Social and institutional factors affecting the daily experiences of the spouses of international students: Voices from the Midwest and implications to academic institutions

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Social and institutional factors affecting the daily experiences of the spouses of international students: Voices from the Midwest and implications to academic institutions

by

Yalem Teshome

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education

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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2010

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DEDICATION

To Carla and John: For your enduring support.

To the participants of this study: For sharing your stories and experiences.

To my parents, Ato. Teshome W. Michael and Wzo. Askale Mengiste: For ingraining in all of your children the veneration of knowledge and critical thinking.
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ABSTRACT

The decades after WWII witnessed a substantial increase in the number of international students coming to the U.S. In the course of decades, international students and their families have become essential both to the economic and cultural life of campus communities throughout the country. Yet, academic institutions continue to overlook the needs of a very important segment of this constituency: accompanying spouses of international students.

Currently, appropriate programs and services targeting the needs of spouses of international students are lacking. Except sporadic efforts by a few institutions, suitable programs targeting the contemporary needs of accompanying spouses are virtually absent.

Based on interviews with twelve women from eleven different countries, this study examines the day-to-day experiences of female spouses of international students as they reside in the U.S. with legally dependent status. While accompanying spouses are both men and women, due to the disproportionately small number of men who come as accompanying spouses, this study focuses on the experiences of women who sojourn in the U.S. to await the completion of the studies of an undergraduate or graduate student spouse. This study provides insights into the challenges as well as benefits of coming to the U.S. as an accompanying spouse. From the stories these women told, large numbers of accompanying international spouses are well-educated individuals, some with years of professional experience. The study revealed that these women, due to their legally restricted status, tend to live for years in a type of social isolation filled with economic and emotional struggle.

A strong message for academic institutions emerges: while there has been a historical link between international spouses and community volunteer organizations serving this
group, community networks no longer have the capacity to meet the needs of this group. Hence, as universities worldwide compete to attract international students, the existence of university services and programs for accompanying spouses could eventually become a key factor in determining where couples decide to enroll.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examines the daily experiences of the spouses of international students (SIS) as they sojourn in the U.S. with a restrictive visa (Appendix C). My interest in this problem emerged out of the intersections of my personal experience, professional background and academic course work. My own background includes having, myself, lived with the tensions that come along with having a restricted visa. Early in my career, my international development work experience in Ethiopia, working with low-income women with few safety nets, made me realize the importance of investing in women in order to improve the well being of women themselves, their families, their communities, and societies at large. The courses I was exposed to in graduate school, specifically those in critical theory and feminist literature, were also influential in my decision to closely examine the unique problems of SIS. I conceived of the following questions as a result of my scholarship: (1) How do spouses of international students adjust to a new phase of life, and what are the factors that are affecting their sojourn? and (2) What is the best way to pursue such an inquiry?

My exposure to the activities of a local volunteer network that assists international spouses was also influential in compelling me to pursue this research topic, especially as that exposure enabled me to understand that women’s experiences represent a necessary focus for research. While many men have been identified as spouses of international students, the majority of accompanying spouses are women (De Verthelyi, 1995; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986). Therefore, this study focuses on SIS experiences as one not only largely composed by women, but also by women who live in the margins of society. This understanding makes a feminist approach an appropriate one.
The spouses of international students in the U.S. are defined as having a legally dependent status (F-2 visa) by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. That status prohibits them from seeking educational and professional opportunities and restricts their sojourn to the domestic sphere. Since their sojourning is entirely dependent on the status of the scholar spouse, SIS have restricted latitude to change their status on their own. As the majority of accompanying spouses are professional women (DeVerthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) who are used to financial independence, their sojourning is problematic, specifically because of gender. Since most are not able to enjoy the same level of economic freedom and professional life as they did in their respective countries, the questions arises of how these women interpret their daily sojourning experience.

Smith (1987), who first proposed the concept of the everyday life as problematic, stated that the challenges people experience in their own lives serve as a ripe area of inquiry for research. For me, my field experience with international development in Ethiopia, working with grassroots women groups, has been important in helping me understand the significance of having structural support in order to empower economically-marginalized and legally-excluded women. My work with low-income women’s groups has enabled me to recognize the important roles that support structures play in providing social, economic, emotional and psychological well being. At the same time, my interest in researching the experiences of this group has grown strongly out of my understanding of the social, economic and psychological complexities of living with a restrictive visa. Because the situation of SIS fits neither with the standard notions of “illegal,” nor with the “legal,” migrant conditions, the ramifications of this status are seldom explored in the literature.
Over the years, having learned through volunteer endeavors about the professional qualifications of many spouses, I was convinced of the significance of this topic and the potential to contribute to the sojourners literature. Given the presence of such groups of women throughout U.S. college campuses on the one hand, and realizing the shortage of knowledge on the other, I saw an opportunity to contribute to the literature on sojourners—specifically to understand and expose the daily experiences of this special group that has been severely underrepresented in the literature.

The situation of SIS is parallel with feminist scholars’ (e.g., Enloe, 2000; Ehrenreich, & Hochschild, 2003; Zarembka, 2003) identification of global patterns of segregating women into care-giving and low-paying roles. These scholars have observed that the treatment of male and female immigrants has always been politicized, and marital relations have often historically assumed the status of women as legal dependents. In the case of SIS, even though they are not portrayed in the same way as economic immigrants, the fact that they are strictly classified as legal dependents of the student spouses makes their situation even more precarious, because it removes them from any claim to obtain employment and education rights. This structural dependency defines them only in terms of the household, and is the condition that compelled me to examine how these women view their dependent status and the coping mechanisms they use to sustain their daily lives.

In order to understand SIS sojourners’ daily experiences in this study, I examined their views and opinions in terms of (1) the effects of the perceived level of participation by academic institutions to assist in their sojourn, (2) their relationship with local community networks, (3) their role as support systems to their own families and (4) the programs and services they wish to see implemented. For this study, I adopted a feminist methodological
framework with an interview approach. Due to my own familiarity with this status, I offer a
glimpse of my own experiences to illustrate how they have influenced me to understand the
needs of women who come in search of opportunities for themselves or their partners.

**Background of the Researcher**

I came to the U.S. on a student visa, which is designated as an F-1 visa, as opposed to a
spousal visa, which is considered a dependent or F-2 visa. Although this status allowed me
the opportunity to pursue an education (with which F-2 visa holders cannot), the expiration
of my permit exposed me to the precarious reality of living with a restrictive visa. While I
immigrated to the US to pursue my undergraduate studies, as part of the African Diaspora,
the primary goal of my sojourn was to flee from the military dictatorship in Ethiopia. At the
time, though I was certain that I needed to join the Diasporas of the 1980s seeking safety, I
did not know that it was going to be eleven years before I could return and see my family
again. Four years after my arrival in the U.S., the completion of my studies revealed the
predicament of my subsequent immigration status, and I needed to make a very important
decision. First of all, the completion of my studies meant that I was neither a student nor a
legal resident. Second, the choices I had to make were not easy: either apply for political
asylum to stay in the U.S., or return to the dictatorship back home.

Because of the political crisis back home, I was certain that I would eventually be
granted the legal papers for the right to work and pursue my education. At the same time,
waiting for this process was long, and involved expensive legal fees. As is the case with
perhaps millions of immigrants labeled as “illegals,” where waiting for the legal process
means one has to have the means to survive in the short-term, for me, the need to take two
menial, minimum-wage jobs were my only means of survival. Yet, even in that situation, I
felt that things would eventually change and that I would be able to study or take professional jobs again. However, as I learned more about SIS, I discovered that their situation is different. As accompanying spouses, their status is strictly confined to the domestic sphere. Although the contemporary profile of accompanying spouses has changed over the past few decades, academic institutions, sponsors of international education and immigration policy makers continue to view the role of this group as one relegated to the household.

My experiences with living with the complexities and challenges of a restricted visa has always compelled me to be supportive of immigrants who live with a restricted visa, especially women, since they are often affected by the rules of their host country differently than men (Grasmuk & Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Zentegraf, 2002). Empowering women who do not have a voice to speak for themselves is one foundational component of feminism; seeking policy changes, however, is the ultimate goal of feminist research (Fonow & Cook, 1991). In the case of SIS, it is my hope that the findings from this study will inform administrators, advocates and policy makers alike regarding the circumstances that SIS face—circumstances that, as this study shows, are often hidden from the public, occurring as they do in the private realm of the household.

The Problem in Context

In the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the number of international students and their families living in U.S. campus communities has continuously increased. According to the 2008 Open Doors Report, published by the Institute of International Education, the diminutive number of 33,833 international students in 1954/55 has continually climbed to reach 623,805 for the 2007/2008 academic year according to the report by the Institute for International Education (IIE Report, 2009). Worldwide, the flow of students
across borders is currently expected to rise even higher. It is estimated that about 2 million international students living in foreign countries are pursuing higher education (mostly in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France). International students and their families are bringing economic as well as social benefits to their host countries. For example, in 2004, international education was estimated to have brought $12 billion to the U.S. and $30 billion worldwide (Altbach, 2004), reaching an all-time high in the 2008/9 academic year to US $15.5 billion (IIE Report, 2009) through payments for tuition, housing and other expenditures. In addition, diversity and social and cultural benefits are recognized as important contributions coming from international students and their families (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner & Nelson, 1999). While the increased presence of foreign students has been reflected in the amount of literature available on international students focusing on their cultural adjustment and their emotional, financial and psychological needs, the same cannot be said about accompanying spouses of international students.

Research on SIS has been extremely limited; therefore, little is known about many aspects of their adjustment. DeVerthelyi (1995) described this absence from the literature as SIS being “invisible.” Pence (2004) equated the absence of SIS from the literature to their status as marginal residents of university communities. According to Pence, SIS are neither part of the academic institution, nor part of the surrounding community. She further described their isolated life as a life of “double marginalization.”

Although there is much we do not know about the spouses of international students, based on research about the aspects of other sojourners experiences (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Fukuda & Chun, 1994; Ward, 1996), it is reasonable to assume that the adjustment of the accompanying spouse is critical to the success of the scholar and/or expatriate spouse.
Nonetheless, despite the financial, cultural and intellectual benefits that these sojourners and their families bring to campus communities, the interest level in studying this group has been extremely low. What we do know about SIS is that they are typically characterized as homemakers who live isolated and lonely lives (Kim, 2006).

For researchers who have investigated the circumstances of SIS (e.g., De Verthelyi, 1995; Pence, 2004; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) this isolation is the consequence of the unwillingness of academic institutions to take responsibility in assisting the group by providing appropriate services. De Verthelyi asserted that academic institutions are unwilling to support this group because “unlike their student husbands, they [SIS] are not required to fulfill any specific task nor to achieve any positive goal during their sojourn …” (p. 390). Similarly, Martens and Grant (2007) contended that institutions have never been willing to assist the spouses of international students, because college administrators view the concerns of this group as an external matter. Schwartz and Kahne (1993) made a similar assertion. According to these authors, not only has there been an absence of official acknowledgement of this group, but when institutional support for SIS did exist, it was usually “ad hoc or covertly accomplished to get around the official system” (p. 453). The authors further asserted that, because of this lack of acknowledgment from academic institutions, when services and programs have been offered to the spouses of international students, they have not been a result of campus-wide supported effort. Rather, they were created because a particular individual or a group of individuals advocated for a particular program (e.g., English classes). While these research findings and observations are reasonable, the central problem for the spouses of international students remains the F-2 visa and the restrictions attached to the visa.
According to documents issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, when spouses and children of international students enter the U.S., they are issued a status as dependents of their scholar spouses. Because of the large numbers of women who have been arriving for decades as accompanying spouses, some scholars (e.g., Kim, 2006) have viewed this system of categorization as gender biased. In view of the large proportion of women accompanying male spouses, Kim contends, the dependent status became gendered when women and children were made to rely on the student spouse as the provider of the family. Kim further argued that this policy “lumps women with children, [and] evoke[s] the conventional middle-class nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker and reinforces patriarchal ideology” (p. 163). Even though there are various visa categories offered to scholars (e.g., postdoctoral, visiting scholars and so on), the largest numbers of international students are issued an F-1, or a student visa (NAFSA, 2009). The F-2 visa holders are prohibited from accepting jobs or seeking full-time education without going through the extended, and expensive, process of changing their visa status (for some nationals, due to required returns and re-entry with a student visa into the United States). It is noticeable, however, that while the policies of institutions have not reflected any changes toward their involvement in assisting SIS, research has proven that the social and professional status of women SIS has been transformed. No longer the homemakers of the 1950s and 1960s, today’s F-2 visa holders reflect the social, educational and professional changes women have undergone since then. Many studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Lo, 1993; Pence, 2004; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Shao, 2001; Vogel, 1986) have affirmed that female accompanying spouses of international students are often well educated, most of them having years of professional experiences.
This advancement of women around the world is reflected in the research to date. For example, one of the earliest studies on SIS was conducted by Florida State University researcher Baldwin (1969). Reflecting the social values and gender roles of the time, Baldwin presented her subjects as homemakers whose primary purpose of being in the U.S. was to play a supportive role to the scholars and to their children. In the same way, the lack of opportunities outside the home reflects that institutional perceptions about SIS have been that these women are uneducated homemakers who struggle with language difficulties. At the same time, this failure to correctly promote contemporary images of SIS continues to overshadow the needs and expectations of the group as a whole. Because of these perceptions, even when there is an opportunity for SIS to participate in programs, these opportunities are often limited to learning basic English (a skill many of them already possess). Nevertheless, the SIS are part of the same international constituency responsible for billions of dollars annually paid to higher education worldwide (Altbach, 2007; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004). Given the economic, social, cultural and intellectual benefits of international students and their families to campus communities, institutions as a whole must learn to understand the importance of providing this group with access to appropriate programs and services. Most importantly, there is an urgent need for academic institutions, immigration policy makers, and sponsors alike to investigate educational and professional opportunities for SIS outside the gendered space of the household. By doing so, institutions will help not only the spouses in the short-term, but will also give them access to invest in their education and career goals, which, in turn, would allow them to become contributors to society at large, whether they return home or not. It should be noted however, assisting SIS has mutual benefits. Given the large revenue which
international students and their families bring to academic institutions, providing appropriate services and programs to accompanying spouses would enable universities to be more preferred destinations for capable couples. Realizing this, other countries such as Canada have made the sojourning process for both the students and accompanying spouses a friendly one (Kong, 2003). According to Kong, not only are spouses of students permitted to participate in employment opportunities, but access to full-time education is equally accessible to them. Given that there are no policies in the U.S. to assist in the adjustment and sojourning process of SIS, this study examines their daily experiences of living in a dependent status in order to make informed policy recommendations related to this group.

**Rationale**

This study aims to accomplish various objectives. First, by examining the narratives of women who reside in the U.S. as SIS, this study contributes to the scholarly discussion on women sojourners by specifically addressing the challenges and opportunities these women face in their daily lives. While the type of visa offered to SIS “legally” justifies their status as dependents, this process has resulted in SIS being taken for granted, where these spouses are perceived by academic institutions and sponsors of international education simply as housewives. This is perhaps one reason why their situation is seldom addressed in scholarly publications. Given the professional qualifications of women who come to the U.S. as accompanying spouses, examining how their needs have been overlooked for decades is very important. At the same time, learning about appropriate services and programs that are relevant to their sojourn is equally central to the wellbeing of this group. For example, offering them access to education and professional opportunities has multiple benefits. While investing in their education and career goals offers SIS empowerment at a personal
level, it would also allow them to be contributors to their families and communities. Furthermore, given the significance of international education to academic institutions, additional knowledge about this group is equally significant for such institutions. Programs for accompanying spouses may become an important factor for international students when deciding where to enroll for their education.

Although the general sojourners literature has recognized the various stages that all sojourners go through and the significance of networks of support during transition (Church, 1982; Oberg, 1960), there is a void in the literature about the support mechanisms on which SIS have relied. Given the expectation by academic institutions about the availability of volunteer networks that assist this group, learning about the challenges SIS face in their daily lives will inform interest groups, including other SIS, sponsors of education, advocacy groups and academic institutions. Offering SIS, specifically women in transition, an opportunity to speak their stories is important for empowering the women themselves (Reinhartz, 1992) and contributing to the body of knowledge on SIS.

On the whole, the rationale for this study could be summed up by looking at the various factors that make this research important. First, there is a shortage of studies that have looked at the perceptions of SIS regarding institutional support. Second, as the number of international students and their spouses continues to grow, and as they seek educational opportunities worldwide (Altbach, 2007; Altbach, 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004; Weber & Duderstadt, 2008), U.S. academic institutions must learn about the contemporary requirements of this group. Acknowledging the needs of spouses, in addition to being a morally responsible act, is also a way to attract competent professional couples. Third, as opposed to the spouses who came to the U.S. decades ago, findings from this study
provide up-to-date information on the contemporary needs and expectations of spouses of international students. In all, such a study promises to bring changes in policy by exposing the contemporary needs of spouses to all interest groups—academic institutions, sponsors of education and advocates alike.

**Research Questions**

This study aims to fill the gap in the sojourners literature by examining the experiences of a special sojourning group that has seldom been understood by structured support systems. Employing an overarching question followed by several probing questions, the study focuses on exploring what we know about SIS in terms of (1) their coping mechanism of adjustment, (2) the availability and capacity of support networks and (3) their views and opinions on what the role of academic institutions should be. The findings from this study provide pertinent information to academic institutions and education donors about the state of programs and services for accompanying spouses of international students. As such, the chief research question that guided the study is: What are the salient factors affecting the day-to-day lives of SIS in a large Midwestern campus community?

Probing questions then enabled further investigation of the problem:

- What are SIS perceptions of their adjustment and transition and how has this process been affected, positively or negatively, due to the level of academic institutions’ participation?

- How do SIS view the role of a community volunteer group and the capacities of this network in providing support to international spouses?

- What are the views and opinions of SIS with regard to the potential roles that academic institutions should play in their sojourning lives?
• What are the opinions and views of SIS concerning the supportive role which they are assumed to play, and how does this relationship affect their experiences as sojourners?

• What recommendations in terms of programs and services do SIS suggest to assist in their sojourning needs?

**Theoretical Assumptions**

Feminist scholarship centers on examining the relationships of gender and power, and how the intersections of the personal and the political affect women’s freedom and choice. In her conception of the everyday world as problematic, Smith (1987; 2005) established how societal connections between the state and the individual are facilitated by institutions at various levels. Smith’s idea also illuminates how everyday experiences in people’s lives can be traced to what she describes as “ruling relations” interlinked by time and space, and mediated by social and bureaucratic institutions. Other qualitative researchers (e.g., Fine & Weis, 2005) have concurred with Smith’s concept of “mapping people’s experiences” through making connections between the everyday life of individuals to the political and economic systems that govern those experiences. Fine and Weis (2005), writing on critical theory and social justice, have stated that “the emergence montage of social groups must simultaneously be positioned within historically shifting social and economic relations in the United States and across the globe” (p. 66). This set of connections not only signifies the personal link with national and local bureaucracies, but it also implies the significance of establishments, such as academic institutions and immigration services in the lives of SIS. Given that SIS are legally categorized as dependents and restricted from access to employment and education opportunities, I wanted to know how they view the impact of...
their dependent status, especially knowing that a large number of them are well educated professionals.

Feminists recognize that the oppression of women exists in various forms and that it is reinforced by social and bureaucratic institutions of patriarchy at local, national and international levels. In fact, researchers of transnational feminist issues (e.g., Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Enloe, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Romero, 2002; Zarembka, 2002) recognize this gendered phenomenon in particular with those who come from the Third World to the First. According to these feminists, the state of women, particularly those from the Third World, is influenced greatly by the domestic policies of First World countries, which often see women as suppliers of cheap labor and carework. Although this assumption is centered on women from the Third World who move to the First in search of economic opportunities, there is a strong parallel between this group and the circumstances faced by SIS. Whether from the Third World or not, the spouses of international students face years of removal from investing in their own education and professional goals, which has both long-term and short-term consequences. For some of these women, years of exclusion from professional opportunities likely lead to lesser aspirations.

For many accompanying spouses, while their short-term experience is marked by isolation and lack of access to education and professional opportunity, it is also a time filled with anxiety and frustration (Chang, 2004; De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006). Silently, due to legal restrictions regarding work, their experience is also marked by an abandonment of professional identities and economic independence. Moreover, additional problems related to the daily experiences of the spouses of international students exist. The general sojourners’ literature identifies the fact that adjustment difficulties of one spouse could also
threaten the well being not only of the other spouse but also the family at large (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Caliguiri, Hyland, Johsil & Bross, 1998).

Terminology

**Internationalization of education**: Refers to specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments or institutions, to cope with or exploit globalization (Altbach, 2004).

**Dependent visa (F-2)**: A nonimmigrant entry permit provided by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (the former INS) to accompanying spouses and children of F-1 visa holders (international students). Spouses who enter in this visa category are not allowed to engage in full time study or employment and their children are allowed only to participate in full time elementary, secondary school education, as well as vocational and recreational programs.

**Accompanying spouses/SIS/International Spouses**: These terms are used alternatively and refer to the same group of individuals – the spouses of international students.

**Co-national**: As defined by Martens and Grant (2007), refers to a group of international students and families from the same ethnic and cultural background residing in a community.

Organization of Chapters

There are five chapters in this dissertation. This first chapter offers a glance at the researcher’s life that led to the decision to pursue the research interest. In addition, this chapter provides the problem statement and the rationale for carrying out the inquiry. Chapter two presents a review of the literature relevant to the experiences of the spouses of international students. Because of the limited literature specific to SIS, Chapter two examines extant literature as a foundation for examining SIS. In Chapter three, I discuss the
feminist research methodology that I utilize for the study, and I present the interview process, the participants, and the research protocol, as well as the data collection. Chapter four presents analyses of the findings. In Chapter five, I revisit the research questions. Then, I discuss the findings, conclusion, limitations, and recommendations. I close the study with a personal reflection on my journey through the research process.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last fifty years, U.S. universities have become major destinations for international students (Altbach, 1989). Campus communities across the country have become temporary residences for international students and their families. This increasing presence of international students in U.S. higher education has been emphasized by the expanded knowledge and continued research interest about this constituency (Allen & Cole, 1987; Altbach & Wang, 1989; Hall, 1978; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Selby & Woods, 1966). Because of both the economic and the cultural benefits this group provides to campus communities, the importance of programs and services (e.g., counseling, orientation, advising and so on) and the institutional implications of attentiveness to this group has been a central theme for research (Ebbin & Blankenship, 1988; Johnson, 1971; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hall, 1978). However, the same cannot be said about accompanying spouses of international students (SIS). Research interest in the adjustment process of SIS has been extremely low. Particularly, research on appropriate programs and services that meet adjustment and transition needs of accompanying spouses is virtually absent.

Some studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Pence, 2004; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) have maintained that, as part of an international education constituency, academic institutions and communities have not given enough attention to this group (SIS). On the other hand, for one of the authors who has looked at this issue from a feminist viewpoint (Kim, 2006), the fundamental problem for SIS is the visa process itself. As Kim concluded, categorizing accompanying spouses into a legally dependent status reflects automatically a “gendered visa” category of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.
Feminist Research on International Spouses

While both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been employed to study the experiences of SIS, there have been three studies in particular (Kim, 2006; Kong, 2003; Pence, 2004) that have utilized a feminist research approach. The primary distinction of feminist research is that it takes gender as a focal point of investigation and questions the taken-for-granted position of women. The principle reason for using gender as a chief investigative point is to account for the systematic exclusion of women and the distortion about women in the politics and power of patriarchy (Harstock, 1987; Mies, 1991; Smith, 1987). In the case of SIS, because a large number of them are women (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kong, 2003; Schwartz, 1993; Vogel, 1986), the reality of their daily experience necessitates a special concern that needs to be investigated by listening to the women’s voices about their own experiences.

Two studies that have employed a feminist approach were conducted in the United States. Another was carried out in Eastern Canada. The objective of this research was to listen to the women’s voices and understand problems the groups faced. With the aim of examining how SIS make sense of their experiences as dependent spouses, using in-depth interviews, Kim (2006) examined the experiences of 11 Korean wives who resided in a large college community in the state of New York. The purpose of her study was to look into how the Korean wives, who used to be professionals back home, viewed their new status, which Kim refers to as “forced into carework” (p. 163). Kim discovered that the women were frustrated about their restrictive visa-status, which forced them to stay at home rather than engage in employed work. Similar to other studies (Day, 2003; DeVethelyi, 1995; Shao, 2001) the women Kim interviewed expressed frustration about the changes in their status
(from professionals to home makers). Notably, Kim asserted that, “their feelings of frustration, which stems from being confined at home, are directed toward, not at their husbands, but mainly toward the restrictive immigration laws” (p. 163).

In her analysis, Kim (2006) questions the role of institutions and their policies, namely the U.S. Citizenship and Naturalization Services. Since a large number of accompanying spouses are women (Bigler, 2007; De Verthelyi, 1995; Day, 2003; Vogel, 1986; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993), Kim does not view U.S. immigration policy as gender neutral. She says, “even though the gender-neutral term ‘spouse’ is used, F-2 visa status becomes gendered by the meanings of ‘dependents’ in the definition of citizenship” (p. 163). Kim believes such a policy serves gendered values of patriarchal ideology. According to her analysis, because of the classification of all accompanying family members of mostly male international students as legal dependents, the immigration system is embedded in "the conventional middle-class nuclear family structure, with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker and reinforces patriarchal ideology” (p. 163).

