

MALAGASY IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCES:  
HOW PERCEPTIONS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM INFLUENCE ACCULTURATION TO  
THE UNITED STATES

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## ABSTRACT

Dr. Margaret Z. Booth, Advisor

This phenomenological study explored the potential influence of the discourse of the American Dream on the acculturation of immigrants to the United States from Madagascar. The American Dream discourse is that anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status at birth, can take advantage of the bountiful opportunities in the United States and work hard to achieve upward economic mobility. The phenomenological methods of this study aimed to reveal the essence of the shared experiences of acculturation of the nine Malagasy participants through textural description of their words. Data was collected through open-ended interviews with participants, which included four females, five males, aged 24-44, living throughout the United States and having arrived less than one year to 17 years ago. Particular attention was given to prior exposure to American media in disseminating the discourse of the American Dream and establishing preconceptions of life in the United States and how this affected acculturation. Five themes: choice in immigration, perceptions of opportunity in the United States, acculturation and acculturative stress in the United States, interpreting American culture, and navigating education values, emerged through analysis of interview transcripts. The results of this study indicated a gender difference in perceptions of the American Dream where most of the female participants echoed the discourse and succeeded according to the discourse while most of the male participants had little faith in the American Dream. Differences in perceptions of American culture also fell on gender lines. Additionally, consistent with previous studies, the participants

who echoed the discourse were more likely to employ the integration acculturation strategy, be bicultural, and experience academic and economic success while the participants who perceived their immigration as involuntary were more likely to employ the separation acculturation strategy.

*Tsihy be lambanana ny ambanilantra*

All who live under the sky are woven together like one great mat.

-Malagasy proverb

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study employs qualitative methods to capture and analyze the lived experiences of nine immigrants from Madagascar to the United States. In particular, this inquiry unveils the shared experience of the participants' acculturation to life in the United States and pursuit of the American Dream. While there is a wealth of research on immigrants' acculturation to the United States, there is little research on Malagasy people and culture both within Madagascar and in the U.S. This study will present acculturation experiences not as quantitative data but in the words of the participants in order to show acculturation as the individual people experienced it. As a result, the essence of their shared experience with acculturating to life in the United States and perceptions of American culture and the American Dream will better personalize the process of acculturation.

The participants of this study are nine Malagasy immigrants to the United States, composed to four women and five men, aged 25 to 44 years old. While some of the participants have come to the United States with the specific purpose to earn higher degrees at American universities, others have come to the United States as husbands and wives of Americans, or for various other reasons. They live throughout the United States, from small mid-western college towns to big cities. As a group, they range in U.S. residency from as little as one year to as long as 17 years. While their ages, years of living in the United States, geographic origins in Madagascar, and current locations differ, they all share the experience of acculturating to life in the U.S. In accordance with both of the above research methods and in an effort to understand the experience of acculturating to the United States at the individual level, this study addresses the following major research question and sub-questions:

- 1) How, if at all, is the acculturation of Malagasy immigrants to the United States affected by the discourse of the American Dream?
  - a. How, if at all, is the discourse of the American Dream disseminated to Malagasy people?
  - b. What role, if any, does the English language play in this experience?
  - c. What role, if any, does the American media play in this experience?
    - i. Is there a relationship between positive or negative acculturation processes and exposure to and use of American media?

### **Background of the Study**

As a nation of immigrants, it is important for Americans to understand the continuing experiences of immigrants to the United States and how these experiences are changing with the global economy. The American Dream was born of immigrants seeking more opportunities and better life in the United States and the discourse of this Dream is repeated today even though economic realities of the current context are different from the realities of the historical context in which the discourse was established. The amount of immigrants to the United States continues to grow, particularly immigrants from African countries (Terrazas, 2010). Because African immigrants tend to be more highly educated, more likely to be proficient English speakers, and from higher socio-economic statuses compared to immigrants from other continents, their pursuit of the American Dream may be of great interest (Terrazas, 2010). The traditional immigrant discourse is of laborers who come to the United States to make a better life for their families. Therefore, the unique experience of the elite African immigrant to the United States may reveal the American Dream under new light. This study seeks to examine the role, if any, that the belief in the American Dream plays in acculturation to the United States.

Additionally, it will examine the effect of achieving or not achieving these aspirations has on the acculturation of the participants.

### **Justifications of the Study**

The choice to study Malagasy immigrant's acculturation to the United States could potentially illuminate the ways in which the American Dream can affect acculturation because most Malagasy citizens who immigrate to a Western nation, do so to France. English is not widely spoken in Madagascar and the country does not have a strong relationship with the United States. As a result, Malagasy immigrants who choose to come to the United States have specific reasons to do so. This reason may be driven by the pursuit of the American Dream. The use of the phenomenological method may help to demonstrate how personal experiences of the participants drove them to come to the United States and contribute to describing the essence of this experience.

This study has the potential to reveal how one national group experiences acculturation to the United States with particular attention to how the discourse of the American Dream and exposure to media influences this process. By examining the words of these participants, their navigation of this experience may further our understandings of how the pursuit of the American Dream influences acculturation.

### **Organization of the Chapters**

This manuscript is structured to introduce the purpose and framework of the thesis, situate the study within the literature, outline the details of the research methodology and practice, and explain and examine the findings of the study. CHAPTER II presents an in-depth review of relevant literature in relation to acculturation, the American Dream, and discourse, the media's effect on these, and relevant information about Madagascar and Malagasy people which



provides a solid foundation for discussion of the lived experiences of the Malagasy immigrants to the United States. CHAPTER III describes the phenomenological methodology utilized for this study, and details the practical processes of participant selection, data collection and analysis. CHAPTER IV outlines the findings of the study via the voices of the participants, and thus contains extensive quotes from interviews, pieced together to provide both profiles of the individual participants' lived experiences, and to describe three major themes prominent in the shared experiences of the participants. Each theme is then discussed following frameworks from relevant literature and previous studies. The thesis concludes with CHAPTER V, which reviews the implications of the study and offers speculative suggestions for practical application of the findings.

### **Key Terms Defined**

- American Dream: The American Dream, a discourse which has existed since the early 1800's, is the belief that the United States of America is the best country to find a fair chance to achieve academic, professional and economic goals because there are many opportunities to do so (Clark, 2003).
- Acculturation: The experience of groups of individuals from different cultures having long-term contact with a new culture which can result both in changes of the individuals and the new country (Berry et al., 2011).
- Phenomenology: A qualitative methodological approach which is philosophically influenced by the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and was further developed by into a research methodology by Clark Moustakas (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology seeks to reveal the lived shared experiences in order to understand the essence of that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

- *Epoche*: A component of phenomenology where the researcher sets aside their biases, preconceptions and judgments by explaining their experiences with the phenomena in order to see the phenomena in a new light (Moustakas, 1994).
- Madagascar: An Indian Ocean island off the south east coast of the African continent which is populated by over 20 million people from 20 different ethnic groups. Geopolitically, Madagascar is an African country, but culturally and linguistically, the strength of this tie varies throughout the island (Campbell, 2005).
- Malagasy: The adjective used to describe the people from Madagascar and the noun to describe the dominate language of the country.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this thesis will outline the subjects and present background for understanding the case of Malagasy immigrants to the United States. Relevant background on the history of the American Dream and current statistics will be provided. Theories of discourse, encoding and decoding, and acculturation will be presented, as well as previous studies which apply these theories to similar research. These theories will later be applied to the themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants of this study.

Immigrants accounted for over 12% of the total population of the United States of America in 2009, which is the highest percentage in U.S. history (Bridgewater & Buzzanell, 2010, p. 235). Compared to immigrants from other areas of the world, African immigrants tend to speak English at a higher level of fluency, be more highly educated, and come from higher socio-economic levels relative to their country's economy (Terrazas, 2010). While there is much research on the issues of immigration, acculturation, and the pursuit of the American dream, little research focuses on the issue from an African immigrant perspective. Furthermore, there is little research on how the media disseminates discourse of the American dream and how this influences immigrants' expectations.

### **The American Dream**

The American dream is the idea that the United States of America is a unique, free country where one can work hard to rise above their social class. There are two elements of the American dream: "a belief that there is a fair chance of succeeding and ample opportunities to do so" (Clark, 2003, p. 4). This discourse of upward mobility for those who are willing to work for it has been present within the United States and abroad since the early 1800's (Clark, 2003). For

Americans, this means that they were born in or immigrated to the country where freedom is tantamount and success can be achieved by anyone who is willing to work hard. For those abroad, this means that the United States could be a place where their dreams could come true if they were able to move there.

Achievement of the American dream is measured in the material aspects of life as “an evocation of the successes of living in America” (Clark, 2003, p. 2). It is an enduring notion that achieving material success in the United States is possible for poor and unskilled people. The economic facts of the United States tell a different story. According to many recent studies, there is less economic mobility in the United States than previously thought (Sawhill, 2007; The Brookings Institute, 2007; Wooldridge, 2004). Over the last 30 years, there has been a “considerable drop-off in median household income growth compared to earlier generations” (Sawhill, 2007, p. 3). While the American Dream tells us that the United States is the unique country where rising in social class is possible for all, attainment of the Dream has been slower for new immigrants than in the past as measured by career entry and high education attainment; their children were less likely to earn as much as the children of older immigrants and less likely to earn higher degrees (Hatton & Williamson, 1998). In fact, for new immigrants, it is more economically viable to rise in social class in France, Germany, Canada, Denmark, the Scandinavian countries, and most of Eastern Europe (Corak, 2006). Yet for many hopeful immigrants, the United States is still aspirational.

Because the experience of the American Dream can be different for immigrants than those born in the United States, their perceptions of success in achieving it may also differ. For example, a 1995 study of English speaking foreign born immigrants to the United States suggests that participants “are unequivocal in their desire to remain in the United States and are

enthusiastic about being American” (“Immigrants and the American Dream,” 1995, p. 4). Over 80% of the study’s participants reported that they were happy with the level of opportunities for themselves and their children compared to opportunities available in their country of origin (“Immigrants and the American Dream,” 1995, p. 4). According to this study’s results compared with a Gallup poll of American born citizens in the same year, more immigrants believed in the possibility of the American dream than American born citizens (“Immigrants and the American Dream,” 1995). However, attitudes towards the reality of the American Dream have shifted since 2007 according to the Pew Economic Mobility project (Lasky, 2011). Previous to 2007, about half of those who were surveyed reported feeling positive about their economic opportunities while the other half reported feeling negative. Since 2007, however, an increasingly higher percentage of all Americans report feeling negative about their economic opportunities (Lasky, 2011). Though, the younger generation may be more hopeful. According to a 2005 survey of American college students, Abowitz (2005) found that a majority of the participants did believe that the American Dream was alive and well. The data from their survey study also shows that the participants acknowledged that starting at a higher socioeconomic status did help in achieving the American Dream but that family background and ethnicity did not have an effect (Abowitz, 2005).

There are many ways that society can evaluate if the American Dream is a lived reality. One indicator of the success of the American Dream can be gleaned from the common measure of absolute economic mobility: an individual’s economic status as compared to their parents’ at the same age. Research from the 2011 Pew Economic Mobility Project in the United States shows that “two-thirds of 40-year-old Americans are in households with larger incomes than their parents had at the same age, even taking into account the fact that the cost of living has

risen” but this does not take into account that household sizes are smaller now than they were 40 years ago (Winship, 2011). As a result, the same amount of income may be split between fewer people giving the illusion of economic growth (Winship, 2011). When the data is adjusted to account for the difference in household size, four out of five 40 year old Americans are better off than their parents were at the same age. While the trend of economic mobility is still upward, the pace of increase has slowed since the Baby Boomer generation.

A measure of relative mobility, however, may paint a different picture. The bottom fifth economically of the population has very little mobility at all across generations. Only one third of the bottom fifth will make it out of the bottom three fifths (Winship, 2011). This is an issue particularly for black Americans because “remaining in the bottom is much more common among black families than white families” (Winship, 2011). Not only has upward mobility slowed overall, but most of the bottom fails to experience the upward mobility at all. The American dream of upward mobility has been presented as truly and uniquely American, but upward economic and educational mobility is now more common in most of western and northern Europe as well as Canada (Winship, 2011). Statistical evidence for the viability of the American dream in modern times is bleak.

## **Conceptual Frameworks**

### **Discourse**

Discourse theory will be used to understand how the participants talk about the American Dream; therefore, a definition of discourse, its creation and its effect is necessary to discuss how the American Dream is understood by the participants of this study. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972) was concerned with construction of knowledge. Through what he called “discourse” the production of knowledge is created. Foucault theorized and wrote about not only

how knowledge was constructed, but about who had the power to construct knowledge (Hall, 1997). According to Foucault (1972), knowledge is a product of dialogue, and those producing the dialogues that produced knowledge have the power to create ‘truth’. He defined discourse as “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language” (Foucault cited in Hall, 1997, p. 44). Foucault also emphasizes that what was ‘true’ in one historical context is not ‘true’ in a different context. For example, in one historical context it was ‘true’ that the world was flat; in a more recent historical context, it is not true at all. The world was never, in reality, flat, but because those in power to create the discourse ‘knew’ that the world was flat, the rest of the world operated as if it were flat. Foucault argues that the ‘truth’ of discourse is more important than real truth because it affects how people act and how policy makers make decisions (Hall, 1997).

In a case study of how Caribbean immigrants to the United States use the discourse of the American dream, Bridgewater & Buzzanell (2010) found that “Participants described a dialectic interplay between: idealized or fantasized images of the United States acquired through media and their “real” American Dream by which they obtained educational, job, and economic benefits” (p. 245). Several of the participants described a preconceived notion of the United States as a land of plenty and easy lifestyle with little work. Furthermore, they themselves perpetuated this discourse to their friends and family in their country of origin even when they found it inconsistent with their experiences (Bridgewater & Buzzanell, 2010). This shows how pervasive discourse can be because even when one is faced with reality versus discursive reality, they may choose to continue believing the discourse.

## **Encoding and decoding**

This thesis will employ Hall's reception theory, particularly encoding and decoding, to understand how the participants decoded messages that were presented to them through American media and how their frame of reference may have affected this decoding. An episode of a TV show or a feature film presents a story and message as told by the creative team responsible for crafting the show. According to Hall's (1973) reception theory, this is only part of the process. Because each individual watching the show brings his or her individual and cultural possibilities for interpretation, the media's message is created not only by the makers of the show or film, but in a kind of dialogue with the viewer. An episode of a TV show or film, without being viewed by someone, has only an encoded message. It is in the viewing that the message is decoded by the viewer (Hall, 1973). Deeply rooted in Marxist theory, Hall's encoding and decoding theory seeks to explain the power dynamic between the powerful and the exploited (Doran, 2008). In the case of television and film discourse, the producers are encoding the message, while the viewer decodes the message according to their personal worldview (Hall, 1973). Hall (1997) writes, "meaning is a dialogue" (p. 4). Thus, the meaning of media is not in the media itself, but in the relationship between the media and the consumer (Hall, 1973; 1997).

Mass communication (such as U.S. American news and entertainment media) plays a crucial role in both the construction of reality and the maintenance of reality (Hall, 1997). This is a reality where some are powerful and more are dominated by the powerful, and all are made to believe that this is the natural way of the world (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, through this process, one point of view (perhaps that of a particular news conglomerate) can be presented as if it were common sense, and could then 'become' common sense (Hall, 1973; 1997; Doran, 2008). Different news media sources tend to be politicized (i.e. in the United States, there are



papers which are known to be liberal and papers which are known to be conservative), but Hall argues that even though different sources seem to be couched in opposing political ideology, they often present the same kind of narratives which, when carefully analyzed, actually present only one ideology (Doran, 2008). This singular “ideological value is strongly fixed because it has become so fully universal and natural” (Hall, 1980, as cited in Doran, 2008, p. 197). For instance, this ideology is represented in the news media when it presents news stories centralized around one, western, male politician. While there are many other ways to tell a news story, this is the informally agreed upon way to tell a story. It is so commonly employed that it is seen as the *common sense* way to report news (Doran, 2008). Hall (1997) emphasizes that this ‘common sense’ is constructed by the most powerful players in society.

### **Acculturation**

The shared experience of the participants of this study is acculturation to the United States. A definition, the importance of, and previous studies about acculturation will provide background to the shared phenomena. Acculturation is “the process of coping with a new and largely unfamiliar culture” (Dow, 2011, p. 221). New immigrants experience acculturation when adapting to their new surroundings, and the country they immigrate to also can adjust to the new immigrants. Jean Phinney’s (2001) acculturation model describes four strategies of acculturation which can affect an immigrant’s economic and educational success in a new country. Those strategies are: *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation* and *marginalization*. *Integration* is both adapting aspects of the new culture and creating new relationships while maintaining the ethnic identity from the country of origin. *Assimilation* is adapting to the new culture while not maintaining ethnic identity. *Separation* is maintaining original ethnic identity without participating in or adapting to the new culture in a meaningful way. *Marginalization* is neither

adapting to the new culture nor maintaining ethnic identity but instead remaining lacking identification with both the new culture and the original culture. A single individual can use more than one strategy at a time through the course of their acculturation, go through phases of using different strategies in different situations, or follow one strategy completely (Phinney, 2001). The use of the different strategies can be influenced by age, ethnicity, gender, fluency in the heritage language and new language, and education and socioeconomic level (Dow, 2011).

Phinney (2001) also describes biculturalism as being a part of two or more cultural groups. Biculturalism can be both blended (the individual expresses both cultures at the same time) or alternating (the individual keeps the cultures separate, perhaps one culture for the public sphere, and one for the private sphere). For example, a blended bicultural person can draw from both their original culture and the culture they are acculturating to as is necessary based on any given situation. An alternating bicultural may draw from the new country's culture while at school or work but maintain their original culture in the home. The *integration* strategy is linked to biculturalism and both are linked to academic and economic success in new immigrants because of the positive benefits of a strong ethnic identity coexisting with establishing relationships and adapting to the new culture (Dow, 2011; Phinney, 2001). Tadmor (2006) studied acculturation strategies for their relationship with successful career mobility and found that immigrants who use the *integration* method are more likely to have upward mobility. Immigrants with strong ethnic identity from their original culture who are also able to function as a part of the new culture are able to navigate both their cultural worlds with fluency and confidence needed for economic and education success.

