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"Too Many Boys in My Major": Exploring the Gendered Experiences of International Students at Home and Away

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"*Too Many Boys in My Major*": Exploring the Gendered Experiences of International
Students at Home and Away

By

Jieyun Zhao

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"Too Many Boys in My Major": Exploring the Gendered Experiences of International
Students at Home and Away

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ABSTRACT

My main objective in conducting this research study is to explore the gendered experiences of six international undergraduate students in their home countries, and in Canada. Studying as a graduate student in the Faculty of Education focusing on education administration, together with the support from the ISC (International Students Center) administrators, I was able to conduct research in the University X, Ontario, Canada. I used a case study method as my qualitative research strategy, and interview process as my research method. Personal interviews were conducted with each of the six participants, who were all international undergraduate students studying at the University X. These interviews were conducted to learn about their academic and social experiences, and discover how does gender, together with other social categories such as race, ethnicity, social class, cultural background shape their experiences. As a researcher, I provided insight into the participants' lived experiences from the past to the present, their feeling of loneliness, as well as their academic and financial struggles. This study may bring more awareness to the Canadian Government and the public, as it will help promote the international programs as well as support for the international students in various manners. In addition, it may also support future researchers to conduct similar research studies with the purpose of capturing the lived experiences, gender beliefs, personal stories of undergraduate international students studying in Ontario, Canada.

Keywords: gender, lived experiences, Canada, international undergraduate students, ethnicity, social class, cultural background, race, academic, social

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to myself, to my family and friends, to my professors,

to the other international students studying and living in different countries, and

everyone that supported me throughout the process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

There has been a steep increase in the number of international students in Canada over the past years. The Canadian government and a variety of educational institutions have actively devoted more time and resources to the recruitment and development of international students. As Hegarty (2014) argues, international students have become an essential part of the higher education system. He contends that universities have a responsibility to ensure they make significant efforts to meet the academic and social needs of international students. Part of the challenge in understanding the complex experiences of international students in the post-secondary context, in particular in Ontario, is the limited amount of high quality research available. Little, if anything has been written on this topic in the context of Ontario. As a female graduate student in education, a researcher, and an international student myself, I argue for the importance of exploring the international students' academic and social experiences, and my research aims to fill this gap.

Current research indicates that international students face different kinds of academic and social challenges (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Sawir, 2005; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Some of the challenges experienced by international students include bit are not limited to language barriers, social and cultural differences, gender and feelings such as loneliness. Using semi-structured interviews with six international undergraduate students studying at the University X, I explore and examine their lived experiences at home and away. Each interview was around one hour and the whole data collection

period was about ten hours. The interviews focused on the academic, social and cultural experiences of the international undergraduate students as they pursue all or a portion of their bachelor degrees in Ontario, Canada.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the gendered social and academic experiences of students at home and during their stay at one Ontario university. By doing so, the research will provide a broader understanding of the relationship between being a non-domestic student and higher education. The research will contribute to the literature in the following ways: First, the research will fill a gap in the literature on the experiences of international students, specifically within the Ontario context; Second, seeking to understand international students' experiences as gendered subjects, this study will also explore gender relations of power, while simultaneously serving as an outlet of expression for international students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research study. I specifically intended to address the following one research question, together with the sub-questions.

Major Question:

1. What are the social and academic experiences of international undergraduate students' studying at University X, Ontario, Canada, at home and away?

Sub Questions:

1. How does gender, along with other social categories such as cultural background, ethnicity, race and social class shape international undergraduate students' academic experiences at home and in University X?

2. How does gender, along with other social categories such as cultural background, ethnicity, race and social class shape international undergraduate students' social

experiences in University X?

Locating Myself in the Research Study

In this this section I introduce myself as a student, a researcher, and a teacher. I am a middle-class, Chinese, heterosexual, able-bodied woman in my mid-twenties. I was born in a middle-class family as the only child in the early 90s under the 'one child policy' in China. My parents are both well-educated and our family income is stable. Growing up, my parents supported me in numerous ways including helping me to obtain an education and providing me with financial stability. They always placed an emphasis on education. So, rather than spending money on various material luxuries, my parents spent their time and resources on my education. Deeply influenced by my parents' beliefs and actions, I now value the importance of education for myself and for my future students.

As soon as I entered University numerous years ago, I started to work part-time in different labour market areas, but gradually found my passion in education. I have been a teacher for over six years, teaching in both Chinese and English. The age of my students has varied from preschool children to retirees. I have mainly taught students IELTS (The International English Level Tests) and TOFEL (The Test of English as a Foreign Language). As a teacher, as a person who also studies in a foreign country, I can empathize with my students who are struggling as second language learners.

By teaching, I was able to cover my living expenses and tuition fees during my four years of undergraduate in China. Although it was more expensive to study and live in Canada, with more teaching experience, I was able to receive a higher salary to afford school abroad. Despite this, sometimes it was a bit stressful for me to be totally

independent from my parents, in light of all the expenses in Canada. However; my parents were always very supportive. My hunch is that my experience, being somewhat homesick and missing my parents, is far from unique when it comes to international students.

Most people have multiple identities. For example, a young woman can be a mother, a student, a worker, a friend, a partner, an athlete and a book lover, and the list can go on. For me, my identity is also very complex, but being an international student from China certainly plays prominently in my life. But how did I become an international student, in the first place? During my undergraduate years, I received a scholarship from my home university in China and had the chance to become an international exchange student. I spent one year as an international undergraduate student studying English Literature and History at a Canadian university. It came as no surprise then, that through my own experiences as an international student, I gradually developed a strong interest in exploring the academic and social experiences of other international undergraduate students, but in a much more systematic and rigorous way.

After I achieved my Bachelor degree in Education, I chose to obtain my Masters majoring in Educational Administration. The graduate program has been a great opportunity and has provided me with valuable experiences, including helping me understand more clearly about the importance of research. It was in the graduate program that I became increasingly interested in the topic of international students. I have witnessed the increasing number of international students and the growth of international programs inside Ontario universities, and I want to explore areas of its growth. Along with trying to make sense of my own experiences as an international student in a

scholarly way, this is also in part why I chose international undergraduate students as one of the topics of my research study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Most of the research currently available discusses the issues and challenges for

international students as an undifferentiated group rather than separating the findings by

region, and other factors such as gender. Despite this limitation in the literature, there are

a handful of studies that are notable. This review of the literature, will discuss the

relevant literature, along with providing an account of some of the major concepts used in

this study such as gender. I begin with exploring the concept of gender.

Understanding Gender

When I first learned about the concept of 'gender' from my middle school English

book, my understanding was limited to an exclusive male-female dichotomy. This is not

an unusual belief, but through education I realized that gender is a social construct and

that many other gender identities exist. I also came to understand the concept of gender as

an 'enactment'. West and Zimmerman (1987) consider gender as an enactment, or "the

activity of managing situated conduct in light of attitudes and activities appropriate for

one's sex category" (p. 127). For West and Zimmerman, and later elaborated on by

philosopher Judith Butler (1990), gender is best considered to be a performance where

people 'do gender' in a way that often conforms to societal norms. The social

construction of gender as a concept rejects the idea that gender is an outcome of biology

or some manifestation of inner essence.

Gender, then, is a social construct, or a social phenomenon not empirically related to

sex. Decades ago, feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir (1953) framed gender as a social

institution located outside of the body in her work *The Second Sex.* As she famously

wrote: "one is not born, rather becomes, a woman" (p. 281). Influenced by Beauvoir, West and Zimmerman (1987) also made the distinction between sex as a physiological fact, and considered gender as a social process which operationalizes sex as a site of meaningful difference. 'Gender' and 'sex' are conceptually separated. Gender is framed as a social construct, and sex as a biological term. Sex is usually considered as a product of genes and hormones, which refers strictly to the biological make up of a male and a female (Carl, 2012). The word 'sex' can also be referred to largely as reproductive capacities, not connected to the concept of gender in any biological way (Bradley, 2013). In contrast, gender is a category that describes 'gendered' behavior and social interactions, and is more flexible. Gender varies over time, from culture to culture, and it is considered as changeable and capable of being presented in many different ways. In research fields, 'gender' is a topic of study in the social sciences and humanities, while 'sex' is under the investigations of biomedical subject areas. However, the debate about the relationship between 'gender' and 'sex' is ever lasting. There are lots of differences in these disciplines made by researchers or institutions in the field but there is no firm consensus (Dussauge & Kaiser, 2012). These disciplines meet and need to coexist, especially in the field of psychology.

In this research, gender is drawn upon as a theoretical lens to differentiate from understandings which merge gender with sex as a variable, and to understand "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

West and Zimmerman (1987) introduce the gender socialization theories in their foundational article "Doing Gender". They believe that gender may be achieved, and by about age five, it was fixed, unvarying, and static. West and Zimmerman (1987) use the

phrase "doing gender" to describe the complex action that gender is a routine, a methodical and recruiting accomplishment that is actively engaged by participants. They conclude that doing gender is unavoidable on the basis that gender as a legitimizing factor in a person's social intelligibility. In conclusion, West and Zimmerman (1987) believe that gender, as separate from sex, is 'done'. As Butler (1990) states, "Gender is always doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed, it is not a single performance but a routine repetition which creates the illusion of a stable self" (p. 25). Her statement explains the fact that we constantly play out gender, we "do gender" through the words we use, the activities we do, the clothes we wear, the way we relate to our family, friends and other relationships. We convince ourselves that our gendered selves are stable by repeating these every day acts again and again. Therefore, doing gender can be understood as how individuals conform to social expectations of appropriate behavior for their socially perceived sex category. Eagly (2005) states in his social role theory that individuals behave differently and adopt different roles that reflect the sexual division of labor and gender hierarchy of society. According to Gherardi (1994), women do gender well by conforming to societal expectations of what is deemed appropriate behaviors for women.

Martin (2006) states that people do gender through social practices, he understands gender practice as "roles, norms and ideas relative to gender…when they involve action, that is, when they are actively done, said or interpreted" (p. 270). Martin (2006) also states that people conform to rebel against institutionalized gender status. This statement acknowledges that gender is not a possession of individuals (Mavin an& Grandy, 2011). Linstead and Thomas (2002) recognize the active role of individuals, in relation to their

ability to act, make decisions, struggle with, influence, accept or reject gender social role expectations.

Gender roles are entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity. Bohan (1993) argues that gender is not a trait of individuals at all, it is socially constructed, and is not defined as resident in person but exists in those interactions that are socially constructed.

Secondly, gender is politically deployed as a social construct. It is a force tied up in power relations between men and women. As Weber (2006) states, the development of theorization about gender, is shaped by the political and intellectual contexts of the time. There are two moments that strongly influenced the way understanding gender within social science has evolved, one is modernity and the other is postmodernity. For example, since the 1970s, gender has become more and more important as an academic topic, behind this, the rebirth of feminism in the 1970s is considered as a political movement, which aims to help women be treated equally and have the same rights as men. Bradley (2013) argues that though the "close link with feminist politics and activism has been broken" (p. 4), the way 'gender' is employed still has political implications.

In addition, gender must be considered as lived experience. According to Fenton and Bradley (2002), gender is at the same time both a material and a cultural phenomenon. Gender includes the lived experiences of people, the gendered relations between and among people, the concepts and ideas we developed to make sense and frame these relations. In summary, "material experiences inform cultural meanings, which in turn influence the way lived relations change and develop" (Bradley, 2013, p. 5). The "material experiences" here do not mean objects (e.g. a table or a garden) which have

stable physical existence. Bohan (1993) talks about the necessity of recognizing diversity among gender studies on women. For example, simply being a woman does not shape one's gender experiences, and sex is only one of the aspects that frame women's lives. Bohan (1993) also encourages people to see gender through different contexts or situations.

As individuals, gender impacts each one of our experiences. Lived experiences involved with gender affect us in every aspect of our personal lives, even though we don't realize its existence. In this research, based on the lived gender experience of six participants and myself, I aimed to explore the way gender exists or influences people's lives. As Bradley (2013) argues, the institutions which make up our society (families, hospitals, school, etc.) are all gendered locations where gender experience of individuals, and relationships take place. Thus, the study of gender is multifaceted; one can conduct a study of gender in relation to other social or cultural phenomenon. As Beck (1992) accurately describes, gender is 'omni-present.' His research took place inside a university in Ontario, which is considered as a gendered institution.

The points that I have made above are at play in considering how gender is experienced by international undergraduate students in Canada, and their home countries. Firstly, gender is a social construct and the rules of gender relations operate differently in different countries. For example, Participant F felt unsafe to wear shorts in public while she was in India. However, she felt comfortable and safe wearing shorts while in Canada. Secondly, gender is also politically shaped: Chinese feminists and women's right groups became increasingly active as the result of the government's approval. Chinese feminist organizations have been working on legislation against domestic violence, gender

inequality and LGBT rights over the years. Thirdly, as I want to emphasize strongly that gender is lived experience, I have included the lived experiences of my six research participants in the Chapter Four, to explore the way that gender is lived out in people's lives. These lived experiences include narratives, personal stories of individuals, or the illustration of dilemmas and possibilities that individuals may face.

Overall, gender is a very complicated concept. It does not relate to a single aspect or sphere of human activity. It is a social construct which is politically deployed and must be explored through lived experiences. From my understanding of gender, I think gender is entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as race, ethnicity, social class and cultural background.

It goes without saying that gender has shaped my lived experience from birth. The vast majority of my own experiences, if not all, are gendered in one way or another. But let me give you one very real and concrete example that stands out in my own mind, but also illustrates the broader systemic and structural issues faced by many women and girls. When I was very young it became very clear to me that my grandparents preferred their grandsons over granddaughters because the Confucianism, a Chinese philosophy that is deeply patriarchal, is deep-rooted in their mind. Under such traditional cultures, my grandparents did not favor me and they discouraged my parents from spending money and educating me as I was a girl. They were against me taking piano, art and taekwondo lessons because they believed it was useless for a girl to develop these interests. Luckily, my parents never listened to them and insisted on offering me the same opportunities as a boy to learn and study whatever I felt interested in. My family-life, therefore instigated my interest in gender and education. Dealing with the inequity from my grandparents

allowed me to realize how gender can affect others' and how it affected my opportunity in education.

    Gender and Postmodernity. As Weber (2006) states, the development of theorization about gender, is shaped by the political and intellectual contexts of the time. As I pointed out earlier in this paper, the term 'gender' is politically influenced. There are two moments that strongly influenced the way understanding gender within social science has evolved, one is modernity and the other is postmodernity. Modernist thinking was responsible for developing the concept of gender, bringing issues of gender disadvantages and inequity into the public arena and making it a central concern of the academic agenda. In this section, I am going to introduce gender and postmodernity, as the postmodernists guided my understanding of gender through the ideas of considering 'difference' and 'multiplicity.' I realized that each gender experience is different and unique, and at the same time entwined with so many other social factors.

    Barret and Phillips (1992) first point out that there was a dramatic shift in the feminist approach to the analysis of gender in the early 1990s, which is referred as 'postmodern turn.' Theorists started to completely change their way of understanding gender and studying gender. According to Bradley (2013), ideas of 'difference' and 'multiplicity' are central issues in the postmodernist case. Instead of a primarily binary category (female/male), gender is conceived through a signifier of diverse and multiple identities. For example, an African American working-class female cannot speak for a white British middle-class female because their gender experiences are incomparable due to racial and class differences.

