Volume 13 Issue 4
13/2015
tamarajournal.com

Acculturative Stress: Untold Stories of International Students in the U.S.

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Keywords

Untold Stories

Storytelling

Acculturative Stress

International Students

Abstract

International students (ISs) are important actors in higher education institutions (HEI) as they bring diversity, status and revenue. However, ISs stories of acculturative stress in HEI have remained untold in the current research. While there have been quantitative attempts to understand the links of such stress to negative symptoms affecting ISs, the current literature fails to address the emic aspects, origins, and occurrence of such symptoms. In response to this oversight, this paper presents the results of an ethnographic study spearheaded by an international student sensitive to these acculturative stressors at a large land grant institution in the Southwestern United States. Based on field observations and semi-structured interviews, this article contributes to the literature by addressing existing gaps in three main ways. First, by providing insight on how sources of acculturative stress are produced. Second, by allowing for increased understanding of the prevalence of resulting symptoms. Finally, it provides insightful implications for HEI.

Introduction

A recent special issue of TAMARA explored 'untold stories' in organizations. According to the issue's editors, these stories are those "which are simply absent from discourse" (Izak & Hitchin, 2014: 5). Essentially, this special issue encourages scholars to explore these stories, as in the case of Foroughi's (2014) presentation of 'epic untold stories' of charity workers. For scholars with knowledge of untold stories, this special issue was a call to arms and a justification to explore those accounts of topics neglected by current, positivist quantitative research. Now, this current special issue gives us an opportunity to further explore such neglected topics through an ethnographic approach describing the interrelation of organizations and its members. The plight between ISs and HEI is one such topic.

International students (ISs) in American universities usually experience difficulties adjusting to their new environments. For example, ISs may experience unfamiliarity with American customs or traditions as well as lack of social support by individuals in the new culture (Chavajay, 2013). Moreover, there are the evident problems associated with language and academic demands. Furthermore, ISs are in the unique position of maintaining their legal statuses, including being responsible for new regulations and immigration laws that may affect them. Such cases have made the adjustment process more difficult for ISs as they seek to cope with these difficulties (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). As a consequence, administrators concerned with the adjustment of ISs are beginning to look for policies and schemes that may ease the adjustment process and minimize problems affecting ISs (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1999). Such efforts are needed to retain ISs, as they are important contributors to the education, culture, and economy of the U.S. (Murat, 2013).

Most research on ISs focuses on the social processes and feelings and emotions ISs experience in their adjustment process as they try to succeed in an American university. For example, some of this research includes social interactions (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Trice, 2004), adjustment factors (Andrade, 2006), and feelings and emotions (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992) experienced by ISs. An important segment on the research of feelings and emotions is that of stress. These studies (e.g., Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003) try to explain the different discourses associated with stress and ISs in their adjustment to American culture. This type of stress related to the adjustment process is usually referred to as acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Crockett et al., 2007).

Markedly absent from the above research are efforts to reveal the firsthand stories of ISs and how these could impact HEIs. Instead, most of these studies are of a quantitative nature (e.g. Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011; Ying, Lee, & Tsai, 2004; for an exception see Constantine et al., 2005) which excludes important cultural factors and storytelling necessary to obtain a better understanding of the emic cause of stress and the feelings and emotions associated with stress as experienced by ISs. For example, in order to determine whether or not social isolation is a cause for stress, such questionnaires and surveys examine the response to questions such as "I am treated differently in social situations" and "some people ostracize me." However, this is a superficial exploration of a more complex situation. Studies fail to follow up on these questions to determine if there are contingencies associated with initial responses. For instance, the student might only feel treated differently or ostracized by a certain group of people or in certain situations. Understanding these deeper, situational factors can provide a better understanding as to the root cause of the problem for social isolation in ISs. Also, there is usually no measure of each stressor's likelihood of occurrence. This is particularly important, as incidence of occurrence could reasonably be expected to depress or escalate the severity and propensity of the symptom. For example, ISs could report perceptions of discrimination in a quantitative survey based on a single incident occurring long ago, the salience and intensity of which may have escalated the perception of discrimination. This is different than ISs reporting perceptions of discrimination based on a continuous basis.

Speculating as to why stories of acculturative stress by ISs are untold is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we focus on finding and presenting these untold stories themselves as a response to positivist survey research performed to date. Specifically, we are interested in untold stories surrounding the origination of such stressors (source) and the prevalence of resulting symptoms (frequency).