Pence (2004) presented a slightly different recommendation, however, after outlining the problems of her respondents. Using an ethnographic approach, Pence examined the cross-cultural experience of three Japanese spouses of visiting scholars in a Southeastern university. The highly educated Japanese women, while they found themselves in a similar situation of isolation as spouses in other communities, expressed additional disappointment, not just for missing professional opportunities but also for not being able to learn about American culture as a result of their isolation and lack of opportunity to meet local residents. According to their responses, the women had hoped to study U.S. culture by making
American friends, and “they had aspirations to be good neighbors in their new and unfamiliar community” (p. 112).

Unfortunately, however, as shown in the few studies on SIS, the absence of a support network affected the cultural adjustment of the Japanese women. Because of the absence of support from the university and the local community, as Pence (2004) theorized, these Japanese women turned to each other for a support network; however, they expressed that they made this choice not because they wanted to be friends with their own ethnic group, but because they felt they were being excluded by the local community. In spite of their strong desire to meet community members and to study U.S. culture, these women were unable to have access to the campus community; Pence declared, “the findings from my study indicate that the traditional sex/gender system continues to shape the campus community as the public domain and to ostracize the spouses of their international students and scholars” (p. 110).

Similar to other studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Vogel, 1986; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993) Pence’s study (2004) clearly suggests that the host higher education community had not been attentive to the needs of international students and spouses. She further discussed the important role that SIS play as supportive partners to the scholars, and the contributions they make to the multicultural knowledge and diversity in local communities.

To Pence (2004), wives of international students live in a situation of “double marginalization” because they are neither considered part of the university community nor the outside community. In other words, as De Verthelyi (1995) has said, SIS are “invisible” members of the community. To others (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993), the circumstances of SIS shows they are in the community but they are “not of the community.” She argues, given the level of internationalization that allow higher education institutions to thrive and to attract
top researchers and fee paying students, that providing services to accompanying spouses is simply to reciprocate the intrinsic benefits which SIS and their families bring to campus communities (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner & Nelson, 1999).

In the community of St. John’s University of Newfoundland, Eastern Canada, Kong (2003) discovered there were many educated women who came as SIS and ended up living an isolated life because of language difficulties. Kong’s study employed a feminist research approach in questioning why so many educated women were left out of the system (i.e., stayed at home) despite the fact that they were legally permitted to seek admission to the university. After conducting interviews with eight women, Kong discovered that although the language classes were available, information on the courses was not known to the women. While the immigration policies in Canada are considered to be friendly (Kong, 2003) to accompanying spouses in terms of allowing for work or education opportunities, she discovered that because of their language difficulty, most women stayed at home or took unskilled jobs. She also noticed the situation was different when men come as SIS. Kong, who was working as a language instructor to international students, observed that, unlike women who come as SIS, “the husbands who come as spouses of international students usually try all means to get admission and manage to further their schooling” (p. iv). This discovery gave Kong the inspiration to study the wives’ experiences with existing English-as-a-Secondary Language (ESL) instruction that was offered to the spouses. Specifically, Kong (2003) wanted to know how the English language service offered to spouses could be improved in order to assist them to prepare for admission to St. John’s University. Most of all, because of that fact that many SIS Kong interviewed were women (which mirrors the larger trend), in addition to the ESL program, it was important to Kong to strengthen other
programs that would allow these women to get out of the house and to network with other spouses. In identifying the importance of providing appropriate services to accompanying spouses, Kong concluded that for campuses to stay competitive in attracting foreign students and scholars, the needs of accompanying spouses must be met. Furthermore, her feminist analysis revealed that many women were "left out of the system mainly due to their failure to meet the English proficiency requirement" (Kong, 2003, p. 3). As a result, Kong advocated for a support system within ESL programs to enable women to perform well for universities’ English language requirements for admission.

**Related Studies on Accompanying Spouses**

Given the increase in the number of foreign students attending U.S. institutions and the related increase in the numbers of graduate students arriving with their spouses (Bigler, 2007; Martens & Grant 2007; Vogel, 1986), institutional attention and policy to facilitate for the sojourning of this constituency has been shockingly limited. Apart from one previous comprehensive study by the University of Chicago¹, which was cited by Swartz and Kahne (1993), comprehensive studies to examine the characteristics and needs for services and programs directed toward the needs of accompanying spouses are unavailable.

While there are no specific theories developed for examining the circumstances of SIS, some authors have looked at the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds (e.g., Bigler, 200; DeVerthelyi, 1995; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993). On the other hand, a few studies have focused on looking at the experiences of women from specific ethnic groups residing in a particular area. For example, Chang (2004), Kim (2006), and Pence (2004) have investigated their own ethnic groups of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese women, respectively.

¹ Repeated efforts to obtain this document failed because the document has been permanently misplaced.
On the other hand, Schwartz and Kahne (1993) and Vogel (1986) have looked at a collection of diverse ethnic communities. Similarly, others researchers (Baldwin, 1969; Bigler, 2007; DeVerthelyi, 1995; Greenberg, 1989; Martens & Grant, 2007) have been involved with multiethnic ethnic groups of interview subjects. In that all of these researchers were intrigued by the lack of interest in studying this group, some of them have given various explanations for this absence.

For example, De Verthelyi (1995) believed that the spouses of international students have been absent from the intercultural literature in the same way they have been living as isolated members of campus communities around the U.S. To De Verthelyi, this absence occurs because “unlike their student-husbands, they are not required to fulfill any specific task nor to achieve any positive goal during their sojourn” (p. 390). Other researchers (Martens & Grant, 2007; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993) contend institutions have never been interested in spouses of students because college administrators view the concerns of this group to be an external issue. By comparing the neglected state of SIS to the well organized support system of other sojourners, such as the military families, Schwartz and Kahne (1993) declared that if any support for spouses existed in universities, it often took the form of being “ad hoc and covertly accomplished to get around the official system” (p. 453). No matter the reason, it could be said that SIS are the least researched part of the sojourners group.

While there is much to be studied about the adjustment experiences of SIS, owing to the similarity in the adjustment process of other sojourners, several studies (Bigler, 2007; De Verthelyi, 1995; Greenberg, 1989; Lin, 2006; Martens & 2007; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) have simultaneously discussed the literature on international students and expatriates as an alternative means of understanding diverse issues related to sojourners.
Even though all aspects of sojourners’ experiences may not be the same, the social and psychological aspects (Church, 1982), as well as the similarity in the stages that all sojourners go through, has been suggested by researchers (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 2001).

The lack of information about accompanying spouses has compelled many researchers to use the experiences of other sojourners (e.g., international students and expatriate families) in order to learn about adjustment, culture shock, psychological and emotional issues (Day & Beavers, 1988; Ebbin & Blankenship, 1988; Fasheh, 1984; Furnham & Treizisel, 1983; Furnham, 2004; Hull, 1978). Nonetheless, even if there are some similarities between accompanying spouses of students and those of spouses of expatriates in terms of lack of daily routine and the absence of intellectual challenge and professional opportunities, there are still economic differences. While some international student families are learning to survive on a single assistantship or stipend, expatriate families are less likely to face the pressures of economic constraints.

Nonetheless, the literature on international students (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Martens & Grant, 2007) suggests that academic progress of the scholars could be influenced by positive adjustment and cross-cultural experiences of their accompanying spouses. In other words, not only is the adjustment of accompanying spouses important to the emotional and psychological wellbeing of their spouses, but other research (Church, 1989; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 2001) also indicates that the timely adjustment of sojourners and their families is an important factor to the achievement of the student spouses.
The State of Institutional Policy toward Accompanying Spouses

The dependent visa currently offered to accompanying spouses restricts spouses of international students from participating in the job market or from enrolling in institutions of higher learning, unless the SIS is first able to change her or his status by obtaining an F-1 visa. While some spouses have qualified and have eventually been admitted into degree programs the process could be expensive and even prohibitive for others because of the likelihood that they will need to exit the U.S. in order to re-enter as student.

Professional organizations such as the National Association of Foreign Students Advisors (NAFSA) acknowledge the importance of international education and the contribution of international students to communities (NAFSA, 2009). As a result, the spousal issue seems to be an unresolved problem both for advocates such as NAFSA and for sponsors of international education. In a 1989 report from a workshop on The Donor Agencies in International Education and Training, sponsored by NAFSA and USAID, a section on spouses concludes this way: “Workshop participants agreed that the problem of separation of families and the role of the spouses during the period of training are matters of unfinished business calling for further examination” (Jenkins, 1989, p. 8).

This statement reflects the fact that NAFSA and the sponsoring bodies of international education do recognize the spouses’ role in providing support and stability to the scholars; however, though years have passed since this debate, appropriate policies within academic institutions to facilitate their sojourn are still unavailable. Similarly, academic institutions, too, have avoided designing and implementing effective programs to facilitate SIS transition. This lack of acknowledgment of institutional responsibility has left the existence of services toward this group to the compassion and “commitment of few
individuals in key positions” (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993). For example, according to
Schwartz and Kahne, in the case of SIS who sojourn in the Cambridge area, international
spouses were able to get access to “clinical and support services because the Psychiatrist-in
Chief was able to maintain the program as part of a general out-reach strategy” (p. 461).

The availability of support for the adjustment needs of the spouses of scholars is
extremely variable. For example, although some universities, such as the University of
Washington at Seattle, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of
Montana, the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota are believed to
provide some type of “help through an independent, community sponsored, volunteer
program, most college administrations do not do more than encourage self-help organizations
of student spouses” (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993, p. 452). On the other hand, Schwartz and
Kahne also mentioned that some institutions aim structurally to meet adjustment needs of
international families. For example, they mentioned that Stanford University has a half-time
advisor for international families.

Examples of Services

The variability of services among the Big 12 institutions is similar to the situation at
larger, nation-wide institutions. Within these institutions, services are dissimilar, ranging
from being not present to that of monthly and bi-monthly programs coordinated by
University Housing Offices. In some other cases, community volunteer organizations, such
as churches and the YWCA, have had a long tradition of being caretakers of international
spouses. This community (the research site) is an example of this longstanding tradition.
While the immigration restrictions of the F-2 status of accompanying spouses has influenced
the university’s position of not having policies that stimulate involvement of SIS within the
campus community, a slowly vanishing local volunteer endeavor, the Friends of International Women (FIW), has been serving as an English conversation group, building friendships for the group for decades. While FIW enjoyed large numbers of volunteers decades ago, today, it is a fading organization—primarily because of the current lack of volunteers. According to a long time volunteer organizer of the group, as the number of international families in the community has increased, the decrease in volunteers has forced FIW to limit the gatherings to one conversation group.

In some institutions, international students and spouses are paired with American families (host families) who are likely to spend time visiting with them during holidays. In other institutions, formal programs for spouses are much more vigorous, organized and ingenious. A good example exists at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Recognizing the economic constraints of the family, the university subsidizes the transportation expenses of international student spouses by giving them free access to city transportation services. At many institutions, these types of services are inaccessible.

Even though studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Lo, 1993; Pence, 2004; Shao, 2001; Swartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986) have repeatedly commented on the high level of education among international spouses, basic English as a Secondary Language (ESL) is the dominant service for spouses of international students. In other words, if and when there exists institutional strategy to assist spouses, learning ESL is the most commonly cited service (Baldwin, 1969; Curry, 2000; Greenberg, 1989; Kong, 2003; Lin & Yen, 1997; Ostler, 1990; Patchecohele, 1998). Although the need to learn English may have been prevalent decades ago, it is not clear whether today’s international spouses are in need of the
same basic English classes that were popular years ago. Spousal proficiency in English has been observed in the findings of researchers (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Vogel, 1986).

During her research on Japanese spouses in the Cambridge area and the issue of language, Vogel (1986) wrote that although some Americans complain about their lack of understanding of foreigners because of their accents, she noted, “sometimes, what is labeled a language problem is really a problem of cross-cultural communication” (p. 275). In other words, just because her interviewees seemed uncomfortable when they spoke English, Vogel reminds the reader that many of her respondents were college educated women and have been taking English courses since seventh grade. DeVerthelyi (1995) had similar responses from some of her interviewees. Not only were they well above understanding simple English, but some had even had business experiences in English.

Sojourning, Displacement, Culture Shock and Adjustment

Who Are Sojourners and How Do They Adjust?

Whether they are international student families, expatriates on assignment or military families, sojourners are characterized as persons in transition in a new culture with an intention to return to their home culture (Church, 1982; Ward, Bochner & Furnham; 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). Though the category of sojourners is believed to consist of a wide range of people, from transient families such those in the military, students and expatriates, as well as missionaries and volunteers, "considerable controversy remains about the process of adapting to a new culture and the patterns of adjustment over time" (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998, p. 278).

One of the popularly accepted theories on sojourning, known as the U-curve, was developed by Lysgaard (1955). After examining the adjustment process of Norwegian
Fulbright Scholars who had studied in the United States at various times, Lysgaard concluded their adaptation process followed what he called the “U-curve.” The two hundred scholars whose sojourn he examined stayed in the U.S. for a diverse period of time, ranging from fewer than six months to longer than 18 months. For Lysgaard, the responses fit into what he viewed as a three-step process of up-down-up, which illustrates the “U-curve.” He explained the cultural adjustment of his subjects through this illustration of the adaption of his subjects: those who said they stayed six months or fewer represented a high point of excitement and euphoria, followed by the second stage, which is characterized by low adjustment. In what Lysgaard called the third stage, which refers to as being above eighteen months of stay, sojourners reportedly felt comfortable about the new environment. An extended conclusion in Lysgaard’s study was that the enthusiasm that newcomers felt when they first arrived (up to six months) was similar to the way they felt after they had become well adjusted (eighteen months or more).

A slightly different assumption from the “U-curve” theory of cultural adoption is Oberg’s (1960) theory of “four stages.” According to Oberg, newcomers go through four stages of adjustment: (1) “the honeymoon,” which depicts the euphoria of coming to a new place, (2) “culture shock,” which corresponds to the realization of the challenges and difficulties of being a newcomer in a different culture flowing with anxiety and resentment, (3) the triumph over the difficulties of the second stage, which leads to (4) acceptance.

While authors of the sojourning literature (Church, 1982; Furnham & Treizise, 1983; Furnaham, 2004; Ward, 1996; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998; Ong & Ward, 2005) concede the “U-curve” theory of adjustment is inconclusive and/or controversial, it was Church (1982) who remarked that more longitudinal studies were needed in order to
substantiate Lysgaard’s (1955) and Oberg’s (1960) claims on sojourners’ patterns of adoption. In an extensive review of the literature on adjustment, Church (1982) remarked upon what he considered to be a drawback of these two theories. According to Church, both theories remained rigid, because each failed to consider situational as well as personal factors. In other words, the difference between individuals’ skills (e.g., language) and ability to adjust, as well as situational factors (e.g., culture), were influential to the adjustment process.

Despite the differences in the adjustment pattern itself, a commonly accepted view in the literature is that successful adjustment requires an effective support network in order to minimize the emotional as well as the psychological distress of sojourners (Bigler, 2007; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989; De Verthelyi, 1995; Fukuda & Chun, 1994; Patchecheole, 1998; Shafer & Harrison, 2001). Schwartz and Kahne (1993) also have commented on the comprehensive safety-net program offered to military families. It should be noted, however, even if social and psychological support systems were available to international students and their spouses, their economic situation makes their experience distinct from other sojourners. The constraint of living on a limited income contributes to additional challenges for international students and their spouses.

Whether it focuses on international student families, expatriates or others, research on sojourners seems to agree they all go through some degree of adjustment and they all require a support network in order to facilitate the emotional and psychological well being of the accompanying spouses, as well as for the academic performance of the student (De Verthelyi, 1995; Patchecheole, 1998) and the job performances of expatriates (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Fukuda & Chun, 1994; Shafer & Harrison, 2001).
A Spouse’s Adjustment Determines the Success of the Other

Research on sojourners has revealed the complexities of the adjustment process and how they affect psychological, emotional and general mental health (Searle & Ward, 1990; Thoits, 1995; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1996). At the same time, while much remains to be discovered about the impacts of the adjustment process on SIS, the body of literature on sojourners, which speaks about international students, families of business professionals (in the U.S.) and American expatriates abroad (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Black, 1988; Black & Stephensens, 1989; Brein & David, 1971; Harvey, 1985; Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1999; Church, 1982; Patchecheole, 1998) agrees that the adjustment of accompanying spouses is a determining factor (at times highly) in the adjustment as well as professional success of the assigned spouse. To Black and Gregerson, even when the new environment might be exciting, the opinion and attitude of the accompanying spouse is critical to the success or failure of the expatriate’s assignment. In other words, without the successful adjustment of their accompanying spouses, professional spouses can find themselves trapped between competing responsibilities of supporting a spouse while at the same time being expected to excel in their professional assignment.

To study the relationship between couples’ adjustment and the factors that influence the process, Black and Gregerson (1991) surveyed spouses of American expatriates who lived in eight different countries (four European and four Asian). Using contact information from the U.S. Department of Commerce, the authors distributed 1,500 survey questionnaires to a randomly selected group of expatriates. The primary objective of this study was to examine and predict the personal and in-country factors that possibly contributed to the level of adjustment for the trailing spouses. They discovered that 86% of the respondents were
married and 98% of the trailing spouses were women. The authors found the issue of spousal adjustment to be very valuable, “because spouse adjustment can be a substantial factor in the completion of successful overseas assignments” (Black & Gregerson, 1991, p. 64).

Consequently, studying those variables which allowed them to predict the adjustment of the accompanying spouses, provided information to the companies on how well the expatriate spouses would perform on their assignments and whether or not the expatriate would stay long enough on the assignment. Because the adjustment of accompanying spouses is critical to the success of professional/student spouse, it could be said that the adjustment difficulties SIS may go through can be central to the adjustment and academic success of the student spouses.

Confirming Church’s (1982) assertion of personal and situational differences on adjustment, Black and Gregerson (1991) observed predictors that may make differences. According to the authors, these predictor variables can be in-country support systems as well as personal ones (e.g., preparedness of the accompanying spouses, previous cultural familiarity, knowledge of history, previous international experience and so on). Black and Gregerson described the in-country support system as the social support and training (about the place and culture) that spouses receive. Based on their analysis, Black and Gregersen concluded that, for the expatriates’ assignments to be successful, the accompanying spouses had to have been involved in the process. These preparedness factors included spouses’ involvement in the decision making (to live abroad), self-initiated training and the level of available support systems (from co-nationals as well as nationals). These were some of the strong predictors of a successful adjustment for the spouses, including the prediction of a successful stay for the completion of each expatriate’s assignments. The emergence of Black
and Gregerson’s ideas on attributes for successful adjustment, while it has been utilized in understanding the experiences of expatriate families, similar concepts have been revealed in understanding other groups, too.

For example, while interviewing accompanying spouses of international students, De Verthelyi (1995) discovered similar responses. The purpose of DeVerthelyi’s study was to “gain some insight on how international students’ spouses perceive their internal and external resources at arrival, and the type of obstacles they have to overcome to achieve a successful adaptation to this transitional role” (p. 390). The author reviewed 49 spouses from 26 different countries employing semi-structured interviews. Similar to the conclusions in the adjustment literature (Black, 1988; Black & Gregerson, 1991; Church, 1982; Harvey, 1985; Oberg, 1960; Ward & Kennedy, 2001), De Verthelyi’s respondents expressed adjustment difficulties, in part due to cultural and language differences, financial difficulties, social isolation and loneliness. Because many of the interviewees were former professionals, to some, their culture shock depended on “the degree of acceptance or rejection of the more traditional role as a home maker” (p. 404). In other words, the change in their status (from being a professional to being a home maker) was as difficult as other aspects of learning about life in the new place.

De Verthelyi (1995) noted the majority of her respondents showed resiliency more or less in the typical time span of adjustment. However, the variability in their adjustment came more from having a personal goal, degree of preparedness, involvement in the decision making process and so on. Similar to what Black and Gregerson (1991) reported on expatriate spouses, related factors were influential in the adjustment process. Although many of her respondents expressed disappointment in their lack of contact with the community,
similar to Black and Gregerson (1991), the author found that personal variables (e.g.,
preparedness of accompanying spouses, degree of involvement in making the decision to
sojourn, expectations, having a personal project and previous international experiences)
resulted in diverse experiences in terms of the well being of spouses and the attitude about
the new place. Because of the importance of the degree of involvement in the pre-arrival
resulted from the perception of increased functional fitness and autonomy in dealing with the
host culture as well as from finding a role of her own conveyed meaning to the sojourn “
(p. 404). However, Patchechole (1998) discovered a slightly different result when
evaluating an orientation program for accompanying spouses.

In a study that involved spouses at the University of Montana, Patchechole (1998)
documented the importance of the adjustment of accompanying spouses to the success of the
student spouse. The evaluative study, which examined the effectiveness of an orientation
program offered to the spouses of international students in Missoula, involved women from
six different countries. The particular orientation program was put into place after the
university discovered that accompanying spouses were having negative experiences due to
isolation and loneliness. Following this discovery, the university and some community
organizations were convinced that helping accompanying spouses was crucial, especially to
the success of the scholar spouses. Among the significant discoveries revealed in this
incident was the realization of the absence of volunteers in that community (a consistent
pattern throughout the U.S.). Accordingly, with regular opportunity of socialization with the
local members of the community and other spouses, accompanying spouses were offered to
participate in bi-weekly activities. These bi-weekly activities did not involve professional
and educational opportunities; however, the spouses expressed positive sentiments about the chance to get out of the home and to get to know the community. According to Patchechole’s study, the participants’ responses categorized them into three groups: for the first, travel was necessary to accompanying the husband, but wives were not personally enthused about living in the U.S.; for the second group, women viewed their presence as beneficial both to the scholar husband and to themselves; the third group said they were happy about being in Missoula.

The influence of adjustment of accompanying spouses to the success of expatriate spouses has been examined by researchers in other countries, too. For example, Fukuda and Chun (1994) studied a Japanese expatriate community in East Asia. After examining the difficulty of adjustment reported by the expatriates and their families, the authors concluded that the success on the assignment of these expatriates was strongly connected to family stability and the couples’ situations. The authors noted that traveling abroad for the Japanese families with children was a challenging experience, particularly when children reached ages where they would attend high school. According to Fukuda and Chun, the difficulty of not finding appropriate schooling, cultural problems, and the mothers’ preference to return to Japan to send children to school, created difficulties that resulted in cases of whole families’ early return.

The adjustment of sojourners’ families, such as the Japanese expatriates in East Asia, is explained in what is called a “spillover theory” (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshili, & Bross, 1998). Spillover theory assumes a direct relationship between one’s work life and one’s family life, and that one of these two cannot be good without the other. Any indications of trouble from either can be carried to the other.
Whether in the case of expatriate families or international students, the literature suggests the adjustment of the accompanying spouse is critical to the adjustment of the professional and the scholar spouses. Cultural familiarity and preparedness of the trailing spouse seem to make a difference on the level of difficulties faced during adjustment. Once in the host country, the major sources of adjustment differences remain as the difference in having or not having daily routine and professional aspirations, none of which is provided to accompanying spouses, particularly the wives of male students.

**Loneliness and Isolation**

The sojourner literature (Church, 1982; DeVerthleyi, 1995; Vogel, 1986; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Ward, 1996; Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998) suggests that adaptation to a new culture is difficult in part due to cultural differences and isolation. For example, Vogel (1986) recognized “communication difficulty and stranger anxiety are two of the stresses for foreigners” (p. 277) in a new place. In a Northeast U.S. campus community, while studying two international discussion groups for international wives (one, all Japanese and another with mixed nationals), Vogel (1986) studied the experiences of foreign faculty and student wives. As a clinical social worker of the university’s Health Services, Vogel worked with two international wives groups in a discussion program entitled, *the Pleasures and Problems of Living Overseas*. It was during these discussion sessions that she discovered the social isolation of the Japanese women was connected to their feelings of racial discrimination and their inability to communicate, because they “consider language as their primary problem in getting along in this country” (p. 274).

Vogel notes that loneliness was the biggest problem the spouses were facing. To her, their isolation from the campus and this sense of loneliness “makes the adjustment of the
women more difficult than the men” (p. 277). Vogel believes that “husbands have the pressure of performing academically in an alien environment and in a foreign language, but they also have the continuity of their work, the structure of their academic tasks, and collegial relationships with others in their fields” (p. 277). Because of her own experiences from a three year residency in Japan, Vogel was able to identify additional factors that she believed contributed to the sense of loneliness and isolation of the foreign wives. While studies by other authors (e.g., De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006) have highlighted the importance of personal variables, such as lack of professional and educational opportunity, and the role of having a goal for the spouse as important factors in cultural adoption, for Vogel, cultural difference was a big factor. Confirming situational and personal factors like cultural differences, which Church (1982) commented on as one of the diverse challenges faced, Vogel noted the wives suffered not only from social isolation and lack of professional opportunities, but also from additional factors within the family. Cultural factors were among the strongest factors that impacted the daily lives of the Japanese sojourners. Vogel (1986) explained that for her Japanese interviewees, the absence of female relatives—particularly mothers who provided a strong support system and acted as “confidants”—added to anxieties while sojourning in a new culture.