Different from modernist, class is no longer one of the central concepts, but only one of a long list of sources of division and inequality, it is considered a form of social difference together with ethnicity, race, cultural background and religion. Bradley (2013) also points out that compared to modernist, during postmodernist, feminists achieved a great extent academically, gender is officially accepted as a key part of the curriculum within the social science and humanities. Courses on gender and feminist research have been offered in different institutions since then.

Postmodernism is considered a type of collective state of mind, as it is not a specific theory, many different things contributed to this state of mind. Firstly, postmodern feminists saw gender as socially constructed, it is not a fixed or stable category. Riley (1988) explored this principle in her book "Am I that Name?" influentially. In her book, the meaning of being a woman keeps changing over time and time, she states the idea that there is no universal version of femaleness and femininity.

In addition, Bradley (2013) supplements that individual consciousness of gender is also highly unstable, it is not a consistent base of identity. We are not consistently considering ourselves as women or men, the sense of being gendered is triggered by certain circumstances. For example, sometimes we feel inferior due to gender stereotyping: women are horrible with parallel parking or men do not know how to take care of babies. Individual consciousness of our gender is highly unstable and not a consistent base of identity.

Postmodernism researchers consider the range of competing discourses and counter-discourses of femininity and masculinity as the objects of gender study, because they think gender is a discursive phenomenon. As central topics, gendered subjectivities

and identities are also fluid creations of changing discourse. To many people, gender relations seem fixed and stable, and readers may then question, how does this happen? Butler (1990) gives this answer: "Gender is always doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed, it is not a single performance but a routine repetition which creates the illusion of a stable self" (p. 25). Her answer explains that the fact that we constantly play out gender, we "do gender" through the words we use, the activities we do, the clothes we wear, the way we relate to our family, friends and other relationships. We convince ourselves that our gendered selves are stable by repeating these every day acts again and again.

Postmodernists criticizes modernist's approach to gender as being 'essentialist', founded on the notion of some essence to all women's and men's being, which promotes a common identity. Therefore, researchers influenced by postmodernism tended to explore gender in specific contexts and look at different groups of people, for example, lesbians and gays, disabled women, African American women. They aimed to explore different experiences of gender relations in specific contexts (Bradley 2013). I was influenced by this idea and decided to conduct my research in a specific context: an Ontario university, to explore gender through international undergraduate students' lived experience, as they belong to a specific group.

Postmodernist has expanded the knowledge of how gender is experienced, and also developed a deeper and more detailed understanding of different shades of relations. Researchers no longer focus on exploring different relationships only between men and women, but also within groups of men, and women. In addition, postmodernists are sensitive about how these gender relationships are managed in different social contexts,

and this sensitivity to difference can be seen as the great contribution of postmodernism. During my research, I explore the six participants' lived experiences, through their different experiences, I work on exploring different relationships between the participants, and between themselves.

  Intersectionality. Intersectionality emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s from critical studies as a scholarly movement born in the legal academy. In the past few years, the concept of intersectionality has become a dominant model with which to engage in how differences, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, age, disability and religion, interlink with human lives. It is an analytical tool developed to study the imbrications of race and gender oppression, which can be used to analyze any context of intersecting systems of oppression. The perspective of intersectionality offers me a way to understand gender, to consider gender together with race, ethnicity, cultural background and social class through individual's lived experiences.

  Critical race theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw, is credited with coining the term intersectionality (Cole, 2009), first using it to describe the experiences of black women. She states that the term intersectionality is used to underscore the 'multidimensionality' of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). She narrated the different types of discrimination the women face because of their gender and race. Connell (2012, p. 1675) illustrates the concept of intersectionality as the "focus on complex relations between multiple groups not only within but across identities and analytical categories." These different sociocultural categories are class, gender, ethnicity, family, religious affiliation, and race. Intersectionality refers to the fact that the way people are located in a society is never the result of one set of relations. Collins (1998) states that

intersectionality offers a framework of analysis that complicates ways these categories intersect and mutually construct each other.

According to Bhopal and Preston (2012), to understand intersectionality, we first need to be aware of 'otherness'. They constructed the idea that that 'otherness' is related to the notion that identity itself is "fragmented, even fragile, yet constantly evolving through multiple engagements and relationships in society" (p. 1). In this case, intersectionality is considered as a model to understand, analyze and engage with difference, which is the defining feature of 'otherness'. Therefore, intersectionality should be understood as a dynamic rather than a static process.

Cole (2009) states that research including more than one aspect of an individual's identity produces a more nuanced understanding of their reality. McCall (2005) points out the strength of intersectionality, which is the notion that so many different forces can be included in one study. From an intersectionality viewpoint, individual identity can shape students' experiences (McCall, 2005), ultimately leading to changes in self-beliefs, such as self-assessment of student learning. In the study, McCall examines international exchange students' self-reported learning outcomes and social interaction outcomes by their gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, among other factors such as age.

In writing about intersectionality, I have learned from my own personal biographies—my experience as a female, able-bodied, young, middle class Asian international student studying in Canada. I am aware of my own identity in society, and amongst my peers in academia. I am a very adventurous person, capable of change in lifestyle and a willingness to adapt to different lifestyles. I have many different interests and partake in various hobbies. To me, sticking to the same routine is impossible, as I am

always seeking new ways to enrich my life and experiences. I came from a middle-class family and my parents support me financially and emotionally in my academic and social life. They encourage me to challenge myself in different life experiences. I am a Chinese woman, born in China and lived in there until my early 20s. I have experienced the Chinese education system from kindergarten to university and I am familiar with the Chinese culture and traditions. I moved to Canada in my early 20s and have spent almost six years living and studying in Ontario. Academically, I struggled for a few months adapting to the Canadian education system, but I have become more accustomed to it now, able to solve problems and research for answers, with the professor's guidance and help. Socially, after overcoming most of my language barriers, I felt more and more involved in different kinds of social activities. I have made local friends, joined different local groups and Canada now has a sense of 'home' to me.

I perceive myself as a typical international student, and the perspective of intersectionality offers me a way to look at my experience through a different lens. It has taught me to consider various social categories into consideration while analyzing and exploring my own lived experiences. Influenced by the perspective of intersectionality, I stopped looking at gender separately, realizing gender is and will always be entwined with other social categories.

International students

Overview of International Students. 'International students' refers to those who have decided to travel to another country for tertiary study (Ryan & Carroll, 2005). Much of their previous educational experiences come from different educational systems, in diverse cultural contexts, and sometimes, different languages from their home country.

International students also may or may not attend some secondary or preparation education in the country they have chosen for their higher education.

There are many benefits to be an international student. International students may have a chance to mix with a wider range of nationalities (Brown & Holloway, 2008), and increase their level of confidence and responsibility in learning (Warring, 2010). According to Campbell (2010), international students challenge their views and develop personal experiences, which may help them become independent thinkers and adaptors for change. Campbell (2010) also points out that, international students may become more employable globally after graduation, which brings positive influence to their future career. Most importantly, the experience of being an international student can also challenge their sense of self (Kim, 2005), while shaping their outlook on the world around them (Furnham, 2004).

International students also face many difficulties, such as culture shock, described by Brown and Holloway (2008) as an anxiety from losing familiar signs and symbols of social interaction. This topic will be discussed in more details later in this chapter. Yeh and Inose (2003) state that a new language can cause some serious difficulties for students to understand and participate in the academic activities. Furthermore, Chalungsoth and Schneller (2011) argue that international students may find that they need to develop different learning strategies and study patterns, to adapt to the new academic system. This phenomenon is identified by Huang (2012) as learner shock. In addition, the feeling of loneliness has become a more and more popular issue among university students (Arkar, Sari, & Fidaner, 2004; Lin & Huang, 2012). Previous research targeted on university students in Canada shown that loneliness has a negative influence

on University students' overall academic performance, perceptions of stress, and educational engagement (Lin & Huang, 2012; Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015).

Research showed that international students absorb knowledge better when they are placed in active roles and safe social learning environments (Erichsen and Bolliger, 2011). Brown and Holloway (2008) also suggest that regular social gatherings can help the students to enjoy a sense of belonging. The school administrators, professors and peer students, are working together to offer different kinds of help to international students.

Culture Shock. Culture shock can be described as an experience a person may have when one leaves their familiar, home country to live in another cultural or social environment. Furnham (2010) introduces how culture shock is part of a larger process of socializing newcomers to a foreign culture. He stated that it is a "loss of one's culture, a marker of moving from one culture to another, and a resocialization in another culture" (p. 87), as well as a "serious, acute and sometimes chronic affective reaction to a new (social) environment" (p. 88). Although culture shock can be experienced through cross-cultural encounters within one's own country (Ward et al., 2001), my research refers specifically to culture shock experienced while visiting another country.

Culture shock has various forms, such as skill interdependence, homesickness, loneliness, technology gap, information overload, etc. For example, homesickness is one of the most popular cultural shocks caused by being away from home. According to Thurber and Walton (2007), homesickness is a kind of distress and functional impairment, whose cognitive hallmark is preoccupying thoughts of home and attachment objects such as parents. University students suffering from home sickness often have a combination of depressive and anxious symptoms, such as having difficulty focusing on

study, losing interest in topics unattached to home. Though homesickness is a very common experience as most people miss something about home when they are away, intense homesickness can be painful and treatment strategies are necessary (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Culture shock has four stages, honeymoon, negotiation, adjustment and adaptation. During the honeymoon stage, the new culture is seen in a romantic way and people may be fascinated by the new culture as there is differences between their own culture and the new one. For example, an individual may fall in love with the new food, the pace of life, or be interested in using the local language. However, as Oberg (1960) points out, like most honeymoon stages, this stage of culture shock eventually ends.

The next stage of culture shock is negotiation, when the differences between the two cultures become apparent and may create anxiety. According to Marvrides (2009), individual may have the unpleasant feelings of frustration, as he or she may continue to experience unfavorable events, such as language barriers, food accessibility, and loneliness. It may also heighten one's sense of disconnection from their surroundings. For international students studying abroad, they are living in a country without parental support and their home culture, as a result, some individuals may develop additional symptoms of loneliness that consistently affect their academic and social life. During the process of adjusting to a new culture, anxiety and pressure may occur.

The third stage is adjustment. During this stage, people begin familiarizing themselves to the new culture and develop routines. Their focus shifts back to their activities of daily living, and they begin developing the ability to solve problems related to cultural differences. When facing a different culture, people often have a positive

outlook and are willing to accept the differences. For example, international students may gradually get used to the local food and be willing to make friends with locals.

The last stage is adaptation, which can also be called the mastery stage. Pederson (1995) states that in this stage, an individual can participant fully and has become fluently comfortable in both the old and the new cultures. This does not mean total conversion, as people often keep different forms of traits from their old culture, for example, accents and diet habits. According to Pederson (1995), there is some controversy about whether this stage is unreachable as it is very ideal.

I consider culture shock as a response to the gap in expectations one has about traveling abroad. It shows how people may react in certain circumstances, or how they expect to fit in and adjust to their new life abroad. When these expectations are not met, it can create all kinds of issues. As an international student myself, when I first started studying and living in Canada, homesickness was deeply connected with the food. The food culture in Canada is totally different from my home country and it stressed me every day. Without realizing it was a typical form of cultural shock, I let the anxiety hit me hard which resulted in gaining thirty-five pounds over six months. It is the reason I put a bonus question at the end of my interview, relating to the topic of food. I would like to find out if there were other international students who were suffering from the similar forms of culture shock with me.

International Students in Canada. Since 21st century, Canadian government and institutions emphasized on the Internationalization of Higher Education, thus, they actively devote to the development of the international students. According to Tang's

research in 2011, the results showed that international students of higher education are the main part of the international students in Canada.

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) is the only national organization exclusively dedicated to international education. It regularly evaluates the experience of international students in Canada through a benchmarking survey. According to CBIE's most recent report in 2009, the results of the survey showed that over half of the students (53%) wanting to study abroad picked Canada as their first choice. The main reasons are the high quality of education and attractive work opportunity after graduation. Financially, the annual tuition fee in 2009 was approximately 14,000 dollars in typical universities or colleges for international students, and it is increasing every year. Therefore, the increase in Canadian tuition fees has made a Canadian education unattainable for many. Academically, over 90% of the international students reported that they were satisfied with the services and facilities they have used at their institutions, such as the international student handbook, the international student supervisor, language support center, study services. etc.

International students have more options these days since many other countries are aggressively marketing on recruiting international students. For example, the U.S. has been particularly aggressive in its recruitment of international students. According to the data from Institute for International Education (2013), international student enrollment in the U.S. for 2012-2013 increased by nearly 10 percent over the past year. To achieve the increasing number of international student enrollment, U.S. institutions have changed their strategies for recruitment such as offering financial aid packages to international students, holding job fairs overseas and improving their social media outreach skills. The

CBIE suggests that Canada should continue to promote their academic quality, competitive tuition fees, better living and studying environment, and attractive work opportunities. The aim is to let all international students put Canada first in their minds when they decide to study outside their home country.

International Students at the University X. The University X is strategically committed to internationalization. The goal is to diversify the University X student's population by attracting students from different countries. According to the school's finance department, international academic fee now comprises one third of the total tuition revenue received by the institution. Therefore, international students play an important role in the school's financial position.

The University X is using multiple ways to increase awareness of the institution, academic programs, and services offered to international students, by using different recruitment activities in countries such as China, Brazil, India, and Mexico. Potential international students consider the University X as an affordable institution to achieve high quality education. Additionally, the University X offers international students with an exciting campus lifestyle together with opportunities to participate in innovative research opportunities.

Since this research focused on undergraduate international students in the University X, I collected information of the undergraduate international student enrolment over the last five years in this university. A systematic review from the ISC report shows the following.

Figure 1: The international undergraduate students' enrollment numebr from the Univeristy X (2010-1014)
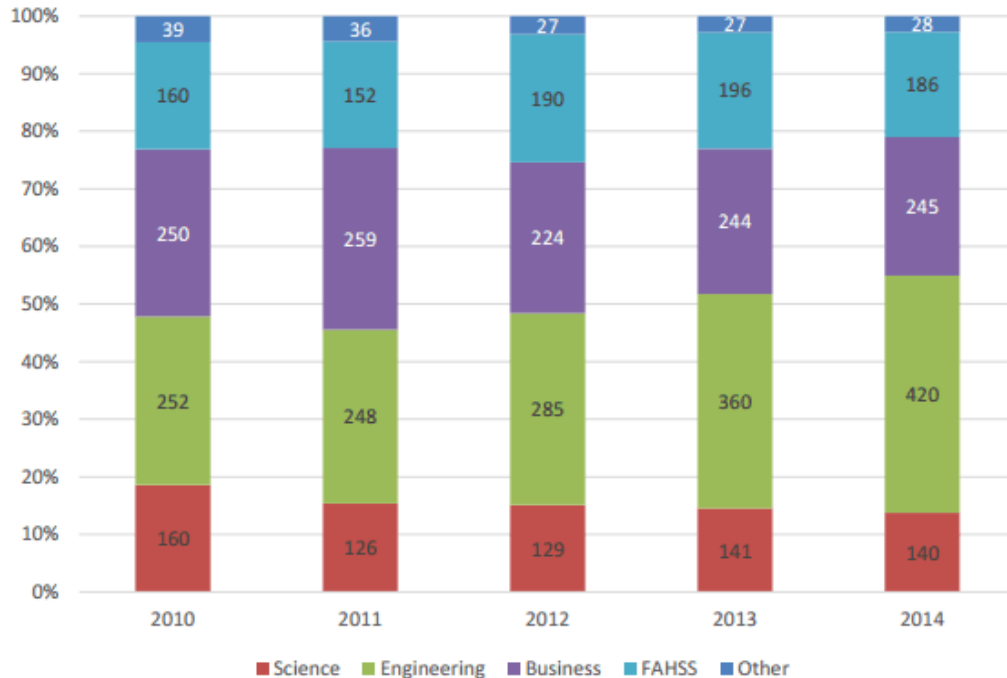
Summarizing from the chart above, full-time undergraduate enrollment has increased modestly (+158); growth can be seen within faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (16%, +26), Engineering (67%, +168); modest decrease can also be seen within the Faculty of Science.

