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The Social and Academic Experiences of International Students Enrolled in a State Comprehensive University: A Phenomenological Study

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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in

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by

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DEDICATION

To the millions who have crossed borders to pursue an international education.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Social and Academic Experiences of International Students
Enrolled in a State Comprehensive University: A Phenomenological Study

by

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Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education
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Professor John S. Levin, Chairperson

Much of the scholarly literature understands international student educational experiences largely as a process of adjustment to host country norms and institutions and portrays international students as deficit in relations to these norms. In contrast, international students live reflexively, shape their own identities, and are successful academically. International students are self-formed, and international students' education is a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities (Marginson, 2014).

The purpose of this investigation was to capture the social and academic experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in a state comprehensive university (SCU). Guided by P-E fit theory (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards, Caplan, & Van Harrison, 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) and the concept of self-formation

(Marginson, 2014), this investigation explored the experiences of thirteen undergraduate students from five different countries matriculated at an SCU in Southern California.

Findings suggest that SCU provided an academic environment that was positive, welcoming, and inclusive. Although the literature signals a potential incompatibility between international students and their host institutions, the narratives compiled in this investigation depict undergraduate international students as compatible with SCU and satisfied with their experiences, albeit with different levels of engagement and of interest in interaction with faculty and with their domestic counter peers. The findings were separated into sections that include groups of students who share similar experiences at this SCU: The Transformed and Engaged Student Group, the Utilitarian Student Group, and the Disengaged Student Group. To some extent then there was both PE-fit and PE-misfit. Fit because the SCU environment facilitated student satisfaction; misfit because some students (i.e., Utilitarian students, and Disengaged Students) did not integrate in all ways with the campus. All students preserved their cultural identity during their studies at SCU.

The social and academic experiences articulated by international undergraduate students can help practitioners reflect upon the design and implementation of services for international undergraduate students. Campus administrators and international education practitioners should design and implement initiatives that enable, confirm, and support interactions that foster the academic and interpersonal development of international students enrolled in SCUs (Rendon, 1994).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much of the scholarly literature understands international student educational experiences largely as a process of adjustment to host country norms and institutions and portrays international students as deficit in relations to these norms (Marginson, 2014). The literature assumes international students as oppressed, and as victims of a series of challenges in their educational environments: Limited by language and psychological states, discriminated against by race, and limited in social interactions with peers and faculty (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Mori, 2000). In contrast, Marginson (2014) argues that international students live reflexively, shape their own identities, and are successful academically. International students are self-formed, and international students' education is a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities (Marginson, 2014). International students are nontraditional students in need of validating experiences both in and out-of-class that lead to their academic development (Rendon, 1994).

Problem

The scholarly literature on the experiences of international students has misled researchers and practitioners. Although the social and academic experiences of international students have been researched and reported in the literature **(**Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sandekian, Weddington, Birnbaum, & Keen, 2015; Zhao & Douglass, 2012), these studies have focused, primarily, on research or doctorate-granting institutions with high

concentrations of traditional students. This literature largely ignores state comprehensive universities (SCU), institutions that host many international students. More specifically, it ignores the fit between international students and their campuses. The special characteristics of SCUs (i.e., teaching focus and less attention to faculty research productivity; a strong applied or vocational orientation; and low selectivity and a larger population of nontraditional and minority students) [Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Kane, 1991] may play a role in providing a different academic environment for international students than what the literature portrays for research universities.

The literature on undergraduate international students treats them as a homogeneous population, not understood as part of the university's student body, and their personal and emotional as well as educational needs are ignored. Much of the literature on international student experiences utilizes quantitative studies that omit international students' explanation of their experiences (e.g., Li, Liu, Wei, & Lan, 2013; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Wei, Wang, Heppner, & Du, 2012). In addition, qualitatively based literature on international students often aggregates international students of different nationalities and ignores their specific backgrounds. This literature frequently overlooks their length of time in the host country and their English language ability, which may limit their ability to express themselves (e.g., Gebhard, 2012; Glass, Gomez, & Urzua, 2014; Hong, Fox, & Almarza, 2007). While the literature has studied the experiences of same-country students (e.g., Bamber, 2013, Valdez, 2015; Zhang & Mi, 2010) few studies have focused on an SCU.

The lack of applicable or appropriate theories used to explain the behaviors of undergraduate international students provides an incomplete explanation of this population. Many of the salient theoretical frameworks in the literature on international students (e.g., adjustment, adaptation, acculturation, intercultural competence) present this student population as deficient in characteristics that qualify the normative higher education student. Therefore, this literature places the onus upon international students to adapt and to incorporate their hosts' values and practices, and to overcome any challenge in their educational setting (Lee, 2014). Research that assumes a deficit perspective limits scholarly knowledge and international education practitioners of the social and academic experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in SCUs.

International students are a substantial population of U. S. university students, and without an accurate portrayal of this population and their experiences and needs, universities do not address this population effectively. The literature on university students in the U. S. omits the inclusion of international students as a substantial student population and thus skews the understanding of U. S. university students in favor of domestic students. The lack of appropriate theories leads to a mischaracterization of the international student experience.

Purpose of the Investigation

The purpose of this investigation is to explain the social and academic experiences of international students enrolled in an SCU. The literature, in the main, ignores the experiences of international students at SCUs, and focuses primarily on the experience of international students at research universities. This research moves a step

closer to illuminate the personal and emotional needs of undergraduate international students enrolled in SCUs. In this investigation, I explore how the special characteristics of SCUs (i.e., teaching focus and less attention to faculty research productivity; a strong applied or vocational orientation; and low selectivity and a larger population of nontraditional and minority students) play a role in providing a different social and academic environment for international students than what the literature portrays.

In this investigation, I use a theoretical orientation informed by challenge and support theory (Sanford, 1962), validation theory on culturally diverse students (Rendon, 1994), self-authorship theory (Baxter Magolda, 2004), and the concept of self-formation (Marginson, 2014). This investigation uses qualitative research methods based on a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013, van Manen, 1990) to shed light on international students' social and academic experiences, and relies on the analysis of individual and group narratives (Riessman, 2008). I use P-E fit theory (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) to help explain how environmental attributes play a role in the satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being of international undergraduate students, and to explain international students' social and academic experiences in the SCU setting.

This investigation questions the literature that views international students as oppressed and as victims of language, race, and interactions with faculty and peers in research university educational environments (Lee, 2014). This literature understands international students in deficit and portrays them without characteristics to be successful academically and integrated socially in their institutional setting. I use Marginson's

(2014) concept of self-formation to see international education as a process of self-formation in which undergraduate international students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control.

Salient Theories Used in Research on International Student Experiences

Many of the salient theoretical frameworks in the literature on international students present this student population as lacking in characteristics that qualify the traditional higher education student. The following section provides a list of some of these frameworks and addresses salient research that examines international student experiences.

Adjustment

The literature on international student social experiences is associated with the concept of adjustment (Brown, 2009; Grebennikov & Skaines, 2007; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). Gebhard (2012) posits that international students face adjustment in academic, social, and emotional realms. Ward and Kennedy (1999) propose two dimensions to adjustment: Psychological and sociocultural. Zhang and Goodson (2011) speculate that psychological and sociocultural are interrelated domains and use these theories to depict an adjusted international student as one who, presumably, is satisfied psychologically and who possesses the skills to interact with individuals of the host environment. Those who do not possess these characteristics are in deficit. When adjustment is applied to international students, adjustment becomes a concept that reflects characteristics that international students possess or lack and that are

a detriment or asset to their assimilation into the institutional setting (e.g., home culture and environment). This literature largely exempts institutions from their responsibility to accommodate international students' needs and leaves the onus for change on international students. Therefore, the adjustment concept also annuls international students' agency and an international identity, and voids international students' ability to make their own individual decisions and to develop their own values.

Adaptation

Generally, adaptation refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands (Berry, 1997). Similar to adjustment, adaptation views international students in deficit (e.g., Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014; Manguvo et al., 2015; O'Reilly, Hickey, & Ryan, 2015; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Tas (2013) concludes that international students leave the university not for financial or personal concerns as domestic students do, but due to insufficient adaptation to the institution. Albeit scholars (e.g., Tran, 2011) acknowledge that both international students and the institution share the responsibility for students to adapt, the use of the term adaptation portrays international students in deficit despite the recommendation for mutual adaptation.

Acculturation

Acculturation and adjustment are used occasionally and interchangeably with adjustment and the adaptation process of students who live under different cultural practices (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008). Literature suggest that international students encounter more academic and social difficulties than their U. S. counterparts, given

international students' English language and cultural barriers (Leong, 2015). The use of acculturation with justifications based on positive psychological effects on students implies the cultural superiority of the host and undervalues what the international student has to offer the host institution (Lee, 2014). Since the acculturation framework holds the view that international students must adopt values and behaviors of the host environment, this framework also positions the student in deficit, and voids international students' ability to develop their own values, international identities, and ways to relate to peers.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is understood as the range of skills that leads to effective communication between people of different cultures (Deardorff, 2009). Under Sodowsky and Lais (1997), intercultural competence is the individual's difficulty with relating to other people within the context of a new culture. Winton and Constantine's (2003) findings state that international students' intercultural competence concerns were related positively to distress. When the intercultural competence concept is applied to international students, the broader question asked pertains to how well international students can interact with individuals of the host institution and in the host country, and whether international students have the skills and attitudes to interact with them well.

International Students' Social and Academic Experiences

The social and academic experiences of international students have been covered thoroughly in the literature; much of this literature explains myriad problems that international students face in both the countries and the institutions that host them. I use this literature to portray international students as active agents who make their own

decisions, construct their own value systems and identities, and who interact with others inside and outside the institutional setting.

Academic Achievement

International students are assumed to be successful academically due to their high persistence levels (Fass-Holmes, 2016; Korobova, & Starobin, 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2012). Stoynoff (1997) found that English proficiency and study strategies correlate with academic performance. Mamiseishvili (2012) found that GPA, degree plans, and academic integration were related positively to persistence, and remedial work in English and social integration were related negatively to persistence. In his study of the factors that influence retention of international students in four-year institutions, Kwai (2009) found academic achievement as the only statistically significant factor that has a positive effect on persistence, which is consistent with other literature on international student persistence (e.g., Mamiseishvili, 2012). Kwai uses existing literature and traditional student retention frameworks (e.g., Bean & Metzner, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Tinto, 1975) and concludes that there is need for models that explain international students' persistence, given that existing frameworks' focus on domestic students.

International Students' Social and Academic Experiences

Racism

The topics of racism, unequal treatment, and discrimination appear in the literature on international students as examples of international student challenges (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Rich & Troudi, 2006). The triggers for racism are several. Skin color and national origin are indicators

for susceptibility for racist abuse of international students (Hanassab, 2006). Typically, students from non-White regions of origin face negative experiences more frequently than students from White regions (Lee, 2010). International students can experience segregation based on cultural background or national origin (Lee & Rice, 2007), and these experiences point to inadequacies of the host society as the source of these problems, rather than to a lack of adjustment on the part of the international students as it is often noted in the literature.

Language

Language is presented as a major challenge that international students face in their host academic environments (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015; Triana, 2015). Language problems are more germane to non-native English-speaking international students from non-Western backgrounds than to international students in general (Berman & Cheng, 2001). International students whose cultural backgrounds are different from those of the host country will have more problems interacting with local students (Lee, 2010). Low English proficiency may lead to a lack of confidence and hinder communication with native speakers (Hong et al., 2007). International students also struggle with colloquial language and with idioms, both of which appear commonly in university classrooms conversations (Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015).

Psychological Challenges

Scholarship has identified psychological challenges international students experience at their host institutions. Chen's (1999) review of the literature lists the

common stressors among international populations: Language challenges, educational issues (e.g., performance expectations, educational system adjustment), socio-cultural factors (e.g., culture shock, social isolation and alienation, financial concerns, racial discrimination), and limited contact with members of the host country. Limited contact with locals is related to international student anxiety, depression, and alienation (Chen, 1999). Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) posit that international students experience stress due to the many and rapid changes that disrupt their new lives at the host institution. Studies have shown that international students need more interaction with locals because international students with local ties adjust well in the host environment (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir et. al., 2007). Despite international students' isolation, the literature portrays an overwhelming intent by international students to be accepted by their peers and by the staff at their host institutions (Robertson et al., 2000).

Relationships with Domestic Students

The literature on international students' social integration posits that international students face challenges in finding U. S. friends at host institutions (Gareis, 2012; Rienties et al., 2001). The larger the cross-cultural differences between international students and the local students, the more the levels of interaction between them decreases (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Rienties et al., 2001). Students who come from non-Western countries, who represent most international students enrolled in U. S. institutions, do not make friends with local students at the same rate as domestic and as Western international students.

Interactions of international students with domestic students in their institutional setting is promoted, as these bring benefits to international students (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Triana, 2015). International students who do not interact with domestic students miss opportunities to learn from their domestic peers. Social interactions between domestic and international students aid international student understandings of their local environment (Gresham & Clayton, 2011). Furthermore, contact with local students help international students develop confidence and the capacity to negotiate their way within their host university (Sawir et al., 2007). A further benefit for international students from interaction is improved language proficiency (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

Relationships with Faculty

International students face numerous challenges inside the host university classroom. The most documented problem in the literature regarding international students' experiences in the classroom is a lack of English language proficiency (Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015). The lack of English proficiency leads to scarce opportunities for spoken interaction for international students (Maddox, 2014), and it generates a sense of isolation and frustration in the learning process (Glass et al., 2015). Furthermore, international students often do not understand regional accents of the faculty (Bamber, 2013). Exclusion from faculty may go beyond communication difficulties and spawn a sense of non-equal treatment and racial prejudice within the classroom (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Lee, 2010).

In general, international students seek a close relationship with their instructors (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). The literature reports that students who are integrated academically are more prone to persist (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1997), and adaptations by both faculty and international students make teaching and learning more relevant for international students (Tran, 2011).

Financial Problems

International students' financial problems are documented thoroughly in the literature (Chen, 1999; Dunne, 2009; Lassegard, 2006; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Mori, 2000). Tuition costs, room and board, health insurance, textbooks and other miscellaneous expenses represent a significant pecuniary expense for undergraduate international students. Financial support solves this problem, but for many international students help is not always available. Despite the availability of jobs for undergraduate international students on some U. S. campuses, these part-time jobs can only ameliorate financial need, and not solve serious financial needs given high tuition and living expenses in most U. S. colleges and universities.

Social Media

The influence of electronic media use on the academic and social lives of international students is not clear, as both technologies and research are evolving in this area. However, there is a negative relationship between students' cellular-phone use, video game and online gaming, and TV exposure and their GPA (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). Specifically, literature indicates that international students use social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) to look for everyday life information, and that younger

international students use it more than older students (Sim & Kim, 2013). Social media helps international students learn the language and ease the adjustment in adapting to university life in the U. S. and fosters their sense of community both in the host and home countries (Sawyer & Chen, 2012). Research by Kim, Yum and Yoon (2009) found that international students can build new relationships with co-national students through the use of the internet, and improve the management of daily situations for international students; to integrate in the host society in their actions but preserving home country values. As social media technologies evolve, and as new platforms are introduced with new services and approaches, their effects on international students' social experiences will also change. More directly to the aims of this investigation, the literature needs to explain the outcomes of new social media platform use on international students' social and academic experiences at an SCU.

Theoretical Orientations for the Investigation of International Students

The theoretical work that guided this research includes the theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962, 1967), the theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001), the concept of self-formation (Marginson, 2014), and the concepts of validating culturally diverse students (Rendon, 1994, 2002).

Theory of Challenge and Support

Sanford's theory of challenge and support is considered a foundational student development theory. The theory of challenge and support (1962) argues that college students experience personal growth and development, and that this growth is influenced by the experiences that take place in the college environment, in both what occurs inside

and what occurs outside the classroom. Sanford asserts that for this growth to take place, a student should experience a balance between the "challenges" (i.e., academic, social, psychological problems) he/she faces and the "support" he/she receives in the institution. Sandford defines challenges as circumstances in the academic, social, and psychological realms that in which a student faces but does not have the skills, knowledge, or attitude to overcome (Sanford, 1967). A third element in the Sanford's model is "readiness," which refers to the level of student maturation needed to take on the challenges and to receive support.

Validating Culturally Diverse Students

Another theory that provides a general explanation to the experiences of undergraduate international students is Laura I. Rendon's (1994) validation theory on culturally diverse students. She posited that it is not non-traditional students who must adapt to a predominant institutional culture, but that institutions must also adapt and change to serve nontraditional students. Rendon's concept of validating culturally diverse students reiterates the need to provide external and internal sources of support to international students, as they encourage and reinforce their academic goals.

Self-Authorship

The theory of self-authorship applied to international students positions them as meaning-making active agents capable of producing individual decisions, who develop their own values, their own international identities, and their ways to relate to peers. Their ability to "self-author," that is, generate an internal view of self, relationships, and knowledge suggests that international students can think critically and develop

intercultural maturity (Baxter Magolda, 2004). In self-authorship, individuals perceive themselves as capable of knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 1998).

Self-Formation

The concept of self-formation is a critique offered by Marginson (2014) to the literature on international education which depicts international students as deficient and in need to adjust to their host country and host institution's norms and values. Marginson's notion of the international student is that of a reflexive and self-determining individual, guided by agentic freedom. He sees international students as self-formed, and international education as a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological investigation seeks to answer the following overarching question and subquestions,

What are the stories that convey the experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in a state comprehensive university (SCU) in Southern California?

a. How do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California perceive and interpret their social experiences?
b. How do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California perceive and interpret their academic experiences?

Methodology

Qualitative Research Methodology

This investigation utilized a qualitative approach that relied upon semi-structured interviews as methods of data collection consistent with qualitative field methods research (Bailey, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013; Mason, 2002). This investigation intended to capture the experiences of undergraduate international students and connected several theoretical orientations to the collected data for analysis. To pursue this endeavor, this research used qualitative research methods with a social constructivist worldview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Lichtman, 2013) and a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013), which foreground the perceptions of research participants in order to capture and express their lived experiences. Narrative analysis was used to analyze the data collected from interviews (Riessman, 2008).

This research used a social constructivist framework, sometimes called interpretivism **(**Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In the social constructivist worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they interact with others, and they create subjective meanings about these interactions (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1990). My social constructivist worldview led me to embrace qualitative methods in this investigation (Creswell, 2009). This investigation used qualitative research methods to uncover meaning in the narratives of international students. The phenomenological approach allowed me to understand the lived experiences of those

international students in the social and academic realms within the SCU setting (Lichtman, 2013), and to give to voice those experiences (van Manen, 1990).

I used a phenomenological approach to understand the academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students. In a phenomenological approach, typically, data collection procedures entail the interview of individuals exposed to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the focus of this investigation is the experience of individuals, I conducted interviews with undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU campus (Burgess, 1995; Hermanowicz, 2002; Lundgren, 2012). This investigation utilized semi-structured interviews as a primary source of data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013), along with field ancillary notes, to explain the "lived experiences" in the academic and social realms of undergraduate international students (Schultz, 1967; van Manen, 1990). My interest in international students, my personal experiences, and my exposure to the literature influenced the themes used to create the interview guide, but not the data collection process.

Data Collection and Analysis

The site was chosen for scholarly and methodological reasons. The scholarship on international student experiences is replete with studies conducted in research universities, and generally excludes the experiences of international students enrolled in SCUs. The site was also selected because of access: My prior working experience at the SCU site facilitated my access to students and to information about the site. The site is part of the California State University System. The site is a mid-sized SCU located in

Southern California, with over 20,000 students. The campus has a large population of nontraditional students and a large population of international students.

An IRB application for the use of human participants was submitted to the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) of the University of California, Riverside (UCR). ORI approved my IRB contingent upon the IRB approval at the study site. I then submitted an IRB application at the study site, which was also approved.

Recruitment of Participants

I identified international undergraduate students through faculty and staff who worked on campus. These individuals (i.e., two faculty and one staff member) contacted students and then gave me the contact information of the initial participants. I reached out to the students via email or via telephone, and I explained the goals of the interviews. After my initial conversations with faculty and staff who assisted me to identify participants, I scheduled the interviews of the first cohort of participants. I then attempted snowball sampling, which is a technique where existing interview participants helped recruit future participants among their friends or acquaintances (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011).

The sample size is a number comparable to those used in other studies in the literature that addresses international student experiences in the U. S., as well as in international institutions (e.g., Caluya et.al., 2011; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Tran, 2010). All participants were enrolled in undergraduate courses at SCU.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the stories of undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are the most

used data collection method in the applicable literature. The purpose of an in-depth interview is to understand the experiences of those who are interviewed and to present those experiences with detail and depth, not to test hypotheses or to predict behaviors (Seidman, 2013). In semi-structured research interviews, the researcher focuses on the participants' experiences in an attempt to understand themes of the everyday world from participants' perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

In this investigation, I sought to acquire an understanding of the international student academic and social experiences in the SCU setting. The reflexive approach enabled me to investigate the social and academic matters of importance to the students without imposing theoretical views on their responses (Seidman, 2013). I followed the guidelines suggested by the three-interview series recommended by Seidman (2013), with each interview having a different goal. My first interview sought to establish the context of the interviewee's experience as an undergraduate international student at an SCU. The second interview had as its purpose to concentrate on the specific details of the participants' current lived academic and social experiences as undergraduate international students at the SCU. The third interview was intended to be an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the meanings of their experience.

Ancillary field notes were written during and after the interviews; my audio memos were recorded after interviews. My notes included context and explanations of participants' expressions, which were complemented with voice memos in which I explained what I observed or experienced during the interview. These were reflexive in that they considered my views as part of the data creation process.

Data Analysis

I used narrative analysis to analyze the collected data from the interviews and to develop findings based upon the academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in the SCU. Narrative analysis is a method for interpreting texts that have a common story (Riessman, 2008). Creswell (2009) refers to narrative research as "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals… to provide stories about their lives" (p. 13). In narrative inquiry, the researcher focuses "on how the speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning" and as a family of methods for "interpreting texts that have a common storied form" (Riessman, 2008, pp. 10-11). In this investigation, I use one of Riessman's approaches to narrative analysis, thematic analysis, and incorporate elements of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry.

In narrative analysis, stories are co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, and a story emerges to convey a point (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis was used to understand both the stories of the individual participants and to understand the overarching story among international students in the context of an SCU. In thematic analysis, data are interpreted in light of "themes developed by the researcher and influenced by prior and emergent theory, the concrete purpose of an investigation, the data themselves, political commitments, and other factors" (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). In thematic analysis, the researcher focuses only on what the participant conveyed, that is, the experiences reported by the participant and not on other aspects of "the telling"

(Riessman, 2008, pp. 53-54). To complement thematic analysis, I used Clandinin and Connelly's "three-dimensional approach" to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). The three dimensions are "temporality," "the personal and the social," and "place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Temporality refers to the past, present, and future. This dimension helped me recognize the participants' past and current experiences and surmise over their possible future experiences. Here, the participants' past and present experiences are the foci of analysis, as these will likely influence their future actions. The personal and the social dimension refers to the interaction of the participants. There are the "inward," which include the internal conditions of the participant (i.e., feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral positions) and the "outward," which refers to the existential conditions (i.e., environment) of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). On the personal and social interaction, I analyzed internal conditions and expressed feelings of the interviewees. In the social interaction realm, I focused on the ways that the participants described the conditions of interaction with others. The interaction dimension helped me to analyze the social and academic experiences of international undergraduate students and to focus on the students' international conditions and expressed feelings, as conveyed through their interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. The place dimension focuses on the specific concrete physical boundaries of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the research, I focused on the physical places that appear in the story (e.g., home country, California, the SCU classroom), as these places give meaning to the participant's narrative. The place dimension helped me to consider the participants' physical locations, specifically the dichotomy between home

country and Southern California, and how these places influenced their lived experiences and how these affected their experiences described in their narrative.

I worked on a single interview at a time and identified relevant episodes and metaphors. I positioned the narratives within the context of the participants' experiences prior to arriving at the SCU and after their arrival at the SCU, and placed attention to narratives that addressed their culture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I read through both interview transcriptions for each participant, wrote marginal notes, and placed relevant experiences chronologically. I then identified assumptions in each account and named them as codes (Riessman, 2013). I relied on the narrative of the text and utilized the components of P-E fit (e.g., fit, misfit) and then used components of self-formation (e.g., multiple identities, agency) [Marginson, 2014]. Both served as overarching frameworks for me to make sense of the students' stories. Particular cases were identified that illustrated general patterns and considered the identified assumptions. P-E fit theory is broadly defined as the degree to which individual and environmental characteristics match (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Harrison, 1978). P-E fit theory is used to study outcomes such as co-worker satisfaction and feelings of cohesion (Boone & Hartog, 2011). Fit is defined as the degree of compatibility or match between individuals and some of aspects of the work environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). This theory indicates that if the environmental attributes (i.e., job demands, working conditions and rewards, and climate) are congruent with the personal attributes of the employee (i.e., needs, traits, goals, preferences, knowledge and ability, and values) there will be fit or compatibility. Fit creates a positive effect that produces employee satisfaction, increased

performance, and overall well-being (Caplan et al., 1980; Harrison, 1978; Ostroff & Schulte, 2007). The use of the literature on P-E fit (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) helped me to explain how environmental attributes in the institutional setting played a role in the satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being of international undergraduate students. I utilized P-E fit to help me explain international students' social and academic experiences in SCUs and how the international students' experiences are influenced by the distinctive features of SCUs (e.g., teaching focus/higher teaching load for faculty, lower entry requirements). The supplementary model of P-E congruence states that a person fits into the environmental context because he or she supplements or possesses characteristics that are similar to other individuals in the organizational environment (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). I utilized the supplementary model of P-E congruence to see if there was a fit that existed for similarities in characteristics of international students and those of domestic students enrolled in this SCU. Marginson (2014) sees international students as self-formed and international education as a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control. The self-formation concept provided a lens for me to understand international students' movement across geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders, while they negotiated various identities continually (Marginson, 2014).

Narrative Analysis Procedure

A systematic filing system was utilized to organize and to ensure accessibility of data. I annotated, coded, and interpreted the collected unstructured data. I read interview

transcripts thoroughly in search of salient themes and sought patterns across the experiences in all the participants of the investigation. I classified data into three parts. In part I, I identified international students' fit with the institution, and thus I relied upon the theory of P-E fit. I interpreted fit between international students and the institutional characteristics, and what program demands, studying conditions, and university environmental characteristics were similar to students' views of themselves. In part II, I explained fit between students and their peers. I interpreted fit between international students and their peers as similarities in age, university level, language, values, ethnicity, and extracurricular activities. In part III, I interpreted international students' self-formation by identifying reflexivity, agency, and identity changes (Marginson, 2014) in their comments.

Particular cases were identified to explain general patterns across the set of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also sought to locate epiphanies or turning points in which the story line changed direction dramatically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2017). I then re-storied the participants' stories into a coherent framework (Creswell, 2017). These stories were presented in a biographical format, that is, described from the participant's perspective, and not from a conversation format that included me. This process consisted of the presentation of the stories in a chronological sequence, per the recommendation of Cortazzi (1993). I adopted some basic elements of novels, such as predicament, conflict, or struggle (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cortazzi, 1993), which helped me gain insight into the narrative, and as a way to "place" the reader into the setting (Bailey, 2007, p 178). I concluded by presenting a narrative and

explanation that focused on the unique elements of the story within each interviewed student, and then I interpreted the larger meaning of the story (Riessman, 2013).

Structure of the Dissertation

The following four chapters report the investigation. Chapter 2 comprises a critique of the scholarly literature, theories, and methods that form the foundation of this qualitative investigation on the social and academic experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in a state comprehensive university. This review of the literature also includes limitations of this scholarship. Chapter 2 also includes salient themes in the international student experiences literature, including academic achievement, racism, language problems, psychological challenges, international student relationships with domestic peers, international student relationships with faculty, financial problems, and use of social media. At the end of Chapter 2, I state my research questions. Chapter 3 presents the methods, research design, and methodology utilized in this investigation. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the investigation. Finally, Chapter 5 offers the conclusions, limitations, recommendations for future research on undergraduate international students enrolled in state comprehensive universities and concludes with recommendations for practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the scholarly literature understands international student educational experiences largely as a process of adjustment to host country norms and institutions and portrays international students as deficit in relations to these norms (Marginson, 2014). The literature assumes international students as oppressed, and as victims of a series of challenges in their educational environments: Limited by language and psychological states, discriminated against by race, and limited in social interactions with peers and faculty (Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Mori, 2000). In contrast, the argument here is that, despite under social circumstances largely beyond their control, international students live reflexively, shape their own identities, and are successful academically.

A major theoretical assumption is that international student development is a function of the interaction between the student and the educational environment (Sanford, 1962, 1967). I conceptualize international students as active agents who use external information to make their own decisions and construct an internal belief system, an identity, and a way of relating to others (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001). I see international students as self-formed, and international students' education as a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities (Marginson, 2014). I also view international students as nontraditional students in need of validating experiences both in and out-of-class that lead to their academic development (Rendon, 1994). That is, enabling, confirming, and supportive interactions are carved out by in-class and out-of-class agents such as faculty, classmates, friends, family, and

others, who foster the academic and interpersonal development of international students (Rendon, 1994).

