ASIAN INDIAN SOJOURNERS:
AN INQUIRY INTO THE PROBASHI – “AWAY FROM HOME” EXPERIENCE
OF GRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MID-WESTERN UNIVERSITY

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OF GRADUATE STUDENTS AT A MID-WESTERN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

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Data indicate that the number of international students at U.S. institutions of higher learning has been rising. From 2002 to 2007 India has sent more students to U.S. colleges and universities than any other country. Previous researchers have found many of the problems of international students unique and perhaps more pressing than those faced by other student populations, yet this pattern is not reflected in their use of counseling facilities (e.g. Pederson, 1991). Counseling center records at one midwestern university indicate that international graduate students use counseling center services proportionally less than any other group of students.

This study is an inquiry into the experiences of Asian Indian graduate students, the largest segment of the international graduate student population at this midwestern university. Through this study, I attempted to understand how these students make sense of their experiences at the university, what problems they perceive themselves to have, and how they go about resolving those problems they deem significant. I employed a qualitative
methodology in pursuing this study and I used an interpretive/constructivist paradigm to conceptualize my work. In-depth interview data were analyzed for recurrent themes and patterns. Four primary themes emerged: transitional issues, sources of support, counseling and mental health, and cultural beliefs and practices. The identified themes were shared with some participants during a second round of interviews to glean feedback and validate the findings.

Participants in the study typically faced challenges with a pragmatic approach. They reported a preference for using previously established support networks, such as family and friends (even newly made friends) rather than formal counseling. Typically, they were unaware of counseling services and reported being unlikely to use services for other than pragmatic issues e.g. help with adjusting to a new educational system.

In addition, it was clear that cultural beliefs and practices continued to play a part in their current life experiences. Implications of these findings for the practice of mental health counseling on university campuses are discussed.

Approved: ________________________________________________

Thomas E. Davis

Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
Acknowledgments

"We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something." Sandra Day O'Connor

This dissertation is a testament to love, not so much a love of my topic and my continuing love affair with the subject and reason for this research, but the love of those all around me who have made this possible. My gratitude extends to those who encouraged me to re-start this endeavor, to those who have walked with me every step of the way, and to those who came on board towards the end of the journey and helped carry me across the finish line.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents

Oscar I. S. Clarke 1910 - 1977
Marjorie L. Guinier Clarke 1914 - 2003

my brother
Robert W. Clarke II 1946 - 1994

And to the Indian student community, particularly to
the memory of

Sojourner
Abhishek Singh 1985 - 2007
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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

College Counseling Services

Role of Counseling Centers

Colleges and universities generally acknowledge a responsibility for the wellbeing of the student population they serve. Consequently, most institutions of higher education offer services that include, but are not limited to, health and mental health assistance. Mental health services commonly are offered through a unified counseling center usually located on the campus (Spooner, 2000). Counseling centers serve a vital function in assisting institutions of higher learning to achieve their overall mission (Sharkin, 2004). Thus the role of the counseling center must be consistent with the mission of the institution and must address both the unique needs of the institution and the unique needs of its constituents (Dean, 2000).

In the last half century the role of counseling centers has expanded and includes both personal and academic learning goals through the provision of self-reflection and personal growth experiences, preventative outreach services, and consultation (Bishop, 1990; Kahn, Wood, & Wiesen, 1999). These services are in addition to the traditional role of providing counseling interventions to students whose problems might interfere with their academic performance (Sharkin, 2004). Hence counseling centers are called upon to
deliver clinical services as well as address the broad
spectrum of student needs (Dean, 2000). College counseling
is defined as the delivery of counseling services by trained
counseling professionals in a postsecondary educational
setting (Spooner, 2000) and as such counselors must be
cognizant of, and provide services that are particularly
sensitive to, precisely who makes up their constituency.

Changes in Student Demographics

Over the last several decades there has been a growing
awareness by college counseling providers that the student
population in the United States is far from homogeneous.
From 1978-2000, the percentage of minority students (African
American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native
American) attending four-year institutions of higher
education in the United States increased from 18.3% to 26.9%
(U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education
Statistics, 2002). In the same period (the first years Ohio
University (OU) used the designations African American,
Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American)
minority student enrollment increased from 4.7% to 5.6%
(Ohio University Office of Institutional Research, 2005).
Furthermore, during 1978-2000 the percentage of
international students at major universities increased from
2.6% to 3.4% of the total student body (U.S. Department of
Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002);
at Ohio University the corresponding figures for the same
time period were 3.9% to 5.9% (Office of Institutional Research, Ohio University, 2005).

As part of the overall increase in the numbers of international students attending U.S. institutions, the number of Asian Indian international students enrolled at U.S. universities and colleges has also risen steadily since 1993. For purposes of this study, the terms Asian Indian and/or Indian will refer to people born in the south Asian country of India. From 1997 to 2004 their number has effectively doubled, that is from 33,818 to 79,736 (IIE, 2004). By 2002 India had surpassed and replaced China as the largest contributor of international students to U. S. colleges and universities and has maintained its status through academic year 2005 - 2006 as the leading place of origin for international students (IIE, 2006). Moreover, Asian Indian students are one of the very few international student groups whose numbers have continued to increase since the events of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Buildings in New York City (9/11) (Khandavalli, 2003). Students from India constituted 14% of international students in fall, 2004 (IIE, 2004). At Ohio University, India is the largest contributor of international students, numbering somewhat more than 200 and constituting 21% of the total international student community (Ohio University, Office of Institutional Research, 2004). The size and position of India as the prime
supplier of international students at Ohio University and elsewhere in the U. S. provided powerful incentive for selecting this group as the study group.

Challenges for College Counseling Centers

The contemporary university community is recognized as diverse, with a myriad of ethnically, racially, culturally, gender, and nationally defined groups. Contributing to the diversity of students on U.S. campuses has been the increasing number of international students. The increasing diversity of students in attendance at institutions of higher learning has challenged the counseling community in its attempts to meet the needs of the student body (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Arthur, 2004; Davidson, Yakushka, & Sanford-Martens, 2004). This research targets Asian Indian sojourners. For purposes of this study sojourners are defined as individuals who are in the United States temporarily as indicated by their admission to this country on a student visa. Whether or not they actually return to India or remain in the United States is an empirical question, which cannot be determined a priori.

This research will add to the body of knowledge regarding this particular subset of international students and contribute to an under-researched and much-needed fund of knowledge that allows college counseling center providers to most effectively serve the contemporary student body. Counseling center professionals need to know more than just
basic information about the groups they serve. They need to know the experiences the members of those groups have had in the United States (Maki & Kitano, 2002; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). Specifically I hope to elucidate the experiences of Asian Indian sojourners who are in the United States as students at Ohio University.

The Study Group–Asian Indian Student Sojourners

Klein, Alexander, Miller, Haack, and Bushnell (1986) found Asian Indian student sojourners, evidenced challenges (e.g. difficulties with language, adjustment to a new educational system) and responses (e.g. anxiety, loneliness, homesickness) similar to other international students. I have chosen this group as my co-researchers because of the increased number of Asian Indians on U.S. campuses (IIE, 2004; Khandavalli, 2003), and in particular Ohio University’s campus (Ohio University Office of Institutional Research, 2004). For purposes of this study, co-researchers are also referred to variously as, students, participants, interviewees, and respondents.

I hope by interviewing these students and learning about their experiences as sojourners, I can gain knowledge of the issues that they face. Thus the general purpose of this research is to understand the self-perceived and experienced realities of international student sojourners from India. This purpose is best served through a qualitative interview study (Weiss, 1994). The interview
format of this research allows participants to expound on their mental health needs, help-seeking behaviors and perceived challenges (Weiss). These Asian Indian students are considered sojourners because their documented intention is to return to India after they have completed their studies abroad.

Statement of Problem

Increased knowledge about these students will help counseling center professionals create clinical, consultative, and outreach services that can more effectively serve the needs of this group.

Research Questions

What are the experiences of Asian Indian sojourners who are fulltime graduate students currently enrolled in degree granting programs at Ohio University? The question is formulated as a result of my interest in gaining information in the following the three areas. I wish to understand (a) what these students perceive their problems, if any, to be, (b) from whom they seek help for problems, and (c) what are their thoughts and feelings about the counseling center, Counseling and Psychological Services, on Ohio University’s campus?

Significance of the Study

While the trend over the last half century has been towards an increase in the number of international students at U.S. universities, the events of 9/11 and the subsequent
changes in granting student visas has produced a decrease in the number of international graduate students enrolled at major U.S. universities (Bain & Cummings, 2005), including Ohio University. The number of enrolled international students at OU dropped from 1,178 in the fall of 2000 to 979 by fall of 2004 (Office of Institutional Research, Ohio University, 2005). This decrease may be indicative of a significant change from the previous pattern, or a temporary anomaly that will disappear when political conditions change and the enforcement of U.S. immigration policies eases the stringency with which student visas are issued. Yet, regardless of the future pattern, international students maintain a continuing and important presence at Ohio University.

Diversity

The presence of international students on the OU campus is just one indicator of the diversity and cultural complexity of the contemporary college environment. The college counseling community has come to recognize that in their attempts to meet the needs of the current student population, trained mental health professionals are challenged by this increase in diversity (Archer & Cooper, 1998). Counseling professionals are expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities in multicultural counseling (ACA Ethical Code, 2005; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992) and recently multicultural competence in Organizational
Development (Arthur, 2004). This implies that counselors ought to be minimally competent to address the needs of and have insight into the realities of multiple social and cultural groups and the contexts in which they exist (Arthur). Multicultural counseling is a recognized and significant issue for the health and well being of the student population for practical reasons, and because the counseling community sees it as part of its ethical and moral duty (Wright, 2000). Yet it is evident that multicultural training does not automatically translate into competency in a multicultural setting or with multicultural clients. Counselors who are poorly motivated, ill prepared, ill equipped, and/or inadequately trained in multicultural counseling are unlikely to effectively address the problems of students who are not native-born Caucasians (Arthur). International students do not fit the native-born Caucasian category, and it cannot be assumed that they conform to any existing multicultural model (Arthur). They are not part of any United States native-born minority population as is generally defined, and their needs, problems, and the solutions to their needs and problems are not necessarily defined within the standard multicultural context (Arthur, 2004; Arthur, 1997; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Rarely do counselor education programs include training for working with clients who are international students (Arthur, 2004).
Arthur (2004) contends that international students are a special client population at four-year institutions of higher learning. As such, these students do not necessarily see themselves as, nor conform to the behavior associated with members of United States racial and/or ethnic minorities. Their problems, needs, and the issues they face are not the same as those faced by other student groups, including those groups that are generally associated with a multicultural society (Arthur, 2004; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Rather, their issues and problems are unique for several reasons:

1. International students are not a homogenous group; they come from different countries, each of which is distinct and characterized by different worldviews and cultural norms. These norms are not only different from those of the United States but differ from each other as well (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993).

2. They are sojourners who are geographically removed from their home cultures and significant networks of support for the extent of their study abroad. These networks are frequently physically very distant, thus there are often major obstacles to accessing support from their home communities on a regular and consistent basis (Lin & Yi, 1997).

3. They do not necessarily embrace United States culture or see themselves as either assimilating or becoming
acculturated into U. S. society. It cannot be assumed that international students identify with any indigenous ethnic or racial population, even if from the perspective of the United States culture they are seen as similar, if not identical, to such groups (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

4. They are students who, in addition to the problems and difficulties usually encountered by college students, face unique circumstances and have special needs that generate additional stress (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993; Dana, 1993; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1995).

**International Students and Counseling Services**

While many of the problems of international students are unique and perhaps, more pressing, than those faced by other student populations, this pattern is not reflected in their use of counseling facilities (Pedersen, 1991). The services that normally handle the psychological and adjustment problems of the student body at large, and are regularly used by other groups, appear to be underutilized by both domestic minority students and international students - a pattern that has become more pronounced over the last several decades (Leong, 1986; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sue, 1977). Knowledge of the reasons how and why international students underutilize student counseling services remain imprecise. For example, data from a 2004-2005 utilization study at Ohio University’s counseling center indicate that the majority of international students
served by the center are Asian, including Asian Indian (53%) and the percentage of all international students who seek counseling is less than that of the student body as a whole. However, a finer breakdown of the relevant figures indicate that international undergraduate students demonstrate a pattern that shows a slightly higher tendency to utilize counseling services, while the opposite pattern is characteristic of international graduate students’ use (Williams, Cosio, Demyan, & Wing, 2005).

Lin (2000) as well as Arthur (2004), suggest that use of counseling facilities could be increased if counselors were to provide culturally specific and appropriate interventions and outreach programs. In short, cultural competence is required if counselors are to move beyond a mere appreciation and recognition of differing cultural groups to working effectively with diverse populations (Sue, 1998; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). Through this research I sought to remedy a deficiency in knowledge of the peculiar problems and significant issues of Asian Indian international graduate students at Ohio University.

More specifically the data will aid counseling professionals in their understanding of the experiences of this group of student sojourners and facilitate an understanding of their unique help-seeking needs, behaviors, and attitudes. This is a necessary step in determining these international students’ psychological, and personal
adjustment needs in order to effectively address such needs which, in turn can aid in their academic success (Arthur, 2004). I have sought to understand how international students as represented by Asian Indian students perceive their problems, and to identify the types of solutions they see as being most effective in addressing these perceived difficulties. There are no assumptions as to what these problems might be or for that matter, that the group under study even perceives itself as having significant problems or issues. It is possible that Asian Indian student sojourners do not perceive themselves as being plagued by serious adjustment issues, or that seeking help for acknowledged problems is regarded as a viable option that requires some type of external assistance. There are indications that international students find counseling an unfamiliar practice and due to the stigma attached to using mental health services of any kind prefer to seek assistance from other sources (Arthur, 2004; Pedersen, 1991). In conducting this research, I allowed the participants to define for themselves what their precise needs are, and what types of solutions or supports might be amendable to meeting these needs.

Format of the Study

The target group consisted of individuals who are currently enrolled as graduate students and attend Ohio University on student visas from India. I chose to research
graduate students, because the underutilization of counseling services occurs with graduate students and because of the limited number of undergraduate students from India at Ohio University. Using existing data available from the Office of Institutional Research, I constructed a basic demographic profile for members of this group who are fulltime students.

From this larger group, a small convenience sample, comprised of eight individuals who were in attendance at Ohio University during the spring quarter of 2006, was chosen for in-depth interviewing. A snowball method of selection (Weiss, 1994) was used to acquire the participants for the study.

I selected the participants through already established contacts within the Asian Indian community, including but not limited to personal ties to members of the Indian Students’ Association, and personal ties with faculty and administrators from India. I asked members of the above groupings for referrals for potential participants and then asked the potential participants if they knew of others who might be available to participate (Weiss, 1994). Such factors as availability and a willingness to participate, among other factors, figured prominently in the selection process.

I used a semi-structured interview format to cover a range of topics including information allowing me to
construct a demographic profile, and data on the availability and use of support networks both in the United States and in India. The bulk of the interview was devoted to eliciting information on the self-perception of problems, if any, and their view of appropriate solutions. The interview also included material on the perception of, and use of counseling facilities.

The second phase of the research involved exploring the themes and categories that appear in the individual interviews. Through the technique of member checking (Highlen & Finley, 1996; Morrow, Rakhsha, & Castaneda, 1995), I tested the accuracy of my reconstructions of the participants’ reality with three of the original participants. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Limitations and Delimitations

Issues in the Selection of Participants

While the general intent of this study was to provide insights into the experiences, problems, and issues of international students, the actual focus of the research was on one group, graduate student sojourners from the Indian subcontinent. This group was selected for a number of different reasons.

The size and the position of India as the prime supplier of international students at Ohio University and elsewhere in the U. S. provided a powerful incentive for
selecting this group as the study group; the larger the base population the more representative the sample is likely to be. For another, the focus on one group, as opposed to sampling from a number of distinct national groups, is designed to control for certain variables. Asian Indian students share, at least on some level, a common cultural tradition, a tradition that serves to distinguish these students from other national groups (Klein, Alexander, Miller, Haack, & Bushnell, 1986).

There is no doubt that the Asian Indian student population is internally variable, differentiated by such factors as geographic and social points of origin, religion, class, and even caste (Das, & Kemp, 1997; Durvasula & Mylvaganam, 1994; Stern, 2003). However, these students will exhibit greater homogeneity in these critical areas than persons from a totally different and distinct national group.

While it might be argued that the insights gained from examining only one national group have limited applicability to other international student groups, there are in fact, indications that there are major commonalities characteristic of international student populations currently attending higher education institutions (Arthur, 2004; Leong & Chou, 2002; Pedersen, 1991).

For the purposes of this study the subject group, Indian international students, was narrowly defined as non-
U.S. nationals holding neither citizenship nor resident alien status and who have been admitted to the U.S. on an "F1" or "J1" student visa. The subject group included only those who are fully matriculated, fulltime graduate students as defined by university policy, at Ohio University, a four-year, degree-granting, post-secondary institution. This definition excluded a number of students at Ohio University who are designated as part-time students, undergraduate students, or whose legal visa status is something other than a student visa. While it was likely that such individuals shared many features with the participants, this more narrow definition was designed to minimize the impact of specific factors that may have introduced greater variation into the study group.

**Ethical Considerations**

Both practical and ethical considerations require recognition that counselors must attempt to serve the needs of all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and nationality. While the counseling profession has begun to address its limitations in dealing with diversity through its increased attention to issues of multiculturalism, these attempts have fallen short of the mark when addressing international students (Arthur, 1997; Arthur, 2004; Pedersen, 1991). The models of multiculturalism are far too narrow, not merely in dealing within the diversity of life in the United States, but also, and much more acutely, for
dealing with the mobility of a global society (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). If the models for counseling resident minorities are lacking or insufficient to reflect the intricacies of working with these populations, then the capabilities of counselors are even more restricted in dealing with individuals who are part of the global society, but not necessarily part of the United States culture (Dana, 1993).

International students may not even be aware of, or expect that aid and assistance in dealing with life’s inevitable problems, academic, psychological, social, or otherwise, is part of the “culture” of the university (Arthur, 2004). Our knowledge of international students, their psychological needs, expectations, coping, and help-seeking skills is limited. Because of a limited knowledge base, the ability to ethically fulfill the professional role of counselor is compromised. My proposed research is one attempt to gather the requisite information needed to counsel all students in the most ethical, expeditious, and effective manner.

Issues on Ohio University’s Campus

On another more practical and immediate level, Ohio University is faced with a series of new problems pertaining to international students. As already discussed, the events surrounding 9/11 have produced a decline in international student enrollments at Ohio University and elsewhere in the
United States. Rather than seek admission to a U.S. institution of higher learner, a long and arduous process without guarantees of success, international students are seeking admission to universities in other English-speaking countries around the world such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Arthur, 2004; Bain & Cummings, 2005).

In response to this new pattern Ohio University has initiated an active policy of recruiting international students. Any and all information that allows the university to undertake changes that make it a welcoming, more comfortable, and hence more attractive environment, will aid in this recruitment effort. The University is also concerned with the retention of international students already enrolled. Issues surrounding retention, for example, have significant financial implications; for every student retained Ohio University’s revenue is increased by $10,000 (Heaton, 2004).

More importantly, a significant mandate of the university is to deal with the wellbeing of its diverse student body; that is part of its mission. For the mental health professionals of the Counseling Center, it is difficult to assist the university in its targeted goals of attracting, enrolling, and retaining students from diverse backgrounds, if our knowledge of the mental health needs and help-seeking behaviors of international students is compromised or inadequate.
Through this research I expect to provide crucial and missing data on just how the counseling community can understand and thus serve one segment of its diverse population. It is also expected that an outcome of this research is to expand knowledge of the parameters of multicultural counseling as to how best to serve diverse clients in a complex global society.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Impact on U.S. Colleges and Universities

As a part of the complex global society, contemporary society in the United States is indubitably diverse. This contemporary, multicultural society evidences a diversity that has become even more pronounced in the second part of the 20th century. Since 1965 changes in U.S. immigration policy, coupled with changes in global economic, political, and social conditions have produced a marked increase in persons from other parts of the world seeking and gaining access to the United States (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1975). The character of this influx is diverse as many émigrés come from countries characterized as “third world” or developing.

The reasons for this influx along with the outcomes of the movement are as varied as the nationalities that make up this “new migration” – a migration distinguished from migration to the United States that occurred during the last decades of the 19th and first decades of the 20th century (Reimers, 1985). Many of the new immigrants come from the middle class and many are college-educated professionals, unlike their predecessors who were laborers escaping poverty (Grant, 1995; Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1975). The contemporary migratory influx now exceeds that of the earlier period (Dinnerstein, Nichols & Reimers, 1996; Reimers, 1985). A component of the increased diversity in United States
society and culture is a new diversity in U.S. higher education.

While much of this diversity is attributable to an increase in the number of domestic racial and ethnic minority students who are currently attending U.S. colleges and universities, a second source has been a notable growth in the numbers of international students also in attendance (Arthur, 2004; IIE, 2004).

The current trends in student enrollments, along with other practices, have led some observers to characterize a new atmosphere within higher education as the internationalization of higher education (Arthur, 2004). In the years 2001 to 2002, for example, nearly one-half million international students were enrolled (Chin, 2002). Of these students, increasing percentages have come from India (Khandavilli, 2003; IIE, 2004).

Effects of Asian Indian Migration

While there has been little research devoted to determining precisely how Asian Indian students are similar to or are different from other groups of international students, the general characteristics of the Asian Indian migrant are well known, and share characteristics with other Asian groups (Chandras, 1997). Unlike earlier migrations, contemporary Asian Indian migration includes people from all parts of India and from all caste groups. However, the largest percentage of people comes from the north of India,
particularly those areas that have industrialized. Many come from the larger cities and towns and from the middle and upper caste groups. A sizeable number come minimally with a college degree and many have some type of post-graduate degree (Jensen, 1988; Saran, 1985). Given the fact that a large number of India’s populace live in rural areas and are illiterate, migrants appear to come from the more privileged sectors of society (Leonhard-Spark & Saran, 1980).

Once ensconced in the U.S., they are often quite successful in finding both careers and good incomes in medicine, research, engineering, computing, banking and finance, insurance, or as entrepreneurs in businesses that range from small shops to large international corporations (Helwig & Helwig, 1990; Lessinger, 1995). On the level of educational achievement, students mirror trends evident in the larger Asian Indian migratory community. At Ohio University, 200 of the 204 students from India during the 2004-2005 academic year were graduate students; 132 were male, 72 were female, and 165 were either in the College of Arts and Sciences (53) or Engineering and Technology (112) (Ohio University, Office of Institutional Research, 2004).