The international students at the University X in need of language support are offered two professional language training programs: English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) and English for Academic Preparation Program (EAPP). The International Student Center (ISC) is designed to facilitate the well-being of students engaged in international experiences, providing continuous support to help them succeed.

I am currently studying at University of Windsor as an international student. My personal experience as being an international student contributes to the motivation of conducting this research. I am proud of how successful the international student program

is in the universities, also I feel grateful for all the help and support I have received as an international student.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this research, I discuss and analyze the participants' gendered experiences in their home countries and as international students studying at the University X. According to Creswell (2009, p. 175), "participants meaning" occurs when "the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature." In this research study, my main task is to understand, analyze, and discuss the meaning of the lived experiences from the participants. More specifically, I hope to answer the following question: How does gender, along with other factors such as race, ethnicity, and social class shape international students' lived experiences at home and away?

The Design of the Research Study

Qualitative Research. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define qualitative research as a kind of research that "studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). To thoroughly address the topic of gender and lived experience of individuals, I decided to use qualitative research as my research methodology. I aim to examine meanings from the participants' perspectives, with findings collected from a rigorous data analysis.

Interviews. I have decided to use the interview process as my research method. According to Jarvinen (2000), an interview is not only a meaning-making experience, but also a site for producing knowledge through the collaboration of both interviewer and interviewee. Denzin (2001) describes, the interview as a "special performance" (p. 25), which involves interviewer and interviewee both eliciting and representing an interpretive

relationship of the world. An interview provides an opportunity for the interviewee to discuss and reflect. The participation is an active process that advances the participants own self-understanding (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004). Therefore, I chose to use the interview as my approach to conduct the research. It provides me with a better way to assess how the participants explain, refine and reorganize their personal experience in all its complexity.

Overview of the Research Procedure

I attempted to explore the presented research questions using a qualitative research study, through digging into the phenomenon of international undergraduate students' gendered experience at home and away. I was aiming to collect valuable information and data, to achieve possible findings and conclusions.

Research Site & Participants Selection

Research Site. With the support from my research supervisor, my faculty and the ISC (International Student Center) Officers, I was able to conduct my research at the University X, and all the interviews were conducted in the university campus. All the registered undergraduate international students were notified of my research study via emails, flyers, general information letters and consent forms. As all the participants were enrolled as undergraduate international students at the University X, University X acted as the research site, as well as a large community including students, professors and administrators. All the interviews were conducted inside the campus of University X. During the pre-interviews, I discussed with each participant about the location of their interviews and gave them some suggestions, half chose the ISC office and the other half chose the Graduate student office.

University X. University X is a public comprehensive and research university in Ontario, Canada. With approximately 10,000 full-time and part-time undergraduate students and over 3,000 graduate students, it is considered a mid-sized university. University X has different faculties, including Arts, Humanities, Social science, Education, Engineering, and Business.

The ISC office. The ISC (International Students Center) office is the first stop for most of the international students when they first arrive at the University X. The office is located at the second floor in one of the school buildings. Welcomed by the students working at the reception table, students are told to sit in front of a computer in the ISC office and finish their soft-landing. It means that they will be added to the international students mailing list and be able to receive all kinds of information related to international students through emails. The ISC office offers different workshops such as study permit extensions, internship interviews, in addition, it also provides various services and supports. The ISC officer generously offered private meeting rooms for my research interviews, and three out of six participants chose ISC office as their interview locations.

The Graduate Student Office. The Graduate student office mentioned in this research paper refers to the office provided by Faculty of Education. It offers computers, printing, scan machines, and private meeting rooms for graduate students in Education. Graduate students spend their time reading, researching and writing in this office. It is normally very quiet and comfortable. During the pre-interviews, I recommended this place to my participants and half of them chose this place as their interview location.

Participants Selection. The entire process of participant selection is based on the standard Creswell (2007) that points out, "the qualitative research should purposefully selected participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question." In this research, participants are selected based upon their nationalities, status in Canada and their degree-type. Each participant had to meet the three following conditions to be considered for an interview. The three conditions consist of the following:

1. The individual is currently studying at the University X.

2. The individual is an international student.

3. The individual is enrolled in the Winter term, 2017 as an undergraduate student.

The instructor of the International Student Centre (ISC) sent an email to all international students with an introduction and purpose for the research along with the researcher's contact information. The email can be found in Appendix A for reference. The international student population is tremendously diverse as they have different nationalities, culture backgrounds, international education or working experiences, etc. The recruiting email was sent to all undergraduate international students who were enrolled in the Winter term, 2017. It gave all undergraduate international students the opportunity to potentially share their lived experiences. Those who expressed interest were able to contact the researcher via email with their background information.

There were twenty-one potential applicants who reached me through email and sixteen of them attended the pre-interview. I arranged a meeting with the individuals and found six of them were graduate international students so they did not meet the degree-type criteria. I explained the study in more detail, asked about their persistence and

reliability in the research study, and indicated all ethics associated with participating in this research project. In addition, I have asked them whether they would agree to be audio-recorded throughout the whole interview. As the research interviews were conducted during the final exam week, four potential participants did not have enough time for the interviews. Six participants agreed with the schedule for their interviews and I examined their eligibility for the research as the final step in recruiting participants.

Finally, six participants showed up and finished the interviews. According to Stake (1995), researchers can develop more detail from each participant if fewer participants are selected. In this qualitative study, the cases to be analyzed are six undergraduate international students enrolled in the Winter semester, 2017, at the University X. The small size of the participant pool helps me develop an in-depth understanding of each participant.

Table 1. Research participants and their nationalities.

	Nationality			
Participant	Chinese	Caribbean	Nigerian	Indian
Participant A	O			
Participant B	O			
Participant C		O		
Participant D		O		
Participant E			O	
Participant F				O

Participant A. At the time of the study, Participant A was a senior undergraduate international student in her last semester. After graduating from high school in her home country, China, she then attended a program hosted by a local university. The program offered preparatory courses specifically for studying abroad. While talking about why she chose to leave China and study in Canada, she said the decision was solely made by her parents.

> I didn't get a really good mark in the entrance exam of universities in China, and I cannot go to a famous university…We chose Canada because tuition fees, which is lower than the States, immigration policy is really good, is easier, and better education quality… My parents helped me made the decision to study abroad. I don't care that much where I study actually (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant B. Participant B also comes from China. At the time of the study, she was in her second semester of co-op and was working for a local company related to her major. During her high school summer vacations, Participant B spent her time studying English and about different cultures. She decided to study abroad after discovering her enthusiasm in English in high school, and it was a mutual decision between her and her parents.

Participant C. Participant C is from Caribbean as a descendant of immigrants from Haiti. She had Canada and America as options to finish her undergraduate study according to the scholarship she received from her home country. She told me she chose Canada because the tuition fees are much lower than that of American universities'. She

specifically chose University X because it had the lowest tuition fee in comparison to the other Canadian universities she had applied to.

> I actually have the State and Canada as options as I went to English schools.
> But the tuition fee is much cheaper here, so I chose her. Yeah I made a list of
> the all the tuitions, and to be honest, [University X] is cheaper, but still, it's a
> lot (Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant C mentioned that her reason for choosing University X was that they offered a great program in her major.

Participant D. Participant D is also from the Caribbean, and she chose to become an undergraduate international student in Canada while supported by her parents. Before she transferred to the University X, she spent two years studying in another university in another province of Canada. During her interview, she has compared her former university and current university in Canada through academic aspects and the social environment of the two cities where the universities are located. Her academic and social experience piqued my interest and her confidence impressed me during the pre-interview.

> Participant C impressed me a lot with her confidence, I can tell she is a very
> strong girl. During our conversation in the pre-interview, she told me that part
> of the reason she wanted to participant in my research is she wants to share a
> different point of view, undergraduate international students are not always in
> desperate need of help, some of them are very strong, are able to solve all
> kinds of problems and issues, there are a lot of positive parts (Field notes,
> pre-interview, April 7, 2017).

Participant E. Participant E is a first-year undergraduate international student from Haiti. Studying in the UK was his first option, but in the end, he finally picked Canada due to low tuition fees. A close friend of his, who had already been attending a university in Canada, provided him with details about Canadian schools and the lifestyle, which appealed to him. In addition, the participant also mentioned other particular reasons why Canada was an attractive country to study in, and what future goals he had in mind. Here is Participant E explaining:

Ontario has the best weather. Here (Canada) is far more developed than Nigeria, technology, resources to academic knowledge and access to Internet. I really appreciate that I have the chance to study and live here. My major is considered very strong in University X and I hope to get a good job and a bright future. I plan to continue studying in master program and apply for permanent residence, help my siblings to come over and study and live here (Participant E, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant F. Participant F is an undergraduate international student from India. After four years of studying and living in Canada, she is in her last year of university. Oddly and somewhat surprisingly, I came to understand that she chose Canada randomly as her country to start her undergraduate degree. Yet, despite her somewhat random method to choose a country to study in, at the end of the day she was very happy, given the way the politics of different countries can shape international students' choices. Here is Participant F explaining:

Thank god I didn't go to the [United] States, you know the policy under Donald Trump now is horrible. Students can't study and work the same time.

Cause I am not on scholarship, I have to work to at least get some money

(Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Pre-Interviews

After selecting the six participants, I set up a pre-interview with them, providing information regarding the detailed procedures and the purpose of the study. I also told them that my study required participants to sign a consent form. In the consent form, participants were made aware of the nature of the study and I also informed that if they decide to withdraw, all the related raw data will be destroyed immediately. Also, participants were able to withdraw when they feel uncomfortable or insecure, and had the right to refuse answering the interview questions if they deemed them as being inappropriate.

Interviews

Throughout the interview process, I used open-ended questions to allow participants to speak of their experiences in a complete manner. As a qualitative researcher, I was not in any way interested in generalizing the findings of my study, but much more interested in telling the participants individual stories, in all their richness and depth.

During the whole interview, as an interviewer, I explained the purpose of the study to the participant and plans for the collected data by reading the abstract of my research study. In the beginning, participants may feel hesitant to answer questions from a stranger and in turn may hold back their true feelings. I tried my best to design efficient interview procedures to ensure that participants felt safe and comfortable. I avoided asking private questions and assured the participants that none of their personal information would be disclosed. Additionally, I followed the listed questions and kept the length of the

interview to a structured time frame. However, when some of the interviews were taking longer than I had expected, the participants were respectfully asked to move on at a certain point. Some of the participants were giving brief answers, so I asked follow-up questions to encourage them to provide more details. Additionally, I was respectful and courteous to my participants informing them of any services they may require. I prepared water, coffee and tea for every participant. I had created an environment in which participants would feel free to express themselves by actively listening to their comments and concerns. At the end of each interview, I sincerely expressed my gratefulness to the participants for their time, effort, and overall assistance with the research study. All the participants received a 15-dollar Shoppers Drug Mart Card as a gift.

Interview Questions

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself before you came to Canada? What's your nationality, cultural background, education background and family background?

2. What made you choose Canada? Why this country specifically? Do you have any pre-knowledge about this country before studying here?

3. How are you adapting academically so far? Did you come across any kind of academic issues at first? And how did you deal with it?

4. How are you adapting socially so far? Can you describe what kinds of social activities you have taken part in? To what degree do you feel the differences in the cultures?

5. Could you tell me something about your program? Are there more female or more male students in your major? What's you gender experience from the academic aspect?

6. What's your gender experiences as a male/ female in their home country and

Canada? Do you feel any differences being a male/ female?

7. Do you have any gender experiences or personal stories related to gender that you

would like to share?

Challenges and Solutions

Before conducting the interviews, I had considered some challenges which may arise

with recruiting participants. These challenges include not being able to recruit enough

participants as there are fewer international students throughout the winter semester in

comparison to fall. Furthermore, it may be difficult to find willing participants, ultimately

decreasing sample size. However, I have received more than twenty emails from potential

participants who expressed their interest in participating in the research and finally six of

them participated in the research.

Another concern that came to me before the interviews was that the participants

may decide that the study is time consuming. The interviews for each participant lasted

more than forty-five minutes. During the final examination period, it may be difficult for

the participants to devote time into the interviews and study. To combat this challenge, I

allowed the participants to arrange the meeting time for the interviews to be conducted.

To make this process easier and more accommodating, I had arranged my schedule to be

as flexible as possible.

It is possible that some participants were not being completely honest with their

feelings and thoughts during their interviews. I had tried my best to create an easy-going

environment for them, reducing any performance anxiety they may feel.

Lastly, the language spoken between the participants and I was primarily English, which may not be the participants' first language. I brought an on-line dictionary during the interview to aid with any questions that may occur. Luckily, all the participants' English is fluent and clear enough to be understood. As for some words that the I didn't know, I had politely asked the participants to spell them out into take more detailed side notes.

Data Collection

Yin (2003) recommends six types of information: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts as data collection sources in case study practices. As illustrated in the introduction part of this paper, the main purpose of the research is to explore how gender, along with other factors shape undergraduate international students' life in academic and social aspects, the participants are individuals with different backgrounds, these backgrounds include race, ethnicity, social class, cultural and religious belief. The research data was collected from six participants and their personal gender experiences studying at University X and living in Canada.

Throughout each interview, I audio-recorded all dialogue between myself and the participants. I have ensured the audio-recording machine is of high quality so the dialogue was recorded clearly and properly. In addition, I prepared a protocol paper with the interview questions and follow-up questions for each interview and took notes of the responses of the participants. The notes were the key words or key points of the participants' answers. Only the researcher and the supervisor had access to the raw data.

I first familiarized myself with the data by reviewing my side notes about the participant and listening to the recordings. Then I transcribed all the audio-recordings, organized and indexed data for easy retrieval and identification. To protect the privacy of the participants, I have made the sensitive data anonymous. All the data files were recorded using Microsoft Word. The document is stored on my personal laptop which is password protected and locked in a secure drawer. Access to the files was only granted to the myself and the supervisor. After finishing all the transcripts and double checking the material, raw data and audio-recordings were permanently deleted or destroyed.

Data Analysis

Using a case study as the approach to this qualitative research, I interpreted and understood the data to have a phase of description and finally began building towards a theory of the process. As a researcher, I followed Creswell's (2007) opinion about coding, "Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information" (p. 186). I coded the data and then formed a discussion of the data and combined this coding into larger categories and themes. After re-coding the data, I developed the provisional categories and explored the relationships between these categories. After refining the themes and categories, I presented the development of theory and the incorporation of pre-existing knowledge. I then tested the theory against the data and finally reported my findings, including excerpts from original data if appropriate. Additionally, I visualized and presented the data by creating a comparison table that will be used to formulate a discussion.