In another study conducted in a similar region, Schwartz and Kahne (1993) also discussed the problems of isolation and loneliness affecting the sojourning experiences of foreign wives. Aimed at identifying the problems of adjustment experienced by accompanying spouses in the Cambridge area, Schwartz and Kahne argued for the development and maintenance of a self-help organization for international spouses in order to facilitate the creation of relationships, particularly for those who are new to the community.
While Schwartz and Kahne agree with De Verthelyi’s (1995) and Vogel’s (1986) conclusions about the isolated lives of SIS, Schwartz and Kahne commented, “the majority of the problems of newcomers are related to being outsiders, having family responsibilities, being institutionally unconnected, having their status almost exclusively determined by their spouse’s career commitments and being both transients in the community and in transition in their own lives” (p. 453).

While Schwartz and Kahne’s study (1993) reflected the personal challenges that accompanying spouses face, the adjustment in their careers and the subsequent identity change (from the professional sphere to the stay-at-home domestic sphere) reflected the findings of Kim (2006). On the other hand, while Kim’s discussion focused on the policies of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, for Schwartz and Kahne (1993), the problem was caused by the educational institutions which is reflected in “the absence of official acknowledgment of institutional responsibility for this group” (p. 451). For Schwartz and Kahne, if a university accepted a “formal responsibility” and provided programming for this group, much of the social and psychological difficulties could be resolved.

Schwartz and Kahne (1993) also contend the temporary nature of SIS and their families’ sojourn is another factor that adds to the difficulty of their transition. As opposed to immigrant families who view their sojourn as permanent, “these wives’ bridges are never fully burnt because a considerable portion of their energy must be expended in maintaining old ties” back home (p. 455). Another point that was confirmed by Schwartz and Kahne’s study was that when there are large numbers of co-nationals, adjustment experiences could be different than when there are none or too few co-nationals. As Adelman (1988) has theorized, sojourners tend to seek a support system when there are no co-nationals around
them. Conversely, when there are large pools of co-nationals, networking and support systems are created within that ethnic community, thereby reducing the need to seek friendship from locals. On the other hand, their increased need for friendship and networking could explain their tendency to stay within one’s own community. As Vogel (1986) indicated, women tend to form strong interdependence with friends and families in their own cultures.

The unique challenges that “women in transition” go through have also been documented by Bystydzienski and Resnik (1994). Examining the experiences of fourteen women students residing in a large Midwestern campus community, Bystydzienski and Resnik were interested in learning how sojourners go through cross-cultural transitions in terms of daily challenges and opportunities for adjustments. Even though some women explained that they lived in dormitories, their stories implied loneliness, isolation and even grief. Bystydzienski and Resnik attest, no matter how successful these women were, the sense of anxiety and “cultural homelessness” was strong. Confirming the personal and situational assumptions of Church (1982) and the unique cultural needs women may have and their strong bond to their friends and family (Vogel, 1986), the responses of these women were similar to the responses of international spouses of scholars who were interviewed by other researchers (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986). When comparing the adjustment process of SIS with other women sojourners, such as the women in Bystydzienski and Resnik’s book, one has to look at the special situation which SIS face. In contrast to women who come as students and therefore have the structure and stability of campus life (Vogel, 1986), the daily experience of SIS is very different.
Research on the cultural adjustment of spouses of graduate students at Western Canadian University (Martens & Grant, 2007) offered a divergent report. Initiated by the advisor of the International Students Office, the purpose of this quantitative study was to gather “information on the needs of spouses so that new programs developed by this group would be appropriate and effective” (p. 59). Because of funding constraints within the project, the study primarily focused on examining the three large ethnic communities (Iranians, Indians and Chinese) who resided in the area. There were very few differences in the adjustment experiences of the three groups, because most people “reported that that they had adequate levels of social support” (p. 59). Confirming what other sojourner researchers (Adelman, 1988; Furnham & Bochner, 1986) have said about the preference of co-nationals, especially in the initial stage of sojourning, they concluded the responses were influenced by the presence of large numbers of co-nationals who served as support groups for each other. Martens and Grant further concluded, “the needs of spouses with smaller conational networks might vary significantly from the needs of this sample because of the reduced opportunity for obtaining adequate conational support” (p. 59).

The adjustment literature views loneliness and isolation as two of the major difficulties that SIS experience. At the same time, the literature also suggests that because of the large numbers of SIS, their need for friendship and networking is related to the nurturing and socialization needs women tend to have (Bystydzienski & Resnik, 1994). Nevertheless, cross-cultural adjustment could also depend on the size of co-nationals. While the research suggests that sojourners who reside in a community of large co-nationals may have an easier time adjusting to their transition, relationships tend to build within similar ethnic communities. For those with very few co-nationals, the tendency to make friends with locals
seem to come easier, in part, because of the lack of alternative choices. But there is another scenario presented in the literature: with regard to SIS, a large number of them live isolated and lonely lives, often because there are no support services which give them access to locals. Unfortunately however, other problems stemming from physical isolation exist. In addition to the lack of access to economic and professional opportunities that accompanies their being pigeonholed into the domestic sphere, loneliness can damage sojourners’ emotional and psychological health.

**Mental and Physical Health**

It has been estimated that above twenty percent of international students in the United States are married, an estimate that has remained steady for decades (Bigler, 2007). The absence of information about SIS is particularly noticeable when it comes to the mental and physical health of these sojourners and how such conditions might impact their marriages. Hall (1978) first reported on the prevalence of international spouses in need of counseling and other health services. The purpose of Hall’s study was to determine the variables to successful coping for foreign students in America. He defined coping as “the behavior utilized by the individual to establish emotional security within a culture distinct from his or her own” (Hall, 1978, p. 4). Although Hall concluded that, “the number of percentage of foreign students who do not cope positively is unknown” (p. 14), he mentioned that, according to in depth analysis of foreign students, both international students and their spouses seem to experience a range of physical and psychological problems.

More recently, a few studies (Bigler, 2007; Chang, 2004; De Verthelyi, 1995; Shao, 2001) have noted the health dimension of accompanying spouses. In a study that focused on Chinese wives’ perceptions of their life in the U.S. while awaiting the completion of their
husbands’ graduate study, Shao (2001) found increasing incidents of marital tension due to adjustment problems and the spouse’s education issues. Correspondingly, De Verthelyi (1995) reported tension in the marital relationship arising from long separations between couples, as well as on the question of couples’ or individual’s decisions to immigrate to the United States. In other words, when there has been a prolonged separation between the couple, or when the female spouse arrived later, wives tended to feel more dependent on the husbands, which led to tense relationships and misunderstandings. Bigler (2007) also conducted a study of distress on international spouses, examining the significance of the quality of marital relationships during sojourning. Bigler said, “marital satisfaction and the quality of marital relationship serves as a salient concomitant in the cultural adjustment process of spouses and needs to be taken into account by university officials in their work with international students and spouses alike” (p. 95). However, tension within the marriage is not the only challenge that families of international students face during their sojourn. Adjusting to the change in their status—from professionals to housewives—constitutes a significant factor affecting accompanying spouses.

**Status Change and Identity Struggle**

The issue of role changes in the status of the SIS has been noted as one of the causes of difficulties sojourners face (Day, 2003; De Verthelyi, 1995; Martens & Grant, 2007; Pence, 2004; Vogel, 1986). Particularly, in Kim’s (2006) study, the frustration and dissatisfaction that some SIS expressed have been very explicit. The intensity of frustration that Kim discovered among her interviewees compelled her to characterize the sojourners’ situation as being “forced careworkers.” Similarly, Day (2003) also noted a distinction in the way her interviewees defined their identities with regard to how they felt back home and how
they felt here in the United States. Day observed that many of her interviewees presented a major shift in their identity and status (from a professional to that of a homemaker). Similarly, Shao (2001) and Lo (1993) also have documented the sudden status changes that interviewees felt they had to endure when they arrived in the States. Shao commented that while her research participants were highly educated women, such changes in their identities and the absence of opportunity led them at times into “grief and resentment” (p. 19).

The comment made by Vogel (1986) regarding the high professional level of her interviewees residing in the Cambridge area revealed similar assessments. Although some of her interviewees reported experiencing cultural bias, which many times made them feel like they were less educated and poor communicators in English, many were medical doctors who happened to be stay-at-home spouses during their sojourn. Unfortunately however, these are the kind of facts that never get captured about SIS, because of the lack of research interest in studying this group.

To be fair, the issue of role changes and the associated frustration of the non-student spouses is non-existent in the earlier literature. For example, one of the earliest studies on this group was conducted by Baldwin (1969) of Florida State University. Perhaps reflecting the societal values and gender roles of the time, her study did not mention issues of frustration resulting from role changes in the way it was described by later researchers (e.g., Kim, 2006; Pence, 2004; Swartz & Vogel, 1986). Baldwin interviewed a group of international spouses who sojourned in Gainesville area. The women in her study expressed a wide range of concerns, which she categorized as urgent and long-term. Among other things, Baldwin criticized the orientation programs of the university because they failed to address the women’s needs. While expectations of the role of accompanying spouses could
have been strongly traditional during Baldwin’s study (in the 1960s), even back then, women revealed discontent regarding their isolation. Reflecting the gender roles of the time, the responses of her interviewees revealed their strong desires and obligations to meet their families’ basic needs (e.g., finding affordable clothing, food and other necessities) and their overall sense of playing a supportive role to their families.

Even though Baldwin’s 1969 study assumed that the primary gender role played by SIS was as caretakers of the family, her study shed significant light on some of the issues that are still being discussed regarding SIS. For example, she recommended that institutions must help this group, both in the short- and long-term scope. Baldwin explained that once SIS become able to meet their families’ basic needs, institutions should adopt long-term planning to help the women, and that these plans should include services, such as psychological orientation, counseling and preventive low-cost healthcare programs, which would help the spouses to develop self confidence. Central to the issue of supporting SIS is how to understand the need for supporting them. While status change and the ensuing frustration of sojourners have been part of the focus of the literature on SIS, barriers to spousal adjustment has been viewed from various angles.

**Views on Barriers to Spousal Adjustment**

The notion of facing a barrier has been scrutinized with various explanations in the discussion about SIS and the challenges they go through during their sojourn. Barriers are viewed as factors that affect the adaptation process for the spouses of international students. For example, Schwartz and Kahne (1993) view a “barrier” as a lack of physical and social access to the university community. Because of this disconnectedness between international spouses and the university community, as mentioned in a previous discussion about the
“invisibility” of SIS, Schwartz and Kahne characterize the situation of SIS by saying, “although these women are in the community, they are not of it” (p. 454). Correspondingly, for other researchers (Harvey, 1985; Shafer & Harrison, 2001), the absence of routine and familiar settings that student/professional spouses enjoy can be a strong barrier for the adjustment of SIS. For Pence (2004), academic institutions are responsible for fostering the distance that has existed between campus communities and spouses of international students who live in the “margins.” Pence concluded that instead of promoting multicultural community building and services, academic institutions have adopted a corporate style of business, in “which institutionalized system of individualism has a tendency to push the need for a community building on the back-burner of organizations’ priorities” (p. 3).

For Kim (2006), the barriers to SIS economic and social well being are solely the result of immigration policies which categorize them as “dependents.” Kim further discusses how this policy is rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth century property ownership rights, when “political rhetoric on citizenship and economic independence was linked with political freedom and became gender specific so as to establish the prerogatives of white masculinity; at the same time, all women and Blacks were perceived dependents” (p. 163). Therefore, for Kim, since large numbers of international spouses are women, their restriction into the private sphere seems apparent to a casual observer as being simply each sojourner’s individual circumstances. However Kim maintains the immigration rules actually foster this condition by restricting the SIS position to that of dependency.

Despite the general neglect of spouses in the cross-cultural adjustment literature, the issue of facing a barrier is among the frequently mentioned themes. However, while some scholars view barriers as a result of neglect by academic institutions (De Verthelyli, 1995;
Pence, 2004; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986), Kim (2006) maintains that the policies of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services are primarily responsible for this circumstance. On the other hand, in the general literature of sojourners (Church, 1982), person and situation factors (e.g., language and cultural distance/similarity) are discussed as most salient barriers to acculturation. Other factors mentioned as barriers include finances, ethnic discrimination, loneliness and homesickness.

**Conclusion**

In spite of decades of absence from the literature, interest in studying the experiences of SIS is slowly growing. Perhaps reflecting the significance of international issues within U.S. higher education, after a long lag since Baldwin’s (1969) study, the last decade has seen a modest increase in research about SIS. At the same time, while knowledge on the issues affecting SIS is advancing, much remains unexplored about this constituency. Much of the research available on the topic suggests this group remains unattractive, in part because of “the absence of official acknowledgement of institutional responsibility for this group” (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993, p. 461).

In looking at the thematic areas of research, the increase in the diversity of topics is observable, and knowledge is expanding. A closer look at findings in the literature suggests that contemporary themes have been emerging, and that there have been changes in the research dialogue. Some of these changes include:

- The perception about SIS has been shifting away from thinking of them as home makers toward viewing them as professionals.
- The successful adjustment of spouses is pivotal to the academic achievement of the student spouses.
• Adjustment is viewed as dependent on personal abilities, such as language skills, situational factors and cultural closeness.

• Availability of social support highly determines the ability to adjust.

• Sojourners with large numbers of co-nationals are likely to have an easier adjustment within their own community.

On the whole, the research seems to suggest the importance of understanding the needs for programming and implementing services to ease the sojourning experience of international students and their families. Clearly, directly and indirectly, the decades-old practice of restricting SIS concerns to the domestic sphere has come under repeated criticism. While there is a growing acknowledgement of the economic and cultural benefits of this constituency, empirical studies documenting these facts (within academic communities) are not yet available. Assessment of the economic gains for communities through the influx of international students and spouses could be one area for future study.

Another area of research is the exploration of effective programs and their implementation to assist this group. Research has shown (Altbach, 2004; 2007; Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Norman Soutar, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004) that higher education institutions are realizing the presence of international students to be beneficial to their overall internationalization activities. However, given that many academic institutions are public institutions, could it be argued that they have an ethical and moral responsibility to assist SIS? On the other hand, given that any new services that institutions could provide would require new expenses, what kind of services would be satisfactory to SIS and how do universities view those commitments? This dissertation aims to contribute to the literature
by exploring these issues further. Employing a feminist research approach, this study examines how and why universities need to employ effective programs and services.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

To restate, the purpose of this study is to examine the daily experiences of the spouses of international students residing with a legally dependent status. The study explores the institutional and social factors that the spouses perceive to be influential in their sojourning experiences. This research expands existing knowledge on SIS, based on their views and opinions regarding their day-to-day experiences as legally dependent sojourners. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, I discuss the methodological assumptions that inform my study: the research relationship, the importance of reflexivity, the use of these women’s voices and experiences as a source of epistemology, exploratory assumptions and the importance of taking action by looking at policy implications of research findings. Second, this chapter presents the method: the research process, the research instrument, the importance of complimentarity, demographic information and the profiles of the participants.

Feminist Methodological Theory

My choice of methodology was an important step in the production of meaningful research for examining the circumstance of women living in a forced dependency. The decision to employ a certain methodology is related not only to the nature and objective of the research, but also to the desires researchers have in understanding certain experiences, through which they themselves have lived. As Bloom (1998) has remarked, a chosen methodology reflects and is profoundly ingrained in the beliefs, experiences and values the researcher brings to the study. I came to the decision to employ a feminist methodology for my research because it is an appropriate approach to uncover the silencing and marginalization of women—a subject that I have been studying for several years. As various feminists (Acker, Barry, & Essevold, 1991; Bloom, 1998; Collins, 1990; DeVault, 1999;
Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987; 2005; Taylor & Rupp, 1991; Westkott, 1979) have concurred, adopting a feminist methodology when inquiring about women not only uncovers the silencing of women, but also simultaneously uncovers the relations of social and political powers that influence women’s daily experiences. Lugones and Spelman (2005) claimed that employing feminist theory to study women’s conditions is significant because feminist theory “presupposes [that] the silencing [of women] is unjust and that there are particular ways of remedying this injustice” (p. 19).

I employed a feminist methodology because the process of uncovering women’s marginalization involves both the researcher and the researched in creating new knowledge with an egalitarian and ethical process of negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment. Entering into the lives of my participants—a group of women living with compulsory dependency—I was reminded of Denzin’s (1989) concept of all lives as products of their broader socio-political system. I recognized that our life experiences (both mine and those of my participants) are the outcomes of our encounters through economic, social, political and other interactions with society. Also, during our discussions, as my participants discovered significant moments in their lives, which Denzin (1997) has called “epiphanic moments” (p. 208), the taken-for-grant worlds of gendered experiences and conflicting feelings were revealed. Further, as women who were made to live in conditions of invisibility and isolation, most of the participants realized their perception of gender ideology, which they felt was responsible for their segregation into the household, revealed understandings of their experiences that might otherwise remain hidden. For that reason, as Lather (1986) suggests, I perceive feminist methodology in research as praxis. Thus, while feminist theory and
methodology illuminates the experiences of silenced people, validating these experiences is a form of empowerment.

Embracing a feminist research methodology was significant for my study because it allowed me to use humility and openness to get into the lives of my participants. The process also allowed me to reflect on my own history, values, and social position. Since this methodology enabled my participants to recount their daily experience of living on a legally dependent visa, and thereby create knowledge about their conditions, such a study is bound to be empowering at an individual level through the process of naming what they perceive to be as their problems. Similarly, findings from this study could be transformative because of the potential contribution to the literature on sojourners, as well as to policy debates regarding the nature of international students in higher education. As Harding (1987) asserted, in feminist research, women, reflecting about their own daily struggles and the forces that influence their lives, seek ways to transform the structures that contribute to oppression. Therefore, my study contributes to the construction of knowledge that can be used by women themselves, subsequently contributing to their liberation.

For me, as I learned to listen to the circumstances of women residing in a legally dependent status, using feminist theory and methodology allowed me to use gender as a “lens” in order to comprehend the socially and historically constructed place for women who come to the U.S. as accompanying spouses. To this end, the work of various feminists (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991; Bloom, 1998; Collins, 1990; Hartsock, 1998; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1986; Rogers, 1980; Smith, 1987; 2005) have been influential in educating me and in opening my eyes to the importance of using gender, race and class to critique political, social and historical spaces that women are forced to occupy. Furthermore, as the feminist
sociologist Smith (2005) explained, the theory of using gender as a focal point is a way of “asking how, and why social processes, standards, and opportunities differ systematically in women and men” (p. x). In the same way, as this study attempts to bring to light the silencing of women living in the isolated space of a legally dependent visa, focusing on gender elucidates one aspect (among others, such as race, class and nationality) of the forces of hegemony and injustice that continue to affect women’s daily experiences.

Another important benefit of using a feminist methodology is that researchers reflecting on their own experiences with regard to social and political relations that affect their lives wish to challenge, and even to change, the social and political structures that perpetuate their circumstances through that research. Lather (1986) maintained, the “overt ideological goal of a feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (p. 571).

Using this approach offered an opportunity for some participants to reflect on the "transformations" and tensions in their lives due to social, economic and professional changes. Some feminist researchers (e.g., Mies, 1991) have suggested those studying women’s lives at life-changing or “rupture” moments, such as domestic violence, childbirth, divorce and rape, may influence participants’ reflection of these moments and the impact on their consciousness. In other words, when feminist researchers examine the lives of women respondents regarding a major event in their lives, the process is likely to have an effect whereby the impacts of the phenomena are interrogated. For the participants in my study, as they recounted the social, economic and psychological changes in their lives (before and after arriving in the U.S.), their own consciousness was raised through the process. As these
women reflected on the changes that had taken place in their daily experiences and the choices they made either to stay or to follow their husbands at the end of their stay, consciousnesses raising led to understanding and empowerment.

Finally, in my choice of a feminist methodology, I concur with feminist author Harding (1987). According to Harding, in feminist research, the demand to understand women’s situations are emphasized in the need for taking a step to end certain conditions. While feminist research engages in a critical examination of certain conditions affecting women, the liberation of women from these conditions is the broader objective. For me, as I sought to create new knowledge about women, using the narratives of my participants, I was aware that my objective was not in looking for the “real truth” about their situation. Instead, I hoped to change their conditions by exposing the institutional and social forces that continued to influence their sojourn. Feminist methodology not only seeks to uncover knowledge using women’s personal experiences and narratives, but also seeks social justice and change. It is my goal, and another justification for a feminist approach to this study, to use my findings to advocate for, and to seek active ways to, change the current social and legal conditions for accompanying spouses.

**Women’s Voices and Experience as a Primary Source of Data**

The use of women’s experiences as a primary source of data is a common feature of feminist methodology (Acker, Barry, & Essveld, 1991; Bloom, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Mies, 1991). Postmodern feminists, whose work inform my own, reject the idea of “truth” and the nature of reality as uniform, contending that there are multiple ways of knowing. As opposed to the “modern,” where reality is assumed to be fixed and universal, postmodern perspectives view the human experience as one filled with ambiguity, fragmentation and
multiplicity (Merriam, 2002). In the same way, even though all of the participants in this study were females, I recognized the diverse possibilities in the meanings they gave to their experiences, due to the differences in their cultural, familial and other socio-economic factors. In spite of this diversity of views and opinions, however, I believe, as Bloom (1998) has noted, “examining women’s experiences as sources of research data asserts that women, as researchers and researched, are producers of knowledge” (p. 145). In my research, focusing on the lived experiences of my participants elucidates their ongoing subjectivities and the relationships between their lives and social values and institutional policies. Through the stories told, women create a different way of looking at their circumstances—one far removed from the traditional “happy housewife” image.

As Mies (1991) declared, the emphasis on women’s experiences as a starting point for generating feminist assumptions is critical for feminist methodology, because the term ‘experiences,’ “denotes more than specific, momentary, individual involvement. It denotes the sum of the process [through which] individuals or groups [have gone] in the production of their lives; it denotes their reality and their history” (p. 66). The daily experiences of accompanying spouses communicate the ongoing process of economic, social, political and institutional relations of these individuals (or the group) to a society at large that simply views them as housewives.

Understanding their daily lives as accompanying spouses who have crossed multiple social and geographical borders (their own culture and the culture of others) requires “connecting the dots” of the socio-political and economic relations of society at large. While the goal of using gender as an investigative group is to invalidate patriarchal domination in order bring change, the process (of using gender) reveals how individuals’ lives are entangled
within institutional policies and social beliefs. That is why, Bloom (1998) remarked, when women are allowed to narrate their stories, they
demonstrate how women negotiate their ‘exceptional’ gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime; and, they make possible the examination of the links between the evolution of subjectivity and its shift and changes and the development of female identity. (p. 146)

For this reason, women’s lived experiences and their resulting identities are substantiated in feminist research through the stories they tell about themselves and the situations they have experienced. In the process, each individual creates her own truth about her life’s journey and the challenges and opportunities that have influenced her. That is the reason why feminist methodology encourages and validates what women put into words about themselves and the world around them.

In drawing together narratives of lived experiences from my participants, my research has been transformative in the sense that it has allowed me to propose recommendations in order to change their circumstances. As I listened to their stories, the feminist-interview approach allowed me to enter into the lives of my participants and to acknowledge their subjectivities with humility and trustworthiness. Therefore, the relationships I was able to build through the research process have helped me to understand how their experiences (here in the U.S. and in their own countries) have influenced their identities. In the same way, the process has allowed me to reflect on my own journey in life. For that reason, I am convinced a feminist approach to research, besides giving voice and empowerment to the researched, also allows the researcher to use her own life as a site for social change (Harding, 1998).
Finally, as I examine and seek to understand the impact of what it means to live as a woman in a legally dependent status, all aspects of feminist research principles have been important in the creation of the personal stories of my interviewees. Also, as some authors (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have commented regarding the importance of the principles and personal beliefs of the researcher, my own background and experience were relevant in the discovery of knowledge about my participants. Because I am an immigrant woman from Africa, recognizing my own experience in the broader social world required me to approach my participants’ worlds with humbleness and equality.

Following the seven principles based on Bloom’s (1998) work, for me, the significance and strength of the characteristics of feminist research methodology to study women’s issues could be summed up this way:

1. Feminist methodology should break down the one-way hierarchical framework of traditional interviewing techniques. Feminist interviews should be engaged, interactive, and open-ended. Feminist interviews should strive for intimacy from which long lasting relationships may develop. Feminist interviews are dialogic in that both the researcher and respondents reveal themselves and reflect on these disclosures.

2. Feminist researchers give focused attention to and non-judgmental validation of respondents’ personal narratives.

3. Feminist researchers assume that what the respondents tell is true and that their participation is grounded in a sincere desire to explore their experiences.

4. In feminist methodology, the traditional “stranger-friend” continuum may be lengthened to a “stranger-friend-surrogate family” continuum, which can allow
the connection between women to be a source of both intellectual and personal knowledge.

5. Identification with respondents enhances a researcher’s interpretive abilities, rather than jeopardizes them.

6. Through working closely with another woman, particularly a feminist, a sense of identification with her may emerge that can be a powerful source of insight.

7. Feminist researchers strive for egalitarian relationships with their respondents by making space for them to narrate their stories as they desire, by returning transcripts to the respondents so they can participate in interpretation and by respecting the editorial wishes of the respondents regarding the final product or text. (p. 17)

The topic for this study, the daily experiences of female spouses who sojourn with a legally dependent visa, is a topic that cannot be understood simply by using an approach that puts distance between the researcher and the participants. Instead, it is the research relationship that engenders the trustworthiness, which in turn allows women to narrate their stories to other women. In this study, the conversation about personal experiences was not a space where the women felt inhibited and disempowered. Rather, similar to De Vault’s (1984) understanding, the feminist research approach was important to my study, because the process allowed me to attempt egalitarian conversation where participants displayed moments of awareness of their daily situations through women-to-women talk. I am aware that feminist research principles are not restricted to investigating problems related to women alone. Instead, according to Smith (1987), feminist methodologies are equally important when examining the problems of all marginalized groups. For this study, as I examined the
women’s narratives regarding their experiences, I realized a special space in terms of self-
reflection, trust and reciprocal relationship, which both characterized this methodology and
allowed me to obtain the findings.

