

**EXPLORING NARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY AMONG AMERICAN AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A RESEARCH INTENSIVE, U.S.
UNIVERSITY**

By

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DECLARATION

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- I dedicate this thesis to my mother Ilirijana Memaj, also known as Lili to her closest family and friends. My mother believed in the powerful force of education to cultivate productive citizens in order to advance society. Following her philosophy that education starts at home, the best education I received was the one she provided during my early childhood years. Rooted in strong ethics and values, she provided the solid foundation that steered my life to a successful academic career. One of those values was the value of community. My mother was always thoughtful of others and always went out of her way to make others feel part of our community and family. She instilled this value in me and this fuels my passion in the work I do with university students from all walks of life. And if it wasn't for her being on my side, supporting me in each step of my academic journey, and demanding that I strive to be my best self I don't think I would have ever attempted to pursue a PhD. My mom was sweet, kind-hearted, caring, loving, compassionate, gentle, and inclusive of everyone. I may not have had all the toys or other material items we naively wish for as a child, but she worked tirelessly to provide a safe and comfortable home, filled with unconditional motherly love. This is something I now realize that no material item could ever attempt to supersede. I was fortunate and blessed to have had a wonderful mother like Lili and I am proud to honor her with this work.
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OPSOMMING

Tans studeer meer as vier miljoen studente in 'n ander land. Daar is verskeie redes vir hierdie beduidende toename in internasionale studente-mobiliteit oor die afgelope 15 jaar. Eerstens is studente-mobiliteit nou verweef met die groter tendense van globalisering, waar lande soos die Verenigde State, Kanada, die Verenigde Koninkryk en Australië meeding vir die beste en blinkste verstande om nie net in hulle onderskeie lande te studeer nie, maar uiteindelik ook daarheen te immigrer. Tweedens kyk baie studente na ander lande as 'n geleentheid om hulle kanse te verbeter om werk te kry wanneer hulle teruggaan huis toe.

Laastens kyk baie universiteite met 'n tekort aan kontantvloei ook na internasionale studente om gapings in hulle begrotings aan te vul, aangesien hierdie studente baie hoër studiegelde betaal as hulle Amerikaanse eweknieë. Daarbenewens het internasionale studente 'n beduidende invloed op beide die plaaslike en nasionale ekonomieë in hulle gasheerlande. Aangesien die top gasheerlande meeding vir getalle internasionale studente het daar wêreldwyd debatte ontstaan oor hoe internasionale studente op kampusse integreer. Soos kampusgemeenskappe toenemend diversifiseer, so doen ook die konsep van 'n sin van gemeenskap vind. Internasionale studente kan egter aanneem dat Amerikaanse studente reeds 'n sin van gemeenskap op 'n universiteitskampus het, hoewel die literatuur aandui dat Amerikaanse studente ook sukkel. Die hoofdoelwit van hierdie studie was om 'n in-diepte verkenning te doen van die narratiewe van beide internasionale en Amerikaanse studente om te vergelyk hoe hierdie studente 'n sin van gemeenskap in 'n onbekende kampusomgewing konstrueer. Daarbenewens verken hierdie studie ook hoe internasionale en Amerikaanse studente hulle sin van op die kampus behoort, onderhandel; die dinamika met betrekking tot gemeenskap wanneer internasionale en Amerikaanse studente met mekaar in kontak kom; en hoe hierdie studente hulle eie en ander se kulturele identiteite onderhandel. Hierdie studie verskaf dus praktiese implikasies vir universiteite om die ervarings van beide internasionale en Amerikaanse studente te verhoog.

Die teoretiese basis vir hierdie studente sluit in akkulturasieteorie, sosiale verteenwoordigingsteorie, derde ruimte teorie (*third space theory*), Tinto se model van studenteretensie, en die teorie van saakmaak (*the theory of mattering*). Met behulp van 'n epistemologiese konstruktivistiese paradigma het hierdie studie 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering met 'n gevallestudie-navorsingsontwerp gebruik. 'n Totaal van 20 internasionale en Amerikaanse studente het deur middel van fokusgroepe en weeklikse joernale aan die studie deelgeneem. Die navorser het ook 'n joernaal gehou om die bevindinge van die studie te interpreteer.