Limitations

The first limitation is the small sample size of my research. I had six research participants from one university in Ontario. This is a limitation as the results may not apply to other universities, and it does not allow for external validity or generalizability of results.

The second limitation of the study is that my research participants were selected based on who replied to my recruitment email. Some other races, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds may not be covered in the research. This factor did not allow for all the international undergraduate students to be represented in my study.

The language barrier posed the third limitation to the study. The language used in the research study was English, which is not the first language for most of the participants. It potentially limited the study's scope in terms of the participant involvement, as they were not able to express themselves accurately.

The last limitation to this study is my relationship with the participants. When I first met the six research participants, I was a stranger to them. Although we share one same identity as international students, they may not have felt comfortable enough to express their true feelings during the interview. There is opportunity that the participants did not reveal their true feelings and thoughts during the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, I conducted the interviews after obtaining the Tri-council ethics certificate and completing the research ethical review procedure. My research study has achieved a successful ethical review from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University X. In the following section, I am going to introduce my ethical considerations in designing and conducting this research study.

I indicated that there would be a low level of risk associated with my research, all interviewees were consenting adults, who are not vulnerable and can make formal decisions, and there are no physical risks associated with my research.

I conducted the research and collected the research data inside the University X. The participants all received a flyer containing details of the research (the interviews were audio recorded) with an introduction and purpose for the research along with my contact information before completing their interviews. They were required to sign a consent form clearly indicating that they can withdraw any time before the interview finished. If they decided to withdraw, all the related raw data would be destroyed immediately. Additionally, they acknowledged that they can refuse to answer any interview questions they deem to be inappropriate.

Only the researcher and the supervisor had access to the raw data. To protect the privacy of the participants, I made the sensitive data anonymous. I changed any names, including the participants' names that may arise during the interviews. The name of the university and majors related to the research are not mentioned. All the data files were kept locked in a secure drawer. Only the researcher had access to the files. After transcripts had been made and the material had been double checked, raw data and audio-recordings were permanently deleted. I only kept the email addresses of the six participants until the completion of the research, at which time they receive the feedback of the research through the email. Contact information was stored together with the transcripts in a secured drawer. After the thesis dissertation, their emails were permanently deleted.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This qualitative study was conducted with six participants, all of whom were undergraduate international students enrolled in the 2017 Winter Semester at University X, a mid-size Ontario university. The data was gathered for this research study through individual semi structured, face-to-face interviews. This chapter will describe and analyze the data collected from the in-depth interviews, and offer up to the reader emerging themes and sub-themes.

The first section of this chapter presents each participant's experiences prior to, and during their stay in Canada, with a focus on gender. I explore the participants' gender related experiences in their home countries, within individual families, and during academic and social life in Canada. The next section of this chapter identifies reasons participants felt lonely in their academic and social lives in Canada. In the third section, I examine different kinds of academic struggles the participants faced. The final section includes a discussion around financial concerns. Most participants felt various forms of financial pressures during their stay in Canada. To protect the participants' identities, letters are used in place of their names.

Gender Experiences Before Canada

Each of the participants completed high school in their home country before applying to undergraduate programs in Canada. Except Participant A, the other five participants started their university career right after graduating from high school. Participant A did a one-year program in Sichuan University (Chengdu, China) before she started her

undergraduate degree in Canada. Individual experiences of growing up in their home countries affected their gender experiences. It is this this topic that I turn to now.

Experiencing Gender in Their Home Countries. Participant A was born and raised in Chengdu, a second-tier city in the southwest part of China. Chengdu is the capital city of Sichuan Province. Her gender experiences growing up were directly linked to the sense of 'being normal.' She explained that in China, there is a common belief that being different will result in being judged, especially for girls. Her definition of 'being different' was deeply gendered in a way that reflected traditional heteronormative gender norms. Here is Participant A explaining:

> For sure I am afraid of being judged, and especially being a girl. It is more
>
> often to be judged by others … I was told that as a woman, at a certain age,
>
> you suppose to accomplish certain things. For example, getting married
>
> before you hit the age of 28 and have your first baby before 30. I don't like
>
> this but meanwhile I don't want to be different and being judged (Participant
>
> A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant A's gender experiences growing up in China certainly reflects patriarchal expectations that many women are confronted with growing up. But the gender expectations, just didn't include issues around early marriage and pregnancy. They also included expectations around what the ideal body for a woman should look like. Participant A provides a personal example:

> I'm super tall and it is kind of rare in my region as most of the girls are very
>
> tiny in height, so I am already different, hmmm. I look like a tall bird walking
>
> on the street (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Prior to coming to Canada, Participant A was clearly faced with a multitude of gender expectations, including being 'too' tall, that shaped her life. Of course, being considered socially too tall for a woman, isn't necessarily unique to China. The fear of tall women is also found in other parts of the world, where the expectation is that 'real' men are taller (symbolically more powerful), than 'real' women who should be smaller (symbolically less powerful). Gender-based expectations around height preferences within the context heterosexual relationships, in China or North America, typically adhere to societal norms, where the man is expected to be taller than the women (Yancey & Emerson, 2016).

In a related way, Participant B, also from China, told me about her gendered experiences in high school that reflected similar patriarchal norms found in Participant A's testimony. She mentioned that in the area of China where she grew up, men were expected to be the leaders. She explained that in this traditional way of thinking, men are supposed to be leaders and women are considered to be natural followers, or at least take on secondary roles. When it came to issues of leadership and gender and gender relations, Participant B told me the turning point of her life was when she felt inferior based on gender in high school when she was running for elected office, and hit the proverbial glass ceiling:

> I remembered it was in high school, I was running for the president of the
> Student Union. Although I did pretty well, much, much better than the other
> male participants, there is a tradition that the president is meant to be male
> student. I thought I could break the traditions but I failed. My teacher told me

straight forward, 'forget it, you'll be the vice president.' I felt really upset and

kept thinking what's wrong with this tradition (Participant B, personal

interview, April 11, 2017).

Not surprisingly, Participant B described her gender experience as unpleasant and

that it somehow damaged her confidence. She started to question herself during other

competitions, especially when her competitors were boys. She worried that no matter

how much effort she put forward, the result would likely be influenced by patriarchal

norms that conflate leadership with heteronormative, white masculinity.

The conflation of leadership and masculinity of course is not unique to China.

Patriarchal beliefs about leadership, in a similar way, are also found across most of the

globe, including North America. People in general associate men with high ranking

leadership positions, whether that be a CEO, a President or a Prime Minister. Women

worldwide face a significant gender barrier when they attempt to secure leadership

positions. Although women are no longer explicitly banned from leadership positions,

Catalyst (2008) points out that they are still drastically underrepresented in upper levels

of organizational management. Along with blatant forms of sexism, Eagly and Karau

(2002) propose in their role congruity theory that women are disadvantaged in leadership

because the leader stereotype overlaps with the male stereotype.

Both Participant C and D came from the Caribbean, and mentioned that the

Caribbean is a country comprised of immigrants and has a diverse cultural background.

They both mentioned that because the Caribbean is so culturally diverse, most families

have varying cultural backgrounds. During the pre-interview, Participant D told me:

The Caribbean has different islands, and a large percentage of the people

living there are immigrants. They have different cultural backgrounds and I

would say it is quite interesting. It's pretty multi-cultural (Participant D, pre-

interview, side notes).

During her interview, Participant C mentioned that the Caribbean was home to many

different cultures. After immigrating from Haiti with her parents, they witnessed the

stark cultural differences between the two regions. For example, in Haitian culture, it is

deemed inappropriate or taboo for a female to become a doctor or for a male to marry a

female doctor.

But from my own culture [Haiti], it's different from here. Like if I want to

become a doctor, back home [in Caribbean] it will be okay, but back in Haiti,

it will be really hard. And it is normal in Canada. So, a lot of difference

considering gender. No man would want to get married to a girl who is a

doctor, because he knows that she won't have time to cook for him or clean

the house (Participant C, personal interview, April 12).

Participant C highlights some of the prevailing gender expectations found in her

home country of Haiti. In this particular case, based on her testimony, many women are

still expected to complete most of the domestic labor, cooking and cleaning and

childcare. Of course, my feeling is that this would also likely lead to Haitian women

having to do a 'double day' if they aspired to enter the labour force, working two jobs,

one at home and one at work.

Participant E is from Nigeria. In our interview Participant E told me that even

though there are some people in Nigeria who believe that women are supposed to take on

responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning, these old traditions are gradually being replaced by the concept that men and women have equal rights as society develops. He said:

It [the old concept] definitely still exists in our country, but I have seen improvement. More and more girls are chasing their academic career and fight for their own rights. I think witnessing these changes and improvements are the most part of my gender experiences (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Participant E's view is more likely aspiration than reality, and in fact borders on simply being naïve. Women in Nigeria, while making some advances toward equality in light of increased urbanization, are still deeply marginalized economically, socially and politically (Nwosu, 2012). Obioha (2009) also points out that in typical traditional society countries such as Nigeria, the gender belief is that the role of women starts and ends with running of the home, and nothing more.

Participant F is from a southern city in India. She admits that women are discriminated against and treated unfairly in her country compared to men. For example, like many other patriarchal contexts across the globe, women in their country often feel not safe when they dress in certain attire that is deemed inappropriate by men. In a similar way, Participant F feels that she would not be able to walk alone late at night as a woman. It is far too dangerous, and far too open to male violence such as sexual assault. According to the National Crime Records and Ministry of Home Affairs (2012), India's National Crime Records Bureau reported that over 244,000 crimes were committed against women, such as rape, kidnapping and molestation. Dutt (2012) points out that

public forms of sexual harassment continue to be prevalent and not always reported to the police. As a result, the prevalence of sexual violence and less opportunities for women has led gender experts to rank India near the bottom of G20 nations on gender equality (Bennhold, 2012).

Participant F's gender experiences in her home country were varied and complex, but she easily found some concrete examples to illustrate her point. Clearly, central to her gender experiences was the notion that women are not only subservient to men, but also considered to be men's property. Here is Participant F explaining:

> Living in my home country (India), women's gender role is considered as taking care of the family through giving birth, cooking and cleaning. Some traditional families believe that women should not work and have a career, they should focus on their husbands and kids. Women are the property of men (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Participate F also spoke very carefully about the experiences of being a woman in India, in a way that demonstrated how they need to be constantly aware of their circumstances and situation in order to be physically, psychologically, emotionally safe from male violence. Here is Participant F:

> Growing up in my home country, women have to obey many social disciplines and regulations, violating them may put yourself into a dangerous situation. As a girl living and growing up in India, it is very important to know how to keep myself safe. For example, if I want to go out during evening time, I will dress properly and ask my brother or father to accompany me. If I dress inappropriately (like in short jeans or T-shirt) and be out alone

in the evening, it is highly possible that I will be in danger. The attacking and

harassing women still happens in the country. So, I have to be more cautious

living as a woman (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

The six participants all had different life experiences growing up in their home

countries, yet at the same time gender as expressed by patriarchal relations in the form of

attitudes and beliefs profoundly shaped their lives. The gender-based expectations from

their home countries, such as height preference, leadership positions, family roles, have

established various gender barriers to the participants. In the next part, I am going to

explore the participants gender experiences within their families.

Experiencing Gender within Individual Families. Participant A is from a higher

middle-class family in the context of China. In light of the one-child policy, she is an

only child. Her father works for the government and her mother owns a company. When

she talked about her parents, she described them as traditional Chinese parents. Her own

explanation for this term is:

> [My] parents focus a lot on my study, they generally think study, maybe is the
>
> most important thing in the world. Well, at least during my teenage years, I
>
> was told to study harder and harder. They wish that I can accomplish a higher
>
> level of education than them. I think they have a Bachelor's degree… they
>
> want me to get a Master's degree. They also taught me to respect others…
>
> Just be kind of normal… don't be special, don't be different from others.
>
> Don't stand out (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

From my perspective as a Chinese born and raised person in my middle twenties,

'traditional Chinese parents' usually refers to some common characteristics that some

Chinese parents share, such as focusing on their children's academic performance, being strict about children's personal life choices, and hoping that they become respectful and obedient. This also seems to reflect the views held by Participant A's parents.

At the same time, her parents also told her that as she is a girl, she will have different responsibilities than if she was a son. Her parents have a deeply gendered view about what it meant to be a boy and what it meant to be a girl. For example, Participant A was told by her parents that she doesn't need to take on a lot of significant and meaningful responsibilities, such as taking care of the whole family in a financial way or making major decisions. Those kinds of responsibilities were gendered male. She shared with me what her parents kept telling her overtime:

> You are a girl, so you don't need to take more responsibility. If you are a boy,
> we [her parents] would ask you to do more things… like your uncle and aunt
> requires your cousin to do. You only need to take care of yourself (Participant
> A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant A told me that her gender experiences in her own family started with the comparison between her and her cousin, who is a young man. She gradually realized through this kind of comparison that based on whether you were a boy or girl, you would receive different expectations from the family in a way that privileged boys and men.

Participant B is from a middle-class family, her parents both have a university education, and currently both work for the government. Her parents provided her with a very different set of gender expectations growing up. She described her parents as very open minded and extremely supportive when it came to gender and other matters. They sent her to study English in kindergarten and discovered her enthusiasm for English.

They encouraged her to practice English with a foreign teacher, take part in all kinds of English competitions, and study abroad. Her gender experiences inside her family were centered on the idea that 'girls can be as good as boys', and as odd as this may sound, used an American example to set the gender norms. Here is Participant B explaining:

> My parents always use the example of Hilary Clinton [Former American First Lady and American Presidential Candidate] to encourage me … they believe that girls can at least be the same as the boys, maybe not better than boys, but at least the same (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

Participant B considers herself very competitive due to her gender experiences in her family. She receives love and support from her parents, along with other family members. Although, she had some negative gender experiences from her high school. For example, she felt disappointed and less confident after her failure in running for the President of the Student Union in her high school, as she attributed this failure to the traditional gender-based view that men are meant to be the leaders. She rebuilt her confidence through the support of her parents. She told me that her parents gave her a lot of support after she was treated unfairly in a high school election.

> My parents definitely played an important role in this [rebuild my confidence], they give me a lot of confidence, kept telling me to ignore the traditions [men are meant to be the leaders], it is wrong … focus on improving myself and get better (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

Participant B summarized her gender experience inside her family as a 'pleasant experience' but in a way, that also demonstrated how some families are active in resisting

patriarchal gender norms. Her parents and other family members never treated her

differently because she is a girl and always supported her. Although, her circumstances

may not be as straightforward as she thinks, as she also mentioned that she also worked

hard to prove herself that she can be as good as boys. Boys rarely, if ever, have to prove

they are as good as girls.

Participant C was born in a middle-class Haitian family. Her parents are originally

from Haiti but immigrated to St. Maarten during their late twenties. They had to drop out

from school to take care of their families after graduating from high school. Influenced

by the traditional Haitian culture which is deeply patriarchal, Participant C's father

believes that women (wife and daughters) in the family are expected to take care of all

the housework such as cooking and cleaning. Her gender experience inside the family

began with her skepticism towards her father's ideas.