Despite its deficit view of international students, existing literature on international students provides both justification and background to this investigation. In this chapter, I address the literature on international students' social and academic experiences in host U. S. institutions. First, I speak of the theoretical and methodological limitations of the literature on international students' experiences. In this section, I critique salient theories used in international students' research, specifically adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and intercultural competence, which portray international students in deficit (Lee, 2014). Second, I address literature on social and academic experiences, and I focus on the prominent themes discussed in this scholarship including international students' academic integration, international students' English language proficiency, international students' psychological problems, and international students' interpersonal relations with peers and faculty. I use this literature to portray international students as active agents who make their own decisions, construct their own belief systems and identities, and who interact with others inside and outside the institutional setting in search of validating experiences.

I conclude this chapter with a description of the theoretical work that guided this investigation: The theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962, 1967), the theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001), the concept of self-formation (Marginson, 2014), and the concept of validating culturally diverse students (Rendon, 1994; Rendon, 2002). The constructs of challenge and support help me explain that international student

development does not occur in a vacuum; it is influenced by the academic challenges and educational support offered to the student in the institutional setting. The theory of self-authorship helps me understand international students as active agents capable of making individual decisions who are able to develop their own values, international identities, and ways to relate to peers. The concept of self-formation provides a lens for me to understand international students' movements among cultural and linguistic borders, and their effective management of their lives reflexively, while they shape their own identities.

Limitations of the Literature on International Students' Experiences

As the number of international students have increased in U. S. colleges and universities, so has the scholarly interest on their experiences. The scholarly research, however, has its limitations. These include methodological and theoretical weaknesses, as well the literature's almost complete disregard for certain institutional types that host large number of international students (i.e., state comprehensive universities).

Much of the literature on international student experiences utilizes quantitative studies that omit international students' explanation of their experiences (e.g., Li, Liu, Wei, & Lan, 2013; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Wei, Wang, Heppner, & Du, 2012). This omission is evident in much of the literature, which utilizes adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and intercultural competence theoretical frameworks (Brunsting, Zachry & Takeuchi, 2018; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In the literature that utilizes qualitative methods, data collection, typically, applies semi-structured, in-depth interviews in order to engage international students. The limitations of this literature

include issues of self-selection of interviewees, which can lead to bias and which may reflect bias in the characteristics of the participants. Additionally, this qualitatively based literature on international students often aggregates international students of different nationalities and ignores their individual backgrounds. Specifically, this literature ignores international students' country of origin, their length of time in the host country, and their language ability, which may limit their ability to express themselves (e.g., Gebhard, 2012; Glass, Gomez, & Urzua 2014; Hong, Fox, & Almarza, 2007).

A further limitation of this literature is the depiction of international students in deficit, that is, they lack traits that other "traditional" students possess which presumably makes them academically successful and socially integrated in their institutional setting. This is not germane to international students only. It is present in research that studies other student groups and positions them of one of two student groups: the traditional-nontraditional student dichotomy (Levin, 2014). The traditional-nontraditional categorization abridges the conversation on diversity by positioning all students into one of two groups. One group is perceived as having all the traits of the typical college student, and identified as the traditional student, while the other group is perceived as having atypical characteristics, therefore conceptualized as nontraditional (Levin, 2014). In the literature, traditional students are those who are White, 18 to 22 years of age, from middle or upper socioeconomic backgrounds, single, and enrolled full-time in a higher education institution directly after they complete high school. These students are considered traditional even though they do not reflect the profile of most students enrolled in U. S. higher education (Levin, 2014). Indeed, these nontraditional students

represent by and large the majority of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States (Choi, 2002). International students, given their nontraditional status, are therefore conceived as deficient and in need to "adapt" or to "adjust" into standards set by the institution, which positions the student's home country as inferior and the host culture as superior. This conceptualization, therefore, gives rise to theoretical frameworks that seek to study the traits these international student lack in order to adapt or to adjust to the campus expectations (e.g., adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and intercultural competence) [Lee, 2014].

Finally, the literature signals a potential incompatibility between international students and their host institutions. Although the social and academic experiences of international students have been researched and reported in the literature **(**Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sandekian, Weddington, Birnbaum, & Keen., 2015; Zhao & Douglass, 2012), these studies have focused, primarily, on research or doctorate-granting institutions with high concentrations of traditional students. The experiences of international students who study at state comprehensive universities (SCUs), institutions whose students are typically less prepared than those at research universities (Henderson & Kane, 1991), are not as numerous. The special characteristics of SCUs (i.e., teaching focus and less attention to faculty research productivity; a strong applied or vocational orientation; and low selectivity and a larger population of nontraditional and minority students) may play a role in providing a different academic environment for international students than what

the literature portrays for research universities (Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Kane, 1991).

Salient Theories Used in Research on International Student Experiences

Many of the salient theoretical frameworks in the literature on international students present this student population as deficient in characteristics that qualify the normative higher education student. Therefore, this literature places the onus upon international students to adapt to and incorporate their hosts' values and practices, and to overcome any challenge in their educational setting (Lee, 2014). According to Lee (2014), among the most common frameworks to portray international students are adjustment (Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006), adaptation (Anderson, 1994, Manguvo, Whitney, & Chareka, 2015; Tran, 2011), acculturation (Chen, 1999; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015), and intercultural competence (Jon, 2013; Winton & Constantine, 2003). The following section provides a critique of these frameworks and addresses salient research that examines international student experiences.

Adjustment

The literature on international student social experiences is associated with the concept of adjustment (Brown, 2009; Grebennikov & Skaines, 2007; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Some literature addresses adjustment without providing a definition of this concept (e.g., Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Mesidor and Sly (2016) do provide a definition and cite the Latin word *ad-justare*, as the process by which the individual

balances needs and obstacles in his or her environment. Gebhard (2012) posits that international students face adjustment in academic, social, and emotional realms. Additionally, Ward and Kennedy (1999) propose two dimensions to adjustment: Psychological and sociocultural. In their view, psychological adjustment is affected by personality, life changes, coping styles and social support. Social cultural adjustment is influenced by cultural learning and social skill acquisition (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Ward and Kennedy (1999) divide the concept into two types: Psychosocial adjustment (i.e., psychological wellbeing or satisfaction) and sociocultural adjustment, which refers to the "ability to 'fit in,' to acquire culturally appropriate skills, and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment" (p. 140).

In their review of literature of psychosocial adjustment of international students, Zhang and Goodson (2011) speculate that psychological and sociocultural are interrelated domains. The use of these theories depicts an adjusted international student as one who, presumably, is satisfied psychologically and who possesses the skills to interact with individuals of the host environment. Those who do not possess these characteristics are in deficit. Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn, (2002) apply Baker and Siryk's (1986) definition of international students, and define adjustment as the "common problems when relocating to go to school such as academic pressures, financial problems, poor health, loneliness, interpersonal conflicts, difficulty in adjusting to change and problems with developing personal autonomy" (p. 460). In their view, international students will suffer more adjustment *vis-à-vis* domestic students because their "home culture and environment is often vastly different from their host environment." Therefore,

when adjustment is applied to international students it becomes a concept that seeks characteristics that international students possess, or lack, and that are a detriment to their assimilation into the institutional setting (e.g., home culture and environment). For example, Andrade (2006) posits that international student adjustment is affected by language ability and by a lack of knowledge of U. S. pedagogical methods. These theoretical positions reinforce the view that international students are from the start in deficit due to their national and cultural origin.

Similarly, the solutions to adjustments issues reside with international students. For example, Gebhard (2012) states that international student adjustment problems are related to "academics, social interaction, and handling of emotions" (p. 190). Interpreting his results, Gebhard (2012) suggests "observation and imitation" as a coping strategy to help international students adapt to the new culture (p. 189). Gebhard also identifies international students' behaviors that do not help them to adapt such as "expecting others to adapt, excessive complaining, and withdrawing" (p. 189). Consequently, this view of adjustment also portrays international students in deficit and blames them for this lack. This literature largely exempts institutions of their responsibility to accommodate international students' needs and leaves the onus for change on international students. Therefore, the adjustment concept also annuls international students' agency and international identity, and voids international students' ability to make their own individual decisions and to develop their own values.

Adaptation

Generally, adaptation refers to changes that take place in individuals or groups in

response to environmental demands (Berry, 1997). Berry (1997) makes a distinction between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. According to Berry, psychological adaptation refers to "a clear sense of personal and cultural identity, good health, and the achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context" (p. 14). Sociocultural adaptation, a concept that appears in the literature more frequently than psychological adaptation, is related to outcomes that link the individual to their new context, such as their ability to deal with daily problems (e.g., family, work, and school) that link individuals to their new environment.

Adaptation, a similar concept to adjustment in that international students are also depicted in deficit, is common in the international student literature (e.g., Glass, Gómez, & Urzua, 2014; Manguvo et al., 2015; O'Reilly, Hickey, & Ryan, 2015; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). For example, in a quantitative study that addressed, among other aims, differences in retention between domestic and international students at a private university, Tas (2013) concludes that international students leave the university not for financial or personal concerns as domestic students do, but due to insufficient adaptation to the institution described as: "College experience is not as satisfactory as domestic students," "problems regarding college environment," weak interaction "between students and university," and "academic reasons" (Tas, 2013, p. 37). Albeit scholars (e.g., Tran, 2011) acknowledge that both international students and the institution share the responsibility for students to adapt, the use of the term adaptation portrays international students in deficit despite the recommendation for mutual adaptation. Marginson (2014) argues that by conceptualizing

international students in deficit, the "adjustment" concept reflects a sense of cultural superiority and ethnocentric logic on the part of the researchers, voids the student's home country identity, and establishes a new implanted identity with local attributes in a process of re-acculturation. Much of this literature on adjustment and adaptation views students as having specific traits that either help or hinder their education and notes that these characteristics shape the institutional response which is considered necessary to avoid suffering for the disadvantaged group (Levin, 2014).

Acculturation

The theory of acculturation appears frequently in the international student literature. Acculturation and adjustment are used occasionally and interchangeably with adjustment and the adaptation process of living under different cultural practices (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008). Berry (2005) defines acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698). Garcia (2001) views acculturation as an individual's process of adaptation in which members of a cultural group adopt the values and behaviors of another. Psychological acculturation includes psychological changes that result from acculturation processes (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Acculturative stress is the negative outcomes of acculturation in the individual's physical, psychological, and social health (Berry, 2005). Therefore, acculturation is interpreted as the assimilation to a different culture, typically the dominant one, in which a transfer of values and customs takes place from one group to another, and at times with negative psychological effects on the individual.

Several quantitative studies use acculturation in their research on international students. For example, Leong (2015) used interview data from 11 international students to compare their experiences and the acculturation issues they encountered. Findings suggest that international students encounter more academic and social difficulties than their U. S. counterparts, given international students' English language and cultural barriers. Despite a thorough explanation of international student experiences and challenges (e.g., faculty-student relations, pedagogical differences, cultural differences and misunderstanding, language), Leong's study focuses on adjustment issues, which is a deficit view of international students. Notwithstanding findings and subsequent recommendations that encourage host institutions to pursue efforts that engender international student integration (e.g., "help foster more positive and cooperative relationships between individuals from two vastly different cultures," p. 473), Leong uses language in her recommendations that assumes the host's cultural superiority: "But there is a burden on the international students themselves. The individual students themselves must also contribute to the acculturation process" (p. 473). Leong makes these recommendations without providing a definition for acculturation in her literature review. Instead, she points to two studies that conclude that factors that influence acculturation (i.e., English fluency, country of origin, and social support) and effect international student adjustment to their new social environment. Both studies of Nasirudeen, Josephine, Adeline, Seng, and Ling, (2014) and Yeh and Inose (2003) explore literature on acculturative stress (e.g., Berry, 2005). The use of acculturation with justifications on the basis of positive psychological effects on students implies the cultural superiority of

the host and undervalues what the international student has to offer the host institution (Lee, 2014). This perspective abounds in international student literature. Since the acculturation framework holds the view that international students must adopt values and behaviors of the host environment, this framework also positions the student in deficit, and voids international students' ability to develop their own values, international identities, and ways to relate to peers.

Intercultural Competence

As in the case of the acculturation framework, intercultural competence also assumes the cultural superiority of the host and undervalues the cultural background of the student. Intercultural competence is another concept that often appears in international student scholarship without a clear definition (e.g**.,** Tran & Pham, 2015). Despite its frequent use in the higher education literature and the attempts to produce a definition of the concept (e.g., Deardorff, 2006), the concept of intercultural competence is unclear (Jon, 2013). Intercultural competence is understood as the range of skills that leads to effective communication between people of different cultures (Deardorff, 2009). Under Sodowsky and Lais (1997), intercultural competence is the individual's difficulty with relating to other people within the context of a new culture. Hammer (2004) asserts that "intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions" (as cited in Deardoff, 2009, p. 58). An earlier definition by the same author quotes Byram: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values,

beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence also plays a role" (as cited in Deardorff, 2004, pp. 14-15). Therefore, intercultural competence includes more than understanding of other cultures; it involves the development of an individual's skills and attitudes in successfully interacting with persons of diverse backgrounds (Deardorff, 2004).

In the international student literature, the concept of intercultural competence is used frequently to measure psychological distress in quantitative studies. For example, Winton and Constantine (2003) examined cultural adjustment and psychological distress in international students. Their findings state that international students' intercultural competence concerns were related positively to distress. As in the case of the acculturation framework, intercultural competence assumes the cultural superiority of the host and undervalues the cultural background of the student. When the intercultural competence concept is applied to international students, the broader question asked pertains to how well international students can interact with individuals of the host institution and in the host country, and whether international students have the skills and attitudes to interact with them well. This, as in the case of the concepts of adaptation and adjustment, assumes that the student is deficient and ignores the student's agency. Again, this literature focuses on what the student is lacking in order to meet the expectations of the host.

International Students' Social and Academic Experiences

The social and academic experiences of international students have been covered thoroughly in the literature; much of this literature explains myriad problems that

international students face in both the countries and the institutions that host them. Among salient themes are international students' academic integration, international students' English language barriers, international students' psychological problems, international students' interpersonal relations with peers and faculty, their financial problems, and, in recent literature, their use of social media. I use this literature to portray international students as active agents who make their own decisions, construct their own value systems and identities, and who interact with others inside and outside the institutional setting.

Academic Achievement

Student attrition continues to be one of the most prominent problems in higher education (Tinto, 2009). Notwithstanding the size of the student persistence research, much of this literature focuses on the experiences of traditional students. International students are assumed to be successful academically due to their high persistence levels (Fass-Holmes, 2016; Korobova, & Starobin, 2015), hence, there are few empirical studies that examine international student persistence (e.g., Andrade, 2006-2007; Andrade, 2009; Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Stoynoff, 1997). In a study of factors associated with international students' academic achievement, Stoynoff (1997) found that English proficiency and study strategies correlate with academic performance. In a logistical regression analysis of international student persistence, Mamiseishvili (2012) shows that GPA, degree plans, and academic integration were related positively to persistence, and remedial work in English and social integration were related negatively to persistence. In his study of the factors that influence retention of international students in four-year

institutions, Kwai (2009) found academic achievement as the only statistically significant factor that has a positive effect on persistence, which is consistent with other literature on international student persistence (e.g., Mamiseishvili, 2012). Kwai uses existing literature and traditional student retention frameworks (e.g., Metzner & Bean, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975), and concludes that there is need for models that explain international students' persistence, given that existing frameworks focus on domestic students. Kwai (2009) paraphrases Tierney's (1992) critique, stating that Tinto's is an "integrationist position" and elaborates that existing retention frameworks expect international students to "separate from their former communities, beliefs, cultures, values, and attitudes, and to adopt those of a different culture and perspective in order to be successful" (p. 38). These frameworks view the international student as culturally inferior, and in need to empty him or herself of its culture, in order to adopt the host's culture and its institutional norms. These frameworks also negate the student of agency to make their own decisions, to live reflexively, and to construct their own identities. This investigation, however, constitutes a small number of empirical studies that lead to a limited number of findings, and that do not describe international students' experiences in-depth.

Racism

The topics of racism, unequal treatment, and discrimination appear in the literature on international students as examples of student challenges (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Rich & Troudi, 2006). Brown and Jones (2013) list negative experiences faced by a group of international students at a

university in the U.K., and these experiences include racism, verbal abuse, religious discrimination, and physical assault. International students who experience racism can face negative emotional reactions such as sadness, disappointment, homesickness, and anger (Brown & Jones, 2013). In a qualitative study of graduate students who come from Arab countries, Rich and Troudi (2006) report that participants who experienced racist incidents began to perceive themselves as marginalized on account of their culture, color, ethnicity, and nationality. Racism, hence, fuels segregation among international students (Brown, 2009) and leads to international students' self-perception as inferior (Rich & Troudi, 2006).

The triggers for racism are several. Skin color and origin are indicators for susceptibility for racist abuse of international students (Hanassab, 2006). Typically, students from non-White regions of origin face negative experiences more frequently than students from White regions (Lee, 2010). Skin color, however, is not the only catalyst for racist behavior. In their study of 24 international students from 15 countries who attended a Southwestern university in the U. S., Lee and Rice (2007) explored the experiences of international students who reported unfairness, inhospitality, cultural intolerance, and hostility. Lee and Rice posit that the cause of these problems is neo-racism, which they define as "notions of cultural or national superiority and an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups" (p. 389). That is, international students can experience segregation based on cultural background or national origin. Lee and Rice (2007) point to inadequacies of the host society as the source of these problems,

rather than to a lack of adjustment on the part of the international students as it is often noted in the literature.

The literature on international students' experiences with racism has several limitations. One limitation is that it is conducted in research institutions with a White student majority and ignores the experiences of international students enrolled in SCUs, especially those with a non-White student majority. Institutional characteristics can influence student experience; hence, they need to be considered. Another limitation in the literature is that it does not differentiate the experiences among students with different nationalities. Although the literature indicates that cultural background can engender racism, the literature does not compare experiences of racism among different groups within the same institutional setting.

Language

Language is presented as a major challenge that international students face in their host academic environments (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015; Triana, 2015). International students who have completed secondary school in a country where English is not the language of instruction need to demonstrate English proficiency prior to matriculating in U. S. universities, typically by passing an English language proficiency exam such as the TOEFL exam (Educational Testing Center, 2016), or by studying in a language training program in the host university (Study in the USA, 2016). Even if international students can pass a language examination or language training that allegedly verifies their ability to use and understand English at the university level, often they do not have adequate

language skills to interact in an English-speaking environment to the same level as domestic students (Ramachandran, 2011). Language problems are more germane to non-native English-speaking international students from non-Western backgrounds than to international students in general (Berman & Cheng, 2001). International students whose cultural backgrounds are different from those of the host country will have more problems interacting with local students (Lee, 2010).

An English language barrier can create myriad problems for international students, including "adjustment issues" and lack of academic achievement (Leong, 2015). Low English proficiency may lead to a lack of confidence and hinder communication with native speakers (Hong et al., 2007). Arguably, inability to communicate affects international students' interactions with peers and faculty. Concerns about English proficiency and lack of confidence may make international students fearful to communicate with native speakers—both peers and faculty—thus this isolates them and connects them only to the international student community (Hong et al., 2007).

Non-native English-speaking international students typically have more problems listening, speaking, and writing than they do reading. Language barriers are most often present among students who pursue academic disciplines that are demanding linguistically (Zhang & Mi, 2010). Therefore, students in different disciplines will have language problems of different intensity. In turn, spoken language barriers are far more frequent than written language (Sherry, Tomas, & Chui, 2009). For example, at the postgraduate level, international students face complicated interpretation processes which they may not able to understand even when they possess training in the discipline (Bell,

2007). International students also struggle with colloquial language and with idioms, both of which appear commonly in university classrooms conversations (Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015).

There is no consensus in the literature with regards to international student language proficiency challenges. For example, Zhang and Mi (2009), in their mixed methods study of 40 Chinese students in Australian universities, report that participants were not concerned about their language deficiencies in English, particularly in courses less demanding linguistically. The results indicate that English language problems did not affect their academic performance, and that these difficulties lasted only two years. Studies such as Zhang and Mi's are in the minority; as described above, more research points in the opposite direction. A prime limitation of the literature that lists problems with language is that it is quantitative (e.g., Akazaki, 2010; Berman & Cheng, 2001; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010; Sherry et al., 2009), and this literature fails to describe international experiences in detail. Qualitative research that explores this topic exists; however, not only is the number of participants in these studies small (e.g., Leong, 2015; Thorstensson, 2001) but also these investigations typically do not consider student cultural and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Leong, 2015; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Finally, and again pertinent to this investigation, these studies were conducted in White-majority universities, and ignores the experiences of international students in SCUs and in minority serving institutions.

Psychological Challenges

Scholarship has identified psychological challenges international students experience at their host institutions. Chen's (1999) review of the literature lists the common stressors among international populations: Language challenges, educational issues (e.g., performance expectations, educational system adjustment), socio-cultural factors (e.g., culture shock, social isolation and alienation, financial concerns, racial discrimination), and limited contact with members of the host country. Limited contact with locals is related to international student anxiety, depression, and alienation (Chen, 1999). Misra, Crist, and Burant (2003) posit that international students experience stress due to the many and rapid changes that disrupt their new lives at the host institution. Caluya, Probyn, and Vyas (2011) report that international students may experience anxiety amplified by the pressure to achieve permanent residence in the host country and by their living conditions. Congruently, the challenges international students face relocating to an unfamiliar culture affect their sense of security (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004). Studies have shown that international students need more interaction with locals because international students with local ties adjust well in the host environment (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sawir et. al., 2007). Despite international students' isolation, the literature portrays an overwhelming intent by international students to be accepted by their peers and by the staff at their host institutions (Robertson et al., 2000).

This literature lists the many psychological challenges faced by international students during their studies. As in other areas discussed in this literature review, the studies reviewed on international students' psychological challenges were conducted in

White majority institutions and excluded SCUs. Another salient limitation is that these studies are mainly quantitative, which fail to give voice to international students, and do not provide rich descriptions. Similarly, in the main, this literature ignores the differences in international students' origins. Within the international student population, Western international students are less likely to experience stress than non-Western international students, specifically international students from Europe experienced less acculturative stress than their counterparts from Asia, Central/Latin America, and Africa (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Similarly, in a study on study abroad participants conducted in Ireland, U. S. students reported mainly positive experiences and overall lower stress than local students (O'Reilly et al., 2015). These findings reiterate the need for scholarly research to consider student origin in the research on international student experiences.

Relationships with Domestic Students

The literature on international students' social integration posits that international students face challenges in finding U. S. friends at host institutions (Rienties et al., 2001; Gareis, 2012). The larger the cross-cultural differences between international students and the local students, the more the levels of interaction between them decreases (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Rienties et al., 2001). According to Glass et al., (2014), international students' region of origin may moderate their access to participation in recreation activities, and thus affect friendship formation. Students who come from non-Western countries, who represent most international students enrolled in U. S. institutions, do not make friends with local students at the same rate as domestic and as

Western international students. These quantitative findings, however, fail to explicate international student social experiences in detail.

Interactions of international students with domestic students in their institutional setting is promoted, as these bring benefits to international students (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Triana, 2015). International students who do not interact with domestic students miss opportunities to learn from their domestic peers. Social interactions between domestic and international students aid international student understandings of their local environment (Gresham & Clayton, 2011). Furthermore, contact with local students help international students develop confidence and the capacity to negotiate their way within their host university (Sawir et al., 2007). A further benefit for international students from interaction is improved language proficiency (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Although interaction benefits international students, involvement in their new setting and integration into their new environment may prove difficult for them given their ignorance of existing social rules in the host country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

Scholarship suggests that domestic students may not be interested in interaction with international students. In a qualitative study in the U.K., Harrison and Peacock (2010) state that domestic and international students often inhabit separate social spaces within the institution with little interaction between the two groups, where social encounters are coincidental. and where friendships are built among shared appreciation of culture and primarily with other native English speakers. International students are viewed by their domestic peers as handicapped in English language ability (Dunne,

2009). Studies have found that domestic students perceive themselves as privileged in their local environment and unwilling to draw closer to international students; this prompted international students to experience rejection and to view local customs and practices as superior (Turner, 2009). However, the reasons for domestic students' lack of interest in international students are not well understood. According to Williams and Johnson (2011), U. S. students with international friends scored higher on "open-mindedness" and had lower scores on intercultural communication apprehension. Exposure to other cultures may also spur domestic interest in international students. For example, study abroad participation among the domestic population may incentivize interaction between international students and returning study abroad participants. Participants in study abroad programs improve their cross-cultural skills, and study abroad helps them appreciate their home country's diversity (Kitsantas, 2004; Wortman, 2002).

The lack of interest in interacting with students from a different culture is not a phenomenon germane to domestic students only; it is also present in international populations (Tsai & Wong, 2012). Just as domestic students prefer local friends, international students also prefer friends with international backgrounds. In a study by Furnham and Alibhai (1985), the scholars found that international students first prefer co-nationals as friends, then friends from international backgrounds, and finally host country nationals. The connection with culturally and linguistically similar individuals provides international students a platform in which to share their personal struggles and receive emotional support (Tsai &Wong, 2012). Given this, international students may seek

friends who understand the difficulties they face, and show empathy, and who may provide advice to tackle these problems. Some international students may find domestic students' cultures and behaviors radically different from their own; hence, they may avoid contact with domestic students. International students may reject the liberal values of U. S. institutions and sexual permissiveness in dormitories (Leong, 2015). Similarly, international students can be confounded by "relationships with students and staff from the opposite sex, gestures that are acceptable, networking with other students and implications for their privacy, religious beliefs in the modern world, and human rights and value systems" (Ramachandran, 2011, p. 206). International students show agency and are capable to develop their own values, international identities, and ways to relate to peers.

The literature that addresses international students' relations with domestic students is not without limitations. First, most of this research is conducted in White-majority universities and excludes SCUs. Second, studies with quantitative methodologies do explore this topic; however, these fail to explain in detail the experiences of international students. For example, Tas (2012) measured the number of domestic students' friends of an international student, but not the quality of these friendships. Third, some of the qualitative studies do not differentiate between student cultural and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Thorstensson, 2001; Tsai & Wong, 2012). Finally, some of the qualitative studies employed methodologies that may not produce sufficient "thick descriptions" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). For example, Tsai and Wong

(2012) utilized focus groups as a data collection method, instead of in-depth interviews, which would have provided richer data.

Relationships with Faculty

Faculty play an influential role in shaping international students' academic trajectory (O'Meara, Knudsen, & Jones, 2013). International students, however, appear to face numerous challenges inside the host university classroom. The most documented problem in the literature regarding international students' experiences in the classroom is a lack of English language proficiency (Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015). The lack of English proficiency leads to scarce opportunities for spoken interaction for international students (Maddox, 2014), and it generates a sense of isolation and frustration in the learning process (Glass et al., 2015). Furthermore, international students often do not understand regional accents of the faculty (Bamber, 2013). Exclusion from faculty may go beyond communication difficulties and spawn a sense of non-equal treatment and racial prejudice within the classroom (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Lee, 2010).

In a study of international student learning environments and perceptions at an Australian university, the findings present a lack of awareness and empathy by faculty and staff, despite the interest of international students to be accepted in the institutional environment (Robertson et al., 2000). However, this perception of unequal treatment does not apply to all international students. Those from non-Western regions were less integrated academically; students from Western countries were more academically integrated (Lee, 2010; Rienties et al., 2012). For example, Valdez (2015) describes how

faculty assumptions shape perceptions in a classroom setting, specifically targeting Chinese students on issues of academic dishonesty.

Notwithstanding faculty who are not openly biased, international students face difficulties in adjusting to the activities that take place inside U. S. classrooms where pedagogy and expectations vary from those they experienced previously in their home countries (Andrade, 2006; Leong, 2015). Even when knowledge of U. S. social rules and U. S. pedagogical styles have been acquired, international students may experience racial prejudice inside the classroom (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008). Scholarship shows, for example, that there is a greater expectation of faculty-student communication in and out of class in the U. S. than what Chinese international students have experienced in their home countries (Leong, 2015). Other elements such as large lecture classes prevent participation and create a divide between faculty expectations and students' understanding with regards to the interpretation of content and its subsequent assessment (Bamber, 2013). These conditions are detrimental for international students given that the burden to adapt to the host learning context is placed on them. U. S. faculty do not always take on the responsibility to adapt to the changing culture of the classroom in light of the presence of international students (Campbell & Li, 2008).

In general, international students seek a close relationship with their instructors (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). The literature reports that students who are integrated academically are more likely to persist (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1997), and integration can be facilitated by instructors. Adaptations by both faculty and international students make teaching and learning more relevant for international students

(Tran, 2011). The presence of faculty and staff who are sensitive to the needs of international students is more beneficial to them than institutional efforts that foster international student resilience in an environment that ignores their needs (Lee, 2010).

