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## Exploring Acculturation And Intercultural Identity Building Of International Students At The University Of Mississippi

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“ONE’S DESTINATION IS NEVER A PLACE, BUT A NEW WAY OF SEEING THINGS”:  
EXPLORING ACCULTURATION AND INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY BUILDING OF  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfilment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Southern Studies

The University of Mississippi

By

RACHAEL WALKER

May 2014

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## ABSTRACT

The experiences of international students studying in the U.S. continue to be the concern of numerous literatures in the field of international education. This master's thesis addresses the experiences of international students at the University of Mississippi. A qualitative study of 13 semi-structured interviews with international students at the University of Mississippi was conducted. The findings from the interview transcripts discovered that the interviewee's experiences could be discussed regarding four key sections. Firstly, the findings discovered factors that affected international student's acculturation at UM. Secondly, the findings presented how the interviewee's experiences at UM could be plotted on the "acculturative process" curve. The third section of the findings presented the interviewee's experiences regarding intercultural identity building. The final section of the findings presented regional particularities that affected the interviewee's acculturation. This research offered contributions to the body of literature on international education in the U.S. regarding how aspects of region, such as the concept of Southern hospitality as viewed by individuals from other cultures, affected international student's adjustment at UM. It also contributed to the field of literature by presenting findings regarding placement options of international students to argue how the acculturation process begins before international students arrive at UM.

*Key words: international students, acculturation, intercultural identity building, adjustment, culture shock, U.S. South, region, University of Mississippi*

## DEDICATIONS

“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things,” said Henry Miller. Though Oxford was my destination, I agree with Miller that my time living and studying in another country has allowed me “a new way of seeing things.” I believe that as a result of this, I am a more capable and considerate individual. I dedicate my master’s thesis firstly to my family for their encouragement to peruse a study abroad year, as well as my master’s abroad. I am in a position of privilege to be able to have had two opportunities to live in another country and I thank my family for their continued support both emotionally and financially. I also dedicate this master’s thesis to all of the individuals I have met along the way while studying at the University of Mississippi. I met people who challenged my belief systems and others who expanded my understanding of the world. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all the international students who decide to study in Mississippi. I fear that many of them do not know the extent of their decision to study in this state but I thank them for challenging themselves to study somewhere that might at times be difficult but is an experience that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Dr Minjoo Oh for agreeing to work with me as my thesis chair for this research. Dr Oh did not know me or my research interests when I initially approached her to work on this thesis. She decided to work with me based upon a shared status as international individuals at the University of Mississippi. I thank her for her advice through all of our long meetings and detailed guidance throughout the thesis process. I also thank Dr Barbara Combs, who worked with me in the earliest stages of this research when I was writing my proposal. I thank her for all of her guidance at the start of this research and detailed comments and queries on my final draft. I also want to thank Dr Kathryn McKee who helped me to cement my passion for understanding the South, question my personal difficulties in acculturation at the University while I was on exchange and also for her comments and advice on this thesis. I thank the Southern Studies department as a whole for their passion in understanding the rich history and culture of the region while confronting the region's issues on a daily basis. I whole-heartedly believe that a humanities education is beneficial in shaping you as an individual, who is compassionate but critical, aspects that will be beneficial throughout life. Finally, I thank the state of Mississippi, for my love of you and for my frustrations.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Oxford, Mississippi, home to the University of Mississippi, has a population of roughly 20,000 permanent residents and an additional 19,000 student population. Of this student population, approximately 745 are international students who come to study at the University of Mississippi (UM) from all over the globe. These international students could chose to study at other universities around the world or other institutions in the U.S. but what brings them to Oxford, Mississippi? What experiences do international students have living and studying in this small Southern college town? Why does the administration want or need to continue to grow the international student community at UM? These are some of the questions that prompted me to explore the experiences of international students currently studying at UM for my master's thesis. This research specifically explores the acculturation and intercultural identity building, which I define later, of international students (degree-seeking, exchange and IEP) at the University of Mississippi.

International education continues to be one of the keys ways in which individuals are able to travel and explore the world, allowing them to study, work and live in another culture for an extended period of time. Since the 1960s, the number of international students opting to study in the U.S. has increased annually. In 1971 the State Department issued 65,000 student visas (Hazen and Alberts, 2006:201). This is compared to the 819,644 international students in the

U.S. during 2012/13 (Open Doors 2013 Report on International Education Exchange, 2013). The Institute of International Education (IIE) “Open Doors 2013 Fact Sheet” stated that there were

2,699 international students studying at accredited higher education institutions across Mississippi (2013). The state is currently ranked number 43 in the nation in enrolment of international students (Open Doors Fact Sheet: Mississippi, 2013). The University of Mississippi’s Office of International Programs (OIP) was established in the early 1990s and currently enrolls 745 international students at various educational levels.

Studying abroad, especially as part of an exchange program, is often under peer scrutiny to be “the best experience of your life.” In the majority of cases, this statement is true. Most international students find their study abroad experiences to be enlightening and definable periods of their lives. Studying abroad might be invaluable for students in the long term but it is not always an easy emotional and psychological experience at the time. Therefore, studies exploring international students’ experiences of culture shock, issues of acculturation and adaptation and intercultural identity building continue to be published.

Some of the key studies addressing international student’s experiences of culture shock and acculturation are Furnham and Bochner’s *Culture Shock: Psychological Reactions to Unfamiliar Environments* (1986), Pedersen’s *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents Around the World* (1995) and Redfield, Linton and Herskovits’ “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation” (1936). These studies are crucial in understanding the theory that explores the issues international students confront while studying abroad. Some of the more recent studies exploring international student’s experiences studying abroad are De Araujo’s

“Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and Universities: A Review of the Literature” (2011), Simmala’s “Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Lao and Vietnamese International Graduate Students: Implications to Adult Education” (2010) and Kim’s *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* (2001). These studies adapt and develop some of the earlier theories regarding culture shock, acculturation and adaptation of international students studying abroad.

The studies I referenced above offer an introduction to the body of literature that explores the experiences of international students studying abroad in various countries. My master’s thesis builds upon this previous literature to explore the experiences of international students studying at one university in the United States, the University of Mississippi. My research is relevant as the University is currently in the midst of implementing its UM 2020 strategic plan. A central aim of this plan is to further internationalize the University community through internationalization of the student body, faculty, staff and curriculum. With this administrative goal in mind, my research, which explores the experiences of current international students at UM, is beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it is beneficial for prospective international students in understanding the experiences of current international students at UM. Secondly, it is beneficial for the University as a reference to assist current international students, attract prospective international students and internationalize its domestic student body via increased engagement with a growing international student body and an increased internationalized curriculum.

My master’s thesis was greatly influenced by my experience as an exchange student at UM during the academic year 2010/11. This exchange year was part of my undergraduate degree in American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham (UoB), United Kingdom.

My exchange year was a difficult personal emotional and psychological experience, which arguably followed the stages of acculturation. I experienced initial acculturative stress regarding life at UM but this was later followed by a gradual adjustment to the culture of the University and Oxford. Acculturation is discussed in depth in my literature review (p 16). There was a time in my first semester that I strongly disliked the University and Oxford. I felt frustrated, isolated and homesick, to the point where I contemplated not completing the exchange year. My experience at UM was greatly different to my arrival at UoB in which I was able to make a large group of friends early on and adjust to life in a city significantly larger than my hometown.

I also had difficulty in understanding why I was experiencing these emotional and psychological difficulties. I had been on family vacations to other parts of the U.S. such as New England, New York and Florida a number of times before coming to Mississippi. From a young age I had a passion for American culture, though I must admit that it was a passion for largely popular culture filtered through television and film. My experiences on vacation largely reinforced these somewhat stereotypical views of America that I would later find out were not the complete truth about the nation. On top of this, I had avid support from my parents who were advocates for travelling to the North American continent. They lived in Canada for two years in the 1980s and my sister was born in Alberta before they moved to Germany. As a final point of consideration, I attended a number of pre-departure briefings offered by my department at UoB which aimed to educate me about potential issues of acculturation in the U.S., which was introduced to me through the theory of culture shock. Therefore, I felt proficient in American culture and how to deal with issues of acculturation as an international student in the U.S.

I must call attention to that the South was a region of the U.S. that I had not been to before beginning my exchange year. I did not know much about the region, other than some areas of its history I had studied. This was largely what appealed to me as I wanted to challenge myself to experience an unfamiliar part of the U.S. On one hand I was curious about the region and its painful history but on the other, I was scared to “go it alone” in a large U.S. city and felt that a small town would be an easier and safer experience, I was perhaps correct about the latter. However, I did not think I would feel as if I could not adjust to the way of life at UM and find the region to be so apart from the America I knew. An issue arose that I did not know how to confront regarding the religiosity of the region. I was aware that the South was a more religious region compared to other parts of the U.S., as well as compared to the United Kingdom. However, I experienced a challenging situation when attempting to make friends with a group of domestic students who invited me to go to the Baptist Student Union with them. I accepted the invitation because I was interested in experiencing religion in the region, even though I am not religious. However, when I was asked by the domestic students who had invited me if I was religious and I politely explained that I was not, I was excluded from further invitations to dinner or to spend time with them. I had not experienced a situation where I had not been able to make friends with people based upon different belief systems. I felt isolated by the situation and questioned my identity.

Upon returning home to the UK after my exchange year, I spoke to a number of UoB students who had also completed an exchange year in the U.S. or Canada. I discovered that my experiences at UM mirrored most closely other UoB students who had studied at universities in the U.S. South. Therefore, my personal experience as an exchange student influenced my desire

for my master's thesis to explore the experiences of other international students at UM in an attempt to address the well-being of international students at the University.

In preparation for my master's thesis research, I conducted a series of oral histories and made portrait photographs of seven international students at UM across the fall 2013 semester. This work culminated in an independent study titled, "Unfamiliar Faces in an Unfamiliar Place: A Series of Oral Histories from International Students at the University of Mississippi". This project was directed by Dr David Wharton in the Southern Studies department. This work was constructive as a foundation to my master's thesis for a number of reasons. It was helpful initially to consider how the literature I was reading for my thesis was applicable to international student's experiences at UM. I was also able to practice conducting semi-structured interviews. I was able to prepare my thesis interview questions by testing questions with similar content on the seven oral history participants. As a whole, this project allowed me to develop and tailor my thesis research to consider the experiences of an initial group of international students at UM and to make sure that I would develop questions for my master's thesis that would receive open and detailed responses.

The overarching question of this thesis focuses on the experiences of international students studying at the University of Mississippi. I explored international student's experiences at UM to address my two key research questions:

1. What factors influence international student's well being at the University of Mississippi?
2. Are regional particularities also factors that influence international student's well being at the University of Mississippi?

In regards to these two research questions, I use the term “well being” to refer to international students feelings of happiness and success to how they feel they have been able to adjust studying at UM and living in Oxford. The core of my findings in this research focus on two theories: acculturation and intercultural identity building. However, I also discuss culture shock literature as a foundation on some of the theory related to the experiences of international students studying abroad. My thesis does not focus specifically on the role of language acquisition on the experiences of international students studying abroad which many studies have explored such as Baohu Yu and David Watkins’ “Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Acquisition: A Study of International Students in China from a Cultural Perspective” (2011). Finally, I do not focus on the processes of internationalization at universities, which is another key focus of studies in the field of international education. An example of a study that focuses on the processes of internationalization at universities is Joellene Coryell, Beth A. Durodoye, Robin Redmon Wright, P. Elizabeth Pate and Shelbee Nguyen’s “Case Studies of Internationalization in Adult and Higher Education: Inside the Processes of Four Universities in the United States and United Kingdom” (2012).

To give an overview of the upcoming chapters, the second chapter is a literature review, which presents significant literature on the theory of culture shock, as well as more recent literature on the theories acculturation and intercultural identity building. The literature review also explores theory on regionalism and the notion of the South as a distinct region. This section of the literature review is followed by a discussion of globalization and the importance of the theories of space and place. The third chapter is the methodology. This chapter discusses my sample, the methodological design of my research with a discussion of the advantages and



disadvantages of this design and ethical implications of this research. I also present my coding method for analysis of the interviews. This is followed by the fourth chapter, which is my findings. This chapter is divided into four sub-headings to present my findings related to the theories of acculturation, culture shock, intercultural identity building and regional particularities. The fifth chapter is a discussion of my findings. This chapter addresses how my findings relate to previous research I discussed in the literature review and what my contribution is to the field of studies on international students studying abroad. In the sixth conclusion chapter, I summarize my master's thesis, discuss the limitations of my research and make recommendations for the future of this research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast wealth of literature on the experiences of international students studying in the United States (Bang and Montgomery, 2013; Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004; De Araujo, 2011; Gonzalez, 2004; Yan and Berliner, 2011). The experiences of international students studying abroad can be studied through a number of different disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and education.

The first section of this literature review examines theories of culture shock. This was the initial theory I examined for my thesis proposal to address how to discuss the experiences of international studying abroad. The next section of this review discusses more recent theories of acculturation. This section is followed by a discussion of literature on the theory intercultural identity building, which is considered an outcome of acculturation. The fourth section addresses regionalism and the notion of the South as a distinct region in the U.S. This discusses literature that explores how and why the South is considered a separate region to the rest of the American nation. The final section of this review addresses theories of globalization and space and place theory.

### 2.1 Culture Shock

The term ‘culture shock’ was first introduced by Canadian anthropologist Kalvero Oberg in 1960. Oberg used this term initially in a speech he delivered in 1954 to the Women’s Club of Rio de Janeiro. However, it was not until 1960 that Bobbs-Merrill published Oberg’s speech in

“Practical Anthropology”. In the 1995 study, *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents around the World*, Paul Pedersen summarized Oberg’s culture shock theory, which Oberg divided into seven stages that an individual experiences in a linear manner,

“Oberg’s seven stages:

- 1) Incubation stage
- 2) Crises resulting from normal daily activity
- 3) Understanding the host culture
- 4) Objective viewing of the host culture
- 5) Re-entry
- 6) Reverse culture shock
- 7) Readjustment to the home country” (1995:2).

Oberg largely saw “culture shock” as a negative experience. Pedersen noted some of the reactions Oberg lists in the crises stage of culture shock,

Oberg mentioned six negative aspects of culture shock including: (1) strain resulting from the effort of psychological adaption, (2) a sense of loss or deprivation referring to the removal of former friends, status, role, and/or possessions, (3) rejection by or rejection of the new culture, (4) confusion in the role definition, role expectations, feelings, and self-identity, (5) unexpected anxiety, disgust, or indignation regarding cultural differences between the old and new ways, and (6) feelings of helplessness as a results of not coping well in the new environment (1995:2).

Pedersen regarded Oberg’s theory of culture shock as definitive in shaping further literature on the theory. Pedersen also discussed four other important theories related to culture shock that developed at a similar time to Oberg’s.

The first other theory developed at a similar time to Oberg’s culture shock is G.M. Guthrie term “culture fatigue.” Guthrie coined this term in 1966 while working with Peace Corps volunteers in the Philippines. He considered the term “culture fatigue” as more appropriate than “culture shock” to explain how Peace Corps volunteers experienced delayed issues of adjustment to Filipino culture (Brein and David, 1971:219). “Culture fatigue” addressed that individuals

experienced delayed issues of adjustment if they believed their home culture to be more closely associated with the host culture they were experiencing. For instance, a student from the United Kingdom may consider British and American culture to be more closely associated and therefore they assume that they will not experience such “culture shock” as a student from an Asian nation coming to the U.S.

A further early work on “culture shock” was conducted by William A. Smalley in 1963. Smalley focused on “language shock,” deeming it the most important factor resulting in culture shock. Marie-Claire Patron and Peter Lang summarized Smalley’s theory, “Smalley argues that language shock is the one of the main components of culture shock for it is in this domain, the language area, where many of the cues to interpersonal relations are found. In the worst cases, if the newcomer is totally inept in the foreign language, the stranger is deprived of his primary means of interacting with others” (2007:106). Francis C. Byrnes is also well known for his early work on “role shock”. In his 1966 study, *Role Shock: An Occupational Hazard of American Technical Assistants Abroad*, Byrnes proposed "role shock" as a sociological phenomenon distinct from Oberg’s "culture shock." A final important work of this time period was conducted by Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, in which she defined the theory of “pervasive ambiguity”. Ball-Rokeach defined this theory as the lack of information that was crucial in defining a given situation. Therefore, having a lack of information about a new culture would affect the adjustment experience an individual would have in coming into a new culture (Ball-Rokeach, 1973:378).

To return to the work of Pedersen, he noted that early literature on the notion of culture shock viewed individual’s reactions to unfamiliar culture in a fairly negative light. Pedersen

noted that most of this research followed what is known as the “medical model”. However, he discussed that more recent literature on the theory of culture shock, has viewed it as more of a positive process, in which the individual can learn from their culture shock experience. Pedersen summarised this,

Each of these early definitions has conveyed the meaning of culture shock as a reactive state of specific pathology or deficit which is both the source and the result of alienation in a new culture according to the ‘medical model’. More recent explanations of culture shock have emphasized the ‘educational model,’ describing the adjustment period as a state of growth and development which—however painful it might be—may result in positive and even essential insights. (1995:2)

Another important development in the literature on culture shock was S. Lysgaard’s U-curve hypothesis of culture shock, also known as the “culture shock curve”. Pedersen commented on Lysgaard’s work, “In 1955 S. Lysgaard first developed the U-curve hypothesis to describe the adjustment patterns of international students in a host culture” (Pedersen, 1995:2). Figure 1. is an example of Lysgaard’s “culture shock curve”, with the four commonly regarded stages of culture shock: honeymoon phase, crises or culture shock phase, adjustment phase and adaptation phase.

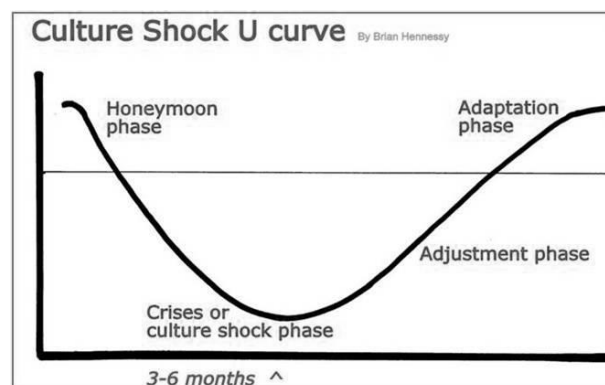


Figure 1. Lysgaard’s Culture Shock “U-Curve”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Figure 1. Lysgaard’s Culture Shock U-Curve Diagram by Brian Hennessy. Retrieved September 10, 2013. (<http://strim.org.pl/2012/wp/?p=1196>)

Pedersen commented that, “The initial U-curve adjustment was broadened to a W-curve by J.T. Gullahorn and J.E. Gullahorn (1963) who pointed out that the adjustment process on returning home resembled the original adjustment process abroad” (Pedersen, 1995, 3.) An example of the “W-curve” is seen below,

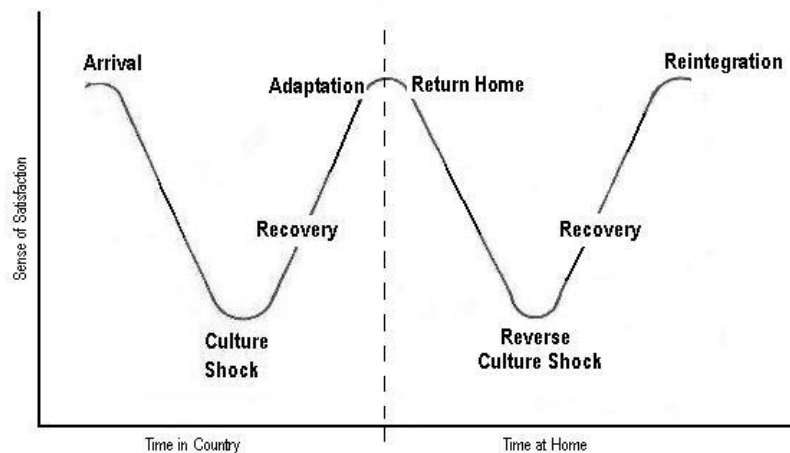


Figure 2. Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s Culture Shock “W-Curve”.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the more recent literature on culture shock comes from Peter Adler. Janet M. Bennett summarized Peter’s Adler definition of culture shock, “Culture shock is primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements of one’s own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences” (1998:215-216). Pedersen also commented that Adler’s approach, “describes culture shock in more neutral rather than negative terms as a five stage educational and developmental process with positive and negative consequences” (1995:3). Pedersen noted other

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<sup>2</sup> Figure 2. Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s Culture Shock W-Curve. University of Wisconsin Center for International Education. Retrieved September 10, 2013. ([http://www.uwec.edu/cie/studyabroad/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent\\_ID=95F88D74-5056-B565-C48698587A39D7A4&Link\\_ID=48A29CD3-5056-B565-C42A4953982A7A94&pID=3&IID=13](http://www.uwec.edu/cie/studyabroad/index.cfm?FuseAction=Abroad.ViewLink&Parent_ID=95F88D74-5056-B565-C48698587A39D7A4&Link_ID=48A29CD3-5056-B565-C42A4953982A7A94&pID=3&IID=13))

important recent works on culture shock as S.O. Lesser and H.W.S. Peter's 1957 study on culture shock as a three-stage process, I. Torbiorn's 1982 study four stage culture shock theory and A.T. Church's 1987 study exploring the U-Curve (1995:3). Pedersen commented that, "Although there are differences across the description of stages, the description of culture shock as a stage-based developmental process is shared by most of the persons writing about the culture-shock experience" (1995:3).

The desirable outcome of the "educational model" of culture shock is "biculturality," though it is perhaps arguable whether this should be the case (Pedersen, 1995:3). This is the assumption that an individual should be able to process both their native culture and the new culture. Ideally, an individual will come to terms with aspects of the new culture that they like and combine them with aspects of their native culture. Scholars such as Pedersen argue that "biculturality" is never completely feasible but others such as De Korne, Byram and Fleming (2007) would disagree and see this as the overall goal of the educational experience of culture shock. In Pedersen's study, he commented on some of the crucial understandings that an individual must be prepared to deal with in coming to an unfamiliar culture (1995:9-10). Pedersen makes a number of valuable points such as his sixth point about how those who are well adjusted in their home culture, can still have a difficult time adjusting to an unfamiliar culture.

Some of the other relevant literature on culture shock comes from the opposite side of the exchange process. Individuals have studied the experiences of American students studying abroad and their experiences of culture shock. One study by Victor Savicki and Eric Cooley discusses the how the idea of national identity affects the experiences of culture shock for

American students studying abroad. This brings into question the extent national identity matters for the exchange students coming to study in America and how it plays a role their reaction to being in the U.S. and whether having a stronger national identity affects your adjustment to a new culture (Savicki; Cooley, 2011).

A final study I reviewed was Raquel Faria Chapdelain and Louise R. Alexitch's, 'Social Skills Difficulty: Model of Culture Shock for International Graduate Students' (2004). The authors explored and expanded upon Furnham and Bochner's theory of culture shock from the 1990s. Chapdelain and Alexitch defined culture shock as "a degree of social difficulty encountered in cross-cultural interaction" (2004:168). They discussed how people adapted their communication style in their host nation and whether or not a larger "disparity" between their home nation and host nation leads to a greater "culture shock" or greater degree of social difficulty in cross-cultural interaction. Chapdelain and Alexitch also explored the differences and potential similarities of the experiences of graduate compared to undergraduate students.

Culture shock is the initial theory I considered regarding the experiences of international students studying abroad. I have presented a number of literatures on the theory of culture shock from its origination in the 1960s up to more recent literature discussing the theory in the early 2000s. Significant arguments from the literature I have reviewed are that culture shock was originally considered a process individuals go through when confronted with a new culture which may result in stages of emotional and psychological difficulties regarding adjustment to the new culture. More recent literature on the theory considered culture shock in a more positive manner. It was addressed that there were educational benefits to individuals coping with difficulties of adjustment to a new culture. A final key argument of the theories was that culture



shock is considered a process with a number of defined stages as presented in Isgaard's 1955 'U-Curve' and later Gullahorn and Gullahorn's 1962 expanded 'W-Curve'.

Culture shock theory is arguably problematic as it implies that there are definitive cultures and that individual's experiences will be of an intense shock to a new culture, compared to smaller bouts of acculturative stress related to emotional and psychological experiences of adjustment to unfamiliar aspects of different cultures. Though Pedersen presented a more recent desired outcome of culture shock as "biculturality", the majority of culture shock theory argues that individuals adapt to the new culture as they give up their home culture. The need to dismiss home culture in favour of the host culture could be considered a call for the individual to assimilate, as opposed to being allowed to develop a "bicultural" identity. Therefore, in the next two sections of this literature review I will discuss literatures presenting other theories explore the adjustment experiences of international students studying abroad. These two theories are acculturation and intercultural identity building.