> My dad would wake me up at 7 am and tell me to help my mom with
>
> breakfast. He himself never cooked or helped clean the house. He would
>
> come home after work and throw his shoes and socks everywhere waiting for
>
> my mom to reorganize them. My mom is taking care of all the family stuff
>
> and my dad tried to convince me that it is all women's responsibility
>
> (Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Despite her father's insistence on maintaining traditional gender norms, Participant C

kept questioning his patriarchal ideology and gradually began to challenge it, pointing out

to her father in clear terms the injustice found in the way domestic labor is distributed in

their household. Participant C explains:

Once I came back from school and went straight to my room. Locked the

door and started to concentrate on my studies. Later that day, I told my dad

that I don't think women should take responsibility for all the housework.

From my point of view, men and women should share the responsibility

(Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant C can be clearly seen developing a critical lens when it comes to issues of

gender and gender relations at home in the Caribbean. Her experiences with her father

are no longer taken for granted, but rather appear to be under scrutiny in a way that

undermines the patriarchal advantages her father seems to have enjoyed over time.

When it came to her early, home life Participant D spoke lovingly about being from

a very open-minded family, and speaking how they are very supportive. She described

her gender experiences with her family as equal and free. Reflecting a sense of freedom,

she was provided by her parents, she was able to choose her academic career and pursue

her future dreams as she saw fit:

I have a younger brother and growing up in my family, I never felt being

different as a girl. My parents always treated us equally and they supported

me unconditionally. They gave me the freedom to make my own decisions,

well, if I have reasonable arguments (Participant D, personal interview, April

12, 2017).

Participant E comes from a middle-class family from Nigeria. His parents are both

well-educated. He has a big family with four other siblings and close relatives. He is the

second child but the first son in the family. His parents told him that as the first son in the

family, he had to take more responsibility such as taking care of his siblings and

supporting his parents in the family business. They believed that as the first male child in the family, Participant E will be the leader of the family in the future. Emile (1996) has observed that in Nigeria, people live in a male-dominated society where the male folks continuously and persistently relegate the female to the background. For example, the male child is encouraged to go to school, while the female child is given out in marriage at an early age. Of course, when a male child is given these sorts of responsibilities and obligations, he also secures an enormous political, economic and social benefits that the girls in the family do not receive.

Participant F is from a middle-class family with very supportive and loving parents. And, despite the fact that her parents are very traditional, they gave her the freedom to plan her academic and work career. Here is participant F explaining:

> My father doesn't believe that women should get married and have no career.
> He wants me to have my own career, but also hopes that I get married before
> a certain age. He has the traditional part, but also part of the open minds, he
> wants me to be able to stand on my feet, and be independent. He educated me
> to respect my home country, to respect people, and be well mannered
> (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Participant F's experience with her father when it comes to gender reflects the contemporary view that many fathers hold when it comes to your daughters. Fathers, on the one hand, have expressed support and desire to provide education for their daughters, to be independent, yet at the same time adhere to traditional heteronormative gender standards such as being married.

The six participants all experienced gender differently in their individual families. Their gender experiences are strongly shaped by their parents' ideas and views. Participant A, C and F's father all offered support to provide education for them, though at the same time required them to follow the traditional gender standards such as being married and having children before a certain age. Participant B and D's parents supported their daughters with an open-mind in the families, and both participants believe that they have the equal rights as men. Except Participant E, the rest of the participants have all studied and lived in Canada for over three years, they have had numerous lived experiences in Canada. In the following part, I am going to introduce the participants' experiences involved with gender during their stay in Canada.

Gender Experiences in Canada

Let me spend a minute to refresh our conceptual view of gender, before I talk about the participants' experience with gender in Canada. To recap, I view gender as a historically, socially and culturally produced social structure, accomplished through day-to-day interactions (Butler, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1991). During these human interactions, people establish, contest, revise the meaning of gender, and develop their corresponding expectations (McGivern & Martha, 2013). With this understanding of gender established, I begin with exploring the participants' experiences in the Ontario University.

Experiencing Gender in Academia. During the interviews, the six participants all talked about their experiences involved with gender through their daily interactions studying at the University X. Below, I highlight the major themes.

"Too many boys in my major." Participant A told me that she is studying in a major that is comprised of mostly men, and only around 15% of the students are women. She told me that at the beginning of her studies in Canada, she was worried as most of her classmates were men. She felt that she received more attention as she belongs to the minority group of the gender in the class:

> I definitely received more attention as a girl in my major… Being late for class and can't find seats at the back of the classroom is a nightmare for me, because I have to walk through the room in front of the whole class and my professor will definitely remember me because there are only a few girls! You can pin point so easily (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

She told me that she expects to cooperate with girls on the class projects every semester but always ends up working with mostly the men:

> I understand it is sort of tradition that in my major and also the related industry, there are more boys than girls. But to me, it's more fun to have a good mix of male and female classmates. In that case, no one needs to feel that they belong to the minority of gender…it is more interesting to work and study with mixed gender (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant E is also in a major where over 85% of the students are men. He once joined an academic program in collaboration with high school students, and was amazed after seeing so many women in the competition. The women were all interested in applying to the same major as him when the time came to apply for universities.

However, he told me that some of them were worried or concerned that the major would be a male dominant major and the companies for internship will be a bit bias against women. Of course, the women were right in being concerned about companies and the way in which many of them are shaped by men's domination. Corporations across the globe have a long history of preferring men over women when it comes to hiring practices. Though societies change over time, some gender stereotypes remain firmly in place. One of these are that men, compared to women, are more prominent and competent in the workforce. Beede et al. (2011) states that gender disparities are more evident in some fields in the workforce, such as science, technology, engineering and math fields. In addition, women are still strongly under-represented in business and corporate positions requiring strong leadership skills (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008). According to Bilimoria and Buch (2010), hiring and promotions biases that favor men over women are also evident in higher education.

Yet, after reflecting on these thoughts, Participant E started to comprehend the gender experiences he was going through. He elaborates his feelings as:

> To me, I don't think who you are and what you are able to do should be based on gender. Gender discrimination occurs often in our life and it is something people should work on. When I was in that program, I could tell those high school girls were a bit scared. I really hope that I can see more mixed gender in my major and stop spreading the rumors about gender inequality in my major. It is not true because the girls in my major have told me they were treated equally (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Participant E's comments reveal numerous issues not just facing international students, but students in general. For example, Participant E suggests that gender discrimination should be something that "people" work on. There is very little in his comment that speaks to the issue of men's privileged position relative to women. There is no recognition by Participant E that addressing issues of patriarchy, that becoming much more aware of how gender shapes the lives of women and girls, is a men's leadership issue. Women across the globe have been working hard to address issues of gender inequality, it is now men, not people, who need to become much more active in addressing issues of gender discrimination. So, with Participant's E's comment in mind, it is important to remember, that some men, who are also international students also come into the university context with patriarchal notions of gender.

Participant F also mentioned that she received more scrutiny as one of the few girls in her major. She felt that this kind of unnecessary scrutiny arose from her gender. And she told me that since there are only a few girls in the class, people tend to make comparisons between these girls and she felt that she is being judged by the way she dresses.

> As soon as I enter each classroom, I feel the eyes in me. There are only a few girls in the class and sometimes I don't go class that often, so every time I show up, it's easy to be pointed out. I always wear sweat pants and loose t-shirt, especially during exam time. However, other girls dress nicely, which makes me look different. And I can feel that I get more attention for being different in this way (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Participant F's comments highlight how women who enter into traditional male dominated programs are often viewed as not quite 'fitting' in, as they sense the feeling of 'otherness'. Gu (2006) points out that the 'othered experience' may cause tremendous feelings of frustration, unhappiness, isolation and unfairness. The unwanted attention, the close scrutiny that women often feel, reveals that to belong to this community is to be a man. For example, Gherardi and Poggio (2001) show that women in male-dominated work employ the strategy of acting 'like a man' to keep their jobs. To be a woman automatically, then, in these male-dominated spheres construct the person as unusual, as the 'other.'

In addition, it is also surprising that Participant F felt that dressing less stylishly, challenging in a way what women should wear, also brought scrutiny. It is surprising, because in some cases, in particular in male-dominated spheres, women are expected to dress in a way that pleases men. So, when a woman choosing to dress in a nontraditional way when it comes to adhering closely to notions of femininity, they are placed under scrutiny by men. One of the prevailing themes that stood out in my research, is that international students who chose to enter into male-dominated spheres came to the conclusion that they were disadvantaged by being women, because companies and corporations prefer to hire men. It is this theme that I turn to now.

"They prefer boys." Participant B shared her gender experiences in her academic Co-op program with me. Before she applied for the Co-op program, she was told by her senior classmates that the companies prefer boys over girls. The Co-op programs offered by her department has a list of companies which hire co-op students as full times interns. From Participant B's personal discovery, she found male co-op students have a higher

chance of getting employed. She then felt a bit worried but also curious about the

reasons. During one of her interviews, she asked the HR about the reasons directly. She

shared the HR's answer with me:

> She [the HR] told me that they prefer male interns because they've found
>
> through experiences that female and male students have different reactions
>
> when they meet problems. When some problems or issues appear out of
>
> expectation during work, and the manager is away, females may feel afraid to
>
> make changes and make the decision, feel afraid to make mistakes and
>
> choose to be conservative. Males are more 'flexible', they change while
>
> change happens (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

Faced with blatant seism, Participant B told me she is still confused about this

answer and feels a bit angry. She doesn't understand why the HR simple linked

'conservative' and 'inflexible' with female interns. She feels that this 'conclusion' lacks

supporting evidence, and involves bias. However, her personal gender experience proves

that girls can be as good as boys.

> I got a job after all. Twice, actually. I am on my second semester of
>
> internship. So, it proves that you just have to be stronger and better
>
> (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

"I haven't sensed the differences." Participant A, Participant C, and Participant D

all told me that they are treated fairly by the professors and students. They hadn't noticed

differences in how girls and boys were treated in their majors. Though Participant A

initially had some concerns that she may be treated differently as a girl.

I was concerned at first I may be treated differently by the professors and my

peers as a girl. However, I am now in my last year and I can't even think of

one little thing that I was treated [differently]. The professors are all very fair

to every student, and my peers… they never see me different as I am a girl.

This feeling is kind of cool (Participant A, personal interview, April 10,

2017).

Experiencing Gender in Social Life. Five out of six participants told me that they

are undergoing gender-related experiences within their Canadian social life. All of them

noticed the differences between their home countries and Canada through their personal

gender experiences, and freedom seems to come up in most of the participants' answers.

"It is different from my home country." Participant A mentioned that growing up in

China, she was afraid of being judged as a girl. She was worried about being different

from others. However, living in Canada gives her a feeling of 'being free', as she thinks

Canadian people seldom judge. As I have introduced in the Literature Review chapter,

Participant A may have encountered a certain stage of the culture shock, the honeymoon

stage. During this stage, the new culture is seen in a romantic way and people may be

fascinated by the new culture as there is differences between their own culture and the

new one. She told me that she was amazed by the diversity, acceptance, and integration

of the Canadian society.

To be honest, I am quite surprised at first. Here girls with big sizes are

confident to try different style of clothes too. This is so different from China.

A girl can be judged for being fat or having a unique style of outfit. I feel

more free living here, and I won't be judged for being one of the kind

(Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant A told me that she experiences gender equality living in Canada, she realizes that gender inequalities still exist here, but she has sensed large differences between her home country and Canada.

Participant B also told me that she found she has more freedom to try different things while living in Canada. She felt being restricted in some ways when she was in China due to the existence of stereotypes or prejudice against women. She shared with me her experience of taking pole fitness classes:

In China, some people will hold their own views and refuse to change. For example, pole is considered as something erotic in the old traditional way of thoughts in China. I would never even dare to learn pole or tell people I am learning it though I know it is not like that. However, in Canada, I feel free to try this 'wild' activity and challenge myself! Of course, I was still a little concerned at the beginning, but after I told people around me and explained to them, they all understand and being really supportive, these people even includes strangers as sometimes I have bruise from learning pole and it brings some curiosity (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

After living in Canada, Participant F no longer felt the need to worry about her safety when wearing shorts. She has the freedom to choose her own style of outfit as a woman. Additionally, she told me that she was a bit concerned to tell people she drinks alcohol before, afraid that people would judge her in a negative way. However, after a while, she

felt comfortable telling people that she drinks sometimes, as it is not something to be judged for.

> I definitely feel much more freedom here compared to my home country. And I am an adventure type of person. Canada gives me the opportunity to try a lot of new things (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Similarly, Participant C feels the difference between being a woman living in Canada compared to her home country. She found that girls are not expected to take on certain responsibilities or play a specific role. She explains:

> I feel it's quite different here, girls don't have the obligation to do cleaning or cooking, we are free to make our own choices (Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant E also sensed the differences in his gender experience living in Canada compared to his home country. He noticed that the members of each family are not as close as his home country and that the eldest sons are not given more responsibilities or higher expectations.

> I realized that all the kids in the Canadian family are treated kind of equally, you don't have to take care of the whole family after grow up because you are first son, well I can assume that if I grow up here, I won't have the pressure and stress for being the first son (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Participant E feels it is more relaxing for him under the family culture of Canadians.

"I'm being Judged by my friends." Participant F shared her personal experiences from the gym, she feels she is being judged by her male Indian friends when she

exercises there. She told me that she is judged because she chooses to lift weights, which is considered as a masculine activity by her friends:

> They would ask me, 'why are you lifting weights in the gym? Are you trying to be more masculine?' It is really ridiculous… I am not being judged by the Canadians but by these friends who are from the same country, sharing similar cultural background (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

"I think we are all human." Participant D's response differed from the other five participants in her gender experiences. She didn't really put gender into consideration when analyzing her social experiences. Though she knows that there are a lot of people who had experiences involving gender, she feels that people are sometimes too sensitive towards gender issues and that they should not overthink. Compared to her own country, she admits that in Canada, gender is considered as a big topic. However, she has her own understanding of experiencing gender:

> I learned gender-related theories and knowledge through my major, and I know gender-related issues is everywhere, like women who are not paid the same as men of equal employment status… However, everyone is going through issues, makes go through issues too. We are all people. When I come across some difficulties or problems, first I will consider myself as a person, not thinking because I am a girl, I am treated in this way. Because at the end of the day, you are a person, a human being. And I do realize that sometimes people with awful experiences related to gender would become more sensitive about gender and sometimes the feelings hurt them so much that

they can't get away from them (Participant D, personal interview, April 13,

2017).

Loneliness in Academic and Social Experiences

Loneliness is defined as an unpleasant emotional experience that often results from

the disconnection from social networks. As most individuals have an inherent desire for

connections with others, and when the real social connections do not reach their desired

levels, loneliness often occurs. (Wright, King & Rosenberg, 2014). Loneliness is a topic

brought up frequently by the participants during the interviews. All of the six participants

had experienced loneliness in their academic and social life in Canada.

Loneliness in Academic Experience. The feeling of loneliness has become a critical

issue among university students. (Arkar, Sari, & Fidaner, 2004; Lin & Huang, 2012).

Previous research targeted on university students in Canada shows that loneliness has a

negative influence on University students' overall academic performance and educational

engagements (Lin & Huang, 2012; Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015). According to the

research data, four out of six participants mentioned during their interviews that they feel

lonely in their academic life. The feeling of loneliness is also a typical form of culture

shock.

