, she had lost excitement about celebrating her traditional holidays. She said the only place she could find peace was her church. Looking back, she said that things were getting better, especially financially. Although “new things pop out all the time,” she said, with a big smile, “I really like my life.”

In summary, Ann’s challenges included (a) role conflicts, (b) language barriers, (c) lack of friends, and (d) problematic communication with her advisor. Her solutions

were (a) supportive interpersonal communication with her husband, and (b) a sense of peace she found in church.

“Powerless, Voiceless, and Helpless” Name: Bhava; Home Country: India; Marital Status: Divorced; Child: Son (13 years); Occupation: Research Assistant; Student Status: Just Completed PhD; Years in the U.S.: 7; Visa Type: F-1

In 2003, Bhava came to the U.S. to pursue her PhD. As a single mother living in the U.S., she found herself neither accepted in the traditional Indian community nor connected with the mainstream American society. “[As a single woman,] they [Indian community] see me as a threat to their traditional family structure,” and she said, “the Americans tend to give you advice, but I wish they could just listen.” She had sought counseling help but was often told the U.S. American norms of doing things. As a result, she said, “I feel powerless, very voiceless and very helpless.”

She tried to inculcate certain traditional Indian values in her son, but she found it difficult without the support of her Indian community. Consequently, her son often received “mixed messages” such as valuing obedience versus independence. She recalled a recent event in which her son had walked out of the home with his American friend after she and her son had a disagreement. “In my culture, if a child disagrees with the parents, the child does not just walk out of the house.” She started weeping, “Independence is good...but there has to be some respect.” She was also very worried about her son’s school environment, an environment rife with children shoplifting, smoking, and using drugs. She said she had to keep talking to him. “But I have isolated voice,” she sighed.

Her parents did not agree with her decision to live and study in the U.S. “They think my son is ruined for his life, but I try to believe all these experiences would expand

his horizons.” What hurt her most was that, from her parents’ perspective, she was a failure as a mother. Financially, as an international student, she was unable to claim a tax credit for her son, which further tightened her budget. In addition, she had to compete with her ex-husband for her son’s custody. “I feel compelled to work crazy hours to provide for him a certain living standard,” she said, weeping. Otherwise, her son might choose to live with his dad. Despite her PhD study and 40-50 hours of work per week, she still tried to cook fresh food for her son every day, to help him with homework, and to bond with him as much as she could. But as he grew, he tended to leave the house more often to play with his peers. “Now what do I do?” she asked herself.

She said the only place for her to find some connection was her spiritual community where they prayed together. “My spirituality...keeps me focused...It gives me an anchor.” She had just finished her PhD, but was unsure about her future. She wanted to be able to teach and to do research, but she believed that she had to be “lucky” in order to secure a position.

In summary, Bhava’s challenges included (a) feeling disconnected from either Indian community or U.S. American society; (b) her son’s schooling, identity, and custody; (c) financial burden; and (d) lack of understanding from her parents. Her sole solution was to find comfort in her spirituality.

“Want to Be Happy Again” Name: Flora; Home Country: Peru; Marital Status: Re-Married; Child: Son (4 years); Occupation: Postdoc; Student Status: Completed PhD; Years in the U.S.: 11; Visa Type: F-1

In 2003, Flora came to the current southwestern state for her PhD after spending three years on her master’s degree in another state. Since moving, she had suffered from

various pollen allergies. Going without medications while she was pregnant and breastfeeding, she also suffered from sleep deprivation for nearly six years. As a result, she felt “tired, annoyed, and easily grumpy.” “The lack of sleep is just killing me,” she complained. “It was very hard for me to study for exams and to do homework.”

Flora went on to tell me that her husband was “getting on her nerves” by allowing her son to watch TV all the time. Moreover, her husband had failed his PhD defense, was unemployed, and rarely cared for the family. They had divorced in 2009, but she had reconciled with him in an effort to reunite the family. “I believed in family and relationships,” she sniffed, “but now I am blaming myself for putting me back in the situation...I feel like I am failing....” She felt heart-broken when she saw her dearest son close to his dad. “He does not love me anymore...” she said, reaching for tissue, “I want to be happy again....”

She said living in a foreign country brought many uncertainties. In terms of her career, she said she wanted to settle in a permanent job with a sponsored work visa, but being an international postdoc, she needed to publish more and competitive papers. “Sometimes I do not know where I will end up, you know, stay or leave...you tried so hard but you do not see far in advance.” Unsure about her future, she often felt in-between: “I feel that I do not belong to Peru because I have been away for too many years, and I don’t belong to here...it is hard.” She could not share her frustrations with her family because she did not want them to worry. When asked how she dealt with all these difficulties, she said she had a few close friends whom she could talk to, and she used to see counselors. She murmured, “I might have to do it [seeing counselors] again.”

In summary, Flora's challenges included (a) sleep deprivation, (b) failing marriage, (c) future career uncertainty, and (d) lack of family support. Her solutions included (a) sharing with a few close friends, and (b) seeking counseling help.

“Very, Very Exhausting” Name: Hui; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married; Children: Daughter (6 years), Son (4 years); Occupation: Nursing Instructor; Years in the U.S.: 8; Visa Type: Green Card (Permanent Residence Card)

In 2003, Hui came to the U.S. with her husband who secured a job in a university in Georgia. A month later, still struggling with culture shock, she found herself pregnant. “Everything is new,” she said, starting to weep, “And I have to transit into a new environment and a new role as a mother.” Two years later they had to move again for her husband's new job. She started nursing school in the following spring, taking 23 credits per semester. Although she was progressing well, she became pregnant again. “I just can't quit my study, and I do not want an abortion,” she said with her voice shaking. She said she woke at 4 a.m. every morning and drove to a hospital 30 miles away for clinical hours. “It was very, very exhausting...and I worked till the last day of my labor delivery.”

Because of this stress, she and her husband ended up arguing all the time. She said that the bitterness grew in her family and she “hated it.” After losing his job during the economic downturn, her husband accepted a professorship in a prestigious university in China. They went back to China in 2009. He loved his job, but she had to return to the U.S. and remain in the U.S. for at least six months per year in order to maintain the family's permanent residence status. This meant she had to leave her two children in China. “I miss the kids, and they miss me too,” she cried forcefully.

Although she did not need to work financially, she was determined to stand on her own feet. “It is just me.” Seeing the gap in healthcare systems in two countries, she was inspired to become a “catalyst” and “transformer” to change Chinese health policy. She talked passionately about this dream for half an hour, but when asked if her husband supported her vision, she smiled bitterly, “No. My husband wanted me to get a stable job, [but] this is not the life I want to live.” Despite living under considerable pressure, she found strength and hope in her Christian faith, and she built intimate relationships with fellow Christians. “It [The Christian life] is a transformed life.” She smiled.

In summary, Hui’s challenges included (a) giving birth and raising two children while continuing her intensive nursing school, (b) separating from her family due to immigration status, and (c) lack of husband’s support to her career. Her solutions included (a) her resilient personality, (b) her faith, and (c) friendships with fellow Christians.

“A Knife on My Heart” Name: Isabel; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married; Children: Daughters (2 years, 6 months); Occupation: Employee; Student Status: MBA Graduate; Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: H-1 (Work Visa)

In 2006, Isabel came to the U.S. with her husband who was on a job rotation program. A metropolitan woman, Isabel felt lonely at the beginning. “I don’t know where to find people,” she laughed. She became an MBA student but felt lost in class discussions. “I really wanted to express myself...but my American classmates just started to talk while I was still thinking.” As she adjusted to her role as a student, she met other cultural barriers, such as not understanding jokes or topics of conversation. “They [Americans] like to chat about movie stars and sports stars, but I don’t know the names....”

She found a job after graduation in 2008 with a sponsored work visa, but she disliked the work. “I used to work in marketing. I used to travel a lot, but now, I basically sit there for eight hours in the office.” But she could not quit, or she would lose her work visa. She said her top priority was to get a Green Card so that her husband and she could “enjoy the equal opportunity and right as other Americans.” Having two children was her greatest joy but also a considerable financial burden. Daycare was too expensive, and she and her husband’s parents were too old to travel, so they decided to send their elder daughter back home. “I felt immense pain as if someone is putting a knife on my heart.”

In terms of social life, she said she liked to make friends, but they were few in number. Her Chinese friends left after graduation, and her U.S. Americans friends were nice, but she did not feel intimacy with them. Although church would have been a good source of networks, she said she was not a Christian. Isabel could not find many of the types of activities she enjoyed, such as singing Karaoke. Nonetheless, she still tried to learn U.S. American culture, and she appreciated the benefits living in the U.S. “I have lots of personal time...plus we could have more than one baby here,” she laughed, “and my kids can receive better education.”

In summary, Isabel’s challenges included (a) feeling compelled to stay on a job she disliked due to her work visa, (b) difficulties in integrating into the U.S. American society and building intimate friendships, and (c) no access to affordable childcare and familiar recreational activities. Her solutions were (a) her positive outlook, and (b) harmonious spousal relationships.

“Clench My Teeth” Name: Jenny; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married (but husband lives and works in China); Child: Daughter (2 years); Occupation: Postdoc; Student Status: PhD Graduate; Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: F-1

In 2006, Jenny came to the U.S. to earn a PhD. It took her one year to get used to the language and to adjust to American life. She was married in 2007 and had her daughter in 2009. She was alone during her pregnancy because her husband was working in China. He joined her for two years after the baby was born, but he had to leave in order to maintain his job in China.

She said she lived a busy life raising her daughter alone while trying to publish. “I pick my daughter at 4 p.m., and then I cook for her and take her to a music class...I tell her a story on bed, and after she went asleep, I read my paper.” As a result, she neither had much of a personal life nor time to socialize with Chinese or American friends. Jenny smiled throughout the interview, until she started to talk about sending her husband to the airport. At that point, she started to cry, as if she had too much to carry on her thin shoulders. Collecting herself quickly, she said, “I told myself, I should not cry...I am a mom now, I should show the sunny side to my daughter.”

Looking forward, she said that she wanted to publish more papers so that she could apply for a grant and create a self-funded position. She also wanted to get her Green Card as soon as possible. She was uncertain about the future, however, saying, “I don’t know where my marriage will end up with.” She sniffled. Nevertheless, she said she appreciated her boss’s patience with her poor English, and she found peace in church. She said she constantly reminded herself to “clench teeth tight” to move forward. She explained, “My daughter made me feel that all is worthwhile.”

In summary, Jenny's challenges included (a) language barriers, (b) raising a two-year-old daughter on her own while pursuing her postdoc career, (c) feeling uncertain of her marriage, and (d) lack of social connections and personal life. Her support came from (a) her resilient nature, (b) her boss's support, and (c) her faith.

“So Many Uncertainties” Name: Jing; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married; Child: Daughter (7 months); Occupation: Research Scientist; Years in the U.S.: 4; Visa Type: H-1

In 2007, Jing came to the U.S. as a postdoc after her husband started a postdoc in a different state. She was promoted to Research Scientist in 2010. Her husband joined her in 2009, and in 2011 they had a baby girl. She said her first challenge was English. “I dare not read my first paper...it was all marked red by my advisor,” she laughed. As a research scientist, she now writes grants to fund her position and to earn a promotion. “This [writing grants] is my biggest challenge right now,” she said, “so I need to get grants...but the approval rate was so low.” She viewed her Chinese doctoral degree as a career setback. “My degree is not as widely accepted as a U.S. PhD,” she explained.

Jing said her social network was primarily Chinese. Her relationships with her few U.S. American colleagues were superficial. She said she felt bored because many activities she liked were not available here. “I love to sing Karaoke...” She giggled. She was lucky to have parents living in the U.S. to take care of her daughter, but she still had to get up twice at night to breastfeed. Lacking sleep, she found her productivity low.

Speaking of the future, she sounded uncertain. “We hope to be somehow established here, but sometimes we really miss going back.... There are so many opportunities in China now.” She was also unsure if she should put her daughter in

schools in China or in the U.S. “There are so many uncertainties, as an international mother,” she said.

In summary, Jing’s challenges included (a) language barriers, (b) uncertainty of future career with a Chinese PhD and of her daughter’s education; (c) limited social network, and (d) no access to familiar recreational activities. Her solutions included (a) her optimistic nature, (b) her supportive husband and parents, and (c) her supportive advisor.

“Riding on a Roller Coaster” Name: Ling; Nationality: Taiwan; Marital Status: Married; Children: Daughter (13 years), Son (10 years); Occupation: Research Assistant; Student Status: M.A. student; Years in U.S.: 6 (3 months in the current state); Visa Type: F-1

Ling came to a state university three months prior to the interview to pursue a Master’s Degree in Special Education. “Life in the past three months was like riding on a roller coaster,” she recalled, “full of ups and downs.” Although she had moments of frustration, she said she felt happy most of the time. She explained, “I could spend more time with my family now, and I could apply what I learned to my [autistic] son.” She also appreciated the chance to go back to school at her age—something uncommon in Taiwan.

She said that her son’s adaptation concerned her the most. Being autistic, he could not read social cues correctly and living in a foreign country made it even worse. The previous week he had struck another child mistakenly and was suspended from school. Ling asked for ESL (English as Second Language) support from the school principal but was told that due to the economic downturn the school had no budget for ESL.

She said her husband also had difficulty adjusting to living in the U.S. Although he had owned his business in Taiwan, he had become a “stay-at-home” dad due to visa limitations and language barriers. This hurt his ego, as men are expected to be the breadwinners in Taiwan. Additionally, the new Motor Vehicle Division policy in the state delayed his driver’s license application, which prevented him from traveling out of state. His frustrations often lead to “heated discussions” between the couple. During the quarrels, Ling usually apologized, “because I think he is at a disadvantageous position.” Ling reminded herself that she could not be weak because she did not want her parents in Taiwan to worry.