**Interviewing as a Feminist Approach**

Increasingly, feminist researchers view interviewing as the primary process by which
researchers seek the involvement of their respondents to generate new information (Reinharz,
1992). According to Reinharz, the interviewing approach “offers the researcher access to
people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the
researcher” (p. 19). For my research, the feminist interviewing principle enabled free and
reciprocated interaction between the researcher and the researched, and provided
opportunities for clarification, discussion and “co-authorship” of new knowledge about the
situation of the participants.

Because interviewing is a popular approach for data gathering by a wide range of
interest groups, including individuals, businesses and government agencies, Fontana and
Frey (2005) suggest caution, noting that gaining trust of the respondent is pivotal to the
quality of data collected. Also, since respondents are not always comfortable in making their
opinions known, especially about their personal lives, Fontana and Frey contend that
respondents’ trust is a very important factor in creating candid responses. In my research, as
women-speaking-to-women, my participants and I were able to engage in a shared dialogue
within the context of gender issues, and in relation to the significance of support systems,
appropriate services and the possibility of academic institutions offering programs and
services.
As a research method in general, interviewing allows for the creation of knowledge about women by substantiating their lived experiences, and allows subjects to tell their own stories (Chase, 2005; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). In my study, allowing women to narrate their stories and experiences gave me an entry into their worlds by learning from their “recollections, ideas, and thoughts” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). According to Reinharz, allowing women to tell their own stories is particularly important because, “this way of learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or have men speak for them” (p. 19).

The principle of building a reciprocal relationship with participants was pivotal in building sincere and open discussion between me (as the researcher) and my research subjects. As an immigrant woman who has experienced the distress of living with a restricted visa, my own personal experience was important to the research, because it induced self-reflexivity, which enabled me to situate myself within my subjects’ narratives. During the interviews, my initial disclosure of my own story was important in removing the sense of hierarchy and power between us. Thus, I believe that providing knowledge about who I was as an interviewer created a degree of comfort for the participants to converse freely. For this reason, the confidence that our relationships created in the research process initiated a “true dialogue” by motivating participants to become co-authors of their own stories in collaborative conversations.

**Feminist Research and the Implications for Policy Changes**

Because the ultimate goal of feminist research is the liberation of women from their marginalized position, I recognize the significance of public policy in affecting change. Mies (1991) particularly emphasized the significance of feminist research to policy integration in
order to make a difference in the condition of women. While the goal of feminist research includes the uncovering of certain conditions, it is by advocating at a policy level that some conditions can change permanently.

The action oriented nature and link between qualitative research and policy change has been noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). According to Denzin and Lincoln, “qualitative researchers can isolate target populations, show the immediate effects of certain programs on such groups, and isolate the constraints that operate against policy changes in such settings” (p. 26). Whether evaluating a current program for women in certain situations or researching a certain issue, the action-oriented aspect of feminist research is reflected in the way feminists aim to publicize their findings. For instance, Lipman-Blumen (1984) maintained the importance of developing research techniques and reporting strategies to communicate to policy makers. Feminists advocate for change in certain conditions of women (and research subjects in general) by advocating for change based on findings from their research. As a result, throughout history, feminist researchers and other advocates have been able to play a significant role in social and political policy formation of a range issues that have affected (and continue to affect) women and girls, such as domestic violence, rape, poverty, education and other oppressive conditions.

This study views the importance of action through developing recommendations and advocating for policy change in order to transform the current circumstances of SIS. I intend to communicate the findings from this study to university administrators and financiers of international education, with the hope of inspiring the creation of new policies related to programs and services that would positively affect the lives of SIS and their community experiences.
Exploratory Assumptions

The research assumptions for this inquiry were varied and reflected my own past and values, as well as my knowledge of the structural marginalization of women. I approached this inquiry with the following assumptions:

- The lack of acknowledgment about the needs of the spouses of international students is highly likely associated with the belief that these women are uneducated and professionally inexperienced. The revelation of knowledge about their background and qualifications as accompanying spouses would be one outcome of the research process.

- Even though migrating to the U.S. is often associated with positive experiences (e.g., investment in education or gain of economic opportunities), the challenges facing SIS makes them different from all other groups.

- Gender bias within the policies of financiers and educational institutions has been identified as overlooking the needs and potential of women (Stromquist, 2006; 1991). From the beginning, international education policy makers have failed to realize that providing outside-the-home opportunities to these women in order to expand their social, educational and professional roles could contribute to the improvement of all members of the family.

- Spouses of international students are left in their situations because, from the very beginning, the term ‘wife’ implied that the women are busy taking care of their children (Baldwin, 1969). The revelation of their family size could communicate a contemporary portrait of a spouse of an international student and the choice of the family size for the couple.
• Although international student spouses are believed to be sources of psychological and social support to the scholar spouses (Baldwin, 1969), this responsibility would be better served when they themselves are content.

• Academic institutions have never developed relationships with spouses of international students in the form of programs and services primarily because there is a strong belief that community volunteers are meeting the needs of this group.

• The education and professional experiences that most SIS possess are unlikely to make a difference in terms of the social isolation and economic marginalization they are likely to face (De Verthelyi, 1995). Alternatively, these isolated conditions reflect the fact that they are neglected and marginalized in the following ways: (1) unless they are able to interact with locals through some opportunities, years of sojourning in the U.S. is unlikely to benefit them in terms of learning about American values and culture. Instead, as Bystydzienski and Resnik have pointed out, these sojourners are very likely to feel “culturally homeless” (p. 5). Otherwise stated, rather than experiencing a feeling of being part of the community, due to their isolated lives, they are likely to return home with little or no involvement with Americans (Pence, 2004); (2) marginality might imply a perception about local people as being indifferent toward them; (3) marginal life could also be viewed as a lack of knowledge these women have about their own rights. For example, if there are domestic problems such as violence and abuse, spouses are entitled to certain rights. Since they know that
their residency is dependent on the situation of the scholar spouse, they are likely
to assume that they have no rights.

**Research Questions**

The above statements were the assumptions I had when framing the research problem. I employed the questions below to allow the sojourners to narrate their own stories regarding their daily experiences as accompanying spouses. In order to generate responses about the diverse aspects of their sojourning experiences, the all-embracing research question was stated as follows:

What are the salient factors affecting the day-to-day lives of the spouses of international students in a large Midwestern campus community? Probing questions then enabled further investigation of the problem:

- What are SIS perceptions of their adjustment and transition and how this process has been affected positively or negatively due to the level of academic institutions’ participation?
- How do SIS view the role of a community volunteer group and the capacities of this network in providing support to international spouses?
- What are the views and opinions of SIS with regard to the potential roles that academic institutions should play in their sojourning lives?
- What are the opinions and views of SIS concerning the supportive role that they are assumed to play, and how does this relationship affect their experiences as sojourners?
- What recommendations in terms of programs and services do SIS suggest to assist in their sojourning needs?
Method and Data Collection

To understand the daily experiences of living in a legally dependent status, data were collected by employing semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted between two and a half to three hours. In addition, data gathering for this research involved taking field notes, which were created during various opportunities where I participated in community activities involving the accompanying spouses.

Because the circumstances of international spouses have implications for university administrators and volunteers networks alike, separate interviews were conducted with two other individuals: a mid-level administrator in the university and a local volunteer group coordinator. Because of my contact with the community volunteer group, multiple interviews and conversations were conducted with the coordinator. However, the administrator was interviewed once in person, followed by an email communication.

Making use of contacts is an accepted form of obtaining access to participants in qualitative research (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). For this study, the local volunteer network for which I have served as a volunteer was a resource in providing me access to participants. My participation in the community volunteer group also gave me an opportunity for observation. My relationship with this network made it possible to access two different groups of international spouses: (1) women whose husbands are currently students and (2) women whose husbands are no longer students (instead, the husbands are now in their professional phase after accepting jobs in the community or within the university).

The purpose for focusing on these two groups of women was to evaluate both the long- and short-term situations women experience when they come as accompanying
spouses. In other words, while each group faced very similar situations at a certain points, these situations changed with time, revealing the long-term impacts of their legally dependent experiences. Examining how the everyday experiences were connected and maintained by social and bureaucratic institutions revealed the social, economic and emotional situations that contributed to the women’s experiences (Fine & Wise, 2005; Oakley, 1981; Smith, 2005).

I shared my own experience with all of the participants prior to beginning the interview to explain why I was interested in this topic. Due to time constraints, unless participants requested more information about me, I kept my story at a minimum. But, in line with a feminist research approach, I made sure that participants were welcome to ask and that I would be willing to answer any question about myself. On one hand, I believe this created a degree of comfort and context, and a relationship with participants (DeVault, 1999). However, I am also aware that the relationships researchers develop with their participants can create controversy, specifically regarding the generation of authentic responses. While researchers such as Segura (1989) emphasized the importance of building relationships with research participants, other researchers (e.g., Zimmerman, 1977) have asserted that their research benefited from the fact that there was no relationship between researchers and the researched. Following Segura’s standpoint, I believe the creation of this shared communication enabled us to remove the sense of power and distance associated with “othering” participants (Fine & Weis, 1998) while conducting research.

The participants represented diverse backgrounds of women who came as accompanying spouses. In this study, by incorporating women from different socio-cultural backgrounds, I tried consciously to portray both the central points of their visa status and the
stories behind each woman’s experience accurately. Further, having representation of women from different countries was important because the research reveals, in addition to gender, how the socio-economic background and their own values might have contributed to their views and opinions regarding their sojourn. I transcribed the interviews after each meeting, and subsequently sent a summary of the interview to each participant. The data gathered from the interviews with the spouses was complemented by information from two groups related to SIS: an administrator of the area’s academic institution and the community volunteer organization’s coordinator. Because of the nature of my research, it was important to collect data from multiple sources to ensure the reliability of the study’s findings.

**Complementary Sources**

To supplement the stories of study participants and to give multiple views on the problem, I expanded the interview process to include other groups related to SIS. Supplementary data were gathered through additional interviews with representatives of two types of institutions pertinent to SIS: academic institutions and community volunteer organizations that have been reaching out to the group for years. By gathering and analyzing data between these sources, I aimed to ensure greater data reliability and internal validity (Merriam, 2002). Each group brought a different perspective to my research question. While the interviews with the twelve spouses revealed their views and opinions regarding their daily lives, the information from the volunteer representative offered a historical perspective on the relationship between SIS and community networks. In the same way, input on the position of the academic institution regarding this group was vital, because as the community volunteer network continued to weaken for a range of reasons revealed in this
study, learning about the willingness of university administrators to provide appropriate programs and services was crucial.

The two additional interviews involved a mid-level administrator in the Office of Student Services and the coordinator of a local volunteer group. The data gathered from these two additional sources enriched the information generated from the narratives of the sojourners. From Esterberg’s (2002) examples on how a study based on interviewing could be complemented by observational data or historical documents, I felt that information on the circumstances of SIS coming from these two groups—university administration and community volunteers—was very important. The findings from these three groups contribute different understandings of how we may evaluate the daily challenges and opportunities that SIS face.

**The Open-ended Interview as an Instrument**

Recognizing that the significance of socio-cultural differences among the participants might inhibit some of them from speaking comfortably about certain aspects of their life experiences, I used open-ended interview questions. Open-ended questions have served as preferred interviewing practices for various reasons. For example, Reinharz (1992) asserted that, “the use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives” (p. 18). Because the nature of the questions are not strictly arranged, this approach allows respondents to discuss their experiences comfortably, without being concerned about following a strict protocol for their responses.

Similarly, Roberts (1981) supported the use of open-ended interviews for interviewing women. According to Roberts, since women’s experiences are embedded in
structurally silenced positions (such as being forced into stay-at-home roles) and excluded from economic, educational and other opportunities, open-ended interviews allow them to recount their stories authentically. Open-ended interviews offered access to “nonstandardized” but long ignored needs, concerns and daily experiences from women’s own perspectives. Other benefits of an open-ended interview are in the ways such interviews “allow researchers to make differences among people” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). Since open-ended questions allow each participant to discuss issues within their comfortable level, this approach allows the interviewer to rephrase or create probing questions depending on what is said or not said to probe for information that may normally remain hidden.

Informed by Esterberg’s (2002) recommendation for designing interview questions, I developed the Interview Guide (Appendix A) with a set of open-ended questions intended to induce conversation about the issues surrounding SIS. In order to understand their views of their everyday lives in the context of dependent visas and the social isolation of being accompanying spouses, the questions were meant to evoke responses on a range of issues. Further, the questions allowed the participants to narrate their stories by comparing their daily experiences now (in the U.S.) with the way they once lived back home in terms of (1) the level of support system they were used to, (2) the aspects of a support system they miss most, (3) the way they now perceive their daily lives and status, (4) the support network they now receive through volunteers and (5) their views on the level of academic institution’s involvement with regard to their sojourning experience. Customary to most interviews, our discussions often began with demographic questions (e.g., education, professional background, age, country of origin and so on).
Requests were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to conduct the interviews. Accordingly, after approval of the IRB, signed consent forms were presented to each interviewee. My source in locating interviewees was the coordinator of the local network with whom I maintained ongoing contact. Once I received the respondents’ names and contact information, the interview process proceeded similarly to what Esterberg (2002) called “formal interviews,” as opposed to spontaneous interviews.

When needed, I provided transportation to respondents and we went to neutral interview venues, which included cafés and university classrooms. At other times, I went to their homes—and a few of the respondents did come to my home to participate in the interviews. I met two women more than once because I used their narratives for other projects (Readers Theater and a project on interviewing techniques). All others were interviewed in an in-depth fashion, lasting between two and a half to three hours. I provided all participants the chance to review copies of their interview transcripts for accuracy.

The Research Site

This research was conducted in a large Midwestern university community. The university has a long tradition of attracting international students from a number of countries. According to the university's fact book, for the 2007-2008 academic year, the total number of students amounted to 26,856 with 2,490 international students from 105 different countries. With large numbers of students from three ethnic communities (Chinese, Indians, and South Koreans), the number of students include all those who are pursuing graduate, undergraduate and professional studies.

While official data are unavailable for the accurate number of accompanying spouses residing in the area, it is estimated that over 350 are residing in the community at the current
2009/2010 academic year (anecdotal statement by the volunteers coordinator). This community organization has a long history of welcoming and fostering relationships with international spouses. I initially met the group in 1998 when I moved to the area. Through the years, I became closely acquainted with the volunteers especially with the coordinator of the group. At various times, I attended social gatherings and conversation meetings. The volunteer network has been instrumental in providing me access to participants for various projects. When I informed the coordinator about my interest in interviewing SIS, she sent messages on my behalf, to her list of contacts and eventually many agreed to participate.

**Interviewees**

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms. The descriptions below represent some demographic details of the interviewees. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted for this research, including twelve accompanying spouses, one administrator, and one volunteer organizer. The nationalities of the twelve spouses of international students who came to the Midwestern university community are Kazakhstani, Dutch, Argentinean, Mexican, Indian, Russian, Kenyan, Chinese (2), Chilean, Bangladeshi and Japanese.
As seen in Table 1, the characteristics of the interviewees represent a wide range of ages and professional qualifications. Participants were all educated, and close to fifty percent of them had earned a graduate-level education. In addition, with the exception of two participants, Nasrin from Bangladesh and Basu from Kazakhstan, most of the women had professional experiences prior to coming to the U.S.

The twelve women represented the characteristics of international women spouses at various stages of their lives: several women in the group (Basu, Alexandra, Tanya, Mindy, Heidi, Chiyo, and Frances) were awaiting the completion of their husbands’ studies. On the other hand, Roxana and Nasrin were settled in the community with their families (after their husbands had received professional offers), while Gita and her husband had just started
working and living in the community (he had been offered a postdoctoral position). The other two interviewees, Ingrid and Manuela, were living as single mothers—both were divorced, and their husbands had returned to their respective countries.

In addition to the interviews conducted with the twelve women, I also conducted two interviews designed to triangulate the data. Interviews were conducted with a mid-level administrator in the International Students Office at the university. Also, the coordinator of the local volunteer network was a resource in providing information about the history and current capacity of the volunteer network. To offer further insight into the profiles of international spouses, the next section presents detailed descriptions of the interviewees.

**Summary of Participants Profile**

The purpose of this section is to offer the reader additional background information on the participants. These individual profiles were created with the data from the interviews, and this section offers a summary of each of the 12 women, including their education, family life in their home countries, professional circumstances and future outlook for them and their families.

The ages of the 12 participants ranged from 26 years to 46 years-old; their respective stages in life and circumstances were also quite varied: the younger respondents currently maintained a status as SIS and most of them had no children, while the five older respondents were settled in the community either permanently or on short-term assignments (e.g., the postdoctoral husband), and four out of the five had children. From the five who had settled in the area, two, Ingrid and Manuela, were divorced, and both of their husbands had returned to their respective countries.
The following text represents their profiles, using information from interviews, including direct quotes from our conversations. As previously indicated, all names are substituted with pseudonyms.

**Basu:**

Born and raised in the Kazakhstan, at the time of this study, Basu had lived 6 years in the U.S. and she had just turned 28. Basu was very busy taking care of her two children and stated that, “after staying at home for three years, I decided to use the time to start a family.” Her story was common among all interviewees, in that almost all of them mentioned that part of the decision to have children was related to the lack of opportunities outside the home. Basu majored in mathematics when she went to college back home, and she said pursuing higher education was expected of her, given the strong intellectual role models of both her parents. She said, “I grew up in a family where both my parents are professors . . . My father, an engineer and my mother in linguistics.” Throughout her conversation, Basu spoke of her high regard for people she views as intellectuals. Basu said her favorite subject has always been mathematics, and that she was once a champion of a mathematics competition for her school. Unfortunately however, she commented that her dream of becoming like her mother and her father is dwindling due to an extended inability to continue her studies. This is how she put the future: “Sometimes, my husband jokes that my brain is frozen (she laughs) . . . I am not sure about what I can do anymore because I feel like I have been away from studying for too many years . . . I do not think I can handle what I used to solve when I was younger.”
Chiyo:

Chiyo is a former teacher from Japan; she was 33 years old, and had lived four years in the U.S. at the time of this interview. Her story was similar to many of the participants in the way that she valued, and drew a strong identity from, her career. Chiyo described her upbringing and her parents’ value of education as follows: “I am the oldest of two girls and we were raised with a strong value for education . . . . Culturally (as Japanese), we revere those in professions such as teaching because Japanese people believe that a generation is as strong as its educator . . . . [My] parents were supportive of our education and they were also supportive of whatever we wanted to focus on as long as we [did] it well.”

Chiyo said she did not realize how strongly she valued her teaching career and all its “social admirations” until she quit her job and moved to the U.S. to be with her husband. Here, she said, “I dread being asked what I do as a profession because it is a reminder of what I used to be . . . . [But], it is also a reminder that I am just a stay-at-home wife right now.”

At the time of this interview, Chiyo had just found out that she was pregnant, and she explained the multiple reasons for being happy and anticipating the arrival of the baby: “I have been depressed not knowing what to do about my professional life . . . . [Because] I am older than many of the students here, and I do not even have many friends to share my situation with . . . . [But], the news of the baby is very special because I will not regret spending as much time with the baby while awaiting for my husband to complete his studies.” Although she is anxious to get back to work as a teacher, she acknowledges that such an opportunity may not be possible for her in the U.S., even if her husband’s postdoctoral status would allow her to search for a job.
Instead, as many spouses do, Chiyo said she will use the rest of her time in the U.S. to be available for the baby, and plans not to expose him/her to a daycare. Perhaps reflecting her strong desire to get a job, Chiyo disclosed her change of heart about the cultural expectations about motherhood. She stated, “when we return, I am very likely to go back to my teaching job (if they take me) . . . which is something family members and extended family do not expect often.”

**Alexandra:**

Alexandra is a 33 year-old lawyer from Argentina. Alexandra is very proud of her family background of intellectuals and human right activists who were active during the military dictatorship of the 1970s. Alexandra said her family included her parents and siblings as well as aunts and grandparents. She stated, “We lived close to each other and saw each other very often especially on weekends . . . my family always had two or three cars and people who worked for us (as gardeners, cooks and cleaners).” While both her parents are well educated, Alexandra said her mother was particularly influential in her professional success and that of her siblings; two became doctors and the other two lawyers. She commented that her mother “has been the pedagogic one.” Alexandra was very critical of the isolation and domestic life she found after accompanying her husband to pursue a graduate degree. She said, “Life as a stay-at home wife was appalling.” According to Alexandra, the process of automatically assigning SIS into the domestic sphere undermines the social and economic gains women have obtained in their respective countries. She referred to such environments as "macho cultures." After graduation, Alexandra practiced family law for three years, which she considered a profession that is “dominated by men,” and was conscious of the high price women paid, “especially to enter into professions such as law.”
For Alexandra, her experiences as an international spouse have been “trying times,” but she is grateful to her husband and her family for supporting her financially and morally in the process of changing her status into a student. At the time of this interview, she was in her second year of pursuing a graduate degree. Throughout her interview, it was apparent that Alexandra felt equal to her husband in deciding family issues, including the decision to stay in the U.S. or to return back home. Alexandra indicated that she missed her family very much and she is counting the years until she returns to live with them.

Gita:

Gita is 28 year-old and she is from India. Gita moved to the U.S. immediately after completing her MBA to join her husband. She has lived five years in the community, and the current year has been her “happiest year” because her husband had just accepted a postdoctoral position. His change of his status enabled her to look for a job in her field. Gita came from Mumbai, India, which is one of the biggest cities in India. She acknowledged, “a small town may be difficult for many who are used to big cities.” She said, “I also look at the positive side of things.” Gita was the youngest of four siblings, all of whom have pursued higher education. “India has a lot of educated people and my family is not exceptional for sending all the children to college . . . . [But], we also have a lot of people with qualifications who are not employed.” That was why Gita said she is pleased both for her and her husband’s opportunity to gain professional experience. For Gita, the postdoctoral appointment of her husband “could change to a permanent job” and she believed her current employment might “generate a better opportunity if I acquire an experience in the corporate culture in the U.S.” Gita said, “I am pleased (at least for now) with the idea of living and working in the U.S. because there are a lot of educated people in India. The number of jobs
are not enough to absorb every educated person immediately.” Although she struggled with the first few years because of lack of opportunity, “staying in the community will be advantageous for both of us.” Since they (the couple) have been thinking about having a child, she thought a small community like the one they now live in could be advantageous for family life.

Roxana:

Roxana was born and raised in Chile, and is a 42 year-old mother of two at the time of this interview. An only child born in a “non-professional family,” Roxana’s story was unique in the way she explained the influence of her parents in encouraging her to pursue “non-traditional” careers (for a girl), such as law and medicine, when she was a young girl. Roxana said her mother became a beautician “when my mother’s family decided to pass the family farm to her brother.” Because her uncle was older and better educated, Roxana said, “my grandparents felt that he was viewed likely to keep the family property in his hand (for the next generation).” Roxana said this situation “has influenced her mother’s choice for her daughter: to be as educated as the boys.”

Roxana’s father “grew up in a large family but his family was not in a position (financially) to educate him.” Despite the fact that he earned a good living doing carpentry, Roxana said her father “regretted not having the chance to pursue higher education, especially law.” The combination of her parents’ desire and regret made Roxana prepare for law school, but after moving to the U.S. with her husband, Roxana said a combination of factors, including the lack of opportunity, language difficulties and differences in the education system have made it difficult to continue her original dream of becoming a lawyer. However, owing to her husband’s career opportunity, Roxana and her family have become
permanent residents of this community. At the time of this interview, she said “after many years of staying at home to raise the children” she was going back to school part-time specializing in special education. Even though her original goal of becoming a lawyer did not materialize, Roxana said she had many things that made her feel successful. Her children and the family situation as a whole seemed to be what she valued as a source of contentment.

Frances:

Frances is a 26 year-old former teacher from China, and she had been living in the community close to two years at the time of this interview. She came from Beijing, where she was a public school teacher for over four years in a select school. Frances is an only child and she said in “Chinese culture it is a given to be close with your immediate and extended family, especially grandparents.” In spite of this closeness, Frances said her move to the U.S. did not induce too much homesickness because “I was already living out of my home town . . . I only saw my family during holidays.” Perhaps because they were relatively new to U.S. culture, Frances and her friend Mindy were enthusiastic during their interviews because, as Frances mentioned, learning English was the biggest stimulating challenge. She commented, “time to time, I worry about the future of my work . . . because I know my job will not be there when I go back.” Perhaps due to the level of economic affluence of her family back home or confidence in both her and her husband’s abilities, Frances’ outlook about life as a stay-at-home spouse did not seem too financially constraining. Unlike other interviewees, she mentioned several trips that she and her husband were planning, including going back home the following summer (to visit their family). She also mentioned the plan she and her husband had about the possibility of having their parents visit them while they lived here.
Nasrin:

Nasrin from Bangladesh is a 43 year-old mother of a first-year undergraduate student (a daughter) in college. Nasrin was the only one in the group who has not pursued education beyond high school. Nasrin and her husband arrived in the community 22 years ago. At the completion of his studies, Nasrin's husband was offered a job in the university. The change in his status was beneficial for the whole family, and enabled Nasrin to seek employment. As a result, Nasrin has worked for many years as a sales associate in a local store. She said, “Culturally, education, especially higher education rate was low, particularly for women.” But, she also mentioned the problem had more to do with traditional values that not only restrict women’s activities (e.g., gender-based division of work in the household), but also affect women's access to property ownership, employment, political roles and other positions in society. According to her comments, these constraints contributed to the lack of role models and the lack of encouragement for girls to pursue education. She said she got married after high school and moved to the U.S. with her husband, who was pursuing a master’s degree at the time. Her experience of living in the U.S. opened her eyes about what she wanted and hoped for her daughter.