## 2.2 Acculturation

The earliest definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in their study "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation" (1936). They defined acculturation as, "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (1936:149). The major concern of this definition of acculturation was how it became easily interchangeable with the concept of assimilation, similarly to the concern about the theory of culture shock. Therefore, more recent literature on acculturation such as Berry

(1997), Y. Y. Kim (1996) and De Araujo (2011) have argued for an understanding of acculturation as the processes of adjustment that individuals and groups from one culture undergo when they move to another culture. The desired end result is not assimilation in which individuals and groups dismiss their home culture in favour of the host culture. Acculturation is instead understood as intercultural contact which results in cultural changes in the home culture of individuals and groups, as well as in the host culture.

A more recent but widely used definition of acculturation was presented by John W. Berry in the article, “Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation” (1997). Berry defined acculturation as, “the general processes and outcomes (both cultural and psychological) of intercultural contact” (1997:8). To further explain his definition of acculturation, Berry also defined Claret’s 1990 theory of intercultural contact which he noted is, “the set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when they identify themselves as culturally distinct” (1997:8). In other words, this definition states that intercultural contact is the processes of engagement of individuals and groups who identify themselves as culturally separate. Therefore, Berry’s definition of acculturation is the cultural and psychological processes and outcomes of contact between individuals and groups who consider themselves as culturally separate

Another recent study on acculturation is Abrahao Andre de Araujo article, “Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and Universities: A Review of the Literature” (2011). De Araujo reviewed relevant literature on the adjustment issues (or acculturation issues) of international students at American universities. De Araujo discussed six common factors that affect international student’s adjustment that he found in the literature he reviewed. These factors are: English Language Proficiency, Social Support, Length of Stay in the

U.S., Perceived Discrimination or Prejudice, Establishing Relationships with Americans and Homesickness (De Araujo, 2011:1). De Araujo discussed these common factors that affect international students acculturation but also commented, “given their culturally diverse backgrounds, international students may experience adjustment strains within their host environment that are unique to them, such as cultural differences, language constraints, and social behaviours” (2011:2). This comment highlighted that although international students will share common experiences in acculturation; their personal contexts are accountable for variances in their acculturation processes.

Another significant study on acculturation which is similar to De Araujo’s is Mehdizadeh and Scott’s “Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland” (2005). The authors explored how adjustment to a new education system can cause students acculturative stress. They noted, “From the arrival of international students in the host country, they encounter many different and unexpected problems. Students may need to adjust to a new educational system, which differs considerably from the methods of study in their own country” (2005:485).

Buasawan Simmala’s study “Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Lao and Vietnamese International Graduate Students: Implications to Adult Education” (2010) is a further recent study on acculturation. Simmala discussed the idea of the Individualism-Collectivism model to understand the types of societies and cultures international students come from in comparison to the U.S and how they are able to adjust to the differences between individualistic versus collectivist societies.

The final recent study on acculturation I present is Hyeyoung Bang and Diane Montgomery’s “Understanding International Graduate Students’ Acculturation Using Q

Methodology” (2013). Bang and Montgomery focus on how “intrapersonal factors such as cultural, emotional, social and communicative competencies” affect the ways in which international students adjust to a different culture and corroborate the dynamics of two or more cultures (2013:344). The authors discuss how explore how student’s acculturate to a new culture in fluctuation with their home culture. The study is reaffirms that international students experiences are influenced by individual personality and that each student’s experience will not be the same because everyone deals with intrapersonal factors in a different manner. Bang and Montgomery’s study also examined the ways in which students feel about their time studying in the U.S. The author’s found that for some international students, they are interested in assimilating to American culture, whereas others are not interested in this and thus spend most of their time with co-nationals.

This concept of support from host nationals was also discussed in Camille Brisset, Saba Safdarb, J. Rees Lewis and Colette Sabatier’s study, “Psychological and sociocultural adaptation of university students in France” (2010). Brisset et al. discussed how many students depend upon co-nationals in comparison to host nationals and how this impacts their adaptation to life in another country and culture.

To summarize this section on acculturation, there are three significant arguments from these literatures. Firstly, it is worthwhile to address how Redfield, Linton and Herskovits’ theory of acculturation was considered the initial definition for the adjustment process individuals undergo when engaging with a new culture. However, similarly to some of the earliest theories of culture shock, Redfield, Linton and Herkovits’ theory has been contested because of the ease at which it could be exchanged for the term assimilation. Therefore, more recent work on

acculturate such as John W. Berry has regarded acculturation as a more general process of adjustment that individuals undergo when engaging with new culture and the outcomes of this adjustment. These more recent theories do not consider acculturation to be a process of adjustment that necessarily results in assimilation. The final point of consideration from these literatures is that acculturation is similarly to culture shock considered a process, though it has not been divided into stages such as the W-Curve of culture shock. However, acculturation is thought of as a process and that individual's adjustment to a new culture is affected by various factors related to the new culture and personal context.

### 2.3 Intercultural Identity Building

The majority of literatures on the theory of intercultural identity building considered it to be a desired outcome of the process of acculturation. One of the significant discussions of this theory is Young Yun Kim's "Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation" (2001). Kim explored how individuals socialized in one culture are able to adapt to life in a host culture. Kim presented three outcomes of the process of acculturation which are the individual's psychological health, functional fitness and intercultural identity. Psychological health is the individual's psychological well being in regards to them adapting to the host environment, for instance, their emotional response such as happiness and sense of belonging as part of the acculturative process. Functional fitness is the individual's internal ability to meet the challenges of the host environment, such as an international students being able to adjust to the expectations of the U.S. education system (Kim, 2001:185). Kim defined intercultural identity as,

Along with functional fitness and psychological health, intercultural transformation is reflected in the gradual development of intercultural identity. The term intercultural is employed here to reflect the boundary-crossing nature of such development in identity...Although rooted in the original cultural identity; the emerging identity presents a more complex process of interpretive activity inside a stranger. Just as cultural identity serves as a linkage between a person and a specific cultural group, the emerging identity links a person to more than one cultural group. (Kim, 2001:65)

Kim's theory of intercultural identity building is regarded as a gradual process in which an individual is able to develop an identity which is influenced by their home and host cultures. Kim commented that the individual does not have to forego ties with their original culture in favour of the host culture. She commented that, "I view intercultural identity as being rooted in, embracing and not discarding the original cultural identity- just as acquiring knowledge and skill in the host language does not necessarily result in corresponding loss in the original language" (Kim, 2001:66). She used the example of language acquisition to make her argument regarding foregoing ties with the home culture. Kim noted that when someone learns another language, they do not necessarily lose the ability to speak their native language. Therefore, when someone acculturates in a host culture, they do not necessarily forget about their home culture and dismiss it in favour of the host culture. They are able to build an intercultural identity, which encompasses aspects from both cultures.

Another relevant study related to Kim's theory of intercultural identity building is Peter Adler's theory of multiculturalism in the article, "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism" (1998). Adler commented on the new "multicultural" or "intercultural" identity, "It is an identity based not on a "belongingness" which implies either owning or being owned by culture, but on a style of self-consciousness that is capable of negotiating ever new formations of reality...He or she is neither totally a part of nor totally apart from his or her

culture; instead, he or she lives on the boundary” (1998, 231). Adler agreed with Kim in that the individual who has built an intercultural identity does not relinquish ties with their home identity in favour of the host identity. Adler referred to these individuals as living “on the boundary,” in which their intercultural identity lays on a boundary between the home and host cultures.

Another final useful theory for understanding the concept of intercultural identity building is presented in Ishiyama and Westwood’s “self-validation model” (2002:3). This model is “based on the premise that cross-cultural adjustment occurs as a person validates his or her own personal and cultural uniqueness while establishing his or her ‘transcultural relatedness’ with others” (Ishiyama and Westwood, 2002:3). This model explored how international students felt about their home cultures and whether or not they go through a period of self-validation in which they become more aware of aspects of their home culture in relation to another culture and how international students come to build relationships with people from other cultures.

There are a number of significant aspects from the literature I have presented on the theory of intercultural identity. To reaffirm, intercultural identity is considered a desired outcome of individual’s adjustment to a new culture. Intercultural identity is a more recent theory that developed out of studies on acculturation, as opposed to studies on culture shock. Kim’s theory of intercultural identity building presumes that individuals are able to build a “new and expanded” cultural identity that incorporates aspects from two or more cultures. This new and expanded identity was reiterated by Peter Adler in his theory of the “multicultural” individual. This is an individual who “lives on the boundary” between cultures and therefore has a cultural identity that encompasses many cultures.

## 2.4 Regionalism: “The South as a Distinct Region”

Scholars such as John Shelton Reed write about Southern culture and the region commonly accepted as the U.S. South. This writer considers the South to have always been culturally distinct and separate from the American nation and that it will continue to be, even in the face of a homogenizing American culture, nation and globalizing world. This section of the literature review presents theory on the concept of regionalism and the idea of the South as a distinctive region to offer an introduction to these literatures.

The most highly considered text exploring the regional distinctiveness of the U.S. South is the seminal work, *Mind of the South* (1941) by historian W.J. Cash. Numan Bartley quoted Cash from *Mind of the South*,

There exists among us by ordinary [people] – both North and South – a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity. As to what its singularity may consist in, there is, of course, much conflict of opinion, and especially between Northerner and Southerner. But that it is different and that it is solid – on these things nearly everybody is agreed. (Bartley, 1988:1)

Cash paved the way for historians and scholars writing about the U.S. South and the notion of its distinctiveness. The people who live in the region defined as the U.S. South consider themselves Southerners, and the South places itself, and is placed, as a distinct, separate region in comparison to the North, which is regarded as the “other”.

Other important studies on the notion of a distinct South come from writers such as John Shelton Reed. In a study in the 1980s of how a group of people from North Carolina define themselves as Southerners, Shelton Reed commented that, “A variety of evidence had accumulated to indicate that, although the culture of the South was indeed changing, it was by no means disappearing as a distinctive variation on the basic American theme” (1983:3). Reed



agreed with Cash's notion of what makes one Southern is as much a part of how one perceives themselves, as how they are perceived by others. Shelton Reed noted, "These two aspects of identity, self-designation and designation by others, are clearly more appropriate measures of Southernness, in the sense that concerns us here, than the simple datum, place of residence" (Shelton Reed, 1983:11).

Reed continued his discussion of how people view themselves as Southerners, "Aside from residential history, the most common reason given for thinking of oneself a Southerner is affection for other Southerners, a feeling of closeness to them and their ways—in other words, a sense of identification with the regional group" (1983:15). He also noted some of the pervasive stereotypes about being a Southerner that are perpetuated by many people who regard themselves as Southern, as much as they are by outsiders,

When we asked for the best thing about the South we did not limit respondents to one answer, and half volunteered that the best thing about the South is its people...Southerners are, by their own reckoning, slower, more traditional, and more polite and friendly than other Americans – a constellation of traits that, as some studies have shown, other American are generally prepared to grant them. (Shelton Reed, 1983: 41)

Others writing about Southern distinctiveness have commented on how this notion has pervaded literature since Cash's 1941 statement. Numan V. Bartley commented, "This question of the nature and extent of southern distinctiveness has been a central concern of scholarship about the region" (Bartley, 1988:x). Moreover, Frank E. Van-Diver remarked, "Difference has never bothered Southerners; many, indeed, are proud of it, prefer it to sharing Yankee commonality" (1964:vii).

A more recent study on the notion of the distinctive nature of the South is James Cobb's *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (2007). Cobb quotes historian David Potter in

his introduction regarding how early historians regarded the South solely in relation to the North and that the North became synonymous with the American nation, “I was obliged...to identify and investigate the distinctive features of southern society by exploring points where the conditions of the southern region might differ from those of other regions” (2007:2). Cobb argues that the North used the South as the negative “other” in which to compare itself against so as to be able to define the region (2007:3). However he continues to state that,

Identity typically refers to perception of reality rather than to reality itself. Identity may, of course, be grounded in verifiable fact, but as the case of the South demonstrates all too well, it is often a mixture of the unvarnished and varnished or even whitewashed truth. The matter of perception versus reality is compounded by the fact that, historically, identities have not existed in isolation, but always in relation to other perceived oppositional identities which they are defined against. Hence, there could be no South without a North and regardless of reality, the perception of significant differences between these two was vital to sustaining the identity of either. (Cobb, 2007:6)

Cobb’s quote highlights that regardless of whether or not the South is truly culturally distinct to other regions of the American nation, it was perceived as different to the North and these perceptions have perpetuated the notion of the South as having a unique identity in relation to other regions.

The other side of this argument of Southern distinctiveness is the belief that this notion is just a myth, “The idea of the South—or more appropriately, the ideas of the South—belong in large part to the order of social myth. There are few areas of the modern world that have bred a regional mythology so potent, so profuse and diverse, even so paradoxical, as the American South” (Tindall, 1964:1). Tindall is aligning with scholars who believe in a distinct Southern region and culture but he also observes that this distinctiveness was created and is not real, thus perhaps questioning how long the myth of a distinct South can sustain.

The counter argument to the notion of Southern distinctiveness comes from those writing about the idea of a homogenizing American culture and nation. John David Smith and Thomas H. Appleton Jr acknowledged that, “In fact, no region in America, including New England and the West, has received as much in-depth analysis and reflection as has the American South” (1997: 1) However, they also noted,

Grits may remain on southern breakfast menus, but franchise bagel shops and gourmet coffeehouses, pizza parlours, and hoagie restaurants have found a welcome home in the modern South. There seems to be no limit to the adaptability of southern palates. Though scholars debate endlessly on this point, the South has become culturally homogenized—for better or worse – just like the rest of the nation. Is the once distinctive South vanishing? (Smith; Appleton Jr, 1997:2)

Smith and Appleton’s comment brings into question whether the South is as distinctive as it claims to be or whether homogenization is wiping away the notion of distinct regions.

In the 2011 “State of the South” report from MDC, the organisation commented on the changing South, “And today’s South is predominantly a metropolitan South” (MDC, 2011:6). The organization’s comment might be true as ten of the largest metropolitan areas are situated in the U.S. South. However, Oxford, Mississippi is not close to one of these flourishing metropolitan areas. Memphis, and the mid-South area, is only an hour and a half drive north of Oxford. Memphis has a large population but is struggling economically. Moreover, Jackson, the state capital, is a three hour drive south of Oxford, and a relatively small city in comparison to the Southern hubs of Atlanta, Miami and Houston. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the notion that there are many Souths, and the South that Mississippi is situated in remains largely rural, thus perhaps slightly cut off from the full forces of globalization.

There are a number of important aspects to note from the literatures on concept of a distinct Southern region. Key scholars writing about the distinctiveness of the region consider the South to be set apart from the rest of the nation and that it will continue to be in the face of homogenization and globalization. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to consider the counter argument to this in that Southern distinctiveness is a perpetuated myth and that globalization and homogenization is forcing the South to change. Finally, it is significant to reaffirm that there are many Souths and that although the region may be considered distinct in comparison to the rest of the nation; there remain unique cultural aspects in different areas within the region.

## 2.5 Globalization, Space and Place Theory

This final section of the literature review presents literatures that explore the theories of globalization and space and place. Though the world is continues to globalize, it is significant to address the importance of the concept of place. In the article, “The world is not flat: Putting globalization in its place,” Susan Christophersen, Harry Garretsen and Ron Martin offer a brief discussion of some of the theory of how globalization is influencing how to define the economic landscape of places. The authors presented Thomas Friedman’s controversial theory of globalization in which Friedman noted that “the world is flat,”

One of the contested aspects of globalization concerns its geographies and especially whether globalization is rendering the significance of location and place redundant and irrelevant. Several writers have argued that globalization—especially as driven by the revolution in information and communications technologies (ICT)—marks the ‘end of geography’ (O'Brien, 1992), the onset of the ‘death of distance’ (Cairncross, 1997), the emergence of a ‘borderless world’ (Ohmae, 1995), of ‘de-territorialization’ or ‘supra-territorialisation’ (Scholte, 2000) and the ‘vanishing of distance’ (Reich, 2001). The most provocative—certainly the most colourful—of these claims is Thomas Friedman's

recent pronouncement that as a consequence of globalization, ‘the world is flat.  
(2008:343)

The author’s discussed whether globalization is making location and place insignificant, whereby culture is becoming homogenized and places are looking similar, in terms of their demographics and the presence of businesses.

As a counter argument to the idea of globalization dismissing place, Richard Volkman argued for why globalization does not necessarily mean homogenization. Volkman commented,

It is alleged that the global application of information and communications technologies will tend to obliterate or water down the rich and varied cultural lives that have been embedded in geographically and culturally isolated traditions. However, a closer examination reveals that living traditions will adapt in ways that remain true to cherished traditional values. Such dynamic traditions are not threatened by global competition; the ability of such traditions to give varied meaning and color to one’s life will be enhanced, not flattened. (2005:145)

Volkman argued that while we live in a globalized market, individual aspects of culture influence this market and that these will continue to thrive. He noted that in the case of McDonalds, “When critics of globalization scoff at this, imploring that this does not constitute *real* diversity, they utterly miss the point. While a McDonald’s salmon burger is not traditional Norwegian fare, it is *certainly* not traditional American fare. Whatever international customers are buying into is not “total Americanization.” Globalization encourages entirely new cultural products” (2005:150). Volkman argued that globalization is influencing the retention of traditional products, and at the same time, the creation of new products which highlights that globalization does not mean homogenization.

Globalization arguably does not take away from the unique aspects of place and culture. Globalization has changed the way in which people communicate, travel, the flow of ideas and information, as well as the physical landscape of many places, yet, there are unique aspects of

place which cannot be dismissed. Therefore, it is important to also present some of the theories of place and space.

An initial text to consider place is Gayle Graham Yates' *Mississippi Mind* (1990). In this text, Yates made a pilgrimage to her home state in 1985, after living away for a number of years. Yates returned to Mississippi to try to understand the state that she had left and to understand her connection to this place. In the introduction, Yates offered some valuable comments related to thinking about place as a signifier of identity and how influential where we come from and the places we go to are in identity building. Yates commented,

Yet, wherever I went or whatever I presided over, I had to start over each time with each new person, someone asking, "Where are you from?", "What does your father do?", "What does your husband do?", "Who are your people?", "Where did they come from?", no matter what I said or did. There are markers to how a person is known, however great her protest, that have to do with her era, her location, her color, her gender- that have to do with who her people are. (1990:9)

She talked about the significance of place in defining who she is and where she comes from. Yates' lack of a "sense of place" was integral to her reasoning for the pilgrimage to Mississippi as she wanted to understand where she had grown up, looking back at its history during the Civil Rights movement and how this shaped the state and shaped Yates' feelings about her home, "I went to Mississippi to discover the quality of the human spirit that inhabits that place; and Mississippi, just as it had on that May morning when I first saw the light of day there, reminded me that the markers of place do matter, that time and place do matter terribly, that they are decisive for who one will be" (1990:9). Yates offered a discussion of the notion of place in terms of emotional connection and personal identification to place, which differs to the discussion of place by John Agnew, who developed a theoretical understanding of place.

Agnew's *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (1987) is another worthwhile study to consider theory of place. Agnew discussed the definition of place as he used for discussion of the relationship between place and politics. In his preface, Agnew noted,

Place is a complex word. The Oxford English Dictionary gives over three and a half pages to it. Symbolic of its devaluation as a geographical term meaning 'a portion of space in which people dwell together' or 'locality,' place is now quite often a temporal or social-categorical term meaning 'rank' in a list, temporal ordering ('took place'), or 'position' in a social order. (1987:ix)

Agnew continued to define place in a lengthier discussion, in which he noted his three important aspects of defining place, "Locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted; location, the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction as defined by social and economic processes operating at a wider scale, and sense of place, the local 'structure of feeling'" (1987:28). Locale, location and sense of place are what Agnew referred to as the three elements of place. Agnew's concept of place is as much about the geographical location as it is about the locale in which people communicate with one another and how these social relations help individuals to build and sense of place, which can also tie in with the idea of building communities. In regards to Agnew's definition of sense of place, he noted, "place is also more than an 'object'. Concrete, everyday practices give rise to a 'structure of feeling,' to use William's phrase, or 'felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time'. This sense of place reinforces the social-spatial definition of place from the inside, so to speak" (1987:27). This comment explained that individuals build a 'structure of feeling' for the place in which they live in as they become a part of the communication in this place.

Agnew further stated, “This literature stresses the fact that people do not experience life in the abstract context of ‘mass society.’ Their knowledge is acquired, and they live their lives in the context of ‘social worlds’ dominated by the perspective of different ‘reference groups,’ in which meaning is attributed to acts and events through communication and interaction with limited numbers of people” (1987:26). Agnew argued that individual’s lives are influenced by locations people geographically live in and the locales people communicate within. Therefore, if we understand how people communicate and interact with one another based upon the reference groups they communicate with and the social worlds that they live in, this makes us consider how people are affected by moving from one geographic location and locale to a different one. Even within their country, Agnew argued that people communicate and relate to one another based upon the place they live in. Agnew argued for the importance of place which disregards the concepts of homogenization and globalization.

There are several significant aspects to recap from this final section of the literature review. The initial aspect to consider is the process of globalization and how it is “making the world flat.” Therefore, globalization argued for the dismissal of the idea of place. On the other hand, numerous texts argued for the importance of place and considered that even though globalization is occurring this does not take away from the importance of place. The final aspect to address is that texts consider how place is important in identity building.

To conclude this literature review, I have addressed five key areas of literature which I addressed for this master’s thesis. The first section presented theories of culture shock from its origination by Oberg in 1960s to more recent literature discussed by Paul Pedersen and Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s W-Curve. These literatures considered culture shock as a reaction to



engaging with a new culture. It is considered a stage individuals experience before they are able to adapt to a new culture. The second section of this literature review addressed theories of acculturation from the earliest theory in 1936 by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits to more recent literatures from Berry and De Araujo which consider acculturation as process of adjustment to a new culture. The third section presented the concept of intercultural identity which is considered an outcome of acculturation. This section discussed Y.Y. Kim's theory of intercultural identity and Peter Adler's "multiculturalism" which noted that an intercultural identity is the desired outcome of acculturation in that an individual can build an identity that incorporates aspects of two or more cultures. The fourth section of this literature review presented scholars writing about the distinctiveness of the South in comparison to the counter argument on the homogenization of the region. This section addressed how scholars argue that the South can be seen as a distinct region in the American nation that will endure through the forces of globalization. The final section of this review explored theories of globalization to present how globalization is "making the world flat". This section also discussed theories of place and space that argued that place should not be dismissed due to globalization.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This third chapter presents the methodological design of my research. I conducted a qualitative study of semi-structured in-depth interviews with thirteen international students currently enrolled at UM. This chapter presents how I conducted my research, discussing the benefits and limitations of my research design. It also discusses the ethical implications of this research and how I dealt with them. This section is followed by a discussion of the current international student population at UM and my sample of international student interviewees. The final section of this chapter discusses my coding process for analysis of the interview transcripts.

### 3.1 Methodology

To restate my methodological design, I conducted a qualitative study of semi-structured in-depth interviews with thirteen international students currently enrolled at UM. These interviews were conducted between November 2013 and February 2014. Based upon current figures for international student enrolment at UM, I interviewed a range of students from various countries and varying levels of education. The University of Mississippi main campus (Oxford) and their regional campuses (Booneville, Desoto, Grenada, Tupelo) currently enrolls 19,431 students and of this population, 745 of these students are international and IEP (Intensive English Program) students which is 3.83% of the total population. There are 436 undergraduate students, 289 are degree seeking and 147 are exchange students. Additionally, there are 306 degree seeking

graduate students and 64 IEP students. Undergraduate freshman enrolment in 2013 has increased by 25% compared to fall 2012. Whereas graduate doctoral and master's enrolment in 2013 have decreased by 7% and 7.25% respectively, compared to fall 2012. The top ten countries of international student enrolment at the University of Mississippi are in order: China (101), India (94), South Korea (92), Germany (40), Brazil (37), Vietnam (30), Nigeria (26), Japan (25), United Kingdom (21) and Canada (20). (All figures from the Office of International Programs for fall 2013 enrolment)

I proposed that a qualitative study of semi-structured in-depth interviews would be the most suitable design for my research goal. I wanted to explore the experiences of international students at UM in detail and discuss interviewee's specific anecdotes to address my research questions. In his guide to interviewing for qualitative studies, titled "Interviewing for Research and Analyzing Qualitative Data," Martin Woods discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews (2010). Woods noted that a semi-structured in-depth interview is beneficial because it provides more detailed information in comparison to a survey or questionnaire. Moreover, the semi-structured nature of the interview means that there is some standardization to the questions I asked which increases data reliability and allows others interested in my study to replicate the design. Another benefit of the semi-structured in-depth interview is that it allowed an interviewee room to discuss other aspects related to the interview questions, as well as allowed the interviewee room to add follow-up and clarification questions. Finally, a semi-structured interview can often be more comforting for an interviewee because it is less formal and more closely resembles a conversation than a rigid interview or survey (Woods, 2010:2).