She said her personality kept her running forward. “I am a person who catches every opportunity...,” she described herself. Her face lifted when she talked about her research. She felt grateful to her advisor who recognized her ability and encouraged her. She aspired to help autistic children in Taiwan one day, and this higher goal kept her anchored. She also found spiritual support in her Buddhist faith. Looking back, she said, “Coming here makes me treasure the simple happiness in life...something I did not have in Taiwan.”

In summary, Ling’s challenges included (a) her children, especially her autistic son’s adaptation; and (b) spousal disputes due to husband’s frustrations living in a new country. Her solutions were (a) her aspiration to help autistic children, (b) her advisor’s encouragement, (c) her proactive outlook, and (d) her Buddhist faith.

“A Picasso Painting” Name: Mary; Home Country: Mexico; Marital Status: Divorced; Child: Daughter (17 years); Occupation: Employee (to be); Student Status: PhD (All But Defense); Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: F-1

In 2006, Mary came to the U.S. to pursue her master’s degree. She spoke fluent English, but writing academic English was extremely difficult for her. Moreover, since she did not have the relevant academic background, she felt overwhelmed trying to catch up. Yet, after completing her master’s degree in 2008, she felt the confidence to continue on to the PhD program and had just passed her comprehensive exams a few months prior to the interview. She said with a deep sense of accomplishment, “I had to read and memorize 15 books, I was stressed out and going crazy.” She also resented the fact that her department chair initially discouraged her from applying for the PhD program. “She said I had ‘B’s for some core courses...but she did not realize that I have progressed so much more [as an international student] than the American guys.”

Her daughter was 12 when they arrived in the U.S. and was homesick and frustrated by English. Mary’s focus on academics sometimes brought friction to her relationship with her daughter. Things had improved, as her daughter had made many friends at school. She said she used to live a comfortable life in Mexico with a stable, well-paid job, but she wanted a change. “I want to learn something new,” she said. Living on a student’s income, she said she used to complain and cry a lot, but she had come to believe that “things happen for a reason.” In addition to her resilience, her American boyfriend had offered important support. “He takes good care of me...but my daughter is a little jealous,” she said with a bitter-sweet smile.

Culturally, she said she identified more with the U.S. and felt disconnected from Mexico. “I feel comfortable living here...My country is crazy right now. It is in a very lamentable situation,” she sighed. She depicted her life in the past five years as a Picasso painting. “It is complicated, but it always brings to a good end. It is also optimistic, and it reflects positivism in life.”

In summary, Mary’s challenges included (a) demanding academic work, (b) discouraging department chair, (c) decreased living standard, and (d) teenage daughter’s adaptation. Her support came from (a) her positivity and (b) her stable relationship with an American boyfriend.

“No Time to Relax” Name: Miki; Home Country: Japan; Marital Status: Married (but husband works and lives in Japan); Children: Sons (13 years, 11 years, and 4 years); Occupation: Part-time Social Worker; Student Status: Bachelor Degree Graduate; Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: F-1

In 2004, Miki came to the U.S. with her husband who was on a two-year job rotation program. He went back to Japan in 2006, but she decided to continue as an international student while raising three boys on her own. Her motivation came from her sister, who died at a young age. Realizing that “I have only one life,” she decided to again pursue her old dream—learning English.

With limited English, she struggled with her coursework. Meanwhile, she was breastfeeding her five-month-old baby and she often felt overwhelmed and tired. She recalled that one night she was so sleepy that she dropped him. She had difficulty finding an affordable, clean, responsible daycare. “Why I am studying here so hard, alone?” She sometimes blamed herself for coming to the U.S... But she coped with these difficulties

by, for example, visiting her professors' office hours and finding a language exchange friend.

Because her student visa required that she completed her study within two years, she took 15 credits a semester. She also had to achieve a B+ in every course in order to keep her scholarship. Under stress, she put house chores aside. "I am not a good wife...my house is always messy," she said, "but I do not have time." When asked how she relaxed, she paused, and replied, "Actually, I did not have time to relax."

She was concerned about her son's language adaptation, but above all, she was most worried about her children's health. "If they are sick, I have to cancel my class...and if I fail my class, I will lose my scholarship." Now that she had graduated, she was both excited and sad. She worried about her sons' re-entry shock into the Japanese education system and about her traditional Japanese wifely duties. "Now I am top of the household," she said, "but back in Japan, I have to obey him [her husband]. This is Japanese tradition." She questioned herself, "Can I follow the Japanese culture anymore?"

In summary, Miki's challenges included (a) raising three boys alone while pursuing her study with limited English, (b) limited access to affordable daycare, (c) constraints on credit hours set by student visa, and (c) concern about her and her children's re-entry adaptation in Japan. She dealt with her challenges by (a) her resilience and courage, and (b) leveraging university resources

"Hyphenated Identity" Name: Olivia; Home Country: Russia; Marital Status: Married; Child: Daughter (21 years); Occupation: Teaching Assistant; Student Status: PhD Candidate; Years in the U.S.: 14; Visa Type: Naturalized Citizen

In 1997, Olivia came to the U.S. with her husband when he moved for his job. She recalled the first year as the “unhappiest year” in her life. “Everything was not what I expected. I missed my friends, my country, and I was very miserable.” Meanwhile, she was disappointed with the public school her daughter attended. “Kids were not taught anything.” Her daughter was unhappy in school and was victimized by peer bullying and discrimination. In 1999, after numerous clashes with the school, Olivia decided to homeschool her daughter. For a couple of years prior, she said there had been huge movement against home schooling, but she persisted. Looking back, she felt that home schooling was the best decision she had ever made. “Homeschooling helped me build a very good relationship with my daughter,” she said with a sense of pride.

She began attending a community college in 1999 and today she is doctoral student in a state university. Being a “linear person,” she found academic multi-tasking among research, publications, and teaching to be a challenging expectation. She also felt lost in her discipline and had difficulty positioning herself. “I cannot categorize my research into a tight box [as job postings require]...I am always interested in interdisciplinary research.”

When asked about how she saw herself, she said she had “hyphenated identity”: partially one thing and partially another thing. She wanted to teach in Russia, and she conducted research mainly focusing on Russia, but she found it difficult to communicate with scholars in her home country due to considerable shifts in the Russian speaking community. Meanwhile, she felt “hesitant” to label herself as an international scholar in the U.S. because she sensed American academicians’ resentment against “scholars of color.”

Speaking of her recent life in the U.S., she said she just had a horrible year dealing with her own health problems and a family member's death in Russia. She had to travel back and forth between two countries while ill and additionally had to work on her dissertation. She said she had shed many tears in the past years in the U.S., but she said her family bonding supported her through the tough days.

Olivia described herself as a decisive and action-oriented person. "It is better to do something about it, if I can." Reviewing her 14 years living in the U.S., she said, "I feel wonderful. ... Without the difficult times, I won't be the person who I am today."

In summary, Oliva's challenges were (a) her daughter's education, (b) struggling with multi-tasking and self-positioning in the academia, (c) lack of sense of belonging in either Russia or the U.S., and (d) her health and family issues in Russia. Her solutions included (a) being proactive in solving problems and (b) her family bonding.

"Unbeatable Cockroach" Name: Penny; Home Country: Taiwan; Marital Status: Married; Children: Son (4 years); Occupation: Part-time Teacher; Student Status: PhD candidate; Years in the U.S.: 11; Visa Type: F-1

In 2000, Penny came to the U.S. to earn a Master's Degree of Education in order to advance her teaching career in Taiwan. She had been dating an Italian man against her parents' will, so she decided to continue on to her PhD in the U.S. in order to stay close with him (now her husband).

Life as two graduate students was tough, and money was tight, but what bothered her most were conflicts with her former advisor. She described her advisor as "controlling," "mean," and "discouraging." "She forced me to take courses that I was not interested in.... She did not support my research interests." Being new to the country and

new to academia, she had no idea how to handle conflicts with someone in power. "I was scared to death," she recalled.

To support her family she took a part-time job in a public school 30 miles away from home. After one month, she had a car accident, and the only family car was totaled. Luckily, she and her unborn baby were unharmed in the accident. To her delight, good things happened one after another after her son's birth. First she and her husband received financial aid, and then she found the courage to change her advisor. "My life is not miserable anymore," she laughed.

Recently they moved to a small college town for her husband's new job. Seeing her husband's progress was bitter-sweet because she had turned down a wonderful job offer with a sponsored work visa for the sake of her husband. "I sacrificed too much," she said, raising her voice, "I feel I am useless here." She said she had invested seven years in her PhD and had lost her pension in Taiwan. Although she was willing to take any job, her F-1 visa set many limitations. "I am stuck," she sighed.

Penny struggled to balance her multiple roles. "Family is more important than career," she said, "but I must work, not just for money, but for my future." She felt guilty that she had to send her son to daycare, and she laughed at the irony that two parents with PhDs in education had no time to educate their own son. "I tried my best to balance, but I feel I could not be my best either in my family or in my career." Regardless of her frustrations, she saw positive things about living in the U.S., especially in their intercultural marriage. "U.S. is the best middle land for us," she said. When asked how she could stay positive, she said that her Buddhist master taught her great wisdoms of life. After a pause, she laughed, "I am an unbeatable cockroach...ha ha ha..."

In summary, Penny's challenges included (a) a controlling advisor, (b) financial pressure, (c) visa limitations on employment, and (d) feeling guilty about not being the best in either family or in career. Her solutions included (a) her faith in Buddhism, and (b) her unbeatable personality.

“Have to Be Everything” Name: Rebecca; Home Country: Brazil; Marital Status: Divorced; Child: Daughter (7 years); Occupation: Research Assistant; Student Status: PhD candidate; Years in the U.S.: 3; Visa Type: F-1

In 2007, tired of work and life in Brazil, Rebecca decided to bring her daughter with her to the U.S. to pursue a PhD. At the beginning of her time in the U.S., language was a challenge for her and her daughter, but after a few months, homesickness was her daughter's biggest problem. “In Brazil, I have a big family.... She has grandpa, grandma, aunts, uncles, nephews.... Here she has only me,” Rebecca explained, “she used to visit her father every two weeks, but now she could not.” Even though they visited Brazil three times a year, every time they returned to U.S. her daughter became upset. “Whenever she had a hard time, she gave me a hard time. Then I could not concentrate on my study. That is the circle.” Because her daughter had food allergies, Rebecca also had to cook every meal. In Brazil, Rebecca could afford a nanny who cooked, cleaned, and did the laundry. “I really miss this part,” she sighed.

Occupied by her daughter and by her school work, Rebecca did not have an adult social life. “I could not hang out with my peers for a beer after class,” she said. “I made three friends in three years.” Being divorced, she found socializing difficult. “People feel you are strange.” When asked how she coped with her life, she burst into laughter. “You are asking me how I maintain sanity after all these? I just have to go for it.” Then she

remembered, “Oh, yes, I go to my church once every month. I feel cool down when I am there.” She said she often pondered, “Am I half of everything? Half mom, half student? Or being a mother or being a student can be optional?” She then concluded, “The answer is NOT optional. I have to be EVERYTHING.”

In summary, Rebecca’s challenges included (a) language barriers, (b) daughter’s homesickness and food allergies, (c) no access to affordable house care, and (d) no “me” time and difficulties in making friends. Her sole support came from her spirituality.

“Carrying a Mountain” Name: Violet; Home Country: Ecuador; Marital Status: Married; Child: Son (14 years); Occupation: Project Assistant; Student Status: PhD Student; Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: F-1

Violet quit her job in 2006 and came to the U.S. for her PhD, bringing her husband and son. The very first shock, she described, was that no one picked her up at the airport as she had expected they would. Luckily, a friend came and got them and allowed them to stay for three nights. Another shock, she mentioned, was when she was offered a cleaner’s job in her department. She was a respected professional in Ecuador where she represented indigenous people at the United Nations. The suggestion to do janitorial work left her feeling mistreated and disrespected. A third shock was when her department terminated her job without notice. It was shocking because in her home culture, “when you begin a job, you stay in that job.” After losing the job she did nothing but cry and pray. She said she cried almost every day for the first two years in the U.S. but then told herself to be strong.

She revealed that her son also had a bad start in the U.S. because he did not speak English and had no friends. Her son came home, crying, “Why they call me aliens? Why

they have discrimination?” She had to visit school almost every week to explain to teachers and students, for example, why her son grew his hair long and why he had a different name from Americans. Much to her relief, her son has grown stronger and prouder of his indigenous identity. Her husband, seeing the family face so many difficulties, has suffered from depression. He was a renowned musician in Ecuador, but in the U.S. he could only play non-paid performances due to his visa limitations. Nevertheless, Violet said she had convinced him to “reverse the situation” and to try to enjoy what they have in the United States.

She appreciated the people who have helped her, but she wished that the university would have done a better job of preparing international students for such difficulties. For example, she felt that the Letter of Acceptance did not explain enough. Looking back, she said, “I feel like carrying a mountain over me. My walk was very heavy and sad.” Yet, looking forward, she saw herself standing, with her arms open, facing the sun. “I said to myself, this is the Violet I want to be.... It took me two years to be myself,” she said, with a calm but determined voice.

In summary, Violet’s challenges included (a) being unprepared for the new environment, (b) mistreatment in her department, (c) discrimination in her son’s school, (d) her husband’s depression, and (e) financial burden due to funding and husband’s unemployment. Her solution came from her inner strength to embrace the challenges.

“**A Turtle**” Name: Yan; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married; Child: Son (4 years); Occupation: Data Analyst; Student Status: Completed PhD; Years in the U.S.: 7; Visa Type: H-1

Yan came to the U.S. in 2004 to join her husband while advancing her degree in mathematics. She received her PhD in 2010 and now works as a data analyst in a financial firm. She recalled two major challenges. The first was her major. After beginning her study, she soon realized that her passion was not in pure math but in applied math in economics. She could not, however, find interdisciplinary research support in her department. The second challenge was her father's cancer. Being the only daughter, she decided to suspend her study to go back to Shanghai for eight months to be with him. After he recovered, she came back, continued her study, and found a financial analyst job immediately after graduation.