Nasrin said that when she arrived in this community there were a large number of volunteers, and they offered diverse cultural, social and educational opportunities, such as learning English. Because of this support, she said, her earlier days were not too difficult, apart from missing her family. Nasrin mentioned that it was too late when she realized that she wanted to go to school again, because she had been out of school for too many years and “once I have my daughter, it was clear that we were not able to afford expenses for day care and expenses for my schooling.” While she seemed content with the opportunity of raising
her daughter, she said, “It is a must that she (her daughter) will pursue higher education not only for first degree but to the highest (post-graduate).” At the time of this interview, her daughter was a first-year college student, and Nasrin said she received a lot of pleasure from seeing her daughter aim for the highest grades and achievement. In Nasrin’s own words, it is a way of “giving her what I was not able to obtain.”

**Manuela:**

Manuela is a 46 year-old former social worker from Mexico. Manuela was one of three women from the pool of interviewees who had arrived in the U.S. with children. Her family was also the one with the largest number of children, three: two boys and one girl. Manuela said back home, because of the extended family support that she used to receive (especially with the children), having a large income was not a requirement for having a large family. But here, she said, “we learned to count every dollar to make sure we had enough for all the basics.” While Manuela had a part-time social worker position back home, and also her husband’s income, they were able to live comfortably in Mexico. However, from her comments, the experience of the family arriving here introduced unexpected stress.

Manuela tried financially to complement her husband’s assistantship by taking care of others’ children at her house together with her own. In spite of all her enthusiasm to make the best out her husband’s decisions to pursue a graduate degree, she said his attitude changed considerably in less than two years and “he became even physically aggressive.” She suspected two things, “stress from his work and lack of resources to support a family of five” may have contributed to the change in his behavior. Nonetheless, she said, “I was afraid of reporting this to the authorities because I did not know what it meant for me in terms of staying with the children or not.” In spite of her reluctance in reporting his
aggressive behavior, neighbors notified the problem to local security, which led to the separation of the couple.

At last, she said, a national women’s rights group, which advocates for victims of domestic violence, petitioned for her to obtain a U.S. residence permit. When I met her, she was living with her three children, and seemed content with the way things turned out for all of them, especially her children who were attending a community college. She said she was grateful for the support that she received from national advocates for victims of domestic violence. Because of their petition, she was granted a residency to stay and work in the U.S.

Heidi:

Heidi is a 33 year-old former psychologist from Holland. Heidi said, in Holland, it is not uncommon for husband and wife to experience equal economic autonomy, and even for wives to earn more than their husbands. Heidi was among the strongest critics of what she saw as the “forced dependency” of international spouses. Heidi said her husband was two years younger than she, and that he never had professional experience. She further noted, “I have been always the career person in our relationship because I started working early and he, on the other hand, has always been a student ever since we met.”

Heidi said that both she and her husband “took the system for granted because we did not know until we arrived here that . . . [my] options were so limited . . . . It never occurred to me that I would be staying at home.” At times, she said, she regretted quitting her job, because she was uncertain about being able to get her job back when they returned. Perhaps reflecting what she is used to as a woman in her own country, Heidi was critical about the lack of support by the university in terms of “basic information that spouses may need” in order to ease their stay. For Basu, another of my participants, three years of staying at home
convinced her that “it is better to use the time to raise a family.” On the other hand, for Heidi and her husband, “having a child because of lack of opportunity for me is not an option, because we are not even sure that we want to have one.” At the time, Heidi said that what she needed was a way to maintain her “human capital,” and she commented that one way to do that was to look into classes to audit or to take for credits. The process was discouraging for her because she did not know which office to contact in order to assist her in determining which courses would have been transferable or substitutable for the courses that she had in Holland. At the time of this interview, Heidi was thinking about taking the GRE for potentially enrolling into a degree program. Heidi acknowledged that the process could be expensive, especially if she were not to receive an assistantship. However, just like Alexandra, Heidi was determined to commit to any necessary steps to change her status.

**Ingrid:**

Ingrid is a 38 year-old former lab technician from Kenya. Ingrid and her husband arrived with their first child (a girl) when they came to pursue his graduate studies. She said after staying at home for a year raising their first child, “the lack of prospect for her (to work or go to school) somehow made it a choice for me to have a second child.” As a stay-at-home mom, her time was used for raising two children. Ingrid said that this was when she missed her family the most. Because “we lived close to my sister’s house and we were also close to my parents house, too . . . [my sister] and her children often spent time with us and I miss all that support and family presence . . . . [I am far away] with two children.” Ingrid said having a second child made the “tight economic situation even tighter.”

To supplement the family income, she started taking care of other children in her apartment. While that seemed a reasonable compromise for a few years, Ingrid was certain
that she was going to convince her husband to look for a postdoctoral position, so that she, too, could further her education. According to Ingrid, her husband’s sponsors could have easily supported his decision if he had wanted to stay for a few more years. Instead, he insisted on returning immediately and she became resentful of his decision to return.

Ingrid said she had tried to point out to her husband how her education could be beneficial not just for her, but to the whole family. According to her remarks, the cost of living in the U.S. made her realize that “whether we stay here or we go back to Kenya, we are now a family of four and we cannot afford to go on living on his salary . . . [you know], even in Kenya, parents prefer private schools, and raising two children and sending them to a good school is going to be expensive.” Unfortunately, her husband was determined to return no matter how she felt. Ingrid said this negotiating process and “other things” indicated to her that their marriage was “breaking apart and that staying alone in the U.S. was a better alternative for the children and myself.” At the time of this interview, after her husband decided to return without her, Ingrid was a single mother taking care of a teenage daughter and eight year-old son. But, as she was able to continue her studies, Ingrid was looking forward to her graduation. She said she had no regrets about the decision she made. As she stated, it “offers my children a better future,” and her major concern at the time of this interview was finding a job where the employer would petition for her to obtain her residence papers.

Tonya:

Tonya is a 36 year-old Russian psychologist, and had been living in the U.S. for three years at the time of this interview. Tonya arrived in the U.S. with her 5 year-old daughter, and she said that taking care of her made her feel very useful for awhile. But, a year after
staying at home, Tonya started to get anxious about what she called “a waste of time that I did not know how to change.” Tonya said she and her husband had not planned to have another child and that she was determined instead to seek any opportunities she could, including volunteer opportunities, to keep her professional knowledge up-to-date.

Her hopes were dashed quickly when she found out about the rules and requirements for certification, even to volunteer in her field. Finally, she said, a friend advised her to take at least a course in order to keep herself busy and intellectually stimulated. She said it was very expensive to do that, especially given that she was not interested in going through the process of applying for a degree program. At the time of this interview, Tonya’s husband was getting close to completing his studies, and she said she had negotiated with him to seek postdoctoral opportunities. However, she mentioned, “he is very interested in going back as soon as he completes his studies.” Tonya believes that his desire to return home as soon as possible was largely induced by his preference to work in his own culture.

**Mindy:**

Mindy is a 25 year-old Chinese woman who had been living in the U.S. for eighteen months at the time of the interview. Mindy had received a B.A. in business back home and she had also worked for three years. Similar to Frances, Mindy said her time in the U.S. was a time of learning English and American culture as a “goal in the short-term.” Because she had lived and worked in the same town where her family lived, she was very close to them until her departure to come here. As a result, she missed them—especially her mother and grandmother, who had been living with them.

Mindy said that every weekend it was a requirement for her to call her mother, because her mother had gotten used to hearing from her every week. Mindy said she worried
from time to time if and when she might be able to work, but during the interview, she mentioned that she had been thinking about taking the GRE and eventually applying for an MBA program at the local university.

**Additional Profiles of Participants**

For the purpose of complementarity, the data collected for this study included interviews with two other individuals—the community volunteers network coordinator and an administrator in the local academic institution. The profiles below report the background of these two individuals and their account of the situation with the spouses of international students.

**Fleur, the Coordinator:**

Fleur was the long-time coordinator of the local volunteer group. Born and raised in the Midwest, she worked as a journalist in the early part of her career. She remained as the strongest advocate for the spouses of international students. At the time of this interview, Fleur was getting ready to take early retirement from her private business and from working as a volunteer coordinator. She said she had been working as a coordinator for nearly ten years and “working with the women in our local international community has been a wonderful opportunity and it has allowed me to serve a special group of women who sometimes never get chance to visit an American home or be friends with Americans.”

Fleur gave details on how she first decided to join the group and she recounted an experience that she went through while living in Eastern Europe. There, she said, “for the first time, I realized what it means to be in a new place and be a total stranger . . . [I] realized how any help or assistance I received . . . with my language problems, showing me a direction to a place or just someone who showed some personal interest or friendship . . . [I]
found it all valuable.” Upon her return, Fleur said, she joined the local community volunteers “because I felt it was important for me to make sure visiting international women were personally welcomed by Americans.”

Fleur viewed the role she and other volunteers played as “something which the university could be offering these women . . . [and] something that is being offered in some universities as I’ve learned at conferences . . . because it lets them know that we care and that we value them. It relieves their isolation and, in some cases, depression.” Although Fleur did not complain about the task she had to accomplish without assistance from the university and other community agencies, she said her work with the group took about 20 to 25 hours per week, doing all kinds of tasks, such as preparing flyers and publicity, advertising meeting places, looking for new arrivals, arranging meeting places, searching for and networking with other volunteers and interacting at a personal level with the international women, as well as participating in meetings.

Complementing the affable remarks by the participants in this study, Fleur said, “through the years with the group, I have come to know so many wonderful individuals . . . very smart and very interesting people . . . [many] have gone back to their countries and I stay in touch with many of them . . . [Especially], at Christmas I receive greetings and remembrances from my international friends.” As she prepared to scale back her activity with the group, she said, “I wish the university was willing to embrace this group by offering more programs and services in a planned, continuing way.” For Fleur and the other volunteers, there were mutual benefits that stemmed directly from their interaction, friendships and activities.
Fleur stated that the benefits of providing support programs to the spouses are not restricted to benefiting the spouses only. Instead, she said, “the benefits are also for the university and the community at large.” Because, according to her remarks, “there is so much we can learn from this group . . . . [They] are willing and eager to share information about their homelands . . . . They yearn to make their time here productive.” Substantiating some of the comments made by the spouses regarding their anxiety and frustration, Fleur mentioned, “Many are professionals in their own country and are terribly frustrated to be so useless except to their own families while they are here . . . . And often their families suffer from little time together and few ways to interact with the American culture that surrounds them.”

Fleur said she has been a strong advocate for international experiences, such as study abroad programs for U.S. students. However, she also believes there is much international experience to gain for students and the community at large by working with international spouses and their families “here in our own town.” She added, “I find it so ironic that we encourage our students to study abroad in order to benefit from exposure to other cultures, and yet we don’t recognize, benefit from or appreciate the opportunities to interact and learn directly about a wide variety of cultures—when these wonderful, international women are right here in the community. They are living among us, waiting for their opportunity to reach out to us.”

Fleur considers the potential of these spouses at multiple levels and she believes, by not building relationships with them, the loss is not just to SIS, but also to the university and the community at large. She concluded: “think of how differently these women will talk about our local community and the university when they return to their homes and jobs in
their own countries if they have had a valuable, profitable time here . . . . If they are women in leadership roles or professions, which they often are, they will no doubt play a big role in how their friends and colleagues feel about the U.S. or coming to study here themselves . . . .

The university misses a big opportunity to have a lasting impact through women around the world by not acknowledging and helping them while they are here in the university community.”

**Anna, the Administrator:**

Anna has been working within this particular institution for over 25 years, and “she is very familiar with and sympathetic to the circumstances of international spouses.” Anna said she liked her job because it brings her in contact with people from all backgrounds, but when it comes to international student families, “I am not in contact with the spouses and family members because our relationship . . . [the university’s relationship] is limited to the students.” While she acknowledged that the university rules are “following the guidelines of the Immigration Services, when it comes to the spouses of international students, I wish there was more involvement by the university . . . [but] on the other hand, we have to go by the book.”

As a professional woman, Anna said she understands “the challenges and frustrations that spouses may face due to lack of outside-the-home opportunities.” She sees the circumstances with international spouses as a “vicious circle which no one seems to be able to solve.” Anna acknowledged that it is too expensive for the university to get involved in the lives of SIS, and she further commented that, “the university does not require that students and scholars report the presence of their spouses here in the community. It is very possible, in fact it is true, that students and scholars have families here that the university
does not know about. And the opposite can be true, too . . . sometimes families leave and we are not aware that they have gone.”

My discussion with Anna also revealed another concern about SIS, healthcare coverage, which has been mentioned by a few of the spouses. Anna said the news came from community businesses and organizations: “I have heard other problems such as access to healthcare that I sympathize with . . . [because] when the prohibitive cost of the university student insurance makes coverage for spouses unaffordable, the accompanying spouses are left for the care of the emergency clinics and the free clinic services of the community.” Anna said she is equally concerned about the restrictions that the spouses face with regard to registration for courses. According to her remarks, these restrictions “have become even more strict since 2001, and that is worrisome because it blatantly ignores the needs of educated women who happen to come accompanying their partners/husbands.”

**Conclusion**

The feminist theory, methodology and research method described in this chapter represent the foundation for the study, findings and ensuing analyses. The benefits of using a feminist research approach for this study were necessary because the study is concerned about the day-to-day experiences of women sojourners who are living in a legally dependent status that excludes them from seeking educational and professional opportunities. Feminist research enabled me to validate women’s experiences through their narratives, which exposed the gaps in the existence of programs and services (from volunteers), in terms of what is perceived and what actually exists.

Similar to other studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Pence, 2004; Schwarz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986), the educational and professional qualifications of the
accompanying spouses further revealed the incongruity of their life experiences back home and the taken-for-granted space of housewives status here in the U.S. In this study, the data obtained from the coordinator of the local volunteer network and the administrator has further added to new ways of looking at the circumstances of international spouses.

This following chapter is presented into two sections: while the first section presents the data analysis procedure, the second part of the chapter offers detailed descriptions of the findings and an analysis of the narratives of interviewees.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the findings of interviews that I conducted on the social and institutional factors influencing the daily experiences of the spouses of international students. An extensive amount of data was generated from the study. In addition to the interviews with the spouses, supplemental information was obtained from interviews with an administrator and a volunteer coordinator. My field notes also contributed to the amount of information generated in this study. As a researcher, I was aware of my responsibilities in drawing and synthesizing the data from these multiple sources. I was attentive to details in transcribing, interpreting the data and identifying themes. Further, I was conscious of this responsibility because I was aware that in qualitative study, data emerges not only from spoken expressions but also from the tensions, silent moments and critical incidents that participants impart (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Overall, in the process of managing and interpreting the data, acknowledging all these responsibilities and the significance of my role as a researcher made me conscious of why other researchers (e.g., Bloom, 1998; Naples, 1997; Smith, 2005) referred to the role of the researcher as a “co-author” and an “advocate.”

As I now share the findings on the daily experiences of women sojourning with a legally dependent status, I am conscious of my responsibility to communicate their stories in the manner and spirit by which they shared with me. This chapter is presented into two sections: the first section discusses the data analysis procedure; the second section presents the findings and analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

While there are various steps that a researcher could follow in interpreting and analyzing data, I was conscious that my role requires diligence and skillfulness. Instead of
simply following steps, I knew it was important for me to create a procedure that would enable me to handle the data truthfully and to work as a “co-author” of my participants’ stories. For this study, I followed Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) suggestions in the process of transcribing, coding and analyzing the data both from interviews and field notes.

The general procedure I utilized for transcribing and analyzing data follows Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) recombination on handling data:

1. **Avoid predetermined themes, organize the data and learn your data**

   Understanding the rationale for the authors’ call for this recommendation, I avoided predisposed expectations in determining topics within the findings. Subsequently, in order to organize the data and to become familiar with it, I spent a great amount of time organizing and “cleaning” the data. In this step, I reduced the excess and repetitive data, while I exercised judgment in making sure that I kept the stories in the way my interviewees wanted them conveyed.

2. **Use two-steps-coding (look for themes)**

   In this step, researchers are recommended to examine the data closely and critically. Here, in first-coding, while reading and rereading the transcripts, I took notes from each transcript (at times by writing on the margins of the page with a code number). I blocked texts by highlighting different themes with different colors. Additionally, I used cutting and pasting techniques to combine texts that weave similar phrases, expressions and themes.

3. **Focused-coding (final coding)**

   Once I was convinced that some recurring themes were emerging, I moved to the final coding, which Coffey and Atkinson (1996) named as *focused coding.*
Because the authors encouraged researchers to use a technique that works for them, I continued identifying the themes by segregating the texts that I had highlighted with handwritten notes (on the margins) with similar colors. Here, while I started to examine the data by looking at differences and similarities in the stories, I also started comparing patterns and critical incidents within the stories.

4. Look for alternative explanations and interpretations

In this step, by comparing transcripts and making connections between the narratives, I continued the interpretation process by looking for alternative explanations of the emerged themes. Here, I compared the themes from the spouses’ transcripts with my field notes and the supplemental interviews with the administrator and the volunteer coordinator.

Field Notes

As mentioned earlier, the process I followed in pursing this research involved interviews with the spouses, additional interviews with a university administrator and volunteer coordinator and field notes. The field notes for this study came from a range of observations and participation in activities. Some of my notes came from the few meetings and holiday gatherings (e.g., English conversation and Halloween pumpkin carving gatherings) where I participated in the early stages of the research. I also attended two formal events where two of the leaders of the local volunteer group were honored for their long-term service. In other ceremonies, one organized by the local YWCA and the other sponsored by an anonymously coded organization in town, I had the opportunity to take part in the nomination of the volunteer coordinator for an award for her special service to the spouses of international students. One of the award ceremonies, titled, “A Strong Minded
Woman,” especially gave me an opportunity to witness the outpouring of support that came from international spouses who endorsed the long-term coordinator as a strong-minded woman. The following section presents the findings and analysis.

**Findings**

The transcripts from the interviews offered rich information on various topics that accompanying spouses view as salient factors affecting their adjustment and sojourning. First and foremost, there were several findings that separate this study from all others: For example, the historical link between international spouses and local volunteer groups has not been explored in previous studies. Similarly, the findings on concerns about healthcare and daycare access also offered a new perception on the lives of accompanying spouses.

Regardless of the countries of origin, the discovery of highly educated and experienced accompanying spouses has been an important revelation in this study. An equally important finding of this study was the discovery of the typical size of the family of international students and their spouses. As opposed to having a large number of children, most are very likely to have had a maximum of two, with many of these participants having had no children at all. On the other hand, the absence of children and small family size (for those who have children) could suggest that accompanying spouses of our current time commonly enjoyed productive lives as professionals in their respective countries, and had not reached a stage where they considered parenthood.

While these findings exposed distinct characteristics about international spouses, other parts of the study confirmed what has been reported in previous findings. For example, confirming the findings in previous studies (DeVerthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Pence, 2004; Vogel, 1986), the majority of the participants mentioned the struggle they face as a result of
the loss of their professional identity. In addition, many of them spoke on a range of issues (e.g., desire for work, volunteer opportunities, anxiety for the future, improving language skills, economic concerns and opportunities to further their education). For the few who did not speak English, the conversation meetings with the local volunteer group seemed invaluable, because they believed the group helped them overcome language difficulties. On the other hand, substantiating what authors (Martens & Grant, 2007) have written about the positive effect of having a larger population of people from the same country (e.g., China and India), some groups were able to obtain some support from their co-nationals, while other respondents had a harder time finding support from their national groups. Overall, the wide range of issues that surfaced in the interviews revolved around five overarching themes in the narratives of the respondents. These included (1) a feeling of invisibility, (2) the importance of having a community or a support system, (3) concerns and frustration, (4) the role of the institution and (5) the variability and uncertainty of the future. While some participants discussed their sense of invisibility in the community in terms of isolation from the community and the campus, for those participants who had enjoyed strong careers in their home countries (e.g., Alexandra, Chiyo and Heidi), the feeling of invisibility was compounded by the loss of professional identity. To these women, staying at home meant not only boredom and isolation, but they expressed a sense of diminution of who they were as people with acclaimed identities. The following section represents some of the major themes that emerged in the narratives of the women.
**We Are Made Invisible**

*“We Are Made Invisible”*

This was the expression used by Alexandra, a lawyer from Argentina. Alexandra had been in the U.S. for three years at the time of the interview. She came from a family background with a commitment to social justice, and remarked, “I am intolerant of seeing anyone mistreated and marginalized . . . [Seeing] myself in a situation like this . . . I feel like I have been shut out and it makes me furious.” After our introduction, I asked Alexandra how she viewed her daily experiences as a spouse of an international student. Her response encompassed her struggle to find (get back) her professional identity, to deal with economic concerns, as well as struggle with feelings of isolation and “invisibility,” which was also mentioned by several other women (e.g., Heidi, Gita and Chiyo). Alexandra continues,

I used to be a respectable lawyer back home, and . . . [here], I felt that we (spouses) were marginalized . . . and made invisible by just abandoning us at home . . . [First], I became very depressed, and I suffered in my own skin . . . [Then], two years later, I was determined to change my status . . . my husband was very helpful and I was able to change my visa from a dependent to a student . . . [But] it was a very expensive process because I needed to go back home and re-enter the U.S. (as a student) . . . [But] what about those women . . . who may not have any money and support [from the husbands] that I had?

While Alexandra spoke a great deal about herself and her family background, her description of her dependent status in contrast to the status she once had [a respected lawyer] is a reminder of the same transition many spouses go through in terms of identity struggle.
during their sojourn. The question of life changing experiences, which feminists call a moment of “rupture,” where women’s identities become transformed as a result of a certain phenomena, has been a topic of discussion in feminist-literature (e.g., Collins, 1990; Harding, 1987; Mies, 1991). By comparing her past professional and economic status with her current status of “a wife who just sits at home,” Alexandra is expressing a drastic experience of change that created tension and a “rupture” in her identity. This statement also implies that her past economic authority within the family may have assisted her in gaining the support she needed to change her visa from one of a dependent to one of a student. The issue of relocation and women’s positions for negotiating their new roles in the household has been analyzed by researchers (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Zentgraf, 2002). According to these authors, during transition to another culture, women’s earning potential can be crucial in allowing them to negotiate household decision making more productively. Alexandra’s remarks about her husband’s supportiveness reflect this finding.

But, Alexandra’s comments (“my husband was very helpful”) also demonstrates how husbands (and sometimes wives) have the dispensation to control the status of their accompanying spouses, regardless of whether they are willing to provide support. This fact particularly should be noted, given that the majority of those who enter as dependent spouses are women. As Alexandra said, “not only do accompanying spouses live with restricted freedom, but they are made invisible because of lack of power.”

“Sometimes, I Feel that We Are Not Part of the Community, Though We Live Here”

This was a statement by Ingrid from Kenya, and is representative of several respondents who concluded that they felt like “outsiders within the community.” Often, the presence of a diverse body of international students is believed to be a resource for campus
communities (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999). But, as many spouses expressed that they feel like outsiders in the community, it is not obvious that the community benefits from that diversity. For most spouses, because of the lack of opportunity to become involved with the campus community, and due to the lack of practical programs that expose them to the community and other foreign students and families, their experiences are filled with loneliness, isolation, and, at best, interaction only with their own nationals. As Ingrid and Chiyo noted, this situation could be a problem, particularly for those who are different from the majority of the population in the community. As a white woman, though her own social life was not constrained because of racial and ethnic challenges, Heidi, who is from Holland, expressed her concern for other spouses who were not Europeans: “I feel comfortable about being here and people are nice in general . . . [but] I am not sure if this is the way other women are feeling with no support system from the campus . . . I am not sure if other women (who are non-Europeans) feel the same way . . . I think it [homogeneity] could be a concern for some women.” Heidi’s concerns expressed her realization of high homogeneity, which gives a sense of welcome to some but not for others. Furthermore, as a white woman, her statement about how “other spouses [non-Europeans]” might feel communicates an understanding that those who come from different racial and ethnic groups face added challenges.

Heidi’s comments on the added frustration and isolation that women of color likely face bring up the very important subject that non-Europeans women may experience: racism. The absence of women’s voices in the political, social and economic situations that affect their lives has long been the concern of many feminist researchers (e.g., Fonow & Cook, 1991; Collins, 1990; Kandiyoti, 1988; Lugones & Spelman, 2005; Smith, 1987; Stanley &
Wise, 1991). Distortions about women’s experiences also affect the development of effective policies that could target their circumstances. While this research aims to provide accurate accounts of the circumstances that the participants in this study face as they reside in the U.S. on a dependent visa, the overall goal is to raise awareness about and seek solutions for the situation that the general population of SIS in the U.S. currently experiences.