The literature on international student relationships with faculty focuses primarily on research universities and ignores, in the main, the experiences of international students enrolled at SCUs and in other minority serving institutions (e.g., Hispanic Serving Institutions, Historical Black Colleges). Pedagogical formats in SCUs, institutions with large numbers of nontraditional students and institutions with a teaching-centered culture (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2020), can be expected to be different from those of research universities. The literature, however, does not illustrate if the presence of academically underprepared students in SCUs classrooms plays a role or not in the creation of more welcoming settings for international students. Furthermore, it is not clear in the literature whether or not faculty who serve in SCU environments are aware of the academic needs of nontraditional students enrolled in SCUs and particularly cognizant and capable to serve international students' academic needs.

Financial Problems

According to the Open Doors report (Institute of International Education, IIE, 2018), the two primary sources of funding for international students' students are personal or family funds (59%) and current employment (19%). That is, international students do not enjoy the benefits of federal financial aid in large quantities such as domestic students do, except funding from U. S. colleges and universities that includes teaching and research assistantships, which are often federal research grants disbursed to

graduate students (IIE, 2018). Additionally, international undergraduate students who attend public universities typically pay non-resident tuition that tends to be higher than tuition costs paid by domestic students. This makes it difficult for many international students to pay for their tuition, living, and miscellaneous expenses while in the U. S., particularly for those coming from families without the financial means to cover the expenses out-of-pocket.

International students' financial problems are thoroughly documented in the literature (Chen, 1999; Dunne, 2009; Lassegard, 2006; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Mori, 2000; Sherry et al., 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Financial need is one of several sociocultural stressors experienced by international students (Chen, 1999; Dunne, 2009; Mori, 2000). Financial support solves this problem, but for many international students help is not always available. Despite the availability of jobs for undergraduate international students on U. S. campuses, these part-time jobs can ameliorate only financial need, and not solve serious financial needs given high tuition and living expenses in most U. S. colleges and universities. Although many international graduate students receive generous financial support in their academic programs, many of them interrupt their studies due to financial need (Lassegard, 2006).

Social Media

The influence of electronic media use on the academic and social lives of international students is not clear, as both technologies and research are evolving in this area. However, there is a negative relationship between students' cellular-phone use, video game and online gaming, and TV exposure and their GPA (Jacobsen & Forste,

2011). Specifically, literature indicates that international students use social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) to look for everyday life information, and that younger international students use it more than older students (Sin & Kim, 2013).

How do international students use social media? More importantly, how does social media affect their social and academic experiences? Typically, international students' national origin determines which platforms they use. Chinese students gravitate towards SNS used in China, in Mandarin (e.g., Renren), more than they do to Facebook (Li & Chen, 2014). Kim, Yum and Yoon's (2009) study found that international students can build new relationships with co-national students through the use of the internet. Lin et al.'s (2012) quantitative study of 195 international students in a major Midwestern university found that Social Network Site (SNS) use, horizontal collectivism (i.e., perception of oneself as part of a group), and extroversion were related positively to international student social adjustment. Specifically, the people with which international students interacted via SNS affected their "social capital and adjustments." The more international students interacted with friends and acquaintances from their home country, the more online capital they gained; the more they interacted with domestic students using SNS, the lower their offline bonding and "bridging social capital" (i.e., loose relationship ties that connect international students to different networks, which in turn gives them access to information) [Lin, et al., 2012]. Li and Chen (2014), tell us that the SNS platform has an effect on the level of bridging capital on international students.

There are several reasons why international students use of SNS requires further research. First, as SNS technologies evolve, and as new platforms are introduced with

new services and approaches, their effects on international students' social experiences will also change. The literature needs to explain if SNS use will solidify or weaken international students' agency. Furthermore, research needs to explain if the use of social media in the international student's own language, will strengthen or weaken an international students' home identity. If international students spend considerable periods of time in their own language to keep abreast of home country news, media, and pop culture, it is not clear if this lowers or not their interest in host country information or their development of English language skills. More directly to the aims of this investigation, the literature needs to explain the outcomes of SNS use on international students' social experiences at an SCU.

Summary of Literature

In this literature review, I addressed the theoretical and methodological limitations of the literature on international students' experiences. I critiqued salient theories used in international student research, specifically adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and intercultural competence, which portray international students in deficit. I also covered literature on international students' social and academic experiences, and I focused on prominent themes discussed in this scholarship including international students' academic integration, international students' English language proficiency, international students' psychological problems, and international students' interpersonal relations with peers and faculty. Among salient limitations is that this literature ignores, and overwhelmingly so, SCUs. I used this literature to portray international students as active agents who make their own decisions, construct their own

belief systems, choose their identities, and who interact with others inside and outside the institutional setting in search of validating experiences.

Theoretical Orientations for the Investigation of International Students

Qualitative research includes in its inception theoretical orientations that inform the researcher in the study of meanings that individuals give to a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). These theories orientations are found in the scholarship and "provide a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 59). The theoretical work that guided this research includes the theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962, 1967), the theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001), the concept of self-formation (Marginson, 2014), and the concepts of validating culturally diverse students (Rendon, 1994, 2002).

Theory of Challenge and Support

Sanford's theory of challenge and support is considered a foundational student development theory. The theory of challenge and support (1962) argues that college students experience personal growth and development, and that this growth is influenced by the experiences that take place in the college environment, in both what occurs inside and what occurs outside the classroom. Sanford refers to "positive growth" to when students become able to integrate and to act on different experiences and influences (Evans et al., 2010). Sanford asserts that for this growth to take place, a student should experience a balance between the "challenges" (i.e., academic, social, psychological problems) he/she faces and the "support" he/she receives in the institution. Sandford

defines challenges as circumstances in the academic, social, and psychological realms that a student faces but does not have the skills, knowledge, or attitude to overcome (Sanford, 1967). In turn, institutional support provided to the student serves as a buffer in the environment, which helps the student meet and, potentially, overcome challenges **(**Sanford, 1967). Challenges are what move the student towards growth, and support is what upholds the student once the challenge has started and what helps the student overcome the challenge. A third element in the Sanford's model is "readiness," which refers to the level of student maturation needed to take on the challenges and to receive support.

Sanford's challenge and support theory views international student growth in the SCU educational setting as a function of undergraduate international student exposure to the appropriate balance of academic, social, and psychological challenges, and institutionally-generated support that sustains international students during the challenge and that helps the student overcome it. The institution exposes international students to a series of experiences that generate academic, social, and psychological challenges, but is there little to support them with a series of services to help them overcome these challenges. The literature is clear on academic challenges (e.g., English language, academic engagement), social challenges (e.g., relationship with domestic peers, discrimination), and psychological challenges (e.g., stress, depression) international students face in U. S. higher education institutions. Institutional support on behalf of international students includes efforts designed to meet international students' specific needs (e.g., international education offices, international academic advisors, international

student programming and orientations, peer mentors), along with faculty guidance and a litany of services and support offered to all enrolled students. This provides a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study.

Validating Culturally Diverse Students

Another theory that provides a general explanation to the experiences of undergraduate international students is Laura I. Rendon's (1994) validation theory on culturally diverse students. This theory brought to the attention of the scholarship in the mid-1990s the dissonance between the traditional portrait of college students as white males from privileged backgrounds and the diversity in student profile in social background, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation present in U. S. colleges and universities. This disconnection, she argued, was predominant in the Euro-centered curriculum and in the passive lecture techniques focused on learning processes present in colleges and universities, which alienated and intimidated nontraditional students. In response, she posited that it is not non-traditional students who must adapt to a predominant institutional culture, but that institutions must also adapt and change to serve nontraditional students. The findings of her study noted that students who became more highly involved socially and academically were more excited about learning, which supported research that preceded hers (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987). She recognized, however, that not all students take advantage of opportunities to participate in academic and social activities, hence, it behooves institutions to take the initiative to validate students. Rendon conceptualizes student validation as enabling,

confirming, and supportive interactions carved out by in-class and out-of-class "agents" such as faculty, classmates, friends, and family, who foster the academic and interpersonal development of international students (Rendon, 1994, p. 37). Rendon defines in-class academic validation as actions of academic nature occurred inside the classroom that fosters student capacity to learn and to acquire confidence. These actions can include faculty who demonstrate a genuine concern for teaching students, approachable faculty, equal treatment by faculty, structured learning experiences that allow students to see themselves as learners, faculty working with students in need of extra help, and faculty who provide students with meaningful feedback. Out-of-class validation is presented by Rendon as the students' interactions from outside the institutional setting that may support and comfort students, even in the absence of in-class validation.

The literature indicates that external and internal sources of support provide encouragement and reinforce academic goals of international student (Andrade, 2008). However, Rendon's explanation of validating non-traditional students misses several of the actual conditions of U. S. colleges and universities which have a large international student population. Each subgroup in the nontraditional student population can have a different experience in college (Carter, Sellers, & Squires, 2002). Arguably, international students will experience college differently from U. S. students. For example, international students who transferred from an international institution into a U. S. university experienced more difficulties than domestic transfer students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Correspondingly, each subgroup of international students will

have different experiences in the U. S. university. For example, Asian international students struggle more in adjusting to campus life compared to non-Asian students (Abe et al., 1998).

Although international students experience academic and social disconnection as ethnic minorities such as African American students or Latino students experience in U. S. campuses, international students' circumstances can prove more difficult. For most international students enrolled in U. S. colleges and universities, the number of in-class and out-class agents (e.g., friends and family members) who can help international students when problems come up are fewer than for domestic students, for some because they have few acquaintances and friends upon arrival, and also in part because international students' families typically live abroad. Zhang (2016), in a qualitative study guided by Rendon's theory that aimed to understand how academic advising validates or invalidates the social and academic experiences of international students enrolled in community colleges, confirms the difficulty international students may have finding in-class and out-of-class agents. Zhang's findings indicate that international students experience academic and personal validation from academic advisors, and that international students face invalidating experiences when advisors have "limited knowledge about international student regulations, unfamiliarity with international students' background, and lack of preparation for communicating with ESL learners" (p. 165). Hence, cultural and linguistic barriers make it difficult for in-class agents to approach and support international students in the institutional setting. For example, international students whose first language is not English, particularly East Asians in

their first years on campus, encounter hardship in understanding faculty. Faculty may not be acquainted with the international students' milieu and may engage only domestic students with whom they have a common language and culture and ignore international students. This occurs as well with out-of-class agents who may support U. S. nontraditional students (e.g., spouses, parents, family members). Upon arrival, most international students can interact only with out-of-class agents through electronic means of communication, as their family members typically live abroad. This is corroborated by the literature that states that international students who are married experience lower levels of "adjustment strain" than single international students, as they have limited need to explore other possible relationships (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006).

Self-Authorship

The theory of self-authorship applied to international students positions them as meaning-making active agents capable of producing individual decisions, who develop their own values, their own international identities, and their ways to relate to peers. Their ability to "self-author," that is, to generate an internal view of self, relationships, and knowledge suggests that international students can think critically and develop intercultural maturity (Baxter Magolda, 2004). The concept of self-authorship in students entails a shift from an external meaning-making capacity into an internal process inside the self (Kegan, 1994). In self-authorship, individuals perceive themselves as capable of knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 1998). Kegan's explanation of self-authorship views values, convictions, ideals, and interpersonal loyalties as elements of a system, but not as the system itself, in which the individual becomes the coordinator of these

elements, not the product of these. This involves a shift from conceptualizing the individual as uncritical, and accepting of values, beliefs, and interpersonal loyalties from external realms to conceptualizing the individual as creating these internally (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Self-Formation

The concept of self-formation is a critique offered by Marginson (2014) to the literature on international education which depicts international students as deficient and in need to adjust to their host country and host institution's norms and values. Marginson is critical of the "adjustment" and the "acculturation" concepts used in the scholarly literature that assumes the host country's cultural superiority. This body of literature assumes that international students are in need of socialization in local norms and values. Marginson's critique echoes the literature's longstanding position against the reduction of minority students' culture in favor of incorporating the values of dominant culture (Attinassi, 1989; Tierney, 1992).

Marginson's notion of the international student is that of a reflexive and self-determining individual, guided by agentic freedom. He sees international students as self-formed, and international education as a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control. Under the concept of self-formation, the conscious agency of the international student (i.e., the sum of the student's capacity to act on his/her behalf) is irreducible (Marginson, 2014).

Summary of Theoretical Orientations

The theoretical work that guided this research includes the theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962, 1967), the theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001), the concept of self-formation (Marginson, 2014), and the concepts of validating culturally diverse students (Rendon, 1994, 2002). Sanford's challenge and support theory views international student growth in the SCU educational setting as a function of undergraduate international student exposure to the appropriate balance of academic, social, and psychological challenges, and institutionally-generated support that sustains international students during the challenge and that helps the student overcome it. Rendon's concepts of validating culturally diverse students reiterates the need to provide external and internal sources of support to international students, as they encourage and reinforce their academic goals. The theory of self-authorship applied to international students positions them as meaning-making active agents capable of producing individual decisions, who develop their own values, their own international identities, and their ways to relate to peers. The theory of self-formation views of the international student as reflexive and self-determining individuals, guided by agentic freedom, and shaping their own identities.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological investigation seeks to answer the following overarching question and subquestions,

What are the stories that convey the experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in a state comprehensive university (SCU) in Southern California?

a. How do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California perceive and interpret their social experiences?
b. How do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California perceive and interpret their academic experiences?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research Methodology

This investigation required an in-depth study of the experiences of undergraduate international students in social and academic realms at an SCU. This investigation utilized a qualitative approach that relied upon semi-structured interviews as methods of data collection consistent with qualitative field methods research (Bailey, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013; Mason, 2002). This investigation intended to capture the experiences of undergraduate international students and connected several theoretical orientations to the collected data for analysis. To pursue this endeavor, this research used qualitative research methods with a social constructivist worldview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Lichtman, 2013) and a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lichtman, 2013), which foreground the perceptions of research participants in order to capture and express their lived experiences. Narrative analysis was used to analyze the data collected from interviews (Riessman, 2008).

Philosophical Principles

Every researcher has a set of philosophical principles. This "interpretive framework" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), or "paradigm," is a "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). It includes premises about ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It guides the way a researcher sees the world, and how he/she thinks it should be studied. My view about ontology, or the nature

of reality and its characteristics, embraces the postulation that reality is seen through numerous perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this research, I accepted the different perspectives of the participants with the intent to study them and to report on my research findings. Epistemology is "what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified," that is, how a researcher knows reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 61). Based on my epistemological view, I spent considerable time with the participants, and situated myself as closely as possible to them in their SCU environment. This investigation presents international students' narratives as evidence of their experiences.

The researcher's philosophical assumptions are often applied within interpretive frameworks. This research used a social constructivist framework, or interpretivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In the social constructivist worldview, individuals seek to understand the world in which they interact with others, and they create subjective meanings about these interactions (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba, 1990). As a researcher adhering to the social constructivist worldview, I focused on the plethora and complexity of views presented by the participants and generated, inductively, a pattern of meaning for those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My social constructivist worldview led me to embrace qualitative methods in this investigation (Creswell, 2009). This investigation used qualitative research methods to uncover meaning in the narratives of international students. I collected data in their natural setting, performed data analysis, and wrote this report which gave voice to the participants and acknowledged the reflexivity of this researcher (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research methodology is characterized by "inductive, emerging, and shaped

by the researcher's experience collecting and analyzing data" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 66). This investigation relied on accepted qualitative research methods and was informed by scholarly literature about international student experiences in higher education. The phenomenological approach allowed me to understand the lived experiences of those international students in the social and academic realms within the SCU setting (Lichtman, 2013) and to give to voice those experiences (van Manen, 1990). The data collection method used comprised in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2013), in a semi-structured interview format (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Narrative analysis was used to conduct data analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). The current chapter explicates in detail each of these investigative phases and describes their interconnectedness, which together form a coherent study capable to answer the research questions defined by this investigation.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher plays a fundamental role in the research process, as all information is collected and analyzed, and data are constructed through his or her eyes (Lichtman, 2013). Therefore, my conceptualization of the research considered what I bring to the inquiry.

In phenomenological studies, the researcher engages in the exploration of the phenomenon, that is, in the interview of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and who have subjective opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviewer carries conscious and subconscious motives, feelings, and assumptions, which make him or her biased (Scheurich, 1995). Therefore, the researcher should bracket him or herself

out of the phenomenon, not to extract the researcher completely from the study, but to identify and to set aside those personal experiences with the phenomenon, and instead focus on the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this reason, I considered the past experiences, biases, values, and personal background I brought to this investigation, as these shaped my interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2013). I also understood that as part of the research endeavor my subjectivity was present both as producer and as a product of this investigation, hence my personal self-awareness was critical in this process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Lichtman, 2013). Peshkin defines "subjectivity" as the "amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of one's class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one's object of investigation" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Therefore, I describe my personal background and values and how this shaped the research process.

I am a middle age, middle class Hispanic living in Southern California. I have been exposed to more than one language and culture all my life. I speak, read, and write English and Spanish fluently, and I have conversational skills in Japanese. I lived my childhood on both sides of the U. S.-Mexico border, and I attended primary and secondary schools in both countries. I lived in Mexico while I pursued my undergraduate program, and, afterwards, I returned to California to study a graduate program at an SCU. In the late nineties, I lived in Japan as an international student, and since then I have been back to Japan more than ten times. I have received university degrees from both Mexico and the U. S., and I have completed a one-year program in a Japanese research university.

I have travelled abroad extensively to Asia, Europe, and Africa, mostly due to professional engagements.

The experience of living in different countries for extended periods helped me understand the intricacies of communicating in a language that is not my own. As a person who is a nonnative English speaker, and as an immigrant to the U. S., I am cognizant of the language challenges that international students may experience. I know what is like to be an international student living in a foreign country, and I understand the challenges that an international student faces in an institutional setting when he or she has not achieved linguistic fluency. I know it takes much effort to master a new language, and to understand the norms and rules of a host international institution and of a country that is not one's own. I can relate to feelings of isolation, frustration, and loneliness that some non-Western international students may experience in U. S. institutions, as I experienced these feelings during my stay in Japan.

I have worked in various capacities in higher education institutions in Mexico, Japan, and the United States. In total, I have worked at five universities in student assistant and graduate student roles. I also have experienced teaching in graduate assistant capacities. As a full-time employee, I have worked in clerical, in entry-level professional roles (i.e., international student advisor, immigration specialist), and in managerial levels as an assistant director, a unit director, and as an assistant vice president at the SCU where this study took place. The conduct of the research at this site provided me with advantages such as familiarity with the campus, understanding of the

verbal expression the students used, and analytic insights into the workings of the institutional setting (Bayley, 2007).

Most of my eighteen years working in higher education have been in the field of international education. I hold views of the importance of international student services, which influenced my research design, and which affected my interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I managed a one-stop-shop international center with seventeen staff members and ten student assistants, which served the institution in the following areas: International student recruitment, international admissions, international student services, nonimmigrant visas, international agreements/MOAs, study abroad, academic advising, and visiting delegations. During my tenure in charge of this program, my institution ranked among the twenty largest programs in the U. S. according to the IIE (2018) in the Master's Colleges and Universities segment, which is the IIE designation that includes SCUs (IIE, 2016). My duties included the management of staff, the coordination of international programs, and the generation of initiatives that fostered the internationalization of the campus. Due to this purview of responsibilities, I was in continual contact with students, staff, and faculty in all academic colleges at the institution. My professional background of creating, organizing, and monitoring programs that served international students allowed me to witness first-hand how international students can also thrive in their educational pursuits, and to be cognizant of common problems international students can face in an SCU educational setting.

During my graduate studies in the field of higher education, I focused on expanding my understanding of the international student experience in U. S. higher

education institutions. I wrote several papers that helped me familiarize with literature on international students' academic and social experiences, and to detect limitations in the scholarly literature (which are discussed in Chapter Two). I conducted an exploratory study about international undergraduate student experiences at an SCU that helped me reflect on essential themes (van Manen, 1990) [see Appendix]. My personal and professional backgrounds, as well as my interest in this literature were catalysts in my pursuit of research on international students' experiences in SCUs. Also important to this decision to conduct research was the increasing representation of international students in the U. S. undergraduate student population.

Given my professional background, I am well-acquainted with international students' use of English language and with expressions and terminology used by international students to describe their positive and negative experiences. As a young student, I experienced when a teacher uses English laced with idioms and slang, and I was excluded from these interactions. I also experienced discrimination in the United States, both verbal and nonverbal, which was due to my accent or due to my appearance. All these experiences shaped how I view international students and their stories and helped my sensitivity during data collection and data analyses.

I was cognizant of international students' language ability during my interviews, and I omitted the use of slang and nuances during my conversation with the participants. For example, I knew that certain terms used in the informed consent form to explain the aspirations of this investigation were beyond the participants' understanding. For that reason, I took enough time to explain in language they could understand, and at times

with the help of an online bilingual electronic dictionary, my questions and comments and the purposes of this investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I used my experience in advising international students to adjust my style and my voice to consider the style and customs of the students I interviewed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I was aware of my age and of my experience of working at the campus, and I avoided the use formalistic language that may have imbalanced the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Seidman, 2013). While cognizant that my age, use of the English language, and experience of working in the campus gave me an asymmetrical relationship with the interviewees, I strived to create a balanced rapport that was marked by respect, interest, attention, and good manners (Seidman, 2013), and I ensured that I provided an environment that was trustworthy for them to talk about their experiences (Lichtman, 2013).

Phenomenological Approach

I used a phenomenological approach to understand the academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students. In research, phenomenology is a strategy that focuses on the "lived experiences" of those who have experienced a particular phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013). In qualitative research, a phenomenological approach identifies human experiences, specifically about a phenomenon, as explained by research participants (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenological approach is interested in the understanding of social phenomena from the actors' own perspectives and the research endeavors to capture the world as experienced by the subjects (Seidman, 2013).

In a phenomenological approach, typically, data collection procedures entail the interview of individuals exposed to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the focus on this investigation is the experience of individuals, I conducted interviews with undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU campus (Burgess, 1995; Hermanowicz, 2002; Lundgren, 2012). In phenomenological interviewing, the researcher seeks to understand the experiences and the points of view of the interviewees, as well as the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). This investigation utilized semi-structured interviews as a primary source of data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013), along with field ancillary notes, to explain the "lived experiences" in the academic and social realms of undergraduate international students (Schultz, 1967; van Manen, 1990). Live experiences encompass the numerous elements that make up the experiences of human beings (Schultz, 1967). Upon reflection of the details of the participants' lived experience is that experiences become "phenomena" and takes meaning for both the interviewee and the researcher (Schultz, 1967). In other words, lived experience is what humans experience, but the only way to approach this lived experience is by a reconstruction of the experience (van Manen, 1990). I concentrated on the details of the experiences of the interviewees to guide participants to reconstitute their lived experience (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, the goal of the researcher in this investigation was to come as close as possible to the "nature of the thing," as defined by van Manen (1990). That is, informed by the literature on international student experiences, and through the use of in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2013), and in a semi-structured interview format (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), I sought to understand the

participants' social and academic experiences in the context of an SCU from their subjective point of view.

Phenomenologist note that there are myriad ways of interpreting the experiences of participants through the interaction with them; hence, the interpretation of these experiences is "socially constructed" (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Lichtman, 2013). The researcher's interpretation of socially constructed experiences is subject to interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Qualitative research suggests that there is no unanimous way of observing and interpreting the world; instead, the observation of the world can produce numerous "realities" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 25). That is, aligned with qualitative methods and with the phenomenological perspective is the assumption that human experience is mediated by the researcher's interpretation (Blumer, 1969). Explicitly, the lived academic and social experiences of international students in this investigation were shaped by the interviewees' experiences but were co-constructed by both participants and the researcher.

In a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, researchers decide to study a phenomenon due to an earnest interest about a topic, what van Manen (1990) calls an "abiding concern" and reflect on essential themes about this topic. I justified my personal interest in the international undergraduate students at an SCU due to my own personal educational experiences as an English language learner in the U. S., as an international student in higher education institutions in three countries, and due to my professional experiences in the field of international education. My exposure to the literature on international students during my graduate program, and an exploratory investigation on

the academic and social experiences of international students enrolled in an SCU helped me reflect on essential themes that are evident in the lived experiences of international students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I incorporated these themes into the interview guide that he used during each of the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

My interest in international students, my personal experiences, and my exposure to the literature influenced the themes used to create the interview guide, but not the data collection process. In data collection, I aimed to "bracket" myself from the experiences of the participants and set aside my own experience and pre-judgements to the degree possible to examine the phenomenon with an unbiased approach (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180). The aspiration of bracketing is to enhance the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings of the phenomenological study. This means that I strived to examine the phenomenon as if I were exposed to it for the first time, namely, to bracket out my own experiences prior to the examination of the experiences of the participants of the research. More broadly, "bracketing" is achieved by suspending personal experiences, theories, or view about a phenomenon (Lichtman, 2013). Moustakas (1994), however, recognizes that full bracketing is seldom achieved. During this investigation, I recognized that I was not able to bracket myself fully from of the interviews. Hence, during the interviews, I sought to set aside as much as possible my past educational and professional experiences, my knowledge of the literature on international students, and my views about international students, and I endeavored to focus on the social and academic experiences of undergraduate international students with whom I interacted during the interviews. I avoided preconceived notions in the

interpretation of the phenomena. Lichtman (2013) recommends that researchers make explicit their ideas about a topic prior to their immersion in the literature and before the interview of participants. I recorded many of my ideas on the topic of academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled at an SCU following the completion of an earlier, exploratory study on this topic, and this action aided me in the identification of my personal views (see Appendix B). I wrote notes prior to my immersion in the literature on this topic and prior to my interaction with this investigation's participants (Lichtman, 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection: Selection of the Investigative Site

The site was chosen for scholarly and methodological reasons. The scholarship on international student experiences is replete with studies conducted in research universities, and generally excludes the experiences of international students enrolled in SCUs. The site was chosen because it helped fill a void in the international students' experiences literature where SCUs are not represented thoroughly. The effects that these institutions have on demographics that are underrepresented in higher education are significant. SCUs are institutions that enroll and graduate large numbers of nontraditional students. Research that explicates the experiences of international students, which is a growing subset of the nontraditional student population, is warranted. The site was also selected because of access: My prior working experience at the SCU site facilitated my access to students and to information about the site.

The site is considered a minority-serving institution, specifically a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), which is a federally recognized category of college and universities based on enrollment criteria. HSIs are institutions that serve an undergraduate population that is both low-income (50% or more receiving Title IV needs-based assistance) and in which Hispanic students constitute at least 25% of the undergraduate population (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). HIS are distinct from other higher education institutions, in that they represent only 13% of U. S. higher education institutions, but they host two-thirds of all Hispanic college and university students (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2020).The site is an SCU with a much larger nontraditional student population, particularly Mexican Americans and other Latinos, than at most other MSIs in the United States.

The site is part of the California State University System (CSU). The CSU is one of the three public higher education systems in the state of California, along with the University of California System and the California Community College System. It is the largest four-year public university system in the U.S (CSU, 2020). The CSU was created in 1960 as part of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, and many of its campuses were part of the California State Normal Schools (CSU, 2020). The CSU currently has 23 campuses and 8 off-campus centers, and it enrolls 482,200 students with over 52,000 faculty staff (CSU, 2020). The CSU confers 126,000 degrees each year, with roughly half of all baccalaureate degrees awarded by all universities in California, and it is the largest producer of bachelor's degrees in the U. S. (ICF, 2010). The CSU student enrollment is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.
CSU Enrollment

Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	4.0
American Indian	0.2
Asian Only	11.5
Filipino	4.1
Mexican American	33.2
Other Latino	8.3
Pacific Islander	0.3
White	23.0
Two or More Races	4.4
Unknown	4.6
Non-Resident Alien	6.4

Statistics that provide the exact number of international students are not available on the CSU's website, but a close estimate is possible to determine by using Table 1. The category of "non-resident alien" includes international students, along with those students who are classified as non-resident students for tuition (e.g., U. S. citizens who have residency out-of-state). Given that several of the CSU campuses are among the top 40 "Master's Colleges" with most international student as reported in Open Doors (IIE, 2018), and that all CSUs host international students, it is fair to conclude that the majority of the "non-resident alien" students reported in the CSU are international students.

The site is a mid-sized CSU located in Southern California, with over 20,000 students. The campus has a large population of nontraditional students and a large population of international students. The institution has approximately 900 degree-seeking international students, of which approximately 550 are undergraduate. Sixty-two percent of the students are considered low-income students (i.e., Pell Grant recipients),

and 84% are first-generation college students (i.e., have parents without a bachelor's degree). The ethnic composition of the student body is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2.
Ethnic Composition of Undergraduate Population at SCU

Ethnicity	Percentage
African American	4.9
American Indian	0.2
Asian Only	2.9
Filipino	2.3
Mexican American	54.1
Other Latino	8.9
Pacific Islander	0.2
White	12.5
Two or More Races	2.4
Unknown	4.3
Non-Resident Alien	7.4

The College of Extended and Global Education (CEGE) houses units that design and implement services and initiatives for international populations at SCU. The Center for International Studies and Programs (CISP) is the unit under CEGE that serves degree-seeking international students. Among the responsibilities of CISP are International student services (e.g., new international student orientation programs, letters of verification), visa and immigration services (i.e., employment authorization requests, visa applications and renewals), and academic advising through liaison with academic units. CISP also collaborates with university and off-campus partners to design and to implement programs, activities, and services that support SCU's internationalization efforts, including international scholar programs, education abroad, and international partners. In addition, CEGE's International Extension Programs houses English language

learners' programs as well as programs for other international students who have not matriculated in SCU degree programs (e.g., "open university") and provides them with academic advising and international student services.