She rated her job satisfaction 2.5 out of 5 and explained, "I had no background in business, and talking with clients over phone in English is my biggest barrier." She was disappointed that her PhD training did not apply to the "real world." Although she easily secured a job, her husband was not as lucky. His finding a job was critical because "if he could not find a job, we might just all go back to Shanghai."

For Yan, merging a Chinese family into American culture was difficult. "We look different; we are interested in different topics.... Hanging out with non-Chinese is just a social obligation, not at all relaxing." She found support from her husband, a typical Shanghai man [who helps with family chores], and from her faith. She joined a Bible study group every Saturday, where she said, "You feel you have a stable group of friends like family members."

She admired people who were goal-oriented and she saw herself compromising. "If I cannot get what I want at the first place, what can I do?" she sighed. "I have to learn

to be contented.” She called herself a “turtle”—an animal symbolizing mediocrity and practicality in China.

In summary, Yan’s challenges included (a) lack of academic support, (b) her father’s illness, and (c) feeling incompetent in her new job. She dealt with them through (a) her faith, (b) her husband’s support, and (c) her willingness to compromise.

“I Feel Tired” Name: Zhen; Home Country: China; Marital Status: Married; Child: Son (7 months); Occupation: Research Assistant; Student Status: PhD Candidate; Years in the U.S.: 5; Visa Type: F-1

Zhen came to the U.S. in 2006 to pursue a PhD in psychology. The first challenge she encountered was working with her former advisor, a “demanding” and “bossy” scholar. Having received her Master’s Degree in Psychology from a prestigious university in China, Zhen expected to complete her PhD in three to four years, but her advisor kept telling her different time frames--from three years, to four years, and then to five years. When her advisor was dissatisfied with Zhen’s work, she would make hurtful comments such as, “your contribution is nothing but trivial.” Zhen argued, but “I do have publications....,I have received grants to support my research, and I presented 21 posters at international conferences.” She related that her interactions with her advisor were very stressful. When she became pregnant in 2010, Zhen found the courage to switch to another lab, which meant she had a different advisor. After that change, she said she was happy because her new advisor was very supportive and encouraging, and she was also ahead of her dissertation schedule.

Zhen said she felt very happy about life in general. “My husband is a really nice person, he always tolerates me,” she said, smiling. She reported suffering from sleep

deprivation after her child's birth because of breastfeeding at night. However, her mother was in the U.S. living with Zhen, so Zhen could sleep through at least two nights a week. She said her baby had changed her life priorities. "Now, life comes first, and career comes next." She also felt that she needed to sacrifice something to prioritize her husband's career. "We need to keep balance," she said.

When asked about her cultural adaptation, she said she had not experienced too much homesickness, as her parents were both in the U.S. Although she enjoyed her family and an extensive Chinese circle of friends, she said that adapting to the U.S. culture was the most difficult thing for her. Although she spoke fluent English, she said she did not understand American humor. Her lack of understanding made "it ... really, really hard to be one of them." Nonetheless she had a few American friends, including her host family who had invited her to traditional holidays and taken her on some enjoyable trips. They also wanted her to be part of their church, and she said with gratitude, "They are very nice to me, even though I do not want to be a Christian."

She wore a smile throughout the interview, but when reflecting on her past five years in the U.S., she said, "I feel tired...kind of...but also proud." She had been working very diligently on her PhD and she expected to graduate in the next semester. She said her main stress at the moment was to find a job. "I am worried that I do not have a Green Card...[and] that would put me into disadvantage," she said. "But I am also confident. I think I am strong candidate." She said she wanted to take some time to rejuvenate herself before starting her job.

In summary, Zhen's challenges included (a) a demanding advisor, (b) uncertainty of job outlook, and (c) difficulties in integrating into the U.S. culture. Her solutions

included (a) a supportive husband and family and (b) close ties with the ethnic Chinese community.

Above, I presented 17 stories as recounted by the women in the study. These stories depict specific and important events in women's lives as well as key people that have either hindered or facilitated their work-life balance in the U.S. As presented, each story is unique to the woman's background and encapsulates her lived experiences. These stories present multi-color, multi-faceted vignettes or pictures of these women's lives. The next stage of analysis, Multi-Level Challenges and Solutions, summarizes similar and divergent challenges and solutions at micro-meso-macro levels. For example, the label Challenges-Similar-Micro indicates challenges shared by 50 percent or more of the women at individual-level. Along the same lines, Solutions-Divergent-Micro indicates solutions adopted by fewer than half of women at the individual-level.

I have not further separated challenges or solutions into work-life balance or intercultural adaptation categories, as I did in the literature review section because the work and life of international working mothers are inevitably, intercultural. I juxtapose challenges and solutions from this study's findings with assumptions and findings in the literature.

Multi-level Challenges and Solutions

In this phase, I examine the challenges experienced and solutions adopted by international working mothers. *Challenges* are the difficulties, conflicts, or tensions that arise from the dialectic demands of work and non-work domains that frequently pull international working mothers in different directions. Challenges also arise from the concurrent difficulties involved in learning cultural norms and expectations of host

countries and resolving them with the norms and expectations of their home countries. *Communicative strategies* refer to social interactions, resources, networks, and other creative ways that working mothers devise to reduce the tension and stress from these conflicting demands. *Solutions* are the tactics international working mothers use to ease the family and workplace conflicts and achieve a satisfying work-life balance. *Balance* is an ongoing achievement for working women and means a state of equilibrium between work and life. In what follows, I report similar and divergent challenges at micro, meso, and macro levels. Figure 4.1 summarizes the micro-level challenges. Similar challenges are listed in the center circle and divergent challenges are listed in the surrounding ovals.

Figure 4.1. Challenges-Micro



Challenges -- Similar -- Micro. This category represents individual-level (i.e., micro) trials and demands that kept the women from feeling a sense of balance between work and non-work lives. The key similar challenges included role conflicts (including time, energy, and psychological interference); work overload; language barriers; financial

limitations; difficulty establishing new relationships; problems with children's adaptation; and lack of family support. Other challenges arose from the women's personality traits.

Role conflict. Role conflicts arose from incompatible role demands between work (e.g., being a successful career woman) and non-work domains (e.g., being a good mother) (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and often resulted in role strains – “the felt difficulties in fulfilling role obligations” (Goode, 1960, p. 483). Role conflicts occurred when life tasks interfered with work (e.g., pregnancy fatigue and breastfeeding affected work and study, or family issues affected academic progress), when work interfered with non-work (e.g., working, studying appropriated energy needed at home), or when different roles in the same domain clashed (e.g., being a caring mother versus being an understanding wife). Issues unique to acculturation and being a foreigner affected both work and non-work life domains (e.g. foreign status made it more difficult to obtain work visa or a driver's license).

Role conflicts resulted in time, energy, and psychological stresses (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflicts arose when time spent on performing one role (e.g., graduate student role) often excluded time spent on fulfilling another role (e.g., mother role), and were evident in comments such as, “I have to be everything.” “It is too much.” “I don't have time to relax.” “There is no ‘me’ time.” and “I don't have time to socialize.” Penny believed it was ironic that, due to the time demands of studying for a PhD, she had to send her son to daycare. She said, “We [she and her husband] both are PhDs in education, but we don't have time to educate our son.”

Energy-based conflicts arose when energy spent on one role fatigued the woman so that she became less active in another role. These were evident in comments such as

“I feel tired.” “I feel sleepy during the day.” and “I feel exhausted.” Miki, a Japanese mother raising three children by herself while studying, recalled that one night while she was breastfeeding her youngest son, “I was so sleepy that I dropped him!” Furthermore, emotional strain experienced in one role affected one’s performance in other roles, as Amy, an African woman explained, “It is so hard to juggle between the two [studying and teaching]...and then I have two kids, I have a husband, I have a house to take care of, and everything.” International working mothers, like most working mothers, felt torn between expectations to be an outstanding student or career woman and expectations to be an outstanding mother (Egan, 2005; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009; Mason et al., 2009). As a result of their role conflicts, women often felt guilty of neglecting their spouse or children (Edley, 2001; Hochschild, 1997). As Amy said, “I feel that I do not know them [her children] anymore.”

What made role conflict challenges unique for international working mothers was the lack of extended family or community support for childcare or household chores that was available in their home countries. As Amy explained, “Back home, everyone helped.” Rebecca said, “I could have a nanny to do the cooking and cleaning in Brazil. Now I have to do everything myself.” Her daughter used to find an “escape home” with her auntie in Brazil, but here “she only has me.” For many, community childcare was “too expensive” and support often adopted by local mothers, such as exchanging daycare, was inaccessible to international women who simply did not know people. These difficulties became acute when their husbands were traveling (e.g., Ann), when husbands were living in the home country (e.g., Miki, Hui, Jenny), or when they were single mothers (e.g., Bhava, Rebecca).

Another unique challenge for international working mothers was the difficulty adjusting to new working, academic, and cultural environments. As such, the stress of work and school affected their performance at home. For example, new to the educational system, and coming from a culture with larger power-distances, many women said that they feared voicing their dissatisfactions to anybody. They ended up crying at home and feeling depressed. Their negative emotion, if coupled with their partners' adjustment problems, often brought family disputes.

Analyses showed that living in a new country added additional role conflicts for international working mothers who strove to live up to being good mothers, good wives, good employees, and good students while dealing with new employment, academic, and cultural environments. They had limited access to family and community support that had been available and affordable in their home countries.

Work overload. Work overload means having too many work demands and too little time to fulfill them (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Overload at work has negative impact on parent-child relationships, on marital relationships, on leisure, and on home management (Barling & Macewen, 1992). International women, and graduate students in particular, felt "overwhelmed" by struggling between demanding coursework, teaching, and publishing. Mothers reported, "Being a graduate student is a 24-hour work." "In order to pass my comprehensive exam, I have to remember 15 books." "Being in academia, one needs to be good at multi-tasking, because you have to study, teach, and do research at the same time."

As suggested by previous research (Barling & Bacewen, 1992), work overload negatively impacts family interactions and leads to family disagreements or

children/husband feeling neglected. Overworked mothers reported having no leisure time and having no time to do family chores. Miki, a Japanese mother said, “My house is messy...I do not have time to clean. When I have exams, I have to send my kids to eat at McDonalds.”

Although most working adults experience negative spillover from work to non-work life domains (Menaghan, 1991), and mothers who take student roles report a great deal of stress (Egan, 2005; Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009), international working mothers reported experiencing unique challenges from language barriers, visa status, and different cultural norms. Due to language barriers, international women had to spend more time reading, writing, and understanding course work. In order to secure a sponsored work visa, international students felt an overwhelming need to publish more than their American colleagues, otherwise, as Zhen, a Chinese PhD candidate said, “Who would be willing to spend thousands of dollars to sponsor our work visa?”

Furthermore, working in a new cultural environment added stress due to different cultural norms. Teaching in a middle school, Amy felt frustrated about the lack of respect from parents and students, “Kids here, they can say anything to you, and parents are so demanding.” She said she had never dealt with such behavior in her home country. As a result of living in a new cultural terrain, international working mothers encountered heavier workloads than locals due to language barriers, visa limitations, and different cultural norms.

Language barriers. The ability to communicate in the host language is the central concern of adaptation (Berry & Uichol, 1988; Kim, 1988). Inadequate vocabulary or a strong accent prevents international students from expressing their ideas fully and

precisely, thus hindering socialization and participation in class (De Verthelyi, 1995).

Concerns about language barriers were voiced by the majority of the women: “People don’t understand my accent.” “It is hard to change [accent] after so many years.” “While I am still forming my sentences, my American colleagues have already raised their hands.” “I could not explain over phone to the Honda repair guy, that [situation] was frustrating.” “Socializing with local people in English just makes me tired.” As a result of limited English, they felt “disappointed,” “helpless,” and inclined to socialize only with co-nationals.

Very little research addresses the intercultural frustration of missing or being unable to follow jokes, which was voiced by many international women, even those whose oral English was sufficient. Jing, a Chinese graduate student, said that she used to attend department parties but stopped going, because “I don’t know why they are laughing.” Not understanding humor made international women feel “disconnected” from local people and gradually restricted their socialization to co-nationals with whom they felt “comfortable.” Although research shows that over time, immigrants feel more comfortable with language (Kim, 2005), most women expressed that English remained one of their biggest challenges.

The unique challenge for some international working mothers was not only adapting to day-to-day English, but also mastering working English, such as academic writing and business English. Recalling her first paper, Jing laughed, “Oh, it was marked red everywhere by my advisor.” Having never worked in business, Yan said, “I don’t know how to communicate with my clients in a diplomatic way.” As such, findings in this study expand the existing literature on the language barriers of immigrants, and in particular, of international students.

Financial limitations. Increasing tuition costs, diminishing university funding, and the opportunity cost associated with studying abroad often made international students feel they have made financial sacrifices (De Verthelyi, 1995). Penny, a Taiwanese PhD student, saw her Teaching Assistantship as “cheap labor.” “Feeling so poor,” she decided to take a part-time teaching job 20 miles from home because her department could not provide enough funding. Used to earning a good income in Taiwan, she complained about her reduced financial status, “I have sacrificed so much.” Similarly, due to the opportunity cost of quitting her job in Brazil and studying in the U.S., Rebecca said she expected a high return on her investment after graduation.

Financial challenges were made acute for international working mothers by extra tax burdens, husband’s unemployment due to visa, and concerns for children’s education. Bhava, an Indian single mother explained that she paid more tax than American parents, because “being an international student, I cannot enjoy tax credit for my son.” Husbands who came on a spouse visa (F-2) were not allowed to work, making women the single source of income for the whole family. Being unsatisfied by the quality of local public schools, Yan, a Chinese mother who valued education highly, said, “I want to save up money for their future education [in private schools.]” She had to send her elder daughter to her parents in China in order to save daycare fees.

Furthermore, due to financial as well as time constraints, many mothers could not visit home as often as they wished. Flora’s comment illustrated the dilemma, “Sometimes I have the money but not time, sometimes I have the time but not money...It is hard to have both.” These experiences indicate that international women encounter

unique financial limitations imposed by government policies on immigrants such as income tax and employment restrictions.