In her book, *The Domestication of Women*, Rogers (1980), has analyzed how the discriminatory effects of the sexual division of labor have perpetuated the invisibility of women. In discussing the circumstances of Third World women and their exclusion from resources, Rogers asserted their circumstances were not only the result of existing written rules; instead, it is the absence of rules that would encourage women’s participation in the public spheres. According to Rogers, patriarchal assumptions of “men as the head of the household” have made women automatically invisible by not involving them as participants of the production activity outside the home. An important analogy can be drawn between Rogers’ assertions of the causes of poverty and powerlessness to women in the Third World and the causes of invisibility that accompanying spouses face.

Most participants discussed directly and indirectly their sense of feeling like an outsider as it relates to the loss of their professional identities and lack of educational opportunities. Chiyo from Japan sees the absence of her professional identity as central to the struggle she has been feeling about herself in the community. For clarification, some of her sentiments from her profile are repeated here:

I grew up learning how important it is to pursue education and a professional life…even after having children, more and more Japanese women are trying to stay [active] in their professional lives…I loved my job very much, but I did
not realize how important it was to me in the way I used to feel about myself... when my husband told me about his plans to come here, I was supportive... he did not force me to quit [my job] but I knew he was expecting me [to do so]... Now, sometimes, I have regrets about being here . . . once in a while, I ask myself, “why did I say yes to follow my husband?”

The universalized assumption of sexism as the sole cause of women’s silencing and marginalization has been rejected by feminists (e.g., Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981; Johnson-Odim, 1991). As Chiyo’s statement discloses, for many accompanying spouses, the ethnic and racial background can exacerbate their sense of loneliness and feeling like an outsider. Chiyo, like other participants from non-European backgrounds, talked about her sense of feeling different or as “an outsider.” On some occasions, as Chiyo also expressed, their loss of professional identity can exacerbate this feeling even worse. When the population of an ethnic group within a community is very small, some spouses may find it hard to make acquaintances even within that community. Basu and Chiyo mentioned that they knew very few people who were living in this town who came from their country. But, as Chiyo commented,

Even if there are students from your country (Japan, in her case), it does not mean that you make friends with everyone from your country . . . [Because], there are differences in our background and we could have age differences . . . . [For me], I have been a professional for several years . . . . [Here], the students I meet are very young . . . [so], it is not easy when you do not have a lot in common.
In her book, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), the distinguished feminist sociologist Collins coined the term “the outsider within,” a dilemma that African American women experience while working for white proprietors and their families. According to Collins, African American women have “insider” status with affluent whites through their history as service-workers, caregivers and domestics. But, this status only allows African American women to look at the issues (of race) from a unique position, where they assume both an insider and not-so-insider (outsider) role. The notion of “the outsider within” is relevant in describing the sense of belonging (and lack of belonging at the same time) by some respondents and their families.

In other words, for accompanying spouses, especially for those who do not identify with the local culture, years of residency has not translated into a sense of “belonging in the community.” To the contrary, several identify their experiences of sojourning in the community in terms their personal reality. For Basu, while she had a great deal of admiration for the university town which she called “an intellectual place,” she said, she has not been able to build relationships in spite of having spent six years in the community. She added that sometimes, “the culture of the community” is what makes her “uncomfortable or different”:

> We came from Kazakhstan where people socialize with everyone . . . [you] may know already that Kazakhstan has very mixed population . . . [because] during the Soviet rule, they brought different people; Indian looking, Turkish, Koreans, and others and released them in Kazakhstan. As a result, we are very mixed . . . [and] we grow up socializing with each other . . . [and] you do not have a feeling of divided community. Here, I feel it is the opposite . . . I
notice it is not the same . . . [people] are always with someone who looks like them.

Additionally, Nasrin’s remarks conveyed the cultural differences which made her feel like an outsider. In addition, her following statement brings to light an important issue that might contribute to the isolated lives of other accompanying spouses:

I have two young children now and I am busy… so going out to socialize is not an option for me, anyway. My husband is at the university all day and I take care of the children . . . and I do not think about other people or socializing because we can’t afford full-time [childcare] . . . [but] the older one attends the Head Start program for two mornings a week for a few hours and that helps me a little . . . . We have one friend from home [with] whom we meet [from] time to time . . . . So, when we have time, she is the person we socialize with.

Finances also contribute to this tension. Nasrin mentioned that some spouses could feel isolated and disconnected from the community for a number of reasons, including the lack of economic means to pay for childcare. In Nasrin’s case, even if there were other opportunities for her to spend time outside the home, the family’s inability to pay for daycare would still require her to remain at home. However, in sum, although many participants said they were lonely and that they were missing family, they were also grateful for the opportunities of friendship and social interaction (though limited) that local volunteers offered them.
Sojourning and Women’s Need for a Community

“They Really Make You Feel Welcome when No One Knows You Are Here”

Summing it up for all the participants, with sincere appreciation, Tonya from Russia described her feelings toward the local volunteer network. She was among the four women who arrived in the community with children (her six-year old daughter). Her responses were shared by other participants, especially those who shared her circumstances. All the participants mentioned that having a member of the community to ask questions about everything (e.g., schooling issues for the children, drivers license/bus, language, utilities and banking) was very important. Having a member of the community to socialize with was particularly emotional for those with children. Tonia explained the importance of meeting local women who provided them with basic information by saying, “the few women we met when we first arrived are the ones who made us feel welcome, and my daughter relates to one of them as her aunt.”

“The community network is where we make friends.” While some participants arrived over twenty years ago, and others have been here only two years, all of them reported that the community network was a place where they made friends. Particularly in the early arrival period, this network served as the only means for support systems and networking. For example, Roxana arrived 17 years ago, and she said her early experience was filled with emotions. As she put it,

For several months, local volunteers were the people that I interacted with and my husband was very busy trying to complete his studies . . . . I remember particularly feeling miserable during the week because I was lonely and I missed my family and friends back home . . . . [Also,] I started to worry about my English language skills . .
my profession . . . what would I be doing . . . [but] joining the conversation group was a great opportunity because I met some long-term friends through the network.

Roxana became a supporter and a friend of the community group because of her gratitude for the volunteer network’s assistance in helping her through her adjustment. On the other hand, while loneliness and homesickness seemed widespread, for a few respondents, their time as an accompanying spouse was not that bad, and they had no regrets about coming here.

“The Community Network Is Instrumental in Learning English”

Perhaps due to the large size of the Chinese community in town or because of other situations and personal factors (Church, 1982), Mindy and Frances, the two Chinese interviewees, were more upbeat about what they found in the local community, especially for the benefit of learning English. As Frances said, to Mindy’s agreement, “My English is very poor . . . and . . . [I] feel this is an opportunity to improve my language . . . [and] also to learn about American culture.” For Mindy and Frances, the two respondents who had been living in the community for a relatively short time (two years, and eighteen months, respectively), neither expressed a sense of loss by not having family around them. As well, neither seemed to regret seriously the loss of their professional identity. As an alternative, they both seemed excited about the opportunity to improve their English language skills. Also, instead of desiring to spend more time with their co-nationals, they explained that they preferred to spend less, so that they were forced to speak English and learn more about American culture.

The following comment by Frances, after 18 months of attendance at bi-weekly conversation meetings with the local volunteer group, communicates the enthusiasm she displayed as she aspired to improve her language skills: “I am speaking better English than
my husband.” Frances and Mindy also mentioned that they also attended one-hour per week basic English classes offered by a local church. Frances was proud to tell me how her language skills improved without having the opportunity to study formally. She stated, “My husband is in a department with a lot of Chinese students and they speak Chinese all day . . . . [I] am sure by the time he completes his study, I will be even in much better level (in English).” Because of the language benefits, Frances was very supportive of the volunteer network, and she credited the group for her English skills. Her friend Mindy expressed similar comments about the group when she said, “though I did take some English classes in China, I did not know how to speak it well…[So], for me, [these] last two years have been spent well because I have improved my language skills—every time we meet with volunteers, we speak in English about something simple enough to express (cooking, cultural issues, holidays [or] whatever) . . . [but] we also learn something about the American culture, and I think that is very important.” Frances added to the discussion to reinforce Mindy’s comment by saying, “improving language is important, but learning the American culture is even more important because you can learn English even in your own country, but we learn about the culture better while we are here . . . [so] for me, it has been a very good group to know.” While some respondents expressed their appreciation for the local volunteer group this way, others were grateful for the everlasting relationships they gained as a result of volunteer efforts.

“The Relationship with Local Volunteers Is Long-Term”

While almost all the participants have attended English conversation socials and holiday gatherings with the community volunteers at some point, several of the participants
made lasting friendships with the volunteers. Nasrin, one of the respondents who had been here for the longest time, expressed her experience in this way:

Because I grew up in a close-knit family, my first few months were very hard . . . [but] years ago, when I came here, the opportunity to get to know people [spouses like myself] was better, because there were many volunteers and many activities . . . . [For example], one lady used to come to the student housing to offer sewing classes . . . . [Although] I didn’t need to do sewing for my family, I enjoyed attending classes like that because, that way, we get to meet new people.

While her long stay in the U.S. empowered Nasrin, she never forgot the “invaluable” friendship that she first received from local volunteers many years ago. She said, “local volunteers are like our family members.” Nasrin’s statement summed it up for several other women, who also compared the local volunteers to relatives. Nasrin arrived 22 years ago and has been living in this community since. Her description of the group articulates the service capacity the volunteers used to offer:

When I was new . . . [many years ago], the wives did not have to worry about how to get to different places such as meetings, churches, conversation gatherings . . . because their were many volunteers who were helping out . . . [they] drove us to different activities in town and out of town . . . sometimes, we shared recipes and we used to do baking in church kitchens in groups . . . . [Driving] to the Capital to see the Christmas lighting was one of my favorite times.

For two of the respondents (Nasrin and Roxana), the friendships they developed with the community volunteers when they first arrived developed into permanent relationships.
Both Nasrin and Roxana said they have remained friends with the group coordinator, and that they would never forget the kindness they received. Nasrin said,

> It has been so many years since I attended the gatherings with community volunteers. And, many of the friends that we have made through the volunteer organizations have returned to their countries . . . but, we have remained friends with a couple of ladies who helped in those day… Many of us are particularly close with the former organizer of the group . . . she is like family . . . If she meets a new family from my country, she [introduces] the newcomers to the network [ . . . by] letting them know about the people she knows in town . . . from time to time, we used to meet new people [in] that way.

Two other early arrivers, Roxana and Ingrid, also described the impact of the community volunteers. Roxana, now a mother of two, settled in the community after her husband accepted a job at the university. Like Nasrin, Roxana, too, has developed a lasting friendship, which she described this way:

> When I first arrived, I agree that I was pleased to be reunited with my husband . . . [but] it was a challenging moment . . . [I] was just staying at home, [and] joining the volunteer group helped me a lot . . . I made lasting friendships during those difficult days . . . one of the former volunteers is [still] like an older family member to me and my family . . . [she] loved everybody . . . Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and everyone; she just wanted to help us out of our loneliness . . . it was like a real job to her and she offered it with no salary . . . she put so much work into contacting us, driving us, advertising (about activities) . . . you will never forget someone like that.
Nasrin’s, Roxana’s and Ingrid’s stories emphasize the nurturing and caring relationships that women sojourners treasure. Unfortunately, the diversity of activities that used to be available decades ago is available no longer, and speaks to the decline in the capacity of the community volunteer group today.

Collins (1990) presented the significance of family and community connections to black women. Collins explained that, as opposed to the fragile structure that the “market” sees, Afro-centric models of community stress connections, caring and personal accountability. Collins saw this strength of African American women as a power that has not only served individual families, but also the community at large. Given the narratives of many the participants regarding their closeness to their family and friends, a similar analogy could be drawn about women who come from cultures that nurture extended family structures and social networks. On the other hand, when women are removed from that community, the loss occurs not only at a personal level, but at a family and community level, too. For international spouses who come from close relationships with family and friends, in a time of relocation to a new place, they experience considerable losses that often cause adjustment difficulties.

Based on their participants’ narratives, Bystydzienski and Resnik (1994) found "cultural homelessness" to be a salient issue for women SIS. These women described their own survival as international students in terms of “resilience” and “growth;” paradoxically, they also reported never feeling entirely part of the new culture. This observation is consistent with the conclusion of Vogel’s (1986) study, where the loneliness that women experienced was particularly related to the absence
of close relationships with their families and friends back in their home country (Japan, in the case of Vogel’s interviewees).

The comments by Roxana, Tonya, Ingrid and Nasrin described the vital role the community volunteer support group played in assisting with the adjustment of sojourners. But, as can be seen in the excerpts of the volunteer coordinator (see p. 111, the section entitled, “What Do Volunteer Networks and University Administrator Say About SIS?”), changes have been taking place on both sides of this relationship. As the coordinator put it, “it has been difficult to find volunteers, and we also do not see a lot of women coming to the meetings like they used to . . . [because of all that], our group size (the number of groups) that used to meet for conversation has folded significantly, and we have only two now.” While her comments suggest that the capacity of the community organization has gone down in part because of shortage of volunteers, the coordinator mentioned that the number of spouses interested in attending the meetings has declined as well.

“Volunteers Can Only Do So Much on Their Own”

For the spouses who were well educated and had acquired high proficiency in English (Heidi, Gita, Chiyo, Basu, Ingrid and Alexandra), the support they wished to receive from support groups was different. Since their English language skills were well advanced, their hope was to get involved in something more challenging. Here is how Gita, who earned her MBA in India, spoke about her expectations:

When we first arrived, I stayed at home for about two months . . . [then], I found out that there is a volunteer group which met for conversation and socialization with local volunteers and I joined immediately . . . [but] I stopped after attending the meetings three or four times . . . [because] I did
not get what I was hoping for . . . [first of all], the language (conversation) effort felt like it was more appropriate for women who are just beginning to learn English . . . [we] talked about the same thing all the time—each person spoke about her culture regarding holidays, cooking, etc . . . then, next week, it seemed like we repeated the same thing again . . . [I] felt that I needed more . . . [But] . . . I am sincerely grateful to all they are doing to make us feel welcome . . . [Even though] I chose not to go, I know that they are helping many women.

Gita’s observation summarized the limited capacity of the group, and she preferred to do something else instead of attending the conversation meetings. Building support systems depends on the availability to opportunities to interact with others or within one’s culture group (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). On the other hand, when there are many co-nationals in a community, that cultural group by itself can provide support to its members (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Martens & Grant, 2007). Supporting this point, Gita said that an Indian woman eventually helped her get connected with a volunteer opportunity on campus: “It (the work) did not have much to do with my field, but it offered me a different venue to spend a few hours a week doing office type of work for the YWCA . . . . [And] I had a chance to be with professional women, and that was important to me.”

Like all participants, Gita was grateful for the “kindness” of volunteers because she believes “even if some of us do not need help with basic English conversation, I know they are there to provide information and friendship.” On the other hand, hinting at the differences in the backgrounds and expectations of sojourners, her comments revealed a gap between the sojourners’ needs and the limited assistance the volunteer group was able to
offer. Like Gita, Heidi was another advanced English speaker who made similar remarks about the conversation opportunity: “I think the volunteers are doing what they can on their own, but they don’t have the capacity to help if your ability is beyond basic English.” Heidi added that she had heard of some churches in the community who were also offering English classes, but she questioned whether that is “fair to those who are not from the Christian religion.” She further reflected that “when you have religious groups offering free classes, I feel that it is not easy for those who are not Christians to avoid being suspicious.”

Heidi’s comments regarding the capacity of the volunteer group may indicate that more and more women now find the conversation opportunities to be unchallenging. Her comments also communicated another point, one that echoed Gita’s observation about churches offering English classes, and how those who are not in the Christian religion may feel marginalized. When she found out the church was using biblical examples in an English class, she said, “I became suspicious and did not feel like they (the teachers) were showing consideration for my religious (Hindu) perspectives.”

All the comments above reflected various interpretations of appreciation and sentiment by the spouses of international students toward the community volunteer network. Some of the comments also highlighted the fact that expectations of international spouses have been evolving; hence, now the network may not be able to meet those expectations. Furthermore, the legal restrictions that this group (the majority of whom are women) faced on one hand, and the assumptions of academic institutions about the state of the volunteer group on other, currently distorts the fact that much has changed in both the network’s abilities to provide services and the expectations of the foreign wives.
As communicated in the women’s narratives, even those who came from traditional societies where women are expected primarily to focus on motherhood and domesticity, many said that they have been empowered by their families and were prepared to seek some level of achievement. Mies (1985) has commented that, sometimes, girls and women becoming educated and strong is not necessarily a question of families giving them everything. Instead, it is a “case of a series of interlocking experiences in which the parents are central but not exclusively important” (p. 17). Therefore, for many of the women, especially those from non-Western countries, their effort to be well educated may have been motivated by factors other than family support. As Ingrid from Kenya had said, the power of education meant “a way out of culturally prescribed roles and poverty.” Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the women find the lack of opportunity for education and intellectual challenge to be very “frustrating.” Understanding of the circumstances of SIS requires the perspectives of three groups: SIS themselves, volunteer organizations and academic institutions. While the data presented thus far has conveyed the findings from the perspectives of SIS, the next section communicates the position of the other two groups regarding SIS.

What Do Volunteer Networks and University Administrators Say About SIS?

The excerpts below are from my interviews with the coordinator and the local university administrator. As each discussion offers a different perspective about the state of international student spouses, their comments also illustrated the limitations of the desired services. The excerpt below describes Fleur’s responses regarding my first question, which inquired about the number of years she had been serving in the group, and the type of activities the group offered:
I took over this group about fourteen years ago . . . which was the time the former coordinator retired . . . [We] meet twice a month to offer an opportunity for English conversation and there are between 15 and 20 women in each group, including the American volunteers (about two or three in a group) . . . [Right now], there are about six volunteers and we are always looking for more people (volunteers) . . . [You] know, women are working inside and outside the home now, and it is difficult for women these days to have extra time and energy for volunteer efforts, especially if they have children.

The coordinator’s comments reiterated the spouses’ statements regarding the primary objective of the group—English conversation opportunities. When I asked her how she decided to become involved, her answer reflected her own experience traveling overseas with her husband, where they stayed for several months in Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries. She said:

I realized I was in a foreign country and I did not speak the language of the country . . . [I] also realized the hospitality of the locals who offered us whatever they could . . . [When] I returned home, I wanted to be involved with this organization and I was convinced that I wanted to give back to women who come to our country, and some of them go back without knowing anything about our culture . . . [I] am certain that this (isolation and staying at home) makes them feel that no body cares . . . [I] also know, without a service like ours, these women would be locked in their homes their entire sojourn.

The coordinator’s comments regarding the importance of improving language skills and the sharing of American culture was pointed out by many of the participants. Particularly,
Mindy and Frances, who wanted to learn English and American culture, believed both these elements were important objectives when living in a foreign country.

Fleur further added more support for many of my assumptions about international student families (e.g., the wives being very educated, the fact that many families do not have children and the struggle to get out of the household). Fleur said she realized that what the volunteer group was able to offer was not enough, because “these days, the women who come as accompanying spouses are well educated . . . [and] many of the couples do not have children . . . . [They] are like typical American couples who meet in college and do not want to have children right away.” A related issue that she commented on was that some of the services that used to be offered are either discontinued because of lack of resources (including human resources) or because of lack of interest. She noted:

So English conversation and cooking classes are not enough for these groups . . . [but] when the university and other community organizations are not seeing the benefits of assisting this group, there is not a lot we can do on our own . . . [the] only help we used to get was $50, which was supposed to cover printing, distribution of announcements (of activities) . . . [I] believe I used to put at least 20 hours a week doing all sorts of stuff . . . . [For example], I used to contact people to see if I can help some women who were so depressed because of staying at home, to see if they can get a chance to do job-shadowing in courts or hospitals (depending on their profession) . . . . [I] also drove a lot . . . sometimes, to the hospital, to the license office or whatever need they may have.

Fleur’s remarks illuminated the fact that there are changes in the demographics of spouses in terms of their education level and career goals. Her explanation also substantiated
How the ability of the volunteer group is no longer suitable for the majority of the spouses.

When I asked her about the number of spouses who took part in these meetings, she replied:

Well years ago, before I took over the group, I have heard that there used to be as many as 65 volunteer women on a waiting list . . . [but], that has been changing through the years . . . [and] the number of foreign spouses attending the meetings has been changing, too . . . [I] believe it is because they want more than what we are offering . . . [over ten years ago], we used to have several hundred spouses attending what we called orientation meetings, and we used to have more than ten groups which met twice a week . . . [Today], we have two groups left, with about fifteen women in each.

Confirming the remarks of many of the participants of this study, the coordinator added related clarifications about why she thought many spouses are not attracted to the group; hence, why it may be necessary for all related organizations, including universities, to reach out to this group with innovative services. As pointed out earlier, the conditions with the spouses of international students involve the spouses themselves and their expectations, the ability of the community volunteers and the willingness of the universities to accept responsibility for the needs of the spouses.

To verify how Anna might view the situation with international spouses, I discussed the problem with an administrator for the purpose of recounting how the administrator (of the institution) viewed this situation. She stated, “our role (the institution’s role) toward the spouses of foreign students is limited . . . by that, I mean, the university’s obligation is to the students (F-1 visa holders). However, there are community groups that we hear about which have been helping the group for years.” This statement suggests that although sporadic
services do exist at some campuses, this particular campus is among those that do not offer much to the spouses of international students. Anna remarked further on the reasons why the university has not been offering programs and services to the group:

There are immigration rules that we have to abide by and their problem is beyond the university’s ability . . . [For example], we know that the spouses are not allowed to register for degree programs . . . [and] this policy has been strict particularly since September 11 . . . [we] also know that they are not allowed to work, [so], given all these restrictions, I am not sure what we can do to help. [We] do know, however, they can participate with volunteer groups in the community who are offering English language learning opportunities.

Anna's explanation echoes Swartz and Kahne’s (1993) findings in their study of international spouses’ conditions in the Northeast U.S. campus community. As they concluded, the question of providing services for spouses of international students is extremely sporadic, and often depends on the goodwill of one or two individuals in a university. In the community where these authors studied, the Chief Psychiatrist was instrumental in providing a service for spouses that involved organizing gatherings twice per month with social workers and group therapists to let them talk about their experience in the community.

In other situations, however, because of the legal restrictions that simply place accompanying spouses into domestic roles, Anna explained that at many campuses the situation is “beyond their control due to immigration rules,” while at the same time confirmed that “academic institutions have no obligation to serve accompanying spouses.” Because of the traditional relationships between volunteers and spouses, many campuses feel
that community volunteer groups should fulfill the role of service provider to this group. However, as we have seen throughout the discussions with the spouses and the coordinator, this traditional equation has changed tremendously, and for a variety of reasons: lack of volunteers, changes in the expectations of the spouses and the need for change in services.

**Economic Concerns and Frustrations**

Because all the respondents (with the exception of Nasrin) in this study have at least completed their first degree, and some have acquired years of professional experiences, there were repeated comments about “feeling[s] of anxiety and distress” that moving to the U.S. created. Some women associated distress with the lack of opportunity, while others connected it with their lack of economic independence and uncertainty about the future. This theme (distress) was among the common themes in a study conducted by De Verthelyi (1995). While a large majority of the women De Verthelyi interviewed had several years of professional experiences, their loss of professional life and economic independence was mentioned as a source of distress, both to the wives themselves and to the family as a whole. In this study, Alexandra from Argentina, who quit a job as a lawyer in order to accompany her husband, articulated the impact of the loss of professional identity by saying:

> My relationship with my husband has been equal . . . [we] shared all decisions. [I] have never seen myself . . . in a dependent position until I came here . . . [the] first year, when he saw me staying at home and so frustrated, he was also frustrated . . . [and] did not know how to help me . . . [thanks] to my family and my husband, too, I have been able to change my visa and I am now in school . . . [but], this is not a situation I want to continue living in . . . [because] it is irritating and heart breaking for me to see so many educated
women wasting their time . . . . [For] us, it is no longer worth being here. As soon as he finishes his program, we are going back.

Alexandra’s testimony echoes other spouses’ discouragement and frustration due to lack of access to education and professional opportunities. Alexandra’s narrative also reflected the traditional role of a “woman in charge of the household,” a value, she clarified, that she has never shared or viewed as her duty. On the contrary, her description of her achievement—a woman who earned a law degree in a “macho” country—portrays a completely opposite image of policymakers’ expectations of the demographic characteristics of accompanying spouses. With such a level of achievement, it is not surprising that she expressed a feeling of “[suffering] in my own skin.” Her subsequent comment on her dislike of the U.S. Immigration policy toward accompanying spouses portrays her evaluation of what she considers a “backward” policy toward spouses (who are mainly women). Her rejection of this policy demonstrates her expectations of a better situation, one that would allow accompanying spouse to have available opportunities.

No matter their professional background prior to arriving in the U.S., accompanying spouses have been pigeonholed into a traditional gender role, where an accompanying spouse’s role as sojourner has been limited to taking care of domestic concerns. Even though they know that their care is needed to sustain their family, many of them regret the circumstances of “domestic work” because, previously, they have enjoyed life outside the private sphere. Or, in the case of Basu, who moved right after graduating from college, the dream of becoming a professional was deep-rooted, because she said “I grew up seeing both my mother and my father teaching in a university.”
Although she decided to have children in the U.S. because of the lack of opportunities outside the home, Basu said she feels frustrated with her life as a dependent spouse. She remarked, “all day, I am busy with housework . . . . [I] do everything . . . I take care of the children, I clean, and I cook.” Raised in a family of two professional parents, her background did not prepare her for homemaking. In addition, she is frustrated by the lack of support from her husband: “he is all day at the university . . . and, when he comes home, I have to ask him to help me with them (the children) . . . sometimes he helps me . . . [and] sometimes, he leaves them to me . . . . [After] not seeing them all day, he seems to have little interest to take care of them.”