Some of the problems Woods mentioned when conducting a qualitative study of semi-structured in-depth interviews are that spontaneous questions can make it difficult to code and analyse data. Moreover, asking spontaneous follow-up or clarification questions to only some interviewees rather than asking all interviewees only set questions can seem unfair and misleading. Conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews is time intensive research process and the interviewer must also be capable of conducting reliable interviews. Finally, Woods noted that it is difficult to make generalizations about qualitative data (Woods, 2010:2). The disadvantages of semi-structured in-depth interviews are opposed to conducting a quantitative study such as a survey. However, I considered this kind of research design as unsuitable for my qualitative study because it would not offer as in-depth detail and specific anecdotes which I wanted to use to explore experiences of international students at UM. Moreover, a quantitative study would attempt to make larger generalizations supported by statistics about the experiences of international students at UM. I do not propose that my study is representative of all international students enrolled at UM but it offers an insight into the experiences of some international students at the University to address my research questions and the purpose of this research.

Each interview took approximately 30-50 minutes to conduct. After an interviewee agreed to allow me to interview them once we had initial communication, I offered for them to specify a place to conduct the interview. The majority of interviewees asked to meet in public places on the UM campus such as the student union lobby and the library. One interviewee asked to meet at his office as it was a private space where we would not be interrupted and this is where he felt most comfortable being interviewed. I was happy to meet students in a public

setting if this made them feel more comfortable. I made sure that we did not sit close to groups of people so interviewees felt comfortable talking about their experiences. It did not appear that my interviewee's responses were impacted by the public setting of the interview. All interviewees answered my questions in an honest and at times frank manner, perhaps because I had informed them that they would receive a pseudonym for the write up of my thesis. Moreover, as I was making an audio recording for transcription purposes only, it did not matter about the quality of audio. It was only important that the recorder was placed between the interviewee and myself so that the sound was clear to ease with transcription.

I was happy to meet in a public setting because the interviewees had not met me before and we had only had email or text communication prior to the face to face interview. I was careful to make sure that all participants were comfortable participating in the interview. Therefore, I presented them with the information sheet and release statement and talked through this information to confirm to them that the interview did not need to be too formal but was more of a conversation about their experiences at UM. I explained to all of the interviewees my background as an exchange student and a graduate student at UM and explained that my experiences at UM were what influenced me to conduct this research. This helped the interviewees to open up to me as they could understand that we shared many similar experiences and we could identify with one another as fellow international students at UM. Perhaps if I had not informed them of my background, I may not have received such detailed responses. My position as an international student put me at an advantage in conducting these interviews as opposed to a domestic student because the interviewees felt an association to me, knowing that I had similar experiences to them. Therefore, the interviewees gave open and honest responses to

the questions I asked them. I had some difficulty with a few participants who initially gave shorter answers to questions and I feared that the interviews would not be sufficiently long. I tried to counter this by making sure I was rephrasing questions if an interviewee had struggled to understand what I was asking or by asking follow-up questions to try to get a interviewee to speak in greater detail about their experiences. A few of the interviews ran around 45-50 minutes which I knew would take a long time to transcribe. Regarding these interviewees who were open and found it easy to talk about their experiences, I made sure that they stayed on track with the questions. If their responses did go off topic, I would listen to their response and show my interest in it but try to bring them back to the main questions. I usually transcribed each interview within a day or two of finishing it. This allowed me to think about what I had spoken with each participant and begin to think about patterns across the interviews. In transcribing within this time period, it maintained that each interview was still present in my mind but it was acted as a way to refresh the interviews in my mind as I continued to conduct more of them.

There are some ethical implications worth discussing in regards to my research method. As seen in my interview questions (Appendix B), interviewees were asked how they felt when they arrived at UM and also asked to discuss memorable or surprising experiences while studying at UM. This led many interviewees to discuss some of their psychological and emotional difficulties of being an international student at UM. However, interviewees received an information sheet to read through before the interview was conducted (Appendix C). This sheet informed them that they did not have to respond to any questions they did not feel comfortable answering or could end the interview at any time if they felt that it was causing them any psychological or emotional distress. All interviewees read this information sheet and signed

a release statement (Appendix D) to confirm that they were willing to participate in this project. None of the interviewees refused to answer a question or ended an interview early. On the information sheet students were also informed that they would be given a pseudonym in the transcription of their interviews and write-up of this thesis for confidentiality purposes and so that each interviewee felt comfortable in answering potentially sensitive questions. Moreover, on the release each student signed to allow me to record their interview with an audio recorder but they were informed that the audio recording was only used for transcription purposes. The audio recordings and transcribed interviews are not attached to this thesis due to the length the transcriptions and medium of audio.

### 3.2 Sample

My research was approved by the University of Mississippi's Internal Review Board (IRB) on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2013. (Protocol # 14x-119) I was approved to recruit interviewees for my study by requesting the Office of International Programs to insert my cover letter (Appendix A) to their weekly email newsletter which is sent out to all international students at UM. I received a good response from international students willing to be interviewed. I was also fortunate that I received response from a varied group of international students in terms of home nation and education level. In total I received seventeen potential international student interviewees and interviewed them on a first response basis. I interviewed the first thirteen students that responded to my cover letter. I interviewed thirteen students so that I would have sufficient data to conduct a qualitative study exploring the experiences of international students. However, I denied four potential interviewees because of limitations on time related to conducting this kind of research. To reaffirm, each interview was approximately 30 to 50 minutes in length and took

approximately two to three hours to transcribe. Each transcribed interview was approximately eight to fifteen letter sized pages in length. Therefore I was unable to interview all of the international students who responded to my cover letter due to the time it took to conduct the interview, to transcribe each interview, as well as the amount of information I would receive from additional interviews. In Table 1. which is seen below, I have listed the thirteen interviewees who I interviewed for my research. The table lists their pseudonym, home nation, gender, level of education and field of major.

Table 1. Interviewee Profiles

Name	Home Nation	Gender	Level of Education	Field of Major
Angela	Malaysia	Female	PhD	Counsellor Education
Jake	Republic of Ireland	Male	Bachelors (Exchange)	Journalism
Asim	Oman	Male	Bachelors	Business Administration
Emma	United Kingdom	Female	Bachelors (Exchange)	English Literature
Camila	Brazil	Female	Bachelors (Exchange)	Electrical Engineering
Khadija	Oman	Female	Bachelors	Business Administration
Jaehwan	South Korea	Male	Masters	Mechanical Engineering
Jags	Bangladesh	Male	PhD	Chemistry
Harinder	India	Male	PhD	Pharmacy
Kam	India	Male	PhD	Health and Nutrition
Annie	China	Female	Bachelors (Exchange)	Journalism
Ena	China	Female	Masters	Counsellor Education
Shigeki	Japan	Male	PhD	Chemistry



### 3.3 Coding

As each interview was conducted and transcribed, I began to find patterns and aspects related to theory I discussed in the literature review regarding acculturation, intercultural identity building and regional particularities that affected the interviewee's adjustment at UM. Once all of interviews were conducted and transcribed, I began to think about themes and commonalities between the interviewee's responses and began a system of coding. In the Center for Evaluation and Research article "Tips and Tools #18: Coding Qualitative Data," it commented that, "[coding] serves as a way to label, compile and organize your data" for analysis (2012:1). Based upon a recommendation in this article, I thought about my storyline and what I wanted to convey in my findings. I wanted to create a storyline that explored the two research questions I presented in my introduction which address factors that affect international students well-being at UM and if there are regional factors that affect international students well-being at UM.

I developed a series of pre-set codes based upon my research questions and themes that were present in the interviewee's responses because of some of the questions I asked them in the interviews. I also developed pre-set codes which related to organizing my findings into four sections that I discovered from the interview transcripts. These pre-set codes are seen in Table 2. The table offered the codes that I used in analysing the interview transcripts, as well as an explanation of the meaning of the code and its relevance.

Table 2. Pre-Set Codes

Code	Meaning	Relevance
Acculturation	Acculturation	Related to acculturation
Intercultural	Intercultural Identity Building	Related to intercultural identity building
Regional	Regional Particularity	Related to a regional particularity
Expect. U.S. (Regional)	Expectations of U.S.	Student discussed expectations of U.S.
Expect. South (Regional)	Expectations of U.S. South	Student discussed expectations of U.S. South
Social (Acc.)	Social Circle/Friendships	Student discussed friendship groups and various social activities
Emotional (Acc.)	Emotion Response	Student discussed emotional response to arrival or emotional response over time
Food (Acc./Regional)	Food	Student discussed topic of food
Climate (Acc./Regional)	Climate	Student discussed topic of climate
Transport (Acc./Regional)	Transport	Student discussed topic of climate
Home Culture (Intercult.)	Home Culture	Student discussed aspects of home culture/identity
Host Culture (Intercult.)	Host Culture	Student discussed aspects of host culture

As the Center for Evaluation and Research article suggested, I began the coding process with the pre-set codes but also discovered that I had to create emergent codes based upon themes which became present in the interview transcripts which I had not anticipated. These were aspects that many of the interviewees spoke about during the interviews but were not what I specifically asked them questions about such as the length of their study, language proficiency and the education system. These were often responses that I received from the questions in which I asked my interviewees to talk about memorable and surprising experiences or how they felt

about their arrival and their experience overall. It was interesting to see that many interviewees spoke about similar aspects which then became emergent themes. These emergent codes are seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Emergent Codes

Code	Meaning	Relevance
Placement (Acc.)	Placement Options	Student discussed where they chose to study in U.S.
Length (Acc.)	Length of Stay	Student discussed issues regarding length of stay
Language (Acc.)	Language Acquisition and Proficiency	Student discussed issues regarding language acquisition and proficiency
Education (Acc.)	Education System	Student discussed comparisons in education systems
Religion (Regional)	Religion	Student discussed aspects of religion
Race (Regional)	Race and Ethnicity	Student discussed aspects of race and ethnicity
Individual Context	Individual Context	Student discussed something separate to other students

Alongside coding, I was also careful to write coding notes to add additional information to the codes which would allow me to understand the importance and relevance of a section of the interview transcript that I had coded. This was helped to highlight interviewee’s responses that did not fit a specific code and that were based upon their individual context. The series of pre-set and emergent codes I developed were allowed me to analyze my data and present my findings in four sections. These four findings sections are discussed in the next, fourth chapter of my master’s thesis.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This fourth chapter presents my findings from the analysis of the thirteen interview transcripts. As I initially began to transcribe the interviews, I could see that the interviewees were mentioning similar experiences related to certain factors that were affecting their well being at UM. However, I could also see an aspect that some of the theory I discussed in the literature review such as De Araujo (2011) addressed. De Araujo noted that not all individual's experiences of adjustment to life in the U.S. fitted certain patterns because of individual contexts. It is evident that my findings highlighted common experiences between my interviewees but there were often one or two interviewees who did not fit the patterns and their responses differed from the majority of my interviewees, which accounts for the role of personal contexts in my interviewee's well-being at UM.

This chapter is divided into four sections that explore the experiences of the students I interviewed to address my two main research questions. As I analysed my data, I found that the interviewees responses fitted into four sections related to some of the theories I had explored in my literature review such as acculturation, intercultural identity and regionalism. The first section of this chapter presents interviewees comments related to their experiences of acculturation. This section presents various factors that were found that affected the interviewee's experiences of acculturation at UM. These factors were themes that emerged in my pre-set and emergent codes such as placement options, language, socialization and support group

and emotional responses. The second section presents some of the interviewee's experiences and how I found that they can be considered to fit Gullahorn and Gullahorn's W-curve of culture shock. I regard the W-curve of culture shock as a useful diagram to consider that international student's experiences are an acculturative process. The third section of this chapter presents my findings in relation to theories of intercultural identity building. This section presents the interviewee's comments on their home culture and their experiences of the host culture and how these relate to the concept of intercultural identity building. The final section of this chapter presents my findings regarding regional particularities that affected the interviewee's acculturation at UM and how regional particularities highlight the notion of Southern distinctiveness.

#### 4.1 Acculturation

As mentioned in my literature review (p 16), the most commonly referenced definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in their 1936 study. To reaffirm their definition, they explained acculturation as, "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (1936:149). I discussed earlier in my literature review how this definition of acculturation has been contested by more recent literature such as Berry (1997), Y.Y.Kim (1996) and De Araujo (2011) (pp 16-18). These scholars have argued for an understanding of acculturation as the processes of adjustment that individuals and groups from one culture undergo when they move to another culture. The desired end result is not assimilation in which individuals and groups dismiss their home culture in favour of the host culture. Acculturation is instead understood as intercultural contact which

results in cultural changes in the home culture of individuals and groups, as well as in the host culture.

In the article 'Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation,' John W. Berry defined acculturation as, "the general processes and outcomes (both cultural and psychological) of intercultural contact" (1997:8). For the purpose of this section of my findings, I understand Berry's definition of acculturation. Berry's definition of acculturation is the cultural and psychological processes and outcomes of contact between individuals and groups who consider themselves as culturally separate. This section of my findings presents factors that affected the cultural and psychological processes of acculturation of the international students I interviewed at UM. This section does not present the cultural and psychological outcomes of acculturation of international students at UM as this is discussed in my second findings section. This third section of this chapter presents my findings in relation to the concept of intercultural identity building discussed by Y.Y. Kim (2001) as a desired outcome of acculturation. Kim defined intercultural identity as "a new, expanded identity," which she argued individuals earn, "through prolonged experiences of trial and error." Kim further states that the "expanded identity...is neither the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture" (2001:65). Kim's comment stated that through acculturation, individuals are able to build a new, expanded identity which encompasses aspects of their home culture and host culture but does not reaffirm either culture.

Berry developed an acculturation model as a continuation of his studies on acculturation. In this model he discussed four acculturative strategies which individuals assume to cope with acculturation: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization (Berry, 1997:9). Individuals who assume the assimilation strategy are defined as those that are willing to give up

their home culture in favour of regular contact with the dominant host culture. This is in contrast to individuals who assume the separation strategy. These individuals want to maintain their home identity and avoid contact with individuals from the host culture. The integration strategy is defined as individuals who want to maintain their home identity but actively seek out participation with the host culture. The final strategy, marginalization, is defined as individuals who are not interested in maintaining or cannot maintain their cultural identity and also do not seek out engagement with the host culture for reasons such as perceived discrimination (Berry, 1997:9).

International students have entered the acculturation process voluntarily but they also undergo this process temporally (Berry, 1997:8). It is relevant to consider this statement as international students are a unique “sojourner” group. Their processes of acculturation are affected by their status as a student as they decide to study temporally in another country and have the ability to return to their home countries. This is in comparison to for instance a refugee group who experience acculturation involuntarily or an immigrant group whose acculturation process is voluntary but occurs over an extended period of time. Therefore, Berry’s acculturative strategies represent how individuals and groups cope with “acculturative stress” as a result of their acculturation to a host culture. It should also be noted how acculturation processes are affected by the group’s status of voluntary/involuntary and temporary/extended acculturation. Berry considered that individuals may experience “acculturative stress” as a result of issues they undergo during their acculturation process. (1997:13) I contended in my introduction that studying abroad is an invaluable experience but that international students may experience difficulties in their adjustment to the host culture which results in acculturative stress (p 2).

Berry's acculturative strategies represent four possible ways for international students to cope with acculturative stress related to adjustment to life in their host nations. I do not focus on these four acculturation strategies in this section but it is valuable to consider which of the four strategies my interviewees have used to cope with acculturation.

I am instead interested in the factors that I found through my analysis, which affected my interviewee's processes of acculturation. I present the various factors in this section and address potential reasons for why these factors affected my interviewee's acculturation. I also present these factors in an effort to understand my interviewee's acculturative processes. In understanding the factors that affect current international students at UM, I am able to consider what might affect prospective international student's acculturation at the University.

The factors I have identified are: Placement Options, Length of Stay, Social Support and Socialization, Education System and Language Acquisition and Proficiency. I discovered that my factors related closely to the factors discussed by Abrahao Andre de Araujo in, "Adjustment Issues of International Students Enrolled in American Colleges and Universities: A Review of the Literature" (2011). De Araujo reviewed relevant literature on three major online databases. He searched the terms international students, adjustment issues, United States and colleges/universities and reviewed articles published between 1991 and 2010 (De Araujo, 2011:3). De Araujo found six common factors discussed in literature exploring the adjustment issues of international students in the U.S. These factors are: English Language Proficiency, Social Support, Length of Stay in the U.S., Perceived Discrimination or Prejudice, Establishing Relationships with Americans and Homesickness (De Araujo, 2011:1).



De Araujo used the term English Language Proficiency to comment on the literature that explores language proficiency as a factor that affects acculturation. He commented on how student's perceived fluency of English and apprehension about speaking the language affects their acculturation. He also noted that studies found that international students with greater language proficiency found it easier to adjust academically and experienced less acculturative stress (2011:3). Regarding social support, De Araujo explored literature that discussed how social support from family, peers and faculty affected international students acculturative stress. Findings commonly presented that satisfaction with social support resulted in less acculturative stress (2011:3). De Araujo discussed these common factors but also commented, "Given their culturally diverse backgrounds, international students may experience adjustment strains within their host environment that are unique to them, such as cultural differences, language constraints, and social behaviors" (2011:2). This comment highlighted that although international students do share common experiences in acculturation; their personal contexts are accountable for variances in their acculturation processes.

I discovered factors that commonly affected my participant's adjustment at UM which echo De Araujo's research. I used three of the same terms as De Araujo: Length of Stay, Social Support and English Language Proficiency. My findings differed to De Araujo's in that I discussed his term, Establishing Relationships with Americans, as part of my factor, Socialization and Support Group. In this section I discuss my interviewee's friendship circles with home and host national's students. I do not discuss Perceived Discrimination or Prejudice in this acculturation section of my findings as I discuss this in my fourth findings section on regional particularities. I present how the regional particularities of race, ethnicity and religion

affect student's adjustment at UM (p 119). The two factors I discuss that De Araujo did not are Placement Options and Education System. I found that Placement Options affected my interviewee's acculturation process before their arrival as international students at UM. The majority of studies on international students acculturation in a host country, such as Rodrigo Sicat's 'Foreign Students' Cultural Adjustment and Coping Strategies' (2011), discussed international students acculturation beginning upon their arrival to the host nation. However, I found that an acculturative process begins as students decide where to study, address expectations and discuss stereotypes of the U.S. De Araujo also did not discuss Education System as a factor, though I found that it was commonly discussed by my interviewees as an aspect which affects their acculturation at UM. In the article 'Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland,' Mehdizadeh and Scott commented on how adjustment to a new education system can cause students acculturative stress, "From the arrival of international students in the host country, they encounter many different and unexpected problems. Students may need to adjust to a new educational system, which differs considerably from the methods of study in their own country" (2005:485). I present my findings of the factors that affected my interviewee's acculturation in a chronological manner to address the acculturative processes the interviewees endured, beginning at their application process, continuing to their arrival at UM and finishing with factors that have affected them during their time at UM.

#### a) Placement Options

I found an initial common factor that affected international student's acculturation at UM is their placement options to study in the U.S. 7 of the 13 students I interviewed discussed that they did not have a lot of choice in their placement to study at UM. This is in contrast to the other 6

students who felt that they had more control over their placement at UM. My interpretation of the majority of the student's responses is that the lack of control in their placement at UM impacted their acculturation before they arrived and during their time at UM. Zuo Chen Zhang and George Zhou discussed international student's decisions to study at a Canadian university in their article "Understanding Chinese International Students at a Canadian University: Perspectives, Expectations, and Experiences" (2010). Zhang and Zhou discussed reasons for why the seventeen Chinese students they interviewed decided to study at Windsor University and reference similar aspects I discuss such as financial issues and partner programs. However, they did not explore how the student's placement affects their adjustment to life at the university and in Canada (2010:50). This is where my findings go further than this previous literature to address how placement options and the decision to study at UM affected international student's acculturation before their arrival at the University.

Camila, an undergraduate exchange student from Brazil, is an example of one of the students who was unable to decide her placement option at UM. She currently studies as part of a government sponsored exchange program between the U.S. and Brazil. Camila commented on her placement,

So I got a scholarship, the federal government of Brazil has a program that sends about 100,000 students who study abroad, so actually I didn't choose to come here, I just applied for the scholarship and then I sent my application to IIE and they put me here.

A significant aspect of Camila's comment is, "I didn't choose to come here... they put me here." This is a crucial statement because it highlights Camila's lack of control in her placement to exchange in the U.S. This has arguably impacted her acculturation at UM as it is evident that she had hoped to study elsewhere in the U.S and therefore did not feel as optimistic about her

placement at UM in comparison to students such as Angela, a graduate student from Malaysia, who was enthusiastic about her decision to study at UM.

Camila commented on other Brazilian's perceptions of higher education in the U.S., "I think in Brazil, every person that thinks to study abroad here [the United States] thinks about big universities like MIT, California, but it's okay, I'm having a good time here, meeting a lot of new people, learning as well." Her comment highlights that overall Camila has had a positive experience at UM and has been able to go through an acculturative process without much stress. However, her placement option was surely a factor that affected her acculturation before arriving in the U.S. and during her initial time at UM because of the lack of control Camila had in her placement at the University. UM did not meet her expectations of studying in the U.S and she did not have much time to research UM when she received her placement in comparison to my other participants such as Jake, an exchange student from the Republic of Ireland, who was able to research in-depth before he made his decision to study at UM.

Some of my other interviewees such as Jags and Harinder, also discussed Camila's comment on international student's expectations about studying in the U.S. These two students had expectations about studying at larger, globally recognized universities in the U.S. situated on the East or West coasts. When the student's expectations of studying in the U.S. are not met, this affected their acculturation before and during their arrival at UM. They may have experienced feeling dissatisfied about coming to study at UM which could have resulted in acculturative stress before their arrival. Jags and Harinder discussed being excited about studying in the U.S. but not specifically in Mississippi. Nation trumped region in their expectations of America. I discuss this concept of national versus regional expectations in greater detail in the fourth section

of my findings, which discusses regional particularities that affected my participant's acculturation (p 99).

Another aspect to consider is how financial issues affected 5 of the 7 graduate student's placement options. The graduate students I interviewed had more control over their placement at UM compared to Camila, Khadija and Asim who are placed at UM as part of government sponsored programs. However, the majority of graduate student's placement options were ultimately limited by financial resources. These students may experience acculturative stress related to their inability, due to finances, to attend a desired university instead of UM. This is the case for Shigeki, a PhD student from Japan who first came to study in the U.S. for his bachelor's degree at an institution in Texas before transferring to UM. Shigeki comments on this,

I searched for the schools and I thought my first priority was U.S. and I picked the one school in Texas and that's only because the school tuition is not really that expensive. You know I wanted to go to New York or California, the universities, but the tuition and living expense that's really expensive, so I couldn't, my family could not afford it so yeah, so I just picked the one in Texas.

Shigeki's comment highlights that that the cost of tuition and living were essential in his decision to study in Texas for his bachelor's degree, as well as when he decided to transfer to an institution of higher academic regard and chose UM. Shigeki is another example of a student who hoped to study in a global city in the U.S. but the cost of education and living expenses ruled this out as a possibility for his placement options. His acculturation at UM was affected by financial resources affecting his placement options. Shigeki did not know much about the University other than it being the state's flagship institution. Arguably, his lack of knowledge about UM was influential on his initial adjustment. Wenli Yuan addressed international student's expectations of life in the U.S. in the article, 'Investigation

International Student Perceptions of Adjustment through the Q Methodology' (2010).

Therefore, these findings agreed with Yuan's study.