Understanding some of the reasons as to how and why ISs develop and handle stress may further allow administrators and instructors to comprehend the difficulties and pressures endured by ISs. As Harkins, Ray, and Davis (2010: 135) note, "Consulting…is different and more effective when members of all level of the organizations embrace readiness, patience and commitment toward organizational change." While we are not acting as formal consultants, as scholars we strive to be 'helpers' of all our disenfranchised students, ISs included. Thus, for purposes of our paper, we are hopeful that the presentation of ISs' untold stories will serve as a catalyst for those embracing change as it pertains to ISs while potentially opening up resistors to the potential for change.

From an economic perspective, attention to ISs is important, as these students are contributing financially, bringing diversity and increasing the 'status' of HEIs in the U.S. (Andrade, 2006; Kato & Sparber, 2013). For example, the influx and outflux of ISs in universities is a sign of prestige due to the given importance of internationalization and its effect on global rankings (Green, 2012; Wildavsky, 2012). Furthermore, ISs bring an important source of new perspectives to higher education (Ackers, 1997), cultural understanding between ethnic groups, (Greenaway & Tuck, 1995) and diversity to help the development of educational institutions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1997). Additionally, these students may serve as highly educated immigrant workers essential to the American workplace. Currently, 24% and 44% of the total U.S. workforce are immigrants involved in science and engineering positions, respectively (Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2008).

As a result, these employees are important elements in technology and commercialization in the U.S. (Kerr & Lincoln, 2010). Consequently, HEIs look for policies and changes that may help retain ISs (Andrade, 2006; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1999).

The paper is structured as follow. The first section presents a review of ISs and the different symptoms resulting from stress. Secondly, we discuss our ethnographical approach to uncovering the untold stories. Third, we present the findings from the untold stories collected. Fourth, we discuss the implications of the findings for HEIs and provide a conclusion.

Review of literature

International Students

We define *international students* (ISs) as individuals enrolled in HEIs who are on temporary student visas. According to the Institute of International Education (2012), there were 764,495 IS enrolled in American HEIs in 2011-2012 with 228,467 students enrolling for the first time, higher than previous years. Most of these ISs come from China (25%), India (13%), and South Korea (9.5%), and are evenly distributed as undergraduate and graduate students in the areas of business and management (22%), engineering (18.5%), and math and computer science (9%). Moreover, California (13.5%), New York (11%), and Texas (8%) are the top U.S. states for hosting ISs.

Research on ISs concentrates on their social experiences and relations such as perceived social support among ISs. For example, Chavajay (2013) studied perceived social support among ISs and found that ISs perceive more support from other ISs than from Americans. In the same vein, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) examined how ISs create similar "ethnic communities" as an important social factor of adjustment. Similarly, Trice (2004) examined social interactions and found that ISs who socialized with American students adapt more comfortably to the American culture. Also, Lee, Koeske, and Sales (2004) suggested how social support for ISs can alleviate acculturative stress.

Additionally, the literature extensively covers the adjustment process for ISs. For example, Lin and Yi (1997) examined different stressors in Asian ISs as they adjust to the American culture. In a similar manner, Andrade (2006) examined different factors such as language barriers, personal and educational background, and culture that impact the adjustment of ISs. Likewise, Kagan and Cohen (1990) suggest how employment level or the language spoken at home affects cultural adjustment in ISs. Moreover, Ladd and Ruby (1999) examined how graduate ISs adjust their original learning styles to be successful in classes. Likewise, Ramsay, Barker, and Jones (1999) analyzed examples of critical incidents and the emotions they produced in ISs that affected their learning in the first year.

Besides the aforementioned researched streams, research also explores the problems and stressors affecting ISs (e.g., Lee et al., 2004). These difficulties are widely discussed, with some caused by events or cultural experiences in the host environment. As these are more pertinent for the purposes of this paper, we discuss such problems and stressors in detail in the following section.

Stress in ISs

We refer to acculturative stress as the stress associated with adjustment to a foreign culture (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Crockett et al., 2007). Research has shown that acculturative stress is caused by a number of factors in ISs. For example, Lin and Yi (1997) explain how different socio-demographic characteristics such as language, discrimination, and loneliness of Asian ISs in the U.S. may lead to stress. Similarly, other researchers attribute stress to loneliness, social discrimination, and financial struggles (Mahalingam, 2006; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Weiss, 1973; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008, Mori, 2000). Further, other stress factors include academic, social, and intrapersonal problems (e.g., Andrade 2006; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mori, 2000). In other words, acculturative stress is affected by different environmental forces such as the daily adaptation to the American culture and other socio-economic factors. Examples include the adaptation to the new social environment and members of the new culture (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Trice, 2004) as well as struggling with financial aspects due to the lack of financial support or job opportunities available to ISs.