"There are only a few girls in my class!" Participant E told me that in his major,

over 85% of students are boys, it is very common that there are only four or five girls in

an 80-people class. He feels lonely as he hardly knows any girls in the same program. He

explains his loneliness arises from the lack of interaction with female classmates.

I realize that people with different gender always have different ideas about

the things and problems, it is interesting to see these differences. I am a bit

disappointed in my academic life as there are very few girls in my major. I

would like to know more female classmates and work together in the

presentation or project with them. Not only I feel lonely, I am also feeling

lonely for those female students in my major too (Participants E, personal

interview, April 13, 2017).

In Participant F's program, the majority of the students are men. She told me that as

one of the only few women in the class, sometimes she feels isolated. She explains this

feeling of loneliness in detail:

It is so hard to start a conversation with the boys in my class, they are always

talking about the topics they are interested in and major related questions. I

mean, dude, you need to have a life. Don't be a nerd all the time! It is so hard

to social with them (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2107).

Participant F also comes from a major with only a few women. Sometimes she

feels lonely in the class as most of the conversations occur among her classmates are

centered on the major, and among the men.

They are always talking about our 'major related stuff', it is kind of boring

sometimes (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2107).

"I am the only black girl in my class!" This sentence was often brought up by

Participant C during her interviews. She told me that in most of her classes, she is the

only black student in the class. She felt an invisible line representing 'being different'

between herself and other classmates, and she felt left out by the professor sometimes.

Martha Minow (1991) discusses about difference thoroughly in her book "Making All the

Difference." Minow (1991) points out that there are real differences in the world, and

each person differs in countless way from each other. People may feel excluded, degraded or unrecognized because of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, weight, height, or health status. Participant C then shared her story from one of her lectures with me:

> We were having a lecture and I am again, the only black student in the whole classroom. The professor started to talk about veins, and how the color of veins would change when people are feeling excited or nervous. All the other students were looking at their arms and checking the color of their veins. I looked at mine and I couldn't see any of my veins cause the color of my skin. At that specific moment, I feel left out. I know the professor didn't do this on purpose, it is quite a big class and the professor may not even notice me. However, the feeling that I am the only one different sucks (Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Minow (1991) points out that people may feel excluded, degraded or unrecognized because of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, weight, height, or health status. She believed that there are many more differences that people make significant than any of us may note self-consciously. Participant C noticed that her skin colour is different from other students in her class and started to feel extremely lonely. The negative effects of loneliness gradually became evident in participant C's academic scores. She told me that her academic grades weren't ideal during the first semester because she felt lonely.

Participant F also expressed her feelings of loneliness as she is a visible minority in her classes. She sensed that most of her classmates have hesitations to start a conversation with her.

I think it is highly possible that it is my race, I am Indian and most of my

classmates are Caucasians, sometimes I feel that they are even a bit afraid to

talk to me since they believe I have a very different cultural background

(Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

She remembered that one time she was joking with her classmates, and a race-related

joke came up, her classmates were so scared that she would take it seriously. However,

she responded with another joke, thinking her classmates were being too sensitive. Their

sensitiveness towards race reminded her that she was different, creating a feeling of

loneliness.

Loneliness in Social Experience. Five out of six participants strongly expressed

their feeling of loneliness in their social life in Canada, especially when they first started

living here. Some common reasons are the lack of friends, struggling to understand the

cultural differences and being far away from the family.

The lack of friends. Participant A described herself as a shy person when it

comes to socializing. She is not confident enough to talk to strangers, especially using

English. English is not her first language, though she is able to use it for communication,

it is hard to accurately express her feelings. Due to her lack of confidence and aptitude

for language skills, she hardly has any Canadian friends. She feels she is not involved in

any Canadian social life and culture since she only has Chinese friends who share the

similar or same backgrounds. She expressed her thoughts to me:

I keep my social circle pretty much inside my Chinese classmates. I am used

to the lifestyle in China, and it is hard to walk out of my safe zone. But my

social circle is very limited and my comfort zone is very narrow. It is so

lonely when you only have the same kinds of friends, and boring haha. Sorry

my Chinese friends! I didn't focus a lot of on the Canadian culture, and I

definitely need to make more Canadian friends. I would like to know more

but I just don't know how. I don't usually go to a lot of social activities

(Participant A, personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Participant C described her social life as "extremely lonely" during her first few

months living in Windsor. She explained her loneliness in detail:

I came to a city that I knew no one. Every time I go home, I don't have any

friends. All I can talk to is my parents and my sister. I feel like I'm kind of

isolated. It is hard for me to make friends, maybe part of the reason is my skin

color. There a lot of black people from my island, but black people are

minority here. I found that Canadian people always have their own little

group, sometimes high school mates or neighbors or friends since childhood.

They basically do everything together. I only made academic friends during

my first semester, I would discuss with them in the school but after school, I

am back home alone. I don't have any social friends, and I feel very, very

lonely (Participant C, personal communication, April 11, 2017).

Participant E told me that it is not very easy for him to make friends, part of the

reason is he is not really an outgoing person and is a little shy. And he is quite cautious

about making friends, he needs to make sure the person he hangs out with is the same

kind of person as himself before they truly become friends.

I feel a bit lonely sometimes as I don't a lot of friends. I made some friends in

my floor, and also in the school clubs. I don't make friends very easily, I have

to make sure the person is the same type person with me, then I will develop

the friendship (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

A number of participants found difficulty making new friends and joining new social

groups in their new environment. They did not know how to make contact with people

who had similar interests, or how to find out about activities around them. Participants

also indicated that finding and developing quality friendships were hard.

Being far away from the family. All the participants expressed their feelings of

loneliness as they were separated from their family. Being away from a familiar place

without any family or friends made it difficult to adjust to the new culture, causing some

culture shock.

Participant E misses his family in Nigeria every day. Even though he keeps frequent

contact with his family through Skype, he still feels lonely:

It is still different cause they are not actually here with me. I am from a big

family and I have four siblings. All the family members are very close and

supportive to each other. I am used to be surrounded by them so now I am

lonely. Hmmm how to describe it, it is like Christmas every day in my family

(Participant E, personal interviews, April 13, 2017).

The other participants also partially attribute their loneliness to being separated from

their families. As Participant B said:

I know the Internet is so well developed that you can Skype 24/7 if you want,

but they are still not physically here with me (Participant B, personal

interview, April 11, 2017).

"I am the only child in the family". Participant A and B are both from China. Interestingly, they both mentioned in their interviews that part of the reason they felt lonely is that they do not have any siblings, due to the 'One Child Policy.' 'One Child Policy' belongs to the family planning policy of China. It was introduced between 1978 and 1980, to control the growth of population. The policy allowed many exceptions, such as families that are ethnic minorities or have disabled children would be allowed to have multiple children. This policy is controlled by means of political law, and people who didn't obey it, would receive harsh punishment such as high fines. Participant A and B were both born in the 1990s, while this policy was strictly reinforced around China. In 2015, the 'one child policy' began to be formally phased out. Participant B describes her feeling as:

> I am always jealous of those who have siblings. To me, siblings are like your
>
> closest friends and will always support you and understand you. I know my
>
> parents love me and I am grateful that I've got all the love and attention but it
>
> is different. I don't know how to explain this feeling of loneliness but
>
> sometimes I just want to share my secrets with someone except my parents,
>
> and sadly I don't have any (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

"I don't fit into either of them." Participant F specifically mentioned during her interview that sometimes she feels lonely as she cannot find a sense of belonging to a certain group. She came to Canada when she was only 16 and after studying and living here for almost four years, she gradually established her view of life influenced by Canadian culture. Thus, she is different from those Indian students who came to Canada after reaching maturity and keep the traditional way of thinking; but she is also different

from Canadians as she keeps part of the Indian culture and traditions. Though India is a diverse country and its own culture varies from place to place, Participant F told me that some traditional concepts are similar around the whole country, such as people's attitude towards drinking alcohol. She also admitted that her country keeps changing these days and people are getting more open-minded than before. However, she still sensed the difference and she explained her loneliness to me:

> I feel lonely because I don't fit in each side. I can't understand some of the Canadian culture, and don't agree with part of the Indian culture (Participant F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Participant F's answer reflected that her experiences created a sense of loss and confusion about her identity, and it interfered with her ability to build new social relationships. She was struggled to find her own identity and it's very hard to make friends because how can you make friends if you don't know who you are?

Sawir et al. (2008) find that two thirds of 200 international students residing in a Western country reported experiencing problems of loneliness or isolation, especially in the first months of their time overseas. Khawaja and Dempsey (2008) indicate that the international students had less social support, used more dysfunctional coping strategies, and had greater incongruence in their expectations and experiences of university life. In addition, Rienties et al. (2012) point out that the social networks that international students previously had access to may be quite different to those in the host countries, as a result of differences in customs and culture.

Among the six participants, Participant D is the only one that told me that she doesn't feel lonely for the most time. Though she still misses her family in the Caribbean,

she has made friends with different backgrounds through classes and school clubs. She shared her experiences with me:

> Making friends with people isn't hard for me, I don't think it is a problem. Before Windsor, I stayed in Halifax for two years. Compared with Halifax, Windsor is a very multi-cultural city and Windsor people are really friendly and welcome. Halifax always give me sense of distance. Though there are only three or four people from my country live in Windsor, I don't feel I am lonely, instead, I really enjoy meeting different people and get to know their culture (Participant D, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Academic Struggles

Different cultures have adopted a wide variety of methods, philosophies, and styles towards learning (Smith, Whiteside, Blanchard & Martin, 2013). International students studying abroad often face academic expectations that differ from their home country. During the interviews, each of the participants talked about their academic struggles, which occur during their first year of study.

Language Barrier. Brierley and Vechter (2009) believe that the elements of language measured by scores on standardized proficiency tests rarely include the ability to use English effectively as a learning tool in the academic and social culture. Four out of the six participants' first language is not English and they all successfully met the English-language proficiency entry requirement of the University before they studied abroad. Three of them have experienced language-related issues in their academic studies. The rest two participants' first language is English, however, one of them expressed his concern about his strong accent speaking English. During the interviews, I

found that some participants whose first language is not English were making grammar mistakes, which has created difficulties to communicate. Therefore, their incorrect grammar may create the language barriers and result in academic issues.

"Writing is a nightmare to me!" Participant A considered writing as her weakest area of the four categories of English (listening, reading, writing and speaking). She told me that before she started her undergraduate in Canada, most of her English writing practice was targeted for the English Level Tests such as IELTS. IELTS is the International English Level Test held by Cambridge University and its result is accepted by most Canadian Universities as a language proficiency certification. Participant A found the writing in her real academic studies were quite different from writing an essay for a language test. She really struggled at the beginning of her study in the university and it still troubles her now sometimes.

> Writing was like a nightmare for me definitely... In my major, we had to write reports and essays, I would sit in front of my laptop and only type one word in two hours. It is so hard to reduce the interference of my Chinese thought patterns and train English thought patterns in my writing process (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant F also struggles with her writing. Though her major doesn't require a lot of essays, she chose a course called "creative writing" as one language & art course is mandatory to complete her bachelor degree. The course was quite challenging for her as some of the words are difficult to understand and English is not her first language. However, after an unsatisfactory result from an assignment, she was asked by the professor to drop the course. She explained her experience and her feeling in detail to me:

[the professor] thinks it is the best for me to just drop the course. I was so

surprised, I mean, you are a teacher, you should help me pass or just help me.

The professor didn't even ask me whether I need any kind of help. I felt that I

am being discriminated. She is mainly saying just drop the class (Participant

F, personal interview, April 14, 2017).

Participant F admits that she hates writing after this incident happened, she tried to

seek for some help from the university's writing center in the library, but it is a busy

faculty. After being refused by the professor during a personal meeting, she chose to drop

the course and retook another one in the next semester.

"People don't know what I am talking sometimes." Participant B told me that in

her first few semesters, she was worried about those courses which involve in

communicating with other classmates or have presentations. However, these courses are

mandatory in her major. Though her spoken English is gradually getting better, she still

remembers the stress she was going through:

It was an in-class presentation and I panicked. It was my first time making a

speech using English. The former study I received from China didn't pay

much attention on the speaking part, so I am lack of confidence. I was told by

my classmates that sometimes they don't understand what I am talking about

(Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

When I was making the transcript of Participant F's interview, I found that she was

using incorrect gramma, which made it difficult to communicate. She had problems with

some expressions and I had to re-ask the interview questions or ask her to explain in more

detail.

Though English is Participant E's first language, he is going through difficulties communicating using English as he has a heavy accent. This annoys him sometimes as he needs to keep repeating the sentences.

My accent bothers me. Sometimes I am really nervous cause people can't understand me. And it is like a circle, the more nervous I am, the heavier my accent is. I do hope that people can be a bit more patient, as it takes more time and patience to understand my English (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Kuo and Roysircar (2004) report in their studies that international students may have insufficient English proficiency. Though all international students who intend to apply for higher educations in Canada are required to take standard language proficiency tests, sometimes the accuracy of the tests are questioned. Hwang and Ting (2008) points out that Asian students had high test scores but still encountered huge language barriers in their daily communications. Therefore, people have doubted how standard language proficiency test can examine international students' ability in spoken English.

Participant F found her Indian accent has brought her some issues when she first arrived here. She soon realized the importance of English for living and studying in Canada. She then started to learn and practice her English through daily life:

When I first came here, language is somehow a barrier. However, I forced myself to talk in English 24/7, and find every chance to practice it with Canadians. And gradually my English improved a lot, I am very happy when people ask me whether I was born here. It means my English is really good (Participant F, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant F struggled with her accent when she first arrived Canada but she managed to overcome the difficulties and got herself more involved academically and socially living in Canada.

Study pattern and self-consciousness. Coming from different educational backgrounds, many international students find it difficult adapt to the unfamiliar aspects of Ontario education system, such as independent academic research, frequent class quizzes and public presentations (Mori, 2000). During the interviews, participants have expressed their concerns about study and self-consciousness.

"I want to know more about how to study." Participant A told me that before studying at the University X, her academic experience in China was under the "teacher-centered" phenomenon, which means teachers direct all classroom activities and retains full control. The teachers are giving instructions and students normally don't have the chance to say no. In this case, students don't have to worry that they will miss an important topic. However, she found that in her major, it is student-centered in most of her courses.

> Instead of listening to the teachers exclusively, I find that the students and the
> teachers share the focus, and we [interact] quite equally. I have to direct my
> own study. It is pretty struggling for me at the beginning. I don't know how
> to ask valuable questions and also afraid of completing tasks on myself, I
> mean independently (Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant B also completed her high school in China and is used to the teacher-centered education. When she first started school at the University X, she found that she was less experienced in group work.

I even googled the phrase student-centered online to see the difference… and

I found that under this study pattern, group works are extremely encouraged,

students learn important communicative and collaborative skills through

group work. I rarely have group work experience in China, all the

assignments are independent ones and we seldom have projects. I'm really

struggling at first as I don't have any experiences, and plus my major needs

even more group work compared to other majors (Participant B, personal

interview, April 11, 2017).

Participant D found the courses in the University X are structured differently from

home. There are a lot of midterms and finals in her major and it was quite hard for her to

adjust at first.

I studied in Halifax before I transferred to The University X. And the study

pattern here [University of Windsor] is different from my home and Halifax,

and I am still adjusting to it. I wish that we could have some kinds of support

service to help me with how to study well in my major (Participant D,

personal interview, April 13, 2017).