The Effects of Internationalization

Internationalization, however, extends beyond mere numbers. It has been described as a process that prepares students for the new interdependent global economy (Deardorff, 2004). Internationalization, according to
Knight, (1994) as cited in Arthur (2004), is the process that introduces and integrates a global, intercultural, and international perspective into the major teaching, research, and service functions of institutions of higher learning.

The advantages of this internationalization are numerous. Students are exposed to and acquire a better understanding of global interdependencies; the exchange of knowledge promotes cooperative problem solving, and students benefit from an enhanced ability to compete in the global market place (Arthur, 2004).

International students provide alternative sources of funds — tuition fees are two to four times higher than those paid by domestic students (Arthur, 2004) — in an era of a shrinking resource base. In 2002-2003, 18,668 international students contributed 257.5 million dollars in tuition and fees and made a total contribution of 425 million dollars to the economy of Ohio (IIE, 2004). In 2005-2006, 18,000 international students contributed 323.8 million dollars in tuition and fees, for a total positive economic impact of 424.1 million dollars to the state of Ohio. (IIE, 2006)

Additionally, international students support a cross cultural exchange of knowledge, aid in improving international relations, and facilitate the development of global social networks in business, the sciences, and the professions (Arthur, 2004; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002).
Issues and Problems for the International Student

While there are clearly advantages to an internationalized higher education, there are also disadvantages. Research has indicated that contemporary students often experience stress sufficiently high to interfere with normal performance (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Bishop, 1990; Bishop, Lacour, Nutt, Yamada & Lee, 2004; Chen, 1999). It is estimated, for example, that 10-15% of college students experience problems that could benefit from psychological or mental health intervention (Gallagher, 2004). Mori (2000) citing Thomas and Althen (1989) posits that international students not withstanding their diverse origins, share certain characteristics. International students not only experience the same stresses as do their domestic counterparts (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002; Lin, 2002; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori), but they also face problems that are unique to themselves (Lin; Mori; Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Some of the challenges faced by international students include financial, cultural, and social issues (Lin; Hayes & Lin, 1994), manifesting in loneliness, social withdrawal, sleep difficulties, sexual dysfunction, academic performance issues, reduced self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Chen; Mallinckrodt & Leong 1992; Pedersen, 1991; Prieto, 1995). The peculiar challenges facing the international student fall into a number of areas.
Adjustment Issues

International students must adjust, at least temporarily, to an international culture -- that of the United States, and may have the potential for a “crisis of personality or identity” (Adler, 1975, 1987 as cited in Lewthwaite, 1996 p. 168). Adjusting to the new environment, according to a study by Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, (2002), is more difficult for international students than for domestic sojourners away from their home communities. However, this study was based on a relatively small sample at only one mid-western state university making it hard to generalize. Other researchers argue that cultural adaptation does not inherently give rise to pathology, but is merely a process of learning new behaviors (Taylor, 1994). Moreover, legitimate questions can be raised as to what are the precise cultural and institutional differences that international students must face. The emergence of a global economy and society has meant that a convergence of institutional forms has taken place (e.g. e-mail), and while there remain cultural differences, the learning of new skills is required for all persons as they move into new situations and settings. In short, it should not be automatically assumed that academic settings in the United States are radically different for international students, and if there are differences, that these differences continue to be more stressful than they
would be for domestic students entering a new higher education setting.

Yet there can be no doubt that differences in the definition of roles, if in no other dimension than the degree of formality required, exist (Arthur, 2004). The clarity with which roles are defined and the appropriate behaviors specified can be an area of confusion and conflict in a host of areas, including the most significant—academic and social relationships. For some international students, especially those coming from cultures characterized by more restrictions than are generally accepted in the United States, role confusion and ambiguities, can promote uncertainties with regard to areas such as decision making and personal responsibility (Arthur).

Cultural and Language Issues

The impact of cultural differences and a prolonged absence from their home country and culture can impact upon international students in other ways. Both major and minor political, social, and economic problems as well as natural disasters in the home society can produce stress for the international student (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994). Even more poignant is that physical distance from the home country prevents the international student from offering the expected support to family and friends as they experience both ordinary problems and emergencies (Arthur, 2004).
The prospect of returning to the home culture can also produce stress (Arthur, 1997, 2004; Furukawa, 1997; Lin, 2000). Having made the necessary adjustments to life in the United States, the international student will ultimately have to repeat that adjustment problem in reverse. The home culture can differ from the culture of the United States in a number of critical ways. There may be less personal or political freedom, there will be social ties that will have to be reestablished, some of which the international student may even wish to avoid, and the work environment may be significantly different from that which they have come to expect in the United States (Arthur, 2004).

Language problems have been cited as major problems of adjustment for international students (Chen, 1999). Many arrive with only minimal competency in English and even for those whose language facility is adequate, there are major differences in communication styles. Communication styles include differences in both verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Khoo, et. al, 1994) and international students can have difficulties with English as spoken in the United States (Mori, 2000). Yet in some arenas such style differences are likely to be minimal. The physical, biological, and most recently, the computer sciences, have had, historically, a shared standard language of discourse. This contemporary language standard is English. Persons trained in the sciences are expected to have, minimally, reading fluency in
the English language. They are also likely to have fluency in the shared code of English communication in the sciences.

Social Support Issues

International students are generally seen as facing peculiar challenges because of reduced familial and social support (Mori, 2000). The social isolation that results from the loss of significant relationships in a new environment add to the stress experienced by students (Chen, 1999). Some argue that the absence of supportive networks of family and friends promote a higher degree of social isolation than among domestic students and that international students are left feeling unsettled, cautious, and lonely, with an increased sense of alienation in the new environment and an increased risk of clinical depression (Chen; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi 1992). However, increased social support, through interaction with domestic students can lessen the alienation and feelings of isolation, as well as ward off depression and symptoms of physical illness (Chen; Hayes & Lin, 1992; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). International students often have difficulty establishing relationships with their U.S. counterparts, and despair of ever developing significant cross cultural friendships (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004). Reliance on faculty instead of peers when faced with problems can become one of the international students’ adaptive strategies (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986).
Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

International students’ adjustment to their new environment can also be influenced by intentional or unintentional prejudice, discrimination, and even racism (Arthur, 2004; Chandras, 1997; Khoo, et. al, 1994; Lin, 2000; Pedersen, 1991, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1990). Moreover, international students may lack the ability to develop significant social ties even when there are other students who come from the same home society, and culture. Since all communities are cross cut by divisions based on geographic locale, class, status, race, ethnicity, or religion, to name just a few of the potential sources of division, what may appear to an outside observer as a relatively homogenous group is, for the member, one that is fraught with significant social divisions. Such divisions, along with factors peculiar to the individual, may preclude the possibility of developing significant relationships with other persons even if they are from the same country of origin.

Issues of Stress and Isolation

It is an empirical question as to what types of social ties international students regard as a potentially significant source of social support. Research has shown that international students benefit from establishing relationships with other students from the host country (Arthur, 2004; Hayes & Lin, 1994) and the lack of social
support can be a direct contributor to stress (Arthur) and stress related illnesses (Leong, F. T. L., 1986; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timimi, 2004). Yet, establishing relationships with host nationals can be in and of itself stress producing, due to differences in language and cultural understandings of what constitutes a friendship (Hayes & Lin; Pedersen, 1991).

International students may operate in their environments with the perception that there are a very limited number of potential sources of social support. When international students have difficulty fitting in with any group, develop a reluctance to become involved in social situations, and make few friends in their new environment, they may experience increased feelings of social isolation and alienation (Pedersen, 1991).

Pragmatic Issues

Pragmatic issues can loom large for the international student. Many pay between two to four times more in educational fees than do domestic students (Arthur, 2004). Increasingly United States institutions are unwilling or unable to subsidize the international student community (Arthur; Bain & Cummings, 2005). While the disparity between costs and the available amounts of financial assistance are most notable for undergraduates (Arthur; Pedersen, 1991) graduate students are not immune to financial pressures. Visa restrictions on employment dramatically limit any
international student’s ability to acquire other sources of income outside the confines of the university (Arthur; Mori, 2000; Yi, Lin & Kishimoto, 2003) and thus any disruption in university financial arrangements is unsettling, even stressful. However, the degree to which the university is willing or able to provide adequate financial support for its graduate students in part depends on the field of study. Fellowships and other types of across the board support are common in both the physical and biological sciences as well as in the engineering and computer fields.

It is important not to assume that international students do not have individual or family resources at their disposal in order to finance their education. Thus no assumptions as to the financial position of international students should be made (Arthur, 2004). It is also possible that the expectations regarding appropriate standards of living for international students, is distinctly, and perhaps significantly lower, than that of domestic graduate students. Hence it becomes yet another empirical question to ascertain as to whether or not international students are more or less prone to stress generated by financial circumstances.

Model Minority Issues

A common image of international students is that they represent the brightest and the best from their countries of origin. Chosen by family, academic, or government agencies
to further their education abroad, international students are viewed as performing well above the average and distinguishing themselves among their peers (Pedersen, 1991). Because of these exceptional qualities, they are viewed as under pressure to perform and maintain the highest of standards, as defined by family or their academic sponsoring programs (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994). Asian students are particularly vulnerable to this stereotype. While this image may apply to some, it is not applicable to all international students (Archer, 2004). 

Institutional Issues

The unique features of the educational system of the United States create another potential source of stress and anxiety for international students. An implicit, and even explicit, Eurocentric bias in the curriculum can lead to the denigration of contributions of non-European cultures, that in turn can have a negative impact on the self esteem of international students (Archer, 2004).

Educational systems differ in terms of both teaching and learning styles. International students can be handicapped by these differences that can prevent them from performing not only in the expected fashion but also in a manner that reflects both their capabilities and potential (Chen, 1999). Unfamiliarity with educational practices can exacerbate performance and test-taking anxiety (Chen; Lin, 2000). In addition, international students often arrive with
an expectation that they will pursue a determined course of study. Subsequently they may find that they are dissatisfied with their initial field, or that personal relationships with key professors or an advisor are proving to be far more difficult than they had anticipated. Switching from one field to another, transferring to another program, or even to another institution may not be seen as viable options as they may fear that it would mean that they would have to continue their studies without either family or government approval or support. The possibility that they might be forced to return home without completing their studies could mean that they would face significant social sanctions. In short, the social, economic, and even political consequences of a failure to complete a determined course of study can be formidable and even dramatic (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994).

Meeting the Challenges

The foregoing discussion would suggest that international students, faced with a plethora of issues and problems, would be more likely to make use of university counseling services than their domestic peers. Some researchers maintain that the magnitude of problems and issues faced by international students is substantially greater than those faced by American students (Cheng, Leong, & Geist, 1993) and that international students bring with them or develop while in attendance, mental health issues
that can significantly impact their performance as students (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994).

The literature on this topic is, however, far from definitive. Some studies indicate that international students underutilize university counseling centers (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pedersen, 1991). Rather than being plagued by a myriad of problems and issues, international students were found to be robust and quite capable of handling their situation, showed only moderate levels of concern, and their self-images were more positive than negative (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992). Other studies indicate that the use of counseling centers is on a par with the pattern shown by domestic students (Ebbin, & Blankinship, 1986).

Arthur (1997) has suggested that some of this discrepancy can be attributed to methodological differences in the investigations. Researchers who conclude that the use of counseling centers by domestic and international students is approximately equal may have been investigating a single session while other researchers have been more focused on counseling styles and changes that take place over the course of therapy.

Challenges to Providing Mental Health Services

The underutilization of counseling services by international students has been in part attributed to the cultural values and assumptions held by these students (Mori, 2000, Zhang, & Dixon, 2003). Counseling and
psychotherapy are viewed in some cultural contexts as indicated only for the most disturbed individuals and thus persons who seek or need such services are stigmatized (Sue & Sue, 1990). Ashcraft (1986) found that Asian Indian émigrés seeking services at a New York community-based psychiatric clinic feared and mistakenly associated mental illness with insanity suggesting that these clients did not comprehend the specific nature of outpatient mental health services. Some referred clients persisted in utilizing the clinic under the guise of less stigmatizing labels such as getting assistance with housing or employment, thus illustrating their concern about receiving mental health services. Such negative sanctions can extend beyond the individual to the entire family (Mori, 2000). Zhang & Dixon (2003) found a significant relationship between Asian international students level of acculturation to white American culture and their stigma tolerance. They also found that whether or not these students planned to stay in the United States did not affect their help-seeking attitudes.

Cultures vary as to the etiquette surrounding the discussion of personal problems; it may be unacceptable to go beyond the family or narrowly defined confidants in dealing with mental health issues (Sue & Sue, 1990). Family members and spiritual advisors may be seen not only as the best suited, but the only acceptable choice, for help with emotional or psychological problems.
Thus international students may actively resist referrals to mental health professionals. Additional factors such as the perception that counseling is only accessible to those with substantial financial resources also may deter the use of counseling services. International students may simply be unaware that mental health services are both accessible and affordable (Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1995). Ramisetty & Mickler, (1993) have indicated that this may be the case for Asian Indian students.

**Challenges to Multicultural Training and Counseling**

While there are factors within the international student community that impede, or restrict, the use of counseling, there are also factors within the counseling community that may serve as barriers to serving this population effectively. One issue is whether or not counseling is designed to meet the needs of international students.

There is no doubt that counseling explicitly recognizes that diversity is a critical feature of the contemporary student population. Multicultural counseling evolved out of the sociopolitical environment of unrest of the 1960s and 1970s and became established as a basic component of the field by the 1980s (Pedersen, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990). However, practices and training have been criticized because they do not deal adequately with this diversity and because they are Eurocentric and culture bound (Sue, Ivey &
Pedersen, 1996). Problems in delivering mental health services to ethnic/racial minority groups include both cultural and linguistic mismatches between clients and providers (Aponte, Rivers & Wohl, 1995; Sue, Ivey & Pedersen). Cultural differences between therapists and clients can affect the validity of an assessment, the development of rapport, and the establishment of a therapeutic alliance between therapist and client, as well as treatment effectiveness (Sue, 1998).

Investigators have recommended a number of ways to facilitate the creation of culturally sensitive environments and the provision of culturally responsive treatments (e.g. Lin & Yi, 1997; Prieto, 1995). These include acquiring knowledge of the culture of clients, being sensitive to the specific needs of the clientele, and developing flexibility in dealing with clients. All such traits are required if services are to be delivered in ways that are consistent with the cultural heritage and background of the client. Sue (1998) has suggested that a broad form of multiculturalism, a new type of cultural competence, is required and this includes not only an appreciation and recognition of all cultural groups but also an ability to work with all groups.

One of the major problems in developing such cultural competence is the way in which multiculturalism is defined and viewed. Cultural differences are often conceived of as a product of the historical conditions, including the racism
and oppression, characteristic of the United States (Sue & Sue, 1990). Indeed, categories such as African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, or Native American are culturally specific groupings that emerged out of the unique historical development of the United States. Such categories, the hyphenated and ethnic labels, appear to provide neither historical nor cultural validity for the mass of contemporary migrants (Grant, 1995), students or otherwise. Unfortunately, the current dominant culture of the United States, one that is at least in part characterized by a multicultural worldview, does not allow easily for the conceptualization of persons who are neither members of the dominant culture nor members of any existent racial or ethnic minority.

Challenges to Research on Counseling Sojourners

Clearly there is a need for greater specificity when assessing the patterns of use of mental health services by international students. Comparisons tend to be made either between international students and their domestic counterparts, or international students are assumed to fit into one of the U.S. ethnic or racial minorities (Yoon & Portman, 2004). The former assumes a homogeneity of international students that serves to distort the actual patterns within this diverse group and is thus not warranted. The research on the counseling experience of international students in general is not necessarily
applicable across the board and there is a paucity of studies that deal with specific groups such as Asian Indian college and university students. The research that has been conducted has focused on either the broadly defined category of Asian immigrant or the more narrowly defined category of Indian-Americans (Zhang & Dixon, 2003).

Studies on Asian Indian university students are very rare. One exception is a study conducted by Rahman and Rollock (2004) that found that higher levels of depressive behaviors were attributable to the student’s perception of prejudice from the larger society. This finding suggests that Asian Indian students are not accustomed to the prejudice that American ethnic and racial minorities often experience.

The second tendency, which subsumes international students under the heading of any ethnic or racial minority group that is a product of a specific history and cultural circumstances, is just as invalid as assuming that this group is a homogeneous entity. Research on the general population of post 1965 immigrants reveals that they are not only distinct in very significant ways from indigenous ethnic and racial minorities but also from earlier waves of migrants. They are regularly described as sojourners or transnationals (Grant, 1987, Schiller, Basch & Blance-Szanton, 1992).
While it is clear that research on international students must turn to the examination of student populations from specific cultures (Cheng, 1993), care must be exercised so that assumptions that may have been applicable to earlier migrant groups and contemporary ethnic and racial minorities are not automatically applied to international students, in general, and Asian Indian students, in the specific. It is hoped that through this research, unwarranted assumptions have been minimized and much needed data on the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of Asian Indian students has been provided. In turn, this facilitates the ability of professionals working in the counseling center to more accurately assess Asian Indian students’ needs, and thus be in a better position to offer apposite consultative services, design and administer accurate treatment interventions, and deliver appropriate outreach services to this group. It is hoped that the outcome of the research will have some applicability to groups who experience similar situations to those of Asian Indian students.

Qualitative Study

Pedersen, (1991) while noting the great variability among international students, maintains that it is important that researchers determine how these students perceive and define their roles and learn to manage the attendant stresses. He further maintains that the study of international students requires an individualized approach.
Most educators and clinicians who have been teaching or practicing in the disciplines of Counseling and Psychology have been trained in quantitative research methods. These methods have emerged from a positivistic design paradigm that uses numbers as data, is concerned with facts, and predictions, and seeks to establish causal relationships. Such methods attempt to describe events and set up relationships between events through numerical data sets and are “characterized by carefully circumscribed and narrowly focused questions designed to illuminate causality and relationship” (Bloland, 1992 p. 4).

Yet, following Pedersen’s (1991) mandate for an individualized research approach, the stated purpose of this research has been to gain a greater understanding of the Asian Indian students’ experience at Ohio University. It has not been to establish causality and relationship, but rather to understand through their own subjectively chosen and reported words, the reality of their experience. This phenomenological research question is best addressed through a qualitative research method (Orbe, 2000).

According to Bloland (1992), qualitative research methods use words as data to communicate the behaviors and experiences of human beings. What qualitative approaches have in common is a reliance on the written or spoken word or the observable behavior of the person being studied as the principal source of data for analysis. The purpose of
such research is a greater understanding of the world as seen from the unique viewpoint of the people being studied (Bloland, 1992). There are multiple methods that can be used in a qualitatively designed study. As stated previously, I have chosen to use in-depth interviewing to assist me in obtaining data to address my research question.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Intent of the Study

My major intent in this study was to develop the means for counselors to gain an understanding of how international students perceive the issues and problems they confront as they participate in a society and culture that is not their own. Specifically I sought to determine how Asian Indian graduate students perceived and understood their multifaceted experiences at Ohio University: how they conceptualized their experiences, what they identified as the problems associated with being away from their home environment, and what types of help they tended to seek and to receive. In addition, I wanted to ascertain their perceptions of counseling and the counseling center.

One of the major premises of this research is that effective counseling interventions are contingent upon an awareness of the multiple realities characteristic of all individuals. An individual’s identity is never static; rather, it is varied and adaptive to changing circumstances and expectations. It is essential that counseling professionals be knowledgeable as to a client’s salient identities; such knowledge provides vital clues as to how clients see the world, what they value, and how they are likely to behave in different situations, as well as how others are likely to perceive and respond to their variable behaviors (Sue & Sue, 1990). In short, the more a therapist
knows about a particular client’s cultural identities, associations, and realities, the more accurate will be the inferences and conceptualizations the therapist will develop, and the better able the therapist will be to accurately and effectively assist the client (Lopez et al., 1989)

**The Researcher**

Boyatzis (1998) suggests that in qualitative research it is important to understand the author’s “context”. I offer the following information to assist my readers in understanding the path that has brought me to this research and how my journey may influence my analysis. Personal experience has made me very sensitive to the issues surrounding multiple realities. I am the child of immigrant parents. I spent my early life hovering between two worlds. I was born and lived in the United States, but spent much of my childhood in the land of my father’s birth. Home was always where I was not.

My mother called no place home; she had lived in three different countries and two U.S. states as she was growing up. She never really accepted the United States as her home, and when asked, she called herself a citizen of the world. Her racial identity was also fluid: she was considered variously as Caucasian or Negro (later African American and/or Black) in the U.S. depending on the time period and who was doing the classifying. However, her looks and
features figured her Asian Indian heritage prominently. She identified herself always as “colored”.

My father never doubted where home was. It was Jamaica, West Indies. And though he spent 49 of his 67 years in the United States, it was always his desire to return home to live and die. He was always a sojourner in these United States. The only two of his seven siblings who followed him to the U.S. realized that vision and returned to live out their retirements and their lives in Jamaica.

Much of my formative years were spent wondering to which country and culture I belonged; I was acutely aware of living between two worlds. That experience, along with others as an ethnic minority in this country, sensitized me to the experience of feeling like an outsider and being a sojourner in another person’s country.

In order to survive emotionally it was necessary for me to understand the cultural context in which I was currently living and the expectations of that culture for how I was to behave and function. I became adept at code switching, though I never felt integrated into either world. As a teen I chose to identify with being an American, and I did not return to Jamaica until I was eighteen years old and my identity had coalesced as a United States citizen and not as a Jamaican. Later in life, I realized I could not shed my bi-cultural identity (i.e., as coming from two different cultural contexts). I have reconciled to being a Caribbean-
American with strong cultural ties to both places, but more comfortable in one environment (the U.S.) than in the other.

I started college in the United States at the age of sixteen. The necessity and desire to understand another’s perspective and worldview led me to the study of anthropology and psychology, and eventually to the practice of counseling as my ultimate career choice. I am currently employed by Ohio University as a mental health counselor in the student counseling center, a position I have held for more than nineteen years.