Difficulty establishing new relationships. Social support and interpersonal relationships are important for coping with life stresses, especially work-life balance stresses. However, international students find it difficult to establish new friendships due to lack of time, lack of shared cultural knowledge or norms (De Verthelyi, 1995), and the mobility of friends. Women voiced: "I have no time to hang out." "[American colleagues] like to chat about movie stars or sports stars, but I don't know the names." "My American friends are nice, but my relationships with them are superficial." "My only few friends moved away after graduation." As a result, they felt "lonely," "excluded," "bored," and "isolated." Amy, an African woman, laughed that one had to make an appointment to visit a friend, "...in my country, you just go, when you think of them." But on the other hand, she realized that "people here are busy, if you don't make an appointment, they may not be at home waiting." Ana, a Peruvian mother, without an ethnic community, said, "I am not [interested in] celebrating my traditional holidays anymore."

Divorced women from conservative cultures experienced unique challenges in forming new relationships. Bhava, an Indian single mother, shared with tears,

Being a divorced woman, I am neither accepted in my traditional Indian community nor connected with the mainstream American society. The Indian community sees me as a threat to their traditional family structure...the American community tries to tell me what I should do based on their values...I feel powerless, voiceless and helpless.

Similarly, Rebecca, a single mother from Brazil, echoed, "People here have their lives, and their lives are quite different from mine...being a divorced woman does not make things

easier.” Although immigrants generally experience difficulty establishing new relationships (De Verthelyi, 1995), single mothers felt the double jeopardy of being divorced and being international. In their home countries, they might have access to a much bigger circle of friends and families, even if divorce was not socially acceptable in some societies. While in the U.S., they had a much smaller ethnic community, one that might not always accept them.

Analyses revealed that international working mothers faced unique challenges in building new relationships due to lack of time, lack of shared cultural norms with locals, and being divorced and international.

Problems with children's adaptation. Stresses experienced by children of immigrants include language problems, separation from former social networks, feelings of being different from the majority peers in the new country, confusion in behavioral norms between their indigenous culture and the host culture, and growing up as adolescents in a new country (e.g., Aronowitz, 1984; Baptiste, 1993; Lee & Chen, 2000; Zhou, 1997). Challenges faced by children became the concerns of international working mothers when they had to communicate with schools and to comfort the children at home. Rebecca said, whenever her daughter missed home, she became “hard on me, and then I could not shift my mood to focus on my study.” Violet’s son, bearing an indigenous name and long hair, was mocked by his classmates, and was called “alien.” Unable to express himself in English, he came home “crying and crying.” Violet remembered that she had to visit his school every week, to explain to the teacher and the students about her culture. Receiving “mixed messages” from home and school, Bhava said her son was “utterly

confused” between asserting independence (learned from school) and showing respect to his parents (expected in an Indian home).

Unique problems for some international working mothers included raising an autistic child and trying to educate a child without ethnic community support. Autistic children have difficulty reading social cues. Unable to understand the languages and gestures in a new culture, autistic children may display aggressive behavioral problems (Welterlin, & LaRue, 2007). Ling reported that her son mistakenly struck a girl and was suspended from school. She talked to the principle and asked for English as Second Language (ESL) support, but was told that due to the financial downturn, the school had no budget for ESL support. Such behavioral problems would be less should they live in Taiwan where he was used to the linguistic and social cues.

As another example, as a single mom of an adolescent son, Bhava found herself powerless to push her son to excel academically and to maintain traditional values without her ethnic community’s support. She said, weeping,

There is so much focus in my culture on academics, but here I have isolated voice. ‘Son, you need to focus on your study,’ but he would say, ‘Mom, that boy does not have to do his homework, and if he does, he get \$10.’... If other parents [in the Indian community] tell him, ‘You should listen to your mom,’ that would help a lot... But I am not connected to my Indian community here...so it is very hard for me to inculcate what is important for us traditionally...

As such, these women’s unique challenges in raising children add depth to existing literature on children’s adaptation.

Lack of family support. Family support contributes greatly to individuals’ wellbeing and work-life balance (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001). Such supports include parental support, spousal support, and an open family climate that allows members to share

concerns at home (Clark, 2002). However, living away from home and sometimes even away from their husbands, international working mothers did not always enjoy emotional and practical support from their parents and their spouses. Women expressed that they did not want to “bother” their mothers at home because “my mom has diabetes,” “my mom is old,” and “I don’t want them to worry about me.” Bhava’s parents disagreed with her decision to live and work in the U.S., and they saw her as a failure as a mother. Extremely hurt, Bhava wept, “I wanted to expand the horizon for my son, but my parents want stability. They think my son is ruined by me.”

A husband’s support is critical to reduce a working woman’s stress (Home, 1997b). However, such support is not always rendered (Greenberger & O’Neil, 1994), as experienced by many international mothers. Some mothers could not receive any practical support because their husbands lived and worked in their home countries. Being quasi-single mothers while pursuing their career, these women described their lives as “crazy,” “so hard,” and “tough.” When husbands lived in the U.S., they did not always render support due to their own stress from work, or from not being able to work due to visa limitations. As a result, couples often ended up quarreling and arguing over “trivial matters.” Having experienced disputes at home, Violet said that she chose to “keep everything within myself,” because “I could not share with my husband. I don’t want any more quarrels at home.”

All individuals seek comfort from family support, but what makes the lack of family support more devastating to international working mothers is the distance from home, the separation from their spouse due to the husband’s career, and visa limitations. Face-to-face communication is the most desired human communication, and is by no

means replaceable by phone or Skype. Anna said she talked to her mother once per week, “but it is not the same [as seeing her in person.]” Due to distance, family members simply could not provide immediate, practical help, as well described by a Chinese idiom, “water afar cannot fight the fire nearby.” So, “what is the point [of bothering them]?” these women questioned, “I will only make them [parents] worry.”

Some women had to live apart from their husbands who either could not find a job in the U.S., or had to secure their employment in home countries. As a result of raising children alone and pursuing study, these women often felt deep-seated stress. Moreover, the jobless status of husbands on spousal visa (F-2) affected their self-efficacy, and in turn, affected the mood of the family. If living in the home country, these women would have more direct family support, and their husbands would most likely have jobs. Findings showed that international working mothers could not receive desired emotional and practical support from family members due to distance from home, separation from their husbands, and husbands' own stresses due to visa.

Personality. Last but not least, working mothers who aspire to be “perfect” experience increased incidences of physical and emotional stresses (Greenhaus, Allen, & Spector, 2006; Mirashidi, 1999; Whitney, Kuszniir, & Dixie, 2002). This personality attribute was evident in comments such as “maybe I am a perfectionist.” (Zhen) “I push myself too hard, it is just me.” (Hui) “[My husband can support me]...but I don't like that, I want to be independent.” (Ann, Amy) “I can not stop; I want to set up a goal for myself.” (Ann) “I am a person who always moves forward.”(Ling) “I could choose to quit or continue, but I decided to continue.” (Rebecca) “I just feel like I could continue with a PhD” (Mary) “Sitting at home doing nothing just makes me crazy.” (Amy). Being high

achievers meant they did not easily give up their goals and they chose to live a challenging life. Such personality attributes brought more challenges to international working mothers because they often lacked the social scaffolding available in their home countries: affordable childcare, parental and extended family support, extensive and deep-rooted social networks, and familiar working and cultural environments.

Challenges – Divergent -- Micro. This category addresses individual level (i.e. micro) challenges expressed by less than half of the participants. International working mothers reported challenges from their jobs, decreased quality of life, reduced social status, reduced feelings of self-efficacy, and erroneous expectations and lack of cultural knowledge prior to coming to the U.S.

Workplace challenges. A variety of workplace conditions have negative effects on women's lives, including poor relationships with bosses, job insecurity, and lack of job orientation (Menaghan, 1991). Although the majority of the women in this study expressed great appreciation for their advisors' and bosses' encouragement and support, some reported terrible experiences. Zhen, a Chinese PhD student, said that her former advisor "kept changing her mind." She was told initially that she could finish her PhD in three years, and then was told four years, and five years, without explanation. Penny, a Taiwanese PhD student, felt discouraged by her "controlling" advisor who "forced" her to take the courses that she did not want to take and discouraged her from attending conferences. Although dealing with bosses can also be a challenge for local women, the challenge is particularly difficult for international women from cultures where challenging those in power is a strong taboo.

Hui worried about her husband's job security during the economic downturn. She said she had to work because "you never know when my husband might lose his job." Compared with many international women, Isabel was lucky to find a job with a sponsored work visa. Nevertheless, although she did not like the job, she could not quit, for fear of risking her work visa. Amy, an African woman, was put in the classroom without much orientation to teach cognitively disabled children. She felt overwhelmed because this was her first time teaching disabled children.

Although working adults often experience poor relationships at work and job insecurity (Menaghan, 1991), two things that made international working mothers' challenges unique were not knowing how to handle conflicts with someone in a power position in a new environment, and having limited job opportunities due to visa limitations. Penny, a Taiwanese PhD student said, she was "so scared" that she dared not tell anyone about her "mean" advisor. Coming from a high power-distance culture (Hofstede, 2001), Penny was intimidated by the seniority of her advisor. New to the American educational system, she did not know where to look for help. International working mothers faced more job insecurity than local people because if they had lost their sponsored work visa it would be very difficult to obtain a new one. As a result, they had to compromise, after taking a job they disliked with an uncompetitive salary.

Decreased quality of life and reduced social status. Quality of life measures physical wellbeing, material wellbeing, social wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and development and activity (Felce & Perry, 1999). The judgement of "good" or "bad" quality of life is culturally dependent (Hofstede, 1984). Social status is the complex set of stimuli that are evaluated by others as better or worse, higher or lower (Homans,

1961). Homans (1961) classifies social status into three kinds, namely individual characteristics such as age, sex, or skin color, relational characteristics such as seniority at work and authority, and perceived characteristics such as esteem. Furthermore, cross-cultural research suggests that collectivists are more sensitive to status differences than individualists (Triandis, 1994; Triandis et al., 1988).

International students experience a lower life quality due to changes in lifestyle and experience lower social status because they are ethnic minorities (Lin, 2006). Women felt their quality of life had been decreased because of decreased income for women who had a career prior to becoming a graduate student, and because of lack of access to affordable luxuries and lack of access to ethnic food and entertainment. Isabel, a Chinese mother said she missed “hot pot,” a popular dish in China. Jing felt bored because she could not find activities she liked to do, such as singing Karaoke. Rebecca missed massages and facials she used to enjoy in Brazil. These women’s accounts confirm that the judgment of “good” or “bad” quality of life is subjective and culturally dependent. A western woman may enjoy the peace and serenity of living in a small city, while a metropolitan woman from China may find life in small town extremely boring.

Some women experienced the loss of social status as an ethnic minority and as a student. Violet, an indigenous woman who often spoke at the United Nations, cried out, “I do not deserve to be treated like this,” when her department offered to fund her study by letting her work as an office cleaner. She resented the fact that her colleagues did not respect her background as a prestigious scholar in her country. “My past means nothing to them, I have nothing, nothing.” These experiences confirm previous findings about experiences of international students (Lin, 2006).

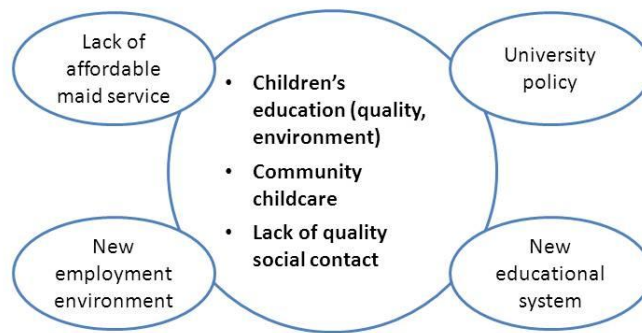
Reduced self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of performing a certain manner to attain a certain role (Bandura, 1997). Low self-efficacy leads to low self-evaluation, low self-esteem, and lack of sense of control (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) and, in turn, affects life and work satisfaction (Bono & Judge, 2003; Dormann, Fay, Zapf, & Frese, 2006). The women expressed a lack of self-confidence that evidenced reduced self-efficacy. Repeatedly discouraged by her former advisor and having put aside her dissertation for three years, Penny felt a sense of failure. When I validated her achievement and her future success, she responded, with surprise, “Really? You really think so? I felt I don’t have the confidence anymore. Thank you, thank you for saying that.” Flora, seeing her marriage failing again, blamed herself for bringing herself into the situation again. She said, weeping, “I feel I have lost control of my life.” As a result of the hardships and uncertainties living abroad, international working mothers felt less confident and less satisfied with their work and life.

Lack of cultural knowledge and erroneous expectations. Erroneous expectations and lack of cultural knowledge prior to coming to a foreign country affects adaptation (Kim, 2005). This was evident in comments such as, “I thought someone would pick me up at the airport, but no one was there,” “I went to Albertsons, but I don’t understand the food labels,” and “I don’t know the sports stars or movie stars they [colleagues] talk about.” Violet wished that the university could have prepared international students better, “When they [school] give you the Admissions Letter, they did not say anything about life in the U.S...they assume you know it.”

International working mothers feel and experience the challenges of balancing work and life in the United States at the micro level (i.e., at home or at work, at

intrapersonal and interpersonal level). Nonetheless, these challenges are inevitably shaped by meso level issues (e.g., community factors: child-related services, schools; organizational factors: work-life policies) and macro level systems of meaning (e.g., societal factors: host culture receptivity, gendered roles, technology, etc.). Next, I explore meso-level challenges, as summarized by Figure 4.2. Similar challenges are listed in the center circle and divergent challenges are listed in the surrounding ovals.

Figure 4.2. Challenges-Meso



Challenges – Similar -- Meso. This category represents challenges from community and organization that constrain communication at the meso- or mid-level (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Rinderle, 2006). A majority of the women dealt with child-related services, such as school and community childcare, and difficulties in establishing meaningful social contact.