"I have to depend on myself." Participant A told me that during her previous study

in China, teachers usually tell the students what to do step-by-step. However, most of the

Participant A's professors met at the University X did not check the students' progress of

study. She is worried that she does not have enough self-discipline to study.

No one is chasing after us, I have to rely on myself. There are warning signs

from Chinese teachers but there is none here. You totally can be super easy

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and enjoy for most of the semester, and too late to even cry for the finals

(Participant A, personal interview, April 10, 2017).

Participant B realizes the importance of being self-disciplined, she told me that during her first semester, she was still in the study mode from her home country and almost missed an important assignment.

To be frankly, I am really stressed the first semester, no one is after me to push me or remind me that I have an assignment due or mid-term coming soon, and it takes time to adjust to the change. That's the time I started to create my own daily schedule and stick to it. Also I realize that no one is responsible for me study but myself (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

Participant E also realizes the challenge of self-control and self-discipline. He explained in more detail:

You have to keep it up with it all time and it is hard. If you don't work hard from the beginning, it will come back to you eventually. It is different from my high school, teachers will push me though sometimes I don't want to study. I have to be super independent studying here and I can only rely on myself. It is a challenge (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Financial Concerns

Increasing Tuitions and High Living Expenses. Based on the information from the financial department on the school website of the University X, undergraduate internationals students are paying more than twice the tuition compared to domestic undergraduate students. According to 2017/18 Operating Revenue of the University X,

the proforma from the undergraduate international tuition fee section shows a consistent increase from previous years across all institutions in Ontario. In the University X, Business, Engineering, Computer Science and Law undergraduate programs have an increase of 6.5% -8.0% for first year (5% continuing). For the rest undergraduate programs, there is a 4.7% increase for first year (4% continuing). Except Participant A, all the other participants told me about their concerns and pressure of the increasing tuitions fees.

"The tuition fee is increasing every year." Participant B told me that part of the reasons she decided to apply for the co-op program is her financial concern, as she is getting paid by the Co-op companies:

> My parents were paying for my tuition fees and living expenses consistently.
> It is nice for them to have the chance to take a break. For the two semesters in
> Co-op program, I didn't need to tuition fees and my salary is enough to cover
> my living expenses (Participant B, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

She admits that it is still stressful sometimes for her parents to support her financially as the tuition fee is increasing annually.

Participant C is the only one who received scholarship from her home country. However, the scholarship is a fixed number and it is not able to cover all the tuition fees and her living expenses. She received financial support from her parents but it is still a stressing issue for her as she does not want to put pressure on her parents. Participant C explains:

> I always trying to look for summer jobs and part-time work to make some
> money and help out my parents. My younger sister is also studying in the

States under scholarship and my parents have to support her financially too.

In my home country, economics is not as developed as here, 10 dollars per

hour is considered as a decent salary. But prices here is more expensive

(Participant C, personal interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant D, E and F also expressed their concerns on rising tuitions while sharing their academic experiences. They have also admitted that tuition fees have brought them stress and pressure.

"It is expensive to live here." The six participants all considered living in Canada as expensive compared to their own countries. Five of them chose to live off campus as living in the school residence is costly. Participant E is the only one living in the school residence, however he told me:

It is so expensive to live in the school residence and I am definitely moving

out next semester. And my residence comes with the mandatory meal plan, it

is also very expensive to eat in the school canteen and I don't like the food

there (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Additional financial stress comes from international students' living expenses that come out of their own pocket. Sam (2001) points out that while university fees are very high per credit hour, international monetary exchange is rather low especially for those international students who come from third world countries.

Participant A is the only exception, both her tuition fee and living expenses are paid by her parents and she has never worried about her financial situation. She has worked part time with the purpose to keep busy as opposed to making money.

Limited Financial Support and Scholarships. Only one of the six participants

studied under scholarship provided by her home country. Apart from Participant A, the

rest of the participants are searching for part-times jobs to support themselves.

"I am not eligible for the scholarship because I am not Canadian." Participant B

told me that she works hard on her study and expected to receive some scholarships from

the university. From her pre-knowledge, she believes that with higher GPA, it is easier to

receive scholarship. Additionally, she considers herself as a competitive person especially

in academia. She was on the dean's list and searched the university website trying to

apply for some different kinds of scholarship. Then she found some scholarships,

however some of them set the eligible criterions on Nationality so they are not open to

international students.

> I remembered I applied for one scholarship and I have met all the criterions
>
> except my nationality. I have received some small scholarships open to all the
>
> students but it is not really helping much… And normally there will be more
>
> people competing if the scholarship is open to all (Participant B, personal
>
> interview, April 12, 2017).

Participant F received a financial support from the University for $500 dollars per

semester, she said it would help with part of her living expenses but her tuition fee is the

real stress. And she felt that compared to Canadian students, international students

receive very limited financial support, and their tuition fee is much higher than the

domestic students'.

> I asked around and found that actually most of the Canadian students receive
>
> the financial support from the OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program),

the money they receive every semester is enough to cover their tuition and

part of the living expenses… As international students, we are paying double

or sometimes even triple of the tuition, and not having some kinds of

scholarship that really help (Participant F, personal interview, April 14,

2017).

International students may have limited resources to deal with their financial

struggles as some resources, such as student loans and scholarships, may only be

available to Canadian students.

Participant E applied to stay in the university residence, then he found the residence

fee was very expensive compared to living off campus. In addition, he told me that the

meal plan was also mandatory, which he was not thrilled about.

I live in the school residence and I have the mandatory meal plan, which

means I have to spend them at the university café or eatery. The food is

mostly fast food and I get tired of them easily. However, if I didn't finish the

meal plan by the end of the semester, I will lose the money. I feel it is wasting

money if I always go to restaurants to have meals, but I really don't like the

food from the school (Participant E, personal interview, April 13, 2017).

Participant D and F both participated in a program called Work Study offered by the

University X. They work for the university and get paid by hours. The income helps them

financially but the hours of working are limited, so they are looking for other part-time

jobs at the same time. Participant B applied for the same program but got rejected, she

was told that it was already full.

When I got to know this program and applied for it, it is already full. It is a

great idea to combine studying and working together, inside the university.

However, there is also a lot of competition for getting into the program as we

have too many students but limited working positions (Participant B, personal

interview, April 11, 2017).

Except participant A, the rest of the participants are all undergoing financial

struggles. Most of them are working or trying to find a part-time job to release at least

part of the pressure.

Concluding Statements

In the four sections above, I presented the information about the academic and social

experiences engaged with gender, race, ethnicity and other factors of the six participants

through their individual interviews. The six-participating international undergraduate

students shared their experiences reflecting on personal beliefs and practices at their

home countries and during their stay in Canada.

Throughout the whole process of coding and analyzing the research data, I

discovered that all the themes and topics blended together, additionally, they supported

and complemented each other very well. The participants gender experiences from their

home countries differ from the experiences in Canada, as culture background may shape

gender experience in different ways. Different forms and stages of culture shock

appeared in the research findings. Loneliness is one of the main themes of the research

findings and the causes of loneliness are interweaved with gender, race, ethnicity, cultural

conflictions. What's more, the academic and financial struggles that the participants are

undergoing also have a connection with their cultural background and social class. In

addition, the participants were able to compare their experiences related to gender between their home country and Canada.

Although the participants revealed some of the struggles in their social and academic lives, they also shared many positive outcomes they had. For instance, they developed life-long problem-solving skills and some independence which gave them a sense of pride. Their optimism, determination and efforts were blatantly evident.

In the following chapter, I will examine all the research findings in through discussions on different themes and sub-themes, in addition, the key findings from the research will also be further explored.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This research project presents a case study of six international undergraduate students studying in a medium-sized university in Ontario, through qualitative research methodologies. In this chapter, I discuss the findings gathered from the six interviews, the personal experiences and stories shared from the six participants, together with the data gathered from the interviews and literature resources. In addition, I also present how the main topics arising from the research findings relate to the literature and purpose of my research.

Gender Experiences

Using case study as my qualitative research strategy and interview process as the research method, I was able to explore the participants' lived experience entwined with gender as an important part of each participant's academic and social life, both in their home countries and in Canada. Participants expressed their own understanding of gender, how they identified gender, how they sensed the existence of gender roles in their lived experiences, and how they deal with this. From these gender experiences, I also confirmed that gender must be considered as lived experiences, and at the same time both a material and cultural phenomenon. In addition, these lived gender experiences interact deeply with the participants' race, ethnicity, cultural background and social class.

Interacting with different categories. All the participants' gender experiences are entwined with different sociocultural categories, such as ethnicity, race, cultural background, religion belief and social class. None of the participants' stories involved

only gender. Among all these categories, ethnicity and cultural background are the highlights of the research findings.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is a social category of people who identify with each other based on a shared social experience or ancestry. As Clarke (2008) argues, ethnicity involves sharing a common culture, which may be based on a combination of different factors. These factors are usually religion, food patterns, language, national identity, customs, social or political positions within a country's social system. Ethnicity is also known as ethnic group, as it is a method of classification based upon a common trait of the population, such as a shared language or dialect. According to the research findings, ethnicity, together with gender, play important roles in shaping international students' experiences. The gender experiences participants shared with me were often related to their national identity, traditional beliefs from their home countries and social experiences. For example, Participant A and F's lived experiences entwined with gender and ethnicity in the way they dress as a girl in their ethnicity groups.

Cultural Background. Cultural background can be considered as the context of one's life experiences based on ethnicity, race, gender, religion belief and other social factors. In addition, it can be understood as the background of an individual, apart from where he/she stays, which is associated with countries and regions. Cultural backgrounds can be shaped by the family atmosphere or society, it is an important aspect to consider when analyzing individuals, and understanding their thoughts and perspectives. According to the research findings, the six participants described their gender experiences inside their individual families separately from their gender experiences in society. The differences presented in the gender experiences between their individual families and

home countries indicate that cultural background has an important impact on shaping participants' gender experiences. For example, Participant A and B are both from China and can be considered as from the same ethnic group, yet their experiences entwined with gender inside their families were very different. It showed that cultural background differs from one's family atmosphere, education background and shapes their lived experiences. Additionally, participants from different countries have different cultural backgrounds and it has shown in the research findings that their gender experiences were very different.

In Chapter Two, I explored the gender perspective of intersectionality, which is the notion that so many different forces can be included in one study (McCall 2005). These forces made up each participants' identity trough different aspects. Coherent to McCall and Cole, I strongly argue that the perspective of intersectionality gives a thorough understanding of the participants' identities and life experience, as the way people are located is never the result of one set of relations. However, I cannot identify that these categories are mutually constructing each other as some of the categories didn't show up or just slightly appear in the participants' gender experiences. This does not mean some categories are less important, we must remember that it is the interaction of these categories which makes each participant's gender experience complete and unique.

Shaping the Individual's Life Experience. It is evident from the findings that gender, along with other social categories are consistently shaping the participants' life experience and ultimately leading changes in their self-beliefs, such as self-assessment of student leaning. The research study demonstrated that the students often seek for life changes, make personal choices under the influence of their gender experiences. For

example, Participant A always had the feeling of being judged and restricted in her home country, and did not want to be different. She discovered that people are seldom judged living in Canada. She stepped out of her comfort zone to be more social by participating my research after feeling more "free" in her gender experiences in Canada. Participant F did not feel safe to dress in short jeans or walk outside alone late at night in her home country, however, she was able to wear any kind of clothes she wanted without feeling in danger or judged in Canada. This phenomenon seems to be consistent with McCall's (2005) literature on how individual identity can shape students' experiences.

Loneliness in Academic and Social Experiences

The Literature Review section discussed the topic that the feeling of loneliness has become a more and more popular issue among university students (Arkar, Sari & Fidaner, 2004; Lin & Huang, 2012). In this study, we can discover that loneliness is a major theme out from the research findings. Five out of the six participants mentioned that they are undergoing the sense of loneliness during their stay in Canada.

Possible Reasons. As most individuals have an inherent desire for connections with others, and when the real social connections do not reach their desired levels, loneliness often occurred (Wright, King & Rosenberg, 2014). Loneliness is also a typical form of culture shock, and may occur at different stages of culture shock, such as the negotiation and adjustment stage. According to the research findings, the reasons causing loneliness are mainly being the minority, being far away from the family and having a lack of friends. It is common that international undergraduate students arrive in a country with no family members and friends, as most of the participants mentioned during their interviews. This finding suggests that the international undergraduate students have a

higher possibly to experience loneliness compared to local students, as they are physically away from their family, and coming from different cultural backgrounds. I believe that discovering the reasons which cause the loneliness will help me find the effective solutions to help the students with these issues.

Negative Influences. Based on the research findings, experiencing loneliness had a negative effect on the participants. Participants undergoing loneliness told me that it had affected their academic outcomes, limited their social activities, and gave them a feeling of lostness. For example, Participant C admitted that as she became extremely lonely, her academic performance drastically declined in her first semester. These findings also indicate that the influence of loneliness can be extremely daunting and exhausting. Participant A complained about her limited social circles, which made her feel bored from time to time. Furthermore, loneliness as one of the highlights from the research findings gave me a chance to seriously consider how loneliness influences international undergraduate students, and what I should do as an educational researcher.

Possible Solutions. According to the research findings, the participants took multiple ways of actions to solve this problem. Those solutions include pushing themselves to make new friends, attending more social activities and stepping out of the comfort zone. I discovered that the students have the determination to get them out of the loneliness and their effort is worth being affirmed. However, I also discovered their puzzlement, doubt and helplessness through the findings, as Participant F told me, "I don't know what to do, I feel lonely cause I feel I don't belong to any side". This made me think deeply that other than students' self-rescue actions, what can educational administrators, professors and faculty members do to help.

The Academic and Financial Struggles

When reviewing the research findings, I was able to discover different kinds of struggles the participants faced during their stay in Canada, and these struggles mainly focused on academic and financial aspects.

Identifying the Issues. Each participant recognized their struggles and issues during their personal interviews through answering the questions and sharing their stories. Academically, six participants all admitted that their academic path is not always smooth. Financially, other than Participant A, the rest of the participants claimed that they are to some extend stressed by their financial status. They have expressed their frustrations of the issues they were facing.

Academically. English as the official language used in the University X, has risen some issues for the participants. Out of the four parts of English (writing, listening, speaking and reading), the struggles are mainly focused on speaking and writing, as the practice they received before studying in Canada is not suitable or enough for completing the tasks here. As a result, students are not able to accomplish the writing tasks or courses, and stand out in the class during presentations or communications with local speakers. Additionally, the study pattern of University X seems to be different from what the students have experienced in their past academic life, as self-dependence and group work takes an important role in the study. The students were stressed from studying by themselves, and worried about their team work skills.

Financially. The issues mainly focused on the increasing tuition fees every year and the expensive living expenses. Tuition fees for international students are two times that of domestic students'. When tuition fees increase even by a few percent, the costs are

substantial for international students. Their complaints made me worried that the pressure

may have a negative influence on the students' academic and social outcomes. The

participants felt that they barely received financial support from the university by

comparing themselves with the domestic students. Aside from Participant A, the other

five participants all expressed their willingness to find a part-time job or receive

scholarships. The OSAP which was brought up during the interviews multiple times is a

financial aid program that can help people lessen the financial burden of paying for

college or University. It is open to Ontario residents of any age who are Canadian

citizens, permanent residents or protected people who are legally defined as permanently

disabled. The OSAP offers funding in way such as grants and student loans. Grants are

money you do not need to repay, while student loans are money that must be repaid once

you're done school. The OSAP can help students pay for tuition, mandatory students fee,

living expenses and child care. As Participant F mentioned in her interview, her

housemate bought a car using the money from OSAP. International students are not

eligible for OSAP and my research participants were wondering whether there were other

financial aid programs to help them. The finical issue had been brought up by the

participants many times during the interview and it needs to be brought to the forefront.