In this position I have had the opportunity to work with a great number of international students. I have been both counselor to and trainer of students who for a multiplicity of reasons have chosen to leave their home countries to study at Ohio University. Whatever their reasons and whatever their problems, these students have impressed me with their courage in leaving behind family and friends to further their education on foreign soil. There is no doubt that my own background and that of my parents have contributed to my interests in this population. Just as my father left his family and friends behind, came to this country as a student, and lived part of his life as an outsider, so does today’s international student. Just as my mother’s identity was multiple and complex, so of necessity are the identities of international students.
Counseling Services and International Students

I have been very aware that many international students struggle with the transitional tasks of accommodating to a culture very different from their own. While such adjustments and accommodations, and the concomitant difficulties and problems they entail, might suggest that international students make greater use of counseling facilities than do other students, the available data do not necessarily support such a conclusion. The proportion of international students at Ohio University who seek counseling and make use of the counseling center is not significantly greater than the proportion of the student body as a whole that utilize those services. A finer breakdown of the relevant figures indicates that while international undergraduate students show a slightly higher tendency than the general student population to utilize the available services, international graduate students’ use is slightly lower than the overall average (Williams et al., 2005).

The reasons for these patterns are not immediately evident. Is it that international undergraduate students have greater and more severe adjustment problems than their domestic counterparts while international graduate students have fewer such issues? Is the pattern not so much a reflection of psychosocial adjustment as an issue of comfort level or fears of stigma? And if so, why is it that
international graduate students show more reluctance than undergraduate international students in this area? Such questions must be answered if counselors are to honor the ethical codes of their profession and to serve clients by means of the most ethical and effective approach.

The Paradigm

The answers to the foregoing types of questions can no longer be assumed; rather, they must be demonstrated. Thus the major thrust of this research was to understand how international students conceptualize their experiences. For this reason the operative paradigm for the research was the interpretive/constructive paradigm. According to Highlen and Finley (1996), the main purpose in this type of paradigm is to understand the participants’ world. Researchers making use of this perspective view reality as relative (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 1995). They are also aware that there are multiple realities and that realities shift in both time and space.

There are several advantages to using this type of research design. For one, it makes no assumptions as to what the research participants view as problematic or stressful. Instead the emphasis is on how the participant perceives reality, and the participant is allowed to define what might be an issue or problem. For another, it facilitates separating the researcher’s vision from that of the research participant’s vision. The international student’s perception
of the university and its environment can be very different from that of the researcher. (Because I, as researcher, am also a clinician, there may very well have been a tendency to view a participant’s experiences from a problem-based, psychopathological perspective. However, operating from this paradigm, I have refrained from making that assumption, and have instead given recognition to the other’s reality.) A final advantage of such a paradigm is that it facilitates both interaction and feedback. The interaction between the investigator and the participants as co-researchers is dynamic, and the data obtained continually inform the research direction. Then, through member checks, the research verifies the data (Highlen and Finley, 1996; Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 1995).

**Procedures and Processes**

**The Pool of Potential Participants**

The pool from which my co-researchers were selected is the universe of full-time graduate students at Ohio University. In order to facilitate aspects of the research, the study group was drawn exclusively from the sub-grouping of graduate students who were born on the Asian subcontinent and who self-identify as Asian Indian. Graduate students were included in the pool of potential participants because there are fewer Asian Indian undergraduate students than Asian Indian graduate students. The group under study was confined to a convenience sample of graduate students, and
while in selecting the research sample no specific effort was made to match the subject group with the larger population from which they were drawn, they in fact did reflect the heterogeneity of the Asian Indian student experience at OU (Weiss, 1994).

All participants entered the United States and remain here on student visas. Thus, on a documented level these individuals can be described as sojourners who intend to return to India after completing their studies abroad. The general attributes of these students such as gender and visa status fit the profile of Asian Indian graduate students at mid-size, state-run institutions of higher learning in the United States (IIE, 2004).

Selection of Participants

Participants in the study were recruited using the Snowball method (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 1995; Weiss, 1994). Participants assisted me in identifying other potential participants through their social networks (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I identified and recruited eight students enrolled in graduate, degree-granting programs at Ohio University. Because of the greater richness and depth of the responses generated by interviewed participants, I relied on a smaller sample than if this were a quantitative study (Weiss). The initial group of potential participants was drawn from contacts I had previously established with Asian Indian students in attendance at Ohio University, including
a member of the Indian Students’ Association. I also relied on an existing personal contact with an Indian-heritage faculty member and administrator to assist me in the recruitment process. These two primary contacts facilitated and expedited the recruitment of others who fit the parameters of the study. I had had no prior contacts with any of the participants in my professional role as counselor.

The Process

In-depth interviewing. I chose to use the process of in-depth interviewing to facilitate a greater understanding of the Asian Indian sojourner’s experience at Ohio University. In-depth interviews provided access to the experiences of these sojourners in their terms. Through interviewing, researchers are able to learn about people’s internal experiences. We learn about their thoughts, feelings, and unique perspectives on, and interpretations of, their realities – a rich source of information that would ordinarily not be accessible to us (Weiss, 1994; Kvale, 1996).

What I wanted to learn influenced how I chose to conduct my study. Interviewing gave me an avenue to understanding the experience of these participants. It simultaneously fostered respect for the individual and recognized the importance of both collaboration and community in structuring the individual’s experience
Additionally, interviewing allowed participants to articulate their stories. This design fit with my conception of the importance of individuals’ stories as supported by my chosen career path as a Professional Counselor. Professional Counselors are trained to listen to people recount their stories as well as help them make sense of these stories. Through this interview process participants told their own stories, but these stories were neither random nor anarchic. This format afforded a structure for the conversation that allowed the co-researcher and the researcher to co-produce the outcome (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, because I elicited information in an informal and conversational manner, the process also served to reinforce a positive relationship with the co-researchers.

Interview guide. The in-depth interview is exceedingly time-consuming (Seidman, 1998; Kvale, 1996) and presents a range of challenges. There are, for example, issues of replication and comparability. For this reason I chose to use a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix A). According to Weiss (1994), an interview guide serves the primary purpose of identifying areas and topics to be explored during the interview session. The guide provides a structure for the interview and helps the interviewer stay focused on a series of specific tasks. In addition, it provides a checklist of topics and areas to be addressed in
each interview session. The guide used in this study was designed to elicit information on the primary focus areas of the research. It was also designed (and the interview was conducted) in a manner that sought to maximize the elicitation of material that allowed for the self-perceptions, categorizations, and self-definitions to emerge.

Interview guides are not without their own problems and limitations. Seidman (1998), for example, entreats interviewers to use an interview guide with caution and not to confuse the use of the guide with hypothesis testing. He suggests that a more appropriate use of a guide is to elicit in the words of the participant what their experiences have been and to have the participant ascribe meaning to these experiences. To that end, I asked as few direct questions as possible without compromising my ability to both elicit and compare data. I allowed information to surface as the co-researchers told their stories in their own words. The interview guide was designed only to ensure that comparable areas were covered in each interview and that each co-researcher provided comparable types of information. My research objective was to develop a deep and reflexive understanding of how Asian Indian students perceive and deal with their sojourner experiences at Ohio University.
Confidentiality

The privacy and anonymity of my co-researchers was assured through a number of means. The identity of individuals was obscured through the use of pseudonyms, and all identifying information was excluded from the final report. During the initial interview each student was given the opportunity to choose his or her own pseudonym for purposes of this study. Composite pictures rather than actual persons are to be used in all published material and a coding procedure was used to hide the identities of particular persons for data collection and analysis. All original data (e.g., audio voice recordings, dossiers, and transcriptions) are housed in the counseling center in a locked file cabinet in a locked room where confidential client material is already being housed. Issues of confidentiality are of utmost importance in a counseling setting and this research has been conducted according to these professional standards; in addition, all protocols and procedures for research on human subjects have been followed.

Initial contact

Initial contact with potential co-researchers was made through e-mail. I selected e-mail as the initial method of contact because of its unobtrusive character. The e-mail consisted of a personal introduction, a brief outline of the purpose and format of the study including issues of confidentiality, and a solicitation of participation.
Through a subsequent e-mail I made arrangements for a personal meeting and confirmed the particulars surrounding the interview process. As the research process solidified, telephoning became a more expeditious way of facilitating contact with some of the co-researchers.

Initial Session

The initial face-to-face meeting, and any subsequent meetings with the co-researchers, took place in one of the private meeting rooms of Alden Library. I selected this site because it represented a relatively neutral and safe environment. Permission was sought to record the interview and all meetings were digitally audio-recorded. Each initial interview lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour and forty-seven minutes and took place during the summer of 2006. One important function of the interview session was to generate rapport and promote the development of trust, both of which are necessary components of an effective research partnership. In this session, I facilitated introductions and provided each participant with a written statement of the research purpose and procedure (see Appendix B).

A major goal of this session was to elicit informed consent. I advised co-researchers of the intended uses of the research, including the uses of the interviews and the potential use of any of the information they provided. I exerted every effort to ensure that there was adequate comprehension of the nature of the project, and more
importantly, that each participant was aware of his or her role in the research (Kvale, 1996). I responded to and addressed any questions that arose for the co-researchers. I discussed confidentiality procedures and obtained signed written consent forms, including written permission to voice record interview sessions. I also explained the possibility of a second interview.

Subsequent Interviews

Three co-researchers were available for a second interview, and these took place during spring 2007. These interviews were also recorded via a digital audio recording device. The intent of the second interview was, in part, to explore the validity of the coded themes from the respondent’s perspective.

Data Collection and Analysis

After the first interview, I made notes on the interview and thought about what was omitted and what I needed to ask in the next interview. I followed that procedure for all subsequent interviews. The previous interview was used to inform the line of questioning and supplement the interview guide in the next interview. Thus I used a form of concurrent qualitative analysis along with the ongoing process of data collection. This system provided a method for identifying and deciphering the meanings that each interviewee assigned to their experiences and attitudes (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Coding began following each
interview (see below). This facilitated the process of identification of similar pieces of information in subsequent interviews. As part of the analysis process, I created and maintained a separate dossier for each participant. Immediately following each interview, I journaled my observations of and reactions to the interview process and each participant. These were included in the participants’ dossiers along with the transcribed voice-recorded interviews.

Subsequent to the interviews and my journaling, the interviews were transcribed. Although ultimately all interviews were successfully and accurately transcribed, the transcription process was somewhat problematic and time consuming. All interviewees spoke English with accents and a cadence that presented problems of comprehension and clarity for the United States born persons I initially employed to transcribe the tapes. Finding a transcriber who understood the Indian accented English of the interviewees was difficult. In all, four transcribers attempted and abandoned the task. On the fifth try, I located and employed an individual to transcribe the tapes whose parents were from India and who was more familiar with both the national and regional varieties of speech in India. However, it was still necessary for me to review each transcription in intricate detail as my transcriber tended to paraphrase responses rather than record them verbatim. I carefully assessed each
transcript and made appropriate corrections to assure its accuracy and completeness as a verbatim transcription.

When the transcriptions were deemed accurate, I examined the specific content of each interview in random order and identified what appeared to be salient and important issues to the interviewee. Saliency and importance of an area were evaluated primarily on two factors: (a) the amount of time, attention to detail, and elaboration (along with my own perception of types of emphasis) that the interviewee devoted to a particular topic; and (b) whether or not the material in the transcript was related to the broad research questions under investigation. At this juncture in the analysis I also recorded, in the margin of the transcript, my own thoughts and impressions on specific comments and issues deemed significant to the interviewee.

Themes and Categories

The transcripts were initially examined in no particular order. After that initial review, I analyzed each transcript again in the order in which the interview took place. This time I color-coded the statements that appeared significant both by means of colored underlining and by color-coded page tabs. This entailed the further development of a system to code the responses so that appropriate comparisons and contrasts could be made. A coding system facilitated the deciphering of meanings each respondent
assigned to their experiences and attitudes, including what they perceived to be challenges and solutions to those challenges (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In other words, coding helped to identify and reveal areas that were commonly perceived to be problems or challenges; helped to identify the means used to ameliorate any sources of discomfort, difficulty, and distress; and included the attitudes and perceptions of the participants toward counseling. For example, comments that pertained to such issues as the relocation from home to Ohio, counseling, family relationships, or monetary concerns were identified in each interview by distinct colors so as to facilitate my recognition of different categories and concepts.

As my analysis of the data continued, I compared and contrasted the coded statements and noted the themes as they began to emerge both from within each interview and among the interviews. I then listed the emerging themes on a separate manuscript page and continued the thematic analysis by exploring each individual transcript to identify the coded data and resultant themes. I extracted quotes and/or passages illustrating the coded category and listed them under the name of the speaker. As the examination of the data revealed new themes, this procedure was continued. For each coded theme the respondents who dealt with the particular theme were identified and illustrative material was included under each theme for the relevant interviewees.
I went through this iterative process four times and grouped the identified themes into a constructed interpretation of the interviewee’s experiences. Some of the material comprising the emergent interpretation was reminiscent of the interview guide. Three of the major themes addressed the research questions; the fourth did not.

When possible a second interview was scheduled with the respondents, during which the identified themes were discussed with the interviewees. The resultant themes and categories are found in the text in Tables 2 through 5 of Chapter Four.

**Member Checks**

As noted earlier, the intent of the second interview was to explore the validity of the coded themes from the respondent’s perspective and to serve as a member check (Highlen & Finley, 1996; Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 1995). Member checking involved using the identified themes to analyze common experiences; it allowed me, in the second interview, to check the three available participants’ perceptions and experiences against those of the others. The goal was to develop a consensus construction of the sojourner experience that was based in the real experience and attitudes of the participants under study (Highlen & Finley).

Without such recognition on the part of those involved in the research process, the validity of the enterprise is
questionable (Seidman, 1998). My co-researchers and I found that the research results not only represented their experiences but also facilitated a greater and more significant understanding of their own experiences (Seidman), either because the experiences of others mirrored their own or because they were familiar through their understanding of the experiences of their peers. This, according to Seidman, helps to establish validity.

_Saturation_

After all initial interviews were reviewed, I decided that eight interviews were sufficient as the thematic data from the interviews had become repetitive and no new themes appeared in the latter interviews. At that time I listed the coded themes and reviewed the earlier interviews once again to see if any themes that emerged subsequent to their review had appeared in these earlier interviews. Appropriate illustrative quotes and comments were added under the corresponding themes and identified by interviewee pseudonym. The review and identification process was deemed complete after repeated perusal of all the transcripts yielded no significant new themes.

_Role Challenges_

My professional mandate as a counselor is to facilitate insight and personal growth by helping clients develop greater self-awareness. By definition the counselor’s role is to go beyond and add to the clients’ self-knowledge.
However, my ethical and professional responsibilities as a researcher were somewhat different. For the researcher the task is to work only within the limits of the co-researcher’s understanding and report of themselves (Seidman, 1998). The key requirement for research purposes is to know and understand the worldview of the co-researchers. As a researcher, I was aware of my ethical responsibility to work only within the limits of my co-researchers’ current understanding and self-report.

Another challenge I faced in conducting this research was the way the participants, my co-researchers, might have viewed me. Because of my role as a staff counselor at the counseling center, participants might have been fearful of disclosing to me out of concern about being judged and/or stigmatized as having problems, especially mental health problems. Additionally, as a clinician I needed to guard against viewing participants’ experiences solely from a problem-based, psychopathological perspective, and instead to consciously try to view them from the perspective of how they conceptualized their experiences in their constructed worldview (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castanada, 1995). My skill and practice at nonjudgmental interviewing served as an asset in this task and aided me in avoiding the above-mentioned potential pitfalls.

An additional challenge was the fact that I am an outsider to the Asian Indian community. This status might
have had an inhibiting effect on participants’ willingness to self-disclose freely. In the event, though, it appears that that status (as well as my co-researchers’ expressed desires to be helpful), rather than inhibiting self-disclosure, actually made it more permissible to discuss difficult and very personal topics. My co-researchers also seemed to want me to understand their experiences, and they expressed the desire to be of assistance to me, a perception that was supported by their willingness to participate in this research study.

Yet, as an outsider, I had no knowledge of the meanings of culturally dictated nonverbal behaviors, nor of the subtleties of communication styles. Consequently I may have missed cues that others more familiar with my co-researchers’ culture might not have missed. Additionally, I needed to be particularly sensitive to boundary issues as to what was acceptable to discuss and what was not (Seidman, 1998). In fact, in one instance a co-researcher did tell me that she was not comfortable discussing the particular line of inquiry I was pursuing, and we changed the topic of discussion to one with which she was more comfortable.

Summary and Conclusions

I employed a qualitative methodology in pursuing the study of Asian Indian students at Ohio University. I used an interpretive/constructivist paradigm to conceptualize my work and to assist me in understanding the participants’
world. My co-researchers were drawn from a convenience sample selected by the snowball method from a pool of full-time graduate students at Ohio University who were born in India, who considered themselves to be Asian Indian, and who were here on student visas. By means of in-depth interviewing, and using an interview guide, I gathered data by audio-recording the interviews, having them transcribed, and coding the data. I then analyzed the data for recurrent themes and patterns, and reconstructed a synthesized study of the experiences of Asian Indian students at Ohio University.

The overall objective of this research project was to provide information on, and an understanding of, why international graduate students in general, and Asian Indian graduate students in particular, underutilize the mental health resources available to them at Ohio University’s counseling center. The emphasis was on understanding this problem from the perspective of the students, the co-researchers, the potential clients. No assumptions were made as to the nature of their concerns or what they might perceive to be the most effective solutions.

Given the nature of the research problem, the most effective methodology for this study was one that relied upon qualitative methods. In situations where the problem is ill-defined and the solution even more so, the only effective remedy is to develop a research program that
allows the subject population, guided by the researcher, to identify the problem and in so doing suggest solutions (Orbe, 2000).
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Conducting the Study

Intent of the Study

My intent in this chapter is to examine the experiences of Asian Indian students who have been engaged in graduate studies on the Athens campus of Ohio University. The first part of the chapter is devoted to a description of the larger universe of individuals from whom the subject population was selected and a description of the characteristics of the small, select group of students who comprise the co-researchers on this project. The second part of the chapter describes the process of conducting the study and organizing the data. The third part is devoted to the presentation, analysis and discussion of data collected from interviews with the select group who comprise the co-researchers on this project. The relevant data came primarily from in-depth, intensive interviews. I employed an interview guide during the interview process; that is, the interviews were semi-structured and not totally open-ended.

Selecting the Sample

The first interviews were conducted during the early part of the summer of 2006. In comparing the sample of participants to the general population I used the statistical data available for the spring 2006 quarter. This period of time was selected for several reasons: (a) the statistical profiles for students enrolled during this
quarter were relatively complete. (b) All co-researchers involved in the study were enrolled during this quarter. (c) This quarter was closest in time to the date the initial interviews were conducted, in July 2006.

The Subject Population

According to the Office of Institutional Research at Ohio University, there were 2,620 graduate students enrolled at the Athens campus of Ohio University in the spring of 2006. Of these 1,290 were male and 1,330 were female. There were 1,868 individuals enrolled in Master’s Degree programs (905 males and 963 females), and 752 students enrolled in Doctoral level courses of study (385 males and 367 females). Individuals classified as international students accounted for approximately 29% of the total, and numbered some 763 individuals. Of these international students 416 were male and 347 were female. The pool of Master’s level students, some 475 individuals in total, was divided almost equally between males (238) and females (237). The largest numbers of male graduate students were affiliated with either the College of Business or the College of Engineering. For females the colleges with the greatest representation were the College of Business and the College of Arts and Sciences. There were 288 doctoral level students, 178 male and 110 female. Male doctoral students were most frequently enrolled in the Russ College of
Engineering, while females were most commonly affiliated with the College of Arts and Sciences.

During the spring 2006 quarter the most common country of origin among international graduate students was India. Out of the more than 700 international students enrolled in graduate programs, 142 were from India (88 males and 54 females). Among Master’s level students there were 71 males and 44 females, with the greatest concentration of both males and females to be found in the College of Business. The second most common affiliation for Indian male graduate students was the College of Engineering; for females it was the College of Arts and Sciences. Doctoral level students totaled 27 (17 males and 10 females), with males most commonly enrolled in the College of Engineering, and females in the College of Arts and Sciences.
Table 1 summarizes the above data on the groups under discussion.

Table 1

**Graduate Students at Ohio University in Spring 2006**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ohio University</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Students</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>1330</td>
<td>2620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from India</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree Students</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from India</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree Students</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from India</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus of this study was a small sample of Asian Indian graduate students drawn from the larger pool of graduate students at Ohio University. These participants were not necessarily representative of the larger group from which they were selected. They were chosen primarily on the basis of convenience, and the snowball method (Weiss, 1994) was used to complete the sample. The largely pragmatic selection process was based on my prior contacts with the Asian Indian community. These included relationships I had already established with a University faculty member and
administrator and with a member of the Indian Students’ Association. Paramount in the selection process was a willingness on the part of co-researchers to participate in a lengthy interview process. Students who had contact with me in my professional role as counselor were explicitly excluded from the study.

Despite limitations imposed by both selection techniques and sample size, the individuals in the sample exhibited characteristics that were in large measure consistent with the larger groups from which they were drawn. Specifically, in total eight persons participated in the interview process, four female and four male. Of the eight, six were enrolled in Master’s degree granting programs of study -- two females and all four of the males. The four males were enrolled in programs in the College of Engineering, and the females were enrolled in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Fine Arts, respectively. There were two doctoral students, both female, who were pursuing degrees through the Colleges of Communication and Arts and Sciences.

In addition to the general statistical measures available on the graduate population of the Athens campus of Ohio University, I collected basic demographic data from my co-researchers as well as other background information I believed might be relevant to the research problems. These characteristics included age, marital status, religion,
specific point of origin in India, family composition and characteristics, number of years at Ohio University, whether there had been prior experience with the U.S.-style educational system before attending Ohio University, prior employment history (if any), whether or not they had been previously educated in the English language, general information concerning when they had decided to study abroad, and whether or not they had had prior experience with counseling. Not all respondents provided information on all of these variables, and in some instances a specific co-researcher provided information on aspects of his or her life and experiences that no one else in the sample provided. In addition, I collected information and recorded my personal observations on the length of the interview, the general demeanor of the co-researcher, their physical appearance, my feelings and impressions of the tenor of the interview, and any other thoughts and feelings I had about both the interviewee and the interview process.

My co-researchers ranged in age from 23 to 38. None of the students identified themselves as being married, and only one interviewee indicated involvement in a significant relationship. Her boyfriend was not a resident of Athens, but was employed and lived in another U.S. state. The participants self-identified with the following religious groups: one Catholic, three Muslims, and four Hindus. All but one of the interviewees identified their point of origin
in India as a “city”. Of these, two mentioned well-known major cities; the others made reference to regions, which presumably meant regional urban centers. The single exception to the urban categorization described home as a “small town just like Athens”.