Acculturative stress and physiological symptoms. Excessive exposure to stress has been linked to chronic bodily complains (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994) and other physiological conditions such as immune system vulnerabilities (Winkleman, 1994). Because the adaptation of a host culture has been shown to be challenging and stressful (Choi, 1997; Mori, 2000; Yang & Clum, 1994), it is not uncommon to find many ISs suffering from stress symptoms such as sleep deprivation, headaches, or low energy levels (Thomas & Althen, 1989).

Acculturative stress and mental health symptoms. Research suggests that the transition to a new culture may have damaging effects on one's mental health (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). Therefore, the adaptation to a new environment may lead to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety (Choi, 1997). Other symptoms include high levels of anger and alienation (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987) as well as fear of making mistakes (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Mori (2000) describes how ISs are at higher risks of such psychological problems due to language barriers and cultural gaps in social relationships. Likewise, Yeh (2003) argues how age, acculturation, and cultural adjustment are also significant factors in the development of psychological mental problems.

Acculturative stress and social environment. Hayes and Lin (1994) mention how social concerns are one of the biggest problems for ISs as they come to America (Day & Haji, 1986; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Pederson, 1991). Consequently, such concerns produce high levels of stress, particularly as ISs experience 'social loss' in coming to American while leaving family and friends behind (Hayes & Lin, 1994). This loss can lead to loneliness (Schram & Lauver, 1988; Weiss, 1973). Moreover, ISs also perceive less social support (Chavajay, 2013; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lee et al., 2004) and more perceived discrimination (e.g., Hanassab, 2006; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994; Mori, 2000) in the host culture. Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) also describe these problems along with language difficulties, personal characteristics, and academic concerns in their social adjustment model. As a consequence, many ISs search for ways to reduce acculturative stress such as social support. For instance, Lee et al. (2004) explains how ISs who perceived higher levels of social support reported fewer symptoms related to acculturative stress.

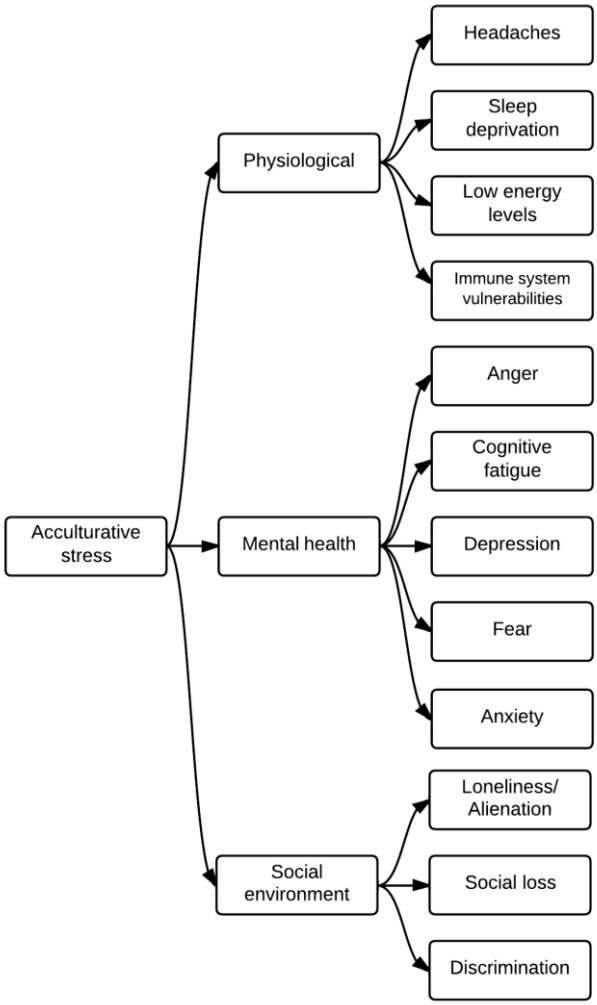
The current literature on acculturative stress fails to acknowledge the untold stories underlying such quantitative results. Specifically, while it seems obvious to these researchers to consult with ISs in order to co-create a depiction of their experience (Boje, 1991), research to date has failed ISs in this respect. Therefore, we will rely on the exploration of ISs' untold stories to (1) confirm the aforementioned quantitative findings (see Figure 1 for a collective presentation of this information), (2) identify the sources of acculturative stress, and (3) delve into the interplay between these sources of stress and the likelihood of resulting symptoms, and (4) provide useful implications for HEIs based on the results.