Because this study includes participants who arrived to the United States at a variety of ages, the variable of age in use of Phinney's acculturation strategies will be important to

understand the differences in experiences. In a study of the acculturation process of youth, Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder, (2006) found that the *integration* method of acculturation, maintaining the heritage culture while adapting to the new one, was the most commonly employed strategy of acculturation (at 36.4%) used by immigrant youth in 13 different countries (p. 313). This is consistent with many previous studies on adult immigrants (Dalisay, 2012; Dow, 2011; Phinney, 2001). However, the same study found that immigrant youth were less likely to identify themselves with the national society than adult immigrants. “Thus there is potential for serious problems in intercultural relations between these immigrant youth and others in their society of settlement” (Berry et al., 2006, p. 324). Child and adolescent immigrants can demonstrate more difficulties establishing an identity in the new country than adult immigrants.

**Race and Acculturation.** Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell (2010) contest that acculturation is not a simple process for any individuals, but that it is even more complex for Black immigrants to the United States. For Black immigrants, “acculturation is not a simple process of integration but one that is highly contested and characterized by conflict” (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010, p. 32). According to Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell’s (2010) study of Kenyan immigrants to the United States, Black immigrants’ first experiences living as a minority is uniquely difficult because Blacks have been historically stigmatized in the U.S. This has impacted their acculturation because they have struggled harder to fit in with a new society where they are a racial minority and subject to discrimination.

Discrimination and perceived discrimination can affect acculturation and inspire use of the *separation* and *marginalization* acculturation strategies. When young immigrants perceive little or no discrimination, they are more likely to employ the *integration* strategy of

acculturation, but “when there is more perceived discrimination, they are likely to be in the diffuse profile, or to a lesser extent in the ethnic profile” (Berry et al., 2006, p. 327). The diffuse profile characterizes young people who feel marginalized and confused and experience many social problems, which is consistent with the use of the *marginalization* acculturation strategy.

Within the United States, it is possible for ethnic groups to establish a majority presence in specific neighborhood, city or region which can create different acculturation experiences. Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell (2003) suggest that because Black Americans have settled into regional “enclaves,” so Black immigrants to areas that are not populated by many other Black immigrants or Americans may have a completely different acculturation process than immigrants who do settle in an “enclave”. Black immigrants can also acculturate to Black American or White American culture or maintain their country of origin culture which further layers the intricacies of acculturation of black immigrants to the United States (Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2003). Because all of the participants in this study have a range of black skin color, the additional levels of complexity in acculturation will be of great importance.

**Language Proficiency & Acculturation.** A high level of proficiency in the language of the new country can positively affect acculturation of international students (Phinney, 2001; Spenader, 2011; Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012; Young & Gardner, 1988), which is significant for this study because three of the nine participants are currently international students in the U.S. In a study of language proficiency’s effect on acculturation of American international students in Sweden, Spenader (2011) found that higher Swedish language proficiency was positively correlated with positive acculturation experiences. American students who reported that they could not communicate in Swedish also reported that they made no Swedish friends and had negative acculturation experiences (Spenader, 2011). Another study of

language proficiency's effect on acculturation of international students found that Chinese students in Canada had more positive ethnic identities if their oral English proficiency was high (Young & Gardner, 1988). Furthermore, language proficiency of international students increases their human agency which can ease acculturation because the international students feel comfortable and capable of solving their own problems (Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012). International students who arrive with high language proficiency experience less stressful acculturation.

Many previous studies on the impact that English language proficiency has on acculturation has shown that higher English proficiency levels are correlated with positive acculturation and lower levels of acculturative stress (Bhattacharya , 2011; Dalisay, 2012; Dow, 2001; Spenader, 2011). "A common language is essential if communication is to take place, and therefore familiarity with language is the skill that most new arrivals look to acquire" (Dow, 2011, p. 223); therefore, new immigrants arriving with language skills that will allow them to communicate in the new country will have a great advantage in having a healthy, positive acculturation process. Research has shown that low language proficiency of a newly arrived immigrant is related to higher experiences of acculturative stress and lower levels of economic success (Dalisay, 2012). In a study of adult African immigrants to the United States, the authors found that participants with low language proficiencies rated themselves lower on self-evaluation of their health than participants with high language proficiencies (Okafor, Carter-Pokras, Picot, & Min, 2013). Language proficiency can affect all aspects of an immigrant's life.

**Mass Media and Acculturation.** American mass media can affect the acculturation of immigrants to the United States even after they have arrived because it is available in abundance internationally and may be the only interaction with American culture a newly arrived immigrant

will have before they make American friends and coworkers. This exposure to American culture through media “is likely to play an important role in the creation of knowledge about American culture” (Moon & Park, 2007, p. 320). In their study of how the use of mass media affects acculturation of Korean immigrants to the Los Angeles’ Korea town, Moon and Park (2007) found that higher levels of exposures to American media was positively correlated to acceptance of American cultural norms. By having exposure to Americans through the media, acculturation can be enhanced. Additionally, media from an immigrant’s country of origin can aid in biculturalism through maintaining the original culture.

While continuing to connect to home culture through the media is a good way to establish biculturalism, research has shown that “as immigrants become acculturated to a host society, their uses of host media increase while their uses of native media decrease” (Dalisay, 2012, p. 156). In a study of how new immigrants to the United States’ acculturation is affected by media use, Dalisay (2012) found that exposure to American media before arrival to the United States lowered acculturative stress possibly because exposure to American media before arrival indicates a previous knowledge of English language. Study participants who reported using American media more than country of origin media indicated that they were comfortable and sometimes preferred using the English language. The study found that “immigrants appropriate English language media, both in their countries of origin and in the United States, to learn about American culture” (Dalisay, 2012, p. 157). American mass media can be a useful tool for immigrants to aid in English language acquisition both before and after arrival in the United States. Furthermore, English language proficiency is often vital in *assimilation* and *integration* models of acculturation. Contextualizing the significance of mass media for immigrants is

essential for a study such as this thesis and therefore a focus will be made on the use of American mass media prior to arrival to the United States.

**The American Dream and the Mass Media.** The discourse of the American dream is often delivered through the mass media to people who are not in the United States. For example, in a study of recent immigrants from India to New York City, Bhattacharya (2011) found that many immigrants expressed that “achievement of the ‘American dream’ was among their life-aims” (p. 84). Participants in this study hoped to raise their socioeconomic status and lifestyle (to be more like Hollywood) by moving to the United States and reported that American TV and movies were their main sources for expectations for the kind of social life they would have in the United States (Bhattacharya, 2011). Many of the participants in this study lamented that they were well educated and of high status in India, but in the United States, they found that they have little opportunity for similar status work and lack socialization with similar status American peers, causing acculturative stress (Bhattacharya, 2011).

Because U.S. American mass media is popular throughout the world, many people are able to establish an understanding of U.S. American culture based on this media (Bhattacharya, 2011; Tan, 1988; Tunstall, 2008). In the 1980’s, 75% of imported media to Latin America and 33% of imported media to Asia was American media (Tan, 1988, p. 809). The peak of U.S. American media’s global saturation was in the 1950’s because since then, each region has been increasingly creating its own programming, but the United States’ television entertainment is still globally popular (Tunstall, 2008). In his studies of how U.S. American TV affects Taiwanese, Mexican, and Thai audiences’ perceptions of US Americans, Tan (1986, 1989) argues that it is important to understand how TV shows are the cultural ambassadors of the United States and “may be cultivating a negative image of the U.S.” (p. 809). Social stereotypes of U.S.

Americans are based on popular TV shows like *Dynasty*, *Dallas*, and *Friends* which for many is the only exposure to U.S. culture (Kamakil, 2008; Tan, 1986, 1988; Tunstall, 2008), and negatively impacts perceptions of U.S. Americans (Tan, 1986, 1988).

Perception theories propose that social stereotypes are learned from both direct and indirect exposure to a group, and media can be a significant source of indirect exposure on which people can develop stereotypes about unknown groups (Tan, 1986). According to Tan's (1986) study of Thai students' perceptions of U.S. Americans, participants rated *Dallas* as having the most accurate depiction of life in the United States. In Tan's (1988) study of Taiwanese and Mexican viewers of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, participants selected the adjectives "individualistic, conceited, materialistic, and ambitious" to describe Americans (p. 813). While this data is from over twenty years ago, the young participants are now adults, and while their perceptions of the United States may have changed, this describes the origins of their perceptions. In a more recent study of Caribbean immigrants to the United States, participants reported being disappointed their living situations when they arrived because they were not like what they had seen in movies and on TV (Bridgewater & Buzzanell, 2010). In this study, it was evident from the participants' interviews that they had expectations of life in the United States that was based on television and movies that was inconsistent with their lived realities once they arrived.

For many Africans, the U.S. American mass media has established an understanding of U.S. American culture based on the country's wealth (Kamakil, 2008; Tunstall, 2008). A Kenyan journalist in the United States wrote that Kenyans believe there are no poor people in the United States and that this perception comes from their exposure to American media. Africa "is the continent most subject to media colonization" (Tunstall, 2008, p. 285) in the way that Kamakil describes because their own media industries are still developing. A 2007 documentary



movie, *Dollars and Dreams: West Africans in New York*, chronicles the experiences of immigrants from Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso who offer their insights about their expectations of and experiences in the United States. The subjects of this documentary indicated that their early exposure to American media gave birth to an impression that the U.S. is a rich country with many opportunities and that this motivated them to immigrate. Establishing an understanding of U.S. American culture and economic climate through U.S. American mass media is over-generalized if not completely inaccurate and can impact cross-cultural understanding.

### **The Focus of this Study: The Case of Madagascar**

Archeologists have determined that the first people to arrive to the island of Madagascar were from Borneo around 400 BCE which makes it one of the last major land masses to be settled by humans (Sharp, 2002). Arab people arrived to Madagascar between the seventh and ninth centuries, and East Africans arrived shortly after (Campbell, 2005). While the ethnic identities of Malagasy people are of mixed heritage, its geographic proximity to the continent of Africa and the culture and peoples of the coastal regions are best described as African in culture and ethnicity. A study of Malagasy people's genetics determined that a majority of its population are made up of equal parts Austronesian and East African genes (Hurles, Sykes, Jobling, & Forster, 2005). Madagascar's population of 22 million people is generally divided into 20 distinct ethnic sub-groups. Most academic research involving Madagascar is focused on the island's unique biodiversity because most of its 200,000 plant and animal species exist nowhere else on earth, and many of these are endangered (Allen, 2005). Because of this, most of the research and study of Madagascar is focused not on the Malagasy people, but on its plants, animals and geography.

Westerners took interest in the island because of its strategic location for trade routes which were established first by the Portuguese and later by the French (Campbell, 2005; Sharp, 2002). Madagascar was a colony of France from 1883 to 1960. Its governmental and cultural ties to the western world have maintained this French influence despite its geographic proximity to Anglophone African countries. Until recently, the study of language has focused on French, but with increasing influence of English in the region in the world, a shift towards giving English equal status as French in the school system has occurred. Because the first formal schools were established by the French and the history of French colonialism, language education in Madagascar has always focused on French language (Sharp, 2002). Consistent with French colonial policy elsewhere, “state education developed very quickly from the beginning of the 20th century, following the doctrine that the colony could only become self-sufficient if the settlers could count on a reasonably effective workforce, which only education could ensure” (Johnson, 2006, p. 686). During World War II, Madagascar served as an important port for the navies of France and England, and Malagasy soldiers served in the French military. After the war, as independence movements spread across the world in the 1950’s, the French began slow steps over a ten year period to build Madagascar’s autonomy, resulting in full independence in June of 1960 (Johnson, 2006; Sharp, 2002). Since independence, there has not been a peaceful transition of power in the coup-torn country.

Madagascar’s economy is based on agriculture, especially labor intensive, high cost crops for export such as vanilla, cocoa, sugarcane, cloves, and more; as well as textiles and mining (Christie & Crompton, 2003). Tourism is another important industry in Madagascar. The island is plagued by both rural and urban poverty which denigrate the rain forests, biodiversity, and natural beauty, but “tourism could generate positive externalities” because tourism also increases

income for many other industries (Christie & Crompton, 2003, p.1). Over 80% of the population is best characterized as subsistence farmers (Christie & Crompton, 2003, p.3).

Because of its colonial history and current linguistic and cultural ties with France, the bulk of Malagasy citizens who emigrate from Madagascar become citizens of France (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2011). From 2000 to 2010, the number of Malagasy citizens earning French citizenship has held steady between 1,600 to 2,000 people per year (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2011). While the total number of Malagasy immigrants to the United States is much less than the number of Malagasy immigrants to France, the immigration of Malagasy people to the United States has more than doubled in the last ten years. In 2000, 33 Malagasy people became new legal permanent residents in the United States; in 2010, there were 80 new permanent residents (Migration Policy Institute, 2011). This does not include people who hold temporary (student and work) visas. When compared to other francophone countries in Europe like Belgium and Switzerland, both of which had no record of Malagasy immigrants until after 2007, immigration to the United States is much more common.

### **A Linguistic Shift from France to the U.S. and South East Africa**

In 2001, after president Marc Ravalomanana took power, he made elevating the status of the English language in Madagascar a priority and it was added to Malagasy and French as a national language in 2007 (Dahl, 2011). Starting in 2009, English language education was expanded to elementary school to begin at the same time as French language studies (Dahl, 2011). Ravalomanana's presidency emphasized an attempt to turn away from linguistic ties to France and instead shift to focusing on cooperation with its Anglophone neighbors in south east Africa and the United States (Hameerstad, 2005). The English language also plays an important

role in developing the tourism industry in Madagascar. Because of Madagascar's shared history, culture and language with France, 60% of tourists to Madagascar are French (OCED, 2008).

Many tourism professionals speak French, but few speak English. Because English is now the international language, enhanced English language training not only opens doors to tourists from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, etc., but also to tourists from the new wealthy classes in Asia who speak English as a second language. English education is crucial to catering to this new group of tourists.

Ravalomanana's predecessor, Didier Ratsiraka, was president from 1972-1993 and 1997-2002 (Marcus, 2004). Under Ratsiraka, Madagascar became a socialist state and was bankrupt after a few years under his rule, industries were not producing products, and food shortages were prevalent. President Ratsiraka also implemented the first change in the education system since independence: he mandated that the language of instruction should be Malagasy. He also mandated Malagasy to be the language of administration in the country. Ratsiraka was credited for the 'malgachisation' of the country (Dahl, 2011). By 1992, at the end of Ratsiraka's presidency, the language of instruction returned to French by the ruling elite who had never sent their children to Malagasy schools (Dahl, 2011). After following a tradition of French, then a turn to Malagasy followed by a return to French language emphasis in education, Ravalomanana emphasized English language education to play role in strategic efforts to sever ties with France and increase relations within the region of southern Africa and with the rest of the world that does business predominately in English. The participants in this study have also been affected by this shift in interest toward the global economy and English language since they all speak

English and most gained at least a preliminary if not fluent knowledge of the English language while in Madagascar.<sup>1</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As Madagascar has increased the significance of English in education and political-economic arenas, Malagasy immigration to the United States has increased. As such, a better understanding of the acculturation process for Malagasy immigrants is essential to assist the process for a people who historically have been disconnected from the Americas. This study will seek to provide a phenomenological description of the shared lived experiences of Malagasy immigrants to the United States who have had their acculturation influenced by American mass media using the frameworks and background studies provided in this literature review. With Foucault's theories of discourse, Hall's encoding and decoding theory, and Phinney's acculturation model, American mass media's portrayal of the American dream and its effect on Malagasy immigrants to the United States will be analyzed. There is a significant hole in the research of African immigrant acculturation to the United States, and this study hopes to fill in the gap with a particular look at Malagasy immigrants. In all of the research about Madagascar, there is a significant hole when it comes to academic research on the Malagasy people. Through a careful analysis of how these theories can be applied to the Malagasy participants' interviews in this study, I hope to help fill this research gap.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the history of Madagascar, see Campbell, 2005; Allen, 2005; & Sharp, 2002.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In order to select the most appropriate research methodology for this study, the goals of the outcomes were first analyzed to determine the most effective methodology. This study explores the experiences of a specific group of people as they adapt to life in the United States of America. These cultural experiences are best understood through use of qualitative methodology because personal stories can be used to gain a profound understanding of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, phenomenological qualitative research allows researchers to cultivate and understand complicated personal stories of lived experiences with a focus on what was experienced in addition to how it was experienced (Creswell, 2007). This chapter describes this study's phenomenological design, researcher perspective, participants, data collection, analysis procedures, trustworthiness, and the study's possible limitations.

#### **Phenomenological Framework**

Phenomenology seeks to reveal what aspects of an experience are universal among multiple people who have shared the same experiences (Ehrich, 2003). The process of phenomenology, which can lead to a greater understanding to a lived experience, begins with the researcher's *epoche* which facilitates phenomenological reduction. In an *epoche*, the researcher sets aside their biases, preconceptions and judgments by explaining their experiences with the phenomena in an effort to see the phenomena in a new light (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological reduction, where the researcher reflects on what is being studied without compromising their own neutrality, is then possible. Phenomenology accepts the inevitability of researcher bias, so it is through the *epoche* of the phenomenological reduction that the researcher's biases are confronted and then set aside (Moustakas, 1994). Next, the collection of rich data, usually in the form of interviews from those who have experienced the phenomena in

question, can be completed by the researcher. The researcher can then analyze these interviews by reducing the data to significant statements which are organized into themes (Creswell, 2007). In order to explain the overall spirit of the phenomena, the researcher must create rich textural descriptions of the shared experience. Additionally, journaling can allow the researcher to record aspects of the interviews which could not be captured through the participants' words as reflected on the transcripts (i.e. facial expressions which indicted emotions, overall uneasiness with discussing any given topic) which is significant because moments of hesitation and emotional inflection can be useful in the analysis to better interpret the participants' words.

Phenomenology can be a particularly illuminating methodology for researching acculturation because it is a human experience which can only be revealed through the words of people who have experienced it. Previous research on acculturation has attempted to measure or theorize about this experience, but phenomenology gives an individual meaning to the experience (Skuz, 2007). Acculturation "is a pervasive, dynamic, vast, and complex phenomenon that is experienced somewhat differently by each individual;" therefore, it is phenomenology which can provide a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences of individual experiences (Skuz, 2007, p. 448). Skuz (2007) argues that phenomenology uniquely gives exposure to the complexity of acculturation and allows a differentiation between acculturation and assimilation, which have been widely conflated outside the academic study of acculturation, to be understood through analysis of individual experiences.