All but one individual identified their mother tongue as something other than English; the sole exception made no mention of his or her mother tongue. All the participants indicated that they spoke more than one language. Seven of the eight reported that the language of instruction during their school years in India was English, and the remaining individual indicated that English was not the language of instruction until the twelfth grade. All co-researchers indicated that English was the language of instruction during their undergraduate education. One respondent indicated that while she was Hindu by religion, she had been educated in Catholic schools, and several others made mention of attending convent schools.

In all cases comments on family life revealed that all co-researchers had at least one sibling. Four respondents indicated that at least one of their siblings was either working or studying in the United States. One indicated that her parents were divorced and that one parent currently resided outside of India. One respondent indicated that two close relatives were living in a city in Ohio. All but two individuals described their family of origin as consisting
of parents and offspring, one indicated that grandparents had lived with the family until recently, and one specifically mentioned that his family was “not a joint family”. A joint family in many parts of India consists of three or more generations: parents, their adult children, the adult children’s spouses, and offspring living in a single household compound (Nandan & Eames, 1980).

Six of the co-researchers offered information on the occupations of their parents and siblings. These were described as engineer, doctor, lawyer, schoolteacher, government employee, United Nations employee, filmmaker, manager of a bank, employee of a pharmaceutical company, an executive for an international company, and homemakers. Only one respondent identified the caste affiliation of the family. This individual also indicated that only one parent was Indian and that the second parent’s heritage was from an adjacent nation.

Three of the co-researchers indicated that they had been employed, either in India or in the United States, for varying lengths of time before attending Ohio University. All of the interviewees had been at OU for a total of two years. Three had attended other schools in the United States prior to attending OU. The information the interviewees provided regarding the decision to attend school in the United States varied considerably. However, all respondents included some details as to who was involved
in the decision, when it was made, and what was the purpose underlying the decision. Three students mentioned having prior personal experience with counseling; one student reported having had a positive, helpful experience at a college in India, and two reported negative or unhelpful experiences, either at another U.S. university or at OU.

Collecting and Organizing the Data

Collecting the Data

Research Questions

Three major, broadly defined research questions guided the collection and analysis of the data. These areas of interest included: (a) what problems did the students encounter in their experience of being a sojourner? (b) What were the sources of support employed in solving these problems? (c) What were their perceptions of counseling and the counseling center? My primary method of collecting data was through an open-ended form of interviewing that made use of an interview guide structured around these areas of interest.

The research was designed to minimize the impact of a priori categories and definitions on the interview process and on the responses of the interviewees. For example, the interviewees were not asked to identify the problems they encountered in making and implementing the decision to come to the United States. Rather, they were asked to describe and discuss their experiences in this area. This permitted
them to self-select what was important and significant, and to use whatever categories, terms, or definitions they deemed appropriate to discuss their experiences.

In addition to the background and demographic data I collected, I also kept a journal to maximize my awareness of my own biases, expectations, feelings, and prejudices. While all research has elements of subjectivity (Gergen & Gergen, as cited in Morrow & Smith, 2000), bringing to the fore personal perspectives enables a researcher to be more aware of how subjectivity affects the research process.

The data provided in the interviews was analyzed by developing a system of classification, a coding system that allowed for systematic comparisons and contrasts of the interview material. My analysis of the data collected required that I impose some type of logical order on the material, one that reflected both individual and collective experiences, and that might prove instructive for the profession of counseling.

**Organizing the Data**

**Overview of Emerging Themes**

The data presented a number of overarching themes that were then categorized into major groups and subgroups. As patterns emerged in the data, I noticed that some of these patterns tended to reflect the overall guiding questions that were used to start the interviews, such as family background or experiences coming to the U.S. Although each
interview was unique and respondents provided a great deal of direction as the interview developed, I decided to organize the report of the data keeping in mind the questions I initially asked when I used the semi-structured interview guide. One of such area of questioning (see Appendix A) that generated a lot of data became a major theme in the interviews. This centered on the issues the interviewees dealt with in coming to the United States for educational purposes for the first time, or in preparing to return home to India. A number of categories of data fell under this overarching category or theme and the respondents talked at length about these issues. I have labeled this collection of data “transitional issues.”

Transitional issues. Under this broad heading several themes emerged, including such material as parental responses to the decision to study in the United States, adjustment concerns, educational adjustments, monetary concerns, and issues with transportation, among others. (For a schematic representation of the groups and subgroups under this theme, see Table 2.)

Table 2

Transitional Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaving Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Response to Education Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Study Abroad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre- and Post-Arrival Feelings and Thoughts

Awareness of New Environment

Adjustment Issues

Loneliness/Homesickness

Self-Care

Environmental Adjustments

Productivity

Informality

Friendships with Domestic Students

Physical Safety

Educational Adjustments

Timing, Methods of Learning, and Standards

Transportation Issues

Inadequate Public Transportation—The Effects

Monetary Concerns

Funding and University Employment Issues

Re-entry Issues

Ambivalence

Non-financial sources of support. Another set of interview questions, those related to family, heavily overlapped with a second overarching theme, although this theme emerged from many different points in the interviews. This theme centered on non-financial sources of support—that is, what resources my co-researchers utilized that provided them with comfort and support. This broad heading
included such factors as the role of parents, the Indian Students Association, peers, university personnel, and self-reliance. (For a categorization of these factors, see Table 3.)

Table 3

Non-financial Sources of Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indian Students Association and Other Peers</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian Students Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ohio University Personnel</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators, Other Faculty and Programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Self-sufficiency                           |                   |

Counseling and mental health. The third dominant set of issues that emerged was also generated from questions used in the interview guide. These were questions about the respondents’ knowledge and contact with mental health treatment. This line of interviewing also became an overarching theme, that I titled Counseling and Mental Health. As with the other themes, these were also found to

include several sub-themes, which included such issues as their attitudes toward counseling as well as their beliefs about counseling. (For a categorization of these themes, see Table 4.)

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counseling and Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief Counseling Cannot Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Toward Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons to Seek Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling- a last resort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric illness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural beliefs and practices. While the above three overarching themes and sub-themes are related in both indirect and direct ways to the initial research areas and the interview guide, the coding process revealed yet another series of patterns that did not appear to conform to any of the other major themes already discussed, or to the research or interview questions. This thematic group centered on an assortment of cultural beliefs and practices relating to
issues of gender; class, caste, and religion; and dating and marriage. (For a categorization of these themes, see Table 5.)

Table 5

*Cultural Beliefs & Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class, Caste and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating and Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranged Marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to Marry: Marriage or Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerations in Choosing a Mate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation of the Data

Transitional issues

Leaving Home

All eight interviewees identified “transitional issues” as a major topic, and discussed a range of sub-themes. These issues centered on the circumstances and experiences surrounding the decision to study in the United States and the implementation of that plan. Foremost among these were concerns about leaving home and family. “Just leaving your parents and coming all by yourself to a new place, new country, new people from all different races. You never know, you might get into trouble at any time.” (R, p.8) “And leaving mommy’s, and the journey is so far. ... It is really far, 33 hours, it’s unbelievable.” (Z, p.10)

Family response to education abroad. The involvement of family and kin in the decision to study abroad appeared in all interviews, whether or not this involvement was viewed in positive and negative terms.

According to one student the involvement of family in his life was “kind of crappy ... it’s your life and you have to do what you have to do, but then you have relatives coming in and poking their noses.” (R, p. 11) Either having the approval of parents or complying with the wishes of older members of the family was an important part of the decision-making process. One student, for example, encountered opposition from one of his parents; his
grandparents intervened on his behalf and his education abroad experience was sanctioned. In fact, most co-researchers faced the task of convincing their parents to support their coming to study in the U.S. “My parents were shocked, saying, why do you want to go so far? Stay here because there are possibilities over here also.”

I ultimately convinced them that sooner or later I need to go away from them. What if I get married or get a job in some other place in India? At that time I need to move away ... and probably go to Mumbai or to New Delhi, or some other big place. I did some talking and some convincing and finally they agreed upon it. (R, p.8)

While most had to convince the family of the wisdom of their decision, this was not always the case. One respondent had to decide whether or not to acquiesce to his parents’ wishes for him to study abroad, or to follow his own inclinations and remain in India.

The interviews also revealed co-researchers’ awareness of and concern for the impact their departure would have on the family at home. According to one respondent, “the actions you make are closely associated with your relatives.” One individual was so conflicted about his parents being left alone — the only other sibling was already studying abroad — that he did not make the decision until a mere fifteen days before actual departure.
Reasons for study abroad. The motivation behind both the family’s and the individual’s desire to study abroad was related to both pragmatic and status concerns. One respondent, for example, decided to obtain a second Master’s degree in the United States because she was unable to find a job and, from her perspective, the easiest way to get a job in the United States was to be in the United States. For her the decision to become an international student was pragmatic; it was simply easier to obtain a student visa than it was to obtain a work visa. For some the status implication of an overseas education was a factor in the decision to migrate. As one respondent remarked, “going to the U.S. is a revered thing in India.” (J, p.10)

Status considerations were not the only factors involved in this type of aspiration. Simple curiosity about life in the United States, coupled with the desire for a graduate degree, was a major impetus for seeking an education abroad. At least one respondent had a parent who had studied in the United States, and because the parent’s experience had been seen as positive and was reported to be a significant factor in the life of the respondent, the student’s desire to study abroad was viewed as a continuation of an established family pattern. Yet, it was not something that was automatic; this individual reported taking some five years to make and implement the decision.
The specific decision as to where to go and what school to attend was also influenced by both family and status considerations. Several respondents indicated that their choice of Ohio University was made because of proximity of family — siblings or other relatives — as well as a perception that the particular program of study at OU was better than most programs at other institutions, especially those in India. The term “family” in this context did not necessarily mean a narrowly defined nuclear unit, but appeared to be broadly interpreted and widely applied. One respondent, for example described the family as “close-knit” and also commented that distance, genealogical or geographic, did not mean a weakening of ties. She explained that one might not have seen some relatives for over ten years but when meeting them in a different country, family ties remained intact: “you feel comfortable and the time apart disappears.”

At least one person’s decision-making included paid professional assistance in identifying and evaluating the choices available in the field in which he wished to study. In fact, because of personal safety concerns he stayed only briefly at his first choice school. After one quarter he transferred to OU, where a close family member had been enrolled.

Dissatisfaction with aspects of life at home and the belief that the United States, above all other places,
afforded the most opportunities for chosen careers was also evident. Others expressed the belief that institutions accessible to them in India were not as desirable as OU. One person admitted that he failed to be admitted to a more prestigious school in India, and another respondent admitted that OU was the only school that accepted her application. In one instance, the choice had to do not only with the reputation of OU — an internet search had frequently identified OU — but also with a personal encounter; this person had made the acquaintance of an OU professor who had earned her respect on his visit to India.

Pre- and post-arrival feelings and thoughts. Virtually all respondents discussed their feelings about leaving home and arriving in the United States. Often they described themselves as feeling numb, at least during the preparatory and initial stages of their sojourn, and some had reservations about whether or not they had made the correct decision.

I was pretty numb. I was totally blank, no happiness, no scary feeling, nothing. I had no feeling. I was totally numb. Because I was getting what I wanted to do, but at the same time I was also leaving my parents. I was all alone, so I was so scared. I had no feelings. I remember still, the night before my flight, I couldn’t sleep and I was just lying on the bed and thinking am I doing the right thing?
…tomorrow I won’t be in this house … how it is going to be, where I’m going to be, I really have no idea. I wanted to go, but I really didn’t know how it would be at that point. (J, p.6)

I didn’t feel anything. I was numb. I had no feeling. … My father was crying, all my friends came to drop me off, my sisters, I had like fifteen friends come and everybody was crying. I didn’t cry. (P, p.13)

…waiting for my flight … is it a right decision that I took? Now I am leaving. I’m not gonna see my parents at least for a few months, and I don’t know how things are gonna be working here. (V, p.4)

… whatever we hear is from media or internet … things like that. Actually if you don’t have a relative over here with an experience, because there are some other countries where you go where you have to be very careful about going out and things like that, so those were the things that scared me the most. (V, p.4)

The interviewees were also very concerned about some very immediate and practical issues. One individual discussed his thoughts and feelings about being picked up from the airport and how his luggage would be managed.
... the pickup and everything and like three big suitcases I am carrying. So really I don’t know. I didn’t have any idea of how I’m gonna be working out things over there, so that made me a little bit nervous. (V, p.8)

This same person indicated that after arriving at a major airport, in less than optimal weather, and then passing through customs and making an uneventful flight to Columbus, his concern shifted to the town he would be making his new home.

I was feeling which place am I going? It is more dense and more dense, and more trees, like a really small town. ... I saw Chicago and there is a rail running for the connecting and it goes out into the city and then comes back so it gives you a view of ‘oh my god this is America’ and you saw the sky up close and everything and that is the time when I was excited ... I’m in America now and then the Columbus was like OK, so you are not such a big airport but it looked like a nice place and everything, but driving to Athens was ... where are we going to now, a very small place ... how will it be, how things gonna work? (V, p.10)

The size of the Athens community evoked comments and concerns from others.

It just sunk in that I’m here and there’s no way to go back. I didn’t like it, because I come from a very big
city. So I think my drive from Columbus to Athens was the worst drive I’ve ever had. (P, p.13)

... in Bombay, I’m so used to it ... being the most crowded city in the world. It’s much worse than New York even. So you know being used to a very crowded sort of place. When I came here it just felt extremely quiet and scary. (M, p.10)

Awareness of new environment. Adjusting to the differences in the culture of the United States in general, and to Ohio University in Athens in particular, involved a number of issues. For example, three students noted that one of their first observations was that their new environment seemed clean and orderly.

... it just seemed so different. The whole world around me had changed. ... the first time I’d felt something different from India ... everything just so sanitized, just looked so in place and perfect. Whereas in Bombay and India in general, there’s this whole sort of tumble down feeling that you have. It’s a different world. (M, p.9)

... cleanliness and space. There’s a lot of space. And everything’s not cramped. And also that everybody follows the system so well. If there is a trash can
there, no one throws it on the street. In India you make the system and no one follows it. (B, p.24)
For some these characteristics were surprising but also pleasing.

... with the way the roads are constructed and the infrastructure. I was particularly interested with the way traffic moves in the U.S. ... I was really impressed by the system and how the roads are in the U.S. You just catch the interstate and then take the exit. That really surprised me a lot and interested me a lot. In India things haven’t really happened that way especially with transportation. Nobody is really concerned with the way you need to move about, so a lot of accidents happen. I’m really surprised with having so many rules and regulations and so much infrastructure in the U.S. Everything is so systematic and organized. (R, p.17)
Yet this same individual was equally surprised by the frequency with which accidents occurred despite the apparent order.

Adjustment Issues

Loneliness/homesickness. After arriving in Athens, the interviewees faced another set of transitional issues that included loneliness and/or homesickness, financial or monetary concerns, and other practical difficulties, as well as the task of adjusting to the differences in the culture
and educational system. Although six students indicated that they experienced some degree of loneliness and homesickness, only two indicated that these feelings lasted more than a day or so, and in these cases such feelings emerged during their initial stays in the United States and not specifically at OU. “Initially you always miss your family. I’ve been with my parents since I was born, and even in my undergraduate years I stayed with my mom. I wasn’t in a dorm, so I was very attached to my parents.” (R, p.13)

Only one individual indicated that this period lasted about three to four months and had an effect on her studies. This occurred during her first sojourn to the U.S.

... but the thing that I was alone out here and I had to manage everything. The loneliness, all that made it a factor that affected my studies a bit. For me it was also my first time away from home. ... I’m very much attached to my family, so missing my Dad and Mom was very bad at that point. ... I couldn’t concentrate sometimes ... for the first three or four months, whenever I was to call my parents I would start crying ... like ten minutes I would cry and tell my dad OK, I’ll call you back ... it was that bad that I couldn’t talk itself... .I would sit in the house alone and just in the room. I didn’t know what to do. Even though I had a roommate, she would be by herself. I had nobody to talk to. (J, p.8)
Another interviewee indicated that after arriving at a nearby major city she went to stay with a family member for several days and subsequently was brought to Athens and dropped at another Indian’s home. It was only after she left her family that she experienced any homesickness. The lack of extended periods of homesickness was also attributed to the fact that as you become older you become more accustomed to change. Another interviewee reported only one day of feeling lonely.

... and when I came here, I came one week late, so everybody was busy in their work. Because, obviously, quarter had started and I came after everything, so nobody had the time to talk to me; my colleagues also because they didn’t know me. So yes, on the first day I knew nobody and I was sitting in front of home for like 12 hours ... then my roommate came. (VG, p.9)

For some any loneliness was attributed to the newness of the situation. One respondent reported that during her first night in the United States she was very lonely.

I didn’t know anybody. My first night was a nightmare. I don’t ever want to live it again. Oh, I cried the whole night. I didn’t sleep. I cried and cried, and I cried and I cried, and I cried. We didn’t know if there was somebody we could turn to or anything. (Z, p.10)
However, she indicated that the transition to Athens, her second sojourn as an international student, went very smoothly and she attributed her previous experience to the fact that “travelers just have fears, miss home and feel homesick.” Interviewees did indicate that it might have been helpful if they could have talked to someone about their initial experiences. Yet others indicated that they never experienced any homesickness at all and attributed it to just keeping very busy.

... I still say there’s lots to do and I don’t think you can get homesick. ... I kept myself busy and I did so many things. Every hour I did something or the other and I studied. ... Always you’re busy, so you are not thinking. So whenever you’re busy you don’t get time to worry. (B, p.21)

For some the easy access to family via the telephone was of great comfort. “When I’d just came here, for the first two or three weeks, I was always on the phone talking. But later it got easier with my work.” (V, p.5) At least one individual never mentioned experiencing loneliness or homesickness; she did, however, refer to being alone. For some the mere idea that overseas flight made home accessible within a day was not only a comfort but also an important resource in convincing family that studying in the United States would be a positive experience.
**Self-care.** Other adjustments required by the new setting evoked both positive and negative reactions and comments. Providing for one’s own basic needs was for some both surprising and difficult. “Here you have to do some cooking, washing, going to school and everything. You are totally independent and back home you got food on the table ready. It’s a lot easier. …” (V, p.5)

For some it was the absence not only of family but also of servants and household help that was notable.

… that is difficult for us, but the concept here is different. They have all the facilities to make the things easy. Like in India, you have a servant come, he will take your clothes, he will wash, and he’ll hang out in the sun, and then they will press it and they keeping your cupboard back ready, but here you have to plan. Like tonight I have to do laundry. … But here, like here you have washing machines … and dryers. (V, p.14)

You got to earn money to survive, and then you have to do things just to survive; all those things. You know, do your own laundry. (R, p.15)

...in India my mom used to do most of my things for me like cooking, washing silverware, clothes, everything would be done by a servant and cleaning the house would
be done by a servant back in India. All you had to do was study by yourself and just enjoy life, but over here it’s so different ... doing your own chores. (R, p.12)

Once adjustment to these new types of circumstances was accomplished, some individuals came to appreciate the new situation and to extol its virtues. One respondent, for example, admitted that while there were appliances in India, they were not as mechanized and were a lot more time-consuming to operate. The utility of convenience foods came to be valued, even while respondents admitted that home-prepared foods such as that available in India were of higher quality. Even fast food seemed to have its place in the life of some of these students.

The pattern that seemed to characterize the respondents’ attitudes toward providing for one’s own basic needs was related to whether or not they had exposure to these circumstances prior to enrolling at OU. Interviewees who had gone away from home to attend school prior to coming to OU did not find caring for themselves as onerous as did those who had to make this initial adjustment at OU. “I was away also from the home in my undergrad... . I was also taking care of me back in India. ... Once you’re out of your home you have to take care of everything from the food – clothes, everything yourself.” (VG, p.19)
**Environmental adjustments.** There were indications that the respondents missed their native cuisines but knew that if they wanted Indian food they would have to cook it themselves. This was contrasted to the home setting where such foods were easily available for purchase. While some indicated that they enjoyed cooking for themselves, others realized it was a necessity, a necessity that, at least for males, would disappear once they were married.

**Productivity.** Work and school environments were seen as notably different from those of the home culture. The pace of work was seen as different. One respondent remarked, "the work environment and hecticness. All the other countries are a little more relaxed, but America is on the toes. OK two hours here, two hours to finish up this." (B, p. 25)

**Informality.** Respondents also noted the difference in degree of formality at school and at work. For example, respondents commented on the informal manner in which people in the United States address each other.

... the relationship over here between a teacher and student or an elder and younger is more frank as compared to what it is in India. Because we respect a lot and I mean, they also respect, I’m not saying that they don’t respect, but they talk more frankly. They will address them by their names but we will never do that thing in India. That is some of the small things
that we learned over here, after coming here. But still, I don’t call my advisors by name, I still like to call them like Dr. "--". he has told me you can directly call me my family name, but I can’t do that, like it’ll take time. (V, p.16)

Friendships with domestic students. Cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding of the motives and intentions of others was also noted. One student complained of not understanding the new rules of friendship. “For American friends, I was friends with them, but it was a lot different. Like I couldn’t figure out what they mean, or what their culture is, or what their understanding about things is and they couldn’t understand me.” (J, p.5)

Physical safety. Other issues that emerged in the interviews were such things as personal safety. One student indicated that he had transferred to OU after other Indian students had been assaulted at his previous school. Another student, referring to her off-campus housing reported,

I don’t think I feel safe. ... I don’t think people really care here. They are very formal and you meet them in the hall, you say ‘How’s it going?’ but will they really stop and ask you? No, it’s just a manner of speaking and you’re not going to stop and say oh my day was bad, my dog died. You’re just going to say oh it’s fine. (P, p.16)
Educational Adjustments

Timing, methods of learning, and standards. One of the more talked about areas with respect to adjustment issues was the difficulties encountered in the transition from one educational system to another.