Ehtnographical co-creation to explore untold stories

The aim of this study was to draw out and present the untold stress stories of ISs. Because we are trying to explore this cultural phenomena based on individuals' co-created experiences, interactions, and customs with their environment or host culture (Boje, 1991; Muecke, 1994), an ethnographic approach was chosen in which we privilege the voices of our informants who may otherwise be "subordinate or hierarchical to other voices" (Boje, 2001: 21) in telling their untold stories (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

We subscribe to the definition of ethnography as posited by Boje (2004:10) as the "…thick description, & interviewing; hermeneutic and dialectic analysis of social constructs". Therefore, ethnographic data includes every interpreted experience within a social context where the researcher keeps records of stories and narratives (Agar, 1980). Because our first step was an attempt at confirming the aforementioned quantitative results via untold stories, we attempted to frame the stories we heard. Then, as researchers interested in the collective voices of our ISs informants, we next sought to find a broader framework for the totality of these stories by including our own voices as co-creators of the experience (Boje, 1991; Van Maanen, 1979). Gioia et al. (2013:18) argue that the inclusion of both voices not only add qualitative rigor in the data collected and analysis, but also allows "for the kind of insight that is the defining hallmark of high-quality qualitative research." Figure 1 below illustrates the overall depiction of acculturative stress we sought to explore in more detail.

Figure 1. Symptoms of acculturative stress found in ISs.



Because our paper, at its heart, focuses on exploring the untold stories of ISs, we employed interviews of 18 different ISs from 6 different countries: 2 (11.1%) from China (1 male, 1 female); 7 (38.8%) from Mexico (4 male, 3 female); 3 (16.6%) from Afghanistan (2 male, 1 female); 3 (16.6%) from Iraq (2 male, 1 female); and 3 (16.6%) from Saudi Arabia (2 female, 1 male). Each interview was pre-arranged and recorded, lasting from 15 to 45 minutes. These interviews were supplemented with conversations collected outside formally arranged times. We also used our fieldwork notes to relate to untold stories as researchers. The use of interviewing to uncover untold stories in conjunction with ethnographic fieldwork is consistent with Fetterman's (1998) description of an optimal emic approach.

The field setting for our study was a university in the Southwestern United States enrolling approximately 1,000 ISs from 75 countries. Researchers acted as participant observers on a daily basis, and recorded events and conversations as they occurred (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Most of the participant observation occurred on campus, classrooms, cafeterias, offices, and social events. In order to facilitate note keeping, a "field" notebook and a dairy were kept with all the dates, communications, and details of the field notes.

Reflexivity

Preliminarily, we relied on NVivo (software) to assist us in assembling the untold stories we found. NVivo, (formerly known as NUD*IST) allows the researcher to "build worksheets [to analyze a paradigm] and … track the location for various quotes" (Boje, 2001: 124). We also acknowledge the importance of reflexivity in conducting empirical qualitative research (Keso, Lehtimäki, & Pietiläinen, 2009). Cunliffe and Jun (2005) encourage the need for reflexivity in the social

practice since it makes us active participants in our environment rather than responsive units to it. Reflexivity also makes us aware of the different and multiple realities of interpretation (Riach, 2009) which may help in identifying different perspectives in the research process. Reflexivity is important as we try to make sense of the realities and environment of ISs as they try to adjust to the American culture. Reflexivity allows us to privilege the untold stories of ISs in hopes of better understanding their struggles and difficulties as they deal with the stress experienced in the new culture. In our study, we practiced reflexivity as a tool to aid us in uncovering previously untold stories. Two authors, themselves ISs, reflected on their personal experiences, struggles, fears, and uncertainties. Based on their reflexivity, we were better able to identify stressors and their subtleties during our own interactions with ISs.

Context

Johns (2006) noted that studies are incomplete without attention to context. For this reason, it is important as reflexive scholars to provide a brief discussion of how ISs' choice of university plays a key role in this study. First, the university is located in a city less than an hour away from the U.S. – Mexico border. This unique context sets our study apart from those performed at other institutions of higher learning. For instance, while most ISs in the U.S. come from Asia, students in the study university are predominantly from Mexico. Second, while American students do attend the university where the ethnographic study was conducted, there is a larger population of Mexican-American students than any other demographic. Finally, having a large population of ISs, the university provides social opportunities to ISs that might not be offered by other HEIs in the U.S. (e.g., Muslim, Nepalese, Chinese, Indian, Iranian and Sri Lankan ISs clubs). As a result of these characteristics, ISs' acculturative stress levels might be reduced in this context, an important note for future researchers conducting similar studies in less organically diverse contexts.