Kam, a PhD student from India, supports Shigeki regarding financial resources as an aspect affecting his placement options in the U.S. However, Kam is an example of a student whose individual context influenced in his final decision to come to UM. Kam's placement options were influenced by his relationship with his wife, who is a white Eastern European. Kam discussed that he believed coming to study and live in America or another Western nation would be easier because of his interracial relationship. Kam expected America to be more tolerant of different races, ethnicities and cultures in comparison to India. Kam was also influenced by a further personal context in that his uncle is part of the engineering department at UM. Kam noted that his uncle told him, "I'm here, why don't you come here because I'm already here, and we have the same program, good university, good school and then he mentioned if you come here, compared to New York it's easier here to find an assistantship." This comment highlights that Kam was largely influenced by this family tie to UM and his uncle offering Kam information about what to expect at UM regarding the program and options for financial assistance. It is relevant to discuss how Kam's personal context influenced his experience of acculturation. It appears that Kam had greater control in his decision to study at UM. He was also able to inform himself about the University via first-hand information from a close family member. Kam discussed that he did not have a preference on regional placement but he made comments such as, "I decided to go to a small place, because I love small cities and that kind of culture, Southern culture, I wanted to experience so that's how I came here." This comment highlights that Kam was aware of region in his placement decision more so than students such as Shigeki. Arguably, Kam's

control over his placement at UM helped to limit any experiences of acculturative stress. Kam was able to bridge “the gap between expectations and reality” because of his personal context. His optimism about life in the U.S. as part of an interracial couple and his familial connection to UM was influential in how he acculturated at UM.

The student’s comments I discussed highlight that I found that placement options are a factor affecting acculturation of international students at UM. This is a factor that De Araujo did not discuss in his article reviewing literature that explores international student’s issues of adjustment at U.S. universities. It is arguably an aspect that affects public universities similar to UM because international students come to study through sponsored programs and due to the more affordable tuition. International students do not choose these universities because of regional preference or status. For the 7 students who expressed a lack of control in their placement at UM, they had to adjust to the fact that they would not be going an institution of higher academic regard or an institution with a greater global presence. UM was not the majority of student’s first choice for placement. Some of these students had to deal with acculturative stress related to their placement at UM not meeting their expectations of study in the U.S., as well as financial issues restricting their desired placement. The other 6 students had greater control over their placement options or were influenced by personal contexts such as familial ties. These students arguably experienced less acculturative stress because they were responsible for choosing to study at UM. These students did not have to adapt their expectations of coming to study at the University over a preferred placement option. They were better equipped with information about the University which influenced their decision to study here.

## b) Length of Stay

Another significant factor that I discovered that affects international student's acculturation at UM is the length of stay that students are at the University. For exchange students, this may only be one semester or an academic year. However, for undergraduate and graduate degree seeking students, their stay may range from two to four or more years. De Araujo noted, "Six of the articles examined in this study revealed that length of residence in the U.S. was significantly related to the adjustment issues of college and university student sojourners" (2011:4). De Araujo summarized that the studies he reviewed highlighted how the longer an international student had been in the U.S., the greater they were found to have acculturated and the less acculturative stress they reported (2011:4-5). My findings arguably support De Araujo's. 8 out of the 13 participants I interviewed had been at UM for between one semester to two years. 5 of these 8 students who had been here for this shorter time period reported some form of acculturative stress within their time at UM. The other 5 of the 13 participants had been at UM for between three to six years. 2 of these participants reported experiencing some form of acculturative stress but this was during their first couple of years at UM.

Jake is an example of one of the students who has been at UM for a shorter period of time and arguably highlights how these students who have been at UM for less than two years are still coping with acculturation. Jake's comment highlights that as he has only been at UM for one semester, he has not gone through an extended period of acculturation in comparison to some of the other students I interviewed such as Kam and Jaehwan. Jake did not express specific feelings



of acculturative stress but this is arguably due to the nature of his status as an exchange student.

Jake mentioned a relevant point regarding how he felt about being away from his home,

I think as well that I went home for a month at Christmas, so I always had a date in my head when I knew I was going home as it's different for people who are here for a three year course, and they don't go home or people who are here for a whole year, like if it was nine months maybe I'd feel a lot more about it but I've gone home and realized that everything's the same anyway, nothing changes.

Jake's comment highlights how his ability to return home after his first semester away was actually beneficial in how he experienced acculturative stress. Jake was only away from Ireland for one semester before he returned home for the winter break. He commented that "nothing changes" at his home and therefore he felt more positive about his experience at UM. Jake's status as an exchange student is also relevant to his acculturative process at UM. Arguably, Jake does not have to "fully" adjust to the way of life at UM because he is aware that his experience is only for a set amount of time; it is a "once in a lifetime" or "one off" experience. Jake sees himself as somewhat of an outsider, delving into the way of life at UM but not being able to or needing to fully adjust to it. This is perhaps why Jake mentioned that he was feeling slightly low during the end of his first semester. The monotony of living and studying at UM had somewhat set in for him. He noted that he had high expectations regarding his exchange experience being a "once in a lifetime" year living in another country. Jake's experience differs from degree seeking students such as Asim, who made the decision to earn his bachelor's degree at UM and therefore has more invested in acculturating. Exchange students are aware that their time at UM is limited and that their overall university career is at their home university. Jake does not mention any form of "reverse culture shock," upon returning to the Republic of Ireland, perhaps because while he has somewhat acculturated to life in the U.S., he has not been away from his home

environment for an extended period which could make him feel as if he had to readjust to his home.

I found that length of stay is an important factor that affects student's acculturation at UM. My findings support De Araujo's in that the longer students have been at UM, the less they report dealing with acculturative stress. However, I found a unique aspect in that exchange students offer a distinct aspect on acculturation as their status as a student at UM is more temporary than degree seeking students. For students who spend a number of years earning a degree at UM, they are able to acculturate over an extended period of time and therefore report less acculturative stress later in their time at UM. However, financial constraints often do not allow these students to return to their home countries during their study at UM. These results in the students being somewhat forced to adapt to life in America, while their home countries are also evolving in the time that they are away. Students such as Harinder, who has been at UM for almost two years reported more recent experiences of acculturative stress, highlighting that he is still undergoing the process of acculturation. Additionally, students who only spend a short period at UM are attempting to acculturate while under the knowledge that their experience is temporary. These students arguably do not need to adjust in the same way that students who spend a longer period of time at UM do.

#### c) Socialization and Support Group

A further factor I discovered that affects acculturation of international student's at UM is their socialization and support groups at UM. Students who felt like they had strong social support groups discussed lesser feelings of acculturative stress. All of the 13 students I

interviewed commented that they had a fairly diverse friendship circles which included students from their home country, other international students and host national students. Moreover, all of the students commented that it was important for them to make friends with people from other countries and from the U.S. as they believed that this was the best way to learn about other cultures, immerse themselves in the way of life in the U.S. and to aid with language acquisition for non-native English speakers. De Araujo commented that, “nine articles in this review reported convergent findings associated with social support regarding the adjustment issues experienced by international students across U.S. campuses” (2011:4). De Araujo summarized that the articles he reviewed commonly found that international students who felt that they had strong social support groups, with support from family, host and home nationals, reported lesser feelings of acculturative stress in the U.S (2011:4).

Annie, an exchange student from Beijing, is an example of a student who talked about her friendship circle and how this has been beneficial in her acculturation at UM. Exchange students at the University are currently housed together at an office campus facility. Therefore, these students tend to make friends with one another due to this living situation. Annie noted that her close friends were other international exchange students who she lived with. She commented that she did have American friends but that they tended to be student’s involved in the Croft Institute for International Study and were predominately domestic students in the Chinese Flagship program. When asked if many American student’s asked her about China, Annie commented, “No actually, only the people who know China well talk to me about China, like the people who study Chinese they will like to talk more with me about China.” Annie’s comment highlights that international student’s at UM often find it difficult to connect with host national

students who are not already interested in international affairs and studying abroad. Her comment highlights that there are a body of domestic students who want to connect with international students but that they tend to be majoring in specific programs. Annie, who majors in journalism, had to branch out to find domestic students involved in Croft who are more interested in meeting and befriending international students. Annie's comments highlighted that her strong friendship base with other international exchange students has aided in her acculturation at UM. However, she also highlights the difficulty she has had to make host national friends, though this has not necessarily affected her acculturation.

Annie's comments on her friendship circle being largely international students are shared by other international students I interviewed such as Harinder and Ena. These students commented that while they have American friends, they felt that they often had stronger friendships and felt more comfortable around people from their home countries and other international students. Angela, a graduate student in the Counsellor Education program from Malaysia, commented on this,

I'm trying one of the international English [classes], I was taking American language or something like that, and although the class was mixed with undergraduate and graduate, it's good because I can meet many people from other countries and even though it's not really Malaysian but somehow I feel like it belongs to home because we are all foreigners in a foreign country so we need the same things.

Angela's comment highlights that when she was in this English language class with other international students, she felt a sense of belonging and comfort to be around these student's, even if they differed in age to her. Angela has been at UM since the start of the fall 2013 semester and comments that she has a few "sub-groups" of friends which involve friends from Malaysia, other international students and host national's from her degree program. Yet, her

comment on feeling a sense of belonging with other international students at UM highlights how she feels a comfort with other student's undergoing the same challenges of acculturation. It is beneficial for some international students to spend their time predominately with other international and home nation students, as this is where they feel most comfortable and express support during the acculturation at UM.

Asim's and Camila's experiences are somewhat unique compared to other international students because of the nature of the programs that organize their study at UM. Both students arrived to at UM with large groups of students from their home nations. Camila commented on arriving with a large Brazilian group of friends to the U.S. during the fall 2013, "Yeah sure, we always were together, like right now we still hang out together but not that often, because each person has different things to do but at the beginning we were all nineteen together the whole time so it was really helpful." Camila's comment highlights that she felt it was helpful to arrive at UM with a large group of home nationals. Since the start of the spring 2014 semester, she has been taking academic classes which she commented has been beneficial for her to be able to make American friends. She noted that while she was in the Intensive English Program (IEP) during the fall 2013 semester, she found it difficult to meet American students. Therefore, Camila discussed fewer issues of acculturative stress during her first semester as she had a large group of Brazilian friends who were also going through acculturation at the same time as her. However, it was important for Camila to make host national friends to further her acculturation to life at UM. English language proficiency is evidently a factor in Camila's ability to make American friends as she was initially only taking language classes so unable to meet American students in academic program classes.

In contrast to Camila's experience regarding social support from host nationals which aided in her acculturation, Jags had a unique experience as he was the only international student from Bangladesh when he first arrived at UM. Jags commented that his experience as the only Bangladeshi student when he first arrived at UM was beneficial because it forced him to make friends from other countries and host national friends. He commented that since other Bangladeshi students have arrived during his time at UM, he has become friends with them and appreciated spending time to cook traditional foods with them, something he felt he was unable to do when he was the only student and also to talk in their home language. However, Jags mentioned that spending time with other students when he first arrived was beneficial as it "broadened" his view of the world and arguably eased aided in his acculturation as he had to step outside of his comfort zone with home nationals. His experience building a friendship network from other countries influenced his personal religious beliefs and his passion to learn about other cultures. Jags referred to himself as a "global citizen," in that he did not feel tied to one culture over another. Global citizenship is a concept discussed by David Jefferies in the article "Global Citizenship and the Cultural Politics of Benevolence" (2008). Jefferies commented, "In the past decade, the concept of global citizenship, as a concept which signifies the way in which one's identity and ethical responsibility is not limited to their "local" community (i.e. family, nation), has increasingly become a conceptual mantra for international development and humanitarian agencies" (2008:27). In other words, this comment stated that being a global citizen is defined as having a sense of identity not related to nation or family and also a cultural empathy. Jags' comments highlight that he experienced an acculturative process that was eased by his strong social support from other international students and host nationals. However, this also created a

form of stress regarding his questioning of his religious and national identity. Perhaps for students such as Khadija and Asim, who are Muslim, they have retained their religious belief while at UM because they arrived with large support groups of other Muslim Omani students. Jags has not assimilated to life in the South as he did not alter his religious belief to join the majority of people in the region who are Christian but his acculturation has altered his identity.

Shigeki had some valid comments on how social support groups and socialization change over time for international students. Similarly to Jags, Shigeki made a large group of friends that were American and other international students when he first arrived which aided in his acculturation. However, Shigeki commented that as he continued to study at UM, he has spent increasing amounts of time with Japanese students,

Yes, when I was an undergrad, my social circle, I remember was bigger than these days and I used to hang out with classmates, and you know Americans, or Chinese, some other students, it doesn't matter, whoever I hang out...But I think in the weekends if I hang out, mostly they are Japanese these days, so I think I hang out with a lot of Japanese people here.

Shigeki's comment highlights that his friendship group has become smaller because of the nature of his PhD which is time consuming. If he has any free time, he largely spends it with other Japanese students at UM. This is perhaps because Shigeki has been unable to go home to Japan on a frequent basis during his time at UM. Shigeki has arguably felt comforted about his inability to return home by spending time with Japanese students instead of host nation or other international students. It is also perhaps because Shigeki commented on how he has become more appreciative of Japan and Japanese culture in his time away and therefore he is not as interested in American culture. This is discussed in greater depth in my third findings section on intercultural identity building (p 80). Shigeki's comment is a significant insight into how

international students feel they need social support to aid with initial acculturation but how their social groups change over their time studying at UM. Arguably, the longer a student is away from their home, the more they look to build friendships with others from their home.

Emma, an exchange student from the United Kingdom, is an example of an international student at UM who expressed the importance of making friends with host national students. Emma commented that she felt a sense of “fitting in” when she was able to make American friends. Emma noted that she had become friends with other international students and did feel a sense of connection to them due to shared experiences but she believed that her experience would be more worthwhile if she was able to make host nation friends. Emma was able to move in to a house with an American and another international individual that is separate from the exchange student housing provided by the University. She commented that this was a positive move for her to be able to get around Oxford, as well as to be able to build a stronger group of American friends. Emma commented that her friends refer to her as a “townie” which highlights that she has experienced an easier process of acculturation than some of the other students I interviewed such as Ena, who has struggled to make American friends. Students such as Annie highlight that it is not necessary for international students at UM to make American friends to ease in their acculturation. Strong social support from home nationals and other international students is the key aspect that aids in international students acculturation. However, Emma’s situation highlights how she has experienced a greater “sense of belonging” at UM and in Oxford. Emma’s personal context as a native English speaker has perhaps also aided in her ability to make host national friends and experience a quicker comfort at UM. Personal context also accounts for Kam’s ability to make American friends. His relationship with his white,



Eastern European wife was influential in him feeling more comfortable with American friends than Indian friends, some of who were disapproving of his marriage. Kam expressed an ease in adjusting to life at UM which was evidently aided by strong friendships with host nationals, in comparison to students such as Angela, who has had difficulty making American friendship and expressed feelings of acculturative stress related to her sense of belonging at UM.

Socialization and support groups are a factor I discovered that affects international student's acculturation at UM. My findings agree with De Araujo's statement that a strong sense of social support and quality support is important in easing feelings of stress students may experience during the process of acculturation. This does not necessarily mean that students need to make friends with American students to aid their acculturation. 11 out of my 13 participants discussed a sense of comfort and belonging with friends from their host nation or other international students. 2 of the 13 participants discussed predominately spending time with host national friends. These 2 students have arguably experienced a faster acculturative process to life at UM than the other 11 students. However, the other 11 students did not express too much discomfort in their acculturation because they were able to make strong friendship circles with home nationals and other international students. My findings build on De Araujo's research as I discovered that students who have been away from their home for a longer period of time expressed changes in their friendship circles and spent more time with home nationals after they had been away from their home for a number of years. Additionally, students such as Ena and Angela discussed being unable to make strong friendships with host nation students as they felt that the host nationals were not interested in befriending international students. This is perhaps causes acculturative stress when an international student wants to make host national friendships

but cannot. There is an added pressure in the acculturation process as these students feel their experience would be better if they made host national friends.

#### d) Education System

One of the final aspects to discuss that I found affects international student's acculturative process at UM was the U.S. education system and how the international students are able to adjust to it. This was discussed as a factor that affects international student's acculturation in Mehdizadeh and Scott's article "Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland" (2005). 6 out of the 13 students I interviewed found the education system easy to adjust to and have actually found the system to be more positive than their home system. However, for the other students, they commented on the system feeling overwhelming and they have found it difficult to adjust to.

Camila is an example of a student who has found the system difficult to adjust to and has been upset about what is on offer for her major at the University. As she was placed here by the government organization that runs her exchange program, Camila has not had much choice in her placement and therefore this has affected how she feels about the education system and thus how she feels about her overall experience. She commented, "No I guess I would go because my major here is not good, so I feel some times like I'm losing my time here because the subjects I'm taking here I am not interested in." Therefore, Camila's upset with her major at the University had resulted in her feeling as if she could already return home and cut down on her experience on exchange. This highlights that she has had a difficult time acculturating to the education system here and sees her system at home to be much better or believes that if she was at another University in the U.S. this would offer her better class options for her major.

This is also the case for Annie who has had a difficult time adjusting to the education system here and how prerequisites work which has affected the kinds of classes she takes. Annie felt like many of the exchange students were unable to take the classes they had hoped to or that were most suitable for their major and therefore she felt this has impacted on her acculturative process to the education system here.

Angela is another student who has had a difficult time adjusting to the education system here. Angela is in the second semester of her PhD and although she felt she had been informed about the differences in the education system here, she has had a difficult time adjusting to the amount of work in comparison to what she felt she would do in her home in Malaysia,

Some of my professors and colleagues who studied here, they say that the education system is different from where I belong to and also being part of the graduate student is not similar to undergraduate, so they say lots of grading and you need to do your own work, you need to be more proactive, something like that, I thought I was quite prepared for that when I entered last semester but it's totally new, really new for me, so I think that all the information they share with me, they say is just like twenty percentage, before I think like it was almost like sixty percentage, so it's dropped, I knew less... So the week days is more concentrated on studying, all studying I think, compared to my study, my Masters in Malaysia, even though I studied in the week days and the weekend, I can say it's like double or triple times I do it here. And the weekend, it's quite frustrating because I only assume myself [?] one day because I won't have enough time to read.

Angela's comment highlights that she was informed that the system would be quite different and that she would have a lot of work to do and a lot of personal research to conduct. However, she has felt that the system is very demanding and it has been a lot of pressure which in turn has affected her acculturative process. She felt like she could not allow herself much time to spend with friends here because of the level of work she has which also affects her acculturation as she is finding it difficult to make a support group here.

In comparison to these students, Kam and Jake are two examples of students that comment on preferring the education system here to their home countries and this has perhaps been beneficial to their acculturative process as they find the education system to be very good. He commented on this, “Here like for example I have a big office, everything and student’s never get such office and when I sent a couple of pictures to my friends they were like man, professors in my universities, professors don’t have such offices, it looks really great.” Vinyak continued to note, “And here for example we have more opportunities in [?] than Indian, you can only work on two or three subjects...you can only work on whatever...but here whatever you want, they’re flexible to do whatever you want, you can work on that, which is one of the major differences, the flexibility in work place environment is very good, not chaotic, it’s very free, you know freedom.” Kam’s comment suggests that he has much better opportunities at UM due to the education system than he could in India such as having a large office as a graduate assistant and also having freedom to do his own research and flexibility in the classes he chooses. This has been beneficial to his acculturative process as he speaks very positively about the education system.

This is similar to Jake’s feelings on the education system. Jake noted, “I find the way it is over here academically it’s completely different as well, just the whole idea of students in general...I think, with the fees that you have to pay and the scholarships that you have to get, it’s much more of a privilege here and I think the students take it a lot more serious than we do at home because it’s not a whole lot of money and it’s kind of a given at home.” Jake’s comment highlights that he believes the system here is much more of a privilege compared to his home country and therefore he feels that students are much more serious about their studies and this

has in turn impacted how he feels about his studies. He continued on to discuss the setup of the system, noting, “Yeah it’s tough here...it’s lots of little mini tests, the contents quite easy, but you can’t miss lectures, you can’t miss the week in, week out, all these little assignments, like they go 5% but you’ll get twenty of them over a semester, whereas at home it’d be two 50, and you’d get them at the end.” Jake comments here that the system at UM is “tougher” in terms of the amount of work he has to do but he feels as if the content is easier than at his home University. However, overall Jake’s comments were highly positive about the education system in the U.S. and at UM. He liked the regular assignments and that students were more focused on their work. Therefore, Jake has been able to acculturate to the education system here.

I discovered that the education system is another factor that determines how students acculturate to the way of life at UM. As they are predominantly coming to the U.S. to study and either earn a degree or complete an exchange semester or year, it is important for them to adjust to the education system in the U.S. which can be noticeably different to many other countries in the world. Some students find the system difficult to initially adjust to because of the level or work but others find the system liberating because of the class options and the ability to major and minor in various subjects.

#### e) Language Acquisition and Proficiency

The final aspect I found that affected international students acculturative at UM is language acquisition. Although I did not ask a question specifically about language acquisition and proficiency, many of the students brought this up when answering my questions about their decision to study in the U.S. and about their memorable or surprising experiences. As I mentioned in the introduction, language acquisition and proficiency is not the focus of my

research but I do consider it to be a factor that affects acculturation. Moreover, as the student's comments highlight, language acquisition and proficiency cannot be dismissed in the study of student's acculturation. Improving their language proficiency is a large reason why many students come to study in the U.S. and their language acquisition can be important to how they acculturate, are able to adjust to the way of life here and build social support groups.

For the majority of students, being able to make friends with host nationals and other international students was beneficial to their language acquisition and increasing their proficiency. Moreover, it was beneficial for the students feeling comfortable and like they were able to make a friendship circle. Khadija commented on this, "For example I didn't know anything about a lot of countries culture and as soon as I make friends with different kind of international students, I knew a lot of things about different culture, about different language and for American, it helps me a lot speaking English with them all the time, which I'm learning the accent right now so I think it's really helpful." For Khadija, she feels like also being able to speak with an American English accent is also beneficial for her in the long term. Perhaps she felt this because of her major in Business and that this could be beneficial for her future career prospects. However, it could also be because she feels it shows a level of proficiency that she hopes to have so that people do not always consider her an outsider because she speaks with a noticeable international English accent.

Annie also commented on wanting to come and study in the U.S. to increase her language proficiency and she talks about the pressure from her family to learn English. She comments,

I think it's kind of a stereotype like every student and parent and teacher in China they think once you came to an English country like USA or UK, your English can be very good, very soon. So my mum told me, you should talk with American people, you should make friends with them, do not waste this year, you need to improve your

English. I also had that expectation; I think maybe I came for my English. Greatly, but yeah that's my expectation I think. And I also want to learn well at journalism and get some recommendation letter and apply for graduate school.

This comment from Annie suggests that there remains to be a continued global pressure to learn English as the accepted global language. Annie noted that her parents and many other Chinese parents encourage their children to learn English as they feel it is very important for their career prospects. Moreover, there is a pressure that spending a year in a country will increase student's language proficiency dramatically. This may be the case for some students like Annie who notes that her English acquisition has greatly improved because she spends most of her time with host nation students or other international students and only has one friend from China here.

However, it is interesting to see that many people expect students to improve their English speaking skills very quickly and this is an added pressure that affects the acculturative process as students try to immerse themselves in speaking English.

Language acquisition and proficiency can also be an added factor in the pressure of student's work. This is the case for Angela who noted, "For the assignment it's quite tough because we have to read lots of things. So I have one course, I talked to the professor and she knows about my, that I'm not that good with English and she gives me extra time, I really feel so grateful when she tolerates me with that and within that I try to finish whatever I can."

Angela's comment highlights that she was appreciative of her professors understanding that she would need extra time for her work as she is still learning English. However, this puts an added pressure on Angela as she is trying to do the same work as host nation students but she has the difficulty of it being in a language which she is still learning.

Moreover, for many students, especially those that have been in the U.S. for a number of years, they continued to be concerned about their language proficiency. Jaehwan commented on this, “And I don’t think I have any difficulties living in America, except for language, and I got used to American culture.” Jaehwan felt that he has been able to acculturate to the way of life in the U.S. but he felt that his language proficiency is what still causes him some problems with communicating with host nationals in class and outside. Jaehwan noted that he has sub groups of friends but he did spend a large amount of time with South Korean friends so perhaps this has impacted his language proficiency which he is concerned is an issue for him to continue to study a PhD in the U.S.

A final intriguing aspect of language proficiency I discovered is the difficulty students endure when they are still learning the language and there is miscommunication between them and a host national. Camila commented on this regarding an incident with her and some friends in Atlanta,

And there was a time also in Atlanta, I went there with my Brazilian friends, I guess it was in October, and we went to a bar and I guess it was like a misunderstanding between the waitress and my friends, she gave them a pen for them to write in the wall and they understand the table, so they started to write in the table and then they got expelled from the bar, and it was really embarrassing and we were like totally afraid because it was our first time here in the U.S. in a big city because we were here, because people here are cosy, and we don’t have that kind of problem but there.