We in India have a different system of studying. We don’t have exams every week or the professor doesn’t decide how the course work is. ... You have a term ending and an exam at the term ending so your performance at the term ending matters ... weekly classes and your assignment if you do good or don’t ... doesn’t matter; it’s not counted towards your performance. ... Here it’s different. Here every assignment counts toward your performance. ... I didn’t realize that initially so in a few of my classes, in a few of my first assignments, I didn’t do good and it affected my performance.... But this time, I was aware about it. I was doing well in all my assignments so it didn’t stress me out on studies too much. So that was the difference. (J, p.13)

Differences in how performance is measured were particularly significant for these students because an individual’s performance is seen as reflecting on the entire family and young people are judged on their academic performance. Particularly significant was the number of exams per quarter and the fact that each counted toward a
final grade. In India the acquired knowledge was only evaluated once per semester.

... getting used to the kind of education in the U.S. which is so different to India, so that really take a lot of time. ... Our semester system was like four and a half months but OU’s quarter system is about two and a half months so that’s really challenging. (R, p.24)

“In India, everybody can literally learn the whole book by rote. You don’t have that much time here.” (B, p.34) Yet one co-researcher appreciated the change. “It’s very different the way classes are structured in India. It just seemed like fun stuff (here) ... even if I was reading a textbook, it didn’t seem like I was studying. I felt like I was reading. So the studying part didn’t seem like an effort.” (M, p.13)

Perceived differences in what exactly were acceptable standards for English proficiency emerged as problematic. Two students complained that they had to retake the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) after they arrived at OU.

I find this thing particularly weird in OU. You are supposed to do another test for English which is kind of weird since you pass the TOEFL and they ask you to take another test. It is a waste of money, as well as a waste of time. ... I don’t like that kind of system. You’re OK, but that’s beforehand and now you’re made to
take the test again. Suddenly something goes wrong and then you’re in trouble. (V, p.5)

For at least one student the retest presented a problem; he missed the cutoff by two points and was made to take English classes. His advisor was out of town and when he returned two quarters later, the student was told that he no longer had to take remedial classes. He indicated a great deal of dissatisfaction with this experience, stating that he had not come to the United States to study English. For students who had studied in the United States prior to attending OU, the adjustment to the school and system went more smoothly.

Though the differences between educational systems are notable, and one system does not appear inherently more stressful than the other, some students perceived the type of learning described as characteristic of India as “full of pressure”. This perceived pressure may relate to the reportedly public way in India in which one’s academic progress was followed by the family and in some cases shared with their neighbors. How one family member performs, according to my co-researchers, reflects on the entire family, and young people are judged on their academic performance. Thus it is incumbent upon students to do their best so as to bring honor to the family and to avoid publicly shaming and embarrassing them.
Transportation Issues

Issues related to the practicalities of transportation were a significant concern for these students; seven of the interviewees voluntarily spoke about this area. Their comments and observations of the issues involving transportation covered a variety of concerns, including problems encountered in moving about campus-related facilities and issues relating to off-campus housing, among others. One of the respondents felt that the campus escort service was lacking in critical ways, particularly in the absence of a driving escort and the limitations imposed by having only a walking escort system that was limited to the immediate campus area.

Why isn’t there a campus escort service? Why is there just the walking escort? Other universities can afford a driving escort. I have walked at night from The Ridges alone because I had no option. Even the walking escort is just for campus. (P, p.32)

Inadequate public transportation—the effects. The absence of adequate public transportation or access to a car was problematic for several respondents. While some acknowledged that public transportation had improved during their stay at OU, transportation remained a problem, if not the largest problem, for some. “I think the transport thing ... big problem - at least for me and my roommates and many of my friends.” (J, p.16)
One thing about my encounters out here was the public transport. ... because when I came here, still I don’t have a car. I have to rely on other people to go anywhere; I have to ask for favors, which is not a good feeling. Even though they are my friends, how much can one person do? (J, p.15)

That’s a big problem here. That’s my only, that’s the only problem I have here, because if I can’t leave a half hour, it takes me a half hour to walk. ... But yeah, I mean, public transport is not so good here. (Z, p.46)

For some the move to off-campus housing was made possible by acquiring a car. “Now I have a car, so it’s not a problem to drive up and down.” (V, p.11) One female student, in comparing her ability to access Indian foods to that to the corresponding ability of male students, remarked, “of course, you see, they are more mobile, they have a car. I don’t have a car. They go and buy the food; they can go to the Indian stores often. They can do all of those things. I don’t have that much of leeway.” (Z, p.16)

Transportation was also problematic because it was perceived as promoting a dependency on others that some respondents apparently found uncomfortable. One respondent chose to minimize his requests for rides and chastised his
fellow students, especially the females, for requesting assistance.

It is better that I walk. I won’t ask people for lifts. Do your own walk and get along. This is the thing with most Indian students and Indian mentality. Most of them will be at least a little bit lazy; it’s there in all of them; we are a little bit lazy. Most of the girls ask the seniors with cars ok take me here, take me there but I just do my own stuff and get along. Then when it’s required and then I ask like if I need to go to Columbus or whatever. (B, p.26)

In addition, co-researchers felt that transport problems interfered with their ability to participate in extracurricular activities both on and off campus. They felt these activities would have broadened their experience of both domestic and other international cultures. They also felt the lack of transportation options restricted their ability to expand their social circles past the Indian student community.

Monetary Concerns

_Funding and university employment issues._ Financial issues clearly loomed large for these students. For some, having to pay one’s own expenses and/or having a job in order to provide for one’s own needs was a new experience. "You don’t work while you are studying. It is like that
culture in India. After coming here, it was like working, doing all your stuff, going to college, attending class, doing assignments, coming to library. …" (V, p.15)

For all respondents, with the exception of one student who had been admitted with an assistantship, the issue of funding one’s education was perhaps the biggest challenge. Among all the experiences and situations they encountered during their initial adjustment to their new environment, co-researchers seemed most seriously and persistently daunted by this obstacle. Their estimation of what it cost them to pay out of pocket for an academic quarter ranged from $5,000.00 to $8,000.00 U.S., “which is a really large amount when converted to Indian currency.” (V, p.12) This sentiment was shared by other students. One student remarked that “the hardest thing was, I think I will go back to the financial thing. That was the hardest thing I found after coming here - finding a scholarship.” Another indicated that financial insecurity given the costs of OU was very problematic, at least initially.

One student indicated that he believed that most graduate students were eventually fully funded.

99% of grad students are funded here. It’s a very rare commodity that somebody’s not funded, but we were one of the few who even actually paid for the first quarter. And completely paid $8,000.00 or whatever it
is in cash. That’s a big amount in terms of India; a big amount, a very, very big amount. (B, p.21)

Ohio University was perceived as relatively expensive compared to other universities. “This university has a very high tuition fee as compared with other universities. It is like six or seven thousand for one quarter. That is like whole year fees for other universities.” (V, p.12) Obtaining the financial resources to survive, then, was one of the first and most difficult tasks confronting these students.

I remember my emails to my mom and everyone always said about how great it was to be here because for the first time I was totally enjoying what I was studying. Uh, but then I was also kind of scared because financially we were supposed to pay the fee for the first quarter. And that was like very scary because it was like 5,000 and some odd dollars. And that was very scary. And I was just totally preoccupied with that and trying to make ends meet at that point. (M, p.12)

Respondents sought funding from multiple sources and through multiple methods. Some went personally to individual departments for assistance.

But then I did try a lot. I looked all over campus for funding. OU has an option to get ‘out of departmental’ funding which is a very good option in terms of getting a GA or something like that, and that’s how almost
everyone in OU is funded. I’d literally gone to every secretary to see if they had any work. ... (B, p.22)

Others wrote letters to various departments seeking employment.

So, I just tried my level best and applied to all different departments. I used to follow up almost every day. ... I used to ask people, I used to mail professors. I probably mailed 250-300 professors. ... I asked them if they had any jobs for me, maybe on an hourly basis to start with and based on my performance maybe they could fund me for subsequent quarters. (R, p.15)

It should be noted these students were prohibited by the types of visas they held from finding employment off campus. Consequently, several students sought employment in the dining halls; they often found this type of work very physically tiring and demanding. “The first three weeks that I was here I worked at a dining hall. ... It was so tiring.” (M, p.13) According to one co-researcher, the work was also demeaning and undesirable. Two female students worked in India before embarking on their education abroad in order to be financially independent from their families.

... and I think I stayed for five years. I would have left earlier. I stayed for five years for the money. You need financial security; you need to have that. (Z, p.8)
... The two reasons that helped transition being very easy this time than last time ... one of course is financial security, because I am not dependent on my parents for finances any longer. I have my own finances; last time I was very much dependent on my parents. If I needed extra money, I had to ask my father and that makes things very difficult. Especially if you want to make decisions and you want to do things, you know... He has to approve, plus it slows down. They also look upon you as an adult now, because you have your financial stability and you can make your own decisions. (Z, p.9)

I wasn’t having a stipend like here in OU so it was a big issue for me here. Because it happens that now I’m independent and I don’t want my parents to pay for me. This is my decision that I wanted another Master’s here; I have to fight my way out through and somehow survive. I don’t want to ask my parents for money, so yeah, money was an issue out here. It has been since the day I’ve come here. (J, p.1)

Those who were unfamiliar with the system indicated that they felt their lack of experience and knowledge of how things worked hampered their efforts to find funding. Prior experience with the academic world in this country mitigated the difficulties of finding funds. One individual indicated
that she was able “to fight it because I know the system.” Experience also helped because the student was better prepared financially when she arrived for her second stay as an international student than she had been for her first sojourn.

Most respondents obtained some type of financial support and reported that the ability to find such sources and to earn money gave them more confidence about themselves and their potential. After the first quarter, which was perceived to be the most difficult because of the lack of university funding, the students reported that they believed that most graduate students would eventually find appropriate funding from the university. This did not mean they did not report financial difficulties, but generally they saw their situation as notably improved.

... here you can see even after two, three quarters, after one or two quarters they normally get funding, every guy. You have to look around and you have to work a little bit hard, but ultimately you can have it, if you look around. (VG, p.7)

The first quarter I paid the whole fees completely, and I think if people can afford it, and can pay and even manage it, or work here for one quarter, by paying the fees, OU eventually, definitely funds you. ... It’s a
very rare commodity that somebody ... [is] not funded. (B, p.21)

But later it got easier with my work, but I didn’t have the funding at the beginning so I had to struggle for it. That first quarter was very hard for me but after that, the winter quarter I got my funding and I was set. (V, p.5)

Re-entry issues

Last but not least among the transitional issues were concerns and issues related to the anticipated re-entry into life in India.

... the longer you stay in a particular place, you try to feel that’s your home. When you go out of that place, you feel sad. I’m sure it’ll happen to me when eventually I leave Athens and go to some other place because right now Athens is like home to me.... (R, p.19)

Differing material conditions between the United States and India was another area that drew comments and consideration.

... the driving - the roads are better; it’s overall better, like the means of living, the standard of a person over here is much higher than what it is in India. Like in India still we got facilities of getting an air conditioning and everything, but you don’t have
a handle of the electricity, if you don’t have electricity it does not work, if you have an A/C or not. (V, p.25)

Opportunities and experiences that promoted personal growth were also commented upon.

In India I was very conservative and I don’t know if I was ready to go out and speak to … to start a conversation, things like that. Which I felt after coming here it is more easier to (do)… . Here I got some of the experience that really helped me to raise my confidence as compared to what (it) was there, because it was caring and nourishing over there, and it was like independent here. So it’s made a lot of difference. (V, p.24)

Yet this same individual acknowledged that he would return permanently to India. “I don’t mind. If my mom calls and say(s) like come back, so I’m gonna go back. But yeah, the life here is better, I would say that.” (V, p.25)

Another respondent, in her second sojourn from India to the United States, acknowledged that there had been readjustment problems.

After I went home it took me some time to readjust out there also, because it’s a lot different. Being here totally independent, and even though my parents had given me the independence out there that I need there, it’s still not what I was here. (J, p.4)
Just as loneliness for family marked the first stages of life in the Untied States, loneliness for friends, Indian friends who had become a second family, characterized her return to India. Moreover, familiarity and comfort with life in the United States influenced the desire to return.

I wanted to come back, definitely. Because by that time, two years I’d spent here, and by that time, I had got acquainted with this culture and I really wanted to come back here. My aim was to come back here and kind of working and getting more experience here. So I was applying not for universities, but applying for jobs here constantly. (J, p.9)

Other factors that influence the decision to pursue a life in the United States were the independence U.S. life afforded in comparison to India, and the fact that employment opportunities and the experiences provided were better in this country than in India.

I decided that this was the place I really wanted to gain some work experience also. Working there and working here was totally different. Because people out there are not ready yet to accept (my field). They want to work on it but that is not the priority right now ... so I thought I should come back to the U.S. (J, p.2)
Ambivalence. Yet, for those for whom this is a first sojourn abroad, such sentiments often were characterized by a degree of ambivalence and uncertainty. One student remarked:

I don’t know down the lane, five years from now, what my plan will be. India is growing up very fast and what I hear from my friends is like the lifestyle they’re living is much better than what I am here, so I really don’t know down the lane. (J, p.22)

Others indicated similar sentiments.

Yeah, ultimately I want to go back. But I come here actually for getting good experience, so it would be nice if I could get some experience over here for a while and then go back. But at the same time if I’m offered a good job in India it would be great. ... technology is really advanced over here, so it will be a good experience to be here for a while and like two - three years and then go there. (VG, p.18)

I would like to work in America for some time for sure. But then, (working in my field in India) can be so tempting, I don’t know for sure yet. (M, p.16)

And, I think it’s really good if you spend like six months in your country and then you go back six months travel and come back. That’s the best; that’s the most
fun. I’d like to do that. That would be ideal, but …

ahh, I think America is good, I think I’m getting the
hang of it now. And I’m getting used to the life here.
(B, p.14)

There was at least one student whose commitment to
family and whose belief that her education could be well
utilized in India precluded the possibility of remaining in
the United States. According to this student, her
dissertation “topic is such that its applicability and worth
will be in my country.” Additionally, her return was
necessitated by the fact that her parents “don’t have a son.
I am the son. I have to be where they are.” (Z, p.51)

Non-Financial Support

Family

A second set of themes that emerged from the data
centered on the types of support these students sought and
from whom and under what sets of circumstances they sought
out support. Support came from a variety of sources,
although at least initially family, and in particular
parents, often figured prominently in their social support
networks.

Parents. Parents and other family members were involved
in making decisions, among other things. Family was
perceived as a group of persons who take care of you, who
look out for your best interests, and with whom you can
discuss a myriad of issues.
Yea, my mom and my dad, both of them. They know everything. I don’t think there’s anything to hide. I don’t know why, it just makes more sense if you tell them. And because we were all in one house with my grandparents, we always talk and you always share everything. Everybody did that. And because we were one small family, just four or six of us... . That’s it; we used to share everything. (B, p.4)

These students relied on their parents’ judgment, including judgments as to who else they could trust. “Just because my mom, my family knew his family so I could trust him basically.” (P, 12) They had faith that their parents had their best interests at heart, even if they disagreed at times with these judgments. For example, one student commented that despite her father’s preference that she remain in India for schooling, he put her happiness and desires ahead of his own.

He wants me to be happy and he wasn’t happy seeing me unhappy there (on her return to India) so he was like ok, fine, go ahead. So now it’s ok. And now, because of internet chatting, it’s easier to be in touch. Much better like everyday I chat to him, I have to. It gives him a feel that we’re still in touch and connected, so it helps a lot. (J, p.13)

In maintaining contact others also noted that contemporary forms of communication permit frequent,
continuous, and relatively inexpensive contact with family and others despite geographic distance. This was done over the Internet or telephone and was particularly important during periods of transition.

I came here and at around 7:30 or 8. My friend said take a cell phone and call back home. So he helped me to buy a calling card to India. In India it’s not so easy to go online and buy things like it is over here so I didn’t have a credit card, no debit card or anything, what I had was just cash and traveler’s checks. So he purchased the calling card for me and I used that to call India and everybody was like ok you’re safe, how was your travel? (V, p.11)

But nowadays it’s become so easy. You just buy a calling card and call. Now so probably being homesick is not as much of an issue. … (R, p. 23)

Because of all the communication through the Internet and e-mail, it doesn’t even seem like you’re not there. Because you are talking, or I mean you describe your voice message, or instant messaging or whatever it is, you don’t feel it. (B, p.18)

The two respondents who had attended school in the United States in the late 1990s remarked on how much cheaper and easier it is now, in comparison to less than ten years ago, to maintain contact with family.
Parental involvement appeared to provide non-directive guidance. Respondents commented upon their parents’ role in guiding their development.

She just encouraged me to be the way I am. She didn’t force me in any specific direction. And even when I was unsure of something, she let me explore that uncertainty for myself – that I’d know what it was about it that I didn’t want to do ... it sort of gave me direction, that sort of laid the foundation for any other problem I had in my life. To see how to improve on things and to not sort of dwell on the bitterness of it. (M, p.6)

Now they all talk it over. Most of them do talk it over. It’s not like you are wrong or you are right, because ... they talk it over. About everything they talk it over, if you discuss it, it is always better. ... You decide. You have to take your decision. You’ll get all the advice possible. ... It is just to help you make the right decision. So you get both, you get the disagreements and the agreements and then you decide what you think is the best. It’s not like you can take anyone’s word. ... You have to decide now ... either both of the decisions are fine or one is wrong, one is right. It will be like they’ll say OK we agreed to this but we are not very happy with it, but we’ll be fine.
It’s still up to you. Then the other one they’ll say, we’ll be really happy with this one if you do it that way, so. So you have to see what your priorities are, what you want. (B, p.32)

_Siblings_. Parents were not the only family members these students turned to for support and help; for some, siblings were equally, and sometimes more important. “For any problems obviously, over here my brother first. For any decision, I ask first him. What should we do? I do – what should I do?” (VG, p. 15) The reason a student prefers a sibling to a parent for help and discussion can be related to a desire not to cause undue stress to parents because of concerns for their parents’ health or age. Another factor that influenced whether the student sought help from family at home, family here, or more distant and impersonal forms of support may be related to the public nature of school performance. The respondents indicated that in India an individual’s academic progress was known not only to family but sometimes to neighbors as well.

**Indian Students Association and Other Peers**

Peers—either people encountered in formal settings or those encountered in a less structured setting—also provided support and help.

**Indian Students Association.** The most well-developed network of support came from the Indian Students Association (ISA). This peer-to-peer network sets up Internet groups for
incoming students, arranges for students to be picked up from the airport or the bus station in Columbus, transports them to Athens and arranges temporary accommodations until they can find more permanent lodging. I was told that one expects to provide assistance to others but to draw attention to the fact that you are providing the aid lessens the value of the help provided.

ISA support begins even before a student is admitted to Ohio University. This organization sponsors an Internet group that provides incoming students with information, and in some of the larger cities of India, enables students to meet before leaving home and to arrange aspects of their life in the United States. They may, for example, arrange to rent an apartment and live together.

...there’s an Indian Student Association website in the OU website itself. And ah, how did I first establish, how did I first come to know it? Well I think I knew about it even before I got admission here. Because I had been obviously checking out, looking, and thoroughly scanning what all is there. (M, p.2)

On Yahoo groups, you can join on those groups and if someone, like there are fifteen students coming and they all join that same group, so if someone has a question and everybody can see that question and what is the answer to that question. One of the operators
can give the answer to them. And everybody can (see it) 
... it just reduces the number of questions because out 
of fifty, twenty-five will have the same question and 
they will ask at the different point of time so we try 
to organize them such a way that everybody has plenty 
of knowledge about what is here, what they need to 
bring, what they will be needing, or what they should start doing. (V, p.20)

Three students mentioned how much they appreciated 
the assistance given by ISA and indicated that they would 
be willing to extend a helping hand to others. As new 
members arrive, older members reduce their involvement in 
the association and turn over leadership positions to 
those more junior than themselves. “Students, students helping each other. When I became second year, I did the 
same for my juniors who were coming in, so it was just 
kind of rolling over kind of thing.” (J, p.7)

Not all Indian students were active in the 
association or chose to avail themselves of what it had to offer.

I have one Indian friend, but most of my friends are 
not Indian ... because there are none in my program and none in the classes I take, so how do you meet people? And I somehow always miss the Indian festivals. ... I didn’t (connect with the Indian Student Association). Many people do that and that’s
a wonderful thing. They tell me that not only do they pick them up from the airport, they take them to a house and they keep them there and all of that. No I didn’t. I went straight to the boarding hall. And also because I can’t just stay anywhere, you know. I’m kind of particular about where I’m going to stay. I have to know the people, and I think that’s just the upbringing, the sheltered upbringing, which I’ve endured. (Z, p.45)

Nor did all co-researchers have positive experiences with fellow Indian students. One student took advantage of the ISA airport pick-up, but her experience in other arenas was not positive. For example, she felt she had been tricked by her roommates into signing a lease that committed her to an apartment for a year. Thus while some co-researchers felt very supported by the Indian community, this sentiment was not shared by all.

Peers. The ISA is not the only source of peer support for new students. Other peers, who are not necessarily of Indian background, can also be major sources of support. One student commented that during her first sojourn in the U.S. she had only a few American friends and the majority of her friends were Indian. The group provided the basis for her community and helped her a great deal in the adjustment process, and she came to view them as a second family. This
was not the case during her second trip to the United States.

Basically I’m now comfortable in this country; I know things. I don’t have to stick to my community or people from my background. I’m now trying to know people from other countries, not just from America. People from Russia, Ukraine, London. Other people, like trying to know their way of living. And to a very large extent I’ve found that many countries have the same roots as we do, so even though we are from different places it’s very similar somewhere. It’s very nice knowing things like that. Being in OU this time, I’ve made a lot of international friends. I’ve got to know a lot of American people and what they actually are which I didn’t explore... . I was too much into my own group kind of. Even though I have a group from my country out here, I still have another group, which is like all internationals and Americans and stuff like that. (J, p.14)

Friendships. For many just talking and spending time with friends is helpful, especially during the initial adjustment when there are likely to be more difficulties than after they are settled. At least one respondent indicated that peers tend to become more important over time because one’s peers are more likely to share an understanding of their situations and problems. A tendency
to rely on friends rather than family generally and parents in particular was in part motivated by a desire not to burden or worry parental figures. An exception to that would be a situation that involved a family matter or subject that would not be discussed outside the family circle.