Children's education. Mothers with school-age children voiced concerns about their children's education, including the quality of the curriculum, the school environment, and the communication style between school and parents. Comparing local

with schools in their home countries, many women complained, “The school here is too easy,” “there is too much play, and not much homework,” and “the math education is pathetic.” Olivia told me that her daughter “mistakenly” finished a week’s homework in one night. Speaking of the school environment, Bhava was worried, “There are a lot of drugs and alcohol in school, far more than it was in my own educational system back home.” She said she had to constantly talk to her son, to “pull him back into what is deemed important in education.” Some mothers expected more direct parent-teacher communication, similar to what they had received in their home countries. When Ling’s son was suspended for striking another child, she only learned about it when he brought home a note from the school. Surprised to receive just a note in this manner for such a serious matter, Ling said, “I wish the school could call me or at least email me.”

Although most parents care about their children’s education, the challenge was unique for many international working mothers because their home countries’ education was more rigorous, and because their children encountered more problems at school due to lack of language and cultural knowledge. In particular, mothers with adolescent or autistic children had to spend more time communicating with schools and comforting their children. With limited financial resources, women could not afford to send their children to private schools or live in affluent neighborhoods where the schools had more rigorous programs and fewer social problems. In addition, international mothers felt that these problems were exacerbated because they did not have the same family and ethnic group support in co-educating the children as they could have obtained in the home countries.

Community childcare. Access to community support (Kim, 2005), especially community childcare support, is important for international women to maintain a healthy work-life balance. However, many found childcare “too expensive” or “not clean” and some found the teachers “lazy.” Miki tried several daycare centers before she found one that was clean and reasonably priced. Isabel could not afford to send both of her children to daycare, and had to send her oldest daughter back to her hometown. Jenny noticed that her daughter drank three cups of water every day after she picked her up. This made her wonder “if the teachers are just too lazy.” This challenge had a unique impact on international women who came from collective cultures like China, Brazil, and Peru and who used to enjoy easy access to affordable community childcare, or to family support at home.

Lack of quality social contact with either co-national or local people. Building quality social contact with local and co-nationals affects immigrants’ adaptation (Kim, 2005), but was found to be “very difficult” by international women for multiple reasons. First, the size of their ethnic community was small. Second, many graduate students moved out of town after graduation, making it difficult to maintain long-term relationships with friends. Third, although many commented on their American friends being “nice” and “friendly,” they could not build intimate relationships with them, either because they were simply too busy to socialize, or because they shared few conversational topics with the locals. Furthermore, women who were divorced also felt “disconnected,” both from their own either ethnic community and from American society. “They already have their lives...and they live a different life...it is hard to be in the circle,” said Rebecca.

Finally, some women found community in churches organized by their ethnic communities (e.g., Chinese Baptist Church), but women who were not Christians, either felt isolated from this community or felt uncomfortable to participate in church activities, such as sending their children to vacation Bible school. Because religion is an important part of cultural life in the United States (U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008), going to church means not only finding a faith community but also finding an ethnic community. Previous research highlights the importance of social contact in intercultural adaptation (e.g., Kim, 2005); however, this research fails to address challenges face by divorced women who feel disconnected from both their host culture and their ethnic community. Little research addresses the role of religion and church-going in adaptation, but many women in this study highlighted that they found peace and community in church and temple.

Challenges – Divergent -- Meso. This category represents mid-level (i.e., in between micro and macro levels) challenges experienced by less than half of the participants. Meso- or mid-level challenges include university policy, an unfamiliar educational system, a new employment environment, and the lack of affordable maid service.

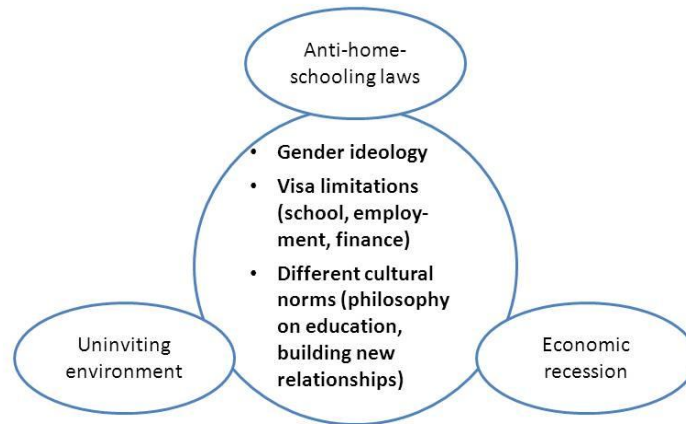
University policy and system. International students report challenges in adjusting to a new educational system in which they are expected to actively participate in classrooms and to fulfill strict academic requirements (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Yan wanted to participate in class discussions, but due to language barriers, she was often outpaced by her American colleagues. Women with financial aid mentioned that they had to achieve at least B+ in order to keep their scholarship or teaching assistantship. Some

said that they could not ask for a leave of absence from school during pregnancy because as international students, they were required to enroll in at least six credits per semester in order to maintain their F-1 status. Although previous research recognizes challenges faced by international students, they have not addressed additional life challenges of international female students with children, such as pregnancy, labor delivery, breastfeeding, and caretaking for the children.

New employment environment. Due to lack of work experience and to language barriers, immigrants have challenges in finding secure and rewarding jobs that match their education and training (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Richmond, 1974). Violet felt shocked when her job was terminated without notice, because, she explained, “in my culture, when you begin a job, you stay in that job.” An MBA graduate, Yan could not find a job that matched her years of training in marketing. Due to her visa, she felt “stuck” in the current job. Their experiences confirm earlier research findings.

The macro level analysis is a “big-picture” view that examines cultural and historical systems of meaning that are often taken for granted (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011). For example, working mothers often feel guilty for not living up to their own expectations of a good mother or wife (Greengerger & O’Neil, 1994). In addition, some are willing to sacrifice their own career to support their husband, without realizing that this thought is in fact influenced by gender ideology in socialization. Other macro factors include government visa policies, different cultural norms, economy, and technology. Figure 4.3 summarizes the macro-level challenges. Similar challenges are listed in the center circle and divergent challenges are listed in the surrounding ovals.

Figure 4.3. Challenges-Macro



Challenges -- Similar -- Macro. This category examines macro level challenges voiced by the majority of the working mothers, including gender ideology, government visa policies, and different cultural norms between host and home countries.

Gender ideology. Traditional gender views hold that women should prioritize family responsibilities over their career, in order to be a good wife and a good mother. Consequently working mothers do not feel supported by their husbands, and become self-critical for not living up to their own ideals of being a good wife or a good mother (Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepherd, 2006).

When asked if her husband supported her dream to change the Chinese medical policies, Hui said, with a bitter smile, “No. My husband wanted me to find a stable job.” Penny, the Taiwanese mother sighed, “I tried my best to balance, but I feel I could not be my best either in my family or in my career.” Gender expectations were so deeply rooted that these women took them for granted. None of them questioned, “Why it is me who quit my job to follow my husband?” or “Why it is me who should sacrifice my career to

keep the balance of the family?” These women lived with constant guilt as a result of the conflicting desires to be a successful career woman and the expectations to be a good wife and a good mother. What made it more challenging for international working mothers was the need to take care of their husbands and children as they went through the adaptation process.

Visa limitations. Visa requirements set limitations on schoolwork, employment, tuition, income tax, and time spent within the United States (Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 2011; De Verthelyi, 1995). Students holding an F-1 visa are required to take a minimum of 6 credits per semester, and are restricted to work a maximum 20 hours per week. As a result, international working mothers could not take leaves of absence from school during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and without childcare support from family, they often suffered from maternal depression.

Visa requirements also set limitations on employment. A student visa prohibited women from working full time, and finding a job with a sponsored work visa was a daunting task in today's economy. Penny said she would rather work to support the family, but she could not. Women who would soon graduate or were working in postdoctoral positions, worried that they might not find a permanent job, and they felt the urge to be more competitive than their American colleagues. Although American mothers who pursue PhD programs also reported a great deal of stress (Mason, Goulden, & Frasch, 2009), international working mothers earning PhDs anticipated more career uncertainties due to visa limitations. As a result, they often struggled with staying or leaving. Isabel, on the other hand, found a job with a sponsored work visa but she felt “stuck,”

I studied marketing, but you can not find a job that you like...I can not just quit and find another job because my company is sponsoring my visa, and I need to

appreciate that. And [due to my visa issue], I did not negotiate a higher entrance salary...I did not realize that salary increase in the U.S. is so tiny, 2%, it is meaningless. So the only way to get a big increase is to change a job, but you can not change a job due to your visa status.

Visa requirements also disempowered their husbands. Spouses that held F-2 visa (spouse visa) were not allowed to work, significantly adding to the family's financial pressure and hurting men's self-esteem. Joblessness was especially difficult for Ling's husband who used to own a business in Taiwan and who was expected to be the breadwinner of the family by traditional Chinese family values. His stress often resulted in arguments. Ling's unique case was complicated by two macro factors: as a woman, she was subject to the gender expectations of her own culture, and as a foreigner, she was subject to the legal restrictions imposed by her visa.

In addition to being subjected to visa regulations affecting employment, students on an F-1 visa were unable to claim tax credits for their children and were subject to higher tuition rates. Consequently many women expressed the desire to apply for a Green Card so as to "enjoy the same opportunity and right as other Americans." Hui, who had a "Green Card," felt differently. For a better career, her husband went back to China, taking both children, but Hui had to remain in the U.S. because Green Card holders were required to be present within the United States for at least six months each year. As a result, the couple had to live apart, and she has spent her days missing her kids. She said, weeping, "That is just crazy."

Non-U.S. status also impacted the tuition fee, incoming tax, cost of driving a car, and the convenience of applying for a driver's license. First year international students could not enjoy in-state tuition. International mothers could not claim an income tax

deduction for their dependent children. New Motor Vehicle Department (MVD) policies required non-residents to make an appointment for a face-to-face interview, which delayed the license application for two months. As a result, Ling recalled that her husband could not travel out of the state, and that they had to pay higher insurance fees for an international license.

Although international working mothers experienced the stress of being a foreigner on the micro level, these stresses were, in fact, brought about by the macro-level visa restrictions and government policies. Although previous research reveals visa limitations on employment (De Verthelyi, 1995), findings in this study show more complicated implications of visa constraints on these women's job search, job satisfaction, income tax, tuition, husband's employment, and family disputes. The interplay of visa policy and gender ideology brought additional complication to these women's work and life.

Different cultural norms. When individuals cross the border of a foreign country, many of the usual ways of doing things become irrelevant (Kim, 2005). International working mothers encountered challenges at micro and meso levels in children's schooling, in their relationships with bosses or advisors, in building new friendships, and in teaching. Seen from a bigger picture, these challenges reflected differences in cultural systems of meaning that were often taken for granted (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011), including philosophies of education, power distance, and privacy.

Schools in the United States generally value creativity, fun learning, and independence. Schools in China, India, Brazil, Russia, in contrast, emphasize hard work, rules, and group membership. Mothers from these countries complained that "there is too little homework," "creativity is good, but the homework is too easy," "American kids...are

free, they can say anything to you,” “in my country, no child behaved like that...,” and “independence is good...but at home, kids do not just walk out of the house after arguing with their parents...”

Mothers who were used to collective cultures felt unsure of how to assert themselves in front of people in positions of power. Feeling discouraged by their advisors, they did not “dare to tell anyone.” They did not have the courage to tell the advisor straightforwardly, “Sorry, it did not work out.” They often waited until the “right” moments to find a face-saving reason to leave: “I am pregnant, I am afraid these experiments are not good for my baby.”

Different views on privacy and respect for privacy affected building new relationships. Amy, an African mother thought it “insane” to call friends in advance to schedule a visit. “Back home, if you say, ‘Call me before you come,’ (laugh) people will say, ‘So, you don’t like me?’” Isabel questioned,

Among the Americans, religion is privacy, family is privacy, but to us (Chinese), family issues are not privacy, we can all talk about openly. Sometimes, I do not know what to talk about.

Kim (2005) identifies uninviting host environment as one of the major macro-level adaptation challenges. However, most women commented “people here are friendly,” “my American friends are nice,” and “my advisor really supported me.” This might be due to the fact that most women were or had been students in the universities, a relatively safe environment with educated people. Previous research focuses on cross-national comparisons (Galovan et al., 2010; Spector et al., 2004), but few studies have examined the conflicts when an individual from a collective culture adapts to an individualistic

culture, such as the United States. Findings in this study thus confirm and expand previous research on intercultural conflicts and adaptation.

Challenges – Divergent -- Macro. This category represents macro-level challenges experienced by less than half of the participants, including, anti-home-schooling laws, economic difficulties, and uninviting environments. Olivia mentioned that for two to three years, there was a movement in California against home schooling. As a result, she found it difficult to obtain the necessary documentation and authorizations to be allowed to home-school her child.

The economic recession delayed immigrants' participation in the workforce (Aycañ & Berry, 1996) due to decreased job opportunities and difficulty in finding a sponsored visa. Penny noted, "The economy is not good...I used to get job offers pretty easily, but now, the opportunities are few." On the other hand, China GDP is growing at an annual rate of 10%, opening many exciting opportunities. Some mothers struggled between staying and leaving. When the U.S. economy was competitive, the choice for international students was easy—to stay, but now they pondered the pros and cons. The conflict that arises from selecting between the recessive U.S. economies and growing economies in home countries deserves attention in future research.