### **Research Questions**

In order to explore the shared experience of acculturation of Malagasy immigrants to the United States and how the discourse of the American Dream affects this process, the following research questions were explored:

- 1) How, if at all, is the acculturation of Malagasy immigrants to the United States affected by the discourse of the American Dream?
  - a. How, if at all, is the discourse of the American Dream disseminated to Malagasy people?
  - b. What role, if any, does the English language play in this experience?
  - c. What role, if any, does the American media play in this experience?
    - i. Is there a relationship between positive or negative acculturation processes and exposure to and use of American media?

### *Epoche*

In order to facilitate phenomenological reduction by providing insight into my own experiences and biases and then philosophically setting them aside, I reflected on my own “*epoche*.” *Epoche* is a Greek word meaning “to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (Moustakas, 1994, p.33). Through Husserl’s process of phenomenological reduction, which requires the researcher to bracket their personal experiences, “assumptions and presuppositions about the phenomena are temporarily suspended” (Ehrich, 2003, p. 46). Reflecting on and expressing an *epoche* can allow the researcher to lessen interference of their own judgments and prejudices. This phenomenological study is not immune from my biases; therefore, my personal *epoche* provides perspective on understanding any personal biases on the subject of Malagasy people’s perceptions of the United States.

Because there is a considerable analysis of the participants’ definition of the American Dream, I will first provide my own definition of the American Dream. Personally, consistent with the discourse, the American Dream is most strongly manifested in upward economic



mobility. This is the idea that no matter what one's socio-economic level at birth, with hard work and effort, one can elevate one's socio-economic status. Not only does the American Dream allow for this, it allows for the means by which this upward mobility is achieved (through business, education, marriage or in whatever field one desires) to be entirely free choice for each individual. Additionally, there appears to be an undeniable sense that homeownership is an extremely important marker of achievement of the American Dream.

While I believe in the reality of this concept of the American Dream, I recognize that it is becoming less and less viable in the contemporary economy. I believe in this Dream because I have witnessed it, and I would argue that I am experiencing it. I was raised in a single-parent household on government assistance in an impoverished, urban neighborhood. More than 75% of the students in my school district qualify for free or reduced lunches (Gokavi, 2010). College was not an expectation for most of my peers, but my mother expected it of me and my older sister. My mother was born to a middle-class suburban family with a stay-at-home mom in 1963. Because she found herself a single mother with two toddlers at the age of 22, her socio-economic status downgraded drastically, and she raised my sister and me more parsimoniously than she was raised. She maintained the expectations of the middle class that were set for her and instilled these in my sister and me even though we were surrounded by peers whose parents set different expectations.

My older sister studied math and science diligently and received a scholarship to one of the most prestigious engineering schools in the United States. Upon completing two undergraduate degrees, she went on to earn a Ph.D., own a house, and earn a six-figure income by the time she was 27 years-old. I recognize that it is possible for someone to go from being raised on government assistance to earning a six-figure salary before they are 30 years old in

other countries, but it is the American Dream that tells us that this is not only possible, but expected of hard-working Americans. Personally, there was never a semester of undergraduate study when I did not work less than full-time in order to pay for school. After graduation, I served in the Peace Corps, and this experience helped me earn admission, with a tuition scholarship, for graduate studies. The American Dream was possible for me through my hard work and singularly possible in the United States because of a government program.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Madagascar, I taught English in a small town where I was the only foreigner. I learned the national language at a proficient enough level to converse with people on many subjects. In my town, everyone knew that I was American. When I traveled the country, this was not always immediately apparent to strangers, but people generally could identify that I was American once they heard me speak Malagasy since the Peace Corps is one of the only organizations whose representatives learn the language. Being easily identified as an American, friends, neighbors, strangers, and anyone else sought me out to answer their queries and discuss my country. Based on the similar yet divergent nature of all of these conversations, I realized that it is impossible to generalize about what Malagasy people think about the United States. From these conversations, I perceived that some Malagasy people understand the United States to be safe, void of crime, and populated by comfortably wealthy to extremely wealthy people. Other people expressed a sense of fear and danger about the United States, asking about how many guns my family had and if I knew anyone who had been murdered. Whatever their perception, it seemed to me that many people had no idea of the variety of circumstances possible in the United States but a more dichotomous spectrum of good or bad.

In general, though, it was clear that peoples' perceptions of the United States tended to be more positive than negative. While teaching at a university, I asked the 4<sup>th</sup> year students to tell

me why they chose to study English. Almost all of them expressed a motivation to move to the United States to pursue wealth and fame. Many other people expressed a desire to marry an American so that they could easily become citizens of and move to the United States. As a result, I wondered about the origins of these aspirations. While the post-colonial cultural influence in Madagascar is French, American TV shows, movies, and music are very popular. When people asked me questions about the United States, their inquiries were often embedded in a discussion of American media (i.e. “I saw in a movie that Americans have more than one car. How many cars do you have?”). I found that these perceptions had a negative impact on my life in Madagascar. Many people asked me for financial assistance, and they assumed that I possessed a wealth of money to spare since I am American and that I did not share my resources with them because I was stingy or did not care about their struggles.

A conversation which had a significant impact on my understanding of the United States as perceived by a Malagasy person has greatly influenced the origins of this study. On one of my final days in Madagascar, I had lunch with a park guide who had lived in the United States. He had married a Peace Corps volunteer and moved to the United States with her. He told me that he initially thought it was everything he had hoped for because his surroundings were comfortable and nice, but after some time, he began to feel isolated. He could not find a job that was at the caliber of his highly respected position as a park guide and instead worked part-time in a minimum wage, unskilled labor job. He made enough money to live a comfortable life with his wife, but her family and friends began to call him lazy because he did not have ambition to buy a car or attain more prestigious full-time work. He had no desire to purchase a car, and he was financially comfortable, so he did not understand why he should work more if he was already satisfied. As an American, I completely understood that people would expect him to

work more and buy a car, but having lived the last two and half years in Madagascar, I also understood the cultural differences and economic expectations. I interpreted his conflict to arise as a result of the disconnect he experienced between the imagined American Dream and his real experiences. The Americans he encountered expected him to pursue a life of material goods and status derived from hard work while his expectations were simply to have what he considered to be a comfortable life. Eventually, partially rooted in this conflict, he divorced his wife and moved back to Madagascar and returned to his former position as a national parks guide. For him, the discourse of the American Dream, as defined by the people around him, caused significant enough acculturative stress for him to decide to return to Madagascar.

I cannot overemphasize the impact this conversation had on my understanding of my own culture and how I am personally a manifestation of the discourse of the American Dream. I started working at McDonalds when I was 15 years old, and for most of my life after high school, I have had more than one job and maintained a more than full-time work schedule. Throughout most of my undergraduate studies, I took as many credit hours as the university would allow and worked as many hours as I could fit into my schedule. I felt that this was what was expected of me, and I never thought critically about what drove me to structure my life in this way or how this schedule affected me. If there was an opportunity for more hours at work, I took them, even if I did not need the money. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see that I was very unhappy with my daily schedule throughout my undergraduate studies which took me five years rather than four because of having transferred schools and multiple major changes. When I returned to the United States after Peace Corps, I found work with a Monday-Friday 9-5 job, and I started looking for a supplementary weekend work. Then I reflected again on this conversation with the park guide and asked myself why I felt the need to fill every hour with income

generating activities. Had I learned nothing from living in Madagascar? In my second year of graduate studies, I again had more jobs than I needed to live comfortably. Sometimes I reflect on this conversation and wonder about the cultural force that has made me value earning money over free time or feel guilty about having free time at all.

This study seeks to better understand how and if Malagasy immigrants to the United States share the notion of the American Dream and if it has had a positive effect on their lives. It seeks to better understand the origin of Malagasy peoples' notion of the American Dream. Through this reflection on my own experiences and relationship to the experience being explored in this study, it is then possible for me to begin phenomenological reduction open to the new ideas that could confirm or challenge my preconceived notions.

### **Participant Selection**

The shared experience this phenomenological study investigates is acculturation to life in the United States. To be eligible, all potential participants in this study had to be: 1) raised at least until adolescence in Madagascar, and 2) currently living in the United States. Participants for this study were selected through deliberate criterion snowball sampling recruitment method (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling recruitment identifies potential participants from people who know other potential participants, while the criterion aspect of this participant selection ensures that all potential participants meet the criterion for the study (Creswell, 2007). While I know several potential participants from my time in Madagascar who currently live in the United States, I chose to disqualify anyone whom I had known before the study began in order to reduce bias. Instead, I asked the Malagasy people that I knew in the United States to help me identify other potential participants. Using the snowball effect, wherein I ask participants to recommend other eligible participants, I was able to find participants from many different backgrounds living

in a variety of regions in the United States for numerous diverse reasons. After interviewing five male participants, I then specifically targeted potential female participants to seek balance between male and female participants.

Table 1 <i>Participant Demographics</i>							
Name	Sex	Hometown	Age	Years in U.S.	English Level on Arrival	Higher Degrees	Purpose for Relocating to U.S.
Hoby	Male	Capital	24	11	None	Bachelor's & MBA (U.S.)	Family
Rija	Male	Small Village	34	2.5	High	Bachelor's (Madagascar)	American Wife
Rado	Male	Small Town	34	3	Low	Bachelor's (U.S.)	American Wife
Kanto	Female	Highland City	44	17	Fluent	Bachelor's (Madagascar)	American Wife
Jouvin	Male	Capital	44	9	Intermediate	Bachelor's (Madagascar)	American Husband
Lova	Female	Coastal City	40	10	Intermediate	Bachelor's (U.S. & Madagascar) Master's (U.S.)	Sister & Studies
Ronald	Male	Capital	25	1	High	Bachelor's (Madagascar) Master's (U.S. & Madagascar)	Studies
Fanja	Female	Capital	36	1/2	High	Bachelor's (Madagascar) Master's (U.S.)	Studies
Franka	Female	Coastal City	34	6	High	Bachelor's (Madagascar) Master's & PhD (U.S.)	Studies

The number of participants for an effective phenomenological study can vary, but Creswell (2007) suggests having at least five participants from which to draw data to create a description of the shared experience. This study's nine participants, who are listed with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, are briefly described in Table 1. This table provides each participant's sex, hometown, age, the age they arrived in the United States, the years they have lived in the United States, their self-described English level upon arrival to the United States, their higher degrees, and their purpose for moving to the United States. These demographics help to establish an individual contextual depiction of their acculturation to the United States.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process began in the summer of 2012, and final reporting of data analysis was occurred in the spring of 2013. Because the participants in this study live throughout the United States, interviews were conducted over Skype, a software application which allows people to make video calls over the internet. Informed consent to participate and be audio-recorded was verbally established according to HSRB procedures (see Appendix A). The interviews were open-ended, allowing for the lived experiences of the participants to be revealed unhindered (Creswell, 2007). Each interview was 30-90 minutes in length and varied depending on how much detail the participants conveyed in their responses. Participants were asked to explain their interpretation of American culture, the American Dream, their exposure to American media before arriving to the United States, and their experiences with the English language. A list of semi-structured interview questions is available in Appendix B. Although the interviews were semi-structured, in order to maintain the phenomenological principle of discovering the phenomenon from each individual participant's view, questions and follow-up questions were varied to accommodate personal experiences.

In order to gain trust with each participant, I first introduced myself and explained my experience in Madagascar in the Malagasy language. After the prescribed open-ended questions were answered, I asked the participants if they had questions for me. Many of the participants turned my questions about what surprised them about life in the United States around on me to discuss my perception of Madagascar. It was during this dialogue that many meaningful statements from the participants were drawn. Notes were taken during the interviews if I found something of interest, such as facial expressions or overall emotional state that may have not been reflected in the audio recording. After each interview, I wrote notes on my overall impressions of the interview and what struck me as most meaningful at that time. As I accumulated more interviews, notes also focused on what was common from previous interviews.

### **Analysis Procedures**

The audio file of each interview was transcribed word for word into an electronic document. Each participant was sent the transcript of their interview via email so that they could ensure that their experiences were accurately reflected, and they were given the opportunity to confirm or amend their statements (Moustakas, 1994). These member checks allowed the participants to confirm the accuracy of their transcripts (Creswell, 2007), and none of the participants requested changes. One participant wanted to add new ideas and impressions of American culture that she did not express in our first interview, but no other participant asked for changes or made an addition.

Next, the transcripts were analyzed to find common themes. This data analysis process followed the procedures common with qualitative methodologies: (1) collect verbal data, (2) read data, (3) divide the data into parts, (4) organize and express the data in disciplinary language, and



(5) summarize the data for reporting (Giorgi, 1997). Specifically for this phenomenological study, the following steps provided by Van Manen (1990) were applied to the analysis process: (1) use personal experience as a starting point; (2) obtain experiential descriptions from others through interviews; (3) draw from observations, literature, art, and anything else available; (4) determine themes; (5) identify areas of focus for description; and (6) analyze what each statement says about the experience which is being shared (Ehrich, 2003).

Once themes emerged, meaningful statements on these themes were compiled, and similarities of negative or positive perceptions and consistent responses were organized by participant demographics to find possible similarities. For example, if many female participants had a positive response where the male participants had a negative response, the meaningful statements were organized to make this apparent. Significant statements were organized by the participants' ages, hometowns, gender, years in the United States, region in the United States, and media exposure to find commonalities.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research describes elements of good practice which contribute to the quality of the methodology (Merrick, 1999). The criteria used to establish trustworthiness in this study were: prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking. Prolonged engagement is a technique to increase trustworthiness through the investment of time (Merrick, 1999). The initial research for this thesis occurred in spring of 2012, with data collection primary in the summer of 2012, and analysis and reporting were completed in spring 2013. In addition, I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Madagascar from June 2008 until January 2011 which has provided me with prolonged engagement with the Malagasy culture. Peer debriefing describes the process of "engaging with others about what

one is finding and about the research process” (Merrick, 1999, p. 27), and this technique was used at every phase of the project. Finally, the member check technique, confirming words and interpretations of those words with the participants after their interviews (Creswell, 2007; Merrick, 1999), allowed for the participants to think more deeply about what they said in their interview and make any amendments they felt necessary. Each participant was sent the transcript of their interview to allow them to reflect on what they said in their interview and allow them to make changes or additions with the advantage of time to reflect on the questions and their initial answers. Only one participant wished to make an addition to her transcript. All other participants confirmed that the transcript accurately reflected their statements during the interviews and were still consistent with their current ideas.

Ideally in any qualitative study, triangulation, or the use of multiple sources of data to answer the same question, is used to analyze different angles of the question (Creswell, 2007). In this study, all data were based on interviews. The reliance on interview data is always subject to untruths that could be from the participants’ error in memory or misunderstanding of facts. This is less important, however, because phenomenology seeks to explain their experiences as they are remembered and interpreted, even if there are errors of historical fact.

Insights into the researcher’s biases and preconceptions are discussed in the *epoche* section of this chapter. While this *epoche* does not relieve this study of my biases, it helps establish an understanding of my point of view. Merrick (1999) describes this technic for increasing the trustworthiness of a study as “disclosure of the researcher’s orientation” (p. 30). Likewise, through the *epoche*, where I reveal my own viewpoints and experiences with the themes within the questions of this study, the reader is able to put my analyses in perspective which increases the overall trustworthiness of this study.

The trustworthiness of this study also benefitted from my experience as a teacher in Madagascar. I was able to establish trust with the participants by initiating our conversations in the language of Madagascar and sharing my experiences with Malagasy culture. My insider knowledge of the culture, language and educational systems of Madagascar may have helped gain the trust of the participants which allowed them to share their experiences with me.

### **Methodological Limitations**

Because the participants in this study were scattered throughout the United States, all interviews occurred over Skype video calls. While these video calls allowed for face-to-face interactions, they also allowed for other distractions and a lack of intimacy. Most of the participants completed the interview from their homes, and two of them were caring for infants during their interviews which caused occasional distractions which could have affected how deeply they were able to go into any given topic. There were no other people present during the interviews in a way which might have hindered open discussion aside from the two infant children. Other interviews were affected by poor internet connections which caused breaks in the interview which interrupted natural flow of conversation and potential deeper delving into questions.

Phenomenological interviews should allow the participants to speak unhindered by the influence of the researcher, but as all of the participants were non-native speakers, some participants asked for examples of ideas or alternate words when they were not sure of their understanding. Most of the participants were quite fluent, so this was not common, but it did occur during some interviews. My knowledge of the Malagasy language assisted in some questions. Both the participants and I engaged in code switching from English to Malagasy for

vocabulary specific to Madagascar; for example, explaining the transportation systems, religion, and food.

Using the snowball method of participant selection, I took recommendations for participants from other people. I contacted many potential participants, but very few responded to my inquiries about scheduling interviews. Additionally, not all respondents who scheduled an interview followed through with their plans. It is possible that some potential participants were hesitant to become involved in this study because they were afraid to share their experiences of adjusting to life in the United States with an American if these experiences were negative. This may have resulted in a skewed group of participants who were more positively acculturated than is reflective of the actual pool of potential participants. However, in a small qualitative study, it is difficult to judge reasons for self-selection. Because the initial contacts for the snowball recruitment method were from high socio-economic and highly education backgrounds, the participant pool may reflect a skewed representation of the Malagasy immigrants to the United States as they recommended contacts from the same social class. Most of the participants of this study were from the highest socio-economic and most educated class of Madagascar. Therefore, this study is limited in representing a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Additionally, in order to protect the identities of the participants of this study, great care was taken to omit specific details about the universities they attend(ed) and their places of work. One participant declined to provide his/her age, but I estimated based on when that participant reported completion of education and Madagascar and years in the United States. The contextualization of these details could provide a richer understanding of their lived experiences and the differences between them, but the protection of their anonymity has priority. Some

participants refused to provide the names of their employers or universities, especially when they were critical, so even the researcher was lacking this context in some cases.

As with all qualitative research, this study has no goal of or claims to generalizability of acculturation experiences of Malagasy people to the United States.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter first introduces all of the nine participants in this phenomenological study in greater depth than in Table 1 (p.33) in the methodology chapter. Thick description of each participant will provide insight into what is common about their experiences. Next, each theme that emerged from the findings will be described and extensive quotes from the participants will illustrate the significance that each theme has for the participants. These themes that emerged as shared experiences of the participants are: 1.) choice in immigration, 2.) perceptions of opportunity in the United States, 3.) acculturation and acculturative stress in the United States, 4.) interpreting American culture, 5.) navigating educational values. In each theme, the findings will be presented in the form of summary and quotes from the participants followed by a discussion and analysis in relation to the original research questions:

- 1) How, if at all, is the acculturation of Malagasy immigrants to the United States affected by the discourse of the American Dream?
  - a. How, if at all, is the discourse of the American Dream disseminated to Malagasy people?
  - b. What role, if any, does the English language play in this experience?
  - c. What role, if any, does the American media play in this experience?
    - i. Is there a relationship between positive or negative acculturation processes and exposure to and use of American media?