Human Research Review Board Approval and Protection of Human Subjects

An IRB application for the use of human participants was submitted to the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) of the University of California, Riverside (UCR). ORI approved my IRB contingent upon the IRB approval at the study site (see Appendix). I then submitted an IRB application at the study site, which was also approved (see Appendix). Both IRB petitions were approved prior to the recruitment of participants.

Recruitment of Participants

Per IRB, I intended to utilize the campus email list generated by the SCU's international office or registrar. The email explained the objectives of the investigation and invited international undergraduate students to participate and asked them to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating (see email in IRB). However, during a telephone conversation with the registrar, I was informed that the university could not send such communications to their international student population on my behalf. I then changed my strategy to identify international undergraduate students through faculty and staff who worked on campus. I made an initial list of 10 faculty and staff that could, potentially, help me. These individuals were faculty and staff whom I knew from my years working on campus and with whom I had developed a relationship during my years at the SCU. I knew that they had contact with international students (e.g., academic advisors; advisors for international student clubs; those faculty who

taught courses with large numbers of international students). I contacted four of these individuals to help me find eligible international undergraduate students to participate in the interviews. One individual said they could not find any participants; three individuals agreed to assist me. These individuals (i.e., two faculty and one staff member) contacted students and then gave me the contact information of the initial participants. The contact information I was provided by the faculty and staff was for students who had agreed, tentatively, to participate, and who had agreed to disclose to me their contact information. I reached out to the students via email or via telephone, and I explained the goals of the interviews. I indicated that the conversations would be in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and I clarified that these interviews were not mandatory. On several occasions, students did not respond to my first communication or to my second. I followed-up with the students at most three times, and the majority of the students either accepted to participate in the interview or declined my invitation by my first communication.

After my initial conversations with faculty and staff who assisted me to identify participants, I scheduled the interviews of the first cohort. After three weeks of interviews, I had run out of participants. I then attempted snowball sampling, which is a technique where existing interview participants helped recruit future participants among their friends or acquaintances (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). I asked most students whom I interviewed for names of students who may be interested, but it helped me only to generate two additional interviews. Whenever I ran out of student participants, I went back to my list of faculty and staff and asked for more student names.

I could not use all names I was provided by the faculty and staff because they comprised primarily of Chinese and Arab students, and that would lead to a homogenous student sample, even though these are the two largest groups of the international undergraduate population at this SCU. Instead, I used maximum variation sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) because I wanted to understand the social and academic experiences of different groups of international students at this SCU. For this reason, I sought to make my sample as representative as possible, including country of origin, age, gender, major, and class standing.

I sought to explore the phenomenon with a heterogeneous group of individuals who had experienced an HSI and a comprehensive university. An appropriate group size according to Creswell and Poth (2018) in phenomenological research is between 2 and 15 individuals; Dukes (1984) recommends a sample of 3 to 10 participants; Polkinghorne (1989) recommends 5 to 25 individuals. Ultimately, I interviewed 13 students, for a total of 26 interviews because each student was interviewed twice. More than one interview for each participant is a recommendation for qualitative, phenomenological interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, Seidman, 2013). The sample size is a number comparable to those used in other studies in the literature that addresses international student experiences in the U. S., as well as in international institutions (e.g., Caluya et.al., 2011; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Tran, 2010). The sample grew in number until saturation was reached, that is, until the data did not lead to additional information (Mason, 2010). All interviews were in person except one interview which was conducted via cell phone. Most of the interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes; one interview

lasted over 100 minutes. All interviews were transcribed following recommendations by Seidman (2013).

The time and place for the interviews were negotiated with each participant, and took a place in a public place on campus, or near campus, where participants indicated was comfortable and safe (e.g., a coffee shop, the student union building). Each participant signed a "Consent to Act as a Human Subject Form" prior to the start of the first interview and each was explained the objectives of the research. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions before the start of the interview and were explained that they could stop the interview at any time. All interviews were recorded, as this was a requirement for participation.

Participants were all taking undergraduate courses at SCU. These included regularly matriculated degree-seeking undergraduate students, undergraduate exchange students, and English language students registered in undergraduate courses. Students in this investigation had diverse backgrounds in country of origin, gender, major, and university level (e.g., first year, third year). No graduate students were included in this investigation because most of the literature reviewed examined undergraduate and graduate students separately. A sample should reflect the range of participants that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect with their experiences (Seidman, 2013). The participants included four students from Saudi Arabia, four students from Japan, three students from China, two students from Taiwan, and one student from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) [see Table 3]. Nine of the students were males, and four of the students were females. Of the participants, four were

management majors, three students were English majors, two business administration majors, and there was one kinesiology major, one finance major, and one accounting major (see Table 4).

Table 3.
Participants in the Investigation by Country of Origin and Gender

Country of Origin	Male	Female	Total
Japan	3	1	4
China	2	1	3
Saudi Arabia	2	1	3
UAE	1	-	1
Taiwan	1	1	2
Total	9	4	13

Table 4.
Participants in the Investigation by Discipline

Discipline	Number
Management	4
English	3
Business Administration	2
Kinesiology	1
Finance	1
Accounting	1
Media Communication/Global Studies	1

Table 5.
Participants in the Investigation by Class Standing/University Level

Class Standing	Number
1st year	1
2nd year	3
3rd year	5
4th year	3
Pre-requisites for graduate program	1

Regarding class standing, five students were third-year students, three were fourth-year students, three were second-year students, one first-year student, and one student was taking courses to pursue a graduate program later (See Table 5). Although this student was not matriculated as an undergraduate student per se, I included him because he had experienced the life of an undergraduate international student. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in undergraduate courses, and he interacted with undergraduate students in all his classes. Furthermore, my interviewing of this student gave me a broader and deeper understanding of international students in an undergraduate environment in this SCU, and complemented the maximum variation sampling strategy applied (Patton, 1990),

Semi-Structured Interviews

During my research planning process, I intended to conduct the interviews in the SCU's international office conference room. This location is both convenient and comfortable for international students, as they frequently visit it during their studies, and it is also void of distractions and background noises (Bailey, 2007). I decided to change the location because interviews at the university office could have been perceived by the

participants as a university-driven initiative. If so, this could have limited the participants' responses or their willingness to express openly their experiences at the institution, especially if these were critical in any way. Therefore, I gave the students the option to conduct the interview at a public place on or off campus, at a location that was both convenient and comfortable for the student, and void of distractions. Most interviews took place at the SCU student union building and at a coffee shop near to campus.

All interview conversations with the participants were recorded using a digital recorder. The oral speech captured in the interviews were transcribed by the me. Per IRB, and to ensure privacy and anonymity, I used pseudonyms for the participants. All research records, including all audio recordings, documents, memos, and computer-based data, were stored in a locked cabinet and in a password-protected computer.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the stories of undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used data collection method in the applicable literature. The use of semi-structured interviews was useful as a tool to understand international student experiences described in higher education literature, as shown in the studies of Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015), Marginson (2014), Akazaki (2010), and Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005), who all used this data collection approach. The purpose of an in-depth interview is to understand the experiences of those who are interviewed and to present those experiences with detail and depth, not to test hypotheses or to predict behaviors (Seidman, 2013). In

semi-structured research interviews, the researcher focuses on the participants' experiences in an attempt to understand themes of everyday world from participants' perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

In this investigation, I sought to acquire a deep understanding of the international student academic and social experiences in the SCU setting. Broadly speaking, interviews are guided conversations (Burgess, 1995). I conducted my interviews to resemble a common conversation, using a defined approach and technique, hence the term "semi-structured," that is, they were neither open conversations nor closed questionnaires (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). My interviews were guided by a pre-established interview protocol that included suggested questions and that focused on themes. During the interviews, I used an interview protocol that was designed to obtain meaningful information from the participants through a series of questions, followed by prompts (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol was present to reminded me of the topics that I wanted to address in each interview. The interviews were conducted with a reflective approach, but participants were allowed to determine what was important about their own experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011; Sato & Hodge, 2015; Tran, 2010). The reflexive approach enabled me to investigate the social and academic matters of importance to the students without imposing theoretical views on their responses (Seidman, 2013).

I followed the guidelines suggested by the three-interview series recommended by Seidman (2013), with each interview having a different goal. My first interview sought to establish the context of the interviewee's experience as an undergraduate international

student at an SCU. The second interview had as its purpose to concentrate on the specific details of the participants' current lived academic and social experiences as undergraduate international students at the SCU. The third interview was intended to be an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the meanings of their experience. Each student participated in two interview sessions, not in three. Initially, I attempted to recruit international students to participate in a three-part interview, but none of the first five students that I sought to recruit agreed to participate in three sessions. It was not until I invited students to only two sessions that I found participants. Therefore, I altered the structure from three to two interviews, necessitated by the schedules of the participants. Typically, I finished the content that I intended to cover during the first interview and continued to the second until I finished about half of the content of the second interview. The second time I met the participant, I completed the content of second interview and continued to cover the content of the third interview. At all times, I maintained the goals and the aspirations of the three-interview series, and I strived to design an interview process that was rational, repeatable, and documentable (Riessman, 2008). Below I explain the content for each of the three interviews.

In the first interview, I asked students to reconstruct early experiences prior to their arrival to the SCU: A range of fundamental events in their past related to family, private life, and school. I initiated the conversation with a question such as "Please talk about your life prior to coming to the United States." At this initial phase of the interview, students often focused only on one aspect of their background such as school or family, with brief responses that contained little detail. Some of the respondents

appeared uncomfortable at the beginning of the interview, likely due to unfamiliarity with participating in interviews or due to lack of confidence in their English language skills. Those students who were not comfortable typically responded with short questions. If this occurred, I followed up with simple questions that they could answer without effort (e.g., "Tell me about your family"; "what are your parents' educational background and profession). After two or three similar questions, most participants became accustomed with the format and began to express themselves more openly.

The semi-structured format permitted changes in the sequence the questions and in the forms of questions which allowed me to follow up on the answers or topics and the stories related by the students (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). After I covered sufficient information about the student's background information, I sought to know more about the student's justification for pursuing international education. Specifically, I wanted to know the reason(s) the student decided to pursue a college degree outside of his or her country, why at this particular SCU, and what the student assumed awaited him or her after completion of his or her course of study.

From the start of the first interview, I paid attention to build appropriate rapport with the participant (Seidman, 2013). I was also cognizant that the relationship between myself and the participants could be power-laden and unequal (Seidman, 2013). I created an interviewee-interviewer relationship that was controlled, and I was conscious that too much or too little rapport could have distorted the participants' responses. I also sought to build trust with the participants; I always behaved with respect, interest, attention, and good manners, maintaining a balance between showing respect for the participant but

without becoming too distant (Seidman, 2013). I chose to dress in a way that communicated who I was, that is, a graduate student conducting a research project, and sought to become a "natural" part of the scene (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Specifically, I wore causal working clothes, and avoided T-shirts and jeans and also the formal attire I used to wear as part of my former managerial role at the SCU. I dressed appropriately for my status as an interviewer. I also followed the recommendations of UCR's OBI (See Appendix) to ensure that the interviews were conducted with consideration of ethical implications that protected the rights and well-being of the participants (Seidman, 2013). At the conclusion of the first interview with each participant, I thanked each person for their time, and I arranged the time and date for the second interview.

In the second interview, I focused on the specific details of the international students' lived experiences in the context of the SCU. The purpose of the second interview was to talk about concrete details of the participant's academic and social experiences as an international student (Seidman, 2013). I opened the interviews with questions such as "Could you please talk to me about your life as an international student?" or "Please describe a typical day at the university for you?" These questions were intended to open the conversation, and to see where the participant would take our discussion. At times, participants were reluctant to share their stories with me. I referred to my protocol and followed up with questions such as "What are your best educational experiences here?"; "What are some of the bad ones? Why?"; "Can you give me examples of these personal experiences?" My purpose with these questions was to motivate the students to provide detailed accounts about their experience instead of their

supplying short answers or general statements (Riessman, 2008). In search of meaningful narratives, I allowed the students to engage in longer discussion than what is taken typically in usual conversations. These long interactions at times took the conversation into topics that initially I did not want to cover. Other times, it was in these conversations when the students constructed meaningful narratives that were related to the themes in my interview protocol. For example, the question "Can you talk about your interaction with faculty?" occasionally generated stories in which the student complained about cases in which a faculty member had been unfair to them, and how this experience made them experience discrimination. Although some of the students used considerable time in describing their feelings, I prompted the students so that later in the narrative the participants provided enough details so that I could reconstruct the students 'experiences.

The second interviews touched on all themes I wanted to explore in the interviews (e.g., interaction with staff, interaction with U. S. friends, interaction with international friends, racism/discrimination, finance challenges, depression). Questions were presented to allow the student to describe their experience at the SCU: "How would you describe the services provided to students at this university?" Other questions were more direct: "Can you remember a particular time when you face difficulties or challenges at this institution as an international student? Please tell me why that particular moment stands out." "Have you perceived discrimination? Please explain to me a particular experience." Good interviews produce rich data filled with anecdotes that reveal the participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2013). If after a question I did not receive ample information from the student's narrative, I would ask follow-up questions such as "What

do you mean?," "I'm not sure I am following you," "Would you explain that?, "Please give me an example," or "What did you say then?" The follow-up questions helped me clarify the participants' statements, and often generated additional data that I had not considered initially. Follow-up questions helped to produce more fluid and data-rich conversations that were engaging both for the participant and for myself. The presentation of many follow-up questions allowed the participants to discuss and present issues they perceived as important (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The purpose of the third interview was to ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their undergraduate international student experience (Seidman, 2013). By meaning, Seidman addresses "the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' … [SCU] and life" (Seidman, 2013 p. 22). To achieve this, I asked participants the following questions: "Given what you have said about your life before you became an international student, and given what you have said about your experiences as an international student now, how do you understand being an international student? What sense does it make to you?" The first students I asked this question were confused. Some students did not understand the question, specifically the phrase "how do you understand being an international student?" This question seemed ambiguous to them. For that reason, if a student did not understand this expression, I re-phrased the questions with "what does it mean to you to be an international student?" This, at times, worked better. Other students did not know what to focus on to respond to the questions, presumably out of the abundance of information they had previously provided. For this reason, from that point on, I decided to spend more time at the

beginning of each interview going over what we had discussed in our previous conversations, both their experiences and background prior to arriving at the SCU, and particularly the highlights of their academic and social experiences at the SCU. This effort helped the student remember what they had said and gave them a more solid foundation to answer these two questions. Seidman (2013) concurs with this approach: "The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflection upon what they are doing now in their lives" (p. 22). In the third interview, I also sought to understand the participants' connection to their institution: "Are you part of the university? Why or why not?" This question helped me to understand further the students' meanings of their experience by their explaining to me their connection to the institution.

During my data collection process, I produced both field notes and audio memos. These ancillary field notes were written during and after the interviews; my audio memos were recorded after interviews. For both the field notes and the audio memos, I applied guidelines for records of qualitative data that were "accurate, contexted, and 'thick,'" as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 65). That is, I strove to write field notes during an interview; I recorded the voice memos immediately after the interview. In search for accuracy, I looked for misinterpretations in the written notes compared to transcriptions. My notes included context and explanations of participants' expressions, which were complemented with voice memos in which I explained what I observed or experienced during the interview. I sought to generate "thick description" (Geertz, 1973),

which contained records that detailed explanations of my observations. The notes and the audio memos were useful as they carried pertinent information about the interviews and about the knowledge gained, including reflection and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The notes and the audio memos were reflexive in that they considered me and my views as part of the data creation process.

Data Analysis

I used narrative analysis to analyze the collected data from the interviews and to explore the academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students enrolled in the SCU. Narrative analysis is a method for interpreting texts that have a common story (Riessman, 2008). Creswell (2009) refers to narrative research as "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals… to provide stories about their lives (p. 13). In narrative inquiry, the researcher focuses "on how the speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning" and as a family of methods for "interpreting texts that have a common storied form" (Riessman, 2008, pp. 10-11). In this investigation, I use one of Riessman's approaches to narrative analysis, thematic analysis, and incorporate elements of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry.

In narrative analysis, stories are co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, and a story emerges to convey a point (Riessman, 2008). In qualitative analysis, stories are not ordinary conversations that emerge from the interaction between two individuals. From the perspective of narrative analysis, stories serve more complex purposes. Storytelling is sometimes carried out to accomplish certain ends, and it can

help narrators to argue a point; stories engage and seek to persuade an audience; and, stories can entertain, mislead, or they can mobilize individuals into action (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative analysis was used to understand both the stories of the individual participants and to understand the overarching story among international students in the context of an SCU. In thematic analysis, data are interpreted in light of "themes developed by the researcher and influenced by prior and emergent theory, the concrete purpose of an investigation, the data themselves, political commitments, and other factors" (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). In thematic analysis, the researcher focuses only on what the participant conveyed, that is, the experiences reported by the participant and not on other aspects of "the telling" (Riessman, 2008, pp. 53-54). That is, thematic analysis places minimal emphasis on how the participant talks, the structure of their speech, the context of the place where the interview took place, or the challenges of transcription in the conduct of interviews with non-native English speakers. When recordings were difficult to understand due unintelligible sound or due to the participants' verbal expression in English, written notes helped me clarify unclear spoken language.

To complement thematic analysis, I used Clandinin and Connelly's "three-dimensional approach" to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). The three dimensions are "temporality," "the personal and the social," and "place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Temporality refers to the past, present, and future. This dimension helped me recognize the participants' past and current experiences and surmise over their possible future experiences. Here, the participants' past and present

experiences are the foci of analysis, as these will likely influence their future actions. The personal and the social dimension refers to the interaction of the participants. There are the "inward," which include the internal conditions of the participant (i.e., feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral positions) and the "outward," which refers to the existential conditions (i.e., environment) of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). On the personal and social interaction, I analyzed internal conditions and expressed feelings of the interviewees. In the social interaction realm, I focused on the ways that the participants described the conditions of interaction with others. The interaction dimension helped me to analyze the social and academic experiences of international undergraduate students and to focus on the students' international conditions and expressed feelings, as conveyed through their interactions with faculty, staff, and peers. The place dimension focuses on the specific concrete physical boundaries of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the research I focused on the physical places that appear in the story (e.g., home country, California, the SCU classroom), as these places give meaning to the participant's narrative. The place dimension helped me to consider the participants' physical locations, specifically the dichotomy between home country and Southern California, and how these places influenced their lived experiences and how these affected their experiences described in their narrative.

I worked on a single interview at a time and identified relevant episodes and metaphors. I gathered information about the context of the students' stories. Specifically, I positioned the narratives within the context of the participants' experiences prior to arriving at the SCU and after their arrival at the SCU, and placed attention to narratives

that addressed their culture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I read through both interview transcriptions for each participant, wrote marginal notes, and placed relevant experiences chronologically. I then identified assumptions in each account and named them as codes (Riessman, 2013). I relied on the narrative of the text and utilized the components of P-E fit (e.g., fit, misfit) and then used components of self-formation (e.g., multiple identities, agency) [Marginson, 2014]. Both served as overarching frameworks for me to make sense of the students' stories. Particular cases were identified that illustrated general patterns and considered the identified assumptions. P-E fit theory is broadly defined as the degree to which individual and environmental characteristics match (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998; Harrison, 1978). P-E fit theory is used to study outcomes such as co-worker satisfaction and feelings of cohesion (Boone & Hartog, 2011). Fit is defined as the degree of compatibility or match between individuals and some of aspects of the work environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). This theory indicates that if the environmental attributes (i.e., job demands, working conditions and rewards, and climate) are congruent with the personal attributes of the employee (i.e., needs, traits, goals, preferences, knowledge and ability, and values) there will be fit or compatibility. Fit creates a positive effect that produces employee satisfaction, increased performance, and overall well-being (Ostroff & Schulte, 2007; Caplan et al., 1980; Harrison, 1978). The use of the literature on P-E fit (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999), helped me to explain how environmental attributes in the institutional setting play a role in the satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being of international undergraduate students. I utilized P-E fit to help me explain international students' social

and academic experiences in SCUs; how the international students' experiences are influenced by the distinctive features of SCUs (e.g., teaching focus/higher teaching load for faculty, lower entry requirements). The supplementary model of P-E congruence states that a person fits into the environmental context because he or she supplements or possesses characteristics that are similar to other individuals in the organizational environment (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). I utilized the supplementary model of P-E congruence to see if there was a fit that existed for similarities in characteristics of international students and those of domestic students enrolled in this SCU. Marginson (2014) views international students as self-formed, and international education as a process of self-formation in which students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control. The self-formation concept provided a lens for me to understand international students' movement across geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders, while they negotiated various identities continually (Marginson, 2014).

Narrative Analysis Procedure

The following outlines steps that were used in the narrative analysis procedure. A systematic filing system was utilized to organize and to ensure accessibility of data. I annotated, coded, and interpreted the collected unstructured data. I read interview transcripts thoroughly in search of salient themes and made marginal notes and formed initial codes (Creswell, 2013). I then sought patterns across the experiences in all the participants of the study.

Making meaning, in a predictable, trustworthy, and organized way, is a critical task in qualitative methods. Miles et al. (2014) identified noting patterns and themes, clustering, and noting the relations between variables as tactics for making meaning. To offer explanations of the interview, I classified data into three parts. In part I, I identified international students' fit with the institution, and thus I relied upon the theory of P-E fit, noted above. I interpreted fit between international students and the institutional characteristics, and what program demands, studying conditions, and university environmental characteristics were similar to students' views of themselves. In part II, I explained fit between students and their peers. I interpreted fit between international students and their peers as similarities in age, university level, language, values, ethnicity, and extracurricular activities. In part III, I interpreted international students' self-formation by identifying reflexivity, agency, and identity changes (Marginson, 2014) in their comments. This categorization is displayed in Table 6.

Table 6.
Data Analysis

Part I P-E Fit: Students perceive a match with SCU's institutional attributes	Part II P-E Fit/Supplementary Model: Students perceive their characteristics are similar to those of SCU peers	Part III Self-Formation: International education viewed as process of self-formation
Match with program demands	Age, grad and undergrad	Live lives reflexively
Match with studying conditions	Language, ethnicity, values	Agency
Match with university environment	Extracurricular activities	Changing identities

Particular cases were identified to explain general patterns across the set of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also sought to locate epiphanies or turning points in which the story line changed direction dramatically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2017). I then restoried the participants stories into a coherent framework (Creswell, 2017), that is, I constructed stories out of the narratives and data generated in the interviews. These stories were presented in a biographical format, that is, described from the participant's perspective, and not from a conversation format that included me. This process consisted of the presentation of the stories in a chronological sequence, per the recommendation of Cortazzi (1993). As well, I adopted some basic elements of novels, such as predicament, conflict, or struggle (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cortazzi, 1993), which helped me gain insight into the narrative, and as a way to "place" the reader into the setting (Bailey, 2007, p. 178). I concluded by presenting a narrative and explanation that focused on the unique elements of the story within each interviewed student, and then I interpreted the larger meaning of the story (Riessman, 2013).

I assigned pseudonyms to all participants to protect anonymity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All investigative records, including digital audio files and transcripts were kept in a secure, password-protected computer in order to safeguard the participants.

Issues of Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity strategies utilized in this investigation reflect my efforts to follow appropriate data collection and analysis approaches consistent with accepted qualitative research methods. In qualitative studies, researchers focus on the accuracy and the comprehensiveness of their collected data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

The trustworthiness and transferability of scientific knowledge rely on the standards of reliability and the validity of research studies (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Reliability speaks to the precision of the research methods and techniques used in the study (Mason, 2002). Reliability in qualitative studies is concerned not on consistency with literature findings as in a quantitative researcher positivist's worldview, but with coherence between the collected data and with what transpired in the study. Under the qualitative definition of reliability, two studies that focus on the same setting may produce different data and generate different findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The goal of reliability is to assure the reader about the procedures of the study. The three-interview structure uses elements that enhance validity, such as the passing of time between interviews as a check for consistency (Seidman, 2013). For example, I used the question: "For you, what does it mean to be an international student?" Here, I gave the respondent the opportunity to address a topic once again, hence, verify internal consistency over a period of time to confirm that the respondent is telling the truth (Seidman, 2013). As well, I checked the codes and applied coder consistency tests according to Seidman (2013). I sought the help of an external coder to compare codes generated by the both of us, in search of stability of responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Validity is the degree to which a research approaches, accurately, and investigates their intended purpose (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviews conducted in this investigation considered several strategies that guaranteed their validity. The investigation provides a detailed description of the methods and procedures of this research that shows how I generated findings and not my personal views. The sample

included international students of diverse background who reflected the diversity of the SCU's international undergraduate population. The participants' narratives were connected and compared against those of other participants (Seidman, 2013). I sought for an accurate description of the data by observing the context of the participants' stories. This context included the participants' personal and social interactions, the participants' narratives in the past and present, and the participants' experiences in their home country and in the United States (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interviews generated thick descriptions, with rich data and with anecdotes that revealed the participants' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2013). Initially, I bracketed myself to enhance the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings of this phenomenological investigation (Moustakas, 1994). I was cognizant of my personal values and kept written notes and voiced memos throughout the interviews and analysis of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I self-monitored through the reflection on my own personal views and the interview data (Lichtman, 2013). All this helped me to understand the interviewees' narratives and the meaning they gave to these experiences, and this allowed me to co-construct a well-rounded story.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present my findings supported by the 26 interviews conducted with international undergraduate students enrolled at SCU. I organized these findings in accordance with my research questions, with descriptions of stories of undergraduate international students who participated in this investigation about their perceptions of their social and academic experiences at SCU. I present narratives and explanations of unique elements of their stories and interpret how their stories are connected.

I divided the findings into separate sections that include groups of students who share similar experiences at this SCU. The first group I named the Transformed and Engaged Student Group. This group clusters students who were academically inclined and who expressed enjoyment with their experience at SCU. Transformed and Engaged students portrayed a fit between themselves and SCU's institutional attributes, which include program demands, study conditions, and the university environment. Several of the recurring themes for these students included diversity, English learning, freedom, differences in values with SCU students, and engagement with students and faculty, as they valued the care they received. Transformed and Engaged students were matched with the characteristics of the students at this SCU. This was demonstrated by the similarities in demographics, in values with SCU students, or in their adoption of these values. Despite their English language limitations, these students took concrete steps to move out of their comfort zone among co-nationals to interact with U. S. students, albeit at times with language difficulties and cultural differences. These students celebrated

their ability to express their ideas and to learn new content. Transformed and Engaged students considered themselves part of the campus and lived reflexively and with agency, but without changing their home-country identities as a result of their experience.

The second group of students I named the Utilitarian Student Group. The students in this group came to SCU with a concrete objective, typically to complete a degree, and to improve English and to interact with SCU. The Utilitarian Student Group performed relatively well academically but did so for the purpose of passing the course, not in search of knowledge or new experiences. The SCU's institutional attributes matched with Utilitarian students at times, but only if they met these students' specific objectives, typically when they pass a course which will take them one more step closer to graduation. For members of this group education is transactional: Students have invested time and money during their stay at SCU and expected to receive something they value in return (e.g., a degree, prestige). Recurring themes for this group included freedom, prestige, English ability as a tool for their future career, difference in values with SCU students, and differences in classroom experiences at SCU and home country. For the Utilitarian student, his/her stay at this SCU is valuable, but only if it meets his/her specific needs; otherwise, the student leaves the university. Some of these students perceived a clear mismatch between themselves and the SCU students' demographics and values. They are critical of differences but do not reflect on these differences. This group acknowledges the environment at the SCU in positive terms, and they welcome the effort by faculty and students to treat them similar to any other student on campus. They were selective, and critical and demonstrated that they lived reflexively, but not to the degree

of the Engaged and Transformed group. However, they showed agency in their actions and decisions, and did not show evidence of a change of identity as a result of their international experience at SCU.

The third group is the Disengaged Student Group. Students in this group were characterized by apathy and lack of effort towards academics. They worked only enough to pass classes. The Disengaged student generally was not academically inclined, perceived education as transactional, and values entertainment over coursework. These students did not perceive a match with the university's attributes, namely program demands, study conditions, or university environment, but they accepted these because the university will provide them eventually with a degree or credits to take back home to their home institution. These students dismissed coursework, viewed this work as not difficult, and underestimated the time and effort it takes to complete assignments or to pass classes with good grades. Disengaged students thought they did not have to work with effort and had sufficient time to socialize with co-national friends. These students positioned themselves persons who wanted to enjoy their time at SCU and were not concerned about the post-graduation future. The Disengaged students expressed that they learned little from their classes, and complained about faculty and about SCU services, but did not reflect on their own lack of effort. The Disengaged students perceived a mismatch between the SCU's demographics, language, values, and extracurricular activities and themselves. These students did not view themselves as part of campus and did not show a change in identity as a result of their stay at SCU, and although they appreciated some local values (e.g., freedom), they were typically critical of the standards

that permeated the campus. These students were also critical of what they perceived as discriminatory behavior from students and from faculty, and at times depicted themselves as victims. Most Disengaged students did not live reflexively, particularly with regards to the source of their problems. However, all Disengaged students demonstrated agency to pursue their own goals. Similar to the participants in the Utilitarian Student Group participants, Disengaged students did not show agency as a result of their international experience. Comparable the rest of the participants, Disengaged students did not signal a change in their identity.