What did the stories tell us?

Below we present the results of our ethnographic approach. First, we demonstrate that we confirmed the positivist quantitative researchers' findings concerning acculturative stress and symptoms as depicted in Figure 1. Then we delve into these untold stories' hidden explanations surrounding sources and prevalence of acculturative stress.

Confirming Survey Results

Physiological Symptoms. These symptoms were the second most mentioned. The responses used were limited to the texts from our interviews only and not from our field observations since we noticed these symptoms could be subjective by individual. Choi (1997), Mori (2000), and Yang and Clum (1994) explain that these symptoms emerge as a consequence of other main symptoms, which arise as the international student faces the new stressful challenges of the host culture. In this case, problems in the classroom were mainly associated with such symptoms. For example, a student feeling stressed due their experience with professors expressed longer studying hours possibly implying sleep deprivation:

> *I feel sad, you know why? Because I always need to go home and go to the library and try to compensate what the instructor didn't do, so I need to study harder. I can't just leave even at night. I need to refer to the library or ask other people so I need to compensate and it is a big blow because in one hand I am paying the tuition to be taught but I do not learn. I need to teach myself*

Mental Health Symptoms. The most prominent symptoms occasioned by acculturative stress were that related to psychological symptoms. ISs told stories of anxiety provoked by immigration agencies. Problems arose when immigration policies are not well-known or communicated with ISs as they tend to change often with no real channel of communication. Moreover, this situation becomes particularly dire for some ISs (for example, those from the Middle East) as a U.S. Embassy is not easily available to them.

> *…the main problem is your visa process and trying to make sure it is always updated, but sometimes it is difficult because they change things often and I really don't know when these things happen.*

However, obtaining a student visa is just the beginning of their continuous struggle to stay in the host country, which produces anxiety in most ISs that are different than American students. Such factors include academic standards also set by universities. For example, in order to maintain legal status and be enrolled at a university, ISs must be enrolled full

time every semester while maintaining a GPA of at least 2.0 or 2.5 and mandatory health insurance in many HEIs. Also, their forms (e.g., I-20, 1-94) must be updated before beginning a new semester. Failing to do achieve any of these will result in revoking their student visa:

> *Visa issues and residency problems because you always need first of all to have 9 credit hours to get TA [teaching assistantship] and RA [research assistantship]. Secondly, you need to work hard day and night to get a good GPA [grade point average] and keep your visa status and funding.*

The interaction with professors and American students was also a reason for anxiety, mostly due to language barriers. Most ISs voiced their eagerness to participate and be active in class and other activities, but their lack of confidence in their inability to express themselves made this difficult:

> *I didn't get too much into the discussions, but in reality it wasn't that I didn't want to or I wasn't interested or anything, but I just couldn't because I didn't know what to say or how to say it. There is a bit of fear that holds you back and sometimes it is hard.*

A last frequent mental health symptom was anger. These ISs described their anger due to the fact they were perceived as inferior by other American students. Most of these ISs felt that their personal, professional, and academic accomplishments were overshadowed by stereotypes and assumptions based on ethnic background or religion:

> *So, if you have some assumptions about my life or my religion, or my…social life, or how…ok… if you use your imagination, it is not my problem, it's your problem, that you don't know anything about me, and keeping mentioning stuff like my life style because you don't think it is understandable to you, it doesn't make me different, it is just makes me not from here or…it makes you silly because you don't know anything about other people. So you should better stop assuming stop or educate yourself, but don't get me in the middle. OK, that's fine.*

Social Environment Symptoms. Based on our notes, the main symptoms associated with social environment due to acculturative stress were discrimination, loneliness and social loss. Many ISs attributed such reasons to language, ethnicity, and nationality. As a result, several ISs associated this perceived differential treatment due to stereotyping and discrimination:

> *I feel the way some people treat you is different than the treatment received by students who are American or who speak perfect English. I mean… just the fact that they see you differently, they know you are different and that you are not from here. [T]here are allegations because of my nationality that OK, because I am from that country this is my religion, and that I am going to do terrorist actions. First of all, it always stresses me out.*

Such examples of untold stories may also have implications in the identity and power relationship of ISs. For example, in this case, seen as foreigners with the roles of students, occupational identity (Jemielniak, 2010) may be especially salient for ISs. Occupational identity refers to the amalgamation of social roles and expectations of an individual in a given context under a set of assumptions toward the view of self (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Jemielniak, 2010). Consequently, occupational identity may affect how ISs are perceived and labeled by others (i.e., the majority) in organizational discourses (Knights & Willmott, 1999) thus being an important determinant of social power (Jemielniak, 2010). In the aforementioned untold stories, the ISs are not only labeled based on their roles as students in the university, but also based on their role as foreigners, many times wrongly defined by socially-constructed stereotypes and perceptions of others. As a result, power relations for ISs may be poorer as compared to their native counterparts in the new cultural context.