Camila comment suggests that for her and her friends, language proficiency was important for them to not misunderstand directions. These kinds of events can be very stressful for students who do not want to make mistakes but it is very easy to misunderstand someone if they are not really aware that the student does not speak English that well and if the student finds it hard to express that they did not understand a direction. These sorts of incidents highlight that language



acquisition and proficiency is important for students to acculturate so that they do not end up in situations that they find stressful and are able to ask for assistance if they have not understood something.

Language acquisition and proficiency is the final factor I found that affected international student's acculturative process as it can be stressful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it can be stressful regarding the pressure put on international students by their families to learn English in a short period of time. It can also be stressful due to the added pressure of taking classes in another language, as well as affect international student's ability to make host nation friends as well as other international friends. Finally, it can be stressful for international students if they feel that they must avoid situations that could create stress or embarrassment.

This section of my findings presented five factors I discovered that affect student's acculturation at the University of Mississippi. The first factor I discussed was placement options. This was a surprising factor affecting student's acculturation at UM because of the common experience for many students who had been placed at the University rather than choosing to study here and the student's expectations of the universities they hoped to study at in the U.S. The next factor I discussed was length of stay and how this affected student's acculturation. For a number of the students who had been at UM for three or more years, they had undergone an experience of acculturation where they felt comfortable in the way of life at UM and were most concerned about experiencing a reverse process of acculturation when they returned to their home countries. For the student's who had been at UM for only a semester to a year, they had gone through an experience of acculturation but it appeared that they had perhaps not fully acculturated as when they had been able to return home, they had felt content in their return

home. Moreover, many of these students knew that their experience was perhaps only a enaar in length and therefore did not feel as if they needed to fully acculturate to life at UM. The third factor discussed was socialization and support groups. It appeared that for the majority of students, their acculturation was affected by them feeling as if they had a support group and people to socialize with at UM. This did not necessarily mean that it had to be a group of host nationals and for the majority of students, they had felt a sense of belonging with home nationals or other international students compared to American students. A noteworthy observation was that for some of the students who had spoken about having a diverse group of friends when they first arrived at UM, they commented on spending more time with home nationals as time went on at UM. The fourth factor discussed was the education system and how student's acculturation was affected by their adjustment to the education system. Some of the student's found the system in stark contrast to their home and found it difficult to adjust to. Whereas other students found the system different to their home but actually spoke about preferring the U.S. system and the education they received at UM. The final factor discussed was language acquisition and proficiency. Common patterns in this section included student's feeling like language acquisition and proficiency was important for their future career prospects, as well as their immediate acculturation at UM and ability to build social support groups. A final anomalous experience from a student commented on how language acquisition and proficiency was important for students not ending up in situations where they felt embarrassed for making mistakes and therefore they felt like language proficiency was important for their acculturation to the way of life in the U.S. and at UM so that they would not feel uncomfortable and make mistakes.

## 4.2 Culture Shock

The culture shock W-curve was developed by J.T. Gullahorn and J.E. Gullahorn in 1963 (See Figure 2.). This was an expansion of S. Lysgaard's 1955 culture shock curve (See Figure 1.). Through analysis of my interview transcripts, I discovered that Gullahorn and Gullahorn's culture shock W-curve could be considered as a way to map out the stages of the acculturation process that my interviewee's experiences. Therefore, I prefer to address the culture shock W-curve as an "acculturative process curve". The W-Curve shows three stages to of culture shock: arrival, culture shock, which I deem acculturative stress, adaption and recovery, which I deem adjustment. This curve was considered a W-curve as it highlighted that individuals often go through a reverse acculturative process upon return to their home countries (See Figure 2.). This curve diagram does not necessarily mean that international students go through the acculturative process in the same time frame. However, I found similarities in certain experiences the students I interviewed that can be considered to fit into some of the stages of the 'W-Curve.' Therefore, I discovered that the W-Curve can be used to discuss international student's processes of acculturation at UM.

### a) Arrival

I found that the first stage of the W-curve of culture shock, which is arrival, also fits the first stage of acculturation the international student's experience during their arrival at UM. This was often a period of excitement and adrenaline related to a new experience and a sensory overload due to new surroundings. Asim commented on his arrival at UM and his initial feelings, "they [international office] brought me here to the apartments, it was different, the apartments are

different, even the sockets, electric outlets, I wanted to charge my phone, I couldn't use it, everything was different but by the time I went to the international office here, I went to the orientation first, I think I felt comfortable when I met some people and then after one week I met the Omani's here." Asim's comment highlights that during his arrival at UM he was going through a series of emotions regarding adjustment to a number of differences between life in the U.S. and in his home country of Oman. 8 out of the 13 students I interviewed discussed aspects of their arrival as this is a pivotal moment in their study abroad time. They were experiencing everything for the first time and this is the stage before the reality has sunk in that they are far away from their home countries and may not be returning for a number of years. Asim's comment highlighted that I found that the international students I interviewed experienced this initial stage of arrival on the acculturation process curve.

#### b) Culture Shock (Acculturative Stress)

I also found that my interviewee's experiences of acculturative stress and emotional responses to this stress fit the second stage of the W-curve of culture shock or acculturative process curve which is culture shock. De Araujo regarded an aspect of this emotional response, homesickness, as one of the factors that affected international student's acculturation (2011:5). My findings agree with his in that how international students cope with acculturative stress highlighted their ability to acculturate to life at UM. However, I considered emotional responses to acculturative stress in this section of my findings as it highlights how the W-curve is useful for understanding acculturation as a process.

This initial feeling of excitement subsiding to a feeling of homesickness was one of the common themes experienced by the students I interviewed, highlighting the relevance of the W-curve of acculturation. This is the case for Khadija, as well as Camila. These students mentioned feeling homesick and lonely after a few months into their time studying at UM. Khadija commented on this,

At the beginning when I first came here I didn't feel anything, I didn't even miss my family or something, I don't know why, it was just a weird feeling but after a few months I felt like I was getting there to feel homesick, lonely and I was like with other international roommates which I don't really like, they weren't good roommates, it bothers me a lot and it hurts my feelings and that was making me crying every day, and I don't even want to talk to my family because whenever I talk to my family it makes me want to cry more and more because I am really far from them.

Khadija's comment highlights that due to a difficult housing situation she began to feel lonely and homesick but she felt unable to speak to her family about the situation because this would make her more aware that she is a long way from them. Moreover, she wanted to tell them about positive experiences in the U.S. rather than tell them about some of the more difficult experiences. This seems fairly common for students who are close to their family and therefore do not want to burden their family when they are going through a low emotional period while studying abroad. Perhaps this is as student's do not want to worry their families when they know there is little their family can do to correct a situation but also because many students are the first in their family to leave home and so perhaps do not want to tell their family that an experience is not going as well as they hoped so that their family will not talk them out of studying abroad. Moreover, Khadija's comments highlight that having a strong social support group is beneficial for student's feelings of comfort and excitement. As Khadija was having a difficult experience with her roommates, she was perhaps not feeling very comfortable in her home environment.

This therefore made Khadija think more about her home and also feel like she did not have a support group at the University.

Shigeki and Jaehwan are two examples of students who spoke about their emotional responses to studying abroad changing over an extended period of time, thereby highlighting that the acculturation process does not always occur at the same time period for international students. Shigeki noted, "If I remember correctly, I was really excited, I didn't feel any loneliness or isolation or sickness or anything, I was just having fun with whoever I met or whoever I hanged out with." However, he continues on to say, "Yeah interestingly when I came here, I felt really, I became really homesick, I don't know why but for some reason I was really feeling lonely and I really missed home and back in Japan and the friends back in Texas." Shigeki's comments highlight that his emotional response changed over a much extended period of time, perhaps as he had to go through another acculturative process to a new place when he moved to study at UM from the university in Texas and therefore was experiencing the start of the W-curve again. Moreover, perhaps Shigeki had a delayed emotional difficulty because of his inability to return home after an extended period away and therefore he had gone through an acculturative process which had not caused him too many problems but he was under added pressure due to higher levels of class and not able to visit his home which appears to be what troubled him the most.

In contrast to some of the emotional responses of the students discussed above, another aspect to discuss regarding student's emotional responses to studying at UM was that many students spoke of not going through an experience of homesickness. This is the case for Annie who says, "I never met [a] homesickness problem, I don't know why, me and my mother are

kind of cold, we never say I miss you, I think oh see you or something like that.” Annie suggests in her comment that her family are what she refers to as “cold,” but perhaps this is more an understanding that she is only away for one year so she needs to not go through periods of homesickness and enjoy her experience, therefore her family are careful to not tell her how often they miss her and to remain positive about her leaving. Moreover, as Annie has only been at UM for one semester, perhaps she is still in the initial upward first section of the W-curve of acculturation. However, Annie does mention that she felt some sort of homesickness, or a feeling of missing out during the Chinese New Year, “I think I only had homesickness during Chinese festival as all my friends and parents and my family were celebrating it in China and they would post some photos on Facebook and Twitter and I want feel like oh I want to join them.” As this is Annie’s first time away from home during a large cultural holiday, it left her feeling as if she were missing out. Perhaps student’s that have been away much longer from their homes, did not comment on this feeling of missing out on cultural holidays because it has become somewhat familiar to participate in cultural holiday’s in the U.S and have to participate in home nation holiday’s on a smaller scale, away from family and friends and the normal traditions. Annie is of course talking about a large national holiday that is celebrated in Chinese communities around the world but as she has been unable to meet a large group of Chinese students in Oxford, she was only able to celebrate with one Chinese friend and therefore the holiday perhaps did not feel the same for her which resulted in an emotional response.

Annie’s response is similar to Kam’s, who commented on not experiencing any periods of homesickness. Perhaps this is because he had spent significant time away from India in other countries before coming to the U.S and therefore experienced the W-curve of acculturation at an

earlier period in his life. Moreover, Kam seems to in a sense have assimilated to the way of life here and as he has discussed earlier, feels comfortable with American friends and feels more westernized because of his relationship with his wife. He discussed this, “I was never homesick because nowadays the phone is very cheap, you can call your parents, you can call anybody for just a few cents, and you have Skype technology...I just don’t have time to miss anyone because I’m always busy.” Kam’s comment highlights that he feels that he has not felt homesick because he has always been able to contact his family very easily and inexpensively via phone and internet services. Moreover, Kam comments that he has always tried to retain a positive attitude to being away from his home and therefore he has not dwelled on being away and missing anyone. Moreover, similarly to Angela, he accounts his busy schedule for also helping to aid in him feeling positive about being away from his family and keeping busy.

Harinder is an example of a student whose individual context influenced his emotional response to his acculturation at UM. Harinder is one of the only students I interviewed who spoke of having a difficult experience acculturating at UM early on. His comments highlighted that he quickly experienced the downward section of the W-curve of culture shock or acculturative stress. Harinder commented on this,

To be a little more honest, maybe I didn’t expect it to be as bad as it turned out to be. But it was not that that bad...it took me about two or three months to fit in...to, you know, to figure out what was going on here, to figure out how to communicate with people, how to make friends, where to go, how to live my life here, because I didn’t have a car. I just found... I just signed a lease the day I landed...straight up lease, and I was staying with a guy I did not know. So, it took a while to figure things out, but I think it turned out okay after a while...two or three months.

Harinder’s comment highlights that his experience acculturating to the way of life at UM was more difficult than he had anticipated it to be. He felt that he was having a difficult time



learning how to make friends, to communicate with people and to live his life at UM. This is unlike many of the students who speak of an initial period of excitement and do not seem to worry too much about their initial few months as they are meeting new people and experiencing many new things. However, Harinder appeared to be more concerned about how he would fit in at UM and acculturate to the way of life. Perhaps this is due to personal context and that Harinder was more anxious about the aspects of acculturation he discusses in comparison to the other students who did not seem to have difficult experiences until they reflected on their time at UM after a few months or even a few years.

Therefore, the students I interviewed talked about a range of emotional responses to being international students in the U.S. and leaving their homes. For many of the students, there is an initial period of excitement which often extends throughout a first semester but as students spend more time away from their homes without the ability to go home, many begin to experience feelings of homesickness. Interestingly, students that have had difficult experiences making friends and students that also made host national friends quite easily both spoke about feelings of loneliness. Perhaps this is accountable for by considering the students personal contexts. Moreover, the students that noted that they did not experience any sort of homesickness could be accounted for due to the pressure of other aspects of their life or to retaining a positive attitude and an understanding of themselves as people who usually do not worry about missing their homes.

### c) Reverse Culture Shock (Reverse Acculturation)

As discussed earlier in the acculturation section, I discussed how I found that length of stay affected student's acculturation process at UM (p 55). I found that an intriguing aspect of students length of stay at UM is how those that had been at the University for three or more years reported a feeling of stress related to returning to their home countries and experiencing a "reverse culture shock" or reverse experience of acculturation. Therefore, this highlighted that international students experiences of acculturation fit into the 'W-Curve' of culture shock or 'W-Curve' of acculturation, as they are concerned about experiencing reverse culture shock. This arguably highlights that these students feel they are acculturated to the way of life at UM. Jags is an example of one of these students; he has been at UM for five years and has not returned home to Bangladesh during this time. Jags commented on his concerns about returning home during the summer 2014,

Oh no I have not been to Bangladesh since I came here, I am planning to go this summer...I think it will be a bit of reverse culture shock I guess because it has been five years after I am going there, some of my friends keep telling me that you know you will find everything different now when you go back because even my Bangladeshi friends coming from Bangladesh now, observing me in a way, they find me a little different, you know you don't really talk or think like us, you have changed a little and you will also see a lot change when you go back, changes in the environment and stuff, you know new buildings and you might see people have changed and you might find five years is probably not a big time but it's big enough to notice some changes I guess.

Jags' comment highlights that he is conscious of having "changed a little" and that some of his Bangladeshi friends "find [him] a little different" since he has been at UM. This comment suggests that Jags has experienced a process of acculturation which has changed him. Jags has been at UM for five years and therefore he has gone through the acculturative process over an extended period of time. He is accustomed to the way of life at UM,

arguably more so than in Bangladesh, which has also changed and evolved in the time he has been away. This is why Jags is concerned about experiencing some adjustment issues upon his return home. Shigeki, is another example of a student who discussed this concern about returning home to Japan as he has been studying in the U.S. for ten years. The longer a student spends at UM, the more they discussed being accustomed to the way of life and expressed concerns about “reverse acculturation” upon their return to their home countries. This is not an aspect De Araujo discusses but it is presented as a stage in Oberg’s seven stages of culture shock discussed by Paul Pedersen. (1995) I discussed this in-depth in my literature review (pp 9-10).

#### 4.3 Intercultural Identity Building

This section of my findings presents how I discovered aspects of my interviewee’s experiences that related to one of Y. Y. Kim’s outcomes of acculturation, intercultural identity building. I present how students consider their home cultural identity in comparison to the host identity as this highlighted that they are building an intercultural identity. I also present my findings on how my interviewee’s have become more conscious of their home identity and the host identity. Through an appreciation and acknowledgement of aspects of both cultures, I found that many of my interviewee’s were becoming the “multicultural individual”.

In “Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation” (2011), Young Yun Kim explored how individuals socialized in one culture are able to adapt to life in a host culture. Kim presented three outcomes of the process of acculturation

which are the individual's psychological health, functional fitness and intercultural identity. Psychological health is the individual's psychological well being in regards to them adapting to the host environment, for instance, their emotional response such as happiness and sense of belonging as part of the acculturative process. Functional fitness is the individual's internal ability to meet the challenges of the host environment, such as an international student being able to adjust to the expectations of the U.S. education system (Kim, 2001:185). Kim defined intercultural identity as,

Along with functional fitness and psychological health, intercultural transformation is reflected in the gradual development of intercultural identity. The term intercultural is employed here to reflect the boundary-crossing nature of such development in identity...Although rooted in the original cultural identity; the emerging identity presents a more complex process of interpretive activity inside a stranger. Just as cultural identity serves as a linkage between a person and a specific cultural group, the emerging identity links a person to more than one cultural group. (Kim, 2001:65)

Kim's theory of intercultural identity building is regarded as a gradual process in which an individual is able to develop an identity which is influenced by their home and host cultures. Kim comments that the individual does not have to forego ties with their original culture in favour of the host culture. She commented that, "I view intercultural identity as being rooted in, embracing and not discarding the original cultural identity- just as acquiring knowledge and skill in the host language does not necessarily result in corresponding loss in the original language" (Kim, 2001:66). She used the example of language acquisition to make her argument regarding foregoing ties with the home culture. Kim noted that when someone learns another language, they do not necessarily lose the ability to speak their native language. Therefore, when someone acculturates in a host culture, they do not necessarily forget about their home culture and dismiss

it in favour of the host culture. They are able to build an intercultural identity, which encompasses aspects from both cultures.

Kim's theory of intercultural identity is supported by Peter Adler's theory of multiculturalism in the article, "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism" (1998). Adler commented on the new "multicultural" or "intercultural" identity, "It is an identity based not on a "belongingness" which implies either owning or being owned by culture, but on a style of self-consciousness that is capable of negotiating ever new formations of reality...He or she is neither totally a part of nor totally apart from his or her culture; instead, he or she lives on the boundary" (1998:231). Adler agreed with Kim in that the individual who has built an intercultural identity does not relinquish ties with their home identity in favour of the host identity. Adler referred to these individuals as living "on the boundary," in which their intercultural identity lays on a boundary between the home and host cultures.

To understand how individuals are able to build an intercultural identity we must consider the concept of cultural identity. Adler offered two useful understandings of cultural identity,

The concept of cultural identity can be used in two different ways. First, it can be employed as a reference to the collective self-awareness that a given group embodies and reflects....A second, more specific use of the concept revolves around the identity of the individual in relation to his or her culture. Cultural identity, in the sense that it is a functioning aspect of individual personality, is a fundamental symbol of a person's existence. (1998:232)

Cultural identity is firstly the "collective self-awareness" that a group of people share that they are a culturally unique collective in comparison to other cultural groups and individuals. Secondly, cultural identity is an individual's recognition of their personality which is related to

and influenced by the awareness of a collective culture. An international student from another country, who considers themselves to be socialized in a distinct cultural, undergoes a process of acculturation which results in intercultural identity building as they learn about another culture which they view as separate to their personal cultural identity. Adler refers to these individuals as “multicultural,” in that, “The multicultural person is intellectually and emotionally committed to the basic unity of all human beings while at the same time recognizing, legitimizing, accepting, and appreciating the differences that exist between people of different cultures” (1992:232). The multicultural person becomes able to understand and partake in numerous cultures but accepts and appreciates that there are different aspects of cultures.

a) Increased Consciousness of Home Cultural Identity

An initial aspect I discovered regarding intercultural identity as the outcome of international students acculturation at UM is that 9 out of the 13 students discussed an increased consciousness of their home cultural identity through engagement with the host culture. This increased conscious of their home cultural identity does not necessarily mean that the student was not building an intercultural identity. I instead would argue that the international students are better able to understand their home identity in relation to the host culture. Khadija is an example of one of the students I interviewed, who discussed how she has become more conscious of her home identity and how it is regarded by host nationals at UM,

I think a lot people do not know about my country so I really appreciate that I am here because I really want people to know where is Oman at and I want them to know a lot of things about my country and it really shocked me that a lot of people here, they'd never heard about Oman so whenever I say oh I'm from Oman, they are like where is that, I will say Middle East and they will say okay where is that? They don't know so I really

appreciate that. I mean I really like to teach people my language and to tell them what's famous about Oman and a lot of things about Oman, I think it's good that I'm here.

Through engagement with individuals from the host culture, Khadija discovered a lack of knowledge about her home. Therefore, she has felt a responsibility to be an ambassador for her home and to educate people from the host culture about Oman and her cultural identity. Khadija expressed that she was "shocked" that domestic students had not heard of Oman but she commented on feeling that she is fortunate to be in a position to talk about her cultural identity with students who are unaware of it. This highlights that engagement between international and domestic students is beneficial in two ways. Firstly, in that the international student is able to consider and better understand their home cultural identity and secondly that the domestic students are able to interact with students from other cultures and to learn about cultures they are not already aware of, one of the key aspects of internationalization in higher education.

Angela, a graduate student from Malaysia shares a similar experience to Khadija of increased home cultural consciousness since her arrival in the U.S. at the start of the fall 2013 semester. Angela commented on this,

I think, [?] I experienced a couple of, I've been here like second semester right, so I'm taking like, there's lots of things I take for granted from my country. Yeah when you've been there in a comfort zone then you don't think there is anything else, even though I travelled to other countries but it's just like one or two week, it's not so long, it's not enough for you to miss your, and realize your home or something. So there is some comparison when every time it's been a new experience I will say like oh that is not like this, I wish it would be like that, and that is one thing and about the way I'm here, I'm wearing, I will feel so proud and say that I'm Malaysia and yeah I trust you to highlight my identity of Malaysia.

Angela's comment highlights that she feels a stronger sense of pride for Malaysia as this is her first time leaving her country for a period longer than for a one or two week vacation. Angela

commented that this allowed her to look back at her country and see aspects that she was taking for granted. She is able to appreciate these aspects as she can compare her home culture to the culture she is experiencing at UM. Angela is building an intercultural identity by considering her home culture in comparison to American culture.

Jaehwan is another example of a student I interviewed that has experienced an increase in consciousness about his home cultural identity while he has been at UM. Jaehwan commented on how when he first arrived in Oxford in 2010, Korea did not seem as “popular” as it does to him today. He credited this increase in popularity to Korean popular music which has gained a larger global following in the past few years. He noted that this increase in interest in Korean popular culture has also resulted in an increase in the interest to study Korean as a language at the University. Jaehwan commented that, “Korean classes are getting bigger, class sizes are getting bigger... It makes me kind of proud of Korea.” Jaehwan has had an increased consciousness of his home identity because domestic students became more interested in Korean culture and popular culture. This highlights that Jaehwan became more thoughtful of his home cultural identity as he became aware of its global presence and a growing interest from domestic students at UM. Moreover, this highlights that as much as the administration wants domestic students to engage with international students, there perhaps must be some common ground such as popular music to aid in increased engagement and interest in learning about other cultures.

Jake is an example of a student who experienced an increased consciousness of his home cultural identity upon leaving the Republic of Ireland for his first extended period of time to study at UM. Jake commented on this,



I think the pride in your country, you definitely do feel that more when you come out here and I don't think I realized how much I would and it's daft, I used to always watch people who'd be out abroad and they'd have an Irish flag in their room or whatever and I used to think it's just a cliquish or whatever but here I am second semester and I just bought one on Amazon so I think I definitely do.

His comment highlights that Jake felt an increased "pride" about the Republic of Ireland, which he did not anticipate feeling when he first arrived at UM. He regarded this "pride" as a negative aspect such as individuals who take an Irish flag with them while they travel to promote their cultural identity in a manner that shows a lack of empathy to other identities. Jake commented that he had become more conscious of his home identity because this was the first extended period he had been away from his home. In comparison to Khadija and Jaehwan, Jake's home identity is more familiar with domestic students at UM due to American family history and interest in travel to Ireland. However, Jake felt a stronger sense of identity because this is the first time he had engaged with people from other cultures for an extended period and therefore he questioned his appreciation and understanding of his home culture in relation to the culture he experienced at UM.

Shigeki shares similar feelings as Jake regarding an increased consciousness of his home identity. He expressed his time in America as being beneficial for him understanding his home identity because it was the first time he was able to look at Japan from the outside. He also commented on how he became more conscious about Japanese culture through understanding how Japan was perceived by other people around the world. Other people's perceptions of Japan were useful for Shigeki to comprehend his own cultural identity as he was acculturating to life in the U.S. and at UM. Shigeki commented on his feelings about his cultural consciousness, "Like people are different, culture is different, rules, and how people behave is different. I mean they

are all unique, I like these things in America too, I'm used to it, I realized I'm Japanese, and I like my home country, that's the way I belong to and this kind of thing of feeling." Shigeki comments on seeing cultural differences between Japan and America in his time studying in the U.S. and UM. His comments highlight that he has become Peter Adler's "multicultural" individual as he shows an appreciation to what he refers to as "unique" aspects of both cultures. On the other hand, Shigeki notes that his time away from Japan and his increased cultural consciousness has made him appreciate his identity as Japanese and increased his sense of belonging to Japan, in comparison to feeling that he belongs in the U.S. or is a "global citizen".