### **Individual Descriptions**

#### ***Hoby***

Hoby, a 24 year old Malagasy man, came to the United States as an adolescent. His father took a job in Minnesota when Hoby was 13 years old, so he moved there from the capital

of Madagascar, Antananarivo in 2002. Unlike the other participants, he did not have experience with the English language education prior to his arrival. As a high school student in Minnesota, he was placed in ESL classes. He explained that *“I went to ESL for most of my high school years, actually all of my high school years because I came as a sophomore not knowing anything and next thing you know I have to take the ACT and the SAT and all these standard tests, and I was always in an ESL classroom.”* He was provided a French translator for extra-curricular activities and sports. After high school, he went on to complete an undergraduate degree and recently completed an MBA both in the city his family originally immigrated to. For the last several months, he has been unemployed and actively seeking full-time work beyond the freelancing he is able to organize himself. Now at the age of 24, he is not sure where to make his career, but knows that he is not interested in limiting himself to the United States. He said *“I’m not trying to stay here and uh yeah retire and die here, that’s not going to happen.”* He also said that he hope to eventually retire in Madagascar.

### ***Rija***

Rija, a 35 year old Malagasy man who moved to the United States to be with his American wife, is from an isolated town on the west coast of Madagascar which is surrounded by thick rainforest which prevents roads from being passable most of the year. He moved to Antananarivo to complete university study in languages. He studied English, Japanese, Italian and German. After he completed his degree, he returned to his hometown to teach English at the sole high school in the area. He also developed a successful community English club which is known about and has been attempted to be replicated in other towns throughout the country. In 2009, Rija married an American who lived near his town as a Peace Corps Volunteer. A year later, the couple moved to her hometown in Hawaii where she now works in a university library.

Because of the success with his English club, Rija has a reputation among English educators in Madagascar, and I had heard of him before he was recommended to me as a participant in this study though I had never met him or his wife.

Rija was highly proficient in English when he arrived to the United States over two years ago. Currently, he is working at a thrift store donation center. He was hired for this job after 12 other failed interviews for other menial jobs. About the hiring processes he went through before he was able become employed; he said *“I’m not a graduate from a U.S. school. It’s kind of hard, and they don’t take me seriously.”* He reports that he is happy with life in the United States, but misses his hometown and his work there and hopes to find work he feels is more suited to his education level. *“I like it here. Just I will go on vacation to Madagascar. Yeah, but you never forget from where you came. I think of Madagascar every day, every hour.”*

### ***Rado***

Rado, 34 year old Malagasy man who moved to the United States to be with his American wife, is from a small beach town on the east coast of Madagascar. He attended university in the capital of Madagascar for one year and studied economics. After that, he returned to his hometown as a *gendarme* (armed military police). He met and married an American Peace Corps volunteer. After her service, his wife returned home to the United States while he stayed in his hometown. After living for one year apart, Rado joined his wife in the United States when he was 32 years old because *“It made more sense if I followed her, like she is here, and I am there, that is not a marriage.”* When he arrived to the United States, he had not studied English since high school, and began pre-college English as a second language classes. After one month in the United States, Rado was hired as a dish washer in a restaurant in Washington D.C. He reports having had a lot of difficulty adjusting to life in a new culture and



new language; *“My problem was English. Living everyday life with Americans in English.”*

After completing one year of ESL classes and two years at a community college, Rado began studying business at four year university in Washington D.C. in fall of 2012. He and his wife have one child, and when she finishes her master’s degree and he finishes his bachelor’s degree, they hope to go abroad for work but have no region of the world in mind. When asked if he was excited about moving to the United States, Rado said *“No, I was not excited.”*

### ***Kanto***

Kanto, a 44 year old Malagasy women who originally moved to the United States to be with her American husband, is from a populous central-highlands city, but spent most of her adolescence in the north coastal tourist destination city where her parents were university professors. They lived at the university professor housing, so she was always surrounded by professors, many of which were from overseas. Because the lingua franca among the international professors was English, Kanto got early exposure to practice with English and was motivated to study it in middle and high school. From an early age, she realized that the English language gave her access to things and information that others could not access. Then, she moved to the capital to study English at university. She spoke at length about why she chose to study English and how this choice has shaped her life. After she completed her English degree, she began working as a tour guide for English speakers. While most tourists to Madagascar speak French (OCED, 2008), there was a tour company that brought cruises from South Africa, and most of these clients were Anglophone. At the time, there were not many highly proficient English speakers in Madagascar, so her language skills allowed her to get hired in this high prestige position.

While working as a tour guide, she met an American man who she later married. She moved with him to Boulder, Colorado, but the two spent most of the early years of their marriage traveling internationally. She reports that this negatively affected her transition to the United States because she felt she never was able to feel at home as they were traveling so much. After three years of marriage, they divorced. When she spoke about her transition out of Madagascar, she said *“I was lost. I did not know what happened to me, and he couldn’t understand either, my husband. There was nobody here for me. I know there is culture shock I think because it was crazy.”* Despite these difficulties, Kanto stayed in the United States after her divorce. She established a non-profit development organization which she now manages. She has lived in the United States for 17 years, but she works about 4 months a year in Madagascar with her organization. She is now married to one of her former classmates from university who she became reacquainted with at a party in the United States. He lives primarily in Madagascar, so the couple splits their time between Colorado and Madagascar. She concluded her life experiences thus far by stating, *“I have lived so many different lives so far. And I think that’s made me who I am now and I am very proud to be American, but I am very very Malagasy deep down inside.”* Not only did Kanto choose to come to the United States, she says that *“I wanted to go to America. It was my dream.”*

### **Jouvin**

Jouvin, a 44 year old Malagasy man who moved to the United States to be with his American wife, is from the capital of Madagascar, and was interested in learning English from a young age because of his positive experiences with English classes and his proximity to the American Cultural Center (ACC) which is the home to one of Madagascar’s most prestigious English schools. He spent a lot of his free time in high school at the ACC watching American

movies and documentaries. While he continued studying English as a hobby, he received his bachelor's degree in forestry and moved away from the capital to a small east coast beach town to work in the forest. He met an American Peace Corps volunteer there, and they began a relationship. They later married, and after her two year Peace Corps service, the couple moved to the capital where she taught at the American school while he continued working in forestry policy. After living together in Madagascar for four years, they moved to the United States.

Nine years later, Jouvin reflected that *"when I was in Madagascar, I thought that abroad, oh it's so easy to find a job, but it's not really at all."* He expressed that he had difficulty finding work in the United States because of his English proficiency was not considered good enough anywhere that he interviewed. Eventually, he got another bachelor's degree and worked for some time in a greenhouse. He is currently not working but stays at home with his infant while his wife pursues her master's degree. After she finishes, they both plan to work overseas but later retire in the United States.

### ***Lova***

Lova, a 40 year old Malagasy woman who moved to the United States to be with her sister, was raised mostly in a coastal city in the north, the same tourist hot-spot where Kanto grew up. She got a bachelor's degree in education in the capital and worked for several years as a high school teacher. Her younger sister moved to the United States to study, and she pleaded with Lova to come join her there. At the time, Lova was in her mid-twenties and in a long-term relationship and was building her career as a teacher, so she denied her sister's appeals. When her relationship ended, her sister asked her to come again and, *"she asked me so much, so I'm like, you know, why not, it's America, right!"* When she arrived, her English skills were intermediate, so she enrolled in an ESL program at a community college. After completing the

program, she tried to get a job in the education field, but she quickly realized that her bachelor's degree from Madagascar did not carry much weight in the American job market, and she had no American teaching certification. She went back to undergraduate study to get another bachelor's degree in education. She explained that her difficulties in the United States were tantamount to restarting her life and said *“when you're in your 30's and you have to begin everything, that's a little bit hard. Pretty much you have to redo your life. So anyways, that was not easy, but you know, if you try, you can make it.”*

After 10 years in the United States, Lova is now married to a Chinese-American immigrant and has one child. She works as a special education teacher, but hopes to return to Madagascar to help improve services for special education students there. After that, she hopes to return to the United States when she retires. All of her siblings work outside of Madagascar, and she hopes they can all one day return and share what they have learned from living, working and studying elsewhere.

### ***Ronald***

Ronald, a 25 year old Malagasy man, is from the capital of Madagascar where he earned a bachelor's degree in Economics and Management and a master's in Business Management from the private Catholic university there. He is now living in a small college town in Missouri for almost two years pursuing another master's degree on a Fulbright Scholarship. Like most students in Madagascar, he started English in 6eme (roughly 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and continued the study of the language until graduating high school. Additionally, he took two years of extra-curricular English courses at the American Cultural Center (ACC) while in college. Despite not having focused on English language studies, Ronald placed out of any supplemental ESL classes at his American university and is highly proficient. He chose to study English as a supplement to his

management degrees because “*you can learn English and pretty much go everywhere.*” His mother is fluent in English and a world traveler, so she encouraged him that fluency in English would increase his opportunities. While he applied for many scholarships in many different countries, he chose to come to the United States because he received the best financial offer from the U.S., and he was most interested in experiencing American culture. Because the Fulbright Scholarship requires that its awardees return to their native countries after they finish their studies, Ronald will return to Madagascar when he graduates and hopes to work in private industry and considers returning to the United States in the future a possibility.

### ***Fanja***

Like Ronald, Fanja, a 36 year old Malagasy woman, is from the capital of Madagascar and is in the United States pursuing a master’s degree on a Fulbright Scholarship. She is in her first year of a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages program in Michigan. She earned a bachelor’s in English at a university in the capital. She chose to study English at university because when she took the university’s general placement test, she scored highest in English. After she graduated, she worked as a private English teacher for individuals. She decided to pursue scholarship programs in the United States because while her English proficiency was very high, she thought that her “*English was rather bookish, everything learned from books mainly.*” She hopes to acquire a better understanding of English pragmatics and American culture so that she will have more authority as an English teacher when she returns home. She would like to return to her previous job when she graduates, and like Ronald, she considers a future return to the United States a possibility.

### **Franka**

Franka, a 34 year old Malagasy woman who moved to the United States for university study, is from a west coast city and had always been interested in learning English. She received a bachelor's degree in English from a university in the capital. She moved herself and her family (her husband and two children) to the United States six years ago so that she could earn a master's degree in French. Even though her passion is for English, she was able to get an assistantship to study French in the United States but was not able to get financing to get a higher degree in English. After graduating with her master's in French, she and her family remained in New Mexico where she is currently a PhD candidate in Education. She reports having an extremely difficult experience adjusting to life in the United States and says *"until now I have language problems. It's not home. I refuse to adjust. I refuse to get into the culture. I still dream in Madagascar, in Malagasy. I am very protective to my own culture and strong with my identity."* Franka expressed a strong desire to maintain a Malagasy identity in her children and hopes to return to Madagascar as soon as possible as a university professor and researcher. While she reports that she was never interested in coming to the United States despite having a passion for English, she ultimately chose to come to the U.S. because of the financial package offered to her to study French.

### **Participants Summary**

With nine total participants, four came to the United States with an American spouse (Rija, Rado, Kanto, and Jouvin), three came for higher education (Ronald, Fanja, Franka), one came while a child with his parents who came for work opportunities (Hoby) and one came as an adult to be with her sister (Lova). Two of the participants, Rija and Rado, are from small towns with little access to English speakers and higher education. Their ages range from 24-44 years

old, and their time in the United States ranges from seven months to 17 years. All of the participants (except Hoby who came as an adolescent) had some years of university study in Madagascar before coming to the United States. Because Hoby came at a young age, he had no previous knowledge of English, and Rado had only a basic level of English proficiency. All of the other participants were at least intermediate English speakers at the time they moved to the United States.

### **Themes**

In order to examine the shared experiences of the participants in this phenomenological study, the data from individual interviews will be synthesized by themes in order to allow the reader to derive a descriptive understanding of each participant's experience with acculturating to life in the United States. After reviewing the data from each interview, shared themes emerged from the participants' words. This included five themes:

1. Choice in Immigration
2. Perceptions of Opportunity in the United States
  - a. Definitions of the American Dream
  - b. Myth and Reality
  - c. Social Capital Motivation to Study the English Language
3. Acculturation and Acculturative Stress in the United States
  - a. Acculturative Stress
  - b. Culture Shock
  - c. Media Based Expectations to life in the United States
  - d. Homesickness
  - e. Permanence of Life in the United States.

- f. Communication Barriers
- 4. Interpreting American Culture
  - a. Diversity
  - b. Ambiguity of American Culture
  - c. American Politeness
  - d. Food
- 5. Navigating Educational Values

### **Choice of Immigration**

While all of the participants in this study share the experience of immigrating to the United States, not all of them underwent this experience explicitly by choice. Some made moving to the United States a personal goal. Kanto said “*I wanted to go to America. It was my dream.*” In this case, her immigration was completely willful. Others, like the Fulbright Scholars, Ronald and Fanja, specifically applied to this program to come to the United States to study; therefore, their moving to the United States even temporarily to study was not only deliberate but required concerted effort. Franka also came to study, but she insisted that she was never interested in coming to the United States. She said:

*I planned to go to Europe. That’s where Malagasy people want to go, but I wasn’t accepted. Actually I avoided it because I was told that, in the United States, everybody has a gun. You can buy a gun like candy, so I was not interested. I thought there’s no way I’m going to go there. I had a negative let’s say thoughts about the U.S., so I didn’t wish or plan to go to the U.S.*

Franka did eventually come to the United States, though. She was given a teaching assistantship to teach French while she earned her master’s degree in New Mexico. When she completed her



master's, she stayed to pursue a PhD. While she reports that she did not originally to come to the United States, she took the action to apply to schools in the U.S. and chose to stay for a further degree.

Rija, Rado and Jouvin immigrated to the United States to be with their American wives. While they may have not explicitly chosen to immigrate to the United States, they chose to marry an American, so there is a measure of active choice. However, Rado stated that he was not excited to come to the United States and that he only came because it is where he could be with his wife. Lova chose to come to the United States because her sister was here. She said that she would not have been interested in coming to the United States if it were not for her sister's persistent pleas that she joins her here. Immigrating to the United States was not Rija's, Rado's, Jouvin's Lova's idea, but it was their choice.

The only participant who had no choice in his immigration outright was Hoby. His father had an opportunity to work in Minnesota when he was 13 years-old, so he came to the United States with his family. At the age of 13, he had little say in the matter. Hoby said that his father *“had to come here for a seminar or something, and then he had the opportunity to keep coming. I think that's the root cause, and then we ended up staying, uh... so I think that's what happened.”*

## **Discussion**

The level of voluntary to involuntary migration has a momentous effect on acculturation to a new culture (Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010; Jamil, Nassar-McMillan & Lambert, 2007; Ogbu, 2004). John Ogbu (2004) explains that involuntary immigrants “are forced into minority status against their will” often through colonization, enslavement or conquest (p. 4). While actual forced status does not represent any of the participants of this study, Ogbu's ideas about

the degree of voluntariness when migrating may influence the acculturative processes of some individuals. In this study, this issue of voluntariness of immigration is the most salient in the case of Hoby because he is the participant who had the least level of choice in his immigration as he came with his family as an adolescent. He spoke extensively about being discriminated against based on his skin color. He spoke about discrimination as a daily conflict in his life when he said “*yeah, yeah, I can talk a lot about [discrimination]. Even at the gym yesterday, even just yesterday, I was with some guys and they were trying to talk me out, and that happens every day.*” Later, he goes on to say:

*There’s modern slavery going on now in front of our eyes, and no one is doing anything, there’s discrimination all over the place and no one is going to do anything to stop it anytime soon, so you just have to do what’s right and you can still enjoy your life and get the best out of it, that’s all that matters. Discrimination, that’s something that we go through pretty much every day.*

Hoby was forced to assimilate to American culture to some degree immediately upon arrival because he was enrolled in American schools. According to Ogbu (2004), this forced *assimilation* often leads to *marginalization* which often takes the form of discrimination and social subordination like Hoby described at the gym.

Hoby feels he has been subject to *marginalization* by the dominate culture but also denied membership in the Black culture because of his recent immigration status. Because Hoby learned Standard English in ESL classes in high school and had little exposure to other dialects of English, like Black Vernacular English (BVE), he simultaneously ineligible for membership in White collective identity and also excluded from membership in Black collective identity which relies on BVE for group identification (Ogbu, 2004). While he is from a country which is

geopolitically African, all Americans may not recognize him as Black, but his skin color could be perceived as Black. Hoby does make sure to show that that discrimination based on his skin color does not prevent him from enjoying life, so it has not completely affected his outlook. He speaks about discrimination as something that is inevitable and must be dealt with. Hoby is the only participant who talked at length about discrimination based on his skin color. Others spoke about feeling discriminated against based on their accents, but not skin color.

The preservation of one's original culture can be influenced by the degree to which the migration was voluntary. According to a study of immigrants to the Netherlands, "when migrants are considered to have left their country on a voluntary basis, endorsement of cultural maintenance is lower than when migration is perceived to be involuntary" (Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010, p. 260). The participants of this study are consistent with those results, especially if Franka's assertion that she did not voluntarily choose the United States is taken seriously. Franka speaks at length about her purposeful maintenance of Malagasy culture in the way she raises her children, eats, and practices her religion. Even though she claims she did not want to come to the United States, she took efforts (applying to universities and scholarships). Consequently, her migration is difficult to label as involuntary. Yet, the way she talks about her choice indicates that she perceives her migration to the United States as involuntary. Therefore, it may be that her own perception of her situation weighs in significance more than the interpretations of this researcher. According to Gieling, Thijs and Verkuyten's study (2010), Hoby's genuine involuntary migration to the United States should leave him with a higher priority of cultural maintenance, and this seems to be the case. He is one of the only participants who spoke about returning to Madagascar and followed the *separation* strategy of acculturation.

He also referred to Malagasy people as “we” which shows that he still includes himself as a member of the group.