Ohio University Personnel

Respondents also reported making use of university personnel as sources of support. Faculty advisors, particular administrators and staff, and in some cases entire programs were mentioned as significant. The support was often at a very practical level. Many appreciated the efforts of program faculty and advisors in securing funding for them. “After coming here, after about two weeks or so, my director somehow managed to fund me, give me the tuition waiver, not the stipend.” (J, p.12)

I didn’t want to call my parents again for such a large amount of money, so my advisor gave me funding. I worked with him for the end of winter break and at that time he decided to give me the funding. So I got funding for winter quarter, I got funding and then life became easy. (V, p.12)

Advisors. Others appreciated the emotional support given by their advisors for a variety of problems. One respondent, returning for her second sojourn as a student in the United States, was highly ambivalent about her decision to continue her studies in this country.
It’s difficult; so I was on the phone with my mother a lot saying, did I do the right thing? I am confused. But I didn’t tell her too much because I didn’t want to upset her. But my advisor helped a lot because I told him did I do the right thing, you know? Leaving a steady job, leaving income, leaving everything and being a student again…. (Z, p.52)

Another respondent mentioned the support her advisor provided after she suffered a traumatic experience. Yet, this same individual was also aware that such support was not assured for future difficulties, and recognized that her advisor had self-interests to protect.

Administrators, other faculty and programs.

Administrative personnel, faculty members from departments other than the student’s, and the entire department or program in which the student was enrolled were also mentioned as being sources of support.

…the people I met … they were really nice. They made me feel so much at home. … It’s like a home environment in the school. It’s like a family because it’s not that big of a school. So I mean it’s in a pretty old building as well. It doesn’t make you feel quite as impersonal. (M, p.15)

I’ve been mostly interacting with those people … they are the most friendly. They give you a good advice and
they never tell you you’re wrong but they will guide you in the right way so that you don’t hurt, and still you know what is the right thing to do. That is the best part I like about it. They really want us to do better in our lives so sometimes they talk about their experiences, so those are the things that help in becoming a good friend with those people and getting that kind of good experience. (V, p.15)

Self-Sufficiency

Last but certainly not least among the sources of support that emerged from the interview data was the self-reliance, resilience, and internal strength that these students manifest. In response to feelings of loneliness, or of being overwhelmed by the difficulties encountered, co-researchers reminded themselves that it was their choice to study abroad and that there was much to be gained through the experience. They did not want to “just lose that and give up everything and go home.” At times continued resolve involved internal struggle, but they showed determination. “I have to fight my way through and somehow survive.” (J, p9)

This determination extended to all areas of life, including some very central and critical areas. In speaking about her difficulty finding funding, one respondent remarked, “Even if I don’t have funding and I have to fund myself, somehow I’ll figure out and I’ll
One’s own resolve and determination was seen as critical.

That’s how it works out; you need to be persistent. Otherwise it’s not going to work out. I guess it’s particularly so in the U.S., the more persistent you are the better your chances are either to get a job or to get funding in academics. That pretty much shows that you’re interested in working and you’re doing your level best. (R, p.15)

Even seemingly negative experiences were seen as beneficial on some level. “As luck would have it, I never got any funding. I guess as a result it made me more mentally tough and secure and as they say, whatever happens, happens for a good reason.” (V, p.15)

Some of them do crib about, you know, Athens being a small place. But it’s there in India, you have to believe in your own destiny and you don’t have to crib about it, but you just have to go with it and enjoy what you have been doing. (R, p.2)

“I accept when I have messed up and even in the experience of messing up there are things that I can learn from it and grow and mature.” (B, p.12)

I really want to do something. I’m doing this because I have a conviction in my mind, but actually I’m at the point in time where I couldn’t care. I’m doing it
because I believe in it and you can think what you like; it’s really up to you. (Z, p. 53)

Counseling and Mental Health

The third theme that emerged from the interview process was related to the role of counseling in particular, and to mental health issues in general in the lives of the co-researchers.

Lack of Knowledge

The students who were interviewed for this study reported a lack of knowledge of the counseling center and its functions. Six out of the eight co-researchers stated that they had been unaware of the existence of a counseling center on campus. At least one interviewee reported that her first experience with the counseling center had come during the interview process. “The first time I heard about it, from you.” She explained her ignorance of the topic: “I told you we’re so asleep (during orientation). Honestly, you’re dead after all that flying. Some things just go out of your head. Although I was taking notes, must be there in my notes somewhere.” (Z, p.36)

Another co-researcher, while trying to recall any information she had previously been exposed to, indicated that she might have been given information about the center during the international student orientation presentations. However, the information she was recalling actually had to do with the services for the disabled that were available on
campus. Comments such as “I, actually, I haven’t explored, I mean I haven’t looked it up at all” (M, p.18) or “I, until now, haven’t heard much about the counseling” (V, p.22) illustrate the pervasive lack of knowledge about the center. One co-researcher generalized to all Indian students by stating, “Right now we’re not really sure, especially Indian students, we don’t know about it.” (R, p.22)

Of the two individuals who indicated that they knew about and had used the counseling center, one had actually confused the counseling service with the student medical service, and the other (who in fact had used the service) indicated that she had not found the process helpful.

But I don’t think even if you speak to somebody, nobody can be in your shoes. They can’t experience what you’re experiencing. (P, p.21)

Belief Counseling Cannot Help

Several students expressed this perception and attitude toward counseling services. “It’s not what they do or didn’t do; it didn’t help me because I needed family here or something. That would have helped a lot. They tried helping me out but it didn’t work out, that was it.” (J, p.4)

So, even if you’re talking to somebody, I don’t know how much that helps. Maybe they can say something nice and make you feel comfortable, but you alone have to face these situations. (P, p.21)
But, I don’t know how helpful they would be because your experiences are so particular. I suppose. What problems could you have when you get here – You might have problems with your landlord, and I don’t know if counseling could help with that; you could have problems with your roommate, can counseling help with that? You might have problems with faculty, can counseling help with that? (Z, p.37)

While the perception existed among co-researchers that other avenues and institutions, such as International Student and Faculty Services, could provide information on how to address problems with your landlord or your professors, there was also a belief that there are areas of concern for which a readily available support system was not identified. If you have problems with your roommate you don’t know where to go, you have no clue where to go. If you have problems settling down, you don’t know where to go. No information is given to you about that, you know. If you have problems, feeling homesick, where do you go? … None of that is ever explain … told to you, not … here. So I would say I knew nothing about the counseling center. Suppose you just have fears, travelers feeling homesick, homesick, you know. You just miss home; where do you go? … you just go to your room and lie on
your bed and cry. That’s all you do. Never knew about it. (Z, p.37)

Attitudes Toward Counseling

Privacy. The lack of knowledge about counseling services and/or the reluctance to consult such services also reflects culturally determined definitions of privacy.

Because you also have this whole privacy issue in our country. You don’t share your troubles with anybody. ... Just your family. I mean, I would share it (a problem or concern) with my friends, my close friends. Yes, yes, I talk a lot. But then I think, I’m probably a woman and we don’t have so many ego hassles. You know we are more relaxed about our personalities, so I think... . I talk to all my friends if I have a problem. All my friends here, I take their advice, and ask their help, I seek you know, assistance and everything, but there’ll be many people who don’t do that, who’ll be embarrassed; I think men especially. They’d drop dead before going to a counseling center. I think men would have serious issues about going, but sometimes I think they need help. ... They only know their physics and their math and their computers. They need help to make that transition into a society you’re entering or you’re coming to. I see them all the time hanging around with each other. They definitely need help with
that, about adjusting, which they would never agree of course. (Z, p.39)

*Stigma.* Other students reported a degree of stigma in India attached to accepting help from a counseling service. "Being from India kind of place, taking counseling help is not accepted very well. It’s like you are not good enough. At some point you feel that it’s a stigma on you." (J, p.20) "But in India if you’d go … they’d (the family) be like ah … why are you not talking to me first?" (B, p.31)

In general, negative evaluations were attached to mental health problems and such issues were viewed as shameful or as a type of indulgence or luxury. "A very intelligent boy (who) was undertaking counseling because (he) underwent depression. I don’t think many people speak about it … because people think insane people take counseling." (P, p.8) "The ones who are financially very secure are the ones who can afford to go berserk, you know. You don’t have to worry about your parents back home." (Z, p.19)

One student, the only co-researcher to indicate knowledge or the availability of counseling in an Indian educational institution, reported having had a positive experience.

In India, we had a counseling center in the college there, and the counselor was a great friend to everyone. He seemed to be counseling everyone at all
times. I did go to him once for counseling because I was having a problem in, um, having, making friends, and there was some ... I don’t know, I felt there was something that was not working quite right. And I remember he said that you have to put in as much an effort as the other person to be friends with them and maybe I wasn’t putting in that much of an effort. And I remember ... and then I felt very happy for some time. It’s nice to talk to people I guess. (M, p.20)

Reasons to Seek Counseling

While these co-researchers would seem disinclined, or at the very least would be quite reluctant, to turn to paid counselors for help in dealing with most issues pertaining to mental health and adjustment, they also indicated that there are issues and circumstances that might motivate a student to accept counseling. One student indicated that one area in which counseling would be used and accepted was career counseling. Such counselors are reportedly found in India, so using counseling services for this purpose would not be regarded as negative or unfamiliar to most Indian students.

Pragmatic concerns. Very pragmatic issues predominated when co-researchers were queried about the circumstances under which they might seek out a counselor. One co-researcher indicated that seniors might not be readily available to help newer students due to the time demands of
their own studies and jobs. Unable to find appropriate support from peers under such circumstances, a student might turn to the counseling center. Another student indicated that counseling might be utilized when someone was ruminating about making an error.

...like it happened to me; like I am sitting in my office and sometimes I felt like, 'Why did I make that mistake?' and that takes me into some sort of depression like, I shouldn’t have done this, how could I have done that silly mistake. And those are the times when you feel like you are alone and you need someone; that’s the time when I miss my family and I think that is a good time if someone can counsel you or someone can assist you in that time. (V, p.26)

Counseling – a last resort. For some the counseling center would be used only as a last resort. “Troubles. Maybe if something traumatic troubles (me) or I can’t think straight, then maybe. But still, counseling would be a very, very last choice. First it would be friends then family. Family more. Particularly my mom or dad, I’d rather talk to them.” (B, p.28)

This same person believed that if the counseling center could deal with homesickness and keep students happier by giving them a place to go and assistance in how they might deal with such issues, then a counseling service would be helpful. Yet he also believed that the Indian social network
was sufficiently strong that someone within the existing social network of a distressed person would be there to offer support, and thus formal counseling services would not be necessary. He maintained that most Indian students would wait a very long time before considering counseling as an option. He also believed that students might benefit from assistance with adjustment to the educational system in this country and with time management skills. Another co-researcher indicated that help with anxiety over exams and other issues might be useful because “we’re so hell bent on doing our best.”

*Psychiatric illness.* Only two of the eight interviewees acknowledged having had contact with persons with serious mental health problems. For one student, the person was a family member. He and other family members seemed to just accept this person as having a problem that they could not impact much in any way. The best course of action appeared to be to simply let this individual alone, since other interventions had failed. The other student was aware of two persons who had problems while in the States attending school; both had returned to India to address their mental health issues. In reference to both instances, the interviewee remarked on how brilliant and intelligent these individuals were and what a shame it was that they were so afflicted.
I have never heard this before but young people getting schizophrenic and undergoing depression, that’s very alarming. Such bright, bright students; it’s just scary because they have their whole life ahead of them. This boy who was in (a prestigious American college). His life is just on pills; he hates taking pills. He has to take them if he wants to remain sane so ... it’s very difficult, especially if you’re the only son. (P, p.9)

Cultural Beliefs and Practices

The last major set of themes that appeared from my analysis of the data clustered around a number of cultural beliefs and practices relating to issues of gender; class, caste, and religion; and dating and marriage.

Gender

Five students made reference to distinctions and differences related to gender in various areas of life. One female student noted that her discipline, which is well developed in the United States as a profession for both women and men, is one in which “men would not do a Ph.D.” She indicated that it would be regarded as a ridiculous profession for a man. It was her belief that no Indian man, to date, would regard this professional degree as a legitimate one to pursue. This was the case, she indicated, despite the fact that in her profession she earned as much as her father, who was 32 years her senior.
This individual also commented on the differences between Indian and U.S. culture with respect to appropriate gender segregation and roles. Initially, at college in the United States, she was placed in a mixed dorm, both males and females, and by her report this evoked a measure of culture shock because there were always separate dormitories for men and women in India. She also noted that her sister, who was trained as both a lawyer and a linguist, did not work outside the home. Instead she devoted herself to the care of her two children and to meeting the needs of her husband and her parents. She noted that her mother had at one time aspired to a career that was regarded as appropriate only for males, and although she studied a more appropriate female discipline at the university, after she was married her husband did not want a wife who worked.

She is very bright. She was at the top of her university, like the gold medal, a very intelligent person. ... She was a woman. She wanted to be a doctor but they wouldn’t let her because that meant studying with boys. You can’t go to a coed school, so she did English literature and she was like very, very good; very good at her work. (Z, p. 53)

Another interviewee noted a difference in how males and females handle interpersonal relations.

Women ... become friends that much more quickly, and then if you intervene with them ... you are a fool. You don’t
do that. Because Indians they, they will get angry with one another and be fighting, but then the next time they be like all fine and things. But, it’s better that I don’t interfere. (B, p.36)

Another co-researcher made mention of the differences in the way males and females interacted. Her current boyfriend, whom she had known since the second grade, in all the years they went to school together in India, never spoke at school; boys never spoke to girls and girls never spoke to boys. Moreover, she noted that there were very different gender expectations.

My parents have three daughters, which is different. People want sons. But they’ve never treated us like daughters. My younger sister has always had short hair; people would think she’s a boy. She was the only one who would play football or soccer with boys and she would break her nose and come home. …Yeah, my parents have never stopped us - you shouldn’t go here or you shouldn’t do that. They put us in a school that wasn’t an all girls’ school. I went to a school where there were boys. All three sisters went to the same high school so we were raised very differently. I grew up wearing shorts and a tee shirt and generally girls shouldn’t do that because it’s ‘obscene’. (P, p.10)
Class, Caste and Religion

References to class, caste, or religious divisions within Indian society were sometimes indirect and at other times direct. For example, one student made an indirect reference to the religious cleavages in India when describing a recent news event. Yet others were very explicit regarding issues that served to define different social groups. “There are group differences … and now it is starting to be seen a little more … even on this campus.” (B, p.36)

Hierarchical relationships. Judgments as to class and caste differences reportedly play a large role in a person’s life. For example, one co-researcher indicated that her family’s decision to allow her younger sister to marry before her was not viewed as an issue because of her family’s social position. While recognizing that such an attitude might appear “snobbish,” in fact she explicitly admitted that India is “a very hierarchical society,” and that the hierarchy continues to influence an individual’s life, extending -- according to at least one person -- even to the people a person associates with at OU.

We not only have religion, which is just one aspect of life, and then people make such a big deal out of it, but the most important aspect of India’s life is what class and caste you belong to…. It’s a class within
caste driven system society. Not religious driven. (Z, p.32)

She elaborated, explaining that these culture-bound and directed relationships continue to play a role on U.S. campuses.

In every American university, I would say. Yea, the higher class. ... We wouldn’t be comfortable with the lower class people, because they don’t come from the same social milieu. So even if you are coming to the same country, there would be so many things that you would be uncomfortable about. ... Yes, caste would definitely play a part. (Z, p.33)

**Dating and Marriage**

*Freedom to date.* Another area of life that provoked comments regarding cultural differences centered on dating and marriage; only one of the seven persons interviewed did not share their thoughts, feelings, or observations on these topics. One female indicated that she had had bad experiences dating and did not want to discuss the topic. Two male co-researchers remarked on dating, and they indicated that they appreciated the freedom to date whomever they chose. "Yea, I can choose who. I have been in short-term relationships over here. ... For me it doesn’t matter whether it’s an American girl or a Chinese girl, I’m really open." (R, p.11) Another interviewee indicated that dating was primarily for "only fun, but nothing else other than
that.” (B, p.30) Dating in the United States was seen as definitely different from India.

It’s not how it is in the U.S. Dating is so common in the U.S., but in India if you are dating a girl you have to ask the father’s permission and then take the girl on a date. In the U.S. you don’t have to ask her father can I take your daughter, only thing when you’re trying to marry a girl, you have to ask her father whether I can marry your girl. (R, p.9)

Co-researchers indicated that dating patterns were changing in India and that these changes were taking place at a rapid pace. And such changes were not necessarily seen as entirely positive. “People are really trying to make it like the West, follow what the West is doing blindly.”

Arranged marriage. Another co-researcher indicated that she thought some of these changes, especially related to the use of new technologies, were peculiar and not always positive.

... arranged marriages are so funny nowadays. They happen over the Internet... . In today’s age, who are you getting married to, and how do you know what is this person all about? I don’t know how people find people on the Internet. How can they do that? I think it’s horrifying, no, no! I suppose people do it, but I don’t know how they do it. And it’s happening all over. (Z, p.50)
Arranged marriages, for both males and females, were still a factor within these interviewees’ life experiences, and technology had begun to play a part in this method of finding a life partner. For some the new pattern has proven difficult.

I can’t connect through emails or phone so very easily. For me, if I’m going to marry somebody, he should be a good friend of mine. So till now it’s not worked. My parents send me prospective messages like “oh we heard from so and so person and their family is interested in our family so this is the phone number, this is the email so contact him.” I’ll contact him up or he’ll call me, we’ll talk a couple of times. For example, there was this guy from another state. We spoke for about 5-6 months, we felt comfortable, and he came and visited me, but after visiting I was also like it’s not going to work out because we were totally different. So it didn’t work out. (J, p. 21)

Four of the seven co-researchers indicated that their parents’ marriages were arranged, and two had siblings whose marriages were arranged. One co-researcher indicated that his mother “was actually forced to marry my dad and sometimes she says probably she could have been a little happier if she would have married her childhood sweetheart or something.” (R, p.8)
Attitudes toward arranged marriages were at times ambivalent. Co-researchers were not always consistent on this subject, and some did not show a strong preference for either an arranged or a love marriage.

I for sure want to go in for a love marriage ... because I don’t believe in arranged marriages. ... I think a love marriage would last a little longer because my thinking is like how can you marry a guy whom you don’t know at all, without dating him or knowing him for that long? (R, p.10)

The whole concept of arranged marriage just scares the life out of me. How can people do it? How can you get married to somebody you don’t know? (Z, p.50)

Because see, arranged marriage would mean it would be arranged with somebody they know. Family they would know and for generations they would know. Like my sister got married to someone whom they’ve known for generations. They’re absolutely sure about the lineage and love. Everything about that family, like what the person does; everything, they’re a hundred percent sure. (Z, p.50)

I don’t object with love marriages also. But like, if you could not find (one) perfectly, then arranged marriage is also good. ... My mom will definitely (be looking). At all her parties and all the other ladies.
It’s all potential thing. They know you’re in the U.S. and I know she will. But it’s OK, it’s fine. It’s physical too. Because, at least then you’re not straying away outside from school also, in other ways. So it’s better. It’s not bad; it’s not a bad thing. There are pros and cons both ways and in both scenarios, but I’d say fine, this is better, more safer in the long run. (B, p.30)

Pressure to marry: Marriage or education. For two of the co-researchers the issue of marriage was made more difficult by their desire to continue their education. This was true because the usual pattern was that older daughters married before younger ones, and that marriage is not to be deferred due to continuing one’s education. They reported that social pressure can be brought to bear on the family or the individual who does not follow the usual pattern.

My younger sister is married, she’s expecting. Many parents, in Indian culture, if the elder daughter is not married, the younger one won’t get married then. Otherwise the elder one won’t find a husband. Because people will start thinking what was wrong with the elder one? She didn’t find someone and the younger one got married so something must be wrong with the elder one; that’s the normal concept. … My dad had a little concern but then we talked about it and it was fine. … I’m doing what I want to do, because I’m not getting
married why should she be affected. Let her go on with her life. So my family took it very positively and things worked out. I don’t know if another Indian family would do that. Probably they would pressurize the elder one to get married to somebody, I’m sure. (J, p.20)

Several co-researchers indicated that other people were often surprised by the fact that their parents had not pressured them or forced them to marry.

It’s very unusual actually for someone my age not to be married, to be doing my own thing. It was initially very difficult for my parents to explain my independence: “she wants to study.” But now they’re ok with it, because studying gives me happiness. (Z, p.22)

In fact people were saying are you sure you want to send your daughter when she’s 23 to the U.S.? I think you should get her engaged first to someone and then send her. My father said no. She is going to get her Ph.D. first. (P, p.11)

You should get her married…. My mom was like no. She’ll study first. My mom believed that you have to be financially independent before you marry a man. She doesn’t want me to depend on anyone. (P, p.11)
I do feel pressure although my mom tries to ease it as much as she can. But yes, it’s definitely there. Although no one talks about it, I’m sure because of my mother. Otherwise I’m sure they’d be hammering me to get married. But even then, in spite of that, you know, 33 and all my cousins are like ten years younger, they are getting married, because something is missing, something is not quite as it should be. (M, p. 23)

I turned 25 this March, so technically if I was in India my parents would have started looking for boys so I could get married, but my parents are so different from the other average middle-class families that come from India. (P, p.10)

Male co-researchers were not free from societal pressure to marry. “When I went for my brother’s wedding last year, then people were saying, OK, now it’s your number for marriage.” (VG, p.16)

Considerations in Choosing a Mate

Though the co-researchers indicated that issues surrounding class, caste, or religion were important factors in marriage, very few actually mentioned these factors in their discussions of marriage and dating. One co-researcher stated that differences in ethnic background were not important considerations, another indicated that having a different background might pose an impediment to her
marriage, and a third suggested that being of the same religious background was a significant factor in choosing a mate.

Analysis of Data

My analysis of the data just presented revealed a number of characteristics that were not only significant to these individuals in the transition to life in the United States, but were also a significant force in these students’ lives. First among these was the role family played in many areas of life. The decision to leave India and study abroad was embedded in a familial matrix. While this fact of life did not preclude the possibility of disagreement among various family members, as well as disagreement between various family members and the interviewee, the outcome for all those interviewed was that they made the decision to study abroad with family approval and support. None of the students in this study left India without family support; thus it is not known what repercussions or sanctions, if any, would be applied if a student could not obtain family support.

The preparation for and implementation of the co-researchers’ sojourn was shared by family; family was present at their departure and wherever possible arrangements were made for family members who lived in the United States to meet the sojourner upon arrival at the airport. For these individuals any anxiety that can be
associated with such transitions was mitigated by family before departure and, whenever possible, after arrival in the United States. While the support of family did not totally eliminate such anxieties and confusion, those individuals who lacked this type of supportive network specifically mentioned the stress associated with arrivals and departures. Family also figured prominently in deciding upon a location in which to pursue a graduate degree, and the students often selected Ohio University precisely because of the proximity of family residing in the United States.