I discovered that the ability to build an intercultural identity is possible for the students I interviewed at UM as highlighted by Shigeki's comments regarding seeing "unique" aspects of both his home cultural and the host culture at UM, which he has come to acknowledge and appreciate. Moreover, it is apparent that a number of these students such as Khadija, Jake and Jaehwan had an increased consciousness of their home cultural identities as a result of their acculturation process. They became more aware of their home culture when they were away from it for an extended period of time or confronted about it by host nationals who were not aware of their home culture. Shigeki's personal context perhaps accounts for his feeling that his time in the U.S. and at UM has made him feel a stronger tie to Japan than the U.S. This is perhaps because he has been away from Japan for ten years, in comparison to some of the other students I interviewed such as Annie who has only been away from China for one semester. Therefore, the result of an extensive period of time away such as Shigeki's appears to be that students have built an intercultural identity with appreciation for their home and host cultures but feel more appreciative of their home culture and that they ultimately prefer this culture.

## b) Depreciation of Home Cultural Identity

In comparison to the students I interviewed who expressed an increased consciousness of their home culture; I found that there were 4 students who discussed no change in their feelings about their home culture or depreciation in their sense of identity for their home culture. I discovered that these students have acculturated to life at UM without questioning their home identity and in some cases they appear to have assimilated to the host nation and dismissed their home identity. This is the case for Kam, who expressed ambivalence to cultural differences between India and America and an increased appreciation of his life at UM. Kam did not see India as culturally distinct compared to his experience of American culture at UM. He accounts for this as he comments that India has become more westernized and therefore there are not vast differences between his home culture and host culture. He commented,

Honestly nowadays India has become like more Western, because we [?] through the British [?] and we got freedom and then I mean like, I lived in a big city, I belong to one of the big cities of India, so in big cities the culture is totally like Western culture, I would not say 100% Western but it is like 50% is Western but no, I don't think nothing, I think everything is fine about how the society works here, society is very [?] which is very good, I would not like to change anything in the society here and I don't have advice.

Kam lived in a large, global city in India which is perhaps why he commented on not noticing cultural differences between the U.S. and India which could have caused him problems during his acculturation at UM. Kam commented that American society is “very good” and did not have any critiques about life in the U.S. compared to international students such as Emma and Camila, who were more critical of the culture at UM. Arguably, Kam has somewhat assimilated to the culture at UM and in the U.S. in favour of Indian culture. Therefore, he has perhaps not

built Y. Y. Kim's desired "intercultural identity" because he has foregone ties with his home identity in preference for American culture.

On the other hand, Douglas Bourn argued in the article, "Young People, Identity, and Living in a Globalized Society" (2008) that, "Young people are in one sense citizens of a global culture but at the same time struggle for a sense of acceptance in the local societies in which they live" (2008:XX). Kam is evidently a product of global culture. He grew up in globalizing India and therefore does not feel as strong ties to a distinct India culture because he did not feel as if he lived in a city that was culturally unique. Therefore, Kam arguably settled for "a sense of acceptance in the local societies." He has accepted the local culture at UM. Kam did not necessarily chose to assimilate and dismiss Indian culture but he is a product of globalization and the culture of UM has perhaps felt more distinct to him. Kam appears to have felt a sense of cultural belonging at UM that he was lacking in the globalized city he grew up in.

Kam represents a student who has felt depreciation to his home cultural identity. This is perhaps as he does not feel that Indian culturally is distinctly different to the culture he has become accustomed to at UM. Kam's easy acceptance of American culture and dismissal of his home culture highlights how he has experienced a less stressful acculturative process at UM. He did not struggle with maintaining a home identity while becoming accustomed to life at UM and therefore he was able to limit any feelings of stress related to losing touch with his home as opposed to a student such as Harinder, who is conscious about his time away from India and his changing intercultural identity.

### c) Critiques of Home Culture

Another aspect to discuss that I discovered related to intercultural identity building is that 12 of the 13 international students I interviewed discussed critiques of their home culture. My participant's critiques are relevant in to see that they are building an intercultural identity that encompasses aspects of their home and host cultures. The international students were able to look back at their home cultural identity and compare it to the host culture at UM. This highlighted that these students are becoming Adler's "multicultural" individual who lives on the "boundary" of cultures and that their intercultural identity is on a "developmental continuum," whereby they are continually negotiating their home culture with the host culture (Kim, 2001:65).

Ena, a graduate student from China, discussed some of her critiques of Chinese culture. She discussed how she initially compared everything in China to America but that over time, she stopped these comparisons and realized that the cultures are different but it is useful to understand each cultures positive aspects and imperfections. Ena commented,

When I first came here, I just liked to compare everything, do the comparison here, and at first I think a lot of things here I saw are much better than China, and I just talk about, just say to myself that America, and that's why America is developing, is a developed country, whereas China is a developing country. But after a semester, I try to kind of alter this perception, I think it's just a different culture, people here have different values and worldview here, so it is hard to judge which one is better than the other one... But inside it's just a different culture and now I can see American culture more objective, but in the first semester I was a bit more subjective, so now I can, I still love my country, and I'm trying to love another culture here.

Ena's comment suggests that she was critical about China during her first semester at UM because she saw things in America that China does not have. Therefore, she compared many

aspects of her home culture to the new culture that she was experiencing. However, Ena noted that overtime she has become more objective about American culture. She noted that, “I think I can make a list of that I like and dislike in the United States and also in my home country but it’s not just that simple because it’s like a person, everyone has their shortcomings...but sometimes they just are a continuum...so you cannot make those two things be apart, it makes sense because they exist in the same culture.” Ena commented on seeing both cultures as a “continuum” in which both have good and bad aspects that she must accept and that she cannot ultimately compare the cultures because she sees them as distinct from one another. Ena commented that her goal is not to choose a culture which she prefers but she stated, “I still love my country, and I’m trying to love another culture here.” This comment highlights that Ena is building an intercultural identity which encompasses both her Chinese cultural identity and the new American cultural identity. Ena has had to come to terms with being able to accept both identities which may have affected her experience with acculturative stress during her first semester. However, she has a positive attitude to being able to become a “multicultural” individual and therefore this is aiding in her acculturation process as she does not feel as if she needs to dismiss her identity to feel a sense of belonging at UM.

Other students such as Harinder offered some relevant critiques on their home culture which further highlighted how the majority of my participants have been able to better understand their home culture through their growing understanding of American culture. Similarly to Ena, Harinder sees positives aspects of both Indian culture and American culture. He commented, “There are some positives to living in America and some positives to living in India as well and there are some things like you said that I’m critical about when I go back. Like when

I was home in December, the traffic problems, or the corruption say, I know things go a lot more smoother here or better here compared to India.” Harinder does make comments about a few aspects in America that have made him think critically about Indian culture such as Indian government corruption. This could suggest that Harinder places preference on the host culture over his home culture but I would dispute this because he initially comments on seeing positives to both sides. A relevant comment Harinder made about anxiety he has struggled with regarding losing touch with friends in India and his changing identity, corroborates Peter Adler’s theory that “multicultural” individuals are “neither a part of or apart from one culture.” As Y. Y. Kim notes, individuals who have lived in more than one culture build expanded, new cultural identities. Harinder commented on this, “And the saying goes, if you stay long enough in America, you become neither Indian nor America, because you lose touch with people over there and you are never an insider here because you’re always in the minority, you’re always the Indian there, and if you go home you’re always the guy that came back from America, so you’re sort of lost, you sort of lose both worlds if you stay too long here.” His comment highlights that he is building an intercultural identity but he worries that he will not belong to either culture and that he will “lose both worlds.” This highlights what Kim says regarding “the process is filled with ambivalence and internal conflict between loyalty to the original identity and necessity to embrace the new one (2001:66). My interpretation of Harinder’s comment is that he is dealing with internal conflict” regarding embracing the culture at UM and in the U.S. because he is concerned that he will never really belong at UM and that also he will have to return to India but he will be noticeably different to other people at home because his cultural identity has evolved. This highlights that Harinder is building an intercultural identity because he is able to critique

India and America but also that Harinder is dealing with acculturative stress regarding the outcome of his intercultural identity and where his place is in both cultures.

In comparison to Ena's and Harinder's responses, Jags talked critically about Bangladeshi culture in comparison to the culture he has become accustomed to at UM. Jags offered some contrasts to the culture of Bangladesh and commented that he prefers certain aspects of the way of life at UM which he did not have in his home. He noted,

Since Bangladesh is a relatively conservative country, Islam is there mostly, so we don't have that bar culture so we didn't use to hang out in the bars, we didn't have places like that, this is new for me but I like it. It keeps us, you know it lets us make friends, hang out, you know a different setting compared to Bangladesh, the bar culture is not in our country. So I think it's better, we have more options sometimes I feel like here and also in our country there is also parental guidance also so we don't go out at night or this kind of things and these kind of things, we are [?], it's given freedom.

Jags's comment highlights that he has become accustomed to the culture at UM as he refers to aspects as "better" than in his home. Jags felt that he has more "freedom" in the host culture than he did in his home culture. His comments highlight that he is thinking critically about his country in relation to the host culture and therefore he is able to build an intercultural identity that encompasses aspects of both cultures. However, his comments also highlight that Jags shares a similar experience to Kam, in that he has a preference for the culture at UM compared to his home culture. As discussed in the acculturation section of my findings (p 44), Jags spoke about changes in his religious beliefs during his initial acculturative process at UM. Jags had to deal somewhat with acculturative stress related to adjustment to life at UM and he dismissed aspects of his home cultural identity that he questioned because of his exposure to a new identity.

The examples I presented of my participants critiques of their home culture highlight that I found that these students have been able to build or are beginning to build an intercultural



identity that incorporates aspects of their home culture and the host culture. An overwhelming majority of my participants were over time, able to come to terms with retaining their home culture and accepting the new culture. Students such as Ena noted that it was not always easy initially to maintain home cultural identity. Many of the students felt that the culture at UM and in the U.S. was “better” than their home culture when they first arrived and experienced acculturative stress related to what extent they should dismiss their home culture. Perhaps many students felt that American culture was “better” than their home culture because this was an expectation they held before they arrived at UM due to American culture, especially popular culture, being globally promoted as superior to other cultures. However, the majority of students spoke about a sense of a changed identity that was expanded to appreciate and critique their home and host cultures.

#### d) Critique of Host Identity

The final aspect to present that I discovered regarding my interviewee’s building an intercultural identity as an outcome of their acculturation at UM, are some of the students critiques of the host identity. Similarly to the students who critiqued their home identity, students that offered comments on American culture and the culture at UM highlighted how they are building an intercultural identity that a “new, expanded” identity with aspects of their home and host cultures.

Camila discussed some of her critiques on American culture and the culture at UM. She commented on how she had felt that American culture was “so awesome” when she was in Brazil but her time living at UM has made her critical of the culture and perhaps increased her consciousness of her Brazilian cultural identity. She noted,

Like before I came here, it was like the United States is so awesome, so perfect, I want to live there forever but I don't think life here is so much better than in Brazil and right now I am really proud of being Brazilian and being from Latin America. Things that I didn't feel before I came here and now that every time a Brazilian speaks like bad things about Brazil, I'm like calm down, it's not like this, like we have these problems everywhere.

Camila's comment highlights that she has become more critical of the U.S., not to the point that she does not like the culture at UM but that she feels "proud of being Brazilian" and can see that America is not as perfect as she originally believed it to be. Her final statement in this passage, "we have these problems everywhere," highlights that Camila has been able to build an intercultural identity in which she is culturally empathetic to numerous cultures. She sees that every culture has its problems but she has become more understanding about different cultures, as well as her personal cultural identity which has been shaped by her time at UM. Camila perhaps comments that she is "proud to be Brazilian" and is more conscious of her cultural identity because of her status as an exchange student. As I discussed in the acculturation findings section (p 44), exchange students have a unique status as they are acculturating in a short period of time and under the knowledge that their experience is temporary. It is therefore likely that Camila has built an intercultural identity but it is focused more on her understanding of Brazil as she knows that she will be returning home and so she is not struggling as much as students such as Ena regarding retaining home cultural identity. Camila made a further significant critique regarding host national students understandings of other cultures. She commented, "Well, so, I met some Americans and I got the impression that the way that they study here, is they learn to just care about their culture, just about America, they don't know many things about South America or whatever." Camila's comment highlights that domestic students do not have as much interest in learning about other cultures and therefore are not building intercultural identities

because they are not engaging with cultures or deciding to study abroad. Camila's comment highlight that it is perhaps difficult for international students to feel as if they belong in the culture at UM because they experience a lack of interest from domestic students to engage in communication between people of different cultures.

Jake also commented on aspects of the culture at UM and in America that he spoke critically about in comparison to his home culture. Similarly to Camila, Jake is on exchange for one enaar at UM which perhaps accounts for why he is more critical about the culture at UM because he will be returning to his home soon. Moreover, Jake has not had an extended period of time to acculturate to life at UM in comparison to a student such as Jaehwan. Jake was critical about his friendships in the U.S. He noted that his relationships with friends in Ireland are stronger than friendships he has made at UM. He commented,

I think just having a laugh with people, like sense of humor, I think a lot of people don't get it down here at least, they don't get mine sometimes, but even just going back for the month that I went back, kind of just, like you'd just be sitting around with your friends having a laugh and it's just a completely different laugh to what you might get out here, I know that you can't really pin that down but it's just, I just think that if I could move the people in Ireland and live here with them, I'd be grand, which is not a good way to be but yeah that's what I'd like.

Jake's comment highlights that he is building an intercultural identity because he sees aspects of the culture at UM and in America that he has incorporated into his identity but he also sees benefits to his cultural ties to his home. Jake commented that he would like to continue to live in America but to have his Irish friends with him as he feels a sense of belonging with those people in terms of humour and ease of conversation. As Jake has only been at UM for one semester, he is still going through an initial acculturative process and therefore this perhaps accounts for why he has adjusted to certain aspects in the U.S. that he likes but he worries about the friendships he

is making at UM and does not feel that he quite belongs in the culture of UM because he does not have a strong host national support group. Jake is therefore battling with aspects of his home cultural identity that he wants to maintain and aspects of the host culture that he has come to appreciate. He is building an intercultural identity but it is not as fully formed as students such as Shigeki who has been in the U.S. for ten years.

A final aspect to discuss regarding critiques on the host identity is that students such as Jags made comments on the host identity regarding the specific culture of the South. Jags commented on the South being a more difficult region to live in compared to other parts of the U.S. because of his racial and ethnic identity as a Bangladeshi male. He commented,

And in the South sometimes I feel that I am not in the mainstream because it used to be a racist place, you know everybody knows that, even though it is not formally here now but still you cannot [?] the mainstream, say if for example I go to a bar I am the only guy here, even though they don't say anything you just sometimes feel a little bit awkward maybe, but still I don't care about that, I feel like I am a global person, so from my mind set I don't feel anything to them but I don't know how they take me but when I visited other places in the U.S., I've been to California, I was staying there for three months as an intern so I experienced that life, they're more accepting to me there, I would say accepting, not intolerant, more accepting to other cultures, they don't really care where you're from.

Jags's comment highlights that he has suffered from some acculturative stress regarding his sense of belonging in the U.S. South. He noted that the region has a history of racial issues and although it no longer has a legal system of racial oppression, he is still concerned that he does not fit into the "mainstream" of the Southern culture at UM. He noted that he has not had any direct negative experiences regarding his racial classification but he worries that people in the South see him as an outsider and that he is not always welcome in social situations with the mainstream population at UM. Jags also commented that he, "[I] find[s] myself as a global

citizen, not to any particular like really, like I feel myself Bangladeshi or American, because nowadays the world is becoming more globalized.” This highlights that Jags has been able to build an intercultural identity that encompasses aspects of American and Bangladeshi culture. He considers this to be a “global” culture and that he is a global citizen as a result of his evolving identity and engagement with people of many different cultures. However, he is concerned about the culture at UM, similarly to Camila. He is arguably concerned that people are not as “global” because they are not concerned about engaging with people outside of their mainstream culture and who did not fit into their idea of their cultural identity.

To conclude this section on intercultural identity, I have presented four sections that I discovered which highlighted how my interviewee’s have or have not been able to build an intercultural identity as an outcome of their acculturation at UM. The first section presented student’s experiences of an increased consciousness about their home cultural identity. Many of the students were able to look at their home culture for the first time from another perspective. They could consider their home culture in comparison to American culture. These students were building Y.Y. Kim’s understanding of intercultural identity in that they were seeing their identity expand and evolve to encompass aspects of their home culture and aspects of the host culture. The next section discussed a case of one student who had seen depreciation in their home cultural identity as a result of their assimilation to American culture and the way of life at UM. The final two sections focused on critiques of home culture and host culture. I presented how students commented on aspects of their home culture and the host culture as they understood both cultures in relation to one another. Students such as Harinder expressed a feeling of acculturative stress regarding an anxiety about belonging in neither culture. Harinder was

building an intercultural identity but he worried that as he became Adler's desired "multicultural" individual, who lives on the boundary of cultures, this would put Harinder at a disadvantage to acculturate to life at UM and upon his return to India to readjust to his home culture. A final noteworthy aspect discussed was about a regional cultural concern expressed by Jags. Jags commented on how he considers himself to be a global citizen as a result of his acculturation at UM. However, he also worried about the specific culture at UM and in the South compared to other regions in the nation and worries that he does not have a sense of belonging in this region because host nationals do not want to engage with people outside of the mainstream population.

#### 4.4 Regional Particularities

The Institute of International Education "Open Doors 2013" report discussed the number of international students studying in particular states in the U.S., with the top three states being Massachusetts, Indiana and Pennsylvania. The top three states are followed by New York, California and Texas. The report states that, "the top 3 host states hosted 32% of all international students in the U.S." The "Deep South" states of Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas are shown to be states that host less than 10,000 international students. Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina are states that host 10,000 to 19,000 students and Florida is a state that hosts 20,000 to 40,000 students (Open Doors 2013 Report on International Education Exchange, 2013). Arguably, the "Deep South" states of Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas are all less populous states compared to Georgia and Florida.

Nevertheless, these states all have one or two major public universities, as well as a number of smaller or well-regarded private colleges. In the list of top 20 U.S. universities with international student enrolment, only one of these universities can be considered in the “South,” this is the University of Florida (Open Doors 2013 Report on International Education Exchange, 2013). These figures highlight that the “Deep South” states are not as popular choices for international students to choose to study in. This in turn highlights how region is a factor that figures into some international student’s decisions on where to study in the U.S. and what their expectations are regarding regional differences across the nation.

This section of my findings presents regional particularities I discovered that affected international student’s experiences of acculturation at UM. In my literature review, I presented a number of literatures exploring the notion of the South as a distinct region. The most significant of these texts was the seminal work of W.J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* (1941) (p 23). Historian Numan Bartley commented on Cash’s idea of Southern distinctiveness, “There exists among us by ordinary [people] – both North and South – a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity. As to what its singularity may consist in, there is, of course, much conflict of opinion, and especially between Northerner and Southerner. But that it is different and that it is solid – on these things nearly everybody is agreed” (1998:1). Cash argued that the South remains a homogenous region of the American nation, which is separate and distinct from other regions. In this section, I present my findings that agree with the idea of the South as a distinct region due to regional particularities that affected student’s acculturation at UM.

a) Expectations

The initial aspect I found regarding regional particularities that affected international students acculturation at UM, was to my interviewee's comments on expectations about studying in the U.S. and whether or not they had expectations about the region. As mentioned previously in the acculturation section of the findings (p 52), Wenli Yuan discussed international student's expectations versus their reality in his article, "Investigation International Student Perceptions of Adjustment through the Q Methodology" (2010). Yuan commented that his study highlighted that, "The gap between reality and their [international students] expectations led to frustrations, especially at the beginning of their sojourn" (2010:243). This was useful for understanding whether or not students had expectations about studying in the U.S. that were not met when they arrived in the South or whether or not the students had thought about the South as a distinct region.

Jags is an example of a student who discussed his expectations about studying in the U.S. which he commented were influenced by what he had seen in movies. He recalled his arrival into Memphis airport and how he felt that the landscape was very unusual to what he had expected and what he knew in his home, Bangladesh,

One expectation from Bangladesh was in my mind like America was always highest buildings and all and you know you see in the sci-fi movies, so the movie portraits like this, since I'd never been to the U.S. before, so I was thinking of yes it'll be like this place, you know New York or Chicago, the highest buildings and highest stuff all around you so it was funny when I landed in New York, I could not see outside and I was on the way back to Memphis, from the plane I was looking down and I see it looked like a rural area to me, like woods, I was like where am I going, do any people live here? So it was kind of shocking, it was not shocking, but different, I didn't expect it. I was like oh, there are not many people, Bangladesh is a densely populated country so being



used to that environment for say twenty, twenty-one years I was not used to see all of a sudden this sparsely distributed population in a Southern setting.

Jags was initially shocked to see the landscape of the Midsouth, a region of the U.S. which he had not seen on television or in movies. He commented that although he knew he was not going to a big city like New York or Chicago, it was still surprising to him to see a relatively sparsely populated area as this is very different to his home of Bangladesh. Jags further commented on the lack of knowledge he had about the South through global media, “Southern states like Mississippi and Louisiana, people do not know much about this because these states are not in the media and I can see why because these people don’t, I mean they have a very unique culture but most of the things that happen [in other parts of the country?], the media portrays those things more.” Jags felt that global media showed more news about other parts of the U.S. than the South which is why people in Bangladesh are not as familiar with the region. He also noted that, “Here, American people, especially in the South, keep their news within themselves, state level, or even city, county level, they don’t keep news of the whole world, they don’t, I’ve seen they are not curious about the outside world.” Jags noted that the American nation, especially the Southern region, is interested predominately in their own news and that Americans and Southerners are not interested in news around the world which he believed accounted for why the South is not such a globally recognized region, compared to other parts of the U.S.

Jags’ comments highlights that for the majority of students, arriving in the South is quite different to their expectations of what coming to study in the United States would be like. More than half of the students I interviewed only knew information about the U.S. through movies and research they were able to conduct through the internet. However, they found it difficult to find

out information about the South through first-hand information or by seeing the South in popular television shows or movies. It seems apparent that students could experience some acculturative stress when they arrive at UM and in the South as it is a region they are not as familiar with compared to other parts of the U.S and therefore their expectations do not meet the reality which can result in acculturative stress.

Camila commented on a relevant issue regarding her expectations of region. When she received her placement to study at UM, she spoke to some of her professors about her placement. She noted, “So before I got the letter, I didn’t know anything about Mississippi and I started to do some research and talk to some of my professors and I was kind of scared because all things that I could read was like it was the poorest state, and there was a lot of racial discrimination and segregation, but it isn’t that bad as I expected.” Camila’s comment highlights that when students are able to conduct research themselves, they often receive negative information regarding the University and the state. Moreover, her comment highlights the global presence of stereotypes about the region and the University. Fortunately, Camila noted that the reality of life at UM was not as bad as her expectations lead her to believe. Camila’s expectations did not meet the reality but this is a positive aspect because she was concerned that she would have to cope with living in a culture where she experienced issues regarding racial prejudice and discrimination. Camila has been able to acculturate to life at UM without this being an issue for her personally.

Shigeki is another example of a student who had negative expectations about the region. However, his expectations were influenced by the opinions of friends he had made in Texas. He commented on his decision to study at UM,

To be honest I didn't know nothing, I mean anything really. The only reason that I picked Ole Miss was that I was searching for some schools that I could transfer and Ole Miss was one of the most reasonable tuition school and the one with most higher academic level. And actually other fact my friends back in Texas, when I decided to go to Mississippi they said don't go, don't go, people there, it's really like thirty years old, how do you say like thirty years old back, like countryside and they're a bunch a rednecks and crazy people there, don't go.

Shigeki's comment highlights that he had expectations about Mississippi which he received through friends in Texas who referred to the state as "backwards" and "rural" compared to Texas. Shigeki noted that similarly to Camila, the reality he experienced at UM did not match the expectations he held about the state and University before he transferred to UM. It is noteworthy to highlight how Shigeki's friends in Texas, arguably another Southern state, regarded Mississippi as a worst state and advised their friend against transferring to study at UM. These individuals shared some of the same stereotypes about the South as Camila received from friends and professors in Brazil.

Kam is an example of a student who discussed that he did not consider region in his applications to study in the U.S. He commented on this,

Not really, not really, I just wanted to, it was still, like I'm studying here and I'm going to graduate, I am not limiting myself to any region, I am open to any region. Already when I was coming here I was like open to all the places, of course I consider the cost of living and the fees, tuition and all that stuff but those are my major concerns, like cost. Otherwise I never thought about region, because when I was in Russia I lived in the cold weather so I was open to everything, all sorts of weather, all regions, all culture.