Loneliness/alienation was another common symptom for ISs. Mostly, such symptoms were produced by American students who created unwelcoming social environments at school. This is consistent with the sense of community studied by Rivas-Drake (2012), who found that community could act as a mediator for ISs to reduce depression and increase self-esteem. Difference in ethnicity and language were common reasons to stay away from the main social environment. For

example, during one of our observations in the classroom, one student mentioned the following while making a presentation about how different foods can relate to diversity in people:

> *I brought the M&Ms. They are all different colors in the bag but they are all the same. As everyone knows I am from Chihuahua so my English is not perfect. I want to say sorry if I haven't said hi or anything, but sometimes I feel like people are going to judge me or…they are gonna…try to get away from me because I am from Mexico or something…*

Only a few ISs mentioned family and friends as a reason for loneliness/alienation. However, friends and family were the only reason for social loss.

> *It was really hard for me to leave my family in Mexico, but I noticed that it was the best option I had to, have a better education, and better life.*

Co-Creating Abstract Themes of Untold Stories

Next, we attempted to collect the untold stories of international students into some assemblage that may be useful in organizing HEIs towards change. In so doing, and in order to prevent redundancy in our scholarship, we sought out existing philosophical frameworks. Ultimately, we settled upon the generative causality domains used by Socrates (and later by Hobbes). Generative causality refers to the idea that every effect has a cause (Boje, 2001). Boje (2001) describes four different types of generative cause based on Aristotle's *Politics*.

The first generative cause is the *material* cause or the physical and tangible aspect, what things are made of. In our findings, the material was presented as the tangible or physical aspects that serve as a stressor for ISs. This domain was virtually present in all texts as a cause for stress. In other words, a material aspect was mostly present as a precursor to acculturative stress in ISs. Figure 2 shows the four different domain types in the texts along with the most common emerging themes.

The second cause is *formal* cause or the agent responsible for the shape or enforcement of the material. In the untold stories we gathered, this was also the second most mentioned domain. Examples included immigration agencies and universities as main agents in the form of organizations.

The third cause is *efficient* cause or the immediate agent producing the pattern established by the formal cause (e.g., a supervisor in an organization). The emerging themes related usually represent or are under the influence of the formal domain. Family and friends, professors in universities, and American students are all examples of this domain. This was the most mentioned domain. The examples found usually mention lack of care or attention usually because of stereotyping and perceived racism in some instances, especially by American students. The last one is the *final* cause or the real motive or the work produced by an individual or organization. Table 1 provides a quick overview of these domains, including the definitions decided on based on our ISs' untold stories.

Figure 2. Four Domains and Examples of Emerging Themes.