Although most mothers appreciated American friendliness, they still felt disconnected from the local community, felt discrimination in academia and in schools, and felt that local residents were ignorant of foreign cultures. In academia, Olivia sensed resentment from American female scholars who "bitterly complained" that because of immigrants, "it is virtually impossible to find a position in academia as a transnational feminist scholar." Therefore, she decided that she would not position herself as an

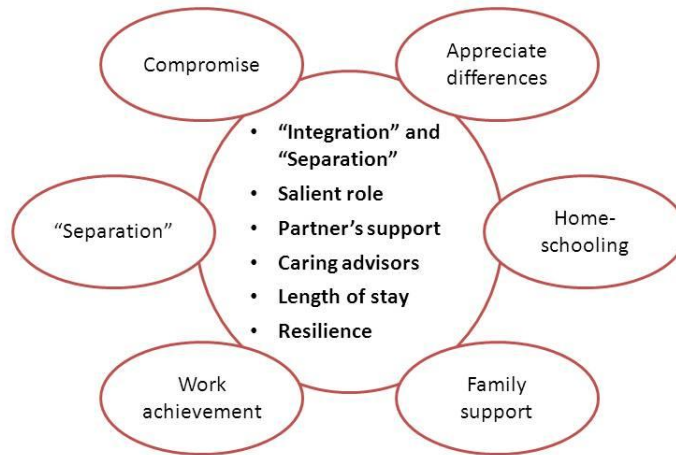
“international scholar.” Violet shared the following story about a Halloween party at her son’s school:

So the teacher asked my son, why don’t you bring your mother [to the party], because she was already wearing Halloween costumes. So my son was telling her, no, you are offending my mom. She was wearing our traditional clothes.

As a result of being a “foreigner,” international working mothers did not feel a sense of belonging. Yan said, “No matter how long we stay here, we cannot merge into the American society. I always feel I am a foreigner.”

How do international working mothers deal with everyday challenges while remaining sane? In the following, I explore the similar and divergent strategies and solutions adopted by these women at micro-meso-macro levels. *Communicative strategies* and *Solutions* refer to social interactions, resources, networks, and other creative ways that working mothers devise to reduce the tension and stress from these conflicting demands, and ideally, to achieve a more satisfactory work-life balance. Figure 4.4 illustrates the micro-level solutions. Similar solutions are listed in the center circle and divergent solutions are listed in the surrounding ovals.

Figure 4.4. Solutions-Micro



Solutions – Similar -- Micro. This category represents individual level (e.g., micro) communication strategies used by the majority of the women who adopted a combination of “integration” and “separation” strategies, and identified with salient roles. In addition, spousal support at home, advisor’s support at work, length of stay, and personality attributes helped smooth their work and life in the U.S.

“Integration” and “separation.” Individuals adopt integration (i.e. intertwine work and personal life) or separation (i.e., set distinct time, space or psychological lines between work and life) strategies to cope with role conflicts (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Clark, 2000; Trembly & Genin, 2008). Previous research shows that women more often tend to be separators, whereas men tend to be integrators (Trembly & Genin, 2008). Nonetheless, international women reported using a combination of both strategies. Some women enjoyed the positive spillover between work and life, as Ling, a Taiwanese mother with an autistic son said, “I feel happy that I could apply what I learn from the school to my own child.” Jenny expressed that being a mom gave her a sense of

“purpose” in her career. Other women tried to separate work from home after a day’s work. They chose not to think about the job or family chores, but instead, “leave it till Monday,” “take the weekends off,” “stop checking emails at home,” and left the house messy.

Although integration is found to be a preferred strategy to separation (Clark, 2000; Edward & Rothband, 1999; Halbesleben, Zellars, Carlson, Perrewe, & Rotondo, 2010; Dreiner, 2006), the majority of the mothers had to alternate their strategies between integration and separation. Being international, they found it difficult to completely separate work from life because they needed to excel in order to find or hold on to a job with a sponsored visa, and they needed financial security. Being a graduate student is “a 24 hour job.” On the other hand, they could not intertwine work and life either, because they needed to give attention to both their children and husbands after work.

Salient role identification. When individuals identify strongly with one role (e.g., a mother or a career woman), they are less likely to experience inter-role conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek & Ozeki, 1989) and more likely to have better wellbeing (De Verthlyi, 1995). Some women identified themselves primarily as “mothers”: “I am a mother now, I need to be strong for my daughter, I need to be her role model,” “I don’t worry about my academics, I focus my attention on my family,” and “After having my baby, I realized that life is more important than career. I am willing to sacrifice my career to keep my family balanced.”

Other women saw themselves as career driven, and wanted to live a life with a “higher calling,” for example, to help children with autism, or to “transform” the medical system in their home countries. Nonetheless, women who focused on pursuing career

success often felt guilty for putting their family second. Ann, breastfeeding her daughter while pursuing her degree, said, "I was trying to study, but I felt guilty for not being with my daughter...it is very very hard."

Although salient role identification helped improve a sense of balance, international working mothers who identified as "mothers" felt more at ease than those who identified as "career woman." Their experiences affirm findings in previous research (De Verthlyi, 1995).

Intimate partner's support at home. A partner's support, though not always rendered (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994), is critical to buffer a working woman's stress (Home, 1997b). When talking about their partners, many women expressed their gratitude for their husbands' support: "My husband is my best friend. I share with him everything," "My husband tolerates me all the time," "My husband really helped, he does cooking and cleaning," and "Luckily my husband understands me... he does not impose these wifely duties on me." Mary enjoyed a stable relationship with her American boyfriend. She said, "He is very nice to me and my daughter... he helped me a lot to learn from the local culture." Living in a foreign country, international working mothers found partner support to be the most needed. Penny, a Taiwanese woman married to an Italian husband, felt "we two are two inseparable living entities that depend on each other."

Encouraging and caring boss at work. Encouraging and caring supervisors and good relationships at work help moderate working adults' stress with managing work and family roles (Warren & Johnson, 1995; Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Kirby et al., 2006). Most women spoke highly of their advisors, mentors, and supervisors at work: "She [advisor] really trusted me and encouraged me," "My professors are nice to me. They know my

English is not very good, and they are very tolerant,” and “After I have my baby, my advisor did not push me too much.” Being in a power position, a professor’s affirmation could be very influential. Ann, a Peruvian woman, was frustrated about her communication with her advisor, but one day, she recalled, excitedly, “She [advisor] told me, I am going to be successful...wow, she said that, that was powerful. I thought she did not care, but she cares. Ha ha!”

Although all working adults appreciate their supervisor’s understanding and support, international working mothers needed additional encouragement and validation from bosses and advisors in order to overcome their sensitivity toward power-distance and their uncertainty working in a new academic environment.

Length of stay. International working mothers who had stayed in the U.S. for long periods had acquired better English and more cultural knowledge (Hsu, 2010; Kim, 2005, Ye, 2006). They voiced: “My paper looks much better now.” “Things get easier when I know routines like shopping and driving.” “When I know what to expect, many things are not a shock to me anymore.” Olivia, a Russian mother, recalled her clashes with her daughter’s school, “If I encounter something today, first of all, I expect it, and secondly, I know how to handle it better...that time, I did not know how to do that.” These comments partially support previous research that length of stay reduces adaption stress (Kim, 2005). Nonetheless, many international working mothers expressed that stress did not subside, but rather “keep popping up.” I will take this up in discussion section.

Resilience and openness. Immigrants who display personality attributes such as resilience and openness are more successful in dealing with stress in adaptation (De Verthelyi, 1995). Resilience is a dynamic process whereby individuals exhibit positive

behavioral adaptation when they encounter significant adversity and sources of stress (Anthony, 1987). Resilience was observed in most international working mothers, in their self-depiction: “I am good at *Chi-Ku*.” (Chinese, literally meaning, “eating bitterness”) “I am an unbeatable cockroach.” “I am the kind of person who is willing to fight, if I see there is something I can do.” “It is just me, you know, determined.” Facing adversities, these women did not give up. Wiping tears dry, these women “kept moving forward.”

Other common characteristics displayed by international mothers were openness and positivity. They reflected: “Things happen for a reason.” “[when we encounter these challenges]...it is time for us to grow.” Olivia echoed, “Without all the difficulties, I won’t be the person who I am today.” Seeing her husband depressed, Violet convinced her husband to face the challenges and live in the present. After quarreling with her husband, Ling always tried to reassure herself, “Our future will be good, my husband will be good, we will be good.” Frustrated about her advisor’s straightforwardness, which was different from the “touchy-feely” Peruvian style, Ann tried to rationalize, “I think she meant well. I need to adapt myself to her.” With resilience, positivity and openness, these international working mothers saw the silver lining of every cloud.

Solution – Micro -- Divergent. This category examines the strategies adopted by less than half of the participants at micro-level. These strategies including seeking family support for childcare, feeling a sense of achievement at work, adopting the separation strategy, home-schooling children, and adjusting to American lifestyle.

Childcare from extended family. Receiving childcare support from their family members contributes greatly to individual’s work-life balance (Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001). This was a benefit enjoyed by a few Chinese mothers. They said they were

“lucky” to have parents or parents-in-law who were healthy and willing to come to the U.S. to take care of the grandchildren and to help with family chores. Chinese women said, “Without my parents, I believe I will suffer from after-birth depression,” and “I can’t imagine my life without my parents.” It is a common social phenomenon in China for grandparents to take care of the grandchildren for both cultural (i.e., four generations living in the same house symbolize happiness and prosperity in China) and economic reasons (i.e., most couples are dual income earners in China). Women from collective cultures such as China, Brazil, and Peru expected childcare support from their parents. Not rendered, these women were more likely to feel stress. As Rebecca, a Brazilian mother, explained, “I admire the American women who could manage both work and family...but this is not the life that I used to live.”

Sense of achievement at work. Work and academic achievement both brought positive spillover to life (Clark, 2000), making some mothers feel happy. Ann, a Peruvian mother refused to depend on her husband’s income. “I want to work... [when I work], I feel good about myself, I feel I am being useful.” However, as addressed earlier, not all women received husbands’ support to pursue their professional goals.

Separation strategy in adaptation. Individuals adopt integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization strategies in adaptation process (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki, 1989), and being integrated is espoused as ideal (Kim, 2008). Chinese women appeared to adopt a separation strategy, maintaining their ethnic culture and primarily socializing with co-nationals (Berry et al., 1989). They explained: “I feel tired to communicate in a foreign language. I see these [social gatherings] more as an obligation than as a relaxation.” “We have different interests, we do not share common

topics...after a while, I feel less interested in going to the parties.” The existence of a relatively large expatriate Chinese community made it possible for Chinese working mothers to live a Chinese lifestyle in the U.S., but women with small ethnic communities often felt “isolated.”

Berry et al. (1989) implied that individuals had the autonomy and the choice to adopt an attitude in the adaptation processes, while in reality the choices might be limited or non-existent to international working mothers (Coproni, 1997). Many women expressed a willingness to assimilate, as “we are living in their land, we have to learn their way of doing things,” but they eventually gave up either because they were too busy to socialize, or because they felt excluded from conversations due to language and cultural barriers.

Other individual strategies. A variety of miscellaneous strategies used by international women included traveling, home-schooling their children, lowering their expectations, and appreciating the different lifestyle that they experienced while living in the U.S. Olivia, a Russian mother, felt that homeschooling was the best decision she had ever made, “Me and my daughter enjoy a very good relationship.” Yan learned to lower her expectations, “I always adjust my state of mind...If I could not reach my goal, I have to learn to compromise.” A few women, coming from larger and busier cities, gradually learned to appreciate the peaceful life in their communities. “We spend a lot of time with kids here,” said Hui, “In China, young couples are too busy to be with their kids and to be their role models. This is a social problem in China.”

Facing community level and organizational level challenges, international working mothers found support from their ethnic communities, from their church community, and from professional service offered by universities. Figure 4.5 illustrates

the meso-level support. Similar answers are listed in the center circle and divergent answers are listed in the surrounding ovals.

Figure 4.5. Solutions-Meso



Solutions – Similar -- Meso. This category represents the meso level strategies adopted by most international working mothers, which include keeping close ties with ethnic friends and attending religious communities

Ethnic support. Close ties with ethnic communities offer immigrants emotional and instrumental support (Ying & Liese, 1991; Winkelman, 1994). Flora described her Latino friends as “family.” Zhen, living in family housing said that her home “was always full of friends and children.” She said she did not feel homesick. Whenever there was a problem, Violet would go to talk to her indigenous friend, and “she immediately understand the situation,” and often gave her food. Previous research suggests that immigrants reduce adaptation stress through building friendships in the host country (De Verthelyi, 1995), but most international working mothers expressed frustrations in establishing meaningful and intimate relationships in the U.S.

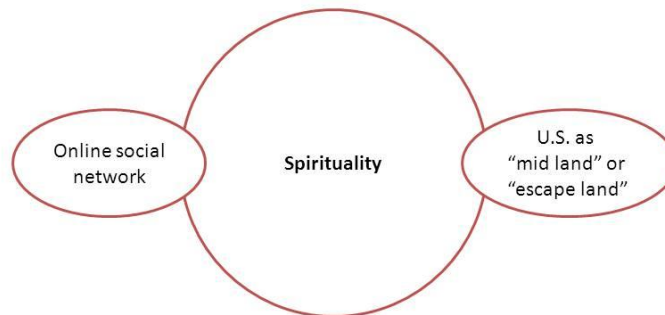
Religious community support. Little research has been done on the effect of faith and religious communities on intercultural adaptation. However, many women mentioned that they found “peace,” “comfort,” “anchor,” “fellowship,” and “community” in faith and in their faith community. Hui said, “I am a Christian. Faith is an important part of my life.” She felt comfortable to share “sensitive feelings” with her church sisters. Many said they attended English classes, baking classes, and Thanksgiving dinner parties organized by local churches.

Solutions – Divergent -- Meso. This category summarizes meso- or mid- level strategies adopted by less than half of the participants, including finding counseling services, receiving support from Office of International Programs (OIPS), and accepting help from host families. Flora said she relied on school counseling services to “pull herself together” when she was coping with school and her failing marriage. Some women mentioned that OIPS staff had been helpful in arranging necessary visa application documentation and in organizing international couples gatherings, but the majority of women were not aware of these activities because they were “too busy” to pay attention to the email announcements. Zhen appreciated her American host family who had invited her for traditional holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas for the past five years.