Kam noted that his placement options were related to financial decisions. However, he commented, "I was open to everything, all sorts of weather, all regions, all culture." Region did not factor into his decision to study at UM in that he decided to study in the South as opposed to

the West Coast. Thus, his comment highlights that he does consider there to be separate regions in the U.S. with differing geographical features, as well as differing cultures.

In comparison to Kam, Jake is an example of a student who considered region as part of his decision on where to study in the U.S. He selected UM as he was interested in coming to the South. He commented, “I think I thought that the South would be more of an experience, I know that the world view kind of the South is what would you be going there for? You know Mississippi, it’s very random to people at home anyway.” Jake’s comment highlights that he considered region and state when deciding to study in the U.S. as he felt that it would be “more of an experience,” which perhaps highlights how he felt Mississippi would be distinctly different to other parts of the U.S. he had previously travelled to. His comment, “it’s very random to people at home,” highlights how the state and the region is not as popular part of the U.S. to travel to or for international students to study in as Jake comments that people in Ireland did not expect him to study in Mississippi for a year. Jake commented on what his cousin who lives in Boston told him about studying in Mississippi,

My cousin said to me, you’ll get a better experience and it’ll be a completely different culture to even what you’re used to, even to places like New York or big cities, it can be different to a place like Oxford, I’ve definitely felt that since I got here that it is a completely different world, like the people are completely different, one of the stereotypes that is true is that they are very mannerly and very kind and welcoming so I’ve definitely enjoyed that so far culture wise.

This comment suggests that Jake’s expectations of coming to study at UM matched the reality he has experienced more closely than student’s such as Jags. Jake was perhaps better able to bridge the gap between expectations and reality because of his personal context as he has family that live in the U.S. However, he refers to Mississippi and life at UM as a “completely different

world,” which highlights how Jake sees the state and region as apart from the rest of the nation and comparably different to Ireland compared to parts of the U.S. such as New England. Jake also noted that he has found that certain stereotypes hold true which he had heard about the South before arriving at UM. Jake noted that he had heard stereotypes regarding racial issues in the South, as well as poverty and lower education levels. Jake noted that UM defied these stereotypes because he felt the culture at the University is open-minded and liberal. Also he realized that Oxford was a wealthier community in comparison to other places in the state and region. However, he commented that stereotypes regarding hospitality and manners in the South had held true. It is noteworthy to consider how students are receiving these stereotypes and through what mediums. In Jake’s case, it was through family members who live in Northern states in the U.S. It is significant to consider how people outside of the region perceive the South. Moreover, it is worthwhile to contemplate what Jake will report regarding the reality of the South to other people he may meet who are coming to study at UM and in the region.

Regarding expectations of the South related to stereotypes, Annie commented on speaking with professors and other friends who had previously been to UM about the way of life and culture. She mentioned that she received positive information about the University in terms of the way of life and the academics. However, she did not seem to be as aware of some of the negative stereotypes of the South that hold true in certain regions. She commented on traveling to a Delta elementary school to volunteer “I remember last semester we went to an Elementary School in Crenshaw, Crenshaw is like a quite low [?] town in Mississippi, I think it is in the Delta, I am not sure, but I do some volunteer job for them to draw a map on the wall for them and I am amazed because it’s a very poor town and I saw many not very good houses.” Annie

did not seem to be as familiar with aspects of the region such as its issues with poverty and therefore she was surprised to see that the town she visited outside of Oxford was noticeably poor. It is important to consider what stereotypes and expectations are passed along about the U.S. and the South depending on the region in which the international student comes from. There seems to be a global view that as America is considered a developed superpower, it does not have the same level of poverty as other developing countries.

Expectations of region and nation are aspects that I discovered that contributed to international student's acculturation at UM. Students such as Jags found it difficult to find first-hand information about the South and therefore his expectations were of the U.S. and what he had seen through movies and television. Moreover, students such as Kam commented on how expectations about regional differences did not affect his decision to come and study in the South. This is perhaps because Kam received first-hand information from a trusted source about UM and therefore he did not think about stereotypes about the region in comparison to other parts of the nation. I also found that there were differences in the stereotypes the students I interviewed knew about the South as seen between Jake's and Annie's thoughts on the region. Arguably, students experienced less acculturative stress when their expectations of the region were closer to the reality that they experienced or when the stereotypes they had heard were not what they discovered when they arrived at UM.

#### b) Social Etiquette

Another aspect I found that related to how regional particularities affected international students acculturation is the social etiquette expected in the South which arguably differs to the rest of the nation. John Shelton Reed commented on this in *My Tears Spoiled My Aim* in which

he noted used Josiah Royce's sense of the word "province" to comment that the South is "part of a national domain which is, geographically and socially, sufficiently unified to have a true consciousness of its own unity, to feel a pride in its own ideals and customs, and to possess a sense of its distinction from other parts of the country" (Shelton Reed, 1994:20-21).

The most common aspect of social etiquette that my participants discussed was the notion of Southern hospitality. All thirteen of my participants mentioned hospitality as a positive aspect related to the way of life at UM and in the South. This was an aspect of social etiquette that some of the students such as Jake discussed was a stereotype he had been informed of about the South before he arrived at UM. However, other students such as Jaehwan did not know about this aspect until he arrived at UM. Jaehwan commented on this notion of hospitality, "Yes America, the Southern area is quite different from California, New York, because the people have like hospitality, they are real more kind, like first impression was many contact with yes, yes, contact, they always smile, that is real big difference compared to New Zealand." Jaehwan's comment highlights that he considers the South as a separate region from the rest of the nation and one of the reasons why is related to the hospitality aspect as he regarded people more friendly in the South. Jaehwan had spent some time living in New Zealand in 2008 and faced some difficulties regarding race and immigration in the country. Therefore, he was concerned about experiencing something similar in the South but noted that he has felt welcome at UM and that he likes the hospitality aspect. It is worthwhile to consider whether or not students are aware of the hospitality stereotype before they arrive at UM. If students do not know about the notion of Southern hospitality until they arrive at UM, it appeared that they are learning it from host national students who are quick to distinguish the South from the rest of the nation. This is a

form of performance of hospitality. As much as the rest of the nation evokes stereotypes about the South, Southerners are also responsible for certain stereotypes that emanate across the nation and around the world. The notion of hospitality seemed a positive aspect that aided in the majority of students acculturation as they felt that people were always welcoming and quick to acknowledge them and thus make them feel a part of the community at UM. However, some of the students such as Angela aired concerns about the extent of hospitality. She commented that people were friendly but she was not sure if they wanted to make a deeper level of friendship which troubled her. She noted that she felt this might be because the U.S. is an individualistic society in comparison to her home of Malaysia which is a collective culture. She commented that the Southern region is more collective in nature but that she felt that ultimately people had their individual interests which made it difficult for her to make friends with host nationals. This is worthwhile to mention because my initial thoughts on this were that students may find it easier to acculturate to life at UM because of this more collective culture but it seems that certain students were not sure if hospitality could extend past a certain level of politeness and social etiquette and that people are hospitable because this is expected of them and something they perform, not because it is necessarily something they will extend to international students.

Jake is an example of a student who commented on another aspect of the social etiquette system that is unique to college life at UM. He commented on the Greek system and how this was something new to him as it does not exist in the Republic of Ireland. Jake commented on night life in Oxford compared to his home, "It's very different, yeah very, very different I think...it's a small town, I know it's a university town but even frat parties, they're kind of good but the whole frat thing is very cliquy and I think you realize very, very quickly that you're not,



they realize very, very quickly that you shouldn't be there in a kind of a way, we've got some kinds of vibes off of that." Jake's comment highlighted that many international students found the Greek system to be "cliquey" and felt a sense that they did could not be a part of it. The Greek system is an aspect of American college life that appears to somewhat fascinate many of the international students I spoke with but Jake's comment highlights that while it is an aspect of the social system at UM, it often makes international students feel somewhat alienated as it is difficult for them to feel that they can be a part of it as it is something uniquely American and also unique in another form at Southern colleges. Jake also commented on the social etiquette aspect regarding dress at UM. He mentioned, "The way Americans dress here especially in the South I think, when I got here and all of the girls were wearing giant t-shirts and running shoes, I just couldn't get over it. But girls at home wouldn't even wear that to bed but they all wear it here as well, so that was interesting but that's just the way it is here, if they went to Ireland they'd probably think it's even more mad." Jake's comment highlighted that there is more of a sense of shared style at UM than he felt at his home University. This is another aspect that international students such as Emma commented on, as she felt that her sense of style made her stand out compared to domestic students who tended to dress the same while on campus. Therefore, Emma felt that it was more obvious that she was an outsider because she did not dress alike to host national students. The social etiquette around dress can be an aspect that affects international students acculturation as they feel a pressure to dress like host national students. Whether or not this is a real pressure from domestic students I cannot comment but the fact that students where similar clothes to campus can make international students feel like they should

change what they wear day to day so that it is not so obvious that they are not a part of this culture.

A final aspect to discuss regarding social etiquette was mentioned by Kam, who noted that he had to adjust to his host national friend's enjoyment of hunting. Hunting is perhaps not a uniquely Southern social activity but there is an element that the activity is popular in this region that would not be found in other areas of the country. Kam commented on his surprise at hunting being such a popular activity,

Hunting culture, yeah, yeah. Sometimes I believe that because of this culture a lot of times shooting happens here and there... So I think that all this hunting culture is kind of, because I have a friend, the same friend he has a twelve-years old son, he takes him hunting, always encouraging him to, putting him in that direction about the violence thing because [?] slowly, slowly, slowly, and then you're not scared of killing any living body. So that was one shocking thing because people have a lot of guns and lots of guns in their houses, in India I had never seen a gun in my life. Here my friend has a pistol, a rifle, all sorts of guns, it's very common here in America.

Kam's comment highlights that he regards the hunting culture and proliferation of guns in the U.S. and his experience of his domestic friend's ownership of guns as related to higher incidences of violent crime involving guns. The ownership of guns is not unique to the Southern region but arguably there is a higher tolerance for gun ownership in the region than for the West Coast for example. Therefore, Kam was somewhat shocked to see that his host national friends found gun ownership to be a normal social etiquette and this has been something that makes international students somewhat uncomfortable at UM as they have to acculturate to a society that is more tolerant of gun culture.

I found that aspects of regional social etiquette affected international student's acculturation at UM in a number of ways. Firstly, the social etiquette regarding Southern hospitality is

noteworthy as students feel welcomed by the friendly nature of host nationals at UM and in the South. Therefore, some of the students such as Jaehwan discussed feeling welcome at UM in a way that they did not expect. Whereas, other students such as Angela noted that she was concerned about the level of friendship related to hospitality and found this impacted her acculturation as she was not sure if people wanted to make deeper friendships. Social etiquette in regards to the undergraduate population at UM is also an aspect that affects international student's acculturation. Jake highlighted that students feel somewhat alienated from the undergraduate population because of the Greek system and feel estranged due to a dress code. Finally, Kam highlighted that the hunting and gun culture of the U.S., which is popular in the region and with many host nationals at UM is something that students have found difficult to adjust to as it concerns them about aspects of violence.

#### c) Food

Food is a major factor that affects international students studying abroad. Food has significant cultural and familial ties as discussed in numerous literatures such as Claude Fischer's article "Food, Self and Identity" (1988). Therefore, food is often an aspect international students had issues adjusting to. This true for the international students I interviewed at UM who had a difficult time adjusting to food in the region and to being without foods from their home countries. The South considers its food to be a culturally distinct aspect and unique to the history of the region. Therefore, I found that Southern cuisine is often an aspect international students are not as aware of because they think about American food and are not as aware that the South has a unique cuisine before they arrive.

10 out of the 13 students I interviewed commented on adjusting to food in the South and that they have come to like many of the foods of the region. Jags commented on this, “food, oh yes, our food is very different, cooking style, so when I came here first time I experienced different food, the old food I had been eating that food for years, so I started, I actually like this food here, Southern style food, I mean it’s completely different from, but still I like this food.” Jags’ comment highlights that the style of food is completely different to what he is used to in his home but he was interested in trying different foods as he felt this was part of his adjustment to life at UM. He noted that he likes Southern food and therefore has been able to acculturate to different styles of food and has not had too much adjustment issues with food.

This is also the case for Camila who has enjoyed trying Southern foods but also had an easier adjustment experience with foods because of the regional particularities regarding international food that can be found in Oxford. The South has a larger Mexican immigrant population compared to other regions of the U.S. and therefore Camila noted that she has been able to purchase a number of Mexican foods to make somewhat similar dishes to what she would eat in Brazil. It is noteworthy to highlight how students from South America might have an easier time regarding being able to cook foods from their home because of the ingredients they can find in the region due to more engagement with South America and greater immigration from there to the South. However, students such as Jags have found it more difficult to find ingredients traditional to Bangladeshi cuisine because of lack of immigration from West Asia to the South. Therefore, many Asian students have to travel to Memphis, the closest major city to Oxford to be able to purchase foods to make their home cuisine. This can be difficult for students as it is not

easy to get to Memphis without a car and therefore they do not have such ease to make home food which might comfort them if they are dealing with issues of adjustment.

Angela also commented on the issue of transport to be able to purchase food due to her religion. As she is Muslim she has found it difficult to purchase halal meat in Oxford due to the small Muslim community at the University. She commented, “I love to try new food actually but again the food is quite limited for me because I am Muslim so I cannot have lots of variety food. I wish I can go grab anything in Walmart but I only have eggs and fish for that, and I eat the meat and also the chicken for the mosque but it depends on any volunteer who went to Memphis.” Angela’s comment highlighted that it is difficult for students regarding food restrictions related to religion at UM because there is still a relatively small international community and therefore this makes it difficult for students to follow their religious food practices.

I discovered that food is a regional particularity that affects international student’s acculturation at UM. The South has a unique food culture that many of the students I interviewed have been able to adjust to and have come to enjoy. However, even students such as Shigeki who commented on enjoying Southern food noted that he had to adjust to different levels of oil, salt and sugar in food compared to Japanese cuisine. On the other hand, some of the students such as Angela highlighted that it has been difficult to prepare food from their home which can be a difficult aspect for students if they feel like they are experiencing a difficult acculturative process. Food can be an emotional element which can aid in students comfort. However, students who have been unable to prepare food from their home have experienced more acculturative stress as it is difficult to obtain ingredients from their home country.

#### d) Transport

The majority of students I interviewed also discussed transport as an issue that affects their acculturation at UM. This is perhaps not a uniquely Southern aspect that affects their acculturation as international students in other regions of the U.S. may also experience issues related to the reliance of cars in the U.S. due to the size of the country and the individualistic nature of car travel in the country. However, it seems that the South is behind other regions in the U.S. in terms of increasing public transport services, perhaps due to the spread out nature of metropolitan areas in the region and lesser concerns with environmental issues regarding car use compared to other regions. Jake offered a comment on transport at UM and in the region. He noted,

I think it's interesting, what we've noticed out here, a lot of us, because we live out in University Trails, so we use the free shuttle bus, which is handy, it's a good service, but Americans don't walk, they just don't walk, so even walking to the gas station or whatever to get some food, people are driving by beeping because they don't know why you're walking, so something like that, I don't think I realized how much you need a car, especially you know maybe in Oxford, so you're not in a big city so there's no transport.

Jake's comment highlights that UM is actually ahead of other parts of the region in terms of public transport because of the bus service. In the past few years, the University has continued to expand the bus routes around Oxford and encouraged the use of buses for domestic students instead of driving to campus. However, the bus system can seem frustrating to international students who come from countries with developed public transport systems in which they do not have to rely on car travel or do not own their own car. Therefore, the majority of international students I interviewed commented that they either owned a car at UM or wanted to own one and felt that this would aid in their acculturation as they would not feel as isolated as they felt when

they first arrived at UM and were without a car. The students who were on exchange and therefore did not have a reason to purchase a car highlighted that transport was an issue that made them feel isolated and that they had a lack of independence related to their inability to move around Oxford during the evenings and on weekends.

e) Climate

A further aspect to discuss that I found which affected my interviewee's acculturation and that is uniquely regional is the climate in the South and specifically in the Midsouth region. This is another aspect that can make student's arrival difficult while they adjust to the pressure of school and often become sick due to adjustment to the climate. Angela commented on this, "I still, I have lots of adjustment to the climate, the first season I think in the late September I guess, I start getting a cold and I fell sick because of adjustment, I think my body cannot tolerate because Malaysia is, the weather is tropical weather, so like we can go down to 23 Celsius." Angela's comment highlighted that her body had a difficult time adjusting to the differing climate in the South compared to her home in Malaysia and therefore she became sick as a result of this. Therefore, climate is a difficult issue for international students who are adjusting to a number of other aspects of life at UM but also must deal with this physical issue. If students become sick during their initial arrival at UM this can also affect their acculturation as it is a time when they are still trying to make friendships and get used to their class work and this can put them back in the acculturative process.

f) Race, Ethnicity and Religion

The final aspect to discuss that I discovered which related to how regional particularities affected international students acculturating at UM is how race, ethnicity and religion have regional issues that affect international students.

9 out of the 13 students I interviewed commented on aspects related to race and ethnicity in the region and at UM. Jaehwan offered a comment which I felt is worth initial discussion. He commented on diversity in the South as he has seen through his time at UM. He noted, “Yeah but here like Southern area you know, it’s not really mixed with other international culture right, like Southern area is like only one area keeping the original culture.” Jaehwan’s comment highlighted that he felt that a lack of diversity in the South perhaps in terms of less international students studying at UM suggests that the region is retaining a sense of “original” culture. Jaehwan perhaps commented on this because he has travelled to other areas of the U.S. such as large cities on the East and West coasts and commented that they seem diverse and globalized in comparison to the South. It is an intriguing comment as the South is a region with a rich history of immigration to the region and diversity of cultures but it is worthwhile to note that to international students who come from more globalized cities around the world, the South can seem like a region of the U.S. that is not as globalized and thus Jaehwan sees the culture in the South as somewhat “unaffected” by globalization.

In terms of the students I interviewed talking about racial and ethnic diversity at UM, Shigeki commented on this and how he sees issues regarding people of different races and ethnicities and whether or not they are friends at UM. He noted,



It's not really that mixed still, a lot of my, not really Asian students, [?], not really people from South America really, actually that's why my friends back in Texas, actually Houston was really mixed, a bunch of people from China, Vietnamese, Spanish people but here it's not that mixed. My friends said to me if you go to Mississippi you will feel lonely because there are not that many Japanese people or even Asian people, and no Asian food or restaurants, and I can of feel that way partly, yes, because there are not many Asian groceries or anything or even Japanese grocery and actually in this entire campus there are only seven or eight people from Japan, so, yeah. I didn't really feel like discrimination or isolation in terms of race because people are still friendly.

Shigeki's comment highlighted that he felt that the university he attended in Texas for the majority of his bachelor's degree was more mixed than at UM. Perhaps this is because Texas is a more popular state for international students to decide to study at than Mississippi and also because it is a larger state, with more global metropolitan centres. Therefore, Shigeki noted that it has been difficult for him at UM in terms of meeting other Japanese students and feeling that he had as diverse group of friends at UM. He said that he did not feel any discrimination at UM but that it is an aspect he is aware of regarding the lack of diversity at UM. Shigeki's comment highlighted that international students at UM have not had to necessarily deal with direct issues regarding racial prejudice and discrimination but there is a sense of lack of diversity which can make students feel like they are somewhat isolated and therefore cause acculturative stress.

Camila also commented on her perception of race relations at UM and in the region. She noted, "Yeah like I feel like here things are really segregated but I was afraid at this racial discrimination or whatever comes toward me but I didn't feel this but that's how I told you it wasn't that bad but I really feel like people here are too separated." Camila's comment highlighted that similarly to Shigeki, she did not experience any direct issues regarding racial prejudice and discrimination. However, she recalled an incident in which an African American student asked her and some friends if he could talk to them as he perceived them to be white and

therefore was concerned about talking to them. Camila noted that this surprised her as this was not something she would consider in Brazil as she commented that Brazil is more racially diverse. Therefore, she noted that she felt the culture at UM is still somewhat segregated and therefore this made her feel uncomfortable because she felt this was different to her home. This issue of social segregation can be difficult for international students who consider racial classifications as different in their home countries and grew up in more racially progressive societies.

On the other hand, Annie noted that she was not that surprised by the social separation by race and ethnicity at UM. Annie did live in Beijing which is a more diverse global city in China but perhaps as she comes from a nation that does not have as high immigration rates compared to other countries around the world, she sees race and ethnicity as different and does not consider people spending time with others from their home countries and racial groups to be an issue. She noted, “I think it’s a kind of very natural because when you come to another country, it’s natural for you to get together with friends who come from your home country.” Annie’s comment highlighted that she felt like it was “normal” and comfortable for international students to spend time with friends from their home countries and also domestic students to stay together. Therefore, she did not seem to have any issues regarding acculturating to the racial divides at UM.

Regarding religion as an aspect that affects international student’s acculturation, Jags offered some comments on how he has questioned his home religion since arriving at UM but also how he has had some difficulties adjusting to the level of religiosity at UM and in the South. He noted,

That was the only thing and about the religion thing, yeah, that was a big thing here. I've met many conservative Christians here who preach to me, still preaching to me, I know what they want and sometimes I feel like they are just wasting their time, I don't think that's the truth they are going for. Well I learn from them about Christianity that I wouldn't learn otherwise because I am not that interested to go and read the Bible but I am interested to learn through personal contact, physical contact, just talking to others, that's how I feel comfortable.

Jags' comment highlighted that even though he grew up in a conservative, religious society, he has found it difficult to adjust to religion in the South. He commented that a number of people have tried to "preach" to him about Christianity and he has found it difficult to adjust to this as he has questioned his Muslim faith and no longer practices religion.

In comparison to Jags, Kam, who does not consider himself religious, actually has found religion in the South and at UM to be more favourable than how people practice religion in India. He noted, Kam "Yeah because in India we have all those sorts of beliefs that are imposed on you... I like how people practice about it, how they teach others about religion which I like, I really like, to be very honest, if I have a kid here I would love my kid to be Christian than practice Hinduism, because I think it's more open, more freedom is there in Christianity." Kam's comment highlighted that he has found it easy to adjust to religion in the South because he actually considers it to be more open and have more freedom than practicing Hinduism which is the faith he grew up with. He discussed that he felt Christians were able to find their own religion rather than have it imposed on them as in India. Therefore, some of the students such as Kam have somewhat assimilated to religion in the region as they find it more open and perhaps less religious than their home country. This seems to be the case for many of the Asian students compared to European students who find the South far more religious than their home countries and find it difficult to adjust to the religious culture.

This section of my findings presented six aspects I discovered from my interviews related to regional particularities that affected international student's acculturation at UM. The initial aspect discussed was student's comments on their expectations about coming to study in the U.S. and whether they had national or regional expectations. It appeared that student's had easier acculturative experiences when they were able to bridge the gap between the expectations about life in the U.S. or the South with the reality they experienced upon their arrival at UM. It is noteworthy to comment that many students had negative expectations related to stereotypes about the South that were globally known. These students had positive acculturative experiences when their expectations were broken and the region did not live up to certain stereotypes. The second aspect discussed was social etiquette and discussed student's experiences regarding Southern hospitality, the Greek system and gun culture in the South. The majority of students found Southern hospitality to aid in their acculturative process. However, other students were concerned about the level of friendship that was offered and were sceptical about the level of hospitality and whether or not it could extend to friendship. The Greek system was an issue for many of the undergraduate students I interviewed as they felt that it was a large part of the undergraduate experience at UM which made them feel as if they did not have a lot in common with host national students who are a part of the system. Finally, hunting and gun culture was a concern for students who grew up in societies less tolerant of guns in the home. The third aspect I discussed was food and students adjustment to Southern cuisine and the ease at which they were able to prepare their home foods. Students who found it more difficult to prepare food from their home countries experienced added acculturative stress because they were unable to comfort themselves through foods with cultural and familial ties. The next aspects discussed were

transport and climate. Some students discussed issues regarding transport at UM and in the region and a feeling of isolation related to this. Also, climate was an issue for some students who found it physically challenging to initially adapt to the climate. The final aspect discussed was race, ethnicity and religion. Students offered comments on feeling that it was not that diverse at UM and felt a sense of social segregation between racial and ethnical groups which made some students from more diverse societies feel uncomfortable. Moreover, some students commented on dealing with issues regarding the religiosity of the region and them feeling it difficult to acculturate to how religious it is in the region. However, this was in contrast to other students who felt that religion in the South was more open and free than the religion they had practiced in their home countries and had found it easier to acculturate to religion in the region.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This final chapter offers a discussion of my findings and addresses in greater depth how my findings related to previous literature I presented in the literature review. I also explore aspects of my findings which offer my original contributions to the field of studies on experiences of international students studying abroad.