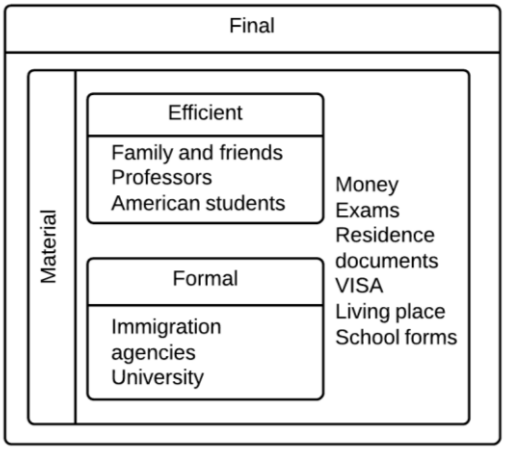


Table 1. Domain Typology

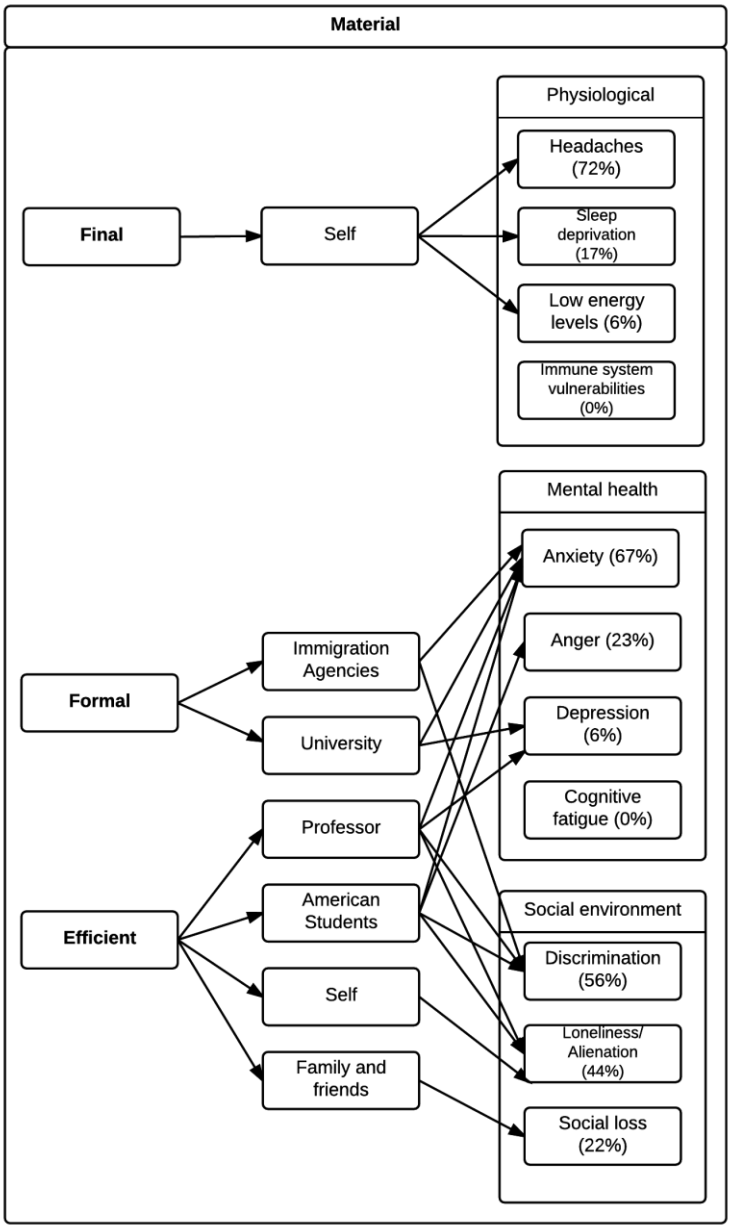
Domain	Definition
Material	A physical or tangible aspect (e.g., passport and proper documentation for international students)
Formal	The institution or organization responsible to shape or enforce the material (e.g., university)
Efficient	The immediate agent under the institution, organization, or social context (e.g., professors, American students)
Final	The end motive of actions to obtain a certain goal (e.g., work, visa status)

In the next section, we discuss the prevalence of symptoms of acculturative stress based on these domains.

Stress Prevalence in Untold Stories

Based on our assemblage of untold stories, the most prevalent symptoms of acculturative stress are mental health symptoms followed by physiological symptoms. The third most common are those related to social environment. Our results also suggest the predominant domains for each symptom category. Within this section, we speak to the implications for HEIs identified as sources inciting the most prevalent symptoms.

Figure 3. Results: Four Domains and Emerging Physiological, Mental Health and Social Environment Themes and Acculturative Stress Symptoms



The main causal domain for mental health was Formal followed by Efficient. The main symptoms described were anxiety, mostly produced by immigration agencies as these institutions are responsible for the legal stay and possible employment of ISs. Even when anxiety over immigration regulations have been previously discussed (e.g. Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 1994) our findings suggests such problems as a more prominent reason for mental health problems than previously encountered, where language barriers have been seen as a predominant casual factor for such problems (Mori, 2000). Because such regulations directly affect some of the policies mandated to ISs by universities in order to maintain legal status (e.g. GPA, immigration forms), universities are an important source of information for ISs. However, most ISs feel like information regarding new immigration policies is not effectively communicated, if communicated at all. Consequently, the disconnection between universities and ISs creates anxiety. As a result, educators and administrators should focus more on the legal aspect of ISs. This can be done through existing departments in charge of dealing with ISs. For example, Murat (2013) mentions how international student offices should serve as a first port of call for ISs. By working closely with immigration agencies to update immigration policies and communicating them

effectively with ISs, international student offices can alleviate some of this stress. The fact that ISs also report high levels of anxiety because of university regulatory policies suggests that there is still more to do in this area.