I used components of PE fit theory and self-formation. I presented explanations of unique elements of the story and interpreted its larger meaning. For every student group, I included two exemplars that depict the characteristics that permeated students in each group. The other students were placed in one of the three categories with a more succinct description and a few quotations that also described their story and explained why they are placed in the group. The exemplars met the description of each group; the other participants in each group broadly mirrored the characteristics of the group, although there was some overlap in the characteristics of another group.

Transformed and Engaged Student Group

Japanese F. 1

Japanese F. 1 is a female, middle-class, third-year exchange student, English major, taking four classes. She chose to attend SCU because of its suburban setting and location in CA. Japanese F. 1 enjoyed her studies and her interaction with students who she found generally more dedicated than students in Japan. Japanese F. 1 positioned

herself as another "normal student living her academic and social experience at the university." She appreciated the faculty's support when she needed help. Japanese F. 1 had never been discriminated against by students, faculty or staff. She reflected on her newfound ability to speak to others openly about her "feelings," unlike when she lived Japan, but questioned her ability to express her ideas and thoughts in English now and in the future post-graduation once she looks for a job. Japanese F. 1 valued diversity in her current educational setting and considered herself part of the campus. As a result of her studies in California, she wanted to work in an English-speaking environment in the future.

Japanese F. 1 perceived a match with the institutional attributes of this SCU and herself (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). This included the campus location in Southern California, with its weather and tourist attractions and also because she preferred a campus located in "the countryside better than the city." When we discussed her program demands, Japanese F. 1 took the conversation to the topics of interaction between her and faculty; she stated that faculty treated her well and adapted their strategies to make certain she understood the requirements of assignments. She highlighted the effort taken by the faculty to modify their language to make her understand the content of the class. This motivated her to study with more effort and interact more with others.

> My opinion of the faculty is that they treat students well. Professors are kind. And if I have questions, they come close to me and try to understand my questions and then they reply as easy as possible for me to understand. I can then understand them. They typically change their language a bit compared to what they use with domestic students. For example, my English professor noticed I could not understand the revision checklist for the final essay, and she tried to help me by

> using easier vocabulary so that I could understand. Yeah. I like it because if professors treat us well. Students are encouraged to study harder, and to ask questions or to answer other students' questions. When professors are friendly, the classes are more attractive or cheerful.

This welcoming environment, driven by faculty who modified their language, created an opening for Japanese F. 1 to interact with faculty and peers (Rendon, 1994, Sanford, 1962). She stated that her best educational experience was the opportunity to "talk to other students." Japanese F. 1 compared her experience at SCU with the interaction a typical student has in a Japanese university setting where students did not talk as much among themselves or to faculty. This interaction improved her confidence as well as her ability to interact with others in English.

> In my English writing class, my professor encouraged students to talk me. In Japan, most people are shy and avoid talking to others and also to professors inside the classroom. When I arrived at this university, it was difficult time for me to talk to other students. Now, with the professors' help, I am getting used to talking to other students in English. This particular class is offered for students who can speak more than two languages. Thanks to this course, I would hear experiences of students who had a Mexican or Chinese or Vietnamese backgrounds. It was very nice experience.

Japanese F. 1 appreciated the opportunity for interaction and welcomed a space where she could meet other students with backgrounds in languages other than English. She also welcomed the opportunity to talk with students at different university levels. This would not happen in Japan, where students interact only with students from the same year in university. Japanese F. 1 thought that her interaction with upper class people helped her gain more knowledge. What she called the "gap" helped her learn.

> At this university, I can take a class with all levels of students. But in Japan, we have classes for third-year students only and for fourth-grade students only. I believe this is a limitation since we cannot meet or talk to people in other generations. For example, a freshman and a senior have a three-year gap. I think

> they have different perspectives. So, if they can meet and talk among them, each of them can have new knowledge from the other. The freshman can get the new knowledge, and also the senior students. Here, the important thing or most interesting thing is the gap.

The gap that Japanese F. 1 referred to was the opportunity to learn from students who are closer to graduation and who may share experiences with lower level students. This showed attachment to the U. S. academic environment, which gave her access to a diversity of opinions and experiences that are not typically present in a Japanese higher education setting where hierarchy is important.

There was fit between Japanese F. 1 and her peers in age, university level, language, values, ethnicity, and extracurricular activities (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). She perceived her personal characteristics as parallel to those of her peers regarding language, values, and extracurricular activities. With regards to language, this SCU was a fit for Japanese F. 1. It was the appropriate place for her, not because SCU peers spoke the same first-language, but because at SCU she had the opportunity to improve her English ability, and this will help her future career aspirations. Yet, Japanese F. 1 expressed her disappointment at her English skills and her concern about going back to Japan and not securing a well-remunerated job.

> My English is terrible. I think my English ability has not changed much since I arrived. For that reason, I am a little bit disappointed. After I return to Japan, I will have to take the TOEIC exam (English language proficiency) and I don't think I will be good enough. 650 I think was my score. Of course, I need 900 to get a good job. If after I go back, and when I take it, and I cannot get above 850, I feel my stay here may be meaningless.

Her concern was justified, as Japanese students go through a regimented job-hunting process to secure a job post-graduation, which often is determined by statistical results in

English tests such as the TOEIC more than other factors. However, she did not have an objective idea of her current progress since she had not taken the TOEIC after she arrived at SCU. This lack of confidence was cemented in the frustration she experienced in conversations that required more advanced vocabulary.

> I don't feel completely comfortable with my English ability because I cannot express my feelings clearly. I sometimes cannot find the right vocabulary. Often, students don't understand what I want to say, and I cannot find synonyms. So, I cannot tell exactly what I want to say. Just today I spoke about gun control to another student. She told me her feelings about gun control, but this topic had some special terms I have never heard. So, I couldn't understand completely.

In this example, Japanese F. 1 expressed her frustration in her participation in a discussion about gun control, which was a topic that required technical vocabulary and some level of knowledge about gun rights in the U. S. This frustration was evident and showed her determination to advance in her language acquisition, which other participants did not show in this investigation.

For Japanese F. 1, there was fit between her values and those of her SCU peers. As an example, Japanese F. 1 made a comparison between the academic rigor of Japanese universities and that of SCU. Japanese F. 1 also compared the persistence of domestic students shown in their efforts to pass courses and praised their "enthusiasm" and "courage," which she had witnessed in the classroom and outside the classroom. In this example, she contrasted Japanese and SCU university classes, which she perceived as difficult. Japanese F. 1 identified her behaviors with the efforts shown by U. S. students to pass these courses. She also criticized the lack of academic rigor in Japanese university courses and the typical Japanese university student who she perceived as lethargic.

> I think that American students have much more enthusiasm than Japanese students. Here academics are harder than in Japan, therefore American students need to study harder, much harder than Japanese students. In Japan, students study hard for the entrance examination, but after they enter school not much. Japanese students can just write a final essay at the end of each course and expect to graduate. Here, American students are enthusiastic and are passionate about their studies. When I go to the language lab, since I am a Japanese tutor, I see them studying, and they ask me questions beyond the textbook, like what words are most common. They try to know more and more things. They have courage.

This picture of domestic students as enthusiastic and courageous mirrored her perception of herself and of her values. As an international student who questioned her ability to express ideas clearly in an English-speaking environment, and who consequently had faced academic problems in this environment, she saw herself as a passionate and brave, albeit not always confident, person who navigated an academic and social environment which prepares her for a future job in an English-speaking environment.

Although Japanese F. 1 did not portray herself as victim, there were some academic problems she faced in this SCU. Again, these challenges were connected to her English ability, but as a result of her interactions with SCU students, Japanese F. 1 was able to cope with them and experienced growth (Sanford, 1962). Japanese F. 1 expressed her connection with other domestic students with whom she had common interests and acknowledged the support she received from them.

> We usually meet at the language lab and talk mostly about homework, or about the weekend, and also about study abroad. I am here as an exchange student. I am from Seijo University, and since it is connected to this university, they could study at Seijo too. With Japanese language students, we speak about 70% about Japanese language topics; with other students we talk about more about hobbies, or about other classes like my English courses. They also they try to help me to do homework. Sometimes, but not often, I have problems because I cannot find the appropriate vocabulary. They always help me to speak more fluently. They are not frustrated with my English. For example, today I had an essay today, and of course I wrote the essay, but I had problems. The organization of my essay may

> not be good. So, I showed it to my friends, and they told me which sentences they were not good, and also why they were not good. They don't just correct it, but they also tell me why.

Similar to Japanese F. 1, some SCU students were also second-language learners, who aspired to be exchange students in Japan. They were interested in Japan and took Japanese language classes in preparation for a potential study abroad experience. Japanese F. 1 received help from domestic students, and she repaid their help with assistance in their Japanese language courses and with answers to their questions about Japan while they patiently helped her with her coursework. In part, Japanese F. 1 carried a currency not evident in all international students enrolled at SCU. She had knowledge that domestic students needed (i.e., assistance in Japanese coursework and an understanding of Japan). Without this knowledge, other participants missed social interaction with motivated domestic students interested in them that would have made their experience richer.

Japanese F. 1 was cognizant of the differences in values in her new environment with those in her home country. Japanese F. 1 lived her life reflexively; she reflected on the effect of these values in her life and decided to adopt the ones she perceived as positive for her life (Baxter Magolda, 2004). However, the adoption of new values and behaviors was not easy for her. Japanese F. 1 offered a story about a friend who held the value of openness. Her friend suggested Japanese F. 1 to express her "feelings" (i.e., her honest opinions) in casual conversations, or during moments of discomfort in social interaction. Although Japanese F. 1 accepted the recommendation, it created dissonance with her Japanese values.

> I enjoy the friends I have at this school. Back home, Japanese friends don't tell you how they feel. It is sometimes confusing for me. I do not know what they feel. It is Japanese culture. But here, students tell me what they feel or what they want to say directly. So, it is really comfortable, and easy to understand. For example, when I first came to this school one of my American friends told me "when you feel uncomfortable, or when you want to say no, you should say no, because here it is normal to say no." I now understand that if I don't say no, others will understand my feelings like it is a yes. So, I try to say my actual feelings. This can be difficult, but it is good. Because I am used to Japanese culture, sometimes I feel ashamed or embarrassed. I don't want my friends to see my actual feelings. But here, I should tell them my true feelings.

Japanese F. 1 experienced dissonance between her Japanese values and the values of her new setting. Some of the core values of the Japanese culture are referred to as *gaman* (i.e., to endure difficult circumstances) and *omoiyari* (i.e., to notice and to think of others), and are learned by the Japanese from a young age (Kanagi, 2017). These values prohibited Japanese F. 1 to state her "feelings" because in Japan it can be perceived as too direct or as not "enduring a difficult circumstance." This dissonance limited Japanese F. 1's ability to express her true feelings at SCU. Her interaction with U. S. students underlined the need for her to express her actual feelings directly, and although she recognized that it was necessary, it was difficult to articulate them. This example shows that Japanese F. 1 lived reflexively, with internal mental debates and in search of the best way to conduct herself in this environment (Marginson, 2014).

Japanese F. 1 was in a process of self-formation in which she lived her life reflexively and demonstrated agency in her actions. Although she questioned her ability to speak English, Japanese F. 1 showed agency by her willful interaction with SCU students and by her participation in conversations in which topics covered went beyond class assignments or in simple everyday pleasantries. Japanese F. 1 showed that she lived

reflexively, in search for the best alternative. She acted to achieve that alternative. Japanese F. 1 reflected on her views on diversity, and how this will influence her future career decisions.

> I really wanted to study English and then also culture because I heard there were many differences between Japan and United States. Japan has few ethnicities, only Japanese and a few Chinese or a few Korean. But here there is much diversity: Half the people are from Mexico or the people whose parents are from Mexico. I was interested in the differences. Before coming here, I wanted to be an English teacher in Japan. Now I have changed my plan and I now want to work for the company which is related to the United States or other countries which can speak English.

Japanese F. 1's experiences at this SCU changed her goals post-graduation from "becoming a teacher" to work in an English-speaking country. Her many struggles with the English language at SCU changed her career goal, but this alteration did not undermine her. The diversity of the student body at SCU also helped in this shift and gave her a profound interest in other cultures. Through her embrace of the diverse environment given to international students at SCU, Japanese F. 1 perceived herself as just another student on campus, and not as an international student or as a Japanese student (Marginson, 2014). She saw herself as one student on campus, contrary to what at times is portrayed in the literature, and contrary to the experiences of other international students in this investigation.

> I don't feel like I am an international student because others treat me like any other citizen. U. S. citizens treat me not as special person. I am not special. I am the same as other people. Sometimes, I face difficulties because my English ability, but not because of the people, people are nice. My life as an international student is just like that of an American student. Study, go out, study for test. I don't have car, but the situation is almost the same as an American student.

Japanese F. 1 perceived herself as just another SCU student because she was treated similarly to any other student, as if she were any other citizen in the U. S. Despite her language difficulties, she interacted with students and faculty whom she valued because of the help she received from them. She celebrated her newfound opportunity to express her ideas freely and to learn new content at SCU which will help her in her future career. Consequently, she viewed herself as part of campus and not as identified as an international student.

Taiwanese M. 1

Taiwanese M. 1 is a male, middle-class, fourth-year kinesiology student, who arrived at SCU as an aspiring basketball player in search of an opportunity to play collegiate basketball. Two years later, and undecided about his future, he opted to pursue a career as a physical therapist in sports medicine. Taiwanese M. 1 considered himself "just another student on campus" now that he had improved his English skills and had gained social exposure with local students after a few years on campus. Despite initially not socially engaged with domestic students, he later recognized the importance of "networking" and of work experience for career success. Taiwanese M. 1 had considerable interaction with U. S. students in the Kinesiology Student Association at SCU. Upon arrival on campus, language was a barrier for him to socialize, but since his initial period on campus his English proficiency improved significantly.

In Taiwanese M. 1's narrative, networking is a salient theme. In Taiwan, he experienced camaraderie among students, but at SCU he saw that university-related matters are what brought students together outside the classroom. For Taiwanese M. 1,

his country provided closer relationships with friends than in the U. S. Although he did not have as many friends here as he once had in Taiwan, he had more exposure to U. S. students compared to most of the other participants, in part because of his experience in the SCU basketball team. However, Taiwanese M. 1 recognized that he was not that interested in "making U. S. friends." He preferred friends who were Mandarin speakers because he had more comfortable conversations with them. Taiwanese M. 1 welcomed the freedom he enjoyed at SCU, and this sense of freedom was a recurring theme among the participants. He valued the respect he was given on campus and the "non-judgmental" attitude he experienced with his peers. Taiwanese M. 1 saw himself reflexively and with agency, as an individual who had gained maturity through his exposure to this international experience.

Taiwanese M. 1 perceived a match between the institutional attributes of this SCU and himself (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). With regards to the university environment, Taiwanese M. 1 highlighted his experience as a personal trainer in the university gymnasium. He described how his supervisors were supportive and forgave mistakes committed by students when they clocked-in for work. Instead of receiving a reprimand, student workers were guided.

> Our department is really diverse. They are really nice to each other. They respect each other. They try to help each other, as much as they can. If we ever made a mistake, they won't really blame us. They will see why we made the mistake and then try to teach us "that is how we work. And next time we can try that to avoid the mistake. But this time it is totally fine. You are new, or you don't really know it." For example, mistakes like clocking-in under a higher-wage work. The supervisor will come saying "I realize some people clock in as a wrong category but that is totally fine, because we didn't really talk about that to you guys. From now on if you are coming for a meeting, consultation, clock-in in different categories." That one, is one mistake, I realize it.

This example parallels most of Taiwanese M. 1's experiences at SCU, where he is typically guided by faculty and staff, and always treated with respect.

As with other participants in this investigation, Taiwanese M. 1 assumed that his lack of English competency hinders his studies. Although his English ability was not equal to domestic students or sufficient to do well in class, Taiwanese M. 1 recognized the importance of interaction with students through network activities. He joined a student organization formed of mostly U. S. students, the Kinesiology Student Organization, which was a step that SCU international students seldom take. As a result, his English language proficiency improved, and, together with his acquisition of content knowledge, his confidence also improved and gave him the courage interact with more people. Taiwanese M. 1's noted that his drive to become involved in more activities opened the opportunity to interact with myriad students and faculty. This built his confidence, his language ability, and consequently improved his job prospects post-graduation.

> To be honest, in the beginning, I felt I still had a language barrier. Sometimes when I was in class, I didn't know what to say, and I did not know how to respond when they talked to me because I didn't think my language ability was strong enough. But now, because I am now trying to be involved more in activities, I have to build some network. I need to know some people. I have more chances to get internships in school. I got a chance to know more professors and I'll probably know more about working opportunities. I feel more comfortable, talking with them, involved in whatever activities, and I have more thoughts, because I have to think what to do after graduation. My language ability is better now, and I know more knowledge in kinesiology, so I can talk more specifics with my peers.

International students do not always find the confidence to talk with native speakers, and this hinders their ability to interact with other domestic students and with faculty, which consequently excludes them from the local community and isolates them in the

international student community, or among their co-nationals (Hong et al., 2007). This fear was also present in some of the participants of this investigation. Taiwanese M. 1 was able to face this fear and took the step to become involved in activities that gave him the opportunity to gain knowledge, English skills, and possibly a better future.

Taiwanese M. 1 was satisfied with his studying conditions. He found his teachers helpful, and they considered him as any other student in the class. He explained his best experience in the classroom with a recognized and strict kinesiology faculty member. Taiwanese M. 1's experiences with faculty members conveyed he was satisfied with the study conditions at SCU (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999).

> This was a sports prevention class and they were teaching us how to do sports medicine. And that is the field that I was interested in before I took the class. I have a lot of prior knowledge because my brother is a physical therapist. So, I already knew some knowledge about that. And the professor, he was kind of famous in our major. He has been there for a long time. And he teaches a lot of classes, and students like him. And in this class, I practice a lot on taping doing sports medicine. I spent a lot of time on myself, and when we were actually practicing in class I did really well. And every time, because he would walk around checking students work, telling them something they can fix, and every time he saw my taping, he was like "you really did a good job! You are really good at taping, huh?" He said that even though he is kind of strict professor.

Taiwanese M. 1 put in the time to prepare for the class and did a competent job in front of his teacher. This faculty member evaluated and praised his work every time he would pass by next to him in class. The faculty member did not care about Taiwanese M. 1's lack of English ability or about his lack of confidence. The faculty member simply expressed that he perceived work well-done. For Taiwanese M. 1, this interaction was an important event because he knew this faculty member was recognized as one of most

competent and knowledgeable, yet the strictest, instructors in the Kinesiology department. This experience created a virtuous cycle in which interaction increased Taiwanese M. 1's English ability, content knowledge, and confidence. In this interaction, the instructor enabled, confirmed, and supported Taiwanese M. 1(Rendon, 1994).

Although Taiwanese M. 1 stated that he had never experienced discrimination, he did face problems with one of his coaches on the basketball team. Since he was a "walk-in" (i.e., not a recruited athlete as were other sponsored athletes in the team), he thought he did not receive the attention he deserved from the basketball coaches even from the first day.

> When I went into our team, I was a "walk-in." I am not a "scholarship athlete." They are not grabbing me from somewhere; I just walked in. So, I think since the beginning, their attitude was not good towards me. I really didn't feel well, and after that when we started practicing, I felt like they always missed my stuff. For example, the coach is supposed to be in charge of our information, because we have to update it every year. I think this is according to NCAA rules. At the beginning of the school year when they'd start collecting student's data, they never asked me. I know I have nothing turned in, and I have to do something, but they never asked me until I said it, and then they would say "can you upload it on "whatever" website." I'd say "I'm not sure, could you show me on your laptop?" and they would say "oh, we are short on laptops, it is very easy to do it yourself, we don't have time now." I think because at that time my English was not good enough, so probably I misunderstood something, or I didn't explain my needs that well to them. Plus, I was walk-in student so probably I was not as important as scholarship students.

Taiwan M. 1 realized that student athletes on scholarships were given attention because they had received money from SCU and therefore the university wanted to obtain as much athletic performance as possible from them. Hence, gave little attention to "walk-ins." Taiwan M. 1 continued on the team as a "walk-in" for two years, but his experience

on the team did not improve. He was critical of the coaches' actions because he thought the coaches did not understand their roles as educators.

> The basketball coaches are still educators. I don't think how they treat students should be like that. They should be more like professors, like staff treating student workers. I want them to be teaching students instead of ignoring them. That is not what educators are supposed to do. That's what I'm thinking.

Taiwanese M. 1 had positive experiences with the basketball team. Although Taiwanese M. 1 was unable to play for the team in an official game during the season, he did value the camaraderie he enjoyed with the team players. It was on the basketball team where Taiwanese M. 1 first interacted closely with U. S. students, and where he first considered himself part of the university. Taiwanese M. 1 noted how teammates mentored him to improve his game, and how this "friendly advice" made him feel safe from rejection.

> Yeah, they were really nice. They tried to teach me, and they said, "at this time you can do this, you can pass the ball, you can drive in instead of just shoot." They had really friendly advice, and they didn't say "OK, there's this Asian kid…" you know, or "we're just going to bully him" or something like that.

Experiences such as the one above made Taiwanese M. 1 change his perceptions of his own characteristics, and to see himself as similar to his SCU peers. He no longer saw SCU students only as foreigners, but as peers with whom he could interact and learn from. However, despite the opportunity to interact and to learn from local students, Taiwanese M. 1 did not seek to have "deeper relationships" with U. S. students. There were several reasons why he did not have many U. S. friends. Taiwanese M. 1 first identified "values" and "culture," and not English language as other participants, as the reasons that stopped him from closer interaction with domestic students. Taiwan M. 1 knew more than 50 students by name, of whom 80-85% were domestic student, and only

20% international; however, he did not consider domestic students close enough to see them as friends.

> I don't have friends right now at school. I feel like students spend time here, but they don't really talk much with classmates because they have their own things to do, plus the culture. If they would say "let's go out," I would probably go, but they don't invite me. Probably they invite others. I am won't say I am interested in making American friends, but I am open.

In his view, a friend was someone who shares a common cultural background. For him, it was easier to become friends with Mandarin speakers.

> It is easier to make friends who are Mandarin speakers. I know the culture, so it is easier. We probably have the same culture, background, and what we think might be similar. What we know, like whatever might be similar too. So, it is easier to talk.

These last two statements which imply the lack of Mandarin speakers on campus, contradict the actual conditions, as there are hundreds of Mandarin-speaking students and which gave Taiwanese M. 1 opportunities to find friends with a common language. A reason why he had not found many friends was because most Mandarin speakers on campus come from China and not from Taiwan. This idea was echoed when I asked him about the nationality of his social media contacts, and he said that 90-95% were Taiwanese living in Taiwan.

When I inquired deeper into the reasons for his lack of meaningful friendships, Taiwanese M. 1 stated that the SCU environment was appropriate to pursue a degree, but true friendships were not there, at least not as close as those he had in Taiwan. That is, he perceived a fit in the environment for academic work (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999), but he perceived a difference in the way his

peers socialize (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). Specifically, he perceived SCU students as private and busier compared to students in Taiwan.

> I feel like friends here are not as close in Taiwan. Because in Taiwan, after class you probably hang out a lot, and we will do something else other than class. But here, even we know each other for a long time, after class pretty much we never meet up. We talk about class stuff, the test or assignments, so it is not as close as Taiwan. I think it is life in general here, and culture. People after class, they will have their private time with family, I guess. Work. Therefore, I think it is easier to make friends in Taiwan.

Taiwanese M. 1 identified the lack of interaction among students at SCU. Prior to his arrival to campus, he expected to socialize with peers. His expectations were not met, and he was surprised by how different the students were in both countries. Taiwanese M. 1 did not think he excluded by U. S. students purposely. The idea that U. S. students were "busy" with academics, with personal matters, and with work, was expressed by Taiwanese M. 1 and echoed by other participants. The dissonance between Taiwanese M. 1's image of a college student and his experience with SCU students was expected for two reasons. Many SCU students are nontraditional students, which includes older students with family responsibilities and students who work full-time and who have little free time to interact with classmates outside the classroom. Also, the opportunity to choose from hundreds of class offerings each quarter makes students independent of others. This contrasts with many participants' view of a traditional university student who takes the same classes within a cohort. Arguably, this latter approach gives students opportunity for deeper interaction with classmates.

Despite a lack of close interaction with peers, Taiwanese M. 1 expressed fit with his peers and praised U. S. students' values (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al.,

1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). He considered SCU students patient with others. Taiwan M. 1 gave the example of a student not able to finish his portion of a group project and exemplified the kinds of responses he would receive from other group members at SCU and in Taiwan.

> Let's say if in a class we have a group project, and somebody did not put much effort. And then they say "I am having hard time now. I'm having some issues in my family." In here, they will respect that. They will try to help. But in Taiwan, they will probably think "you are finding excuse from not putting much effort in work… you are just being lazy…you are not trying to put effort and are avoiding people in the group." But in here, people will respect each other.

Taiwanese M. 1 assumed that in both countries a student will receive help, but the perception and the conversations among peers after the student receives help differ. According to Taiwanese M. 1, U. S. students would help gladly, but in Taiwan the student who helped would criticize the student who received help.

> In Taiwan, they will still help him, but after the group project is finished, they will say "this person doesn't put too much effort. If you do a group project with them, he won't try hard." It is the culture, because people in Taiwan they all think what they think is what it is. If I think "that person isn't telling the truth" they will believe what they think. They will not trust people; they believe the student wants to be lazy. But here, I feel people will respect others. "Oh, I will try to help him because has issues." But in our culture back in Taiwan, people think stuff. Here people think to help each other. I think the most important thing is that they respect each other because everyone is different, so you might be dealing with a problem and nobody knows. So, they'll respect and try to help them out.

Taiwanese M. 1 perceived students at SCU as understanding of people's differences and students' difficulties in comparison to the university students in Taiwan. Taiwanese M. 1 assumed that SCU students care about differences that make every student's experiences unique. Hence, when a student faces challenges, peers accept the problems as genuine and are willing to help.

Taiwanese M. 1's exposure to SCU students had caused him to question his values. He had critically reflected on his values and had decided to emulate his SCU peers: To be empathetic to others' problems. Taiwanese M. 1 developed his own values (Baxter Magolda, 2004), and showed that can the lived reflexively (Marginson, 2014). In contrast to other participants, he did not use his Taiwanese values to judge other students, instead he reflected on the difference between what he perceived were SCU's student values and the student values he experienced in Taiwan. He stated that he had learned not to judge people, because "students are different." Taiwanese M. 1 articulated how people have the freedom to make their own choices.

> What have I learned? I'll say, probably not judging people, because we are all different. Because in our culture probably I will be like everyone and will think what everyone will think. But here, I feel like I can do whatever I want, I have more freedom.

By "freedom," Taiwanese M. 1 explained that he had achieved agency at this university, something he did not enjoy back home (Marginson, 2014). This agency was present in other participants, albeit not in all. Agency here meant to decide for oneself and freedom to act, not based on cultural constraints.

> People won't judge me here. I don't have to worry about what others will think about me. I can do whatever I want. Because students are diverse, and have a different culture, I don't have to worry about what people will think about me. Or what I'm going to do. If people will judge me: "He is this, doing this..." I don't have to worry about that. I learned that from talking and interacting with friends. That's how I feel.

The idea of freedom was present in Taiwanese M. 1's description of an international student. Taiwanese M. 1 could have described an international student as a set of activities a student performs on campus, such as the classes the university student takes

as other participants did. Instead, Taiwanese M. 1 described international students as an individual who shows initiative, who asks questions, and who is assertive in light of difficulties. These students differed from a university student in Taiwan who can rely on university staff to solve their problems, to tell them what classes to take, or to call their parents for help if a challenge arises.

> To be an international student you have to learn what to do with your own life because everything is different here, different culture, different people, different everything. Talk with people, figure it out. Because those problems, some of them, you might not have them in your home country. Plus, if you live with your parents you might not have to worry about them. So, you must be more proactive, and then try not to feel embarrassed to talk with people. Leave shyness. This is important because if you don't ask you will never get answers. If you don't get answers, you don't get what you want. One day you get sick. And if you don't know what to do… it might be really easy in your home country but as an international student it may be really hard. You may have to ask people of previous experiences. Ask your friends.

Taiwanese M. 1 welcomed the freedom he enjoyed at SCU and valued the respect he was given on campus as well as the "non-judgmental" attitude he saw in his peers. In his academic and social experiences at SCU, Taiwanese M. 1 displayed reflexive and agentic behaviors as a student who had gained resilience and the ability to adapt to new environments. Yet in his adaptation, he neither changed or nor attempted to change his Taiwanese identity.