Previous research lists many strategies used by immigrants to ameliorate adaptation stresses, including attending communication events and exploring local mass media. These were not adopted widely by international working mothers. They either had no time for socializing, or they found themselves excluded from conversations due to language barriers and cultural differences. When they were tired and stressed, working mothers

found it more relaxing to read books, or to watch TV or movies in their native languages. Finally, I explore the macro-level solutions, as summarized in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6. Solutions-Macro



Solution – Similar -- Macro. This category represents the macro level solutions adopted by the majority of the women. Previous research identifies macro levels strategies including leveraging government policies (e.g., taking advantage of maternity leave laws), challenging taken-for-granted corporate rules, and getting support from strong ethnic communities (Kim, 2005; Kirby et al, 2006). None of these were reportedly used by international working mothers. This might contribute to the perception that being a foreigner, they did not have the power to influence macro policies or to challenge the university or corporate rules. Their local ethnic communities were small, except for the Chinese. One common support they sought was spirituality. When they experienced trouble, frustration, and uncertainty, they found an anchor and peace in faith, be it Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism. Not all women belonged to a religious community (which belongs to meso-level support), but many connected themselves with something

higher through praying. Through the change in themselves, they found their family relationships also changed, positively. This finding may add an interesting perspective to the current work-life and adaptation literature.

Solution – Divergent -- Macro. This category addresses the macro level strategies adopted by less than half of the participants, including using online social network for support, and regarding U.S. as an “escape” or middle land. Online social groups provide immigrants with informational support (e.g., information about housing), emotional support (e.g., allowing users to share feelings on blogs), and intellectual support (e.g., teaching American slang expressions) (Lin, 2006; Ye, 2006). Jing found helpful child-raising information through a list-serve for new mothers. Jenny wrote on her blogs to express her feelings in her “little private space.” She also obtained useful information on how to apply for a Green Card on a popular Chinese online community. These findings confirm the importance of online social support in adaptation. With the advancement of technology, it can be assumed that telecommunication (e.g., video Skype-ing) will be widely adopted by people living away from home countries.

Some women regarded the U.S. as an “escape land” or a middle land. Miki, a Japanese woman living away from her husband while raising three children and pursuing study, said, “Here I am the head of the house. Even [though] work is hard, study is hard, but I kind of enjoy the situation, I do not have to carry so many responsibilities.” To Miki, the U.S. was an escape land for her to avoid gender expectations imposed by Japanese tradition, such as obeying her husband, and calling her parents- in- law once per week. Penny, married to an Italian, explained that the U.S. was their best middle-land, “Because it is easiest to adjust to U.S. culture. It would be harder for him to adjust to my Chinese

culture, or for me to adjust to his Italian culture.” These findings show that despite the difficulties in living in a foreign country, physical and cultural distance sometimes has beauty in itself. Future research may examine the positive effects of adaptation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

In this section, I summarize this study's findings, and call for considerations to issues that are unique to international working mothers, such as language barriers and visa limitations. I also discuss theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. First, this study's findings suggest a number of valuable insights for understanding the unique challenges that international working mothers face and the communication strategies and solutions that they adopt as they try to balance their work and life in the United States. Findings reveal that international working mothers encounter unique challenges (compared to those faced by U.S. working mothers) in their academic work, in the workplace, in building relationships, in childcare, and in managing intimate relationships. These challenges arise from language barriers, new work and academic environments, lack of extended family support, different cultural norms, visa limitations, and the interplay between gender ideology and living in a foreign country. These challenges are unique to international working mothers because U.S. working adults do not encounter language and visa problems, and they live in a familiar cultural terrain where they know the norms of life and work, and they have access to local resources. Solutions, while limited, arise from their family members' support, their advisors' encouragement, and their own resilient personalities.

Specifically, findings of this study call for considerations for (a) the significant impact of language barriers (micro), (b) the importance of an academic advisor (micro), (c) visa limitations (macro), and (d) the need to understand the complicated nature of these women's lives as a result of micro-to-macro challenges. Findings also shed light on (e) the women's conflicting goals of independence and compromise, and conflicting

feelings of depression and hope, (f) the dynamic nature of their adaptation over time, and (g) the importance of the micro-meso-macro perspectives.

Language Barriers

Lack of host language competency is the central concern of adaptation (Berry & Uichol, 1998; Kim, 1998) and is observed in almost every participant and her children. Children come home crying: they cannot understand what is taught in the class, they are mocked by their peers because of their “strange” accent, name and appearance, they can not express themselves in English, and they do not know how to make friends. Language makes it more difficult for women to be active students in class, to read and write academic papers, to communicate effectively with clients at work, and to make friends with local people. Many women express a willingness to assimilate to the local culture, but they eventually give up because they can not follow the jokes or the topics in conversations. They gradually return to their comfort zones among co-nationals. Language barriers are unique and profound challenges for international working mothers and affect every aspect of their work and life in the United States. Although previous adaptation research has emphasized the role of language, few have studied the importance of understanding jokes and humor that is deeply rooted in the host culture. My study thus extends existing research on language and adaptation.

The Important Role of Academic Advisors

Findings of this study also suggest that academic advisors play significant roles in the emotions of international graduate students. They can either make the women’s lives happy and easy or miserable and difficult. Most international working mothers expressed how grateful they were toward their advisors who have been patient with their English,

who have helped secure their funding, and who have given them encouragement. Nonetheless, a few women were less fortunate and they spent a long time during the interview venting their frustrations and anger. They felt depressed when their advisors forced them to take courses they did not like, discouraged them in their academic pursuits, and acted bossy and cold.

Any women with children going to graduate school might argue for the importance of their advisors, however, due to sensitivity to power-distance and being new to the academic environment, international working mothers did not know how to properly handle the conflict. They often ended up being silent and finding an excuse later to change advisors. The length of time they spent talking about their advisors and the emotions they expressed highlights the importance of academic advisors in the work and life of international working mothers. Previous research shows that supervisor's support at work affects workers' work and life satisfactions (Warren & Johnson, 1995; Galinsky & Stein, 1990). Having worked in business for 17 years, and being an international graduate student, I argue that academic advisors play a more important role in the graduate students' lives than that of the supervisors in employees in the business world. In a tight-knit academic field, an unfavorable recommendation from an advisor would likely ruin a graduate's academic future, whereas in the business world, employees would have more job opportunities across industries or job functions and depend less upon the words of their supervisors. My study has deepened the understanding of the critical role an academic advisor plays in the work and life of international student-mothers.

Visa Limitations

Visa requirements bring unique challenges to international working mothers and all negatively impact their studies, their income tax and tuition rates, and their employment possibilities. A student visa, for example, requires international students to take a minimum of 6 credits per semester, and limits them to work for a maximum of 20 hours per week. Meanwhile, spouses who hold a dependent visa are not allowed to work for paid employment. Thus, these women are the sole source of income for the family while pursuing their academic work, and they are hesitant to ask for a leave of absence even during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Higher income taxes for international families make their tight finances even tighter. A woman's visa also affects her employment. She either must work harder than locals to be more competitive than locals in order to obtain a sponsored work visa, or she must stay with a job she dislikes in order to keep her work visa. Being foreigners, these women face constraints that non-immigrant women do not face or even think about. Although visa limitations are mentioned in previous research, my study offers a more detailed picture of the profound effects of these limitations in every aspect of these foreign working mothers' lives.

The Complicated Nature of Their Lives

This study illuminates that the women's challenges are not due to being a mother, to being an employee, to being a graduate student, or to being a foreigner, but are due to being "all of these." It is the aggregate of all these roles that make their lives complicated and uniquely challenging. For example, individuals, no matter where they live, experience interpersonal conflict with their partners, children, and friends. Mothers in either China or in the U.S. may be expected to perform more family duties than male

partners do. American graduate students report great stress after logging 100 plus hours per week. As such, work and life challenges are not unique to international working mothers. What makes the challenges unique for them is the fact that they have to deal with the multiple layers of role demands as a mother, as a graduate student, as an employee, and as a foreigner all at the same time. If we then take into account each woman's life prior to coming to the U.S., the number of children she has, her marital status, her family situation in her home town, and her husband's employment, the multiplication of all these factors add exponential degrees of complexity to the women's lives. For example, American mothers do not expect grandparents' help in childcare; thus they are less likely to complain about the lack of family support. International mothers, however, would find it extremely difficult to raise children without family support because such support is expected. Additionally, pressure to succeed in a new academic environment, difficulties in managing power relations in a new culture, reduced financial status and social status, and partner conflicts all add to the difficulties women face. Being an international working mother myself, I have washed my face with tears so many times simply because "it is too much" to be "everything." Despite the tolls international women experience, none of the previous research has revealed the complexity of these women's lives. My study therefore is the first of its kind to explore and reveal the complicated and tangled lives of international working mothers, in particular, international graduate student mothers.

Conflicting Goals and Feelings

International working mothers aspire to "be independent," to "stand on my own feet," and to live "the way I want to." At the same time, they are willing to "sacrifice my

own career to keep the balance of the family,” to “prioritize my husband’s career,” and to “focus on my family, not on my career.” Most of the women I interviewed had quit their jobs and followed their husbands to the United States. Work gives women a sense of independence, achievement, confidence, and self worth, but society continues to expect women to be supportive wives to their husbands, to be caring mothers to their children, and to take care of the majority of household chores of cooking and cleaning. Over time, these women tend to take society’s expectations for granted, and to live up to these traditional standards of good mothers and good wives. In fact, many women praised their own mothers as wonderful housewives during the interviews. None of them questioned during the interview, “Why is it me who should sacrifice my own career?” “Why does my husband leave me behind to pursue his career?” and “Why does he not support my career aspirations?” As a result of the conflicting goals of independence and compromise, they often feel guilty of neglecting their children or their husbands while pursuing their own graduate studies and careers (De verthelyi, 1995). Although American women are also expected by society to take on more family duties, international women are likely to experience more guilt. First, they have less time to take care of family due to additional stress from working and living abroad. Second, they cannot receive support from their extended family, who would help with housework and chores if they were home. And third, their husbands, who used to be the breadwinners of the family, are not allowed to work due to visa restraints. The interplay of visa policy and gender ideology brings an extra layer of complexity most international women experience.

Another interesting conflict exists between the women's constant feelings of powerlessness, fatigue, depression, and their sense of hope. To my surprise, when asked to depict a mental picture of their lives in the United States, these women described pictures of beauty and hope. Mary, a single mother from Mexico, saw her life as a Picasso painting, "It is complicated, but it is also optimistic. It reflects positivism in life." Ling, a Taiwanese mother with an autistic son described her life as riding on a roller coaster, "full of ups and downs," but with more "ups" than "downs." Penny, another Taiwanese mother saw "wide, blue sky" and "sunshine after clouds." She envisioned her future "bright and broad, without limit, just like the sky here." Violet, despite her depression, saw herself "standing, with my arms open, under the sun." They often included significant people in their pictures: their husbands, parents, children, and advisors. Isabel, a Chinese mother with two children said, "I saw four of us holding hands together...it is a happy family picture."

Despite their difficult experiences, these women demonstrated admirable positivism. Such positivism was demonstrated by the resilience and the optimism that they showed during the interview. It may also be interpreted as their intrinsic need to survive adversity. I imagine them saying to themselves, "What else can I do, if I lose hope?" Jenny, a Chinese mother raising her daughter alone in the U.S. summarized well, "It is useless to feel sad, because you have to live on. It is life." Instead, she chose to smile and "clench my teeth tight." The positivism of the women I interviewed could also be self-fulfilling prophecy, a term coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968), referring to a prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to become true. For example, when working mothers believe their lives to be beautiful and hopeful, their

positivism actually makes such dreams come true, despite the harsh realities they are facing. Such positive envisioning may serve as a survival mechanism to help working mothers go through the physical and emotional strains of work and life.

Westerners often interpret the opposing feelings of independence and compromise, and of depression and hope, as conflicting or dialectic tensions. Coming from an Eastern culture that values harmony and a holistic worldview, I hope to offer a different interpretation: the co-existence of opposing feelings that are complementary opposites that interact within a greater whole, as part of a dynamic system, *yin* and *yang*. Everything has both *yin* and *yang* aspects, but either of these aspects may ebb or flow over time, as the sun rises and sets, as flowers bloom and wither. In this worldview, life has both its good times and bad. Within despair, there is hope; within hope, there is risk. Positive and negative experiences co-exist and interchange over time. Seen from this view, the tensions between independence and compromise, between depression and hope, are but complementary opposites that co-exist in life. Only by allowing the co-existence of such tensions may individuals find peace. This perspective, although not explicitly expressed by international working mothers, might offer a new interpretation of these women's positivism toward challenge. Few researches have shed light on the resilient and positive nature of immigrants. My study reveals the admirable human qualities in international working mothers.

Adaptation over Time

Culture shock studies (e.g., Ward et al., 2004) and Kim's (2005) and adaptation theory suggest that immigrants experience large and sudden changes during the initial phase of exposure to a new culture. Over a prolonged period of time, the fluctuations of

stress and adaptation are likely to become less intense or severe, leading to an overall “calming” of our internal condition (Kim, 2005, p. 384). When presented with this statement, women expressed different opinions. Some recognized that as time went by, they learned how to form the right expectations and how to handle certain issues. Yan, working in a financial firm, said she learned to “grow thick skin” by accepting the fact that she was not perfect. Olivia, a Russian woman said, “My English is not better now, but now I know how to deal with the problems, and what reactions I can expect from other people.” Jenny, a Chinese mother echoed, “As you experience more, you become calmer.” Nonetheless, others acknowledged that the ability to handle stress better does not mean that stress simply goes away. There are just “different stress” or even “more stresses.” Zhen explained, “In the first couple of years, maybe you were stressed with your course work. Right now, my stress is to find a job after PhD. I am worried that without a Green Card, I might not be able to compete with the locals.” Violet foresaw more stresses as she began writing her dissertation and was expected to work primarily on her own. These women’s views challenge current literature on adaptation. I will take this issue up in Theoretical Implications.