A close third reason for anxiety in ISs was the aspect of language. Since the problem mostly occurs in the classroom during encounters with professors and American students, we suggest universities work with instructors and professors to look beyond language as a communication problem and how it can create feelings of uneasiness that can impact academic performance and learning. For example, foreign language anxiety may cause lack of participation in the classroom, poor concentration, missing class, or postponing homework (Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). For this reason, instructors should be aware of their role in creating a friendly and collaborative atmosphere for all students (Gregersen, 2003). However, some instructors are unaware of or disregard the idea of foreign language anxiety as a present problem in the classroom (Ewald, 2007), which opens opportunities for training. Gregersen (2003) also describes how ISs may suffer from lack of confidence and tendency to forget previously learned material due to foreign language anxiety.

Another surprising finding is that even when ISs do describe some symptoms of depression, these symptoms are relatively low or mild. This is an interesting result, as generalizing a serious disorder like depression may be misleading. Depression usually consists of excessive sadness associated with other physiological and psychological symptoms (Merrell, 2008). We attribute this misstatement to the tendency of quantitative research to assess the severity of such disorder based on a few questions. Also, grand attribution to depression has been associated with ISs since it is likely one of the main concerns when seeking help from university counseling centers (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Yi, Lin, & Yuko, 2003; Yi, Giseala, & Kishimoto, 2003). However, research has also shown that very few ISs, about 2% in some instances (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004), seek counseling services from HEIs.

Admittedly, ISs may not seek counseling assistance because of unfamiliarity with U.S. counseling practices, the cultural stigma associated with mental health problems (Aubrey, 1991; Flaskerud, 1991, Mori, 2000; Uba, 1994), or because of other alternatives such as social support systems (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mitchell, Greenwood, & Guglielmi, 2007). Moreover, mistrust of American born facilitators is also an impeding issue (Byon, Chan, & Thomas, 1999; Jackson & Heggins, 2003; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). In order to attract more ISs for counseling services, administrators need to do more than just announcing the availability and low/free costs of counseling services to ISs, but also make them aware that these services are intended for them and their American counterparts. Mori (2000) also mentions the need for counseling professionals to be familiar and sensitive to the special needs and problems of ISs.

For physiologic symptoms related to acculturative stress, the only domain related was the final domain. ISs predominantly described headaches, lack of sleep, and low energy levels as consequences of stressful situations mostly encountered in the classroom with virtually no mention of other symptoms. However, these symptoms were frequently mentioned. Since many of these physical symptoms are manifestations of the mental state of the student, we suggest administrators of HEIs implement the discussed strategies to reduce the number of mental health symptoms.

Social environment symptoms were mostly due to Efficient causal domains followed by Formal. The main symptoms described were perceived discrimination followed by loneliness/alienation with social loss mentioned less often. Untold stories of perceived discrimination were mostly caused by interactions with American students and professors. This suggests that, even when discrimination is a well discussed topic in diversity management, administrators of HEIs should discard the idea that discrimination is not an issue in a professional HEI and still embody the principles of diversity in the classroom. We propose training not just as a management of diversity, but a management *for* diversity where people learn not to manage differences, but appreciate them (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008).

In the effort to reduce acculturative stress, ISs seek social support from their environment (Lee et al., 2004). However, many ISs feel neglected or rejected by American students and professors because of cultural differences. The problem intensifies when ISs also feel a sense of social loss of family and friends from their native country. In order to address issues with loneliness/alienation and social loss, we follow some of the best practices for ISs mentioned by Murat (2013). For example, offering diverse food services (especially when meal plans are mandatory) and offering awareness training to domestic students about cultural differences. The idea is for ISs to develop a sense of home in the host culture, where she/he can associate the difference and similarity of cultures.

Overall, we conclude that administrators of HEIs should focus their efforts across different domains to address different types of negative symptoms caused by acculturative stress in ISs. We argue that Formal domains are the main contributors to mental health symptoms. In the same vein, the Efficient domain is a prevalent reason for negative

physiological and environmental symptoms. All these symptoms contain a Material domain as a stressor and are encapsulated by the Final domain as students try to succeed in the new culture to achieve their own goals and objectives. By focusing on these domains, administrators can help reduce the negative consequences of acculturative stress.

Conclusion

This paper takes an ethnographic approach to understanding the unique challenges faced by ISs during the acculturation process. Specifically, we map out the untold stories of ISs onto four domains of acculturative stress - material, formal, efficient, and final. We also identify the most prevalent acculturative stress consequences. Lastly, we identify relationships among domains and acculturative stress consequences to determine which domains deserve the most attention when trying to eliminate a particular stress consequence. In filling this gap, we also provide important implications for practitioners interacting with ISs like those in our study. We are hopeful that this study will encourage subsequent research in this important area, drawing from alternative qualitative methods and unique samples to better our understanding of the acculturation process and potential interventions which may mitigate its negative consequences.

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