Other Engaged and Transformed Students

Chinese M. 1

Chinese M. 1 is a student enrolled in undergraduate courses along with English language training, who in the future will pursue graduate program at SCU. As other international students from China, he sought to improve his English competency and

struggled in his first year in a non-Mandarin classroom environment. Chinese M. 1 appreciated the informal relationship he had with faculty and is thankful for their efforts inside the classroom. As other participants, Chinese M. 1 thought classroom presentations helped him to learn content and to develop his verbal skills; he had gained the ability to present himself to others, something he could not do before his studies at SCU. Chinese M. 1 perceived homework as difficult because it required English writing but recognized that this work was beneficial for him. He was engaged with his classes but had sufficient time to volunteer as a tutor in a Chinese language class. He aspired to have friendships with SCU students but had not been able to socialize with U. S. peers. Chinese M. 1 had conversations with his Chinese girlfriend about what it would it be like to socialize with U. S. friends but concluded that domestic students might not be interested in him. Chinese M. 1 did not perceive discrimination against himself at SCU and expressed SCU was a great place for international students because he had received high-level education, and because "the teachers and students are all friendly, and the environment around the school is really good." Chinese M. 1 considered himself part of campus because the university had given him "the feeling that all students are American."

Japanese M. 2

Japanese M. 2 arrived to SCU only a little more than three months prior to the first interview. Japanese M. 2 was engaged academically and socially at SCU; he enjoyed his classes and studied many hours for each class, primarily because of lack of English proficiency. He found the classes interesting, and similar to other participants said that classroom presentations are his most valuable experiences in the classroom. He was

thankful for the care he received from faculty and peers alike and welcomed the feedback they gave him constantly, which made him improve academically. Japanese M. 2 did not perceive discrimination against himself and stated that he was treated "like other students in the class." Aside from one minor problem with a peer who ignored his emails and who did not work sufficiently on a team project, he was satisfied with his experience at SCU. Japanese M. 2 was a member in the Japan Club, where many of its members were Japanese language students genuinely interested in Japanese culture (i.e., language, manga, anime). Similar to other participants, Japanese M. 2 was a language tutor; his interaction with SCU students involved the explanation of Japanese grammar and Japanese conversation, while he practiced and improved his English verbal skills. He often went out with students and had "deep relationships" with five or six U. S. students, most of whom were part of the club or who had an interest in Japanese culture. Japanese M. 2 stated that the way to make friends was through club activities, but he did not join other clubs because he wanted to maintain a balance between academics and leisure, and because he was content with the number of friends he already had. For Japanese M. 2, what it meant to be an international student was to "come here to learn English and U. S. culture, and to share with others about Japanese culture and language. It is an opportunity to exchange my culture with students." As other students in the Transformed and Engaged group, Japanese M. 2 portrayed a fit between himself and the university's attributes, as well as a match with the characteristics of the students at this SCU (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Japanese M. 2

viewed himself as part of the campus and lived his life reflexively and with agency, but without changing his home identity as a result of his stay at SCU (Marginson, 2014).

Japanese M. 1

Japanese M. 1 is an accounting major student who had been enrolled at SCU for less than a year. As other Engaged and Transformed students, he was motivated to attend classes, and was excited to increase his English language skills, particularly "key vocabulary" in business classes and his ability to express his ideas in English. Japanese M. 1 liked the lecture system, in which he took classes twice a week, did many homework assignments, and prepared for quizzes and midterm. His preparation for presentations had helped him to learn content, and to develop his English verbal skills. In Japan, none of those were common in a typical business class, where students were often evaluated with a final paper. Japanese M. 1 had good rapport with faculty; they know him by name, and he "can talk to them if he had any questions about lectures." Faculty have been "fair" to him and he has never perceived discrimination towards himself. The only hinderance Japanese M. 1 perceived in his classes was his inability to speak fluently, but he thought he had improved since his arrival to SCU. Among his best educational experiences was the "great diversity" of the campus, exemplified through his interaction with German, South Korean, and Chinese American roommates. He appreciated his exposure to different ideas that came from this diversity: "In Japan, people have similar ideas, but in America each American is different." As other participants, Japanese M. 1 had met SCU students who were interested in Japanese culture, and who wanted to improve their Japanese language skills. He met these students in the Japan Club and in

the language lab, where he also served as a tutor. These students became "deep friends" with him, and they socialized frequently. He reflected about this live at SCU: "I have learned about other cultures, and about my own personality and about my roommate's personalities. I am too sensitive about cleanliness." He had reassessed his own views about this and stated that "being too sensitive is sometimes good but depends on the situation. Sometimes, I should ignore it or not care about it too much." Japanese M. 1 also demonstrated agency in producing his own decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2004), cognizant of the liberty he enjoyed at SCU without disregard of his academic responsibilities. In his story, Japanese M. 1 did not change his identity, as he remained a reflexive Japanese student who took advantage of his stay at SCU to improve his English language skills, learn academic content, and to "touch many other cultures" (Marginson, 2014).

Utilitarian Student Group

Chinese M. 2

Chinese M. 2 is a male, third-year, middle-class student. He transferred to SCU from an institution in Boston because he wanted to remove himself from a Chinese "circle of friends." He perceived SCU as a better place for him, where he improved his English and used his time in productive ways. At SCU, Chinese M. 2 had plenty of friends who were mainly Chinese and international students. For Chinese M. 2 a student needs to be "good" to be his friend, which for him meant to have a pleasant personality. Chinese M. 2 did not perceive discrimination against himself on campus. His main objective was to improve his English proficiency, obtain a US baccalaureate degree, and

return to China and find work through his personal connections. Chinese M. 2 was not preoccupied with his studies. For Chinese M. 2, life was about work, but also about "enjoying life." Since he did not come to campus as part of a larger group of Chinese students, Chinese M. 2 considered himself less connected to other Chinese students who came to SCU as part of a large cohort. Despite his arrival to campus by himself, Chinese M. 2 expanded his network through some of the first Chinese students he met on campus. He had to adapt but thinks that both SCU and California were "welcoming" for international students, more so than the institution in Boston where he previously studied.

Chinese M. 2 perceived a match with SCU's institutional attributes such as the university environment, the studying conditions, and the program demands (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Chinese M. 2 first came to the U. S. because of his perception of the U. S. as a powerful, high-status country.

> I came to the U. S. because it is the most powerful country in the world. Many advances in technology are in the U. S. such as medical technology, and some top technologies are here. So, education must also be advanced. Actually, I like America the most, I don't know why. I just wanted to come here. Because American is powerful, I mean it has a high-status in the world compared to other countries.

Chinese M. 2 selected his college in Boston because it was listed as #73 in some "college ranking" and he did not consider any other factors. According to Chinese M. 2, it was not uncommon for prestige to be the top determining factor to select universities for Chinese students. However, after some time in Boston, other aspects about his educational experience played a role in his satisfaction and academic progress. Chinese M. 2 described his university selection process and his move to SCU.

> I attended a college in Boston that was ranked 73rd in America. You know, Chinese students prefer to go to some famous university. But I did not care about ranking when I moved to California. I thought here is good. I think I feel happier here than in Boston. In Boston, I had a lot of friends. We just played video games together, drank beer together. Alcohol together. *Piyou* [i.e., Chinese word for beer]. So here, I can focus on my studies. In Boston, I played with my friends, my Chinese circle; they went out, I went out. They drank; I drank. They went to a club; I went to club. I had close relationships with them, but I don't have them any longer. I really wanted to improve my life as an international student.

His decision to move to SCU was based on a sense of need to improve his education and to stay away from other Chinese students with whom he spent too much time in activities not related to his studies. He sought to "improve" his life as international student, that is, to spend time in academic-related activities and to interact more in English and less in Chinese. Upon arriving to SCU, Chinese M. 2 enrolled in a Chinese language class with the aim to meet other students with whom to practice English, and in search of other Chinese students who registered in the class with the same goal. Chinese M. 2 was surprised to find no other Chinese student enrolled in the class; however, his goal to improve his English skills were met, just not in the way he expected.

> When I came this university, I chose to register in a Chinese class to earn credit and to make friends easily. But I was the only Chinese in the class, and I thought there were going to be others. I did not know anybody in the class, and thanks to the recommendation of the teacher, I volunteered to tutor. This gave me the opportunity to do language exchange with other students; I teach them Chinese and use English to teach. I learn words, such as "ABC" [i.e., American-born Chinese], so it is beneficial for me.

As with other participants (e.g., Japanese F. 1), Chinese M. 2 met SCU language learners who were interested in his knowledge about Chinese language, and through this interaction he improved his English language skills and his confidence. This experience made his academic and social experience richer at SCU.

SCU study conditions matched Chinese M. 2 (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Although he considered SCU classes "boring and easy" and confident of his ability to "just take notes and review the exam," he portrayed himself as an academically improved student at SCU. He was dissatisfied with his current 3.1 GPA and explained that "because of my low grades in Boston, it has taken me a year to improve." His best educational experience was with faculty members who interacted with him in class with creative approaches. Chinese M. 2's attention was captured by the faculty member's creativity, and by his interaction with Chinese M. 2.

> The professor is very interesting and has a good memory. His teaching skills will make the students in the classroom focus on him. He can make a philosophy class very easy to understand. The class goes from 1:00 to 4:50pm, but I can still focus all this time on his class because he's so interesting. For example, he separates students between "sinners" and "saints," but not in a true religious way. If somebody makes a mistake, like yawning, like I do sometimes, he will write my name on the sinner list. I mean, his examples are different from those of other professors.

Chinese M. 2 was surprised that he could stay focused in a class that lasted more than three hours, presumably because in other classes he could not keep his attention on the professor. Chinese M. 2 depicted the faculty member's wit and ability to engage his student audience with interesting discussions.

> He is not boring as other professors. He will also ask students if they had similar experiences. "Did you? Your friends?" and we discuss those topics together in class. For example, he told that one time he was with his wife in Las Vegas, and a lady had a flat tire and she asked my professor for help. He replied, "I don't know how to install the tire," and the lady said, "are you a man?" And then he said, "why should a man know how to change a tire?" Stories like that were very funny.

For Chinese M. 2, it was this faculty member's lessons and approaches to teaching which led to his solid academic performance. Furthermore, he did not perceive himself excluded

from the class. Chinese M. 2 thought the faculty member saw him as similar to any other peer in the class. Chinese M. 2 praised the faculty member because he knows his name and for his acknowledgements (Rendon, 1994), although Chinese M. 2 assumed that it was because he was in the "top 5 students in the class, perhaps 3 o 4." Anecdotes similar to this prompted Chinese M. 2 to portray a match with himself and SCU's institutional attributes.

Chinese M. 2 perceived his characteristics parallel those of SCU peers, but not so when he studied in Boston. Although he enjoyed his time his Boston, he knew that it was not an appropriate fit for him to continue there after he noticed that that his English skills had not improved, in part because he spoke mostly Chinese with his friends.

> My first three years in Boston, I just spoke Chinese. That was not good. I came to America, and I could not improve my English level. It was very hard. I talked to my parents and they suggested I should move to California. Although there are more Chinese in California, there were more Chinese around me in Boston.

At SCU, Chinese M. 2's friends were primarily international: "60% Chinese, although 90% are still international (i.e., Japan, Korea, or Vietnam). The other 10% are mostly Mexican." Although most of his friends were Mandarin speakers at SCU, Chinese M. 2 did not think he wasted his time here like he did in Boston. Chinese M. 2 went out, but not with the same level of frequency as he did in Boston. Another benefit was that 40% of his friends were non-Chinese students, which presumably forced him to interact in English language conversations frequently.

Chinese M. 2 perceived a fit the characteristics of SCU students that go beyond national origin (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). This fit goes beyond language and culture; it also related to SCU's students focus on their studies. His closest friends were

all Mandarin speakers and were friends "because it is easy to understand each other, although our slang can be a bit different," in reference to linguistic differences between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese students. Chinese M. 2 also identified small differences in social media platform usage between Chinese and Taiwanese students, as well as differences in spending: "Chinese like luxury cars, like BMW, or Audi, and Taiwanese typically drive an inexpensive car."

As other participants, Chinese M. 2 had English language challenges, particularly with the speed of the conversation in English and with the topics of the conversations that were foreign to him.

> When I am with them, they always speak so fast. When they talk, I do not know how to talk with them. If they talk about something interesting, I don't know it. It is hard to follow the conversation.

Since Chinese M. 2 could not follow conversations with U. S. students, he did not try to interact with them. When asked if it would help him to make an effort to approach U. S. students to improve his English ability, he responded that it would not help him because he "can speak English with other international students." Hence, Chinese M. 2's fit with SCU students' language came from Mandarin speaking-students and other international students who speak English at a comfortable level for Chinese M. 2, but not from domestic students at SCU.

Chinese M. 2 reflected that he did not have more U. S. friends because of their different "lifestyles," and because he preferred to spend time with others who shared his culture. This signals a lack of fit between SCU student values and his values. Chinese M.

2 described some of what he had in common with other Chinese students, and what he perceived as differences in lifestyle.

> Like Chinese, if we are together, we talk about something like popular things in China, or about some superstar or actor. We will go to some place, a famous place to have fun, and at the end of we will play some Mahjong [Chinese board game] or some video games. Americans, like my previous roommates in the dorm, will always go to parties and drink. Just like me in Boston, but they are American, and we are Chinese. Different style.

Chinese M. 2 noticed that the differences in lifestyle with U. S. students did not pertain to nationality. He did not want to participate in activities that took him back to this time in Boston when he was not academically engaged. As other participants (e.g., Taiwan M. 1), Chinese M. 2 recognized that it was difficult to interact with his U. S. peers because after class "I go my way, you go your way." He overlooked whether or not SCU students interacted with him because he was an international student or because that is how U. S. students behaved. He did, however, recognize that he did socialize with U. S. students.

> I once invited an African American student to go to Magic Mountain with some of my friends: A few girls, one Chinese, one Japanese, one Korean, and one Mexican. All were couples except the American student. Some had annual passes. We had a good time. We didn't go out again as a group, not because of him, but because the couples separated. Everybody graduated, all went back to their countries, and I did not speak to him again. After that, I did not ask Americans to go out again.

Chinese M. 2 remembered that once he went out with a U. S. student in a group and recognized that they had a good time. However, the relationship did not continue because the couples that went on the trip had separated and because some of those students later graduated and went back to their respective countries. This highlights the effects that student attrition and student graduation have on international students' attempts to foster friendships both with domestic and with international students. When asked again about

the need to interact with U. S. students outside the classroom, Chinese M. 2 stated that there should be more clubs where students were forced to join as part of their education to join them: “I think they should create clubs. For example, my major is accounting, we must have a club where students can go to the accounting club.” However, Chinese M. 2 ignored that the accounting club did exist at SCU, as in many other universities. What Chinese M. 2 intended to convey was that he wanted the university to make these clubs mandatory, to be part of the curriculum, something where students were forced to participate and to interact with other peers. But since it was not mandatory, he did not want to join the accounting club because he did not see value in his participation in something that will not give him concrete benefit such as grade in a class or credits towards graduation.

Similar to participants in this investigation, Chinese M. 2 was altered by his experience, but not in ways parallel to other participants. Chinese M. 2 showed reflexivity when he recognized that his educational experience in Boston was not conducive to him academically (Marginson, 2014). Yet, in our conversations, Chinese M. 2 projected an image of himself not as an international student, but as a Chinese student: A Chinese student with the goal to graduate from a U. S. institution, to enhance his English competencies, and to secure a job in China. Chinese M. 2 was confident about himself, not about the education he received. He viewed university studies as transactional, not as a transformational experience.

> After I graduate, I will try to find a job in Los Angeles, or here in the U. S. I want to get an employment authorization which can allow me to work. If I cannot find a job, I'll go back to China and find a job. I have many friends in every city in China. So, first I’ll choose a city where there's a contact, a friend, and ask him

> some information about the city, and will tell him my major is management. So, I will ask him what kind of job I can get. Then, I will go to a second company to try to get a job. My parents can also introduce to me some company connections, sometimes just through friends of your friend or a though a sister company. Or I will just go by myself and take an interview. There are many jobs, but also many Chinese. People must try their best. But I am confident. Not because of my major, but because of my personality.

Chinese M. 2 described his vision of how he will land a job in the future. He based his future success, not on the education he received at SCU, or on the experiences and skills acquired during in his studies in the U. S. Chinese M. 2 thought that this success will be come because of his personality and because of his ability to network and to convince others of his value. Chinese M. 2 perceived himself as quintessentially Chinese. He did his best to adapt to his circumstances without the need to change his identity or without the intention to emulate U. S. students or to assimilate into U. S. culture (Marginson, 2014).

Japanese M. 3

Japanese M. 3 is a third-year, management major exchange student. He was enrolled in a prestigious private university in Tokyo when he decided to come to study in the U. S. because it is "famous for business." Japanese M. 3 selected SCU based on the recommendation of an international student agent, and because of its relatively low living and tuition costs. After the completion of his second quarter at SCU, Japanese M. 3 intended to transfer out to a research university in Seattle, Washington. He considered SCU parochial and SCU students unimaginative in their activities and in their goals. Used to the convenience and the urban lifestyle that Tokyo offers its university students, Japanese M. 3 was not able to cope with what he perceived as a lonely environment at

SCU during the summer quarter. Japanese M. 3 stated that when he first arrived at CSU, he did not have much to do. He attempted to start an international club. The university authorization for the club did not materialize, as the office in charge of this paperwork "took too long to approve the petition." When the Spring quarter ended, he gave up in his goal to charter an international club. Japanese M. 3 sought refuge from boredom in social media, where he spent five hours each day in interaction with friends. These "contacts" were mostly Japanese who lived in Japan, with only 10% of contacts non-Japanese who lived locally. Many of his friends in social media talked to him about their job search experiences, as most third-year students in Japan are jobseekers. In turn, Japanese M. 3 talked to them about his life in the U. S.

The institutional attributes of SCU were not an appropriate fit for Japanese M. 3 (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Although the program demands were not difficult for him, and the studying conditions met his expectations, the university environment lacked the vibrancy he was used to in Tokyo. For this reason, he intended to transfer out. When he described his experience during the Spring quarter, he portrayed it as slow, yet tolerable. However, the summer session became a bore, as there were not many students present or activities to do on campus.

> I want to go to Seattle to a bigger university in a bigger city. A university with club activities. Social. That is a big reason. Especially in the summer, here, there is nothing to do. In the Spring quarter, I could enjoy it because I could join club activities, sports, football. I like sports. I took a kinesiology running class, it was very good. The weather is ok. I was good, but now in the summer there are no club activities and not so many students on campus.

Japanese M. 3 came to SCU with the expectation to meet and to interact with an abundance of U. S. students. This did not materialize. As other participants in this

investigation, Japanese M. 3 was perplexed at the fact that there were over 20,000 students enrolled at SCU, but he could not interact with them. To fix this problem, he attempted to create an international student club that would provide him and other international students an opportunity to meet peers, similar to what he experienced back at his home university. Japanese M. 3 did the research needed to form the club, submitted the application with the Associated Student Body department, but the university did not process his paperwork fast enough in the Spring quarter.

> I expected to see many students on campus, but I couldn't see them. There are a lot of students on campus, about 20,000 students on campus. It's a lot, but I couldn't see them. You cannot see them because the campus is too big. Maybe, I expected to interact with more American students, but I couldn't. The university doesn't help you and then there's no place to interact. There's no place. I tried to make a place, something like that, but I failed. The process is too slow.

Japanese M. 3 showed initiative in his attempt to fix this perceived problem. His efforts failed because he could not get his petition accepted in the Spring quarter, and later in the summer quarter because the campus had too few students. Without students on campus, he recognized that he did not fit on campus (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). The start of the summer quarter compounded the lack of students with few students interested in him.

> After I came here, I was kind of depressed, coming here cause there's no restaurants around the year. There's no place to go out, right? And so, few chances to hang out with international students, American students just study in class and then go back home. They are not talkative; they don't talk with friends or their classmates in the class and then they come to university and then take class and then go back home. That's the lifestyle here.

Similar to other students (e.g., Chinese M. 2) Japanese M. 3 saw that domestic students were not interested in him. The fact that many of them leave campus immediately after

the end of class was something he recognized as a different lifestyle. Japanese M. 3 missed the interaction he had in his Japanese university. He explained what he perceived as differences between SCU and Japanese students.

> I don't see people interacting with each other in a big class maybe because there's no reason to interact. I think people here are focused on their family, maybe. I think they stay with family longer than students in Japan. They prefer staying with family than staying with a friend. I fear that. Because they go back home as soon as possible; as soon as they finish the class. Even students living on campus, on weekends they go back home. If I were them, I'd like to do something more active; universities are not only to study. Universities are for students to interact.

For Japanese M. 3, there was a lack of fit because he did not possess characteristics that were similar to other students in the SCU context (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). There was a conflict between some of his values and those of SCU students. While he recognized that a large class was not conducive for interaction among students, he expected that after class students would join their peers in social activities. Japanese M. 3 could not understand why students preferred to go back home on the weekends, instead of social activities among peers. His phrase "universities are not only for study" conveys the frustration he experienced due to his lack of interaction with other students at SCU.

> I think here people like their hometown, and there is little mobility. In Tokyo people move. They focus on the university community, more than in their hometown. In a top university is different, students make more effort to enter. Students who enter a top and prestigious university have pride to have been accepted. They try to make friends with smart people because they will be helpful for them in the future. I think those students also have a higher motivation for everything. Activities, everything. They have experience putting an effort in their past and try to do their best more than people here. And for that reason, they could be accepted into a top university. That is why they get a good job, and the companies understand they can do a good job. That is why university name is important when getting a job.

Japanese M. 3 delineated his personal educational trajectory, as he reflected why he had reached certain scholastic achievements, and why he expected to receive a post-graduation reward in the form of a good job. Japanese M. 3 did not see this same motivation in his SCU students. He justified his view, presumably because SCU is not listed high in national rankings. Yet, Japanese M. 3 stated that he had diligently sought to interact with SCU students inside the class, and in extracurricular activities.

> The university gym organized the trip. It was a trip to Yosemite. Three days in a van. I didn't know most people; I only knew 2 people out of eight. Good relationships. We built a tent. We walked up a mountain with a tent. We could make a good relationship with them. Unfortunately, I am not in contact with those eight people anymore, but I am in contact only with the friends I knew before.

Japanese M. 3 took the initiative to participate in an activity that would give him the opportunity to meet other SCU students. He enjoyed the trip and interacted well with those who accompanied him. After the trip, however, Japanese M. 3 had no more contact with those students.

As other participants in the investigation, Japanese M. 3 did not perceive racism at SCU. He considered SCU students "kind." Contrary to the experiences of other Japanese students in this investigation, Japanese M. 3 did not participate in language exchanges that would allow him to meet SCU students interested in Japanese culture. He did meet SCU students in a Japanese calligraphy class, but this event did not develop into the constant interaction that language exchanges provided his Japanese peers at SCU. The difference in lifestyle hindered his interaction with SCU students. Yet, this interaction helped Japanese M. 3 learn to cope with "pressure."

> People here and the people in Tokyo are totally different because Tokyo is a very busy city. It is. I think people here prefer this California lifestyle. In Tokyo, they

> feel the pressure right around people around them, so your parents or friends feel the pressure. But here I don't feel pressure. I feel independent. When you start a business here people are very supportive. In Tokyo, people are not supportive. Instead, your parents and your friends recommend you a stable life. Here, students prefer to do what they like to do, not what they have to do. In Tokyo, they do what they have to do. But here their focus is on freedom.

Despite his lack of connection with SCU students, Japanese M. 3 recognized some SCU students' values as beneficial. He described his preference for "freedom" to pursue his dream, a U. S. value, over the Japanese value of "stability." Japanese M. 3's contrasts his life in Tokyo with the life of an SCU student. In Japan, Japanese M. 3 had to fit into a homogenous pattern dictated by society; at SCU, he was free to make his own decisions. Japanese M. 3 first reflected on the freedom-stability dichotomy inside an SCU classroom. Japanese M. 3 spoke about the class that introduced concepts that changed his perspective from a focus on "what I must do" to a focus on "what I like."

> Last quarter I was taking a critical thinking class that was very helpful. The class focused on what "they like." The professor told me to focus on what I like instead of what I must do. Then, I can perform well when I do what I like instead of what I must do. After that, I decided to make a club because I thought it would be enjoyable. Japanese universities do not teach fundamental thinking skills, critical thinking, how to think. The class was very fresh. He explained how to think, and how to think deeper. A process. A thinking style. Very fresh. It had a very big impact in my life. Everybody in my life [in Japan] does what they have to do, for example get into a good university and getting a new job. This made a huge impact in my life. I should do what I like.

The critical thinking class introduced Japanese M. 3 to a "fresh" perspective to approach decisions in life. It made sense to him because "doing what you like" would ultimately help him perform better in any activity, and ultimately propel him to reach a higher goal than "doing what others expected" him to do. This idea opened his eyes to a

new perspective and was the catalyst in his attempt to charter the International Student Club. This realization made a deep effect on him, including his career choices.

> This will affect my job hunting. I first thought I should go to Goldman Sachs, somewhere elite. But now, I think I should look for a job that fits me. What I am good for. Maybe I will join a big company that fits me more, instead of the one that is the most prestigious. I don't want to join a company that doesn't fit me. Maybe an American company in the marketing field. I am not sure what my friends are looking for, I don't think they are sure, but they want to join a big company. They think about earning a big salary. Most students in Japan don't have an idea about jobs, they just drink, they don't study, they have fun. They seek prestige.

Japanese M. 3, similar to other participants (e.g., Chinese M. 2), spoke about prestige as his ultimate aim. In his case, a job at a prestigious company would position him high in the social ladder. However, his exposure to SCU lectures and to students changed his priorities and his goals in life.

Japanese M. 3 was in a process of self-formation (Marginson, 2014). As a result of his stay at SCU, he understood that value of social engagement with peers. Japanese M. 3 showed agency when he attempted to change this environment through his efforts to charter a club that would give him more social interaction with peers. Since he did not obtain what he sought at SCU, he decided to transfer out to a different type of institution in a larger university in a larger city. Japanese M. 3 sought a university that could provide him the benefits enjoyed by university students in the U. S. (i.e., freedom, interesting lectures), and provide him the benefits he enjoyed in Tokyo (i.e., a more interactive and cosmopolitan experience). Japanese M. 3 perceived his international experience at SCU as utilitarian, but different from Chinese M. 2. While Chinese M. 2 viewed his international education as a vehicle to secure get a well-paying job, Japanese M. 3 viewed

international education as a vehicle to obtain a degree, one that can also provide him an urban lifestyle, socialization, and entertainment.

Japanese M. 3 did not change his identity. Japanese M.3 was a meaning-making agent capable of producing his own international identity and the ways to relate to peers (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

> I feel like an American. I don't feel like a minority; international students are a minority, and they are actually in number, but I don't feel like one. Considering our numbers, we are a minority, but I don't feel as a minority. Maybe this is America. I feel like an American. They don't treat me like a part of a different people, they treat me like other students. They make you feel like you belong here. Everyone, faculty, students.

The above quotation came near the conclusion of the interview, and it had the appearance of a contradiction to his initial comments about the lack of student interaction at SCU. Japanese M. 3 no longer expressed dissatisfaction about his lack of entertainment opportunities; instead, he reflected on what it means to be an international student in the context of SCU. Japanese M. 3 went beyond his personal social needs and reflected on some of the benefits he received as a SCU student: At SCU, Japanese M. 3 was accepted, was treated as one of their own, and was given freedom.

Other Utilitarian Students

Chinese F. 1

Chinese F. 1 is a second-year English major. Her objective at SCU was to study English and return to China to become an English teacher. Chinese F. 1 perceived a match with SCU's institutional attributes, with the program demands, studying conditions, and the university environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). She perceived SCU as the appropriate place for her

studies, particularly because the English linguistics track at SCU could help her develop the skills she will need to launch her career as an English teacher.

Chinese F. 1 positioned herself differently from other Chinese students, who typically "study business/finance and who will pursue a career in business." Chinese F. 1 had to interact more closely with peers and faculty in English courses compared to students enrolled in business courses. She assumed that SCU faculty members like her, care about her, and listen to her. They communicated with her just as any other SCU student; she thought they were "kind" to her. Chinese F. 1 enjoyed the content of her classes, particularly those related to teaching strategies and English pedagogy, but disliked one faculty member who gave her a low grade. One of her faculty made a comment about Chinese physical characteristics (i.e., he described the Chinese as "short") that made her uncomfortable. This was an isolated event, and other than that she had did not perceive discrimination at SCU.

Chinese F. 1 assumed that her characteristics were not congruent to those of her SCU peers (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). In our conversation, she depicted herself as disinterested in social life, and without U. S. friends beyond her two Mexican American roommates. Chinese F. 1 stated that her English skills were not good enough, particularly her listening and her vocabulary. She was content with the opportunity to interact with SCU students but expressed her disinterest in closer interaction with them. While Chinese F. 1 recognized that this interaction had helped her develop linguistically, she did not seek to know them better: "The teacher lets us in a group, and then we will talk about the homework. Students in the table, how can I say, the other three students just talk. But I

cannot understand immediately, so I just listen." Chinese F. 1 was content with this passive approach to interaction with domestic students, cognizant that her English skills were better than most other Chinese students on campus. Furthermore, Chinese F. 1 stated that SCU's students' "lifestyles" and "cultures" were different than hers, particularly those of Mexican American students, which tacitly depicted another reason why not to interact with them. She described how other Chinese students on campus actively joined student activities. Yet, Chinese F. 1 acknowledged that participation in some of university activities may be positive for international students and knew that she had the option to participate or not to participate.