### Findings in Agreement with Previous Studies

There are a number of areas in which my findings related to some of the literatures I presented in my literature review. In the initial section of my findings I presented the five factors I discovered that affected international student's acculturation at UM. The five factors I found echoed some of the six factors De Araujo's addressed in his article (2011). My findings related to De Araujo's in a number of ways. Firstly, my findings regarding international student's length of stay at UM were similar to De Araujo's findings on literatures that discussed international student's length of stay in the U.S. Similarly to De Araujo, I found that the students I interviewed who had spent longer at UM reported fewer experiences of acculturative stress compared to some of the students who had been at UM for a shorter period of time and therefore were still experiencing their initial process of acculturation.

My findings presented in the acculturation section also related with Araujo's regarding socialization and support groups. De Araujo commented that, "nine articles in this review reported convergent findings associated with social support regarding the adjustment issues

experienced by international students across U.S. campuses” (2011:4). De Araujo summarized that the articles he reviewed commonly found that international students who felt that they had strong social support groups, with support from family, host and home nationals, reported lesser feelings of acculturative stress in the U.S. (2011:4) This is also the case in my findings as most of the students I interviewed commented that they were not concerned about making host national friendships but expressed less acculturative stress when they felt like they had made a strong support group with home nationals or other international students.

Adjustment to the education system was not a factor De Araujo discussed in his study. It was also not a factor that I considered I would find in my analysis of the interview transcripts, as I did not directly ask my interviewees about their experiences with the education system. However, my findings highlighted that the education system was a key factor affecting international student’s acculturation at UM. I discovered that my findings related to Mehdizadeh and Scott’s study (2005) in the how international students adjust to the education system is a factor that affected international student’s acculturation to the way of life at UM. Therefore, my findings on how education system affected international students is not necessarily an original contribution but it is something that was not considered in the majority of studies I reviewed in my literature review, though it is evidently a major factor that affects acculturation.

The final aspect of the acculturation section of my findings that related to De Araujo’s study is how language acquisition and proficiency affected international student’s acculturation. Although I again did not ask a question specifically about language acquisition and proficiency, many of the international students brought this up when answering my questions about their decision to study in the U.S. and about their memorable or surprising experiences. My

interviewees expressed acculturative stress related to concerns about their proficiency which related to De Araujo's findings in the literature he reviewed.

A final aspect of my findings that related to earlier literatures discussed in my literature review was in the third section of my findings regarding intercultural identity. I discovered aspects of my interviewee's experiences that related to Y.Y. Kim's outcome of acculturation, intercultural identity building. My findings related to Kim's theory of intercultural identity (2001) and Peter Adler's discussion of the "multicultural" individual (1988). I found that student's comments on their increased cultural identity and critiques of their home culture and the host culture highlighted how international students at UM were able to build an intercultural identity and become a "multicultural" individual. My interviewee's were able to consider their home cultural identity in relation to the host cultural identity and therefore were building intercultural identities that encompassed aspects of both cultures.

### Implications of Original Findings

There were also a number of aspects of my findings that built upon some of the findings presented in earlier literatures I discussed in the literature review. These findings that extend the arguments of previous literatures highlight my original contributions to studies on the experiences of international students studying in the U.S. and specifically international students in the U.S. South.

Firstly, my findings built upon on De Araujo's research as I discovered that the international students who had been away from their homes for a longer period of time expressed changes in their friendship circles. Many of these students noted that they had initially had a diverse group



of host national and home national friends. However, they spent more time with home nationals after they had been away from their home for a number of years. Therefore, this highlighted that social support groups and socialization is affected by student's length of stay as they feel a comfort in being around home nationals when they have been away from their home for an extended period.

Another aspect of my findings which I argue built upon De Araujo's study is that some of the international students I interviewed discussed being unable to make strong friendships with host nation students as they felt that the host nationals were not interested in befriending international students. This is perhaps caused acculturative stress when an international student wanted to make host national friendships but was unable to. There is an added pressure in the acculturation process as these students felt that their experience would be better if they were able to make host national friends.

The initial factor I presented in the acculturation section of my findings is where I found potentially one of my largest contributions to the studies on factors that affected international student's acculturation in the U.S. I presented how placement options affected international student's acculturation at UM and considered how this affected their acculturation before their arrival at UM. Zuo Chen Zhang and George Zhou discussed international student's decisions to study at a Canadian university in their article, "Understanding Chinese International Students at a Canadian University: Perspectives, Expectations, and Experiences" (2010). Zhang and Zhou discussed reasons for why the seventeen Chinese students they interviewed decided to study at Windsor University and reference similar aspects I found in my analysis of the interview transcripts such as financial issues and partner programs. However, Zhang and Zhou did not

address how the student's placement affected their adjustment to life at the university and in Canada (2010:50). This is where my findings went further than this previous literature as I argued that placement options and the decision to study at UM affected international student's acculturation before they arrived at the University and during their initial stage of acculturation.

In regards to the second section of my findings chapter, I presented my findings from the interviews on how certain students experiences could be plotted along the Gullahorn and Gullahorn's W-Curve of culture shock which I regarded as an acculturation process curve. I would argue that culture shock theory is perhaps the incorrect term to use for a discussion of international students experiences studying at UM in 2013/14. I would argue this because the majority of literatures on culture shock seem to assume that individuals experience a painful adjustment to a new culture in which they must give up their home culture in favour of the host culture. My findings did not show that the majority of international students I interviewed underwent painful experiences and dismissed their home cultures. The majority of students experienced forms of acculturative stress and smaller bouts of emotional and psychological distress. Moreover, their experiences at UM did not necessarily mean that they wanted to give up on their home cultural identities. However, I would argue that student's experiences of acculturation can be plotted onto the W-curve because it is a useful diagram to consider acculturation as a process that international students go through. Therefore, my findings in this section of the chapter are an original contribution to the idea of the W-Curve as I am using it to map out international students processes of acculturation.

A key factor that I discovered in my findings related to the concept of Southern hospitality and how this is viewed by individuals from other cultures. One of my interviewees discussed the

concept of hospitality in regards to her concerns about making deeper friendships. This was an original finding regarding how support groups affected international student's acculturation but also regarding a regional particularity that affected socialization of international students at UM. The American nation is considered an individualistic society in comparison to many Asian cultures. However, the South can also be considered potentially more collectivist compared to the rest of the nation. Joseph A. Vandello and Dov Cohen commented on this aspect in their study 'Patterns of Individualism and Collectivism across the United States' (1999). The authors found that the Southern United States did in fact rank higher on the collectivism scale that they employed (1999:279). My findings arguably presented that the South is more collectivist in nature which is highlighted by the concepts of hospitality and my interviewees discussing aspects of feeling welcome in the region. However, I discovered that one student was unsure about the level of collectivism in the region compared to her home country, as she felt that there was an expectation for people to be friendly and welcoming but that it did not feel as if she was able to make deeper friendships. Therefore, my findings presented that there is perhaps some performance of Southern identity regarding hospitality and performance to highlight how the region stands apart from the rest of the nation. Some of my interviewees were sceptical about this performance of hospitality and whether or not it extended beyond an expectation of social etiquette.

The final section of my findings is arguably where I discovered the largest original contribution to the studies of the experiences of international students studying abroad. I presented regional particularities that I found which affected international student's acculturation at UM. These findings arguably support my argument that the South is a distinct region because

there are certain aspects unique to the region which affected international student's acculturation at UM. It is also noteworthy to briefly discuss certain findings that related to seeing the American South connected to the Global South. In the instance of my interviewee who said she is able to find foods from her home in Brazil due to there being more immigrant from Latin America to this region, this highlights the connections of place through the many Souths around the world. However, to move back to the discussion of the South as a distinct region, I would argue that John Agnew's discussion on the relevance of place is useful for supporting my findings. The international students I interviewed perhaps had difficult times acculturating to a place as they had to adapt to the way in which people communicate with each other in a different place. As Agnew noted, "When in a locale, so to speak, they follow the routines and rituals of that locale" (1987:27). Therefore, it can be assumed that the international students I interviewed underwent a process of acculturation which allowed them to follow the "routines and rituals of that locale" at UM. The international students did not necessarily need to assimilate to these "routines and rituals" but to adjustment in some ways to the differences of the new place they were experiencing.

I initially presented student's expectations regarding region to address whether or not they considered region when coming to study at UM. My findings related to Weili Yuan's study in that, "The gap between reality and their [international students] expectations led to frustrations, especially at the beginning of their sojourn" (2010:243). Yuan's comment suggested that by attempting to inform oneself about a place before coming to study and live there is a process in being able to bridge "the gap between reality and [their] expectations" which is beneficial to an international student's acculturation. My findings highlighted that the student's I

interviewed had to cope with bridging the gap either between their expectations about the U.S. not meeting the reality of the South they arrived in or their expectations of the region either being broken in a positive manner when negative stereotypes did not hold true or when positive stereotypes did not hold up. International students who were able to educate themselves and thus gauge realistic expectations about life in the South appeared to have an easier acculturative process and reported lesser feelings of acculturative stress. I also discussed certain regional factors such as social etiquette, food, climate, transport and race, ethnicity and religion and how these factors affected international student's acculturation at UM.

To conclude this discussion, I presented my findings that related to earlier literatures discussed in my literature review. My first section of findings related to De Araujo's study on factors that affected the adjustment of international student's in the U.S. I found that acculturation was a useful term to discuss the factors that affected international student's adjustment. A number of the factors I discovered that affected my interviewee's acculturation at UM agreed with De Araujo's such as length of stay and socialization and support groups. However, I found original contributions in that my students who had been at UM for an extended period of time discussed changes in their friendship circles in which they spent more time with home nationals as this helped them to feel more comfortable about their time away from home. Moreover, I found that one of my interviewees discussed the concepts of individualistic versus collectivist societies in regards to socialization at UM. The interviewee discussed that the South may not necessarily be a separate collectivist region in the American individualistic nation as she discussed that there is potentially a performance of aspects of Southern identity that did not actually mean that she was able to make deeper friendships.

I also discussed how I discovered that my findings could be plotted along Gullahorn and Gullahorn's W-Culture to represent my interviewee's processes of acculturation. However, I also discussed how culture shock theory might be the incorrect term to use as a discussion of the experiences of on international students adjustment as it seems an outdated and irrelevant theory regarding the experiences my interviewees discussed. Additionally, I discussed that my findings related to Kim's and Adler's theories of intercultural identity and the "multicultural" individual. My interviewee's discussed critiques of their home and the host cultures which highlight that they were building intercultural identities.

Finally, I discussed my largest original contribution to studies on the experiences of international students in the U.S. I found that there were regional particularities that affected international student's acculturation at UM. Some of these particularities were social etiquette, food, climate, transport and race, ethnicity and religion. These regional particularities arguably highlight that the South can be considered a distinct region separate from the rest of the American nation because there are certain particularities that affected these international students acculturation which are affected by their regional position.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the experiences of international students at the University of Mississippi to address factors that affected international student's well being and whether or not there were regional particularities to these factors that affected the student's well-being. My research added to the body of literatures exploring the experiences of international students studying in the U.S. My thesis extended upon this previous work by addressing that region affected the acculturation of international students studying at the University of Mississippi.

Chapter 1 of this thesis was an introduction to my research. It discussed what had influenced me to carry out an exploration of the experiences of international students at UM. This chapter also offered an explanation of the relevance of this project regarding the administration's current strategic plan goal to continue to internationalize the university and therefore my need to address the well being of students at UM and how to ease any difficulties they may experience regarding their adjustment to life at the University. In the second chapter of this thesis, I reviewed literatures divided into five sections. The first section explored literatures on the theory of culture shock to review this initial theory that discussed individuals difficulties of adjustment when moving to another culture. The second section of this chapter reviewed literatures on the theory of acculturation and the more recent literatures that discussed how acculturation is a process of adjustment that individuals endure when moving to another culture. The third section then reviewed literatures discussing the concept of intercultural identity which

was assumed as the desired outcome of the process of acculturation in which individuals are able to become a “multicultural” individual. The fourth section of this chapter discussed literatures on the concept of regionalism and the idea of the South as a distinct region. The final section of this chapter discussed theories of globalization and space and place. Chapter three discussed my methodological design for this thesis which was a qualitative research design in which I interviewed 13 international students in semi-structured in-depth interviews. I discussed advantages and disadvantages of this methodological design. I also discussed my sample size and recruitment process. Finally, I discussed the system of coding I developed to be able to analyse the 13 interview transcripts.

After a discussion of my methodology, I presented my findings of this thesis. This fourth findings chapter was divided into four sections. The first section presented my findings related to factors that affect international student’s acculturation at UM. This was followed by a section that presented how I discovered that my findings of my interviewee’s discussions of their acculturation could be mapped along the W-curve of culture shock which I repurposed to be considered the W-curve of acculturative process. The third section of my findings presented how I found that my interviewee’s were building an intercultural identity. The final section of my findings presented a discussion of regional particularities that I found that affected my interviewee’s acculturation at UM. Chapter five was a more detailed discussion of my findings and how they related to some of the literature I had reviewed in the literature review but also my original contributions in this research to the studies of international students studying abroad. My findings related to a number of the studies I discussed in the literature review but arguably my original findings related to the regional particularities that affected international student’s



acculturation at UM. These findings support the argument that the South can be considered a distinct region separate from the rest of the American nation. Although I found a number of factors that affected my interviewee's acculturation at UM which related to other studies exploring factors that affected international students studying in the U.S. as a whole, I would argue that I found that there are a number of regional particularities to factors that affected international student's adjustment at UM.

### Limitations

There are a number of limitations to my research worth discussing before I address the future of this research. My research is firstly limited by the amount of international students I was able to interview due to time constraints and the expected size of a master's level thesis. Therefore, I often made sweeping conclusions about my findings which would be better supported if I had been able to interview a larger number of international students at the University. My sample of international students at UM is also potentially limited by the fact that I was unable to interview any students from African nations for this research, though UM has a large Nigerian population. It would have been useful to interview a student from Nigeria to be able to potentially discuss ideas of marginalization due to regional particularities. A future direction of this project could be to potentially have a broader interviewee sample to be able to explore the concept of racial and ethnical privileges and hierarchies for international students studying at UM and being able to address if where an international student is from offers them an easier acculturation at UM compared to another student's experience. I did interview a Nigerian student for my oral history project that I mentioned in my introduction (p 6). He had some intriguing comments to make regarding being seen as an African American rather than an

African or Nigerian international student. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to consider how visual markers affect international student's adjustment at UM.

My contribution on how regional particularities affected international student's acculturation is also limited by the fact that that I was unable to interview international students attending other institutions in the U.S. If I had been able to interview groups of international student's at one or more universities in different regions across the U.S., I would have been able to make comparisons about regional differences based upon international student's experiences in these different regions. Therefore, this would have strengthened my argument that the South is a distinct region and that certain aspects unique to the region affected international students studying at the University, which would potentially not be the same for an international student studying for example on the West coast. My assumptions about the South as a distinct region were based upon the literature I reviewed by scholars such as John Shelton Reed, as well as my personal assumption related to my experience in the South as being different to exchange students from UoB who had studied in other regions of the U.S. However, my research is perhaps also limited by the fact that my interviewees are attending a university in the region and therefore are perhaps not able to engage as much with host nationals and instead my interviewees largely spent their time with other international students or home nationals at the UM and therefore my findings are limited to the amount at which my interviewees have been able to engage with host nationals on and off the campus.

Another way in which my research is limited is that I did not decide to discuss the concept of stigma in my findings, though some of the interviewee's responses may have highlighted that they experienced aspects of stigma due to their nationality or ethnicity and also

perhaps that they had a certain stigma regarding stereotypes of Americans and Southerners. This could be a potential future direction of this research but it did not seem applicable to my findings regarding some of the theories I presented in my literature review. Moreover, discussing gender patterns across international student's experiences at UM could be another intriguing direction for this paper but I did not feel as if it was necessary to discuss in my findings and felt it was relevant to consider thematic issues.

The final limitation of my research perhaps was that I did not discuss religion in more depth in my regional particularities findings section. Although it is apparent that religion was a recurrent issue in my interviews, I did not actually ask the interviewees a direct question regarding religion. I suspected that it might be a consistent theme due to religion being such a tenant of Southern culture. My findings suggested that discussing international students experiences regarding their own religious beliefs and how their beliefs are affected by coming into contact with religion in the South could be a future direction for this research.

#### Future Directions

This master's thesis could take future directions to address some of the limitations I mentioned in this conclusion. Firstly, the limitations of my research could be addressed by conducting more interviews.. The limitations could also be addressed by conducting interviews with international students at other universities in the U.S. to be able to carry out a comparative study. There is potential to also conduct surveys alongside the in-depth interviews to be able to offer some statistical evidence to support extended, individual interviewee responses. This research could also be more original in content by focusing primarily on the regional

particularities that affected international student's acculturation in the South which to could be carried out by interviewing international students attending other universities in the region, as well as international students at universities outside of the region. This would be an original research study exploring the role of international student sojourners in the region. It would be significant as it would address how the South is regarded globally and how people from all over the world interact with the region. The concept of regional differences affecting international student's acculturation could also be a worthwhile study in a number of different countries such as the studying the effects of region on international students in the United Kingdom, which also has a large international student body.

Another aspect for the future of this research could be to further discuss the concept of voluntary/involuntary and permanent/temporary sojourners that I briefly mentioned in the acculturation section (p 46). This concept could be further explored regarding migration literatures on pushes and pulls and what brings international students to study abroad and whether or not they want to return to their homes or want to stay in the U.S.

A final aspect for the future of this research could be to discuss in further depth the concept of "living on the boundary" for international students studying at UM. I discussed this briefly regarding one of the Indian student's responses to not feeling a part of the culture at UM and also his concern about not being Indian anymore. However, it would be intriguing to explore this concept further through addressing this as a more direct interview question and reading further into the concept of "boundaries" of international communication and individuals living in other cultures.

## Policy Recommendations

I wanted to offer a few final policy recommendations to the administration at the University as a way to ensure that the purpose of this research is to aid the well being of international students at UM. My recommendation to the administration would be to consider how to increase engagement between host national students and international students at UM. This perhaps could be carried out through greater integration of exchange and IEP student housing with domestic student housing compared to the current situation in which exchange and IEP students only live with one another. It would also perhaps be beneficial to encourage incoming freshmen to the University that there are benefits of coming to a University and being able to interact with people from all over the world. Although the University wants to encourage domestic students to be able to travel through study abroad programs, it must face the reality that this is not an option for all students in one of the poorest states in the nation. However, the University could encourage the benefits of meaningful communication with international students that come to UM with host national students. As much as the University pushes how coming to college is a fantastic academic opportunity, they could also address how engaging with people from other backgrounds is valuable in terms of knowledge and compassion and that engaging with different people will be one of the core benefits of coming to UM. This would hopefully further highlight the value of the international community at the University and encourage domestic students to engage with international students to become “global” and understanding individuals.

The University could also consider extending what it currently does for the exchange student population to the degree seeking undergraduate and graduate international student

population. This is in regards to trips and transport out of Oxford so the degree seeking international students are able to integrate with one another easier but also to be able to see the surrounding area of Oxford. In the past three years, there have been vast improvements to public transport in the town which greatly eases the situation for international students but the University must consider what an expanding international community means and how it can continue to aid a growing number of international students who greatly depend on the resources of the University.

At the start of my literature review, I commented that international education continues to be one of the key ways that individuals are able to live and study in another country for an extended period of time. Education is the core way that international students are brought to the state of Mississippi to earn their undergraduate and graduate degrees or to complete an exchange year as part of their home university programs. International students are a significant group of international sojourners. They are worth continued study and research due to their voluntary but temporary status as an international group. We must not dismiss how international students adjust to a new place and what aspects of that place they take with them when they return home or to another place. It was significant to explore the experiences of international students at the University of Mississippi in an effort to understand how to aid the well being of these students and to consider the future for international education at the University and in the state of Mississippi.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A

Cover Letter to be sent via email

Dear Student,

My name is Rachael Walker and I am a graduate student from the United Kingdom in the Southern Studies MA program. I am currently working on my Master's thesis project on the experiences of international students studying at the University of Mississippi.

I am hoping to conduct a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with approximately 13 participants. I hope that an interview will last approximately 45 minutes.

I want to ask you questions regarding your expectations of coming to study at the University, how and with who you socialize at the University compared to in your home country, about some of your memorable or surprising experiences while studying here and how your time studying here has shaped your understanding of your home culture and identity.

If you are willing to participate in my study, please contact me directly to my email at [rewalker@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:rewalker@go.olemiss.edu). Please also contact me here if you have any questions prior to participating in this project.

Kind regards,

Rachael Walker.

## APPENDIX B

## Interview Questions

Advisor: Dr Minjoo Oh

Researcher: Rachael Walker

### Introduction

At the start of the interview, I will introduce myself and the project and ask the participant to introduce themselves. I will need to know their country of origin, how long they have been in the United States and how long at the University of Mississippi, how old they are, whether they are an undergraduate or graduate student and whether they are degree seeking or an exchange student.

### Questions

#### A) Expectations

1. Can you tell me about how you came to study at the University of Mississippi and why you chose to come here?
2. What were your expectations of coming to study in America and at the University of Mississippi? (Sub-question: If you had any expectations, how do you think you formed them?)
3. Did you think about studying in the U.S. as a whole or were you aware of coming to study in the South?

#### B) Grand Tour

4. Can you tell me about a usual day for you in the week and a usual day for you at the weekend? (Sub-question: What are you doing during these days in America and at home?)
5. What does your friendship circle look like, is it people from your country, other international students or American students?

#### C) Experience

6. How did you feel when you first came to study at the University? (Sub-question: Any periods of emotional stress, feelings of isolation, loneliness, confusion or excitement?)
7. Can you tell me about a memorable experience that involves food, climate, transport, music or the educational system?
8. Can you tell me about a surprising or memorable experience while studying at the University?

#### D) Intercultural Identity

9. Are there aspects of these things from your home country that you cannot find here and you miss?
10. Have you become more aware of the culture in your home country, do you feel more proud of your home country since living in the U.S. or do you feel any stronger ties of identity to your nationality and home country?
11. Are there aspects of your home country that you have become more appreciative of or critical of since coming to the University?

### Closing Statement

I will ask the participant if there is anything else they feel they would like to talk about and then I will thank them for their participation and time.



## APPENDIX C

## INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Exploring Intercultural Identity and Acculturation of International Students Studying at the University of Mississippi

### Investigator

Rachael Walker

Department of Southern Studies

The University of Mississippi

(662) 801-4406

### Advisor

Minjoo Oh, Ph.D.

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Leavell 206

The University of Mississippi

(662) 915-3454

*By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.*

### Description

The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of international students studying at the University of Mississippi and to discuss their experiences of acculturation and intercultural identity building. You will be asked a series of questions related to these subjects. However, as this is a semi-structured interview you may also discuss other issues surrounding this topic that you feel you would like to talk about.

### Cost and Payments

The semi-structured interview will take approximately 45 minutes but as mentioned above, the hope is that there will be other aspects you would like to discuss.

### Confidentiality

Your name and country of nationality will be identified in the recording and transcriptions. However these will only be seen by the principal investigator and thesis advisor. Your full name will not be used in the thesis write-up and you will be given a pseudonym.

### Right to Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, all you have to do is to tell Ms. Rachael Walker or Dr Minjoo Oh in person, by letter, or by telephone (contact information listed above). You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

### IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

### Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview I consent to participate in the study.

## APPENDIX D

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

RELEASE

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

- a. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio tape, film, photograph or any other medium ("Recordings").
- b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings but be given a pseudonym for direct quotations in use of final written work.
- c. Exhibit, copy, reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
- d. I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Rachael Walker was born and grew up in the county of Devon, United Kingdom. She attended the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom and received her Bachelor of Arts in American and Canadian Studies in 2012. As part of her undergraduate program, she completed a year abroad at the University of Mississippi in 2010/11. This year abroad cemented Rachael's passion to further explore and comprehend the American South, as well as reaffirmed her belief in the benefits of international education. She returned to Oxford, Mississippi to begin the Master of Arts in Southern Studies upon her graduation from the University of Birmingham. During her time at the University of Mississippi, Rachael has worked as a graduate assistant for the international exchange program, which enrolls approximately 250 international students annually from all over the world. She has also worked as a graduate assistant for the Division of Outreach, the University's department that offers continuing and outreach education programs to the local community, as well as the rest of the state.