Overall adjustment to their new lives in the United States was clearly facilitated by family. Regular and frequent communication between the students and their families in India aided the process. Only one co-researcher indicated that loneliness or homesickness lasted more than a few days and had an impact on her ability to perform as a student, and that was during an earlier sojourn.

Family figured prominently as the primary source of emotional support in most situations. Students turned to their parents to help them solve problems, as well as for comfort and encouragement. Families did not appear to be dictatorial, but rather acted as sounding boards for potential choices of action. Family, especially parents, helped the students weigh alternatives and stated their support for one or another of the possible positions. It
appears that the customary role of the family in the decision-making process was one of guidance and support. No student mentioned being forbidden to do anything, and most saw their parents as permissive guides whose wisdom was to be followed, and who always had their best interests in mind.

Among this particular group of students, relationships with their mothers seemed particularly strong. Mothers acted as guides for correct behavior, models for dealing with difficult situations, academic supporters, builders of self-confidence, encouragers, matchmakers, and worriers. In addition, the trust placed in family was also extended to others outside the immediate family network based on the evaluation and recommendations of parents or other family members.

Frequent and sustained communication with family was consistently recognized as being a very significant factor in the lives of co-researchers, and it was considered normal and desirable. Ease of communication was made possible by the most modern forms of communication technology. All interviewees regularly used relatively low-cost methods such as prepaid calling cards, the Internet, and e-mail. Modern technology has apparently allowed for the incorporation of these international students and their families into the global village.
My co-researchers clearly considered the impact their actions would have on their families. This was manifest in a number of areas. When discussing their futures, all the interviewees stated that they planned eventually to return to live in India. The exact point at which they would return posed a dilemma. The participants expressed a desire to gain work experience in the United States coupled with an ever-increasing familiarity, acceptance, and favorable stance toward aspects of U.S. culture. These feelings were mitigated or contradicted by their sense of responsibility for, and emotional attachment to, family along with their attitudes toward aspects of their traditional culture. The students who had previously attended school in the U.S. and then returned to India found that they missed the independence they experienced when abroad. This was a factor in motivating their return to the States for additional study. However, they also did not uniformly accept the attitudes and ideas surrounding dating, marriage, or gender characteristic of U.S. culture. Their attitudes toward a “love marriage” versus an arranged marriage for females, and even for males, and the desire to pursue an education beyond the age at which marriage would normally occur in a traditional context were indicative of the pervasiveness of this dilemma.

The interviewees expressed a range of attitudes with respect to a number of areas they encountered during the
transition from life in India to life in the United States. For several individuals, the cleanliness and orderliness of the U.S. and the quietness and emptiness of the streets of Athens was in marked contrast to their life in the major urban centers of India. For some, the fact that they were on their own and had to learn to care for their own daily needs without either supportive family or servants was a new experience. There were clearly a series of trade-offs that they had to make. These included such things as doing their own laundry, but having a facility with automated machines, not having fully prepared home-cooked meals made by family or servants, but having convenience foods that simply required opening a can or heating a frozen meal.

Other transitions appeared to present a degree of difficulty for these students. Co-researchers commented on the need to adjust to a different system of learning and evaluation in the United States. While some types of adjustments they made were not necessarily peculiar to foreign students, such as the transition to quarters from a semester system, other adjustments were specific to these students and possibly to other international students. The emphasis on analysis instead of rote learning was noted as different, as were such things as the frequency with which examinations were given and the cumulative nature of various projects and exams. Moreover, the pace of academic life and the work necessary to achieve the level of productivity
required for success at Ohio University was also noted. Such a system may in fact produce a degree of stress and anxiety for these students because it is different from what they are accustomed to, and because of the social way in which their academic performance is noted and evaluated by family and the larger community in India.

How to deal with pragmatic issues was an important feature of the discourse presented by these interviewees. For example, appropriate and adequate transport was identified as a major problem. They found the bus system inadequate to serve their needs, not only because of the infrequency of the service, but also due to the paucity of routes. They found it inconvenient to walk to and from their homes to campus and tried to limit the number of times per day that they would have to do so. While some individuals owned cars and this provided them with adequate transportation, those without had to either select their activities to comport with walking distance or rely on others with cars to carry out essential tasks. This did not allow them to plan their own schedules, and so compromised their autonomy. They also reported that they found it embarrassing to be that dependent on others.

Another major source of concern, if not the major pragmatic issue they faced, was procuring adequate funds for their education. Adequate financial support was important in that it could relieve co-researchers' families of the
expense of their education. These students indicated that they wished to be financially self-sustaining for their graduate education. While they indicated that eventually every graduate student found appropriate university support, they found the process of identifying sources of funding and acquiring these funds very time-consuming and anxiety-producing. Visa restrictions confined them to on-campus employment, and all of these students were unaccustomed to having to work while attending school. In addition, they found some of the jobs available to them on campus very tiring and, sometimes, even demeaning, which made certain forms of campus employment undesirable. Once funding was secured, they felt much more able to relax and focus on their academics.

In dealing with these issues, and others they confronted, co-researchers relied on a number different source of support, help, and guidance. As previously discussed, family was critical in this arena. However, these students were also cognizant of, and concerned that they not become additional sources of stress for, their parents. Thus, they turned to siblings, friends, and faculty for support. To whom they turned depended on the problem or concern to be addressed. Older siblings were most significant when the issues co-researchers dealt with had implications or repercussions for the family. Respondents turned to faculty, particularly their advisors, for academic
matters as well as other concerns. They came to rely increasingly on local friends as confidants and for social and emotional support when they encountered difficult and stressful experiences. They were, however, mindful of not sharing matters involving their families.

Friendship with other Indian students was a major source of support. While they came to rely on local friends as confidants, and for social and emotional support when they encountered difficult and stressful experiences, the extension of these friendships beyond the Indian community was not specifically mentioned except for those who had previously studied in the United States. This pattern may reflect a theme these co-researchers reported: that they did not always understand the rules of engagement characteristic of U.S. culture. Yet the social networks of all co-researchers were not confined exclusively to other Indian students. Some co-researchers mentioned that they had developed deep and apparently lasting relationships with other international students and with domestic students.

These students were also self-reliant, ostensibly believing that they should deal with their own problems, not complain, and try to make the best of bad situations. These attitudes may reflect their stated desire not to disappoint or burden their families.

The most developed formal network for assistance was the Indian Students Association (ISA). The ISA provided both
information and contacts for prospective and incoming students and generally provided assistance and information on a host of issues involved in acclimating to a new environment. More experienced students provided the services for the newest arrivals, and subsequently these persons provided assistance to those who came after them. Reciprocity is reportedly expected and valued.

Apart from the ISA these students did not seek out other formal organizations and institutions to assist them in dealing with issues related to transition or other aspects of life. Most students were unaware of the counseling center as a resource. When informed about the service, they indicated they would be unlikely to avail themselves of such services except as a last resort, when no other form of support was available. They pointed out that seeking mental health services carried a stigma and they were not sure how helpful such a service could be in addressing their concerns. They also appeared reluctant to entertain the idea of using such a service because it might violate cultural privacy norms and show disrespect by not consulting with family first. These students would clearly prefer to consult with friends and family members before utilizing counseling services. They identified the possible concerns that might propel others to seek services, such as homesickness, issues in adjusting to the U.S. educational system, the need for good advice, anxiety surrounding their
studies, and time management issues. They also indicated that such services would only be sought if other avenues were not available. Those co-researchers who indicated they had known individuals with obvious mental health problems expressed sympathy for both the person and their families. Counseling was not perceived as a vehicle for addressing problems.

Cultural differences in behavior, expectations, and perceptions affected a host of areas in their lives. A lack of familiarity with the U.S. cultural rules of social engagement was reported to affect interpersonal interactions at work and in academic settings. It was difficult, for example, for these students to accept the informality of address many domestic students used in speaking with elders and professors.

The adjustments these students had to make in reconciling their home culture with the culture of their new temporary home were discussed and commented upon. There were, for example, issues surrounding gender roles and gender-specific behavior that surprised some of the interviewees. In India, gender segregation in education, even in coeducational institutions, was reported to be the norm. Thus, these students viewed situations such as coeducational dormitories as unusual.

Some co-researchers explicitly challenged the gender expectations associated with their home cultures. For
example, they did not necessarily expect or wish to marry at the culturally defined appropriate age; they did not view specific careers as appropriate for one gender or another; females wanted to complete their education before considering marriage and to pursue their careers after marriage, and some indicated a desire to be financially independent not only from their families but also from any future mate. Some of these challenges were encouraged and sanctioned by family. One co-researcher, a female with sisters but no brothers, fully expected to care for her parents as they aged, and had not been discouraged from taking on some attributes of culturally defined gender specific male behavior.

In other areas challenges to culturally prescribed behaviors were more ambivalent. Males, for example, did not see dating while at OU as a precursor to marriage; they engaged in the practice for amusement and only entertained the idea of short-term relationships. The idea of an arranged marriage was quite acceptable for the majority of these students, though a few looked favorably upon the idea of a “love marriage.” The pros and cons of each type of marriage were acknowledged and discussed. On the one hand, an arranged marriage was sanctioned by the family, which had already examined the background of the potential mate for possible incompatibilities or negative characteristics. On the other hand, these students were concerned at the idea of
marrying someone they did not know well. The use of the Internet in promoting an arranged marriage was not necessarily viewed positively; yet, these students recognized that their parents, particularly their mothers, were currently looking for suitable mates for them, and one student received regular e-mails introducing her to possible suitors. Most anticipated being introduced to someone, getting to know that person for a short while, and then either accepting or rejecting them.

Issues of class, caste, status, and religion were explicitly acknowledged to have an important impact on determining the suitability of a mate. However, very few actually discussed how such factors might affect marriage. Rather, the discussions surrounding these issues were cast more in terms of how these would affect the individuals one would associate with at OU. While these students indicated that their belief system did not allow such factors as class or caste to be a defining factor in determining their interpersonal relationships, they acknowledged that in reality these factors did play a part in their choices of friendships and associations, even on this campus.

Concerns regarding one’s status or social position appeared at the very beginning of the co-researchers’ sojourns. Ohio University was selected precisely because of how it fit into their own personal evaluations of their social standing. For some, studying outside the United
States was acceptable because they perceived that only lower-status alternatives were available in India. For others, Ohio University was selected because of its perceived high standing in their academic discipline. For one other co-researcher, OU was chosen as their academic home because OU represented their sole choice and opportunity. They acknowledged that India was a hierarchical society. In part, it was the hierarchical nature of their lives that brought them to Ohio University and made them sojourners.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Issue Under Study

My intention in conducting this study was to gain a greater understanding of, and insight into, the experiences of Asian Indian international graduate students who were currently in attendance at the Athens campus of Ohio University. My general intent was to collect information on individuals whose backgrounds were likely to be ethno-culturally and nationally different from most students enrolled at universities in the United States. My specific intent was to become familiar with and more sensitive to, the experiences of such persons so as to assist me, and others, to more effectively provide counseling and support services to this type of student. Universities in the United States, including OU, have increasingly recruited and admitted a growing number of students from diverse backgrounds. Of necessity, the field of college counseling has become more sensitive to the needs of this diverse population. To this end, clinicians and researchers have been developing techniques and methods to more effectively serve these students.

While international students are part of the category of persons whose backgrounds are likely to be different from that of most U.S. students, their particular needs have not been systematically examined or assessed. Rather, there has been a tendency to subsume the international student under the
rubric of multiculturalism. Thus, there is the risk of making a priori assumptions that the needs and characteristics of this group are similar to, if not identical with, any other American ethnic or racial minority. This type of assumption is not necessarily valid; it needs to be examined, critiqued and possibly reassessed.

The objective of this research project was to contribute to this process by providing information on the experiences, attitudes and needs of a small sample of international students currently in attendance of Ohio University. The hope is that as the forces at play in these students' lives, the decisions they have made, the difficulties they have overcome, the types of support they have used, and their thoughts and attitudes about counseling have been made more clear, the field of college counseling, and specifically the counselors at Ohio University, will develop a better understanding of this type of potential client. In turn, this understanding will provide the basis for the development of services that will and can most effectively deal with the real needs of this population.

Limitations of this Study

A limitation of this study of which a reader should remain cognizant is that by employing the snowball method in recruiting participants, (Weiss, 1994) respondents tended to come from the same social and economic class. Possibly by using another method of recruiting I might have recruited a
less homogeneous sample with differing experiences. Additionally, the findings are based on the interpretations of one researcher exploring one data set regarding the experiences of eight graduate students at one Midwestern, midsize institution of higher education. The questions that I chose to ask my co-researchers and the line of inquiry I pursued during each interview, invariably reflects personal biases that may exist. To minimize and control for these biases, I kept a journal in order to maximize my awareness of my own expectations, feelings and prejudices. However, validation of the findings came from the second set of interviews in which participants were given the opportunity to correct any misperceptions or inaccuracies in my identification and explication of the themes that emerged from the data. Thus one may still make use of these findings as a valid description and interpretation of the experiences of this group of students at Ohio University.

The Universe of International Students

Commencing in the early 1990s, the universe of international students in attendance at institutions of higher education within the United States has steadily increased; Ohio University is no exception to this pattern. While the events surrounding September 11, 2001 provoked a decline in the number of international students admitted to the United States for study, this change apparently was temporary; the numbers have begun to flatten out (IIE,
This decline did not affect all groups equally. Students from India were the exception, and Asian Indian students have come to replace persons from China as the largest group of internationals students currently enrolled in United States colleges and universities. Ohio University conforms to this general pattern. Students from India are the largest group of international students on the OU campus and of these, the vast majority are graduate students. I selected this group on which to focus because of these aforementioned characteristics, and their underutilization of the university’s counseling services.

The Study

The major research issues that I was interested in exploring in this study were: (a) What problems, if any, did Asian Indian international student sojourners at Ohio University perceive as significant in their experiences? (b) From whom, or how, did they seek help in finding solutions to these problems? (c) What were their perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes toward counseling, and the counseling center, Counseling and Psychological Services, at Ohio University?

The study was designed as a qualitative research project. Specifically, I interviewed a selected small sample of students. The sample was obtained using personal contacts within the Asian Indian community. Using the snowball method (Weiss, 1994), I recruited my co-researchers
based on convenience and their willingness to participate. Because of these recruiting techniques, there may be a degree of homogeneity manifest in the sample group that might not have appeared if another, more random recruitment method was employed.

While I made no specific effort to match the sample to the larger universe of Asian Indian students enrolled at the university, in fact, this small group matched in the larger universe in terms of basic demographic features, such as age and gender. In addition, the university collects data on such features as in which programs students are enrolled, and what degrees they are pursuing; the sample interviewed also matched these basic parameters.

The study centered on interviews I conducted with eight Asian Indian graduate students during the summer of 2006. During the interviews, I used an interview guide that was designed to elicit information on the three major areas of interest. I attempted to limit or minimize the impact of personal and/or a priori assumptions on the interview process by using broad areas for discussion rather than direct questions. I used direct questions only when I wanted to elicit more information on a topic that had already been brought up and discussed by one of my co researchers. Despite such attempts there can be no doubt that the lines of inquiry I pursued reflect personal biases. However, I made another attempt to minimize and control my biases by
keeping a journal; in this way I hoped to maximize my awareness of my own expectations, feelings and prejudices and minimize my biases.

I audio recorded all the interviews and I had these recordings transcribed. The data was then coded and analyzed for the thematic constructs. During the spring of 2007 I conducted a second round of interviews with the three available co-researchers. In this setting participants were given the opportunity to correct any misperceptions or inaccuracies in my identification and explication of the themes that emerged from the data. These interviews served as a member check as the three interviewees verified that the themes I had identified based on the first set of interviews were consistent with their experience and/or their understanding of the experiences of other Indian students at Ohio University.

Generalizing from this Study

While I made no specific effort to match the subject group with the larger universe from which they were drawn, along broad dimensions this subject group reflected the characteristics of this larger group. However, due the small size of the sample group, the reader is cautioned about generalizing the findings of this study to other Asian Indian sojourners. Thus, on one level the experiences and attitudes of this group of students are uniquely their own.
Yet, on another level they may serve to both illustrate and elucidate characteristics, experiences and attitudes that may have a more general applicability. The features my co-researchers revealed during the interview process merit recognition, not only because they were significant to them but also because these features may have broader applicability. Minimally this requires that I, as a counselor who attempts to serve the special needs of international students, and diverse clients in general, need to understand what this small group of individuals are revealing about their own lives, and perhaps also the lives of others who are in similar circumstances. This was my objective in conducting this research.

The Themes

Four overarching themes, along with several sub themes and categories, emerged from an analysis of the data gathered in this study. These were labeled as follows: Transitional Issues, Sources of Support, Counseling and Mental Health Perspectives, and Cultural Beliefs and Practices. Cultural Beliefs and Practices was the only theme identified that was not directly related to the initial research questions. Transitional issues were related to co-researchers experiences in preparing for and implementing their decision to come to the United States. Under this heading I also included material on their anticipated return to India. Sources of support covered the identified persons
and ways which these students obtained assistance in addressing issues related to being educational sojourners. Counseling and Mental Health Perspectives explored their perceptions and attitudes towards formal assistance for emotional and psychological concerns. The last theme, Cultural Beliefs and Practices identified the types of practices and traditional beliefs that seemed to impinge on their experiences as students at Ohio University.

Transitioning

It is often assumed that transitioning between cultures, is inherently stressful (Arthur, 2004; Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991). Thus international students who are moving from one country and culture to another might be expected to manifest signs of stress. While this indeed may be the case, the participants in this study did not perceive or report the transition to be especially problematic. This did not necessarily mean there were no obstacles or conflicts over the decision or during the process of transition. All respondents reported discussions with family over their desire or lack of desire to study abroad, but all came with the active support of family and any disagreements were effectively resolved and obstacles overcome satisfactorily.

The New Environment

The lack of familiarity with their new, immediate environment was often commented upon. They considered their
feelings of discomfort as transitory. In fact, the discomfort that they experienced in relocating to Athens and OU, may in part, be attributable to moving from an urban environment to a small town rural community, – a discomfiture shared by many students.

All interviewees spoke English and indicated that at least a part of their prior education had been conducted in English. It is possible that students coming from other areas where English is not widely spoken or where English is not the language of instruction at least for secondary education would have a much more difficult time adjusting to their new environment than these students indicated (Arthur, 2004).

The relative ease with which these students reported to have adjusted to their new settings did not mean that there were no issues or problems that caused them discomfort or concern. They reported difficulties in adapting to new domestic arrangements. Providing for one’s own needs, procuring food, washing clothes, cooking and so forth, all merited some comments. While most adults in the U.S. would regard these activities as part of their routines, these students reported that they were unaccustomed to performing such tasks. In the context of their home society and experience, mothers or servants performed such tasks and students were generally free to attend only to their studies. Herein may lay a class and status bias in the
sample. These respondents were apparently accustomed to household help and this suggests that they are coming from the higher rungs of the indigenous social hierarchy. The reported occupations of their parents also suggest this pattern; parental occupation was usually described as some type of professional or businessperson. It is not known whether this bias is characteristic of all Indian students on the OU campus, Indian international graduate students or international students as a whole. However, adjustments such as these may produce additional and unexpected stressors. This is an area that merits further investigation as it may have implications for the kinds of adjustments these students are required to make as well as the types of services these students might require.

**Pragmatic Concerns**

There were other pragmatic issues that drew their attention and comments. They identified difficulties with transportation as a problem facing them, which had implications for their adjustment in other areas. While off campus housing was seen as much less costly than on campus housing, living off campus made it more challenging to provide for basic necessities. The lack of transportation impinged on their ability to manage time efficiently, to participate in extra curricular activities, and on their concerns about personal safety. While having access to an automobile solved some of these problems, there may be a
gender bias as to who actually owns a car; females reported that males were the ones with access to cars. Moreover, these students felt it was embarrassing to continuously ask other people to provide transportation.

Additional pragmatic issues emerged from their discussions, and concerned adjusting to the differences in the educational system. These included the level of proficiency in English that was expected of them, differences in the testing and measurement of achievements, differences in the types of learning they were expected to master, among others. The adjustment to another educational system is often reported in the literature as a stressor for international students (Arthur, 2004, Pedersen, 1991). Undoubtedly, these issues caused these students a measure of discomfort. However, these problems appear to have been resolved without undue stress or notable anxiety. My co-researchers seemed to feel comfortable using the types of academic survival tools (Desai & Coelho, 1980) that they have been accustomed to using prior to their sojourn, and found them to be sufficiently helpful in resolving their concerns.

Monetary Concerns

Another issue that emerged as prominent for these students centered on monetary concerns. Identifying and then obtaining financial assistance was a noted source of anxiety. As graduate students they did not want to be
dependent on family for support, they were unaccustomed to working while studying, and they were also unfamiliar with processes for gaining financial support from the University. However, once university financial support was assured, usually not later than after the first quarter, the students reported that they were able to relax.

While addressing the issues discussed above may appear to be outside the realm of a counseling intervention, in fact such pragmatic issues may directly impact the general well being of a student. Therefore, it would not be beyond the role of a counselor to bring these and other such pragmatic issues to the attention of the people who recruit international students to campus, as well as staff who are responsible for establishing the initial guidelines and support services for new international students. Activities that most people take for granted, such as getting to and from campus and about town, were a source of stress for many of the co-researchers. Stress can be additive and too much stress in the day to day activities of living compounded with the stress of adjusting to an unfamiliar educational system can add up to significant distress (Lin & Pedersen, 2007) Thus, a counselor would do well to take into account that something that seems as straightforward as scheduling a counseling appointment might be a more complicated undertaking for one of these students.
Networks of Support

Family. One of most common types of assumptions is that international students, cut off as they are geographically from the supportive network of family and friends, experience more loneliness and homesickness than is found among domestic students (Arthur, 2004; Pedersen, 1991). My research did not find this necessarily to be the case. While all respondents reported some feelings of isolation and loneliness upon arrival, only one, speaking about an earlier sojourn, reported that these feelings had lasted more than a few days and had impacted her ability to function in the new environment.

Family, in fact, remained an integral, immediate, and vital part of their network of support despite the geographical distance between them and this network. Family ranked highest as a source of support for my co-researchers; they turned to family, including siblings, as first line providers of support. The fact that family continued to fill this vital function is attributable to the revolution in communication technologies that has occurred so dramatically over the last decade.