> Some of them [Chinese international students] just don't try other things and they just want to play games at home. Or some of them, don't want to go outside to try the activities because they don't understand what others [U. S. SCU students] say in the activities. But some of them, maybe some of my Chinese friends whose English is poor, they still go. They try every kind of activity in school.
>
> What activities?
>
> In school, for example, housing has parties in the swimming pool, they will try some pizza or BBQs. My friend goes, and she meets new people. I think she will learn English. She likes to try activities, and I think she can also speak English during these activities. But some of them they just want to interact with other [U. S.] students to improve their English, and not because they enjoy the activity. Not for fun. It is different for everyone.

Chinese F. 1 stated how Chinese international students of different English proficiency levels participated in SCU student activities with the aim to improve their English skills. She recognized that some Chinese international students socialized with U. S. peers even if they were not interested or comfortable in this interaction.

Chinese F. 1 was pragmatic in her decisions. She described herself as a student who currently lived a "different experience" (i.e., culture, buildings, friends, lifestyle,

food) than what she lived in China, but ultimately these new experiences will help her improve her linguistic skills. She lived her life reflexively, particularly on what she thinks advances her academic and career objectives (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Whatever was beyond these two objectives, was not of interest to Chinese F. 1; hence, she is in the Utilitarian Student Group. Yet, Chinese F. 1 demonstrated agency in her decision to try or not to try new things or to meet new people.

> I think American students are willing to express their opinion in school. They try different types of activities in school. In school there are many activities, but Chinese students, some of them after finishing class go home, and then stay by themselves, or with Chinese friends. They don't try other things. They live just like this.

Chinese F. 1 was content without close interaction with domestic SCU domestic students. Chinese F. 1 showed that she lived her life reflexively and with agency in search of what she considered beneficial, unlike her Chinese friend who stepped out of her comfort zone to attend swimming parties with domestic SCU students.

Disengaged Student Group

Taiwanese F. 1

Taiwanese F. 1 is an exchange student who sought to enjoy herself during her studies SCU. She assumed that considerable effort is unnecessary in classes, and that she had sufficient time to socialize. Taiwanese F. 1 preferred Chinese-speaking friends to domestic friends. There was a mismatch between Taiwanese F. 1 and SCU institutional attributes. She resented what she perceived as "being ignored" by other students and perceived discrimination by SCU students. Taiwanese F. 1 positioned herself as a person who was not worried about her future career. However, time spent in her priorities was

important for her, and for this reason she was critical of others who she thought wasted her time, such as faculty who asked her to take notes, or university staff that were "inefficient." Taiwanese F. 1 was not academically inclined and avoids hard work. For Taiwanese F. 1, the university was transactional. She stated that she had learned little from her classes and often complained about others. Taiwanese F. 1 did not reflect on her own shortcomings.

Taiwanese F. 1 did not show a match with the university's attributes, namely program demands or study conditions (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). The university environment at SCU was not an appropriate fit for Taiwanese F. 1 and she disliked what she perceived as a lack of activity in her life.

> I think life here is very boring. Because I cannot take many classes, only three. 12 units. I have much free time. When I was studying in Taiwan, I was a teacher assistant during my free time. Here, I just hang out with my friends. I can't do anything else. I can try a new thing, a restaurant, to Disneyland, to sightseeing. My mother thinks I came only to have fun.

Taiwanese F. 1 did not consider that she could do other activities with her time. Although she thought three four-unit classes were a light academic load, she did not think she could put more effort in those classes, as other participants stated. This attitude displayed again that the SCU institutional environment was not a good fit for her. The suburban environment at SCU was different from the urban atmosphere that surrounded her university in Taiwan. Program demands, as well, were not a good fit for Taiwan F. 1. She assumed that the academic demands of her program were simple, hence did not require much effort from her. Taiwanese F. 1 talked about the difference between her Taiwanese university and SCU.

> In my home university we always play with our cellphones, and we won't focus on the professors. Students here, even though the professor will give them a PowerPoint, they still take notes. In Taiwan we don't copy the PowerPoint because we can get it. Why do we have to write it? No reason. At first, why do you write it? In my opinion is a waste of time. Why spend two hours, when I can just read it. It doesn't help me to remember it. I will [continue to] use my way.

Taiwanese F. 1 saw no value in the faculty's instructions and was critical about the way SCU students took notes. She did not consider that some students took notes to help their memorization of content or to improve their learning. Taiwanese F. 1 presented her approach to notetaking practical and pragmatic, but contrarily, it conveyed a lack of commitment to her studies. Taiwanese F. 1 described what she first considered a bad experience and as the story unfolds, the experienced turned positive for her.

> A bad experience was when we asked a professor in management to put in our team an American student, since we were all international students. The professors declined saying that as seniors we would be able to do it. He said to first try, and then to seek his help if needed. In the beginning of our project we didn't have any idea how to do it. We didn't have an idea because the professor didn't teach it. So, I asked a friend who had taken this class what she did about this assignment. And she said "oh, I don't know because our group had Americans", so she didn't have to spend too much time on it. But I had to spend a lot of time doing this project. Now I don't feel it is very difficult. But for other international students, if this is the first time to do this, they will think it is very difficult. Now, I already did it for a second time. So, for me it's okay now.

Taiwanese F. 1 sought to rely on a U. S. student who would join her team and who would work on the paper, or at least explain it her and to the rest of her team. When the faculty refused to move a U. S. student onto her team, she was then obliged to work on her paper. After Taiwanese F. 1 wrote the paper, she was unable to recognize how she benefited by the new knowledge gained from writing the assignment.

Taiwanese F. 1 expressed the difference between Taiwanese students and SCU students' desire to interact with faculty and to express their opinions in class.

> I think I learned some special things. It is very different from Taiwan. Here, Americans like to answer the professor's questions. But in Taiwan we don't like to answer. And I think here the professors are very different from Taiwan. In here, students like to ask professor. Here the professor won't remind you what you should do, professors just teach you.

Taiwanese stated that Taiwanese faculty were strict, and presumably reminded students about the expectations of the class to the point that students did not need to contact them anymore. How this was achieved was unclear, perhaps the assignments were simpler and more straight forward in comparison to her assignments at SCU. For Taiwanese F. 1, SCU faculty taught their classes, did not remind students, but engaged students in conversations about class content and were open to answer their questions. This engagement with faculty members, however, was not valuable enough for her to describe it as a positive academic experience. Similarly, Taiwanese F. 1 was once approached in class by her Spanish language professor. The result of this interaction was positive for Taiwanese F. 1; however, she did not recognize it as such.

> I had one experience in my Spanish class. Although I couldn't understand what the professor said, I didn't ask the professor questions. One day after class, the professor told me "if you have a question please ask me, don't just stay there without saying anything. That way I won't know if you understand or not." After that, I asked questions to the professor. I could do so because the class is small. There were only 12 students in the class. But if the class were big, I think I wouldn't want to ask the professor questions because I am very shy. I don't like to ask questions in the class. I feel embarrassed. After I changed my mind, I asked my professor questions and I saw how her face look so surprised. I think she was happy because at the end of the class she said she loved our class very much because she had three classes in this quarter, but only our class loved to ask her questions.

At first, Taiwanese F. 1 did not want to participate, but once her faculty encouraged her, she was able to change her mind and to participate. The faculty member was surprised to see her participation in class to the point that she was happy, presumably because

Taiwanese F. 1 did not participate at all prior to this episode. Taiwanese F. 1 recognized this as a positive experience; not because she participated in class and learned this interaction, but more because she made the faculty member happy. However, Taiwanese F. 1 did not change her mind about the value of class participation and justified her lack of participation because she "feels embarrassed."

Taiwanese F. 1 did not have close relationships with U. S. students. Similar to other participants, she resented her lack of English proficiency, which limited her ability to speak with others and to express her thoughts clearly.

> My Japanese friend speaks good English. She can make many friends with Americans. My English is not good. Sometimes, I have many opinions to describe my feelings, but I don't have the words. My Japanese friend has many words to describe her feelings. English is very useful. For example, when we play a game, like poker in a party. They are having fun, but I can't understand what they are talking about. Sometimes I just smile. She can check with them and answer their questions. I don't know how to say that.

Taiwanese F. 1 compared her friend's ability to interact with U. S. students with hers. Taiwanese F. 1 could participate in conversations, and although she could tell the conversation was fun, she decided to remain quiet and smile because she did not know what to say. This lack of English proficiency led to cultural misunderstandings when she interacted with students. Taiwanese F. 1 perceived the recent dismissal of the expression "bless you" as social standard in the U. S. with discrimination against her.

> Here Americans have some discrimination. When I sneeze, they won't say "bless you" to me. Just my American friends will say it to me. Often, I have this feeling. In the library, in classes. They don't say bless you. But if it is your friend, the person will say it.
>
> Do you think this is discrimination?
>
> Yes.

> Where were you? Have you had other times when you face discrimination?
>
> In the class. One time I was discriminated when we were discussing a topic in a classroom. A girl next to me didn't want to discuss it with me. But the boy next to me was ok to discuss it.

Taiwanese F. 1 was taught that in the U. S. it is the norm to say "bless you" after somebody sneezes. Yet she ignored the pattern that many people in the U. S. no longer use this expression. Hence, she perceived this as discrimination against herself. Similarly, when a student did not interact with her in class, she perceived it as discrimination. Without additional details about of this episode, this can be interpreted as classmate who simply ignored her, as students may do and not necessarily as discriminatory action.

Taiwanese F. 1 descriptions of interactions with SCU students were not all negative.

> I took a business law class and it was very hard to understand the teacher. For Americans is easy, but for international students this is new knowledge. The professor is nice, and she gave us a study guide. But even with the study guide I could not find the answer, as the book is very thick. I didn't have time to read the whole book, but my classmates are very nice, as they shared their answers with me. This is a very different in my country. We don't like to share our answers to our classmates, because in Taiwan we care much about our grades. We don't like to; I don't like my classmates' grades becoming higher than mine. Because I work hard. Why you just get my answer and you can have grades be higher than me? But here I saw many Americans that didn't care about this. They love to share their answer and love to discuss something. Even the professor knows about this, as he is also in the group chats.

Taiwanese F. 1 described how the faculty gave her a study guide that she could not solve because "the book is very thick." This could have been an opportunity for her to try to find the answers for the study guide, or even to say she did. She did not. Instead she said that since in her country students "care much about our grades" they did not share answers because this could potentially give better grades to peers who received the help.

Although Taiwanese F. 1 recognized that U. S. students helped their peers, she did not think this a beneficial practice for her. This signals a misfit between her characteristics and those of SCU students (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987).

Taiwanese F. 1 had other differences in values with U. S. students. She talked about how SCU students were quick to become "close" with her, which made her feel uncomfortable.

> I like Americans because they are open. But I don't like some people who are too close to you. You just met with them and soon they check with you all the time. I met you today, then the next day they see you and they say "hi, how are you." If they check with you a lot, feel embarrassed. We are not very close, but I like their open mind. And they don't care about other people's opinions. If they want to wear "these" clothes, they don't care. But in my country, we would care. They would think I am weird.

Taiwanese F. 1 thought some U. S. students sought intimate friendships too soon after their first encounter. She disliked students who called her often, presumably prior to her signaling her interest in them**.** It is not clear Taiwanese F. 1 would be interested to know SCU students better, but most likely not since she did not express any interest in any one U. S. student during our conversations. Taiwanese F. 1's explanation in the difference regarding choice of clothes conveyed her perception about U. S. students as informal in their attire. She perceived U. S students' selection of attire based on their own individual preferences, not based on societal expectations as she experienced in Taiwan.

Taiwanese F. 1 did not live her life reflexively (Marginson, 2014). Her language skills had improved, and her exposure to other cultures increased, albeit limited given her little interaction with SCU students beyond her group of friends. For Taiwanese F. 1 educational was transactional. She was content with her modest academic effort and did

not question why SCU students work harder than her in their courses. For her, SCU students wasted their time. She perceived misfit with SCU's institutional attributes, such as "slow" clerical staff (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). These perceived problems at SCU were always the fault of others and were never due to her lack of effort. Although Taiwanese F. 1 did not show a life lived reflexively, she portrayed herself capable of producing her own individual decisions (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Taiwanese F. 1 conveyed how her stay at SCU forced her to rely on herself to solve problems.

> I think an international student is like you have to do everything by yourself. There is no relative in this country. So, you have to do everything by yourself. And if you, meet some problem, some trouble, you have to be very, be very independent.

She elaborated with a story about the day of her arrival to the US.

> My first time to come to the United States, I faced many problems. I had already booked a shuttle bus. My friend and I arrived at the same time. But we could not find the shuttle bus. But thankfully we met one guy from Taiwan that was living in American already. An American so he could speak English and Taiwanese. So, we ask him "can you help us to contact the shuttle driver?" we asked because we were scared even if we called maybe we could not understand what the driver was talking about.

Taiwanese F. 1 recognized that she had gained assertiveness to solve her own problems. She said that she "maybe changed or some opinions changed" during her stay. Although some of the opinions or actions may have changed, she had maintained her Taiwanese identity throughout her stay.

Saudi F. 1

Saudi F. 1 is a fourth-year, management major student. She positioned herself as a student who liked the campus and who wanted to live her experience at SCU. Saudi F. 1

was not academically inclined and showed mismatch with the university's attributes of the SCU (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Saudi F. 1 did not think her characteristics were similar to her SCU peers (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). She stated that some SCU students were inconsiderate because they did not help her with her assignments. Saudi F. 1 considered "friends" those who helped her complete her assignments; students who did not help her were not her "friends." She described discriminatory experiences, by herself and in the company of friends wearing a hijab, most of them in Texas. Saudi F. 1's time in Texas prior to her arrival to SCU was not pleasant. She did not have many friends there. She decided to transfer to SCU in search of better weather, tolerant people, and more entertainment options outside of university. Saudi F. 1 valued entertainment over coursework and viewed her class assignments as a necessary chore. She did not live her life reflexively and did not question the outcomes of her actions, but she exhibited agency in her decision-making and consequent actions.

Saudi F. 1 signaled a match with SCU's institutional attributes. She preferred California much more than Texas, where she lived prior to her transfer to SCU. She contrasted California and Texas and was blunt in her comparison between Californians and Texans: "Here people are very nice, unlike Texas. People in Texas are racist against international students. People here are not like that, they are very nice." Saudi F. 1 described discriminatory experiences in detail.

> One time, I went to a gas station store and wanted to buy something. The clerk knew I was not American because of my accent. He started talking with me in a weird way, and he didn't sell the products to me. I didn't tell him anything. I was scared and left. Sometimes when I walked with friends wearing a hijab, people

> would tell us "go back to your country." I was with them. We were walking and some guy just said something, we were in the mall, the guy was in his mid-thirties. He was White and was alone. I think he was a little crazy and dressed up like a homeless person. It happened twice in Texas, but it also happened to me in Santa Monica, when my friends were wearing a hijab, but this time it was a woman, a normal-looking person. It was about 4 years ago. Recently, I have not experienced this, not at the stores, not in California.

In her narrative, Saudi F. 1 explained how she perceived racism on several occasions when she lived in Texas. Even though these incidents occurred years before, she remembered the details of those encounters: Their appearance and voice, what was said, and her impressions during and after the incidents. Saudi F. 1 said that one of these incidents occurred in California, but emphasized that it only happened once, far from campus, and never in an encounter with SCU's faculty, staff, or students.

Saudi F. 1 was content with her program demands, as she had been able to pass her courses and will soon graduate, which signaled match with program demands in a transactional way. That is, she was content with her program demands because she passed her courses and will soon graduate, and not because of her academic experience. Saudi F. 1 did not portray herself as an academically engaged student inside the classroom and did not communicate much with faculty nor with students unless she needed an exception in a class or help from her peers.

> Some of them are very good. Some are not so good. They don't respond to emails. The good ones will give me another chance when I need it. She extends the due date, they are flexible. One professor. The other ones know me by name, I think. They treat me fairly, but one doesn't respond to my emails. They don't know I am international.

Saudi F. 1 evaluated faculty as "good" if they gave her special considerations, such as additional time to submit an assignment, or called her by her name and responded to her

email communications promptly. In part, she expected this because she was an international student in anticipation for better treatment.

Saudi F. 1 stated that she had few close friends, on campus or back home. In her narrative she did not refer to an encounter with a SCU friend. She depicted SCU acquaintances as "friends" who work on school-related matters; closer friends spoke Arabic and lived in other cities in Southern California.

> I only have two or three friends on campus. They are Saudi or Emirati. They help me with schoolwork, and I also help them. We sometimes meet at Starbucks. I have a female friend from China. If I miss one of my classes, I text her about lectures, and notes. I have friends in Los Angeles and Orange County. I go to restaurants, beach, coffee. Outside the university I have many friends, and they are international students. We speak in Arabic. I meet them every weekend. We hangout in malls, restaurants, like this stuff. They are also international.

Saudi F. 1 did not have many friends. Different to other participants who made friends among with co-nationals, Saudi F. 1 did not make friends with other Saudi female students on campus. She used the word "friend" to identify both people with whom she had an intimate relationship outside campus, and to identify acquaintances with whom she interacted primarily to receive help with university-related matters.

Saudi F. 1 experienced dissonance in values with SCU students, which she described as a "different life." "Different life" went beyond a rejection of behaviors that may be considered liberal (e.g., alcohol consumption, sexual activity) by Saudi students who hold conservative or religious values. Saudi F. 1 expected SCU students to help her when she needed academic assistance, not as a choice, but as an obligation. That is, Saudi F. 1 expected altruistic behavior among peers as a moral duty.

> I don't have American friends because I don't like parties, dance, maybe because I don't like those things. They have different life. I may not like what they do. I

> have tried to ask students for help, but they don't want to help international students. Even if you ask them for help. Particularly females, this quarter in management class, I was in a group, and I asked one of the girls for her phone number, and she refused. I asked her because I missed the last two classes, and the teacher told me to ask students for their phone number and for their notes. I don't know why she refused, maybe she doesn't want to help me. I don't know why she doesn't, it was weird. It was the first day I attended the class, she didn't know me. I was in her team. So, I asked another person in the group, there were five people, and he agreed to help me. He helped me with all the information I missed and explained everything in the project. He texted me. The project was about running a plaza in China. A whole quarter project and we did a presentation. We worked during the quarter, I tried to avoid her, she was cold with only with me, but with the rest of the group she was fine.

In this story, there was a resemblance with other participants (e.g., Taiwanese F. 1) in that they sought academic help from SCU students, but unlike other participants, Saudi F. 1 did not receive it on several occasions, even from her co-nationals. For Saudi F. 1, students were not "friends" when they did not help her in her coursework.

> Some are nice, some are not. Saudi girls don't help. They are worst. They don't share it with you. I don't remember the specific class. One of my friends, I asked her if she attended the class. I asked her about the class. She said she didn't go, and that she didn't have it. Next day she had the assignment completed and she submitted. They do this to any girl student. They don't share. I would help. I help a lot of people. I have no idea why they do this. I think it is the way they are, or maybe I didn't meet good people.

Saudi F. 1 believed her experience at SCU had helped her to interact with family, friends, and strangers. She realized that prior to her international experience at SCU, she could not talk to others because of extreme shyness.

> I was very shy in Saudi Arabia. I couldn't talk to others. Here, I learned to do presentations, and became an outgoing person, because of the presentations in classes. In Saudi, we don't do this. This is a big difference. I can now talk with family and friends and in general. I can now talk in public. I was very shy, I couldn't communicate, I couldn't make more friends.

Saudi F. 1 did not adopt any new values as other participants have during her studies at SCU. However, Saudi F. 1 developed the ability to interact with others and to express her opinions and her needs. Saudi F. 1 assumed that she acquired this "outgoing person" confidence through university presentations and other related activities. Saudi F. 1 signaled agency in her interactions with others and expressed her need for help. She did not, however, show she was reflexive about the reasons why some SCU students work with effort, or why they rejected her requests for help. As other Disengaged students, Saudi F. 1 did not show a life lived reflexively, albeit demonstrates agency to pursue his/her own goals, and parallel to other participants, Saudi F. 1 did not show any signs or intentions to change identity as a result of her international experience.

Other Disengaged Students

Emirati M. 1

Emirati M. 1 positioned himself as a new student on campus who sought to live "the life of a new international student." He expressed his desire to live many experiences. Emirati M. 1 did not give an indication that he was academically engaged. He described his academic experience as a task or a responsibility, but not as something that will help him or transform him in any way: "I am here to do study, this is what I do. So, I participate, I ask questions. When I participate, the faculty answers my questions." Emirati M. 1 interacted closely with a faculty member: An Arabic language faculty member who presumably would give him a high grade in a class in which an Arabic-speaker can pass without much effort. Emirati M1. tutored SCU students in this class and liked the experience, but it did not develop into additional interactions outside the

classroom similar to those other participants (e.g., Japanese F. 1). Emirati M. 1 was distrustful of universities "that use students who are on scholarships to get money from them." He described himself as a "social guy", although he did not have friendships with SCU students. Emirati M. 1 stated, as some other participants of this investigation, that SCU had not established spaces through which students can meet other students. Hence, he felt lonely on campus. In his country, there were social gatherings of men where he drank coffee, ate dates, and discussed a variety of topics. He did not have a similar place at SCU where he could socialize, as "It is hard to fit in. Back home you can be a friend with everybody in the class. But here, people want to live their lives, and that is it. I see that Americans don't talk to each other." Emirati M. 1 signaled a mismatch with the SCU's institutional attributes and a mismatch with the characteristics of his SCU peers (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). There was no indication that he lived his life reflexively, but he showed agency and assertiveness in his actions in pursuit of his objectives.

Saudi M. 1

Saudi M. 1 is a third-year student who positioned himself as a "changed man" by his international student experience at SCU. He had made academic progress but was not academically engaged nor did he talk about content he learned in his classes. For Saudi M. 1, education was transactional; he expected a return on his investment of time and money in the form of a post-graduation good job. Saudi M. 1' recognized that his English language skills and his knowledge of U. S. culture improved but did not mention other benefit from his academic experiences in SCU classrooms. He was offended by what he

perceived as racist comments, when a faculty member mentioned the name of Osama Bin Laden in class, and when another faculty member asked him if "he was being a White boy." Saudi M. 1 resented what he considered unfair and punitive grading. He also perceived discrimination from students who acted unkindly towards him in class, and also when a student changed her seat away from him. Saudi M. 1 mentioned similar incidents with students inside and outside the classroom. He faced difficulties to establish friendships at SCU: "Friendship here is worse than in other countries." He did, however, recognized that discrimination happens in his own country: "I am not saying that only Saudis are good, no. Even in my country people are can be racist."

Saudi M. 1 signaled a mismatch with the SCU's institutional attributes (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999), and a mismatch with the characteristics of SCU peers (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). Saudi M. 1 had more success in his interaction with co-national students at SCU. In our conversation, he positioned himself as a protector of his country's image when he stated he had the right to reprimand students for what he considered inappropriate behavior (e.g., drinking alcohol). Albeit, he had several U. S. friends with whom he had established closer and supportive relationships.

Saudi M. 1, as other participants, criticized the university for the lack of a place on campus where international students interacted with peers "so they can know we are different." Saudi M. 1's life at SCU was difficult as an international student and he believed it was hopeless to attempt to have closer interaction with U. S peers: "Even if you do the most beautiful thing in the world, they will look at you like something. So,

you can't be one of them. Just take the knowledge, show them the good things you have, we graduate, say bye and go back to your country."

Saudi M. 1 signaled that he lived his life as an international student reflexively and developed his ways to relate to others.

> My experience being an international student, made me change. What changed me was losing people. [By coming here] I lost my old people, my family, I lost my friends, and I started a new life here. I should start everything new, my hair, my car, my friends, my language too. I had one language. Now no, I must learn in English. Even Spanish. This is the period of being an international student. I am making my life.

Saudi M. 2

Saudi M. 2 is a second-year accounting major. He is 25 years old, which is a few years older than most participants, and older than many second-year students enrolled at SCU. Saudi M. 2 came to SCU in search of a friendly international environment but "not with too many Arabs." He was on academic probation, which could lead him to drop out of his program. Saudi M. 2 had taken the same Math class three times before but had not been able to pass it, even with the help of tutors. Saudi M. 2 had few Saudi friends and had created "deep" friendships with a few U. S. students who he met in his first quarter on campus, some of whom were no longer enrolled at SCU. His social life was active, as he continuously socialized with friends in various cities in Southern California. Those U. S. friends enjoyed activities such as "going out to crazy clubs," but he did not join them. These friends assisted him to obtain a driver's license, and to handle escalated traffic tickets that required legal assistance.

Saudi M. 2 did not interact with students in his classes and stated that SCU students "are nothing special, they don't talk to me, I don't talk to them." Saudi M. 2's

narrative highlighted the academic struggles was facing, cognizant that if he did not pass the math class in the current quarter he would be dismissed from the program and would lose his financial scholarship from the Saudi government. For Saudi M. 2, SCU's program demands, studying conditions, and university environment were not a good match (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999). Similarly, Saudi M. 2 did not signal a match with the characteristics of his SCU peers (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). Saudi M. 2's identity had not changed, and he did not live his life reflexively, however, as other participants, he showed agency in his decisions at SCU.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented the findings of this investigation. I organized these findings in accordance with my research questions and with stories about the social and academic experiences of the undergraduate international students who participated in this investigation. I divided the findings into separate groups of students who shared similar experiences at this SCU: Engaged and Transformed Student Group, Utilitarian Student Group, and Disengaged Student Group. All participants were placed in one of the groups. In each group, two exemplars were selected who depicted the characteristics that permeated the group, and their stories were described in detail.

In Chapter 5, I address the conclusions and the implications of my findings in order to bring the dissertation to a close. I discuss how the findings of this research contribute to the scholarship on undergraduate international students. In addition, I explain the limitations of my data collection process. Finally, I conclude the chapter with

recommendations for future research, and I provide recommendations for SCU practitioners who serve undergraduate international students.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this investigation, I proposed a broad research question: What are the stories of undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California? This was followed by two associated questions: How do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU perceive and interpret their social experiences? And how do undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU perceive and interpret their academic experiences? My research questions directed this investigation to examine a specific student population (i.e., international students who are regularly matriculated, degree-seeking undergraduate students, undergraduate exchange students, and English language students registered in undergraduate courses) in a particular higher education institutional type (a state comprehensive university). I explored the stories of undergraduate international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California. The follow-up questions focused on the experiences in social and academic realms encountered by undergraduate international students within the context of an SCU located in Southern California.

Motivated by the lack of scholarship that would answer my questions, I used P-E fit theory (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999) to help me to explain how environmental attributes play a role in the satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being of international undergraduate students, and to explain international students' social and academic experiences in SCU. The supplementary model of P-E helped me to determine if undergraduate international

students fit into the educational context because he or she possesses characteristics that are similar to other SCU students (Muchinsky & Mohanan, 1987). Marginson's (2014) concept of self-formation helped me to see international education as a process of self-formation in which undergraduate international students manage their lives reflexively, shaping their own identities, although under social circumstances largely beyond their control.

The investigation addressed limitations in the literature on international student experiences. The literature, in the main, ignores the experiences of international students at SCUs, institutions that host a large number of international students, and focuses primarily on the experience of international students at research universities. This current investigation helped fill that void. Furthermore, much of the scholarly literature is comprised of quantitative studies that omit international students' explanations of their experiences (e.g., Li, Liu, Wei, & Lan, 2013; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015; Wei et al., 2012). This current investigation used qualitative methods to shed light on international students' social and academic experiences, and this approach which relied upon the analysis of individual and group narratives resulted in a robust view of international students' experiences at SCU (Riessman, 2008).

This investigation questioned the literature that viewed international students as oppressed and as victims of language, race, and interactions with faculty and peers in research university educational environments. This literature understands international students in deficit and portrays them without characteristics to be successful academically and integrated socially in their institutional setting. That is, this is a conception that

positions international students' home country as inferior to the host country and gives rise to theoretical frameworks that examine traits these international students do not possess (e.g., adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and intercultural competence). The findings of the present investigation, in contrast, conceive of international undergraduate student population as those who their lives reflexively, shape their own identities, and are successful academically, even though they face social circumstances beyond their control.

The narratives depicted demarcation in the experiences of the participants. Hence, students who shared similar experiences at SCU were separated into groups. The Transformed and Engaged group clustered participants who signaled academic engagement and expressed enjoyment with their experience at SCU, and who generally signaled fit with SCU institutional attributes and matched with their peers' characteristics. The Utilitarian group included participants with concrete career objectives, who perceived education as transactional, who were career-minded, and who sometimes matched, and sometimes did not, with institutional attributes and with peers' characteristics. Finally, the Disengaged student group were those generally not academically inclined, who valued entertainment over coursework, and who did not match with SCU's attributes, nor with their SCU peers. Despite the similarities in the experiences of participants in the same group, there was also nuances within groups and some similarities between groups.