On the other hand, Kanto chose to leave Madagascar which “involves a responsibility to assimilate to the new society which is also in one’s own interest” (Gielsing, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010, p. 260). She achieved this assimilation according to her responses. Among the participants, Kanto makes the most mention of her desire to move to the United States, and is the only one who refers to herself as an American. She has also shed herself of Malagasy food culture even though she spends four months of the year in Madagascar. As a result, similar to other research, the participants who did explicitly decide to come to the United States were more likely to focus on maintaining their Malagasy culture.

### **Perceptions of Opportunity in the United States**

#### **Definitions of the American Dream**

The belief that the United States provides opportunities was evident in the way the participants discussed their concept of the American Dream. I asked each participant to define the American Dream. Some did so from their own immigrant perspective while others did so from the American perspective. Some focused on materialism while others focused on the idea of hard work. Hoby said that the American Dream is “*materialism, big houses, latest technology, the cars, yacht, a good life.*” Rado defined it “*to make a million dollars.*” Ronald explained the American Dream as “*if you talk about American people it would be having a good job, having a house in the suburbs, nice cars, nice children who go to the football games, stuff like that.*” Rija took a particularly long time thinking about this question before he answered it, but finally he said “*... I don’t know... maybe they want to do big better for different sectors like Education uh, uh, economics, something like that, I don’t know.*” Jouvin also thought carefully

for some time before answering that *“I don’t really have any answer for that,”* but he later went on to discuss economic mobility in the United States.

Lova said *“I think that basically the American dream is to have a good job and an education and a house, and also your children go to college later on and you can have vacation as much as you can.”* Fanja said that the American Dream is the idea that *“you can be someone who has nothing, but if you work hard you can get what you want through your hard work. People expect that if you work hard you can get what you want.”* Franka said it is *“to work for yourself... And my friends who are here who have become American, they [start their own business] because this is the American dream. They don’t like to be repressed. They have protections for rights and responsibilities.”* Kanto said that the American Dream is:

*To set a goal in your life and you just walk to it and no matter what the obstacles or situations are going to happen or problems you just like or what you’re values that you hold with you, I mean as an immigrant, I’m talking as an immigrant... [You must be] goal driven and have very strong will to do, to reach your goal, it’s hard to beat the system...I think you just have to... America is just like almost like a life that you could put together.*

## **Myth and Reality**

As they defined the American Dream, some of the participants talked about whether or not they believed it was feasible. Hoby, who defined the American Dream as *“materialism, big houses, latest technology, the cars, yacht, a good life”* went on to say that *“no one can afford, or a majority of people cannot afford you know what is the American dream.”* Rado said *“[American people] are forcing themselves not to pursue that dream because they don’t believe in it.”* Jouvin discounted the American Dream based on the current economic situation; *“most of*

*the factories are not hiring or working... I don't see how the American dream will prosper... Also to start a business right now in the states, impossible. You can start a small business, and live making baskets or selling coffee in Madagascar.*" He went on to say that the American Dream was antiquated; *"I know that everyone was talking on the TV that there were poor guys but after 1950s, 1940s, they were really rich and they are thinking that that's American, but that was then."*

Kanto, Lova, and Fanja all said that it was possible but emphasized that it is difficult and not something that comes from simply being present in the United States. Kanto said *"no matter how it's going to be hard, it's just I know that to come to America is not an easy choice for me, I took that choice, so I must walk it."* Lova said, *"I think it's feasible but you have to work hard for it."* Fanja said, *"If you work hard you will end up as someone who is not poor. It allows you to get what you want if you really want to work for it."*

### **Motivation to Study the English Language**

Six of the nine participants chose to study English as a part of their university concentration even if it was not their specific major. Several participants reported that their parents were vital in establishing motivation to learn English at a young age. Kanto said *"my dad said you should work on English because it seems like you want to talk to [the international professors], so you should learn English."* Ronald said that his mother told him *"If you want to find the best jobs to get the best opportunities to be able to communicate anywhere around the world, you have to learn English."* Others spoke of learning English as a way to achieve career success and because it is widely spoken throughout the world. Both Kanto and Ronald said *"English opens doors."* Others reported that their personal interest and ability in English was what motivated them to pursue it in higher education. Franka said *"English is something more*

*interesting*” [than French and other languages]. Fanja said “*I started to like it and I started to be good at pronunciation, so I decided to study English at university.*” Jouvin said “*most of the English teachers in Madagascar they are so nice, they are not like the French teachers, so everybody likes to study English language.*” There were many reasons provided for studying the English language, but the pervading idea was that the ability to speak English leads to opportunity.

The most common language in Madagascar is Malagasy, and it has 18 different dialects. As a former French colony, French is still widely spoken among the educated classes. English, on the other hand, is still a rarity. While many larger cities have access to English language courses and university level English studies and English language study is officially required for 6-12<sup>th</sup> grade students, it is not widespread or commonly spoken. Because of this, those who can access English language education have a unique skill. Kanto explained that she understood that speaking English was a highly marketable skill; “*I was one of the few people who spoke English and it was really hard to find English speaking guides.*” Rija, who studied English at university and was fluent when he arrived to the United States, said “*Malagasy people don’t speak very good English, and it’s difficult for us to find practice.*” Because English is not widely spoken in Madagascar, those who speak it are at an advantage, and it takes some effort to be able become fluent while in Madagascar because of this lack of access.

## **Discussion**

### **Living the Discourse**

The traditional discourse of the American Dream is clearly alive as demonstrated by some of the participants of this study. Scholars have defined the American Dream as the principle that America is a unique country where freedom and opportunity allow upward

economic mobility through hard work (Clark, 2003; Lasky, 2011; Sawhill, 2007). Four of the nine participants made mention of material items like houses and large quantities of money in their initial response about the American Dream. Four others clearly echoed the discourse of freedom and hard work. Two participants, Rija and Jouvin, hesitated to define the American Dream. This hesitation and lack of articulateness on the subject is interesting because out of all the participants, Rija had the most limited access and exposure to American media. Jouvin is one of the participants who described their English level upon arrival to the United States as basic. These two characteristics may suggest that exposure to American media and initial competence in the English language is influencing variables when interpreting the meaning of the American Dream.

**Gender variable.** Seemingly, the most influential variable in the differences among definitions of what constitutes the “American Dream” was gender, as an influencing variable. This is notable even though (from my impressions after living and working in Madagascar) there seems to be few if any barriers between opportunities for women and men in Madagascar. According to a poll of American home-buyers conducted by TD Bank, 64% of women find home ownership essential to defining the American Dream while only 52% of men shared this idea (“Life, Liberty and the Pursuit,” 2013). This data is not consistent with the participants of this study as only one of the women mentioned home ownership while most of the men listed home ownership and other material things.

All three of the participants who called the viability of the American Dream into question were male. Yet, all four of the female participants made use of the discourse of freedom and opportunity. These women also agreed that the American Dream is only viable through hard work while the males were more prone to listing material goods and to discount the American



Dream as myth. The discourse of hard work facilitating upward mobility was clear in each of the women's descriptions of the American Dream as evidenced in the following quotes: *"you can be someone who has nothing, but if you work hard you can get what you want through your hard work," "[Americans] have protections for rights and responsibilities," "[you must be] goal driven and have very strong will to do, to reach your goal," "I think it's feasible but you have to work hard for it."* The idea that the Dream is only achievable through hard work is thoroughly demonstrated in these women's definitions of the American Dream.

One of the women said, *"if you work hard you will end up as someone who is not poor. It allows you to get what you want if you really want to work for it."* This truly echoes the traditional discourse of the American Dream even though it denies current economic statistics: the economically bottom fifth of the population has very little mobility at all across generations (Winship, 2011), and over the last 30 years, there has been a "considerable drop-off in median household income growth compared to earlier generations" (Sawhill, 2007, p. 3). Faced with reconciling these statements with current economic data, it is clear that the knowledge produced by this discourse is not rooted in statistical fact but rather discursive truth. Foucault's theories of discourse and knowledge production emphasizes that what was 'true' in one historical context is not 'true' in a different context. He further argues that the 'truth' of discourse is more important than real truth because it affects how people act and how policy makers make decisions (Hall, 1997). If these women believe that that they can achieve their goals and gain economic mobility through hard work, then they will continue to be driven and have a higher probability of fulfilling their understandings of success. Indeed, of the nine participants, all four women have (or are pursuing) graduate degrees and/or employed in their field of choice. Several of the men, on the other hand, are struggling to find work as two are unemployed and one describes his work

as menial. It is the men who decry the American Dream as myth who are unemployed or not enjoying their work. As a qualitative study, a cause and effect relationship cannot be determined; however, the men do not believe in the reality of the American Dream, and they also state that the discourse of the Dream has not been evident in their lives. However, the women believe the American Dream to be true and for them it has been evident in their lives. One of the major differences here seems to be that the women focus on the process of the achievement of the American Dream rather than the outcomes, which appears to be the focus of the men. As a result, they express a sense of satisfaction with being on the path to success even if it has yet to be achieved; while the men focus on the fact that they feel they have nothing to show as a product of success.

Four of the participants moved to the United States because they married an American, but only one of these participants was a woman, and her marriage lasted only three years. She may have gotten to the United States with her marriage, but she stayed because of her personal drive and work. The three men who married an American have three statuses: unemployed, employed in menial work, and a student pursuing a second bachelor's degree after not finding success with his bachelor's degree from Madagascar. Perhaps they deny the viability of the American Dream because they do not feel that they are living their definitions of the American Dream. However, when the women described the American Dream, they were more in line with describing something they are actually experiencing or actively pursuing.

The gender variability in the interpretation of the degree of success in pursuit of the American Dream may also be related to a growing body of research pertaining to gender differences within the African American community. While it is out of the scope of this thesis to apply and analyze the growing body of literature pertaining to African American contemporary

gender differences, it should be acknowledged that within the United States, that scholarship could be relevant here. For example, research has found that African American males have one of the highest rates of unemployment in the United States compared to other demographics (Mong & Roscigno, 2009; Weatherspoon, 1997). Weatherspoon (1997) has found that because “White Americans have negative perceptions and stereotypical biases of African-American male workers” they may be more hesitant to hire Black Americans (p. 25). When hired, African American males are more likely to be subject to discriminatory firing and racial harassment (Mong & Roscigno, 2009). While categorizing Malagasy immigrants to the United States as African American oversimplifies their ethnic complexities, if White Americans (or Asian or Hispanic) decode them as African Americans, these types of challenges could apply to the participants of this study. Perhaps the male participants of this study are disillusioned with the American Dream because they have felt hiring or workplace discrimination that is not as prevalent for female African Americans who are more likely to be received as good workers by White American employers (Weatherspoon, 1997).

According to a study of intrinsic and extrinsic goals in the pursuit of the American Dream, Kasser and Ryan (1996) found that those who were driven by intrinsic motivation reported higher levels of satisfaction. Likewise, the female participants of this study express intrinsic motivation where the goal and sense of achievement comes from inside, while the male participants were more likely to list extrinsic motivations such as home ownership and financial rewards. This has implications for the acculturation of the participants because when financial rewards are correlated with satisfaction level, the acculturation of immigrants with extrinsic motivation will be dissatisfied when the monetary rewards fail to materialize. In the case of this study, the male participants who expressed definitions of the American Dream which

emphasized extrinsic motivation also expressed acculturative stress and a general lack of satisfaction in the United States.

Furthermore, failure to achieve the American Dream by one's own definition can cause further acculturative stress and negative acculturation because of the feelings of shame associated with failure (Policar, 2010). While the participants who are not experiencing success as they describe it in their definitions of the American Dream expressed shame for this discrepancy, they are the ones who criticize the American Dream for being false and / or antiquated. Because they have not found financial or professional success in the United States, their acculturation has not been as thorough or as positive as the women whose definitions of the American Dream are similar to their current experiences.

**Discourse of the American Dream in the Mass Media.** Only one of the participants, Jouvin, made mention of the media when describing the American Dream when he said that it was something that is talked about on TV but that is no longer true in real life. Helen Joy Policar (2010) writes that the versions of the American Dream that are presented in American literature, film and television often ignore the struggles and shame of the working class but rather celebrates the achievements of the higher classes. Because the media portrayal of the American Dream focuses on one's ability to succeed as essential to the Dream, those who have set their expectations of success in the United States through the media may experience the shame of failure in something that was portrayed as easy to achieve. The media (especially American television in Madagascar) also seems to focus on the outcomes of the American Dream rather than the process. This may influence the way that viewers decode the message of success which seems to simply happen without understanding the process by which success was achieved.

However, the women focus on the process in their definitions of the American Dream even though it is not as evident in the media.

Jouvin and Rija were the two participants who had difficulty giving a definition of the American Dream. This is significant because Jouvin reported one of the lowest levels of English proficiency prior to his arrival of all the participants. While he did discuss the American media he consumed, perhaps, as a result of his relatively low English proficiency, he did not understand as much as the other participants. Additionally, Rija's hesitation in response is significant in understanding the media's effect on the participants' understanding of the American Dream because he reports not having access to American media in his hometown. He was not exposed to multiple perspectives of the Dream through American media, so he could not expound on a definition of the American Dream.

According to Hall's (1973) reception theory, the media has the power to establish a definition of common sense. When it comes to the discourse of the American Dream, the common sense presented by the media is that if someone works hard in the United States, they will be able to achieve upward mobility. As Foucault (1972) explains, discourse is the means through which knowledge is constructed. Combined with Hall's reception theory, this means that creators of media construct knowledge about the American Dream which is delivered to and interpreted by individual consumers. Because he did not consume this media, Rija's understanding of the discourse is limited. The other men tended to question what has been presented as the common sense notion of hard work inevitably leading to financial reward while the women echo the discourse, but there is no significant difference in their reported level of media consumption. Therefore, the role of the media in the knowledge production of the

participants of this study is not clear. None of the participants directly reported that their understanding of the American Dream came from the media.

### **Social Capital Motivation to Study the English Language**

Several of the participants indicated that their motivation to learn English was related to social capital. In theory, motivation that is guided by social capital when “knowledge of a foreign language carries value in and of itself” (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Renaud, 2009). According to a study about what kind of motivations English language learners have in different countries, Japanese English students are likely to be driven by social capital motivation because much of the high level international business in Japan is conducted in English; therefore, learning English is an important skill to establish relationships to build a career (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Renaud, 2009). Learners who are motivated by specific outcomes of language learning, like getting a job, are motivated by instrumental motivation. Additionally, according to Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011), “It is widely accepted that fluency in the English language is a key to success in life” (p. 994). Both Kanto and Rado indicated that they understood the value of English in the same way when they spoke of how English proficiency can qualify them for higher prestige careers and open the doors to the world market, not just the Malagasy and Francophone job markets. They are instrumentally motivated by the potential for social capital because they hoped to use their knowledge of English to create social networks and not be limited to French and Malagasy social connections. The limited access to English language in Madagascar could fuel the social capital they built by learning English because those who are fortunate enough to be granted access will have a rare skill that could result in high income and respect careers. According to the discourse of the American Dream, which focuses on the

United States as a beacon of opportunity for those who are willing to work hard, there is significant motivation for hopeful immigrants to gain social capital in English.

While none of the participants who married Americans discussed the role of language in their relationships, once their relationships became serious, they were likely motivated by integrative motivation which drives language learners to increase their proficiency for the purpose of participating in that language's culture (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Renaud, 2009). This motivation is also consistent with the goal of establishing social capital. According to previous research on motivation and language acquisition, learners who report having integrative motivation are more likely to succeed in learning the new language (Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Renaud, 2009; Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). For the participants in this study, however, those who reported ideas consistent with instrumental motivation had the highest level of perceived fluency and speaking and listening fluency as perceived by the researcher from the interviews.

### **Acculturation and Acculturative Stress in the United States**

The theme of Acculturation emerged as I asked the participants about what surprised them about the United States when they first arrived, but the topic pervaded throughout the other areas of the interviews. Many of them spoke about the things that did not surprise them because they had exposure to an idea of the United States based on the media, but sometimes these expectations served to cause further surprise because the reality in the U.S. was so far from what was presented in the media. The following subthemes will be used to discuss the participants' culture shock experiences: acculturative stress, initial culture shock, homesickness, and permanence of life in the United States.

## Acculturative Stress

Six of the nine participants had negative things to report about their acculturative stress to the United States. Acculturative stress, according to the work of Berry et al. (2011), emphasizes the role of emotions during acculturation. He defines acculturative stress as “a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation” (Berry et al., 2011, p. 315). Rado, who moved to the United States to be with his wife after they spent one year in a long distance relationship, responded to my question “where you excited to move to the United States?” with, “No, not really.” He went on to say “*when I first came here it was like really hard, like the transition and everything, it was tough. Yeah, but the problem was, if you are living your everyday life with American people, with any people, that was like English for real, that was my problem.*” The change of language was the biggest factor in his difficulties adjusting to his new life, but he also spoke about how the relationship culture is different in the United States and Madagascar when he said:

*I think there was nothing that was surprising [about the United States], but I have learned a lot about the culture, you know what I mean, like there is a huge gap between the cultures. That plays a lot when you are married to an American, you have relearn everything, like what makes her fed up, what makes her angry does not make you angry. You have to learn.*

Kanto had something similar to say about moving to the United States with her American husband; “*I had no idea how to deal with an American marriage. I was used to being single and living in the rainforest to being married and living in the United States.*”

Franka, who has lived in the United States for six years, was outspoken about how she was not interested in assimilation to the United States. She said “*[the United States] is not home.*



*I refuse to adjust. I refuse to get into the culture. I still dream in Madagascar, in Malagasy.”*

She referred to herself as an outsider on multiple instances. Additionally, she said “*It’s prestigious to speak English and behave like an American, especially if you’re a foreigner, but I am completely opposite. Now I don’t care [about cross-cultural conflicts]. It’s not my culture, but I have to be here for school purposes.*” She is in the United States to study and has no interest in changing her culture.