The Importance of Micro-Meso-Macro Perspectives

The findings reiterate the value of a multi-level framework in examining work-life balance and cultural adaptation issues. Except for visa issues, most of the women’s stories focus on micro-level issues, such as language barriers, work conditions, children’s adaptation, and interpersonal relationships. Women do not seem to recognize or challenge the meso- or macro-level forces that create these challenges, such as organizational culture, government policy on work-life balance and immigration, and

gender ideology. The rare exception is Miki, a Japanese woman, who realized that her non-traditional role in the U.S. would likely disappear if she went back to Japan. Most women also find their solutions at micro level, such as family support, advisor's encouragement, and their personal resilience. As immigrants, they feel powerless to change school policy or government visa policy. Although women live and struggle in the "micro" domain of life, researchers must move beyond examining factors at macro-level to uncover systems of meaning that enable and constrain interactions at the micro-level. This way, my research has offered a rich, layered picture of the phenomenon under study, and brings practical implications on government and organizational policies.

Finally, this study offers theoretical implications to work-life balance theory and intercultural adaptation theory, methodological implications to qualitative research, and practical implications to government and organizational policies and practices.

Theoretical Implications

Findings in this study have theoretical implications to work-life balance border theory (Clark 2000) and to intercultural adaptation theory (Kim, 2005). Border theory focuses primarily on micro- and meso- level processes and features of social life, and particularly upon interactions between work domain and life domain (Clark, 2000). As this study illustrates, international working mothers' work-life balance is influenced not only by work conditions or family interactions, but also by organizational and government policies, macro economy, gender ideology, and cultural norms and expectations in both home and host cultures. These meso and macro factors need to be considered in border theory as working mothers cross the national border.

Findings also suggest that intercultural adaptation theory should consider the complex adaptation process of certain individuals, such as international working mothers. Current literature idealizes that by “accelerating our efforts to cultivate host communication competence and engage ourselves actively in host social communication process,” (Kim, 2005, p. 395), individuals can maximize their adaptation, and consequently, achieve an intercultural identity and selfhood. Such statements assume that individuals can and should have the agency and ability to integrate into the new culture, whereas, in reality, international working mothers might not have the power or capability to achieve this ideal status. Although they are open-minded and willing to accept differences, they may still feel excluded from the mainstream society or from their own ethnic communities. No matter how hard they work, they may still find it difficult to find full time academic positions due to visa limitations. Although they have achieved personal growth through experiences of stress and reflections, some women may never be able to embrace the intercultural identity of being “both-and.” Intercultural scholars should recognize that the stress-growth-adaptation process is an ideal model for perhaps, elites, who have successfully achieved high social status in a foreign country. Many immigrants who are struggling at the margins of society may not be able to achieve the espoused intercultural identity due to the communal, organizational, and macro level constraints. Findings also reveal that not every working mother desires to achieve an intercultural identity. With all the difficulties in life and work, some may choose to be separators and to live in the comfort zone of their ethnic cultures.

Methodological Implications

This study has made methodological contribution to qualitative studies. I used polyphonic interview techniques to depict each individual working mother's story in its entirety, preserving the complexity and vividness of each woman's life. I adopted antenarrative thematic analysis to represent the non-linear and fragmented stories of individual woman, as well as to summarize the collective stories of the women as a whole. Furthermore, I examined the women's work-life balance and adaptation from micro-meso-macro perspectives, which offered a rich, layered picture of the phenomenon under study. These methods have proved to be effective in exploring the complexity of different stories, by allowing the participants to make sense of their own lived experiences. These methods are also rigorous because they have allowed me, the researcher, to theorize meaning through thematic analysis without silencing individual voices. No previous research in work-life balance and intercultural adaptation has employed a combination of these methods. Therefore my research methodology is new, unique, and effective.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have practical implications for governmental policies towards immigrants and global talent retention, for university policies towards international students, for orientation programs for international students, and for the roles of academic advisors. First, despite the influx of international talent in the United States, government visa policies require a specific number of credit hours an international student should take and impact income tax and future employment. Changes need to be made to allow pregnant or breastfeeding women to take leave of absence without

affecting their student status, to grant tax credits to international women with dependent children, and to facilitate their employment after graduation, especially for those who hold higher degrees. Second, universities should be more sensitive toward the unique challenges faced by international students with children, and should provide funding support and peer mentoring on issues such as conflict with advisors, children's schooling, and childcare. Third, when individuals are more equipped with cultural knowledge and expectations, they are less likely to experience culture shock (Kim, 2005). International student offices should offer pre-arrival orientations in addition to post-arrival orientations to prepare international students who are mothers to cope with potential difficulties as they venture into a new cultural terrain. International office may facilitate a buddy system to bridge incoming international student-mothers with experienced international mothers who are willing to share first-hand, practical knowledge. With university funding, international mothers may organize a support group, and meet regularly over lunch to share their stories and cheer each other up. Last but not least, professors should be aware how international students perceive the power associated with their positions. Such power, when used properly, can truly motivate international graduate students, and when not, can indeed hurt their self-esteem and affect their future success. To facilitate such understanding, universities should organize regular conversations between faculty members and international students.

Chapter 6: Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

The study reveals several limitations. First, due to limited resources, I only recruited participants in a southwestern state where I live and work. Although these working mothers come from 10 nationalities, they may not be representative of the international working mothers who live and work in other parts of the United States. International working mothers who live in California, for example, may tell different stories because California is a larger state and has more immigrants. Second, due to my status as an international student, I recruited the majority of the participants from the university I am attending. Although these participants work as part time instructors or in full time postdoctoral positions, they may experience different workplace challenges from international women who work in a business environment. The findings thus may speak more for international women who work in an academic environment. Third, since I conducted interviews over a period of one year, I have noticed the development in my interview skills, which may result in uneven data qualities. For example, I learned to be more observant and to probe deeper (e.g., “you were very emotional when you mentioned about your argument with your husband, would you mind sharing a bit more?”). Last but not least, it is important to hear the voices of key stakeholders (e.g., partners, advisors, and department chairs) in these women’s lives, because they have a strong influence on women’s work-life balance, and my study did not allow for this.

The study’s limitations suggest fruitful directions for research. First, in order to raise the awareness of university leaders, to improve university policies, and to engage more support from professors, it would be helpful to interview university deans, department chairs, and professors, and hear what they say about how they support their

international students, and in particular, how they support women with children.

According to Tracy (2010), by simply speaking out, the reality is changed. Interviewing key people may draw their attention toward the unique challenges these women face, and subsequently inspire them to provide more practical and emotional support to these students. Similarly, since partner support is critical to international working mothers' life and job satisfaction (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1994), future research may also ask women's partners to share their experiences and how they support their wives.

Third, future research may adopt an appreciative inquiry model to bring positive changes to women's lives. Appreciate inquiry is a positive and strength-based model of change management used by today's organizations (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Its key concept is to collectively discover the strength (instead of focusing on weakness) of the organization, and through building on strength, to dream about a desired organizational future. Using positive envisioning, researchers may engage international working mothers in focus group discussions to discover the positive sides of working and living in a new country. Through discovering and dreaming, international working mothers may identify solutions to improve their lives in the United States. For example, researchers may engage women to reflect on "what are things that you appreciate here that are not available in your home country?" and "how different would your life be if you had never worked and lived in a foreign country?" Since most challenges are identified at the micro level, and there are not many solutions at meso or macro levels, researchers may provide participants with practical help through this action-based method.

Last but not least, future research may look into the role of religion and faith in international women's work and life balance. When they felt down and helpless, many women said that they found peace, hope, and anchor in their faith. Research proves that religion, spirituality, and individual prayer play a positive role in time of personal distress (MacGeorge et al., 2007) and in personal growth (Fong, 2009). However, little has been done to examine the role of religion and faith in the areas of intercultural adaptation or work-life balance.

In conclusion, this study provides helpful insight to the unique challenges international working mothers face and the solutions they adopt to balance their work and life in the United States. Although work and non-work domains present a number of challenges to most working adults, international working mothers struggle with unique challenges in work and life due to language barriers, lack of extended family support, different cultural norms, new work and school environment, visa limitations, and the double-jeopardy of being a woman and a foreigner. Their solutions are limited because they are living in an unfamiliar cultural terrain and, therefore, have limited resources. The micro-meso-macro framework helps to highlight the contextual influences of meso and macro forces on the women's daily lives and struggles.

The study extends existing literature on work-life balance and intercultural adaptation by examining the women's experiences at the intersection of culture, gender, work, and life. The findings challenge the assumptions that, over time, the fluctuation of adaptation stress is likely to become less intense. In reality, these working mothers often face different, rather than fewer, challenges as time goes by. Though this was an exploratory study, the results also challenge the prediction that immigrants can achieve

an intercultural identity as a result of growth. The women's responses show that most women end up choosing a "separation" strategy and live within the comfort zone of their ethnic cultures. The study also offers practical implications on government visa policy, university policy, and the roles of professors and the international student offices. The interview process in itself was also validating. All the participants voiced gratitude to me for listening and expressed relief at being heard.

As a researcher, and most importantly, as an international working mother who has experienced similar challenges, I am deeply saddened by their challenges, but I am impressed by their positive outlook and resilient nature. I have learned a great deal from these women through talking to them and through reflecting on their stories. I have become more appreciative toward my own experiences as a graduate student and a mother living in a foreign country for the past two years. I will conclude with the lyrics of "No pain, No Gain" by Betty Wright, a pioneering singer and songwriter in the U.S.:

In order to get something

You got to give something

In order to be something

You got to go through something

No pain No gain

No pain No gain

No pain No gain

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

First, thank the participant for her time, and then introduce who I am and why I am doing this research.

After the initial introduction, I will explain the Consent Form and ask the participant to sign the form. Only after this, will the interview begin.

A. For each participant, note (or ask) the following:

- Age
- Marital status: married, or divorced, or?
- Living with spouse or separated with spouse
- Occupation (graduate student RA, TA or working in a company)
- Number of hours you work per week, study per week
- Number of children and age of children
- Where do they live (ethnic community or mixed with other people)
- Living with children or separated from children
- Type of visa

B. Question(s) responding to RQ1:

Maybe you can tell me about the challenges you've faced trying to manage your work and personal life, while also living in a foreign country?

- Probe: maybe you can start with when you first came here.

C. Question(s) responding to RQ2:

How did you handle that?

- Probe: Was there someone who was particularly helpful?
- Probe: Were there some organizations that were particularly helpful?
- Probe: What would have helped?
- Probe: Who could have made that easier?

D. Closing questions:

1. As time goes by, do you feel less challenging and stressful? How?
2. If you have a picture in your mind about your life in the United States, what does the picture look like? Why?
3. Is there anything important in your life that we did not talk about?
4. Are you willing to be contacted in 2-3 months, perhaps by that time you would share with me a new story or an evolved story? I would love to see how things are going in our life.

Thank you for taking the time to do my interview.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Sample email to be sent to working mothers through the list-serve of Office of International Programs of a large southwestern state university.

Dear all,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study about international working mothers' work-life balance. This is a research to fulfill my thesis project. More important, this is a research topic that I am passionate about.

Being an international working mother myself, I experience great challenges in juggling many roles: a mother, an employee, a wife/partner, and a foreigner. The process is both stressful and rewarding. However, not much research has been conducted to address the unique challenges faced by you and me, and how we handle the tensions. I therefore want to make our voices heard, and at the same time, hope to contribute to the research literature.

I therefore sincerely ask for your participation. Your participation is voluntary, however, I will greatly appreciate if you could spare one hour of your time to share with me your stories. Your personal information will be kept confidential.

Please write to me if you are interested in this research. I will then set up an individual interview appointment with you.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

Qingjing Xu (Angela)
Graduate Student and Teaching Assistant
Communication and Journalism
Name of University
Email (omit)

Table 1*Visa Types*

Visa types	Rights	General requirements
F-1 visa (Student visa)	It allows academic students to attend a university, college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory or other academic institutions, including a language-training program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate students at UNM must enroll in a minimum of 9 credits (without assistantship), and 6 credits (with assistantship); Undergraduates must enroll for 12 credit hours; • Visa holders are limited to work a maximum of 20 hours/week on campus during semesters; • Visa holders are allowed to apply for out-of-campus work in the field of their study after having been enrolled for two consecutive semesters.
F-2 visa (Dependent visa)	It allows dependents (children or spouse) to stay in the U.S. for the duration of F-1 visa; It allows children to attend local schools through high school; It allows spouses to enroll in part-time studies that are vocational or recreational in nature.	<p>Visa holders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not allowed to enroll as full-time student in a university or college; • Are not allowed to seek for paid employment.
Green card (Permanent residence)	It allows visa holders to work, study, and live in the United States legally, and enjoy the same social benefits as U.S. citizens with the exception of voting.	<p>Visa holders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are required to be present in the United States for at least 50% of the time each year or to seek permission to be away.

H-1B Specialty Occupations	It allows visa holders to work full time, temporarily, in specialty occupations that require theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It requires that the prospective employer file an application and petition with the Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Foreign Labor Certification and USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services); • Visa holders can only work for the specific employer(s) that have applied for the H-1B.
H-2 visa (Dependent visa)	It allows visa holders to live in the United States as a dependent to the H-1 visa holders.	<p>Visa holders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are not allowed to enroll as a full-time academic student in a university or college.
J-1 visa (Exchange visitor, such as visa granted Fullbright Scholars)	It allows visa holders to work on exchange programs offered by a specific institution in the United States.	<p>Visa holders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are limited to work on campus for a maximum of 20 hours/week during semesters; • Are allowed to apply for out-of-campus work in the field of their study for a maximum of 20 hours/week, after having been enrolled for two consecutive semesters; • Maybe required to return home before they can change to work visa or permanent residency.
J-2 visa (Dependent visa)	It allows visa holders to live in the United States as dependents to J-1 visa holders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USCIS must authorize work before visa holders begin employment; • Work permission is limited to one year at a time.

Note. The information is from Office of International Programs and Studies, University of New Mexico, and the website of Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, <http://travel.state.gov/visa/>. The types of visa listed above are mentioned by interview participants and are not exhaustive. For a complete list of visa types and general requirements, please visit: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/>