Stories of women who come to the U.S. as accompanying spouses reflect the fact that most of them perform domestic responsibilities for the first time in their lives. Indeed, in a study that examined the experiences of Korean spouses, Kim (2006) confirmed that most of the women were former professionals who found themselves doing “carework” for the first time after accompanying their scholar husbands. Although the women in Kim’s study felt the household role was important for the “survival of the family,” many of them expressed frustration toward the restrictive visa. Kim (2006) wrote that while the restrictive visa was offered to those who come as student spouses, accompanying spouses of those who get jobs with U.S. firms have the alternative of being sponsored by such firms to work or study.

Whereas the issues of immigration restrictions are often discussed in the context of those who are considered “illegal,” little is known about how the legal system creates a situation of economic vulnerability to, and dependence on, others—such as accompanying spouses who come legally. For instance, when realizing the lack of opportunity for the spouse here, some families decided to have children as an alternative; however, the family’s
financial stresses changed according to the size of the family. When a couple decided to have children, it became an added source of stress for the accompanying spouses because of their inability to supplement their own needs and those of their families. Furthermore, with more children, not only did daily life become expensive, but also the possibility to travel to visit family often became impossible. Participants in a study by DeVerthelyi (1995) expressed frustration and resentment because of lifestyle changes due to a tight family budget. The experiences of several women, particularly Ingrid, Manuela and Basu, represent this economic difficulty. Basu explained:

My husband’s assistantship is not enough to support all of us . . . [So], I feel that I needed to find a way to earn a little money . . . [and] that is why I started buying children clothes from local shops during sale. And, I sell it later on eBay. My husband thinks I am wasting my time, but what else could I do to get a little money? Sometimes, I do not make more than two dollars for each item I sell . . . but sometimes I make a bit more.

In essence, Basu’s story demonstrates her worries and responsibilities, now expanded to support the family’s finances rather than just the financial needs of her and her husband alone. For the majority of the respondents, their sojourning has meant “learning to survive with less.” But, economic hardship does not seem true for all the families. For those with economically comfortable families back home (e.g., Alexandra and Frances), they receive support from relatives. In the case of Alexandra from Argentina, it was because her grandmother offered to buy two tickets (for the couple) that they were able to go back to Argentina for Christmas. Unfortunately, however, for Ingrid, Basu and Manuela, living with one assistantship is not just a reduction in lifestyle, but they have also been forced to look for
additional income to cover basic expenses. That is why Basu mentioned that she stays busy buying and selling children clothes for as little as “two dollars profit.” Similarly, Manuela put her situation this way:

After we had the third child, we were five in my family . . . so, when the two older ones went to school, I took care of my younger son…and to make a little money, I also [cared for] two other children . . . though it was a lot of work . . . to be in charge of all the washing, cleaning, cooking for five of us . . . I had to find a way to earn some money to afford a few things.

For Ingrid, the time in America has been “full of stress and economic worries.” Ingrid’s family had one child when they arrived in the U.S., and they decided to have a second when there was no opportunity for her to continue her studies. However, the economic pressure became obvious immediately. Like Manuela, Ingrid found herself babysitting for others. Ingrid noted the experience was “very tiring, because all the chores had to be done while I took care of two extra children (two of my own and two for earning).” For families of international students and their spouses, the financial and social problems have another compounded effect. While most migrants are assumed to benefit economically, and become able to support family back home (Ruiz, 1999), the situation with international student families is contrary to this reality.

The dependent visa (F-2) restriction does not allow them to participate in paying jobs. Even for those who sometimes receive work-permits (e.g., if and when the student spouse receives a post-doctoral status), because of the lack of assistance for the spouses, they often find themselves working in unskilled and low-paying service jobs as housekeepers and babysitters. Without the right papers, on the other hand, those with no such options are likely to
work without proper documentation when facing economic difficulty. Actually, the implications of maintaining economic ties with family members back home have been difficult for some and unproblematic for others. For some families (e.g., Alexandra, Frances and Mindy), not only are resources limited here, but also they have actually received support from their families back home. For example, as Alexandra explained earlier, without the support of her husband and her family (financially and morally), she would not have been able to go through the process of obtaining a student visa. Similarly, while many international couples live for years without visiting family, Frances was expecting the arrival of her parents a few months after our interview.

Baldwin's (1969) study discussed how the presence of the wife and children were considered to be very important for the success of the student spouses. On the other hand, given the unmet needs of accompanying spouses, combined with economic stress on the family, it is obvious, similar to other sojourner families’ experiences, that the experience of the whole family could be affected by one spouse’s problems of adjustment (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Black & Stephenson, 1989; Chang, 2004; Furnham, 2004). As is the case with other families, the happiness and minimum satisfaction of each individual member of the family is vital to the happiness of the rest of the family. As many respondents expressed, the lack of opportunity for spouses on one hand, and the financial challenges on the other, could create a stressful experience for all.

**The Uncertainty of the Future**

The feminist critique on structural marginalization and the subordination of women (Harding, 1987; Kandiyoti, 1988; Lugones & Spelman, 2005; Mies, 1991; Rogers, 1980; Stromquist, 2006, Stromquist, 1998) has scrutinized the institution of marriage and the
complexity of the factors within the household. On one hand, household responsibilities are shaped by gendered division of labor, where women are concentrated in domestic work. On the other hand, the absence of affordable daycare and child services continues to perpetuate women’s roles according to the traditional, patriarchal division of labor. Given that the high proportion of accompanying spouses are women (De Verthelyi, 1995; Vogel, 1986; Swartz & Kahne, 1993), their situation exposes the complexities of these gendered roles within the household, as well as the inability of women to empower themselves economically and politically.

For those who have completed their respective sojourns (Nasrin, Roxana, Ingrid, Gita and Manuela), life is at a different stage, and they are dealing with different questions. Since most of them have not been able to invest in their careers or education in many years, they are still faced with the same set of concerns—career, family and uncertainty as to whether they might ever achieve the goals they had when they initially arrived. However, when and if the marriages of international student families are affected for whatever reasons, as Manuela’s and Ingrid’s narratives illustrate, the accompanying spouses, who are mostly women, could face harsher economic consequences.

For both Ingrid and Manuela, whose children are now adolescents, life’s demands now consist of living as single mothers, because their husbands left the country. While they both seemed pleased with the opportunity of staying in the U.S., “particularly for the sake of the children,” as Ingrid put it, “I would have liked to have stayed with my husband if he had been willing to stay in the U.S. for a couple more years as a postdoctoral.” Ingrid said the tension between the couple reached its worst level when “I asked him to look for a
postdoctoral opportunity so that I can also get educated.” But, as she commented further, he was “not willing to stay one more month.”

As Ingrid commented, it is clear that some couples’ relationships go through a lot of strain during the sojourn, which is an issue that has been addressed previously in the literature (DeVerthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Vogel, 1986). For example, some interviewees in De Verthelyi’s study expressed that limited income forced them to alter their spending habits on food and clothing drastically (e.g., some said they wished to eat meat but they found it unaffordable). Similarly, while the anxiety and stress faced by participants in Vogel’s study originated primarily from participants’ missing family bonds, for Kim’s interviewees, the absence of a professional identity was part of the source of their frustration.

When I asked Ingrid to elaborate on her separation and subsequent decision to remain in the U.S., she explained:

He made it sound like he needed to go back immediately . . . in order to keep his job . . . [but], I know that they would have appreciated his experience if he was interested to stay for a couple more years . . . [Well], at the end, I know he was determined to go back and I told him I am staying with the kids . . . [even] then, he insisted on going back immediately . . . [Then], I knew our marriage was ending and that I was not going back with him . . . [My] son was born here, and he is a U.S. citizen and my daughter was born in Kenya . . . she is a preteen now, and she helps me with her brother . . . [Now], I am the student and I am also working on campus and will finish my studies in a couple of years.
With many spouses feeling lonely and depressed while staying at home, the added economic pressure can be stressful, especially for those with children. In the case of Ingrid and her husband, it is obvious all of these problems impacted them. Similar to Ingrid’s remarks, Tonya mentioned that she proposed to her husband that she look for a postdoctoral position. But, for a reason that Tonya believed to be simply longing to be back home and “missing being pampered in a macho culture,” she said her husband was not supportive of the idea of staying any longer. Tonya said she was negotiating with him (the idea of looking for a postdoctoral) at the time of this interview.

For Manuela, her and her children’s story of remaining in the U.S. was more dramatic than other spouses. Manuela said she was able to stay in the U.S. because of the affidavit of support of a national women’s organization that helps victims of domestic violence. Manuela said that, for reasons she did not know, her husband “started being aggressive a year after they arrived . . . even physically.” Although she was afraid of reporting the situation for fear of being separated from her children due to deportation, neighbors who witnessed the incident informed the authorities. Manuela said, “the court process was difficult” for her and the children, but eventually she was helped by a women’s rights group that appealed on her behalf.

For Nasrin, who was the only respondent who had not earned a college degree, the completion of her husband’s study had not greatly changed her personal situation. Perhaps confirming an influence of culture and family values, she stopped her education after graduating from high school, and now works as a cashier. As she put it, “I grew up in a traditional family and I married young… [However], I should have thought about going back to school after seeing so many professional men and women in our town (here)… [But]
my dream was caring for my family, especially my daughter . . . [and] taking care of her was a priority for me.”

For Roxana, her career goal changed from law to linguistics. “Next to being a mother, having a career is another important factor” in her life. In reflecting about this goal, Roxana notes, “given that we moved to a different country, none of what I had studied (her background in law) was going to be useful . . . [and] then, studying was very expensive when my husband was still a student.” Roxana further reflected that when they did decide to have children, it become her sole focus: “I knew that motherhood was a priority for me.” She further commented that, although her father had always wanted to see her as a lawyer, she had no regrets about choosing her family as a priority.

**SIS Perception of their Role as “Supportive Spouses”**

After studying the relationships between a couple’s adjustment and the factors in that process, Black and Gregerson (1991) concluded that the successful adjustment of the accompanying spouses was key to the success of the expatriates they surveyed. As well, several of the wives in this study were aware that any help from the university or community that enabled them to adjust successfully was not a service exclusively to them. Instead, they said that keeping themselves busy, which eased anxiety, was also a way of enabling their husbands to concentrate on their studies, as opposed to distressing about an unhappy wife at home.

When I asked the participants if they envisioned a role for the university to ease their sojourn, virtually all participants said they wished to see some level of involvement by the university in order to assist them better. To some participants, the university needed to get involved in designing “better” programs and services to enable them to get out of the house
routinely. A few responded somewhat differently. For example, Frances and Mindy, who interviewed together, believed “the university’s relationship is primarily with their husbands, and that their husbands are the link between them and the university.” However, as both indicated, “helping the accompanying spouses needs to be seen as helping the student spouses,” because, as Mindy noted, “when I am not happy or not busy enough, the problem will affect my husband.”

Mindy’s and Frances’s comments regarding the state of accompanying spouses as being ultimately the concerns of the scholar spouses has been discussed before in the sojourner literature in various contexts. For example, some researchers (DeVerthelyi, 1995; Furnham & Bocher, 1986; Chang, 2004; Copeland & Norell, 2002; Shao, 2001) have addressed the relationship between the satisfaction/dissatisfaction of spouses’ adjustment experiences and couples’ overall relationships, which eventually affects the level of achievement. Or, as Ward and Kennedy (2001) commented, when accompanying spouses’ unhappiness will ultimately affect the mission of the other spouse negatively, then the whole family is affected and the objective of being here (in a new place) is also compromised.

While the issue of institutional factors were among the topics respondents commented on, for Frances, Mindy, Heidi and Gita, institutional involvement could mean something as basic as, “presenting us the information that we needed . . . [and] this could be about English classes or volunteering opportunities, or it could be about churches, or how and where to get whatever we need to know.” Many of the participants recognized that any help they receive would help not just the women, but the student spouses, as well. Frances was clear about this point when she said, “If my husband needs to succeed, he needs to be free of too many
worries . . . [and] when I am at home with no friends and nothing to do, that may create a problem.”

To other women, particularly Gita, the university was not the only organization responsible for the adjustment of spouses. Particularly, Gita believed that “the community should partner with the university in creating ways to assist.” She was the only one to mention the fact that international students and their families can be contributors to the community both financially (e.g., rent, transport, restaurants and so on) as well as culturally (Altbach, 2004). Because Gita and her husband just started working in the community after he received a postdoctoral assignment, she thought the benefits from having international families “is not just a benefit for the university.” Instead, Gita further remarked that the community would benefit “by employing a continuous flow of new knowledge.” Because of this benefit, Gita said, other community businesses should be equally interested to aid the adjustment of accompanying spouses—because “when international families decide to leave the area because of difficulties in adjustment, it is not just a loss to the university, rather, it is also a loss to the community.” She added, “I feel that other community businesses are part of the community, not just the university alone.” She believed the university has certain level of responsibility to improve the livelihood of the accompanying spouses in order to help the scholars. For Gita, when international families stay in the community permanently, “it benefits every community business, including the state.”

For decades, it has been known that a portion of international scholars do remain in the U.S. either for a short time or permanently, especially those who study in scientific and engineering fields (Bushnell & Choy, 2001; Giannoccolo, 2006). In the same way, some of the participants in this study became residents of this community, either because the husband
had accepted a postdoctoral position or a permanent job. Gita, who is now settled in the community because of her husband’s postdoctoral position, questioned the factors that she believed might assist SIS adjustment in the community, as well as adjustment to possible permanent membership in the community. After describing her own difficulty with her adjustment when she first arrived, Gita explained,

the question of helping foreign students and their spouses should be seen as part of a community effort . . . [To me], when we come and settle here, I believe we are bringing something to the whole community . . . it could be knowledge, business ideas and so on . . . [In] that context, it seems to me other businesses, including the state and city governments, need to collaborate with the university to make sure we feel that we are being treated as part of the community.

When I asked Gita what kinds of services would make a difference if the town/community offered them, she replied, “Anything that makes us feel like we belong here . . . [that] we are members of the community.” Gita added some examples: “How about planning some activities for the town that will allow us to mix with people . . . for example, foreign movies week, or we can learn what is in the downtown . . . [In] same way, the hospital [could] design a program, too.”

Both the University and the Community are Important to Sojourners’ Livelihoods

Although these concerns may not be everyone’s concerns, Gita’s response makes it clear that for those who are offered an opportunity to stay in the community, their sense of “outsider” status will continue. As she said, “our friends are likely our fellow nationals, because we will never feel like we are part of the community unless we have a chance to
interact.” But, as Patchechole’s (1998) study at the University of Montana illustrated, the services which international spouses desire need to be viewed as the responsibilities of other community organizations, not just the university. Otherwise, as Gita iterated, “most foreign students and their families would end up moving away to bigger cities as soon as they are done with their studies.”

Like Gita, Roxana also lives in this community because her husband accepted a job. Now a mother of two, Roxana commented on institutional factors that could have helped her “when I first arrived and had no children.” Roxana said, institutional support did not exist back then…"it was the same as now"; and, she remarked that finding appropriate information that might have been very useful in deciding what she could study here (coming from a background of law in her home country) has not easily accessible. Primarily because of lack of information and her language skills, Roxana said that it took her seventeen years to figure out what she could do professionally. She commented:

It is seventeen years now, and I am still struggling to find my calling, professionally speaking . . . (she laughs) . . . . my father was so disappointed when I told him I could not go to school to be a lawyer . . . . I am [the] only child and he used to tell me that I was going to do this and do that . . . [and] he used to tell me that I was going to be a lawyer. But, once I moved (to the U.S.), I had no information about what I could have done with my credits from home . . . . But living here for so many years, where there is no law school, I don’t know how I could have used my time. Of course, the other issue is that until my husband received an offer to work as a postdoctoral, we could not have afforded education for me anyway.
While many respondents understand their F-2 visas restriction from seeking admission, some were thinking about the long and expensive process of changing their status in order to seek admission to the university. Alexandra was the only one in this group who was able to accomplish that change. Heidi revealed during her interview that she was also thinking about doing the same. However, since there is no readily available information that assists accompanying spouses with this process, some of them feel frustrated. In some cases, they said having “just a space on campus” designated to assist the spouses could have been helpful in gathering this type of information. Regarding this issue, Heidi commented,

How is that we are not informed where to go on campus to seek information? If I am willing to go through the process of changing my status in order to go to school…or, if we want to inquire about courses . . . [suppose] I want to take a class, I really do not know the course equivalence (vis-à-vis what I took in Holland) . . . what if I want to audit or sit in a course? . . . Where do I go to ask about that? When we first came here, I was in disbelief because I was not able to accept [the fact that] the system assumes that we are all housewives . . . [If] I had known this, I would have thought about it differently.

Many of the respondents, particularly those with English proficiency and professional experience (Heidi, Gita, Chiyo and Alexandra), were vocal about the situation with accompanying spouses in the community, and the lack of involvement of the university. These women did not feel that the community volunteer group was offering the assistance they needed. Instead, they all thought the university should be involved in providing some level of support. To that end, Heidi’s remarks convey that sometimes what spouses need is
simply basic information on a range of issues, including such things as the transfer of credits and the possibility of enrolling in or auditing courses. Heidi said the current situation with accompanying spouses is “unacceptable” because, as she put it, “my husband and I are not interested in having children, and seeing myself waste time idling at home and not even finding a meaningful volunteer opportunity is infuriating.” When her husband decided to come for a PhD degree, Heidi said she had already been working in a professional capacity for several years; although she said she still supports his education, sometimes she does regret her decision to come here. Heidi continued, “If I had known this, I would have thought about it.” Her statement suggests that not only was she the economic supporter of the family (while her husband has been studying), but it also shows her authority in the decision making process of the family (to move or not move).

**Chapter Summary**

The findings from this study offer extensive information on the daily experiences of women sojourners who reside in the U.S. with a legally dependent status. While some of the findings are distinct to this study, other findings are in accord with findings from previous studies (Baldwin, 1969; De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Pence, 2004). First, as their narratives indicated, spouses of international students in this study by and large are not a group of women who enjoy their roles as homemakers. Instead, these women are segregated into the domestic sphere because of lack of policies that would allow them access to other alternatives. Not only do legal restrictions from having access to education and work have an immediate impact of silencing, but also their isolation into the domestic sphere translates into silent struggles of economic, professional, social and psychological well being.
Second, while information about the role of community volunteers has been virtually absent, the stories of participants revealed that local networks have served for years as the sole type of social support system. However, as articulated by the interviewees, as well as by Fleur, the volunteer coordinator, the capacity of the traditional network has diminished, and will continue to do so, primarily due to shortage of volunteers. This research revealed another shortcoming of volunteer networks, in that many contemporary spouses look for opportunities that offer them experiences beyond English conversation which, in turn, remains beyond the capacity of local networks to provide.

Lastly, while each participant described her aspirations and professional experiences prior to arriving as an accompanying spouse, for many of the women, an extended stay away from education and career opportunities had long-term consequences. On one hand, the complicated and expensive process of obtaining a student visa made it difficult for the majority of the women who come as spouses to seek student status. Furthermore, this extended stay from investing in their career goals eventually led into a much lower career trajectory from their initial professional goals.

The following chapter aims to accomplish a number of objectives: First, I revisit the research questions and discuss their role in detail regarding guiding the research and producing the data. Second, I offer a series of arguments and recommendations for improving services and programs for accompanying spouses, based on the findings of my study. I finally offer implications for research and practice in international education services.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To bring this study to a close, I start by reiterating the objectives of the research. The purpose of this study was threefold: 1) to examine the daily experiences of the spouses of international students in the U.S. as they reside in a legally dependent status, 2) to explore how these spouses perceive the social and institutional factors that constitute those experiences, and 3) to uncover and define the contemporary needs of SIS and to advocate for the recognition of these needs.

To conduct this research, I used a feminist research approach in order to explore how the twelve female participants viewed their day-to-day experiences and how they understood the ways in which social and institutional social factors influenced their sojourn. While some of the data from this study confirmed findings from earlier research on accompanying spouses (Bigler, 2007; De Verthelyi, 1995; Pence, 2004; Schwartz & Kahne, 1993; Vogel, 1986), a significant amount of new information has been generated regarding the social, economic, and emotional aspect of being a spouse of an international student in the U.S. While the findings from this study offer new insights and important contributions to the sojourner literature, especially that of accompanying spouses, this information is equally beneficial to academic institutions, international education sponsors, international students personnel, as well as advocates for international spouses.

This chapter accomplishes various objectives. First, I return to the research questions and I discuss the participants’ responses and the major findings these questions generated. Next, I offer recommendations for action, based on these findings. Then, I present the limitations of the study. After that, I discuss the implications of these findings for future
studies. Finally, I conclude with my personal reflection on my own journey through the research process.

**Revisiting the Research Questions**

The feminist research approach (see Chapter 3 for the details on the methodology for the study) and the guiding questions in pursuing this research are central to the data generated in this study. The feminist approach is primarily centered on gender and the associated silencing and distortion of women’s voices. Feminist research concentrates on the experiences of the individual with regard to data collection because it validates ways of knowing that are “historically situated and structurally located” (Lather, 1988; Harding, 1987). This theoretical lens allowed study participants—in this case, women from countries foreign to the U.S.—to recount their personal stories and their ways of knowing based on their experiences.

Further, the feminist theoretical lens guided the development of interview questions that focused on gathering SIS perceptions on social and institutional factors that they viewed as being influential in their sojourn. Because of long-held views about the existence of community volunteers, the women were asked to narrate their experiences with community volunteer organizations. In addition, the women were asked to offer their views on programs and services that they felt would have been helpful to their adjustment.

The major findings of the study, then, are discussed below. While these key findings are connected with multiple aspects of sojourners’ daily lives, such as financial, social, professional, and emotional wellbeing, they are delineated into three major findings: Struggling in silence, social networking, and questioning the role of academic institutions.
Finding 1: Struggling in Silence “Invisibility”

The economic, social, and psychological impacts of sojourning as invisibles were among the key findings which all the women mentioned. To some, while their life of isolation was marked by loneliness, to others, their domestic space was filled with anxiety, depression, and economic hardship. There was a discussion on what institutions such as universities, and colleges can do in order to change the circumstances of SIS. Understanding the root of women’s exclusion and silencing lies in patriarchal assumptions, many of the participants acknowledged their economic and professional wellbeing depends highly on policies designed to give them opportunities outside the home.

While the discussion in this study about SIS is based on the daily experiences of women as accompanying spouses here in the U.S., there are similarities with Roger’s (1980) analysis of exclusion and silencing of women abroad and that of SIS in the U.S. According to the narratives of the women in this study, particularly those who are highly educated, their experiences are filled with a sense of invisibility. For many of the participants, this invisibility implies a level of alienation. Alexandra remarked, for example, “we are abandoned in the domestics,”—indicating the physical isolation that SIS face and the absence of rights to seek education and employment opportunities. However, as the majority of the participants discussed, residing invisibly also demands, due to the legal restrictions, that these sojourners often silently abandon their identity—from professionally inspired and economically independent women to instead becoming individuals with reduced ambition and economic dependency.

Nevertheless, the problems stemming from invisibility are multiple. The participants recounted their feelings of homesickness and of isolation from the local
community, particularly during the immediate period following their arrival. As many of the women recounted their experiences, a pattern emerged: their adjustments were filled with loneliness, depression and emotional problems. This adjustment difficulty impacted both the individual participants and their family units. Roxana’s statement—“I suffered in my own skin”—exemplified the finding of individual difficulty. In addition, this study also clarified how individual suffering, such as depression and emotional crises, overflow into, and impact, all members of the family. As documented in sojourner literature that focuses on families of expatriates who discussed similar problems (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Caliguir, Hyland, Johsil, & Bross, 1998), not only do such problems threaten the wellbeing of the accompanying spouses, but they can also lead both to a family’s instability and to poor professional or academic performance of the other spouse (Black & Gregerson, 1991; Furnham, 2004; Storti, 2001).

The data in this study also speaks to long-term consequences that SIS face stemming from invisibility. While their exclusion from seeking professional and educational opportunities is stated as a matter of fulfilling legal requirements of the U.S. Immigration and Citizenship Services, it has salient implications to their professional and economic outlook in the long-term. Furthermore, the participants’ narratives show that economic and professional exclusion could also have short-term effects. For participants with children (for example, Basu, Manuela and Ingrid), surviving on the assistantship of their husbands has made the short-term-effects of their sojourn economically hard. However, the long-term effects of having neither access to education nor professional goals equally made their experiences difficult. Generally as a result for women in these cases, years of detachment from investing in their career goals permanently alter their professional objectives. In the end, in spite of
their original goals, after years of absence, most spouses are highly unlikely to possess economic autonomy.