A Blended Inquiry for Supports. One of the key point summarized from the

research findings is the different kinds of inquiries for support from the participants. They

were asking for help and support, and the inquiry is different from individuals.

Academically. The major inquiries from the participants' academic struggles are

language support and study pattern supervision. However, it differs from each participant

as every individual is different. Through these findings, I found that the participants were seeking more personalized ways to assist with their academic outcomes.

Financially. I have found that five out of the six participants were undergoing financial struggles and seeking support. They were asking for more job opportunities, larger amount of financial assistant and more scholarships open to international undergraduate students. The financial concerns raised by the international undergraduate students need a serious discussion among all the related personnel. One of my original intentions to conduct this research was to help the international undergraduate students and give them a voice to ask for help. After uncovering their stressful financial issues, I strongly suggest that the students' financial issues need to be further discussed.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

In the discussion section, I began with demonstrating that multiple sociocultural categories shape international undergraduate students' academic and social experience in the University X. While gender is important in shaping the international students' experiences, race, ethnicity, cultural background and social class are also important elements of their experience. This idea illustrated the point of views provided by intersectionality, which I used as an analysis approach to my research.

I demonstrated that loneliness has been an important issue influencing international undergraduate students' academic and social life. The past literature also emphasized that loneliness is a typical form of culture shock, and has become a serious issue where more attention is needed. Through discussing the reasons, influence and solutions of loneliness, I provide a full understanding of this highlighted point throughout the research findings.

It is a fact that my analysis of the research findings continues to imply that the international undergraduate students are undergoing academic and financial struggles. Upon investigating and analyzing the research findings, I was able to witness many of the struggles through detailed experiences, and the participants' effort.

The Lived Experiences of the Participants

In this research study, I explored the participants' cultural backgrounds, academic and social gender experiences, and financial concerns through their lived experiences. Through these rich resources, I could better grasp where parts of the participants' beliefs towards gender originated.

Participant A grew up in China as part of a society that commonly holds the idea that women should conform, or they will be easily judged. Not only influenced by this social concept, Participant A's parents ask her to stay normal and not stand out. As a result, Participant A feared being different and chose to stay in her comfort zone as she was afraid of being judged. However, the free atmosphere in Canada eventually encourages her to try to step out her comfort zone and have the courage to be her true self.

Participant B is also from China, she and Participant A have the same ethnicity and similar cultural background, though, participant B's gender experience focuses more on proving women can be as good as men. The traditional social concept suggests men are supposed to be the leaders and women are naturally the followers, while participant B received different opinions from her parents who supported her with the idea that women and men are equal.

Participant C is from the Caribbean islands, where her beliefs about gender arose when she began questioning whether women should be put into certain social roles. Her family's cultural background had a strong impact on her gender perspectives, while the cultural background of her home country doesn't have much influence. Her beliefs were affirmed after studying and living in Canada.

Similarly, participant D is also from the Caribbean islands, her gender belief has been strongly influenced by her individual family and less so from society. Her gender perspective is one that people should consider themselves as human first instead of putting gender differences first, this mainly comes from her previous living environment growing up and her personal experiences.

Participant E is from Nigeria. His gender belief entwined with the question whether men should take more responsibility and carry higher expectations from the family. After experiencing the cultural differences related to gender and family relations in Canada, he started to question his previous beliefs.

Participant F is from India. She started living and studying in Canada at 16 years of age and part of her gender belief has been influenced strongly by the Canadian culture. Although she has received judgements entwined with gender discrimination, she has upheld a positive attitude against those negative judgements. Her gender belief is quite strong and positive.

Every participants' personal experiences, shared stories, individual beliefs, and struggles, all contribute to their overall lived experiences. Every individual's lived experiences made them who they are and reflect their beliefs. Additionally, those lived experiences also present the participants' past, present, and have a huge impact on their

future. As a researcher, I was consistently experiencing the "otherness" during my research study, which relates to the notion that identity itself is constantly evolving through multiple engagements and relations (Bhopal & Preston, 2012). I was able to understand, analyze and engage with difference, which is the defining feature of "otherness". In the following part, I am going to share my own narrative experiences, my cultural background and my personal stories. Throughout the whole research study, I was able to relate and find connections between the participants and myself as an international student studying in a foreign country. Additionally, I took a deeper look into my previous experience growing up, and how it influenced my current perspectives and beliefs.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Implications

As an international student, I found myself going through various conflicts. Personally, I noticed that gender, along with other factors, have been influencing my academic and social experiences. I started my research with my curiosity on how does other international students feel about how gender related to their academic and social experiences. In the research findings, participants' gender experiences are an important outcome. Their gender experiences in academic and social life has entwined with so many different social categories, and has shaped their life. In addition, loneliness is also an important outcome of my research findings, it is a form of culture shock, and participants were experiencing different forms and stages of culture shock.

In this research study, I further explored the academic and social experiences of international students. First, I provided useful suggestions for international undergraduate students dealing with their academic and social issues in Canada. Second, the intersectionality perspective indicates that gender is entwined with variables such as class, race, and social class, which gives educational administrators suggestion to take gender and other variables into consideration when solving issues. In addition, it may bring more awareness to the Canadian Government and the public, as it will help promote the international programs, and support the international students in various aspects.

Suggestions

Overcoming the Language Barrier. Language barrier is the topic related to academic issues most commonly raised by the participants during the interview. As

international undergraduate students, English is not the primary language of the participants. However, they face different kinds of language-related obstacles depending on their previous level of study of the English language, major, or sometimes, personality. Some of the majors focus on writing reports so writing skills are necessary, while others require a lot of presentations so oral skills are important. Though some of the international students' first language is English, they may have a strong accent, like one of the participants from Nigeria. Others cannot understand his accent well and it has caused some issues or inconvenience in his academic and social life. Some of the international undergraduate students are shy and hesitant to speak in English. Their lack of confidence brings them trouble in communicating using English.

The University X does provide language supports but it would be better if these resources are more specific and focus on different categories of English. In addition, different departments should also consider offering different kinds of language support based on the requirements of specific majors to help international students improve their academic performance. As one of the participants mentioned in her interview, she went to the language support center in the library, but it was always very busy. The school administrators may consider putting more resources into this program and make it accessible for more students by reducing wait times.

Making More Friends. Some of the participants told the me that it was very hard for them to find friends when they first started their undergraduate in the University of Windsor. This usually happens when the participants come from a minority ethnicity and they cannot find friends with similar background from their class or major. Their social activity is very limited and always feel lonely. One of the participants finally made a lot

of friends from the same cultural background through a friend living in the school residence. As that participant lives off campus, she thinks it is more difficult for her to meet new friends. The researcher suggests that the school could organize more events at the beginning of each semesters, linking the students who live in the school residence with those who live off campus, to create more opportunities for both of them to make friends. Students with same or similar cultural backgrounds are easier to become friends, and good, healthy friendships may improve international students' academic and social experiences.

Creating more Co-op and Internship Opportunities. Only one of the participants managed to get into the co-op program and gained a whole year of working experiences. Three other participants mentioned that they would love to have the opportunity to join the co-op program to have a better understanding of their future career, gain real practical experience and have a competitive edge in the job search after graduation. Additionally, co-op helps the international students financially as students are paid for their work. One of the participant's major does not offer co-op, however, practical working experience is required to apply for related jobs. I suggest that the university offer more opportunities for students to be involved in co-op or internship programs, especially in those majors where practical experience is crucial to getting a job after graduation.

Study Patterns and Professor's Guidance. More than half of the participants mentioned that they need more support and advice in study methods and patterns. As the study system is different in the University X compared to their previous ones, some of the international undergraduate students are struggling in adjusting to the study patterns.

School administrators may offer more thorough and detailed support in study methods and study patterns according to different majors.

One of the participants told me an unpleasant experience which occurred during one of the courses she took. The professor asked her to drop out of the course because English is not her first language and assumed that she could not meet the writing criteria. The course was a basic writing course which was opened to students of all levels, and this participant received a B for her first assignment. However, her second assignment was a D. She was willing to find out where she had made mistakes and wanted to receive some help from the professor. She was told dropping the course would be the best decision by the professor during a private talk. This sad story made me think that some of the professors may need more background information of each student and should pay more attention and care to international students. It is not suggesting that the standard be changed for international students, however, they may need more help and patience.

Financial Support and Scholarship. Except one participant, five out of the six participants complained about the high tuition fees for international students. The tuition fee for international students is double compared to domestic students. When the tuition fee increases by percentage, the amount of increase is more significant for international students. Two of the participants were working part time and the jobs were offered by the University X. The rest of the participants all expressed their wish to find a job or internship to release some financial pressure. As a researcher, I suggest that the universities should offer more part-time job opportunities especially for international undergraduate students as they are not able to receive financial support such as OSAP. In addition, I noticed that most scholarships are not available to international undergraduate

students since they are limited to Canadian citizens. The University may consider

creating more scholarship options to international students as financial stress may have

the possibility to influence international students' academic and social experience in a

negative way. As I mentioned in the former chapter, U.S. institutions offer more financial

assistance packages to international students to maintain the increasing number of student

recruitment overseas. Therefore, offering more financial assistance to international

students may also help expand the market of international student recruitment, which

may benefit Canadian institutions as well.

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International undergraduate student volunteers needed for research study:

Gender differences in social and academic aspects of the international students at the University of Windsor

We are investigating the academic and social experiences of international undergraduate students. Volunteers will be required to complete a 60 minute face-to-face, audio recorded interview. This research has been cleared by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board.

Research participants will receive a $15 Amazon gift card in appreciation for their time.

Contact: Jieyun Zhao (Grace)

zhao11z@uwindsor.ca

Recruitment Emails

Emails to the ISC Office administrator

Letter One
Morning Deena:

My name is Jieyun Zhao (Grace). I used to be an exchange student and am now a graduate student in the faculty of education. I am conducting research on international undergraduate students at the University of Windsor, (the topic is "how does gender influence the academic and social experiences of international students). Would you please help me with the recruitment of participants? I would like to ask you to send out an email along with a flyer containing my contact information and a brief introduction of my research to all international undergraduate students. Would you mind signing an agreement allowing me to send the emails through you (or the ISC office)? The timeline of my research schedule is quite tight, my REB review is next Monday and I need to obtain permission before that. Sorry for the inconvenience and please let me know if you are free this afternoon at any time, I will bring the permission form. Please feel free to contact me if you need more detailed information or you have any questions. Thanks again for all the help.

Best Regards,

Jieyun Zhao (Grace)

Letter Two
Good Morning Deena:

The REB has passed my proposal and allowing me to conduct the research. Would you please send this email together with a flyer to the international students and ask them whether they are interested in participating in this research and completing a 60-minute face-to-face interview? Each participant who completes the interview will receive a 15 dollar Amazon card as a "Thank you" gift. Please let them know they are free to contact me through email (zhao11z@uwindsor.ca) if they are interested. In the attachment is the purpose and background information of my research.

Best Regards,

Jieyun Zhao (Grace)

Emails to the international undergraduate students
Dear students:

This email is being sent on behalf of Jieyun Zhao (Grace), a master of education student conducting a research study on undergraduate international students. She is looking for participants to complete an interview about gender experiences involved with cultural background and ethnicity. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Each participant who completes the interview will receive a 15 dollar Amazon card as a "Thank you" gift. If you are interested, please feel free to send the researcher an email, (zhao11z@uwindsor.ca). In the attachment is the purpose and background information of the research.

Materials in the Attachment.

The background information:
International students have become an increasingly important feature of Ontario's educational landscape. In fact, Ontario has led the country in international student entries in higher education between 2002 and 2011. Despite the increased numbers of international students on Ontario's university and college campuses, transitions experienced by international students haven't always been smooth. Current research indicates that international students are facing different kinds of academic and social challenges and difficulties (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Sawir, 2005; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Some of challenges and difficulties experienced by international students may be around issues of language, social, and cultural practices. Exploring in more detail the challenges and difficulties that students may face while studying abroad is needed. Using semi-structured interviews with six international students, I will explore and examine their experiences. The interviews will focus on the academic, social and cultural experiences of the international students as they pursued all or a portion of their undergraduate degrees in Ontario, Canada.

Purpose of the research:
The purpose of this study is to explore the academic and social experiences of international students at one Ontario University. More specifically, I am interested in gender and how it intersects with other factors such as race and social class shape and sometimes determine the experiences of international student.

Email to the potential participants
Good morning:
Thank you for your interest in my research! I will arrange a meeting with you in the next week, during which I will explain my study in more detail, ask about your persistence and reliability in my research, and indicate all ethics associated with participating in this research project. Would you please select a convenient date and time for you so we can meet up?

Interview Questions

1. Could you please tell me something about yourself before you came to Canada? What's your nationality, cultural background, education background and family background?

2. What made you choose Canada? Why this country specifically? Do you have any pre-knowledge about this country before studying here?

3. How are you adapting academically so far? Did you come across any kind of academic issues at first? And how did you deal with it?

4. How are you adapting socially so far? Can you describe what kinds of social activities you have taken part in? To what degree do you feel the differences in the cultures?

5. Could you tell me something about your program? Are there more female or more male students in your major? What's you gender experience from the academic aspect?

6. What's your gender experiences as a male/ female in their home country and Canada? Do you feel any differences being a male/ female?

7. Do you have any gender experiences or personal stories related to gender that you would like to share?

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE OF STUDY: **Gender differences in social and academic aspects of the international students at the University of Windsor**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **JIEYUN ZHAO** from the Department of Education at the University of Windsor**.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact the investigator through zhao11z@uwindsor.ca, or the supervisor Professor Greig through cgreig@uwindsor.ca, 519-253-3000 ext 3819.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Explore the academic and social experiences of international students at one Ontario University.
2. Explore how gender intersects with other factors such as race and social class to shape and sometimes determine the experiences of international undergraduate students.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Conduct a face-to-face interview with the researcher.
2. Understand that the interview will be audio recorded.
3. The interview will be around 60 minutes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may:
1. Feel unconfrotable when you are not able to understand the researcher's questions or express your feelings because English may not be your first language.
2. Feel embarrassed when asked some of the interview questions involving personal experiences due to specific cultural background, the interview may recall some of your unpleasant memory.
3. Withhold your true feelings at the beginning due to unfamiliarity with the researcher.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will:
1. Gain a basic understanding of what qualitative research involves. You may also gain a deeper understanding about themselves.
2. The research may raise more public awareness to help the international undergraduate students through academic and social difficulties.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will:

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1. Receive a gift card from Amazon worth 15 dollars.
2. Receive the gift card after your interview is finished.
3. For those of you who partially complete the interview, but decide to withdraw, you will still receive the gift card.

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: JIEYUN ZHAO

PLACE OF BIRTH: WUXI, JIANGSU, CHINA

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1991

EDUCATION: Yangzhou University, B.A., Yangzhou, Jiangsu,
                        China, 2014

                        University of Windsor, Med., Windsor, ON, 2018