The special characteristics of SCUs (i.e., teaching focus and less attention to faculty research productivity; a strong applied or vocational orientation; and low

selectivity and a larger population of nontraditional and minority students) [Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Kane, 1991], played a role in providing an academic environment for international students different from what the literature portrays for research universities. Overwhelmingly, participants narrated their academic experiences and interactions with faculty and SCU students as positive, welcoming, and inclusive. However, there were participants who decided not to pursue these interactions. Although the literature signals a potential incompatibility between international students and their host institutions, the narratives compiled in this investigation depict undergraduate international students as compatible with SCU and satisfied with their experiences, albeit with different levels of engagement and of interest in interaction with faculty and with their domestic counter peers. Participants were not acculturated. They maintained their home country identity. Garcia's (2001) views of acculturation as an individual's process of adaptation in which members of a cultural group adopt the values and behaviors of another by and large did not occur in the lives of the participants. In the main, the participants understood the values and behaviors present at SCU, yet they did not adopt them in full. That is, none of the participants became "American," yet many of them indicated they experienced their international sojourn as if they were "Americans." Therefore, their sense of self, their self-identity, was not altered because of their international experience at SCU. While this signals identity stability for the participants, it also helps them to preserve cultural identity, and it may also prevent them from the development of liberal values and values of cultural tolerance (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). To some extent there was both PE-fit and PE-misfit: Fit because the SCU environment facilitated student satisfaction; misfit

because some students (i.e., Utilitarian students, and Disengaged Students) did not integrate in all ways with the campus. This may be a positive outcome because it helps students to be able to return to their home country and avoid permanent acculturation to a U. S. environment.

As noted in the findings, undergraduate international students in the Utilitarian and Disengaged student groups made academic progress, but they did not have the same positive experiences as those in the Transformed and Engaged group. Transformed and Engaged students engaged domestic students and faculty, which helped them improve their English verbal skills, assimilate academic content, and boost their confidence, as well as experience and adopted some useful SCU values. Yet, Utilitarian and Disengaged students did not seek this benefit. All students signaled they would return to their home countries with their home country identities intact. Nevertheless, the participants will return to their home countries with various levels of understanding about the content they learned and of the institution and the community that hosted them during their studies in the U. S.

Participants' Backgrounds and Reasons for Selecting SCU

The empirical data generated by this investigation answered my research questions. I positioned the narratives within the context of the participants' experiences prior to their arrival at the SCU and after their arrival at the SCU, and placed attention to narratives that addressed their national culture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants came from similar socio-economic backgrounds: Their parents are middle-class professionals or business-owners who could support a student financially who pays out-

of-state tuition and miscellaneous expenses near $30,000 U. S. dollars a year. Even participants who were recipients of financial support from their governments appeared to live a middle-class life. The participants had their financial needs met and did not express the financial problems and the subsequent stress that are documented in the literature as a result of pecuniary challenges (Chen, 1999; Dunne, 2009; Lassegard, 2006; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Mori, 2000; Sherry et al., 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

In general, most participants had difficulty with describing their experiences with the same level of precision as they would in their native language; that is, their English conversation skills were not equivalent to those of a native speaker. These students enrolled at SCU to pursue a degree or as part of a short-term stay of approximately 2 to 3 academic quarters. The students were attracted to California as an educational destination due to its temperate weather, tourist attractions, and diversity. Typically, they chose SCU because of its location in Southern California, its relatively inexpensive tuition, and its reputation as a "welcoming place" for international students. Their goal at SCU was to receive education from a U. S. institution, and some gravitated towards SCU given the U. S.'s image as an economically powerful country. Furthermore, they were drawn to SCU in order to improve their English competency as this would help their career prospects at home. Only a few of the students contemplated the possibility of a life in the U. S. post-graduation (e.g., Japan F-1), mostly because career prospects back home were good and presumably due to the few paths to permanent residence for international students in the U. S.

Themes

Themes in their narratives varied by groups. For Transformed and Engaged students, themes included English learning/English skills as a tool for future career, personal freedom, academic engagement with faculty, differences in values with SCU students, and social engagement with students. These were among the most salient. For the Utilitarian students, themes that were prevalent included English learning/English skills as a tool for future career, personal freedom, differences in values with SCU students, comparison of classroom experiences at SCU and in-home country, and prestige. For the Disengage students, themes most evident included English learning/English skills as a tool for future career, personal freedom, differences in values with SCU students, comparison of classroom experiences at SCU and in-home country, racism/discrimination, and academic challenges.

Only English learning/English skills as a tool for the future, personal freedom, and differences in values with SCU students were overarching themes across groups. Themes identified in the literature such as psychological challenges (Chen, 1999; Misra et al., 2003) or financial difficulties (Chen, 1999; Dunne, 2009; Lassegard, 2006; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005) were not mentioned or alluded to in their narratives. The topics of racism, unequal treatment, and discrimination that appear in the literature on international students were present in some of the narratives, but the majority of the participants did not perceive them. Perceptions of blatant racism addressed off campus or out state, not on campus behaviors (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee, 2010; Lee

& Rice, 2007; Rich & Troudi, 2006). Some of the instances of perceived discrimination on campus could have been interpreted as language and cultural misunderstandings.

The goal to improve English competency was a clear objective for all students, from the most socially and academically engaged to the least. English communication skills were perceived by the participants as a justification for their time and pecuniary investment far away from home. The participants expressed that much of their actions, successes, and limitations inside and outside the class were contingent on their ability to communicate verbally and in written English, consistent with the scholarly literature (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015; Stoynoff, 1997; Triana, 2015).

The other overarching theme was personal freedom. Students expressed that they discovered freedom during their experiences at SCU. This included freedom to express themselves, freedom from social norms, and freedom to act according to their interests. This expression of personal freedom is aligned with Marginson's (2014) theory of self-authorship (Marginson, 2014), and applies to SCU undergraduate international students. They are understood as meaning-making, active agents capable of producing individual decision, who develop their own values, their own international identities, and their ways to relate to peers.

The final overarching theme pertained to differences in values with U. S. students. At times, these differences emanate from religious views or pertain to moral norms connected to alcohol consumption, sexual relationships, and entertainment. Additionally, in subtler and at times indirect forms, differences were explained in

interactions, including when and how to communicate with a new acquaintance, family relations, and when to help or not a peer in need of academic assistance. These values were identified, understood, and overcome to a large extent by Transformed and Engaged students when they stepped outside their comfort zone and decided to engage U. S. students regardless of these differences. Eventually they reaped the benefits for taking this step, in the form of closer relationships with peers, enhanced English verbal skills, and a boost in confidence, all which echo the literature (Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Sawir et al., 2007). These students learned from their peers and were able to have a deeper understanding of their host environment support. Not so with students in Utilitarian and Disengaged groups. The differences in values between Utilitarian and Disengaged students and SCU students at times deterred them from engagement with SCU students and served as a justification for their rejection to interact with U. S. peers. As the literature documents, involvement in a new setting may prove difficult for international students given their ignorance of social rules in the host country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). This finding also reaffirms scholarship that confirms that international students prefer friendships with co-nationals and international students rather than domestic students, as they seek friends who understand the difficulties they face and who may provide advice to surpass these problems (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Tsai & Wong, 2012).

Comparisons between classroom experiences at SCU and in-home country was a theme evident in participants in all the groups. This theme is reflected in the literature (Valdez, 2015). Participants often compared their classroom experiences with those back

home. Their verdict in this comparison was positive overall, with a few negative judgments. In those cases, with a negative view of SCU classrooms, the difference typically was a justification for inaction on the part of the participants. Inaction to participate in class and to engage with faculty and peers in classroom activities was a typical behavior back home. In Valdez (2015), the assumptions made by Chinese international students were concerning issues such as unwillingness of U. S. students to work in teams with international students or negative perceptions that faculty had about international students in matters such as academic integrity. In this investigation, the perceptions of international students about faculty or U. S. students did not include negative stereotypes about international students. The assumptions were, for example in the case of Taiwanese F.1, focused upon faculty's apparent lack of efficiency and effectiveness in their teaching. She questioned teaching strategies used by some of the faculty. The findings, however, overall indicate that undergraduate international students at SCU had generally positive views of and assumptions about their faculty and their peers with regards to their intentions towards international students.

P-E Fit: Match with SCU Institutional Attributes

As detailed in the individual stories, participants varied in their fit with SCU institutional attributes. In the main, international students at SCU matched with program demands and, except for one participant, all made persistent academic progress. The one participant who did not make academic progress (i.e., Saudi M.2) validated previous findings delineated in the literature on international student retention such as "college experience is not as satisfactory as domestic students," "problems regarding college

environment," weak interaction "between students and university," and "academic reasons" (Tas, 2013 p. 37).

The Transformed and Engaged Group Students found their faculty helpful, even caring, and they explained that they were treated as other students, to the point that some identified with "Americans." These students did not perceive a condition of exclusion or sense of non-equal treatment and racial prejudice within the classroom that is noted in some literature (e.g., Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Lee, 2010). Their positive experiences were parallel to the literature that depicts faculty in influential roles in international students' academic trajectories (O'Meara et al., 2013). For the Utilitarian Group, the university met their academic programs objectives, specifically to pass courses, graduate, and eventually return home with a degree. The special characteristics of SCUs described in the literature (i.e., teaching focus and less attention to faculty research productivity; a strong applied or vocational orientation; and low selectivity and a larger population of nontraditional and minority students) played a role in providing an academic environment for international students different from what the literature portrays for research universities (Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Kane, 1991). SCU faculty, who are more focused on teaching and who are used to serving nontraditional students—those who are typically less prepared than those at research universities (Henderson & Kane, 1991)—signal a good fit to serve the needs of undergraduate international students.

For many students in all groups, some of their most positive experience included their preparation for a classroom presentation and the actual time they spent in front of

the classroom during the presentation where they had the opportunity to use their verbal skills in front of an English-speaking audience. This was particularly beneficial for students in the Disengaged Group (e.g., Saudi F.1) who generally did not seek interaction with their domestic peers or with faculty.

The academic study conditions at SCU were a good fit for most participants. Neither classrooms, nor curriculum, nor faculty-to-student ratio were noted as negatives in the students' narratives. The quantity homework and specific incidents in student group activities were at times perceived as negative experiences, in part due to these students' English communication skills. Academic study conditions, however, were viewed overwhelmingly as positive. Participants, particularly students with less than a year on campus, faced problems following content in English, which reduced their interaction with faculty and with peers inside the classroom; this is echoed the literature (Ramachandran, 2011; Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015). Students said that time progressed and their English skills improved, they were able to cope better with class content, particularly students in the Transformed and Engaged Group who sought out faculty and student interaction. These behaviors are reiterated in literature that states that proactive steps by both faculty and students have considerable relevance for international students (e.g., Tran, 2011). Among the positive study conditions was the "open university system" implemented at SCU, which allows students who have not been admitted fully and have not yet passed their English proficiency to take for-credit courses with matriculated students on a conditional basis, until they pass the English exam and meet all other admissions requirements.

SCU presents a conducive university environment for international students to pursue their studies. Facilities, labs, dormitories, and other elements in the physical plant were not noted as negatives even once during the interviews. Overall, participants perceived SCU as a friendly environment. This was particularly the case for students who possessed a characteristic or ability of value for SCU students that made them popular among U. S. students (e.g., fluency in a foreign language and the ability to help with their foreign language homework; a common hobby or interest). Participants who had this currency perceived SCU students as more approachable than those who did not and were able to cement "deeper" relationships with SCU students and experienced a boost in their confidence. Some of the participants (e.g., Japanese F.1) stated that this kind of interaction often occurred at the SCU's Language Lab, where international students had the opportunity to tutor domestic students interested in their language. The same could be found in the Japan Club, which gathered together U. S. students and Japanese students with the common objective of learning one another's cultures. Members of the Japan Club sought out Japanese student members and expressed interest in Japanese students. This finding contradicts the scholarly literature in which domestic peers view international students as handicapped due to their English ability (e.g., Dunne, 2009), or that they reject international students due to their foreign background (e.g., Tuner, 2009). The reasons for domestic students' lack of interest in international students are not well understood in the literature; findings in this investigation shed light on reasons that encourage domestic student interest in international students.

Suggestions for SCU improvements for international students were evident, however. Two suggestions were most prominent. The need to increase efficiency in student services was noted by most Utilitarian students and was characterized as "bad customer service" by one Transformed and Engaged student (Japan M.1). Also, participants suggested the need for a place for international students to meet with other SCU peers, both for domestic and for international students. Participants in a short-term stay at the university compared their experiences at SCU with those at their home campuses and expressed that a place or club where students could meet was important. When informed that those clubs existed at SCU, several of the participants in the Utilitarian group noted that since clubs were not mandatory, they would not participate, even though they recognized the clubs could help them linguistically and academically. They wanted clubs to be compulsory, presumably for them to receive an academic benefit and to force all international students to participate.

P-E Fit/Supplementary Model: Students Perceive that their Characteristics are Similar to SCU Peers

Whereas some participants perceived their student characteristics (i.e., age, language, ethnicity, values, extracurricular activities) as similar to their SCU peers, others did not recognize this similarity. In general, participants perceived their SCU peers as both polite and friendly. One participant observed that SCU's students' patience and nondiscriminatory behavior towards international students was because many of SCU students' parents were immigrants and English-language learners themselves, in connection with the large Latino, first-generation population on campus. That is,

participants assumed that many SCU students are exposed to parents and acquaintances who do not speak English fluently.

Although English ability was not a source of discrimination, it did hinder the participants' ability to interact with other SCU students. As evident in the literature, English proficiency was a salient challenge for participants (Campbell & Li, 2008; Leong, 2015; Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Robertson et al., 2000; Triana, 2015), specifically as they fully engaged in everyday conversations with their peers due to a lack of command of English vocabulary, slang, and idioms (Robertson et al., 2000; Sandekian et al., 2015). English language problems were expected, since all the participants came from non-Western backgrounds where English is not spoken as a first language (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lee, 2010; Rienties et al., 2001). Participants expressed their inability to speak "deeply," that is, to express their thoughts precisely, and this limited their connection with SCU students. Although the majority of the participants came to SCU with the expectation to establish friendships with U. S. students, this did not materialize for some of them for these reasons, and as a result they gravitated to other students who spoke the same language in their search for acquaintances and friends. This phenomenon echoes the scholarly literature (Tsai &Wong, 2012). Those who remained distant from U. S. peers stated that domestic peers were not interested in them, unless they had a way to benefit from each other through language exchange or tutoring, or if they have a hobby or an activity in common such as a student club. The participants also perceived U. S. students as individualistic and as engaged in their own endeavors and thus unable to give them attention. A large

proportion of students at SCU are full-time workers and/or older nontraditional students who have obligations outside of the university and have limited time for student comradery after class. Nevertheless, those participants who were open to go beyond their comfort zone of a common language and culture and searched out U. S. students (i.e., Transformed and Engaged students) reaped benefits of increased linguistic skills and enhanced confidence.

Self-Formation: International Education Viewed as a Process of Self-Formation

Some of the participants lived their lives reflexively at SCU. Transformed and Engaged students, by and large, meet Marginson's (2014) notion of an international student who is a reflexive and a self-determining individual, guided by individual agency. A self-formed international student is one who experiences a process of self-formation in which they manage their lives reflexively, in control of their own identities, although under social and academic circumstances largely outside of their control. Similar to other participants Transformed and Engaged students did question their ability to speak English, to understand classroom content, and to express their ideas precisely with peers. Yet, the difference between Transformed and Engaged students and other participants was that they evaluated their options deliberately and decided to move forward to engage others, not because they would earn a reward as expected by Utilitarian students, but because engagement of peers and of faculty members would increase their English skills and improve their academic and social experience at SCU.

Participants were all loyal and steadfast to their home country identity. Not one of the participants indicated they were now more "American," or that they had been

"Americanized." This finding echoes Baxter Magolda (2004), as international undergraduate students in this investigation were capable of producing individual decisions, their own identities, and their ways to relate to their home country identity. All maintained their home country identity throughout to peers. Not one of the participants either showed or expressed a decrease of their home identity in their narratives. In the sample, only two participants expressed the possibility to live in the U. S. post-graduation (i.e., Japan F.1, Chinese M.2), but this aspiration did not change their identity. International students were here to study and would return home to pursue their careers and to self-develop in their own country.

Notwithstanding this intention, students did alter during their stay in the U. S. as a result of their experiences at SCU. Prominently, their English ability was enhanced. More subtle changes occurred when students were exposed to academic content that changed their views about future decisions and about themselves. For example, Japan M.3 conceptualized a new criterion for the selection of personal choices: "To do what I like to do, not what I have to do." Similarly, other participants were affected by the freedom of choice at SCU, a condition not present in all of the participants' home countries. At SCU, they experienced freedom to engage others, freedom from home cultural and societal norms, and in lesser matters such as freedom to select courses. Not all students embraced all the liberties enjoyed by other students at SCU, and some separated themselves from the liberal behavior they witnessed at SCU.

Limitations

This investigation is not without limitations. Although the sample size is a number comparable to those used in other studies in the literature that addresses international student experiences (e.g., Caluya et al., 2011; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Tran, 2010), the relatively small sample size prevents the findings to be generalizable. Furthermore, this investigation was conducted in one institution. Other campuses within the CSU system with different international students and domestic populations may have generated different results. As well, CSU campuses are not homogeneous environments (Gerth, 2010).

As does other salient scholarly research on international students, this investigation did not choose a sample of international students based upon country of origin, their length of time in the host country, and their language ability (e.g., Gebhard, 2012; Glass, et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2007). Even though I sought to use a sample that aimed to represent the international student population at SCU, there was self-selection of participants. The sample included students from East Asia and from the Middle East, and did not include students from Europe, the Americas, or Africa. Therefore, the results overrepresented Asian and Middle Eastern students' perspectives, in particular those from Japan, China, Saudi Arabia. This excluded students from South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam, which are countries that are also represented in the undergraduate international student population at SCU. Their participation may have generated different results.

Participants narrated their experiences in English, which is not their native language. Consequently, many of the students had difficulty in the description of their academic and social experiences at SCU. Although I paid attention to build rapport in the initial interview with simple introductory questions and I used language international students could understand (i.e., free of slang, idioms, and without vocabulary that could have been perceived as difficult), some of the respondents demonstrated problems when they articulated their ideas, which may have limited or changed the scope and content of their narratives. Furthermore, my previous role as an administrator at this SCU and that participants were recruited through staff and faculty on campus may have influenced the power dynamics in the interviews. This may have resulted in hesitancy on the part of the students to engage in open dialogue about their academic and social experiences at SCU.

A final limitation of this investigation is that the findings rely on the students' reported academic and social experiences instead than observed behaviors. That is, I relied upon what they told me. Furthermore, students were asked questions that required responses about events that took place in the past, even several years in the past. This may have led to inaccurate descriptions of previous experiences at SCU. In addition, my interpretation of the stories, despite conducted through a rigorous and scholarly methodology, is also open to further interpretation.

Recommendations for Future Research

To augment and develop the findings of this investigation, future studies should address a series of areas that this investigation did not cover. This includes, for example, the effects of national origin on the experiences of international students. There were

similar characteristics in the responses of students coming from specific countries. A study that focuses on the academic and social experiences undergraduate international students from the same country would shed light on their specific experiences at an SCU. While the literature has studied the experiences of same-country students (e.g., Bamber, 2013, Valdez, 2015; Zhang & Mi, 2010) none of these has focused on an SCU. A study with a larger number of participants who are from the same country would help to illuminate the particular experiences of students who share the same language and culture in the specific SCU environment. Research on students who originate outside of the regions with large number of international students in SCUs (i.e., East Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia) such as Europe, Africa, or Latin America could explain other undergraduate international students' experiences from other perspectives and help improve services for all international students. If other studies with a similar methodology and scope are conducted, comparisons can be made that can illuminate the effects that SCU initiatives and strategies have on their international student populations.

More demanding and likely unique would be qualitative interview-oriented research carried out in the students' native language, so that these participants articulate their experiences clearly. Several SCUs have a large number of students from the same country, with students who speak the same language (i.e., Mandarin-speaking Chinese, Saudi Arabians, South Koreans). This would of course require a researcher with language fluency in the selected population's native language.

One of the more intriguing observations and findings of this investigation was the role of social media and mobile device use by international students. The effects of social

media and cellular phones were not pursued in depth in this investigation. For two of the participants (i.e., Taiwanese M. 1 and Japanese M.3), the majority of their interactions with "friends" occurred through electronic devices. These two participants maintained contact and continued relationships with individuals in their home country. In some cases, the contacts and relationships via electronic devices exceeded those maintained locally. Even those students who had been in the U. S. for more than two years, exhibited these behaviors. There is a lack of examination in the scholarly literature on the effects of mobile devices and social media on international students, not only at SCUs but all U. S. institutions of higher education. Their use and effects can serve as a starting off point from this research to other investigations, both quantitative and qualitative, that address international students' experiences and academic development at U. S. colleges and universities.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on these findings, practitioners can consider several recommendations to support their undergraduate international student populations. The experiences and thus the stories depicted in this investigation are not a simple sequence of storied incidents; they communicate meaning and send a message to an audience (Riessman, 2008). In this light, the stories of social and academic experiences of international students convey relevant experiences that should not be taken for granted. Experiences conveyed were both positive and negative. The positive ones can help practitioners reinforce actions that their campus is doing well. The negative social and academic experiences articulated by international undergraduate students can help practitioners reflect upon the design and

implementation of services for students, including strategies and initiatives that universities and college provide for this population of students outside the classroom. Practitioners should continue what its working at their institutions to enable, confirm, and support interactions that foster the academic and interpersonal development of international students (Rendon, 1994), and to change what has not worked.

The assumption of some practitioners in the field of international education is that academic progress is the main, and at times only, indicator to assess undergraduate international student experiences on campus. This investigation contradicts this assumption. Generally, international students succeed academically (Fass-Holmes, 2016; Korobova, & Starobin, 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2012), and for this reason they may be presumed to be academically and socially engaged. Campus leadership may think that international students may be in a better academic position than other SCU students due to their GPA. In light of a 6-yr graduation rate of only 59% for first-time full-time freshmen in the CSU system (CSU, 2020), university leaders may assume, incorrectly, that international students who make academic progress do not need help, and therefore this population's needs are not considered in the allocation of resources.

More specially, practitioners should monitor their international student populations closely. International student orientations, coffee hours, and the rudimentary promotional efforts of campus events are important and beneficial but are insufficient. Campus leaders and international education professionals should observe and monitor the academic and social experiences of undergraduate international students. The application of surveys to all matriculated international students, and the implementation of interviews

and focus groups to a subset of them, would generate an understanding of their experiences on campus, including both the positive and the negative experiences. The Engaged and Transformed participants depicted SCU as an institution that provided an exceptional educational environment and included faculty and domestic students who supported them. These students perceived a match both with SCU institutional attributes and with the characteristics of SCU students. However, not all participants in this investigation had the same experience. The identification by practitioners of Utilitarian and Disengaged Students may prove useful in the design of interventions that will help them enhance their social and academic experiences on campus. For example, the creation and promotion of spaces where international and domestic students interact should be a main priority for international education practitioners. To connect these students to a campus organization or club where they share a common interest with domestic students will no doubt be of considerable aid to international students. To achieve this, mindful of their international student population, campuses should be thoughtful in the design of curriculum that fosters interactions outside of the classroom where domestic and international students with common interests can interact. Without a common interest or hobby with domestic students, international students will not make the bonds that Engaged and Transformed students experienced at SCU.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Participants' Background and Past Experiences Interview Guide

Self-introduction

Hi, my name is Paul Amaya. I am a Ph.D. student in the Higher Education Administration and Policy program at the University of California, Riverside. The purpose of this interview is to explore the social and academic experiences of international students enrolled in a state comprehensive university. Our conversation will be divided into three separate interviews. In this first interview, we will talk about your experiences prior to becoming an international student.

I want to reassure you that this is not a public conversation. You will provide consent for this interview, and I will not disclosure your name publicly. If you have any concerns about the questions, you do not have to answer any question and you can withdraw from this interview at any time. Thank you for participating in this interview.

Biographical Information

Please tell me about yourself. What is your age? Tell me about your family?

Country of origin? How do you identify yourself ethnically/racially?

What are your parents' educational backgrounds? Their profession(s)?

Please talk about your life prior to coming to the United States.

Prior to coming to this university, did you work? How long? What type of work?

What is your major? Why did you decide to study this major?

Student's Justification for International Education

Tell me what led you to decide to pursue a college degree?

How did you decide to study in abroad? Why did you decide to study in the United States?

How did you find out about this university?

Why did you come to this university? What attracted you about this school?

What awaits you upon completion of your course of study?

Researcher's Personal Reflections

So, you have told me that… and that… is that correct? Is there anything to add here?

Am I missing anything? Would you like to add something more to this interview?

International Students' Lived Experiences Interview Guide

The purpose of this section is to talk about concrete details of your experience as an international student.

I want to remind you that if you have any concerns about the questions, you do not have to answer any question and you can withdraw from this interview at any time.

Life as an International Student

Could you please talk to me about your life as an international student?

Please describe a typical day at school.

What are your best educational experiences here? What are some of the bad ones? Why?

Can you give me examples of these personal experiences?

Interaction with Faculty

What are you learning in the classroom?

Can you talk about some of the best experiences in your classroom? Some of the bad ones?

Can you talk about your interaction with faculty?

You have talked about your interaction with faculty, but you have not talked about your English ability to interact with them. Can you talk about this?

Have you perceived unfairness or discrimination in your interaction with faculty?

Peers

Who are the other students in the university? In your program?

Talk to me about your friends? What kinds of activities do you do with them? How often do you talk to them?

Talk to me about your American friends?

You have talked about your American friends, but you have not talked about your English ability to interact with them. Can you talk about this?

Have you felt discriminated by your peers?

Finances

How do you pay for your program/courses?

Do you work? What do you do? How many hours a week?

Topical Questions

What could be improved in your program, courses, or in this institution?

Can you remember a time when you faced difficulties or challenges at this institution as a student? Tell me why that particular moment stands out.

How would you describe the services provided to students at this university?

How would you describe the physical features of this campus?

How would you describe your interaction with the staff?

Have you perceived unfairness or discrimination at this institution?

Researcher's Personal Reflections

So, you have told me that… and that… is that correct? Is there anything to add here? Am I missing anything? Would you like to add something more to the interview?

Thank you

I want to thank you for participating in this second interview. I will contact you to confirm our third interview. If you need to speak with me after this, you can communicate with me by email. Thank you.

International Students' Meaning Interview Guide

Self-introduction

The purpose of this third section is to reflect on the meaning of your experience an international student. I want to remind you that if you have any concerns about the questions, you do not have to answer any question and you can withdraw from this interview at any time.

Students' Meaning

Given what you have said about your life before you became an international student, and given what you have said about your experiences as an international student now, how do you understand being an international student? What sense does it make to you?

Are you part of the school? Why or why not?

Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, what do you see doing in the future?

Researcher's Personal Reflections

So, you have told me that… and that… is that correct? Is there anything to add here? Am I missing anything? Would you like to add something more to the interview?

Thank you

This concludes our final interview. If you need to speak with me after this, you can communicate with me by email. Once again, I want to thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Exploratory Study on International Student Experiences

The purpose of this exploratory study was to describe and explain the experiences of international students enrolled in an SCU in Southern California. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews through a convenience sample of five international students. The sample reflected, to the degree possible with a small number of participants, the international student population profile of the SCU. The questions were based on a set of themes present in the international student experience literature, including English ability, friends, faculty, learning problems, racism, financial problems, and stress and psychological problems (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Lee, J. 2010; Zhao et al., 2005). Given their informal and exploratory aim, the interviews were flexible enough to include questions and themes not part of the initial protocol (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I relied on the narrative of text generated in the interviews, and the analysis focused on how the participant assembled events and used language to communicate meaning (Riessman, 2008).

This exploratory study both echoed and contradicted the scholarship on international students. As portrayed in the literature, English ability hindered the interviewees' interaction with faculty and students; and international students faced difficulties making friends with U. S. students. Some of the participants faced financial problems, which may have caused them stress. However, learning problems and psychological problems were not present, as noted in the literature. Instead of isolation or racism derived from faculty or their peers, the findings point to differences in values and

culture as a catalyst for separation from U. S. students. International students did not portray themselves as victims of segregation; they showed agency by depicting themselves as in favor of joining their own ethnic group in social settings. The positive experiences of the participants in the SCUs classrooms were expected in an SCU that has a teaching focus, lower entry requirements, and a large percentage of nontraditional students (Henderson, 2013; Henderson & Kane, 1991). The participants perceived themselves included in an environment that has a substantial population of international students and of students who share each other's culture (e.g., Chinese).

Contrary to the literature that portrays international students in "deficit," the participants of this investigation appeared to manage their lives reflexively and with agency, while they shaped their own identities (Marginson, 2014). P-E fit helped to explain the special characteristics of this particular SCU (i.e., teaching focus, a large population of nontraditional and minority students) and played a role in demonstrating a less antagonistic environment for international students than what the literature portrays in studies conducted in research university settings.