Students who had resided in the United States during the late 1990s reported that this ease of communication was not a feature of their lives during that period. Today distance between individuals located in different parts of the world is made less by the available technology. A
reliance on their family for guidance and direction in most spheres of their lives was apparent. Although they relied mostly on their parents, they also turned to siblings, and other relatives. Family played a part in their decision to travel abroad for their graduate education, in their choice of educational institution, in offering them support for their anxieties in travel, and comfort after their arrival in, and during their initial adjustment to, the United States.

**Peers.** Family was not, however, their only source of support; peers also provided encouragement and advice. These peers included friends and classmates who most commonly were individuals who also were from India. However, for individuals on a second sojourn in the United States, peers included other domestic and international students. Moreover, friends began to assume primacy over family as a source of support as students moved along in their academic pursuits. These students explained that friends became more important because of common problems and shared experiences. These commonalities of experience forged a bond that allowed them to turn to their friends rather than family in times of stress because of their peers’ understanding of the situations they encountered and their desire not to unduly burden their families with their problems.

**Indian Students Association (ISA).** Another major avenue of support and community came from the Indian
Students Association (ISA). This organization offered various types of assistance before, during and after the transition to life in the United States. Moreover, the strong norm of reciprocity encouraged these students to fulfill similar roles for the next batch of incoming students. Such associations exist throughout the United States and thus OU is not unique in providing this type of assistance to Indian international students (Gravois, 2006).

University personnel. Yet another source of support and direction came from faculty, advisors and other types of university personnel. Respondents actively sought out such individuals, not only for direct academic issues but for other issues as well. They valued the guidance and wisdom of those whom they perceived to be in positions of authority or who were their elders. This is type of attitude toward elders is an expected component of Indian society (Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007). Yet this pattern also posed problems for my co researchers; they consistently noted that the level of informality in the U.S. between students and faculty or others in positions of authority was markedly different from what occurs in their culture. In fact, the level of informality that regularly occurs between faculty and graduate students in the United States, was something these students noted and which posed a degree of discomfort for some. This might imply that should they be in a counseling relationship and disagree with an interpretation or view of
the counselor, rather than directly confront this person with their disagreement, they may be more inclined to terminate prematurely.

Counseling Services

One of the most significant results of this study is that not only did these students not use the counseling services provided by the University, but they were largely unaware of the existence of such services. For the most part, when educated about the service, the interviewees did not envision counseling as providing any assistance for the problems they encountered or, for that matter, as being able to provide assistance for any problems. For them, other avenues could be used more productively and comfortably; these avenues included family, friends, their advisors, other University offices and services, and others in the Indian community.

Only three interviewees had experience with some form of counseling; one individual reported a positive experience in her native India while the other two indicated that their experiences had been negative. Several students suggested that the family might be offended if they were not the first consulted, and that the expectation was that any problems, should only involve family or exceptionally close friends. It is possible that the attitudes of these students reflect cultural norms regarding privacy and the role of family and friendship, as well as a lack of awareness of the realities
of mental illness. Only two respondents admitted knowing persons who had experienced serious mental health problems; one expressed his family’s sense of frustration in not knowing how to deal with the identified family member and the other expressed sympathy for both the individuals afflicted with mental illness and their families.

Cultural Ties

While these students reside in the United States this does not mean they have severed ties with the home culture and society. Quite the contrary, they maintain active ties with family and friends at home and all expected to return at some point to their home country. The cultural ties that they maintain define their expectations and determine what types of experiences and issues that are likely to pose dilemmas. For example returning home to live might bring up conflict regarding filial responsibility to live in the family home as opposed to the freedom of independent living experienced in this country.

One area that appeared as an issue for my co-researchers was related to gender roles and expected behavior. According to the authors Ibrahim & Ingram, (2007), the gender expectation in Indian society allocates to males activities and concerns that reside outside the home such as providing financially for the family, and women’s roles as centering on home and family.
The female interviewees all discussed their perceptions of traditional cultural expectations in a number of areas. These included when and under what conditions they would marry, the role of education and career in their lives, their role in the family and their responsibilities for their parents, among others. Males also expressed reservations or ambivalence about some of these cultural expectations. Males, for example indicated that dating was something they enjoyed; it was not however, seen a prelude to marriage. Arranged marriages as opposed to “love marriages”, evoked ambivalence from both genders but they also recognized the wisdom of knowing about a potential mate’s background and character.

An individual’s background in terms of class, status, caste and religious affiliation are important elements in determining the suitability of a marriage (Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007). Such elements played an important role in the lives of my co-researchers. While only two respondents spoke directly of a rigid hierarchy that characterized Indian society, all interviewees were cognizant of the role such features played in their lives. Some openly acknowledged that their position in society afforded them more privilege than others and that such factors played a significant role in determining networks of support, friendships on the campus, and even which discipline of study was selected.
Implications from this Study

Counseling

The characteristics, attitudes and values espoused by this group have a number of different implications for the field of counseling. One prominent implication has to do with the critical and central role that the family continues to play in the lives of these sojourners despite any obstacles imposed by distance. Moreover, not only does distance not hinder that role, it also does not necessarily diminish with age although it may change. This pattern clearly challenges some of the basic assumptions that underlie the field of Counseling as it has developed to serve mainstream domestic students. One of the developmental tasks that college counselors are trained to assist students with, is the task of developing increasing autonomy and independence from their families. Such a perspective runs directly counter to what these students apparently expect and value.

Families played a significant role in the lives of these students. While the role of family was multiple and sometimes complex, one area appeared as important to my co-researchers and that was the role of their family in making decisions. The role the family played could best be described as non-directive. Basically, the task of family members was to present alternative perspectives as potential solutions to any dilemma. Thus, the individual was exposed
to differing points of view, informed of possible consequences, informed of a preferred alternative, but the decision ultimately remained with the individual. This style of assistance is fairly consistent with good counseling techniques, but is contrary to the frequently expressed view within the cross-cultural counseling literature that international students benefit from more directive counseling techniques. This has led to the erroneous assumption that Indian and other international students would prefer to be given advice and told what to do (Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007). Therefore it is incumbent upon counselors to provide guidance and support in a manner that is consistent with the particular client’s home culture. In other words, adopting a style that resembles the decision making process they are accustomed to within their families will increase the chances of establishing and maintaining a therapeutic relationship.

Counselors must recognize that some of these issues may play a part in how a client presents, even if they ostensibly indicate their distress is coming from another area. For example, a client may identify loneliness as a presenting problem. The source of this distress, however may be attributable, to isolation due to the client’s place in the indigenous social hierarchy, which has been carried over to the new environment and does not permit the mixing of certain social groups.
Without having a basic understanding of the client’s cultural background, a counselor may misinterpret what seems like a straightforward presenting complaint. This underscores the importance of having an understanding of the cultural milieu of the client or at the very least a willingness to ask how the problem would be viewed and addressed if the client were home, lest the counselor misinterpret what seems apparent.

Class and Race

Elements surrounding both class and race can have an immediate effect on issues that these students face. Racism is a fact of life of American culture and the possibility that an international student will experience racist remarks or discrimination is real and should not be ignored. Two interviewees indicated they had experienced some type of racist incident, and they treated these events lightly during the interview. However, that does not diminish the significance of this issue. It is important that counselors be aware not only of racism as it exists in the United States, but also in the way that color consciousness can appear as an element in the Indian status system. One interviewee, for example, described herself and other Indian students as “brown people” and indicated that Indian students might feel demeaned by employment in the dining halls where they were serving other students who were white. This perception is significant due to the fact that these
students perceived themselves as belonging to the higher rungs of a status hierarchy in their own country, a hierarchy that they brought with them to the new setting. Confronting racism and dealing with it may pose an exceptionally difficult topic for these students to discuss.

For individuals accustomed to having a particular sense of one’s place in a hierarchical schema – a place that has been determined over generations – to have this identity and self-image challenged in the United States, can pose problems for self esteem, identity, and evaluations of self worth. Thus, one of the tasks of a counselor may be to ensure that a client maintains their positive pre-arrival self identity, and resists definitions imposed by the host’s culture, that may damage or otherwise undermine a positive self image (Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007). It is vital that counselors be aware of the ways in which racism can impinge upon and structure an individual’s experience even if the client does not immediately bring such experiences to the forefront. Certainly the whole topic of how race and color play out in relationships and adjustment issues for Indian students in the United States is an area rich in research possibilities and certainly merits further investigation.

Backlash

Closely related to this area would be a research focus on post 9/11 era backlash. The post 9/11 era has seen the growth of anti-immigration sentiments which has been
frequently coupled to a backlash against people of color, including Asian Indians. How this has impacted on the adjustment of Asian Indian international students is an area worthy of additional study. For example, several interviewees mentioned that they had encountered difficulties in finding appropriate post-graduate employment. Sensitivity to this problem is rich in possibilities for the counseling profession to outreach to this population. This is especially true since these students regarded counseling for guidance in careers and employment as an acceptable use of counseling services.

Outreach

Given the fact that outreach is one of the mandates of a counseling center, the Asian Indian international student community presents multiple opportunities for the delivery of effective support. The students who participated in this study appeared to be functioning well and according to their own perceptions are not encountering stresses or problems that they have been incapable of handling within the context of their current support networks.

However, they did identify situations that could present problems for other students less able to cope than themselves. Counselors could potentially reach this segment of the Asian Indian international student community through outreach efforts which make use of the student’s informal support systems, address their pragmatic concerns, and help
them to identify culturally relevant resources that can provide assistance. For example, a web-based power-point presentation might help alert students preparing to return home, to some of the issues they might encounter. This type of presentation, one that can be accessed voluntarily and in privacy, can provide concrete support and aid without violating cultural defined norms and expectations.

Additionally, outreach efforts to help educate other university personnel who have contact with these students, might avert cultural misunderstandings and promote meaningful cultural exchanges between host and guest residents.

Counselor Education

Over ten years ago the field of counseling was given the mandate to develop multiculturally aware, knowledgeable, and skilled counselors (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis 1992). Every opportunity that a counseling program can afford counseling students to enhance and expand their multicultural skills should be encouraged and embraced. The participants in this study clearly identified specific, very pragmatic needs which could facilitate the transition from a familiar environment to a basically, unfamiliar, culturally different, educational experience. It has been suggested that setting up a system in which counseling students could be trained in understanding the unique needs of international student, both before and after arrival at a
U.S. institution of higher education, and assisting these newcomers in addressing some of their very basic and immediate requirements, might prove beneficial for counselor and client alike (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

Counselors would benefit through putting their cross-cultural training to concrete use while simultaneously gaining experience in communicating with individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and the new arrivals would benefit from a program that helps ease the stress of the transition. Given the fact, that these students identified the initial arrival period as the most lonely, isolating, and difficult period, providing concrete services may well ease or forestall some of transitional difficulties encountered during this phase.

Seeking the aid and collaborative involvement of the Indian Students Association would be beneficial both because of the familiarity the organization has with the issues new students face, and because they have a series of support systems already in place. Additionally, collaborating with this organization, as well as other international student groups might help de-stigmatize counseling services. Such collaboration might also help international students see counseling as a resource on campus designed and dedicated to assisting students meet and succeed at their academic goals.

Reframing the counseling experience. Reframing counseling in this manner is absolutely necessary for Indian
and possibly other international students to feel comfortable in accessing counseling services. I, among other researchers (Arthur, 2004; Ibrahim & Ingram, 2007; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991), have found that Asian Indian students are reluctant to use mental health services. However, these students are also likely to use any and all services that enhance their abilities to (a) perform effectively in the academic setting, (b) successfully complete their education, and (c) locate suitable employment opportunities after graduation.

In India students have grown accustomed to seeking counseling services related to career guidance. I am suggesting that if students regard counseling as an acceptable aid to their academic success they will be more likely to use the service. In working with students who present and define the issues in their lives as merely academic concerns, the counselor and counseling services must recognize that these academic issues can have a mental health or psychological root cause. (Constantine, Kindaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005). By using the culture specific information gained from international students, such as those who participated in this study, effective, meaningful, and appropriate services can be designed and provided to the members of the international student community.
University Initiatives

The university can assist students coming from abroad by helping these students deal with some very pragmatic concerns and issues. For example, an improved transportation system with more extensive routes and more frequent and extended hours of service would be a great service to international students as well as to other students. Measures that would bring on campus housing more in line with less expensive off campus facilities would benefit international graduate students by providing living arrangements that would allow for easier access to on campus events. Affordable on campus housing would reduce the need for public and private forms of transportation. Alternately, providing an improved, university run transit program would be appreciated for both safety and time management concerns.

Streamlining the process of finding funds to sustain their education would also be welcome, as would providing riding as well as walking escorts, and a buddy or pairing system involving domestic or experienced international students with new arrivals thus facilitating adjustment. These were some of the suggestions my co-researchers offered that would be beneficial to them as new students.

Concluding Thoughts

The students who actively participated in this research appear to be coping well with the issues that arise and influence their wellbeing and performance. While it is often
easier and/or more interesting to seek out pathology and psychological maladaptation rather than focus on the numerous individuals who successfully adapt to their new home (Desai & Coelho, 1980), it is apparent from this research study that there are individuals who fall into the latter category. Arthur (2004), points out that research to date has focused primarily on the problems that face international students and researchers have only given passing recognition to the resiliency and strengths of these students. She notes that in particular the literature on mental health and international students is problem based giving little acknowledgement to their personal and educational goal attainments. The students in this study have adapted successfully; they have utilized their own resources and available skills to become successful sojourners. Clearly, future research in this area is warranted. The field of college counseling can learn from and build on these experiences in order to provide whatever type of assistance is needed in an atmosphere of understanding and multi-national competence.
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Appendix A
Interview Guide

1. FAMILY BACKGROUND
a. Ask R (Respondents) to tell me about their family and to walk me through their family relationships. Geographical area where they were born as well as where they grew up
I want to know what they wish to share about their family of origin such as whether their parents marriage was an arranged marriage or not, who comprises the family, where they are currently located, and what they are doing now. I want to know where the interviewee places in the birth order of their family and the gender distribution of their siblings.

2. COMING TO THE U.S.
a. Ask R (Respondents) to tell me the story of how they came to the decision to come to the U.S. for study and what it was like to actually leave home and arrive at OU. Additionally, I want to learn how long they have been in the U.S., have they ever lived in the U.S. previously, whom did they know in the U.S. before they arrived, and whether or not they were related to these persons by blood or fictive tie. I will solicit information about where in the U.S. such individuals reside and whether or not they are still in contact with these folks.
3. EXPERIENCES AT OHIO UNIVERSITY

a. Ask R (Respondents) to tell me what the first year at OU was like for them.

During this part of the interview, I will attempt to explore the following areas:

What things surprised them about coming to study in the U.S.
What issues they faced as they transitioned into being students in the U.S.
How they support themselves financially and else wise.
What kinds of problems/issues they see as one-time problems and what are continuing issues.
What are some of the experiences that they have had that they feel really good about.

4. SOURCES OF CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES AND SUPPORT

a. Ask R (Respondents) to tell me about the things that have gone well for them and the things that have not gone as well.

What kinds of biases and / or prejudices have they experienced.
To whom do they go to for assistance if and when needed
How helpful do they perceive these people and/or institutions to be
Do they get their issues resolved
How would they go about seeking assistance if they were back home.
How does the process differ here at OU

5. KNOWLEDGE OF COUNSELING
a. Ask R (Respondents) to tell me what they know generally about counseling and specifically about the counseling center.

What do they think of people who go to the counseling center?
What do they see as a problem for which someone would go to the counseling center?

Help me to understand what would lead you to go to the counseling center?
Help me to understand what would keep you in particular and Asian Indian students in general from using the counseling center. What might attract you and them to using the center?

5. RE-ENTRY ANTICIPATION
a. Ask R (Respondents) to share with me what future plans they have after leaving OU, and if they are planning to
return home, what kind of experiences do they anticipate as a result of having studied abroad.

6. INTERVIEWEE OPTIONS

a. Ask R (Respondents) to share what, if anything, they think is important for me to know that was not covered as we talked.
Hello XXXXX,

Thank you for being willing to entertain the idea of assisting me. I work at the Counseling center and I am also a PhD student in the Counseling department. For my dissertation, I am interested in identifying ways that the University can make the experience of being an international student at Ohio University the best possible experience.

To that end, I want to interview students who are from India and who are enrolled as graduate students at OU. I want to work with students from India, because Indian students represent the largest group of international students at OU. I would like to interview willing students as to what their experiences have been like -- What they have found helpful, what they have found challenging etc.

I am asking if you might be able to help me identify students who might be willing to talk with me. I am planning to conduct the interviews over the course of the summer, preferably during the beginning of the summer. I am thinking that the total time involved would be about two hours. Would you be willing and able to help me find students willing to talk to me?
Thank you ever so much.

Sheila Williams
Appendix C

Copy of e-mail requesting participation in the study

Ohio University

Hello XXXXXX

I was given your name by XXXXXXX, who indicated that you might be willing to talk with me about your varied experiences as a graduate student at Ohio University.

I am a doctoral student in Counseling at Ohio University and a counselor at Counseling and Psychological Services in Hudson Health Center. I am doing a dissertation study to investigate the experiences of Asian Indian graduate students at Ohio University. Through interviews I wish to investigate and gain a better understanding of students’ perceptions of their experiences as graduate students, including what they view as their joys and successes as well as any problems that might affect their abilities to be successful students. I am also interested in how students go about seeking help for problems and who they turn to for assistance.

Additionally, my research is designed to permit you to give your views confidentially on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the counseling center as a resource for you. I am also interested in your personal views as to why you may or may not use the center to assist you with any difficulties you might encounter.

Participating in this study provides you with a wonderful opportunity to impact Ohio University’s response to international students. And what you share can significantly improve the experiences that future Indian students might have at Ohio University. Please give this request to participate serious consideration.

If you are from India, came to the U.S. to pursue full-time graduate study at Ohio University and are at least 18 years of age, you qualify to participate in this study. If you are willing to participate, would you please return an e-mail to me at willias2@ohio.edu with a telephone number at which to reach you? I will then call you and we can arrange a time to meet early in July. Participating in this study will mean that I need to meet with you at least twice for a confidential interview of about one to two hours at your convenience.

Thanks,

Sheila Y. Williams

Counseling Doctoral Student

Counselor, Counseling & Psychological Services
Appendix D

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Asian Indian Sojourners: An inquiry into the probashi – “away from home” experience of graduate students at a mid-western university
Principal Investigator: Sheila Y. Williams
Co-Investigator: N/A
Department: Counseling

Federal and university regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

Explanation of Study

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research is to understand Asian Indian graduate students’ views of their experiences at Ohio University, the types of challenges they encounter, and the means Asian Indian students employ to resolve any challenges they may confront. Additionally, the research is designed to elicit information on students’ views about the counseling center on campus.

Procedures to be followed: You are being asked to participate in at least two interviews lasting about one to two hours each. In the first interview I will ask you questions related to your experiences as a student at Ohio University and digitally record our interview. I will then transcribe the interviews and look for themes and patterns in your interview and common to other interviews. During the second interview I will share some of the themes and patterns I have identified and you will have an opportunity to 1.) give me feedback as to whether or not you believe I have accurately captured your ideas from the first interview, as well as 2.) share any new thoughts that occurred to you subsequent to the first interview.

Duration of subject’s participation: Your participation will be complete at the conclusion of the interview process. In almost all circumstances your participation will be limited to two interviews. There is a remote possibility that you might be called for a third interview in order to clarify points made in the first two interviews. It is not anticipated that this will be necessary in most cases.

Risks and Discomforts: The nature of this research, along with the qualifications of the researcher, means that there will be minimal risk as well as minimal chance that you will experience any significant level of discomfort. Moreover, you may discontinue participation in this project at any time for any reason with no consequences to you. In the unexpected event that you experience an adverse reaction to the interview process, I am adequately equipped to recognize the problem and intervene. You may also call Ohio University’s Counseling and Psychological Services at 740 593-1616 to schedule an appointment, or for immediate service between the hours of 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM.
Monday thru Friday you may just walk in and ask to see a counselor. They are located on the third floor of Hudson Health Center and their services are confidential.

**Benefits:** As an international student this research presents you with an opportunity to contribute to a body of knowledge that will assist in facilitating future students’ having a positive experience at Ohio University. Additionally, you are being awarded a chance to give feedback on how the counseling center may better serve the needs of Asian Indian students in particular and international students in general. You will be helping to identify information that can be used to create an environment that recognizes the particular needs of students who have left their home countries to study at Ohio University.

**Confidentiality and Records:** Interview data will be kept at Counseling and Psychological Services (located on the third floor of Hudson Health Center) with other confidential documents. Issues of confidentiality are of utmost importance in a counseling setting and this research will be conducted according to these professional standards. All protocols and procedures for research on human subjects will be followed. Personnel working at Counseling and Psychological services are accustomed to storing confidential material and there are ample security measures in place. The building is locked at 4:30 PM each work-day and remains locked on weekends. Documents from this study will be kept in a locked office to which only authorized persons will have access.

Efforts to maintain the confidentiality of participant information include:
1. identity of individuals will be obscured through the use of pseudonyms
2. all identifying information will be excluded from the final report
3. composite pictures rather than actual persons will be used in all published material
4. a participant ID coding procedure will be used to hide the identities of particular persons for data collection and analysis.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation offered for participation in this study.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact: Name ___________________________ Department Counseling

Address 370 McCracken Hall Phone 740 593-4460

Email davist@ohio.edu

(Researcher/Advisor & email/phone number).
If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature_________________________________________ Date__________

Printed Name________________________________________
Appendix E

Demographic Sheet

Date of interview: _______________ Number in sequence: _______________

Co-researcher: ________________________________

AKA________________________________________

Age:____________________________

Gender:__________________________

Marital status:_________________________

Religion:____________________________

First time in US:__YES______       NO_________

Born in:_______________________

Family moved:____________________    Grew up:______________________

Mother tongue:__________________ Studied in English: _YES _______ NO________

OU first US institution:___ YES______       NO__________

College:________________________________

Department:________________________________

Degree sought:_________________________________

Years at OU:____________________________

Previous counseling: YES_____       NO________

   At OU:_____YES_____       NO________

Positive experience: _YES _____ NO_______
Co-researcher: ________________________________

Family Background___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Family Composition:___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Family Characteristics:________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Prior employment history:____________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Information on decision to study abroad:

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________