At one level, as Kim (2006) has analyzed, the lack of opportunities for spouses of international students, especially those who remain in the U.S., serves as a systemic process of molding them into middle class families. Their economic struggle and their segregation into care-work reinforces the claims made by transnational feminists (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Enloe, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Zerembka, 2003), and is very relevant in understanding the long-term effects of legally dependent policies on SIS. Specifically, not only are these women restricted to their own household roles at a family level, but also, if and when they choose to seek opportunities to remedy their economic hardship, the jobs most likely available to them are usually only within domestic service and carework. This study highlighted the lengths and alternatives these women pursued, all of which related to domestic service or family care. As Basu, Alexandra, Manuela, and Ingrid described, they did all they could to supplement the family income. For example, Basu “used [online selling site] eBay to buy and sell children clothing” for as little as two dollars profit, while Manuela and Ingrid both took care of children for other families.

There are political considerations regarding SIS financial hardships, as well. When economic hardships drag on for SIS, they are likely to seek work that is undocumented (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Enloe, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Zerembka, 2003). Not only is it nearly impossible for such spouses to enter into other job sectors without the appropriate permits, the cleaning and housekeeping job sector also routinely absorbs the job seeker with no difficulty.
Finding 2: Social Networks

When discussing the role of social support systems, all participants described the difficult time they faced due to lack of interaction with the rest of the community. Five participants, for example, mentioned they were depressed during their first few months. While little is known about the role of support systems in the sojourning of SIS, the general literature on sojourning (Church, 1982; Day & Beavers, 1988; Ebin & Blankenship, 1988; Furnham, 2004; Hull, 1978) has stated that situational factors such as social networks are central to the success of the adjustment process. Sojourning groups such as military families have long enjoyed support systems (Schwartz & Kahne, 1993). According to all of the participants in this study, there existed an established community volunteer network, and they valued the efforts of that network. However, it did not offer a range or type of service that met the participants’ specific needs.

The stories of all participants, especially those with children, have highlighted the important role that their community volunteer group has been playing for years. They described that volunteer networks served both as avenues for improving language skills and for facilitating social support systems. Over and above the welcoming environment they created for the foreign spouses, volunteer groups served a cultural exchange role by facilitating holiday activities and social events. However, the findings in this study suggest that there is a striking phenomenon occurring among both of these groups. While the volunteer network has been forced to scale back their services over the course of the past decade (according to their coordinator Fleur), well educated spouses have been seeking types of educational and professional opportunities that are beyond the scope of the volunteer
group as Heidi, Chiyo, Alexandra and Gita all expressed concern over the group’s incapacity to help them in that regard.

It is also important to acknowledge that these women asked for advanced English classes, which suggests that the older model of simple language learning has become an outdated activity for engaging spouses. What is more, the data from this study also suggest that some accompanying spouses have equal authority to their spouses in deciding which college to attend, or even whether to sojourn to the U.S. at all. According to the highly professional participants in this study, women who once contributed as much or even more than the husbands to their family’s income, there is a perspective that is different from the literature. As opposed to simply following their scholar spouses, as Heidi said, “had I known that there was nothing for me here, I would have thought [twice] about it.” So, while the availability of appropriate services seems to be a big factor in determining the nature of these professional spouses’ experiences, women such as Heidi, Chiyo and Alexandra expressed that because they had considerable authority over the decision to immigrate together with their spouses, they would have reconsidered that decision had they known there were so few opportunities for them in the U.S. In all, these women expressed lack of knowledge about the conditions that awaited them speaks to the fact that alienation characterizes their sojourn from the beginning, and contributes to their inability to make autonomous choices.

**Finding 3: Questioning the Role of Academic Institutions**

Another finding that wove through the discussion of all the participants was their expectations of the academic institution to implement policies to assist accompanying spouses. While all of the participants acknowledged that the primary concern of the university is for the scholar spouses, they all expressed the judgment that a certain level of
involvement from the university could have eased their sojourn. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the effort by academic institutions with regard to programs and services for SIS has been random. According to Administrator Anna, the philosophy has been simply to follow the rules of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services. By law, as holders of the F-2 Visa, accompanying spouses are limited to abide by those rules, and many universities simply explain the matter as being one of compliance. Yet, even while universities as a whole have no policy toward these sojourners, some universities do provide limited support. For example, the University of Colorado regularly offers English language classes, as well as subsidized childcare and subsidized access to the city’s transportation system (director of residence contacted for this study). The benefit of having routine access to services such as these is that sojourners’ socialization and networking are nurtured in the process.

Unanimously, the participants expressed that the absence of appropriate programs and service policies from the university affected their sojourn negatively. All of them believed that the current service offered by the community volunteers was not enough to be helpful, and that change needed to take place. While four of the spouses (Heidi, Tonya, Chiyo and Alexandra) thought that the university should have designated a space for spouses at least to obtain information and to socialize, others believed the university should have made the effort to offer non-credit courses, including language classes. As Heidi remarked about her expectations from the university, “I am in disbelief that there is no place for us [spouses] on campus,” which implies that, even if the university is not in a position to offer access to education and professional opportunities, at the minimum, these women want to feel that there is a designated space strictly for their concerns.
Recommendations for Action

Several key issues emerged from this study to which education administrators and host government policy makers who deal with international students must pay attention. First and foremost, administrators of higher education need to realize that an important population has been overlooked among their international constituents. This acknowledgement is important, given the competition between institutions worldwide and within the United States to attract intentional students. Care and accommodation for the needs of accompanying spouses could be crucial in attracting the best and the brightest students and their spouses.

Throughout its history, higher education in the U.S. has been part of the major landscape for social change, including changes resulting from such movements such as women’s rights and civil rights. I believe one of the challenges facing higher education today is the creation of a campus environment that is responsible to all its international student constituents. Even though accompanying spouses have never been viewed as part of the campus community by colleges, they are nevertheless part of the same constituency responsible for billions of dollars annually paid to higher education institutions worldwide (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004). In the U.S. alone, for the academic year 2008/2009, the revenue from international students (through tuition, housing, and miscellaneous expenditures) continues to grow and recent revenue has been cited about US $15.5 billion for the current academic year (IIE, 2009).

While this study was aimed at learning about the social and institutional factors affecting the sojourning experiences of spouses, I found it to be important, due to the close relation between the campus and the community around it, to integrate the community as a
valid concern in both the discussion and recommendation. The recommendations from this study include: (1) advocate for policy changes within the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, (2) offer access to simple language classes, non-credit, professional development, and audit opportunities to provide regular access to the university through on-site services and activities, (3) provide access to a designated space/office/center for spouses, and (4) provide on-site social and cultural programs and services.

**Recommendation 1: Advocate for Policy Changes within the U.S. Immigration Services**

Since the middle of the 20th century, U.S. universities have seen an enormous increase in the population of international students reaching the highest number ever—680,000 in 2009 (IIE, 2009). At the same time, the increased revenue from international education has also produced tough competition among universities worldwide. Given this growing competition, it is important for U.S. institutions to develop an affective way to address problems associated with accompanying spouses. One very important avenue in dealing with such problems would be to lobby for the change of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization policy toward accompanying spouses.

While the role of advocacy for change seems impossible by individual institutions, national organizations such as National Association for Foreign Students Advisors (NAFSA), which have long served as vehicles for expansion of international education, can be instrumental allies. The period immediately after the September 11 attack can serve as a good example. According to the Institute for International Education (IIE), in 2003–2004, enrollment of international students dropped nationwide by 2.4 percent and by another 1.3 percent the following year before leveling off in 2005–2006. As mentioned earlier,
according to IIE Open Doors Report, the numbers are now all time high in 2009: above 680,000.

While administrators of colleges and universities panicked in the face of low enrollment of foreign students, especially those from the Middle East, NAFSA was among the organizations that have advocated for a restoration of a friendly visa process in order to increase the number of students from certain regions. I believe colleges and universities can collaborate with such organizations in order to create awareness of the impact of this strict visa process on the spouses of such a valuable constituency.

Historically, in the process of expansion of international education, NAFSA has been a key organization in representing the interests of higher education institutions. It has served as a liaison between the U.S. government, private agencies and related establishments. For example, a major position of this organization has been the establishment of offices for international students at campuses throughout the U.S. Given the history and dedication of this organization to international education efforts, I am certain that the organization is likely to assist in promoting the needs of all campus constituents, including accompanying spouses.

In the same way, universities could make similar appeals to other agencies that have been active in financing and promoting international education efforts. Philanthropic organizations, such the Ford Foundation, Carnegie and Rockefeller, as well as government organizations such as the USAID, could be likely partners in looking for ways to accommodate accompanying spouses. During the early years of the arrival of international students, these agencies played central roles in promoting and financing international education. Therefore, it is feasible that they could continue to assist in the
internationalization of education by expanding their efforts to benefit the accompanying families of international students.

**Recommendation 2: Provide Language Classes and Professional Development Opportunities**

One of the findings in this study was the importance of education to the participants. Colleges and universities should be creative and sincere in meeting these needs. The frustration of SIS, specifically as it relates to sojourning and education, has been common themes among previous studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Lo, 1993; Vogel, 1986; Shao, 2001). While the findings in this study support the claims from previous, there is a repeated request for gaining access to outside-the-home opportunities. Because of the restrictions from U.S. Immigration, universities may find it difficult to offer educational opportunities for credit to these spouses. However, providing access to programs and services needs to be viewed as a mutual benefit by academic institutions. Even if the professional and educational needs of all SIS may not be identical with the participants in this particular study, academic institutions as a whole need to recognize that there is a sizable portion of this group (SIS) that is no longer content with the option of staying at home.

As we have read in the voices of the participants who were well advanced in English language ability, such as Gita, Ingrid, Chiyo and Heidi, access to elementary English would not change their situation of having a lack of opportunities. Instead, universities could offer these women a valuable way of enhancing their education by allowing them opportunities to audit, volunteer and job-shadow, and thereby maintain their professional skills and knowledge. Particularly for women with science backgrounds, such opportunities could provide them with up-to-date information in their field that they could subsequently take
back to their home countries, or even apply in professional positions in the United States, should they and their spouses choose either to reside in the United States or to go through the process of applying for permanent residency or work visas. Non-credit courses would make it possible for spouses to escape from their isolation, and establish routine contact with their campus communities.

It is also important to recognize that colleges and universities are not the only institutions where activities for SIS can be integrated. As Fleur clarified, these international families are a wealth of resources that can be utilized through other means within the community. One such avenue for involving could be accomplished by offering them volunteer opportunities in the local schools. Volunteer opportunities with community agencies such as schools would enable international women to learn more about the U.S. culture. At the same time, this can create cross-cultural education opportunity to students in American higher education to learn from other cultures.

**Recommendation 3: Provide Space: A Center for Spouses**

One of the major findings in this study was the importance for SIS of feeling part of the campus community. This issue needs to be seen both in terms of a physical space on campus and the psychological aspect of belonging to the place, the university and the community at large. Allocating a center for this group could have a range of benefits for both the international spouses and the campus community. Although budget issues and the need for allocating space could be an expensive proposition, implementation of such programs could take advantage of resources offered by related programs and centers. For example, in the initial stage of embracing SIS into the campus, offices within campus (e.g., the Women’s Center, YWCA) could be used as resources to offer regular programs,
information and socialization opportunities. Both of these offices are currently involved in providing services for various needs of women (and men, too). Therefore, the creation of programs geared toward assisting international spouses could be achieved in the short-term simply by securing help and minimum resources from such agencies.

One of the issues that emerged in the study by Pence (2004) was a sense of invisibility. Her interviewees repeatedly commented on their sense of distance from the community, the university and American culture in the midst of a university community. The statements of participants in this study validated these claims and thus reinforce the need for a designated space where SIS can interact with one another and with the general population. Not only would such a space offer physical access to campus, but it would also be a way of confirming that SIS are part of the community.

The effective fulfillment of this idea requires planning, commitment, and acknowledgment by the university to take care of the professional and social needs of SIS. It is in the successful application of such programs that the campus can embrace all its community members and be able to serve its transient constituents. Universities must accept that the traditional support networks no longer meet SIS needs, and specific activities and social events remain necessary for building community relations. Given the intelligence and interest level of SIS, such campus programs, once put in place, would very likely grow and be nurtured by the interests and desires of the SIS themselves.

Recommendation 4: Provide On-Site Social and Cultural Programs and Services

Isolation and exclusion were among the repeated themes to which participants referred, since the majority of participant/spouses viewed this exclusion as an indirect form of relegating them to the domestic sphere. For many of the interviewees, a simple course of
action would remedy their isolation. Simple occasions of social interaction, and opportunities to build a routine and mingle with the university community would remove the feeling of abandonment. Low-cost activities, such as international cultural shows, art and history programs and movie nights would fulfill these needs. Such networking could also be accomplished by partnering volunteer students with SIS interested in improving their language skills and their knowledge about American culture. In addition, international student organizations and members of other associations could play a useful role in networking, organizing cultural events and other activities.

There is precedent for this sort of system, but it has not occurred at the university level. For example, indicating the existence of loneliness in the midst of crowded campuses throughout the United States, Schwartz and Kahne (1993) have commented that, very often, when programs are indeed offered to SIS, it is because of the effort of an individual who felt compelled to advocate for this group, rather than due to the direct attention of university administration. This study asserts that it is time for institutional policies to address this problem genuinely by responding to the unmet needs of this group. Given the economic resources and cultural values that international students and their families bring to university communities, the university and the community at large need to view such an effort as a mutual advantage: in light of the amount of revenue that international students bring to the university and of the growing competition among institutions in other countries to attract this group, assisting spouses is equally beneficial for the university and the community.

Moreover, any university that does reach out to assist the SIS population would answer concretely the need to support the populations whose tuition dollars support the university, and on whose dollars universities increasingly rely. In 2002, in a speech given at
Duderstadt, former president of Michigan State University, stated:

Social, economic, technological, and market forces are far more powerful than many [people] within the higher education establishment realize. They are driving change at an unprecedented pace, perhaps even beyond the capacity of our own colleges and universities to adapt. Our current paradigms for higher education, the nature of our academic programs, the organization of our colleges and universities, the way that we finance, conduct, and distribute the services of higher education, may not be able to adapt to the demands and realities of our times. (Duderstadt, 2002, p.8)

Duderstadt’s observation is commonly cited among scholars in higher education policy concerned with the increased dependency of academic institutions on private funding, including that from education seekers from abroad (Altbach, 2007; Mazzarol & Norman Soutar, 2002; Mok & Tan, 2004; Weber & Duderstad, 2008). The private funding notion has further implications to the way institutions increasingly rely on enrollment of international students. As universities in other countries strategize to attract international students, competition in the domain of education becomes increasingly similar to the competition between businesses. In this case, U.S. universities compete with both domestic and international institutions for international students’ enrollment numbers and money. Thus, institutions willing to provide appropriate services for accompanying spouses are more likely than competitors to attract competent candidates and their spouses.

The need for providing support to SIS must be examined skillfully and sincerely. This support would have to involve elimination of the type of bias (like that which the participants in this study experienced) evident among policy makers at host universities,
national agencies (such as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service) and sponsors of international education. Providing SIS with modest assistance in the form of programming and community opportunities would yield multiple benefits to SIS, their children and eventually to their societies.

This recommendation can have positive impacts in student recruiting and retention, and can be accomplished by various means. University brochures and recruitment packages promoting services to facilitate the adjustment of spouses would not only be helpful for the SIS population, but would also be a selling point and recruitment strategy for the university. Furthermore, in the process of receiving scholars, the university would answer the imperative to inform, in advance, SIS as to their new position as “dependent,” as well as their rights. As mentioned by Heidi, if people knew in advance, it is likely that they may choose a different institution or country where the spouses, too could have an opportunity to spend time industriously.

**Limitations**

Qualitative studies are often based on stories and situations in a specific research area. While the availability of extensive data from a localized research may “ensure for external validity” and transferability (Merriam, 2002, p. 29), it is up to the reader to decide how much of the findings match their situation. Thus, there are arguments that could contribute to the limitations of this study, and could explain why the study may or may not be applicable to the broader population of spouses of international students in the U.S.

There are three factors that contribute to the limitations of this study and the transferability of the findings. First, this study focuses only on female accompanying spouses of international students, and does not represent the experience of men who come as
accompanying spouses. Second, the selection process for the interviews utilized local networks to get access to participants. This may have contributed to bias in the findings, due to self-selection of interviewees. In other words, the views documented in this study may or may not be the representative of all other accompanying spouses in this community and elsewhere. Third, the nature of community life in a Midwestern campus town may have particular and pre-existing attributes, such as homogeneity and lack of diversity that communities in large metropolitan areas may or may not have. Thus, the findings may not represent the views and opinions of all spouses who reside in different communities. Fourth, the fact that only twelve spouses were interviewed for this study makes it hard to transfer and extrapolate the findings to larger populations.

The age variability among interviewees could be an additional challenge for transferability of this study to the broader population. The twelve interviewees, in addition to being different in their ethnic diversity, varied widely in their ages, such that gaps between age groups were significant, and not uniform. While four of the women were forty years of age and above, others were as young 26 and 28. Not only may these age differences have affected their responses due to the difference in stage in life, but it also may have influenced the things they view as priorities. A further limitation of this project is that some of the data represented varying degrees of retrospectives. Because of the different stages where these women were located both in their sojourns and their marriages, participants varied in the amount of experiences they could draw upon: five of the participants spoke from long-time memories, while seven of them spoke based on what they felt about their current experiences.

Cultural and linguistic differences between respondents and me as the researcher also may have contributed to my inability to make meaning out of certain expressions and
nuances, and thus pose as limitations to this study. While all of the women in the study spoke English, only a few of them spoke fluently, and it is very possible that I was inadequately able to document the expressions of those as they responded verbally and non-verbally. Ideally, more than one interview with every participant would have allowed me to improve on this limitation by checking and rechecking for any expression missing in the translation. However, cultural differences impede complete accuracy in assessing participants’ dispositions.

Race and ethnicity issues pose yet another limitation. Although these issues could have contributed vital information, they remained outside the scope and focus of this study. For the most part, I focused on daily experiences of female SIS from various countries as they sojourn with the dependent-spouse status. I decided that the diversity of the 12 participants’ backgrounds would makes sorting the intricacies of their experiences by race and ethnicity too complex for this study. In hindsight however, I am convinced that posing questions to my participants about race and ethnic identity, as both relate to their day-to-day experiences, could have enriched the findings of this study.

In spite of all these limitations, the study still contributes significantly to what we know about the experiences of the spouses of international students. The contribution is a particularly useful foundation for understanding the complex issues that surround this group. Academic institutions, especially the offices of International Students, Admission and Residence Halls could use these results to understand the needs of this population. In the same way, donors and sponsors of international students, as well as advocates, may find this information useful for establishing practices that address the needs of accompanying spouses.
Contributions to Research and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study brought to light various avenues for future study. The most important among these are the silent economic and professional struggles of spouses. In addition, the significance of social networking to the emotional and psychological well being of sojourners elucidates the necessary role of support systems. However, the subject of volunteer service has been overlooked in the literature on SIS, and this study opened doors for future investigation of the relationship between these two groups. Future studies could further refine the effectiveness of services in aiding SIS by researching the availability, as well as the capability, of community networks in their ability to provide services all over the U.S.

The major contributions of this study include (1) the need to understand and account for the personal and professional needs of SIS and (2) the development of best practices that directly aid all SIS in their sojourning experiences. Previous studies (De Verthelyi, 1995; Kim, 2006; Vogel, 1986) have already documented the professional anxiety and economic concerns that characterize, and which are extensive among, this group. Future studies could add to assistance efforts by learning more about the professional and academic backgrounds of accompanying spouses. While Baldwin's (1969) earlier study presented spouses as busy caretakers of their family’s needs, roles have changed, and sojourning spouses no longer occupy the same roles, even though they are still viewed in terms of traditional gender roles. Therefore, to learn more about this group, surveys aimed at assessing the professional and academic level of the spouses of international students could be implemented by institutions to assess the specific needs of each university community.

For the future, one of the most important research topics needed would be a comprehensive survey of U.S. academic institutions and the availability of programs and
services at each institution. To date, except for an unpublished survey report conducted in 1982 by the University of Chicago (cited in Schwartz & Kahne, 1993), it is impossible to know about services and programs being offered by institutions at large. Such a study would evaluate the degrees of success or failure of offered services, and would ultimately define the needs for services and best practices that would meet those needs. Such research could have as its goal the understanding of types of assistance that universities in other countries offer the group as a way to determine the services and opportunities they themselves could offer. Because international education seekers look for higher education in universities worldwide, such as in the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and more (Altbach, 2007; Mok & Tan; Mazzarol & Soutar; Weber & Duderstadt, 2008), future research should focus specifically on these countries’ institutions.

**Reflection**

While this study took over three years to complete (due to unexpected circumstances), I see this experience as a way of traveling-back in time to visit my own path in life. It served as a revisitation to multiple areas of my past. Though I was not consciously aware initially of why I was compelled to seek out this group, every time I had a chance to do research, I went back to the same group of women. When I took my first qualitative research course, I interviewed a spouse of an international student who I had come to know through the community volunteers. For a final project in another course, I conducted interviews with another spouse about her experiences. Two years after that course, I used the story of yet another international spouse for a readers theater project, which was part of a final project for a course in feminist methodology. Looking back, every time I had the chance, I went to the
same group to do my inquiry. Why was it so important to me to tell the stories of these women specifically?

I believe one reason was that the stories of these women gave me a chance to visit my own past of living with a restricted visa, and the ensuing consequences. The insecure life of surviving in a *catch-22* situation has left me with an unforgettable experience, and will continue to compel me to be a voice for people who are both trapped and voiceless (trapped because the law does not allow them to seek any agency; voiceless because no one knows or understand their situation). They are voiceless and invisible because they do not have real interactions with the general population. So, I have been drawn to these groups because I felt compelled to advocate for change so that they might be empowered through gaining their agency.

Another reason that attracted me to study SIS was the need to understand the potential these women possess in terms of being contributors to the economic development of their respective countries. After my development work in Ethiopia, I had believed wholeheartedly that the education of women, especially those from Third World countries, played—and continues to play—a key role in the successful development of their society. In that sense, I saw the lack of opportunity that many women face in the U.S. as an injustice not only to the women, but also to their countries, too. Even if these women cannot pursue a formal education in the U.S., at least there could be made available plenty of other opportunities, such as internships, volunteer positions and job-shadowing experiences, where they could at least learn new skills or maintain skills they have already learned.

The lack of education opportunities has deleterious effects on these women’s lives, how they feel about themselves and how they feel about their new homes. By
acknowledging these negative effects, I understand that they are caught in a vicious circle, and I have long wanted to advocate for opportunities for accompanying spouses. It is important for me to be supportive to these women, because I know that advocating for changes to their situation is a way of advocating for positive conditions for them, their children and communities at large.
APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear participants:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This is a research study which aims to assess your participation and satisfaction level in community programs and services including the YWCA program of *Embracing the Spouses of International Students* and other community activities. The information obtained from these interviews will be used to complete the dissertation component of my doctoral study.

Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Please feel free to ask questions if you need further clarifications regarding the focus group questions.

If you decide to participate in this study, there is no direct benefit to you. However the study hopes the information gained in this evaluation will benefit the university as well as community organizations to learn about the adequacy of services and programs for spouses. You are welcome to skip any question that you may not feel comfortable to answer.

While there will be recording of the discussions, the records identifying participants will be kept confidential. As soon as I completed transcribing, the recording from the discussions and interviews the tapes will be destroyed. Moreover, your real names will not be used in any report that may come out of this study. Instead, all written material will utilize fictitious names.

Thank you for your participation!

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

The interview process will be informal and descriptive. I will use the following questions to guide the study. Based on the directions that respondents chose to discuss, subsequent questions will follow their responses.

1. Please describe your life before coming to the U.S.
2. Tell me about your professional and academic background.
3. How long has been since you move to the U.S.?
4. How did you deal and continue to deal with the adjustment of living in a new culture?
5. What are your perceptions about your experiences as an accompanying spouse?
6. Are there things in your personal, familial, and social life that have created opportunities or challenges in your new environment?
7. Did you attend and continue to attend any program for spouses within this community? If yes, how long have you been attending community programs?
8. What sort of benefits have you been able to gain from attending the community support network?
9. Are there any changes in the program that you would like to see (to be included/removed)?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX C: VISA FOR ACADEMIC STUDENTS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

The F nonimmigrant category allows qualifying academic students to study in the U.S. in approved academic institutions. To obtain student status, a person must show that he or she—

- has been accepted by an approved academic school in the U.S.,
- has the financial resources to complete the planned course of study without working in the U.S., and
- plans to return abroad when he or she completes the program.

Husbands, wives and unmarried children under 21 of F nonimmigrant students can be granted F2 dependent status to accompany the student.

As an F1, can my family come with me? Can they work, or go to school?
An F1 student’s husband or wife and unmarried children under 21 can come with the student to the U.S. in F2 status to stay with the student while he or she studies in the U.S. For specific information, we recommend you contact your school.

Status – An F2 is granted duration of status (D/S), just like the F1. An F2 is considered to be maintaining status as long as the F2 is the F1’s husband/wife or unmarried child under 21 meeting the terms of their own status, and the F1 is maintaining his or her status.

Extending stay – Since F2 status depends on the status of the F1, as long as the F1 maintains his or her status the F2 does not have to extend his or her status.

Working – An F2 cannot work in the U.S. The F2 category is solely to let a student’s immediate family stay with them while they study in the U.S.

Going to school –
- The husband or wife of an F1 cannot study in the U.S. as an F2. However, if they qualify for F1 status, they can apply to change status to F1 so they can go to school.
- While in status an F2 child can attend elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through twelfth grade) without changing to another status.

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