Fanja spoke about the fear she had of acculturating before she arrived:

*I was worried about people will see I am a stranger or foreigner and then there will be a kind of, if you are in a foreign country, you are self-conscious in a huge way that you are doing something wrong, that’s what I thought. Um... what else, yeah...the pace of life will be different from that of Madagascar. Yeah, so before I came, well actually I was almost scared of the big differences. It’s a very developed country. Everything is, especially about technology, processing computers, etc.; everything is kind of automatic, like spell check... It scared me a little.*

Now that she has been in the United States for almost a year, she reports that “*now, I’m starting to feel comfortable.*”

Kanto spoke extensively about the isolation and loneliness she experienced in the United States, especially after her divorce:

*We got divorced after 3 years of marriage in the United States. And I would say that that was a big part of my culture shock in the U.S., one of the hardest parts. There was nobody here for me. I know there is culture shock I think because it was crazy. It’s all craziness, what happens here. I was by myself. I didn’t have any problems even with my husband or the family of my husband who were so nice. I was just different. I was lost. I*

*did not know what happened to me, and he couldn't understand either, my husband. You know about culture shock, he knew about that. We are both travelers. We had traveled all over the world.*

In the United States, Kanto said that her neighborhood was very spread out and that she rarely saw other people. When she was talking about her reaction to her new surroundings when she moved to the United States, she said:

*So I said ok, but it was really a little bit hard for me because I grew up in a family, very big family, I had 6 siblings and a very small house. We were not that poor, but everybody is around and uh lots of noises and people around. And also in the rainforest I lived in a village where like everybody is close. There was a lot of connections and things like that.*

Rija, who spoke very positively about the United States, said “*you never forget from where you came. I think of Madagascar every day, every hour.*”

### **Culture Shock**

Culture shock describes the initial difficulties one has when arriving to a new culture and differs from acculturative stress in that it is experienced by nearly everyone when they enter a new culture and diminishes over time whereas acculturative stress is not inevitability and can increase and decrease over time depending on individual experiences (Berry et al., 2011).

Culture shock describes minor surprises about a new culture rather than deep emotionally difficulties that arise from living in a new culture. I asked each participant what caused them shock about the United States when they first arrived. Rija answered my question about what surprised him about the United States with:

*When I arrived here, I did not see anybody walk on the streets. I was very surprised. Because in Madagascar you can see people walk to the market, to go to work, all of the streets are crowded of people. But here, it's rare. Everybody takes bus, uh, car, maybe that's why.*

Kanto spoke about surprises about the United States throughout her interview and had some similar ideas as Rija. She said *"I was surprised about where is everybody, I don't see anybody. You mean I don't see any children playing in the yard or somebody hanging clothes."* She also discussed her impressions of the climate when she said *"I was really surprised about how dry is the United States because that's my United States, the desert, and I had come from the rainforest."* She went on to discuss her difference in living situation:

*My husband was very rich... We lived in almost a castle, a mansion, a big big house, and I was like so this is where we live?! When I was in the rainforest we lived in a hut with like a mattress! And he said, yeah this is our house and this is your room, so I was surprised about how big the house is for just two people.*

Fanja discussed her surprise about how technology is used in daily life in the United States when she said she was most surprised by *"Self-check outs."* She said, *"everywhere you can do things for yourself, check-in at the airport, check-out at the store. This surprised me and I didn't know how to do it."* She was also surprised by differences between the levels of freedom the elderly exhibit in the U.S. *"It amazed me the first time to see really old people still driving everywhere, doing grocery shopping, etc. In Mada[gascar], that's the worst thing that people dread."* Lastly, she explained that she had to adjust to the food:

*At first everything was new. I was not used to the food, and I had a kind of problem with my mouth because of the spicy food. At first I had a hard time to eat. And then, I felt a*

*little sick because everything is different. Even sometimes at home, I hear people in the streets. Every time I hear them, I expect to see Malagasy people. At first when I saw people here, I felt like I was watching a movie.*

Ronald spoke about how his surprise was based on how his town did not meet his expectations; *“my first vision the United States was the cities and very developed places with skyscrapers and stuff like that and being in a small town was really surprised me.”*

### **Media Based Expectations to life in the United States**

Many of the participants who did have access to media characterized much of what they watched as “Cowboys and Indians” and four of the nine participants named *Dallas* specifically as a TV show that they watched before immigrating to the United States. Rado said *“since I was a kid we used to watch like western movies like cowboys and Indians, so yeah, those images are what we had back there of the U.S. That was the image we had of America, like cowboys, you know, Dallas. I watched every single show of Dallas.”* Hoby also gave *Dallas* as his immediate first response when I asked what American TV shows he watched. Fanja said *“when I think in terms of movies, I like western movies with cowboys and Indians. We watched a lot of those.”* Other TV shows that were specifically mentioned by more than one participant were *Friends*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Knight Rider*, and *Baywatch*.

Some of the participants talked about how watching American TV shows and movies shaped their understanding of the United States. Kanto, who reported having no access to American TV shows and movies, did have access to NBA games which were broadcast on the French TV station. She said *“every time I watched basketball on TV, we were one of the few that had TV back then, and always on basketball it was Americans, the black Americans, the basketball men in the NBA, and I always thought that Americans were black people.”* In 1986,

there was a cyclone which destroyed many of the homes and food crops in Kanto's city, so an American warship came to offer relief. She explained "*when the warship came, I was surprised that many of [the soldiers] were white, and I said, I did not know that there were white Americans.*" Lova got the impression "*that Americans love smashing and crashing and that kind of thing*" based on the movies she saw before she came to the United States.

**Misconceptions.** Some went to on describe how the perceptions of the United States that they (and others in general) derived from media were different from what they experienced when they arrived. Hobby said:

*Some people think that America is the greatest country in the world because what you see on TV really describes that, describes the great structure of the architecture and landscape, describes how rich people think. So movies give you that perspective. So when I knew I would come here, I was like, oh wow, and when I got here I was like, oh... ok... (disappointed). I didn't know much about [the United States] other than what I saw in the movies which actually was something surprising. It's not the same thing because what's in the movies is not the reality. There's big buildings and highways like I saw in the movies, but culturally the United States is not the same as in the movies.*

Ronald said:

*When you see the movies, you see more the cities or suburbs of city life, and actually it's very different from where I live in Missouri which is a college town. So it was my impression that you know people around me will ask me for the time and have very hectic lives and a lot of movement, cars, craziness of the city and stuff like that which we don't actually have here.*

For some, the cities they saw on TV and in movies in general were very different from the places they are living in presently.

### **Permanence of Life in the United States**

Five of the nine participants reported that they plan to stay in the United States for the rest of their lives or plan to retire in the U.S. after other international work. Two of the remaining four must return to Madagascar after their Fulbright Scholarships end, but both reported that they would like to come back to the United States if they ever had the opportunity. The other two were non-committal to staying in the United States. Hoby, who came with his parents when he was in high school, has now finished his education in the United States and is looking for a job. He said “*certainly I’m not limiting my option to just America.*” Franka said “*I want to go back to Madagascar to do research at university and become a university professor*” when I asked her what she planned to do when she finished her education in the United States. Her daughter, however, recently received a scholarship for undergraduate studies at a university in the United States and plans to stay when her mother goes home.

### **Communication Barriers in the United States**

For those who reported that they arrived to the United States with lower level English proficiencies, communication barriers with native speakers was a common topic. Rado, who reported having arrived with only Basic English, said “*yeah, but the problem was, if you are living your everyday life with American people, with any people, that was like English for real, that was my problem.*” Even though he came to the United States married to an American, his wife spoke Malagasy and a lot of their relationship was in Malagasy. In the United States he was surrounded by English for the first time, and he refers to this as his main problem with adjusting to life in the U.S. Jouvin, who also came to the U.S. with his American wife, reported that his

English level prevented him from having successful job interviews; *“I cannot get through my language, ugh, you know. So they interview me, and we speak for a while, and they discover oh I don’t speak that well.”* He is currently unemployed.

Lova speaks about her fear of speaking and listening because these were the skills they had the least practice with in English classrooms in Madagascar; *“the listening and speaking is the hardest part.”* Fanja, the Fulbright Scholar who is pursuing a master’s in TESOL, said that *“actually the first time I learned English in grade 6, I was not very good.”* When she arrived to the U.S. less than a year ago, she said she thought that her English was *“rather bookish and thought it was very hard when it comes to every day English, especially American English, especially about pragmatics.”*

Despite arriving to the U.S. as a highly proficient English speaker, Franka reports that *“I still don’t know how to pray in English. I still think 5 to 10 percent of conversation with American people is not understood because it’s not my language. It’s not a big deal when you write. People don’t hear your accent, so I’m ok with that.”* She also said, *“the truth of word selection is very important for American people. And they don’t know how to pronounce my name, and that’s ok with me, but if you misspell their name... I remember this girl named Stacey and she said “my name is Stacey with an E” and I’m like I’m sorry!”* The lack of fluency in listening and speaking and knowledge of English pragmatics was a common complaint the participants had about adjusting to life in the United States.

## **Discussion**

### **Acculturation Strategies**

The participants navigated their culture shock and acculturative stress and attempted to acculturate to their new country in different ways. Their strategies can be discussed using Jean

Phinney's (2001) acculturation model which describes four strategies of acculturation which can influence an immigrant's economic and educational success in a new country. Those strategies are: *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation* and *marginalization*. *Integration* includes both the adaption to a new culture and the creation of new relationships while maintaining an ethnic identity from the country of origin. *Assimilation* differs from this by adapting to the new culture while not maintaining ethnic identity. However, *separation* requires maintaining original ethnic identity without participating in or adapting to the new culture in a meaningful way. Finally, *marginalization* limits itself by neither adapting to the new culture nor maintaining ethnic identity but instead lacks identification with both the new culture and the original culture.

The *integration* strategy can also be associated with biculturalism, which, according to Phinney (2001), is defined as being a part of two cultures at the same time. According to Berry (2005), "generally, those pursuing the integration strategy experience less stress, and achieve better adaptations than those pursuing marginalization" (p. 697). The *integration* strategy is most likely to lead to fulfillment of the American Dream as described by the participants of this study.

Of the study participants, Kanto most clearly displays the use of the *integration* strategy, and most often also discusses her biculturalism. As an example, Kanto said "*I am very proud to be American, but I am very very Malagasy deep down inside.*" Later, when discussing the food she eats, she said, "*I am very American*" when she explained that she no longer eats rice everyday as most Malagasy people. After 17 years in the United States, she claims that she is both "*very Malagasy*" and "*very American.*" She still spends about four months a year in Madagascar. While she moved to the United States with her American husband, she is now married to a Malagasy man. *Integration* and biculturalism have not always been the best way to



describe her acculturation to the United States, and this is clear when she describes her initial homesickness and acculturative stress after her divorce. She said “*It’s all craziness, what happens here. I was by myself... I was lost.*” This period of her acculturation is more characteristic of *marginalization*. Phinney (2001) explained that individual people can use different acculturation strategies during different phases of their lives, which is manifest in Kanto’s experiences.

While most of the participants of this study, like Kanto, demonstrate evidence of the *integration* strategy, Hoby and Franka express experiences that are characteristic of *separation*. One could argue that Hoby describes ideas consistent with the *marginalization* strategy, but he also mentions that he hopes to return to Madagascar when he retires and uses “we” when discussing Malagasy people. This indicates at least some maintenance of his ethnic identity. He says that American culture does not make sense to him. He says that he does not have any friends who were born in the United States. However, at times Franka also demonstrates the *separation* strategy of acculturation. She explicitly states that she is not interested in assimilating to American culture, but rather that she has maintained a Malagasy culture within her household. This manifests itself in the fact that she prays in Malagasy, cooks Malagasy food for every meal, and feels misunderstood by Americans. While both have participated in American culture in a meaningful way (by successfully completing degrees at American universities), they do not express that they feel like they are involved in American culture; therefore, their acculturation strategy is best characterized as *separation*.

Kanto and Hoby/ Franka demonstrate either ends of the acculturation scale evident in the participants of this study. Most of the participants fall somewhere on the spectrum between their opposite ends of acculturation. Participants who moved to the United States to be with American

spouses, Rija, Rado, Kanto and Jouvin, have a unique advantage to *integration*, but the data from this study indicate otherwise. The participants who spoke about their acculturation with mention of their American spouse discussed the difficulties of acculturating to the marriage itself. Rado and Kanto talked about learning how to be married to an American more than acculturation to American culture; therefore, being married to an American did not appear to ease their acculturative stress.

For the participants in this study, experiencing culture shock was inevitable, but not all expressed experiences of acculturative stress. Kanto directly speaks about experiencing culture shock when she said *“and I would say that that was a big part of my culture shock in the U.S., one of the hardest parts. There was nobody here for me. I know there is culture shock I think because it was crazy,”* but this experience would be better categorized as acculturative stress. She is describing deeply troubling emotions rather than a surprising reaction to something that she was not expecting about American culture. On the other hand, Lova and Rija do not mention serious emotional turmoil characteristic of acculturative stress when they speak about adjusting to the United States. In fact, it is Kanto who speaks the most about acculturative stress and culture shock, but she is also the one who now best exemplifies the *integration* acculturation strategy and biculturalism. According to research on acculturative stress and culture shock, most people have the most intense experiences when they first arrive in their new country, but some experience a U-shaped curve of adjustment (Berry et al., 2011). This curve would begin with excitement of adventure and novelty in a new place which later dulls into loneliness and frustration. After learning to cope, the U-shape curves back to well-being (Berry et al., 2011). Therefore, both initial culture shock and/or ongoing acculturative stress do not make positive later acculturation impossible. Kanto speaks articulately about the American Dream and

proclaims that she herself has experienced it and that she is living her dream. Over her 17 years in the United States, Kanto experienced many levels of acculturative stress and employed the use of all of the acculturation strategies in order to be as positively culturally, professionally and personally acculturated as she is today.

### **The Role of the Media in Setting Expectations**

While exposure to media can sometimes be beneficial in preparing potential immigrants to lives in their new countries, media can also provide misconceptions. Hoby, Ronald, and Kanto spoke of experiencing acculturative stress when trying to reconcile their realities in the United States with their preconceptions that were based on their exposure to American media. Kanto thought that all Americans were Black because her exposure to American media was limited to NBA games which feature mostly Black American players. Hoby and Ronald both reported that their understanding of the United States was based on urban life represented in film. Hoby expressed his disappointment in landscape and architecture in Minnesota compared to what he saw in American TV shows and movies. Likewise, Ronald's idea of the United States was urban because that is what is featured prominently in TV and film, so he was surprised by the laid-back pace of life in his small college town in Missouri. Even though they came to the U.S. ten years apart, it is significant that Hoby and Ronald share this experience because they are the same age and from the same city. Perhaps they were both exposed to the same media which gave them the idea that life in the United States is predominately urban, an expectation that was not met for either of them. In Bhattacharya's (2011) study of the media's effect on Indian immigrants to the United States, he found that many of the participants experienced acculturative stress based on their media-based expectations not being met. Hoby and Ronald shared this similar experience.

According to Stuart Hall's (1973) reception theory, all media are encoded with a message by the people who create it, but that each consumer of the media will decode the message slightly differently, resulting in their own message. This theory explores how the message encoders have a position of power to exploit the potential decoders. Because the media creates the discourse, they have the power to create messages of what is normal. The messages that Hoby and Ronald decoded were that most of American life is lived in urban settings. Even though this may not have been the message intended by the encoders, this is the message that was decoded by these two participants in a way that negatively affected their acculturation. Exposure to American culture through media "is likely to play an important role in the creation of knowledge about American culture" (Moon & Park, 2007, p. 320), but the knowledge created is not always accurate, and this can cause acculturative stress.

### **Language Proficiency's Effect on Acculturation**

Many previous studies on the impact that English language proficiency has on acculturation has shown that higher English proficiency levels are correlated with positive acculturation and lower levels of acculturative stress (Bhattacharya, 2011; Dow, 2001; Phinney, 2001; Spenader, 2011; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). This holds true for the participants of this study. In particular, Hoby, who came to the United States involuntarily as an adolescent with no English language skills, is best characterized as using the *separation* acculturation method. He says that he does not have any friends who were born in the United States. Having spent his high school years in ESL classes separated from native speakers, he maintained this separation even after it was not imposed on him. On the other hand, both the Fulbright Scholars had high proficiency levels upon arrival to the United States and did not express negativity when discussing their acculturation to the United States.

Language learning can be highly affected by the comfort level of the student when they are trying to use a second language. Linguist Stephen Krashen developed the affective filter theory which states that once a person is uncomfortable using a second language, they can prevent themselves from developing in this language. According to this theory, negative emotions such as frustration, anxiety, and boredom will reduce the amount of a second language the person can understand and learn. The negative emotions function as a filter, which prevent the understanding and saturation of input both in the language classroom and in daily life. The affective filter can affect language learners at any proficiency level (Krashen, 1985; 2003).

Franka, who reported having a high proficiency level of English when arriving to the United States seems to express interference of her affective filter when she said, *“and they don’t know how to pronounce my name, and that’s ok with me, but if you misspell their name... I remember this girl named Stacey and she said “my name is Stacey with an E” and I’m like I’m sorry!”* and *“I still think 5 to 10 percent of conversation with American people is not understood because it’s not my language.”* She describes negative experiences with using English in the United States, and she appears to be highly affected by Americans correcting her or being sensitive to her errors even when they did not impede understanding. She says *“I still don’t know how to pray in English.”* Perhaps it is because she has had uncomfortable communication experiences with Americans, she has neglected to focus on English in some areas of her life in the United States and been inspired to maintain her identity as a non-native speaker through the way she practices her religion.

Jouvin talked about how his English level has affected his job search; *“I cannot get through my language, ugh, you know, so they interview me and we speak for a while and they discover oh I don’t speak that well.”* Since he arrived to the United States, he has earned a

bachelor's degree, but now he is unemployed again. Because he goes into a job interview with the previous experience of having a difficult time understanding and being understood, his interviews could be impacted by his affective filter which actually reduces what he can understand because he is experiencing negative emotions. After nine years in the United States and earning a bachelor's degree, he still says that he does not "*speak that well.*" It is clear for the participants of this study that English proficiency before arrival to the United States eased acculturation. Though, even if participants reported high proficiency upon arrival, they may have experienced additional acculturative stress reconciling their perceived language level with being misunderstood and corrected by native speakers. These experiences can raise the affective filter which can interfere with feeling confident and improving language skills.

### **Interpreting American Culture**

In each interview, I asked the participant to describe American culture. Several hesitated and / or mentioned that the question was very general and asked me to be more specific. When this happened, I asked them to tell me the first thing they think about when they think about American culture. The subthemes that emerged as people talked about American culture were: diversity, ambiguity of American culture, American politeness, and food.

### **Diversity**

The discourse of the Melting Pot emerged from the participants, but many mentioned how this idea was dispelled from their minds after their experiences living in the United States. Hobby said:

*The way I see it America is a melting pot it really is not a melting pot as we say it is because there is a lot of division to the culture. A lot of different cultures came out of that, so the African Americans have their own culture, the Asians have their own culture,*

*all depending on where they are from. They carry that culture with them, so then it becomes part of American culture.*

Ronald, the Fulbright Scholar living in a small college-town in Missouri said *“there are a lot of international students here... I see like people stay between them, like African American people just stay with just them. Between a group of Indians, a group of Americans, lots of small groups, but there is no real mix.”*

Fanja, the Fulbright Scholar in Michigan, said *“there are many people from different origins. Those people only live near people like them... They are still American because no one has more rights to be here than another. Personally I haven’t felt like I’m being a stranger because there are many people of different origins here, so I’m more like everyone else.”*

Also, Franka said *“American culture is very diverse according to their point of view.”*

Jouvin commented that Americans relish diversity in personal choices when he said:

*But Americans don’t like American cars. Everything in America is not from America. How does this make an American? Like, an American will wake up in the morning and have French coffee with a French press and have Italian cheese, and then they go work and drive a German car or Japanese car, and at lunch they go to a Chinese restaurant and eat Chinese, and they go home and watch TV, they watch a British show. When they drink wine, they drink French wine.*

Four of the nine participants explained diversity as their first topic when they discussed American culture.

**Discrimination.** Hoby discussed his experiences with discrimination based on his skin color:

*There's modern slavery going on now in front of our eyes and no one is doing anything, there's discrimination all over the place and no one is going to do anything stop it anytime soon, so you just have to do what's right and you can still enjoy your life and get the best out of it, that's all that matters. Discrimination, that's something that we go through pretty much every day.*

Hoby was the only participant to discuss this kind of discrimination. Jouvin explained that he felt discriminated against based on his status as non-native speaker of English and his accent.

### **Ambiguity of American Culture**

Many of the participants hesitated to answer the question about American culture, and some said that they could not answer the question at all. Hobby, who has been in the United States for 11 years, said the United States:

*has a culture of its own but no one seems to know what that is... I don't know what American culture is, or whatever it is, I still haven't figured that out. I need to actually learn for myself what that is, but the way I see it, there really isn't one. It's unfortunate but American culture is really more of liberty, which doesn't really make sense to me.*

When I asked Lova about American culture, she talked for some time about American food and concluded with “*culture is such a big word. But pretty much that's the way I see it. Like with families and food, dance? I don't know about dance. I don't know if I answered your question.*” Finally, while Rija mentioned his ideas about American culture in his answer to other questions, when I asked him about American culture directly, he said “*can you be more specific?*” I said that I wanted to know the first thing that came to his mind, and he said “*I can't answer that.*”



## American Politeness

Several participants mentioned how polite American people are as the first point when discussing American culture. Rija said “*Americans is [sic] more polite and everything like they talk to you, the way they talk to you they are very polite [compared to] Malagasy culture.*”

Kanto, who worked with many foreigners from Europe and South Africa as a tour guide before she came to the United States, compared Americans with other non-Malagasy people:

*I really distinguish between Americans and the others. They would strike up conversation and talk to me... The Americans wanted to know about who I am personally, and many wanted to help, and many even did. They sent books. Back then, as I said, I was still a student, so they really wanted to help, right away, they would ask me for my address and what kind of books do I want... I told them I need this this and this, and everybody was helping me in different ways. And that was very nice of them because I didn't have that kind of relationships like with them with other tourists.*

When she moved to the United States, Kanto said that her American in-laws were very welcoming of her and asked her about her emotions and thoughts. Even though this caused cross-cultural communication barriers because Malagasy people do not tend to talk about their emotions and doing so made her uncomfortable, she knew they were only motivated by their politeness.

Many of the participants praised Americans for being friendly in general. Lova said:

*[American people] are very nice. The way you say thank you, I don't know if that's a North Carolina thing, but the people around me were really nice. Like church people even teachers, everyone was really nice. That was the thing that struck me. That is the one thing I remember. The people were very nice.*

Ronald echoed her idea that:

*American people are polite. [That is] something that I don't know why I didn't really expect from a developed country people. Like if you take the bus, the people will say thanks to the driver. People will be polite for everyone, hold the doors. I live in a small town, so people will say 'hi' when you meet, something that I wasn't used to. Even in Madagascar, when you take the [public bus] where everybody is just like walking on each other and no one is polite. That is the first thing that surprised me when I arrived here.*

Fanja agreed, and said that:

*This is something that I've noticed, they are very polite. When I go somewhere, let's say to a store or in the street and I ask someone something and then they respond politely and well, and they tell you exactly what you need. If you don't understand them, they are ready and willing to respond and give a satisfactory answer.*

Many praised American politeness; however, some of the participants went on to say that the politeness displayed by Americans is often false and that it is difficult to actually befriend Americans beyond perhaps falsely polite interactions. Hoby, who arrived in the United States when he was in high school, said:

*It's that people are friendly but not welcoming. People will want to say hi, how are you but then if you answer more than they think you should answer, they just roll their eyes, or walk away, or create some diversion. People pretend to be friendly, but really it doesn't come from the heart, so it's very confusing sometimes for people who aren't used to that. But of course you adapt to that as you go along... I was looking back like how many times I have been in Minnesota and how many friends do I have internationally...*

*And in 11 years, I have not been invited to a native Minnesotans house whereas 97% of the time I don't even need to call someone to go to my friends' house that is not from Minnesota or that is not from America, so the culture of politeness is hypocritical.*

Hoby went on to say that American culture “*lacks of respect, lack of manners, uh and just negative, and I don't really want to elaborate on that because that's just my observations of what American culture is without integrating all these other cultures from different countries.*”

Ronald, who initially spoke about the politeness of Americans later said in his discussion American culture that:

*It's very difficult to be friends with American people. You know, they might smile, they might say hi, that's it. But especially there are a lot of people who are not used to being in contact with international students, and they don't really know how to talk to you or how to take you somewhere, and it's the same for me. For example with other international students, it's very easy. After a few weeks, we reached that level of friendship, but with American people, it took 2 semesters.*

Jouvin was the only participant to report that he found American people rude outright; “*I am so surprised that people are so fast forward here. And uh people like they don't discussions with everybody, it felt like people won't just talk to each other. Like if my family asks someone for directions, they will not tell you.*”

### **Praise of American Culture**

While many participants lamented against what they felt to be insufficient friendliness of Americans, others discussed things about American culture that they found more amenable than aspects of their own culture. Ronald said “*it's very relaxed here. People will never look at you no matter what you do. You are pretty much free to do whatever you want to do if you stay in the*

*laws, if you don't do anything illegal. It's just everybody can do whatever he wants to do."*

Hoby also said *"They are so trusting. They even put things in their backyards and don't lock the door. Sometimes I think oh, the Americans they are too trusting."*

Even though most of her commentary on American culture was negative, Franka said:

*I like 3 things with American culture and people. The first is patriotism. They love their country. I wish my people could love their country like American people do. They don't see that. They think everyone in every country loves their country. Two is integrity... They are most of the time honest. The third thing is what I like most about American culture, and it is their generosity. I have had experiences abroad, especially in French [sic], and French people are not generous. Americans complain that they are not generous, like she has 10,000 dollars and she only gave 10, and I'm like, it's good, in France it would have been zero. It's not a lot, but it's from their heart. Everyone wants their tax to be reduced, but they are generous.*

## **Food**

Food can be important to one's culture, and some of the participants included food in their discussion of American culture. Hoby listed *"hamburger and pizza"* when speaking about aspects of American culture. Kanto used food to exemplify how American people are habitual; *"I think the Americans are very habitual, people of habit, you know, so let's say there's McDonald's, it's rich because that's what people are used to even if they don't want it. You gotta eat your ketchup. Can't you eat your French fries without it."* Lova's immediate response in her discussion was about food:

*The American culture for me is more around a lot food. But that's not it, but if you go on like sports like people really spend a lot of food on Superbowl, like fried chicken, all of those things, and that's the food for Superbowl. Then there's Thanksgiving, and there's*

*the special food for Thanksgiving. And then you come to 4th of July, and there's special food for 4th or July. And you come to Christmas, and there's special food Christmas.*

*There's always special food for everything. You know, when you're in Madagascar, it is not like this. You eat what you have. But it's very specific here. This is the food for this, this is the food for this.*

When she spoke about maintaining Malagasy culture in the way that she raises her children, Frank said “*you need to eat [rice] and [vegetables with meat] every day. We won't do pizza.*”

## **Discussion**

### **Politeness versus Friendliness**

Many of the participants reported acculturative stress when navigating with Americans in the social sphere because, while they found Americans to be polite, they considered them not to be friendly. According to the literature, Malagasy immigrants are not alone in criticizing American culture for insincere politeness. According to Pinto's (2011) study of politeness in the United States, many foreigners interpret American social behavior as perplexingly friendly while at the same time insincere. For Americans, “an individual who follows linguistic conventions in accordance with the established social norms in a given language community may still be engaging in sincere behavior” (Pinto, 2011, p. 228) even if what they say is plainly untrue. According to American cultural norms, it is polite to lie in routine conversations (i.e. offering false invitations, saying one is fine when one is not fine). Not only that, but it is impolite not to lie in these situations. Within American culture, both parties in a conversation may recognize that both are lying and acknowledge that both are conducting themselves in a polite manner. They are using a different kind of sincerity because even if someone does not sincerely hope that

you have a good day, their expression is sincere if it “effectively projects concern” (Pinto, 2011, p. 230).

For Americans, polite exchanges with cashiers and acquaintances bare no second thought, but for an immigrant to the United States, it can be very concerning, particularly false invitations. It is considered polite for two acquaintances to extend an invitation to make future contact to establish plans even if neither party intends to follow through. For someone unfamiliar with American culture, this could result in distrust and acculturative stress regarding establishing friendships. Many of the participants of this study reported a positive reaction to general politeness exhibited by Americans, but confusion about establishing friendships with Americans. What they perceived to be false politeness caused acculturative stress regarding the creation of social networks. After 11 years in the United States, Hoby reported not having a single friend who is originally from the United States. Ronald explained that he felt comfortable befriending other international students in a matter of weeks, but establishing friendships with Americans was difficult and took months.

**Gender variable.** Again gender proved to be an important variable in the shared experiences of the participants. Only the male participants (Hoby, Ronald and Jouvin) lamented against what they perceived to be insincere politeness and difficulty establishing friendships. All of the female participants praised Americans for being polite. Three of the five male participants discussed negative reactions to perceived insincerity and unfriendliness. In general, the male participants in this study reported negatively about social interactions with Americans while all of the female participants reported positively. Even Franka, who discussed negative aspects of American culture for several minutes, relented to discuss the three things she likes about American culture (patriotism, integrity, and generosity). However, none of the men countered

their negative points with positive ones. This difference in attitude influences acculturation because to use *integration* or *assimilation* strategies, the immigrant must have an active social life with people from the new culture. As demonstrated by other scholars, the use of *integration* and *assimilation* strategies are the most associated with the kind of academic and financial success described by the participants in their definitions of the American Dream (Dow, 2011; Gieling, Thijs, & Verkuyten, 2010; Phinney, 2001).

The differences in how the women and men perceive American politeness can be applied to Hall's (1973) theories of encoding and decoding and race relations in the United States. While identifying the participants of this study as African American denies the complexities of the Malagasy racial identity, encoding and decoding is relevant because many Americans can decode Malagasy racial identity as Black if not African. As a result, even though they may not identify as African Americans, the participants of this study can be subject to the same discrimination which African Americans receive. African American females have very different experiences with discrimination than males. African American males are more likely to be subjected to workplace racial discrimination (Mong & Roscigno, 2009). These experiences of discrimination would cause the men to have different perceptions of politeness than the women who have experienced discrimination on the same level.

For Hoby particularly, facing this discrimination as an adolescent can have an even more significant affect. Experiences of racial discrimination during adolescence are linked to lower life satisfaction, and these experiences are more likely to be had by males than females (Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2009). This is significant for Hoby who was the only participant who lived in the United States as an adolescent and is the only participant who reported experiences of racial discrimination. He also reports not being satisfied with his career. The

different experiences of discrimination of African American males and females can help explain why the female participants of this study perceive Americans as polite while the men generally do not.

### **Diversity**

Some of the negative social experiences expressed by the participants could be further understood through their perceptions of diversity in the United States. Many of the participants discussed the false discourse of the melting pot. Several mentioned that there is no real intermingling of different ethnic groups, but it was again Hoby and Ronald who point out that this is a false discourse. Hoby is the only participant who discusses perceived discrimination based on his skin color. The effect of this discrimination on his acculturation is clear as his acculturation strategy is best described as *separation* even after 11 years in the United States. Others reported the melting pot, a false discourse or not, was beneficial to their acculturation. Fanja said that the presence of many different kinds of people made her feel like she belonged, and Ronald was comforted by the level of diversity at his university even if people stayed separate according to ethnicity. The level of the diversity in the United States affected some participants differently than others.

### **The Significance of Food in Culture and Acculturation**

Globalization has resulted in multinational food companies being present across the globe. This makes acculturating from any one country to any other country less stressful for some because accessing food from your home country can be a great source of comfort for anyone who is acculturating (Hartwell, Edwards & Brown, 2011). According to a study of international students in the United Kingdom, acculturative stress was eased when eating familiar food (Hartwell, Edwards & Brown, 2011). For Malagasy immigrants in the United



States, however, this is not quite possible because there are no Malagasy restaurants in the United States, nor are there any American restaurants in Madagascar. None of the participants spoke favorably towards food in the United States, but Fanja spoke particularly unfavorably. She said “*you need to eat [rice] and [vegetables with meat] every day. We won’t do pizza.*” Because “food behaviour is integral to individual and collective identity embedded in cultural process and practice,” she is easing her acculturative stress with familiar food and only serves Malagasy-style food to her family (Hartwell, Edwards & Brown, 2011, p. 1401). The participants of this study spoke about food when I asked about culture because culture and food are closely tied. This impacts acculturation, especially when the food in the home country is significantly different from food in the new country, which is the case for Madagascar and the United States. While food might be considered limiting to its depth of cultural understanding as a part of material culture, these participants have demonstrated its significance as an emotional part of acculturation.

### **Understanding American Culture: Influencing Acculturation and Pursuit of the American Dream**

Others have found that having cultural knowledge can ease acculturative stress. Likewise, cultural knowledge is a precondition for using the *integration* acculturation strategy which is also most associated with successful pursuit of the American Dream (Berry, 2005; Phinney, 2001; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). According to this idea, the participants who had a difficult time talking about American culture should manifest characteristics of either *separation* or *marginalization* acculturation strategies. Hoby, who said “*I don’t know what American culture is, or whatever it is, I still haven’t figured that out*” after living in the United States for 11 years, provides further evidence of his use of the *separation* acculturation strategy. Even

though Hoby expresses difficulty in describing American culture, his definition does demonstrate an astute analytical perspective. Throughout other questions he demonstrated a thorough understanding of American history and culture, for example, when he spoke of discrimination and slavery. His own perspective, though, indicates that he feels that he does not understand even when he is able to provide apt analysis.

Rija, who arrived to the United States fluent in English and with his American wife, said that he was unable to describe American culture. He is also one of the participants who was unable to define the American Dream. Perhaps he feels he is not particularly eloquent to speak thoroughly about the United States after only two and a half years, or his lack of exposure to American media has put him at disadvantage in understanding American culture. He is the only participant who reported not having access to American Media before coming to the United States. Even though he said he was no able to provide a description of American culture, he clearly demonstrated some positive acculturation because he reports that he is happy in the United States and aspires to remain in the U.S. for the rest of his life.

Depth of cultural understanding was also unclear with some participants. Lova spoke about the surface level of culture (food, holidays) before concluding “*I don’t know if I answered your question.*” After 10 years in the United States, perhaps she has an understanding of the deeper levels of American culture but does not know how to articulate it. She is now married to a Chinese-American immigrant and working in a public primary school. She has achieved the American Dream as she originally defined it, but does not demonstrate a thorough understanding of American culture.

### Navigating Educational Values

While not a focus of the interview questions, this topic of education emerged as a significant theme in discussions as the participants compared and contrasted education in Madagascar and the United States, with particular emphasis on the difference between their degrees from Malagasy schools and American schools. Many of the participants spoke very highly of the American education system while others included much criticism. Seven of the nine participants earned bachelor's degrees in Madagascar before coming to the United States, and of those seven, three earned a second bachelor's degree in the United States and three earned a master's degree in the United States.

Many of the participants discussed the scrutiny employers had over their degrees from Malagasy institutions and that their Malagasy degrees were not highly valued by U.S. employers. Rija, who has a bachelor's from Madagascar and has not pursued further education in the United States, said:

*Even if you are really smart in Madagascar, [employers] think that you are not from one of their universities, so your degree is kind of low, so that's why it's hard for me [to get a job]. They ask if you have a degree, and I say yes, I have a bachelor's degree. And they ask if you have a certificate, and you say, yes, I have a certificate in something. And because I am from abroad, and I'm not a graduate from a U.S. school, they don't take me seriously.*

Lova, who earned a bachelor's in Madagascar, had the same situation, so she earned another bachelor's degree in the United States. She explains her difficulties with this issue:

*I had to redo it. I mean, I already had my degree when I was in Madagascar, but when I came here, I had to redo it again for the reason that it was very hard to get all of my...*

*you know lessons in Madagascar, it's only three years, and it was so hard to get the transcripts and then as you know in Madagascar, the grading is different too, so if you have like a 12 out of 20, that's really bad here, but it's passing there. It's just the grade thing is really really different, so at the end it was too much, so I just redid it. Pretty much you have to redo your life.*

Jouvin spoke about how Americans' concern with credentials affects US culture:

*What I have learned is that the Americans, they are so specified on a few things and they don't care about the other things. If you are going to the doctor for example, the doctor will send you to a specialist for something like a skin tag, but a skin tag, it is very easy to cut or something like that, but they ask you to go to a specialist. Or if you have something wrong with electricity you cannot call a plumber to fix it. Everything is so specific and specialized.*

Many of the participants had only positive things to say about education in the United States. Ronald, who has a bachelor's and a master's from Madagascar and is now pursuing a master's in the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar, said *"I think the American education is still one of the best of anywhere in the world. I wouldn't have found any better scholarship to any better school in any other country."* Fanja, another Fulbright Scholar with a bachelor's from Madagascar, said *"I think there are a lot of differences between university here and in Madagascar. Every day I don't sleep before midnight because I am doing homework, but it is worth it."* For the participants who had positive things to say about higher education in the United States, they all agree that university in the United States is more rigorous than university in Madagascar.

Others had a more negative opinion about the differences between Education in Madagascar and education in the United States. Jouvin, who earned a bachelor's degree in Madagascar and a second degree once he arrived to the United States, said:

*University here is not like university there. We call it higher ed here, but the classification for the building code, it's a business. I think that [the Malagasy] definition of education is even better than here because you have to study and work, and here like you can go to university, and you pay the fee for the education, and you will pass. You know it gives [the university] a bad image for them that 70% of the students couldn't finish the class, so they just pass because they paid.*

University in Madagascar is free, so students do not pay but instead receive a government stipend so they can support themselves while they pursue their studies. As a result, there is no incentive for the schools to retain students.

Lova, who also redid her bachelor's degree and is now a teacher in North Carolina, said “*if the children don't do well, you're held accountable. I don't understand that. What if the students really don't want to do it? So for me I do not understand why Americans don't do the class like everyone else.*” She explains that schools in the United States tend to pass students even if they do not earn a passing grade because of the policies which hold teachers accountable. In Madagascar, however, it is quite common for students to be held back multiple times if they do not earn the passing score.

## **Discussion**

### **The Significance and Influence of Education**

While the popular discourse of immigration in the United States has focused on low-skill, low-wage workers, this no longer reflects the reality of many immigrants. According to a 2011

study by the Brookings Institution, 30% of working age immigrants to the United States arrive with a bachelor's degree while only 28% come without a high school diploma (Bahrapour, 2011). The participants of this study who arrived to the United States at working age, seven of eight arrived to the United States with a bachelor's degree. Steven Camarota, the director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies, said "we've got an oversupply of highly skilled workers coming into this country" (Bahrapour, 2011). As a result, immigrants to the United States like the ones in this study have more competition on the job market, and the competitiveness of their previous degrees can be a factor in their job search. As Lova and Rija lamented, many employers and schools in the United States do not recognize the accreditation of Malagasy universities. In a country where the school life expectancy is 11 years (CIA World Fact book, 2013), holding a bachelor's degree is rare. Because most of the participants in this study received bachelor's degrees in Madagascar, it is reasonable to assert that they were among the educational elite in their home country, but this status did not immigrate with them to the United States.

This issue of carrying a degree with no value in the United States seems to have negatively impacted the acculturation of some of the participants. Lova and Rija spoke about how the divergent value of their degrees in the United States and Madagascar affected them. Lova said that she had to "*redo*" her life. Rija said that potential employers do not take him seriously. Similarly, Bhattacharya's (2011) study of Indian immigrants to New York City found that many of the participants in his study lamented that they were well educated and of high status in India, but in the United States, they found that they have little opportunity for similar status work and lack socialization with similar status American peers, causing acculturative stress. Lova and Rija reported this kind of acculturative stress. Not only did they have to

acculturate to the United States, they had to acculturate to a lower socio-economic status and less prestigious careers. In navigating acculturating to a new language and culture, there are many strategies, like *integration*, to follow which can lead to success, but there is little one can do to ease adjusting to a lower social class. Instead of learning to live in a less elite position, immigrants to the United States can be fueled by the American Dream to raise their socio-economic status to the relative level it was in their country. Failure in this pursuit, though, can lead to further acculturative stress.

This issue also relates to the American Dream, because in order to have access to the American Dream, the participants have had to compete with people who hold American degrees. In order for Lova and Jouvin to pursue their American Dreams, they decided to get a second bachelor's degree in the United States. Though even after earning his second degree, Jouvin is unemployed. Rija, who also discussed the lack of value his degree holds in the United States, has not pursued an additional degree and described his current job as "*menial*." Lova's Malagasy teaching credentials were not enough to qualify her to teach in the U.S., but after completing another bachelor's in education, she was able to get employment as a teacher. She continued on to earn a master's degree. As a result, she has reported a high level of job satisfaction. She is also one of the participants who espoused discourse relating hard work to success in the United States.

The participants provided a variety of viewpoints on the difference between education in Madagascar and the United States. Both of the Fulbright Scholars (Rado and Franka) described American education as prestigious and intense. They both specifically applied to study in the United States for this scholarship, so their understanding of the value of an American degree was not only present before they came to the U.S. but the driving force of their desire to come. Lova

and Jouvin were more critical of American education. Jouvin compared American universities to for profit companies with a goal of making money rather than education. He and Lova, an elementary school teacher, criticized the American education system for their focus on matriculation of students. Rado and Franka came to the United States explicitly to study; however, Lova and Jouvin did not purposefully come for education but earned a second bachelor's degree in the United States when they faced difficulties finding jobs. These two different experiences have affected the two pair's different understandings of the difference between Malagasy and American education.



## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study of the acculturation of nine Malagasy immigrants to the United States is a qualitative account of lived experiences of navigating a discursive exposure to the American Dream and adjusting to life in the U.S. The purpose of this study was to explore how expectations of life in the United States derived from the discourse of the American Dream and possibly how American media can influence acculturation. The use of the phenomenological framework has provided a description of the experiences as they were lived by the participants.

Prominent in this study's findings was the difference in perceptions of men and women. The women were more likely to share an understanding of the American Dream that is consistent with the discourse of hard work, freedom, and opportunities that can lead to one's vision of their own success. The men were more likely to share the perception that the American Dream, as described by this discourse, is antiquated or even mythical. Perceptions of American politeness also differed across gender lines. The female participants agreed that Americans are very polite while the male participants described this politeness as insincere or even absent and emphasized their perception that establishing close personal relationships with Americans in the United States was a significant source of acculturative stress. This difference cannot be attributed to their differing reasons for immigration because there are male and female international students, and males and a female who came with an American spouse. The positive outlooks of the women compared to the negative outlooks of the men could be attributed to the differences in discrimination of African American males and females in the United States.

Interview questions included a discussion of American media consumption and perceptions and definitions of the American Dream, but there the results did not indicate a

connection between media and perceptions of the American Dream. It may be significant; however, that one of the two participants who hesitated to define the American Dream was the one participant who reported that he had no exposure to American media when he was growing up. Additionally, the same participant was unable to describe American culture. Perhaps he was unable to speak on these subjects at the same level as the other participants because of this lack of media exposure before arrival to the U.S. On the other hand, some of the participants, especially the men in their twenties, reported acculturative stress experienced when navigating misconceptions they had of the United States which were based on the media. Both of the young men expressed that they expected the United States to be predominately urban but were disappointed when they had to reconcile their lives to rural United States. Overall the pervading influence of American media was an expectation for urban life and also, somewhat contradictory, cowboys and Indians.

Another important theme that emerged as a possible influencing factor in participants' acculturation was the degree to which their move to the United States was voluntary. Consistent with previous research on acculturation, those who immigrate voluntarily seem to have experienced less acculturative stress than those with less choice (Gieling, Thijs & Verkuyten, 2010; Jamil, Nassar-McMillan & Lambert, 2007; Ogbu, 2004). One participant was explicit in explaining her intentions to move to the United States, and even though she had experienced a lot of acculturative stress and sometimes employed the *marginalization* acculturation strategy, she is presently best described as an integrated bicultural. On the other hand, the participant who had the least choice in his immigration to the United States because he was an adolescent who had to move with his family was the most strongly associated with the *separation* strategy. Another participant, who insisted that her decision to come to the United States was not

voluntary even though she applied to schools in the United States, was willful in her use of the *separation* strategy and refusal to join American culture. These examples illustrate the importance of choice in the immigration process. Even if negative acculturation strategies are used and acculturative stress is present, this does not make future integration and biculturalism impossible (Dow, 2011; Phinney, 2001; Tadmor, 2006).

Consistent with previous research on the role of language proficiency on acculturation and acculturative stress, the participants of this study reported experiences of acculturative stress reconciling their perceived language proficiency with their communication struggles with native speakers (Bhattacharya, 2011; Dow, 2001; Phinney, 2001; Spenader, 2011; Wamwara-Mbugua & Cornwell, 2010). Even participants who arrived with high English proficiency expressed stress associated with communication with Americans and how their status as a non-native speaker affected their search for employment which may have raised their affective filter thus stunting their language development. Participants who arrived with lower English proficiency levels expressed a sense of marginalization which had a strong effect on their acculturation to the United States.

Another source of stress for many of the participants was the lack of value their college degrees from Madagascar had in the American job market. Some were denied access to the pursuit of the American Dream until they returned to school for additional degrees in order to be competitive with Americans. Because it is only the elite who have access to tertiary education in Madagascar, many of the participants had to acculturate to both a new country and culture and also another social class because holding higher degrees is not as exclusive to the higher classes in the United States as it is in Madagascar.

Finally, the discourse of the American Dream was significant for some of the participants because those who echoed this discourse in their definitions of the American Dream were more likely to use the *integration* acculturation strategy and have achieved their vision of the American Dream than participants who perceived the American Dream to be a myth. Consistent with previous studies, the participants who were best described as *integrated* and bicultural were most likely to achieve upward mobility consistent with the discourse of the American Dream (Dow, 2011; Phinney, 2001; Tadmor, 2006). Additionally, the female participants of this study did not hesitate to provide definitions of the American Dream which were consistent with and not critical of the traditional discourse while some of the men were not able to give a definition or were critical of the Dream.

### *Epoche*

My understanding of the American Dream, acculturation, and American and Malagasy culture evolved throughout the process of this study. As defined in my *epoche* in the methodology chapter, I explained that I understood that the American Dream was about upward socio-economic mobility, home ownership, and the freedom to choose what you do to earn your living. I now have a better understanding of my own acculturation to Madagascar which included acculturative stress based primarily on low language proficiency. My two years teaching in Madagascar equipped me with an understanding of the cultural background of the participants which has become more intricate as a result of this study. My understanding of the American Dream now includes a facet for individuality in defining the Dream. If my definition of the American Dream includes freedom to choose what you do to earn a living, it should also include freedom to define the Dream itself. Many of the participants defined the American

Dream from an immigrant perspective that I have never had, but it is through the immigrant perspective that the American Dream was originally born.

Throughout the process of this study, I have developed a deeper understanding of American culture and Malagasy culture and my own understanding of the American Dream. I was not surprised to hear many of the participants praise the politeness of Americans because one of the biggest contributors to my acculturative stress in Madagascar was the seemingly constant stream of social interactions that I perceived as absolutely impolite. I was well aware of this cultural difference. What I did not expect was to hear the participants explain that while outward politeness was evident, genuine friendships were extremely difficult to establish. Hearing this again and again made me evaluate my relationships with international people in the United States. Just as my participants alluded about Americans in general, I realized that I was personally keeping my international acquaintances at a distance without making efforts to help them adjust to social life in the United States. The frustrations with social relationships with Americans experienced by many of the participants of this study inspired me to reach out to my international acquaintances and work towards helping them establish healthy friendship networks.

Personally, I feel that I have a sense of the complexities of the American Dream having been raised in a lower-middle-class environment by a mother who was raised in a middle-class environment. While my mother experienced downward socio-economic mobility, the fact that mobility of socio-economic status exists in either direction is clear to me. I was raised with the understanding that one's actions and aspirations determines one's future and that the status that one is born into does not have to be the status for life. This instilled in me a sense of control of

my own path, yet I believe many of my hometown peers may not have developed that sense of control and therefore have possibly not pursued the American Dream to the same extent.

### **Implications of Research**

Based on the experiences of the Malagasy immigrants to the United States who were interviewed for this study, there appears to be some connection between actively choosing to immigrate or being a passive participant in this choice and how this affects an individual's use of acculturation strategies in the long term. The participant who arrived to the United States as an adolescent did not make the choice to come himself and the participant who said that she never wanted to come to the United States are the most characteristic of the *separation* acculturation strategy. The use of *separation* is not correlated to academic and professional success (Phinney, 2001). Hoby describes negative emotions about being separated from his American classmates for most of school while he was in English as a Second Language classes, and 11 years after living in the United States, he expressed that he still feels like he is separated from Americans informally as he was formally separated from native speakers of English during his secondary education. This could have implications for educators who can identify immigrant students who did not have agency in making the choice to immigrate. These students could benefit from additional support and inclusion practices to avoid potential *marginalization*.

Additionally, many of the participants of this study expressed experiencing acculturative stress when navigating social relationships with Americans. There was not only confusion but resentment regarding what was perceived as insincere politeness and difficulties establishing friendships. Because politeness and friendship are different across cultures, perhaps immigrants to the United States could benefit from direct instruction about these aspects of American culture. English as Second Language teachers of any level of students in the United States could

include these topics in their lessons to familiarize their students that there may be differences in how friends are made across cultures.

Additionally, media should be used in the classroom, both in the United States and abroad, to explain culture; however, it should be accompanied by discussion to supplement the media. If ESL/EFL teachers present American media in their lessons for exposure to native speakers, these lessons should be accompanied by critical cultural lessons. Especially for EFL students who are hopeful immigrant to the United States, a discussion of the representation of American culture in shows like *Dallas* and *Friends* could benefit their understanding of American culture and aid in their decoding of the messages in a way that would not add to their acculturative stress when they arrive to the United States.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The limitations of the lack of diversity in socio-economic statuses of the participants may have influenced the results. The experiences of the participants, who predominately represent the highest socio-economic statuses of Madagascar, may be very different from Malagasy immigrants from lower statuses. Future research with a wider variety of income levels and educational backgrounds could provide further insights into the variety of possible experiences of Malagasy immigrants' acculturation to the United States.

Because gender emerged as a characteristic with the greatest differentiation, future research could explore the role of gender in acculturation and the American Dream. For the participants of this study, the women explained similar experiences with the American Dream and politeness, which differed from the men's similar experiences. Perhaps there is a gendered difference in definitions and perceptions of the American Dream even among American citizens born in the United States. Because the essence of the lived experiences of these participants

differed along gender lines, future phenomenological research on acculturation should include gender issues.

According to one of the participants of this study, research on Malagasy culture and people will only develop after the education system in Madagascar is developed enough to provide not only research methodology but the curiosity and understanding of how research can illuminate our understandings of culture. Additionally, there is very little research (at least in the English language) about Malagasy people and their culture because most of the research on the island is focused on biology and environmental subjects. Perhaps the differences in perceptions of the American Dream across gender lines is due to a deep cultural difference in Malagasy women and men that could be explored through qualitative research.

This study shows evidence that there is a trend of an association of having an optimistic attitude about one's future success when immigrating to a new country and achievement of this idea of success. This further research could benefit hopeful Malagasy immigrants to the United States decrease their acculturative stress upon arrival by establishing realistic expectations and help instill in them an attitude that is linked to academic and professional success. The results of this study could pique interest and validate purpose of further explanation of the relationship between positive attitude and professional and academic success in a new country. Additionally, future research could explore if this relationship is influenced by gender. Qualitative research cannot prove a cause relationship between these two concepts, but future quantitative research could investigate a correlation between attitude and acculturation. Understanding the experience of acculturation of immigrants to a new country can benefit immigrants by identifying useful strategies to ease their acculturative stress and allow them to achieve their understanding of success.



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APPENDIX A  
HSRB Approval



BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Compliance

DATE: June 26, 2012

TO: Dorothy Mayne

FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [313276-4] American Exceptionalism

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: June 25, 2012

EXPIRATION DATE: April 29, 2013

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 15 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on April 29, 2013. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.



BO 119 W L I N G   G R E E N   S T A T E   U N I V E R S I T Y

**School of Educational Foundations, Leadership & Policy**

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Letter

June 1, 2012

Dear Malagasy speakers of English Living in the United States:

You are invited to be a part of a study of Malagasy speakers of English living in the United States. The purpose of my research is to understand how Malagasy students of English understand the United States of America and how their understanding of the United States of America was formulated. The benefits of this research will be to illuminate the process by which students of the English language make the decision to study the subject. To thank you for your participation, you will receive a small gift of a pen and notebook to thank you for your time.

My name is Dorothy Mayne, and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural and International Education program at Bowling Green State University. I am advised by Dr. Margaret Booth, director of the School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy at Bowling Green State University. I am doing this research for my thesis project.

By participating in this interview, you are agreeing to participate in an approximately one hour long interview by phone in English which will be recorded. In this interview, I will ask you to tell me about your understandings of the United States of America, your motivation to study the English language, and how your knowledge of the English language has affected your life.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you are a professional, deciding to participate or not will not affect your current position or career. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not affect any relationship you may have with Bowling Green State University. Risks of participation are no greater than that experienced in daily life. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

I will protect your confidentiality by not recording your name with your interview responses. You may also select a pseudonym to protect your identity. Descriptive statistics and demographic information will be

reported in collectively in the overall sample. All data will be stored on a flash drive and be locked in an office. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Dorothy Mayne: [dmayne@bgsu.edu](mailto:dmayne@bgsu.edu), 937-475-5008

Advised by Dr. Margaret Booth, [boothmz@bgsu.edu](mailto:boothmz@bgsu.edu), (419)372-9950

You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time.

By agreeing to participate in an interview, you are consenting to participate in the study.

APPENDIX C  
Instrument

Open-ended, Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1.) Acquire background information
  - a. Age
  - b. Gender
  - c. Nationality
  - d. Hometown
  - e. Religion
- 2.) How would you describe Americans in general?
  - a. Can you tell when you meet an American in Madagascar before they speak?
  - b. How are Americans different from other foreigners?
  - c. Are Americans the way that you expected them to be?
  - d. Do Americans treat you the way that you expected them to treat you?
  - e. Did you have a lot of experience with Americans before moving to the United States of America? What kind of experiences?
- 3.) How would you describe the United States of America in general?
  - a. When did you first start learning about the United States of America and in what form (media / in school / from interactions with Americans)?
- 4.) Where did you first start learning about the United States of America/Americans?
  - a. What TV shows from the United States of America did you watch / like?
  - b. What music from the United States of America did you watch / like?
  - c. What movies from the United States of America did you watch / like?
  - d. Did you discuss the United States of America in school?
- 5.) Why did you decide to study the English language at university?
  - a. Are you still happy with this choice?
  - b. What influenced the decision to study English (parents / hopes of moving to the United States of America?)
- 6.) Do you use the English language in your current work or studies?
  - a. Are you learning / using English?
  - b. Have you struggled to find work?
- 7.) What do you hope to do in the future?
- 8.) What has surprised you about the United States of America?
- 9.) What is the American Dream?