Die bevindinge van die studie onderstreep die belangrikheid van 'n sin van gemeenskap, hoewel 'n vergelyking van die narratiewe van die internasionale en Amerikaanse studente getoon het dat daar ooreenkomste en verskille in die sienings van 'n sin van gemeenskap was. 'n Ondersoek na die oppervlak van die narratiewe het getoon dat beide die internasionale en Amerikaanse studente hulle tevredenheid met die universiteitsgemeenskap uitgedruk het. 'n Dieper kyk na die data verskaf egter 'n ander storie. Beide groepe studente het gesê hulle voel dat hulle nie vir die universiteitsgemeenskap saak maak nie, hoewel hulle dalk vir sommige individue saak maak. Hierdie studie vertoon ook hoe elke stel studente hierdie nuwe omgewing met sekere sosiale voorstellings of "lense" betree het, veral met betrekking tot hoër onderwys. Dit stel voor dat studente platforms en geleenthede benodig om komplekse en diverse interaksies te kan hê om te leer van en anders te dink ook komplekse kwessies, soos 'n sin van gemeenskap.

Die implikasie van hierdie studie is dat 'n dialoog aangemoedig moet word om 'n sin van gemeenskap op universiteitskampusse nie net in die Verenigde State nie, maar ook orals oor die wêreld, te definieer. Hierdie studie versterk die impak van 'n sin van gemeenskap op die sukses van universiteitstudente, asook die impak wat dit het op studentewerwing en -behoud. Daarbenewens vertoon hierdie studie die kompleksiteit van identiteitsontwikkeling en die delikate aard van hoe mense kulturele interaksies verwerk.

ABSTRACT

Currently, more than four million students study in another country. There are several reasons to explain the significant increase of international student mobility within the past 15 years. First, student mobility is intertwined with the larger trends of globalization, where countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia are competing for the best and brightest minds to not only study in their respective countries, but to ultimately immigrate. Secondly, many students look to study in other countries to better their chances of finding employment once they return home. And lastly, many cash-strapped universities look to international students to help fill in budget gaps, as these students pay significantly higher fees than their domestic counterparts. Additionally, international students have a significant impact on both local and national economies in their host countries. As the top hosting countries compete for international student numbers, global debates have ensued regarding how international students are integrating on campuses. As campus communities continue diversifying, so does the concept of finding a sense of community. However, international students may assume that domestic students already have a sense of community on a university campus, but literature suggests domestic students struggle as well. The primary aim of this study was to conduct an in-depth exploration of narratives of both international and domestic students in order to compare how these students construct sense of community in an unfamiliar campus environment. Additionally, this study explores how international and American students negotiate belonging on campus, the dynamics about community when international and American students interact, and how these students negotiate their own and others' cultural identities. As a result, this study provides practical implications for universities to enhance the experiences of both international and domestic students.

The theoretical base of this study included acculturation theory, social representation theory, third space theory, Tinto's Model of Student Retention, and the theory of mattering. With an epistemological constructivist paradigm, this

study took a qualitative research approach with a case study research design. A total of 20 international and American students participated in this study through focus groups and weekly journals. A researcher's journal was also utilized as a way to interpret the findings of the study.

The findings of this study boldly underlines the importance of sense of community, though when comparing the narratives of the international and American students, the views of sense of community had similarities and differences. When examining the surface of the narratives, both international and American students expressed satisfaction with the university community. However, a deeper dive into the data provided a different story. Both groups of students shared feelings of not mattering to the university community, but perhaps mattering to certain individuals. This study also showcases how each set of students entered this new environment with certain social representations or "lenses", especially regarding higher education. This suggests that students need platforms and opportunities to have complex and diverse interactions in order to learn and think differently about complex issues, such as sense of community.

The implication of this study is to encourage a dialogue in defining sense of community on university campuses not just in the United States, but around the world. This study reinforces the impact sense of community has on the success of university students, as well as the impact it has on student recruitment and retention. Additionally, this study showcases the complexity of identity development and the delicate nature of how one processes cultural interactions.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Universities compete not only for the brightest minds in their respective countries; because of an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world they now compete for the brightest minds away from home (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2017). The “competition” in attracting students from beyond home borders by offering them not only the best academic programs, but also affordable and relevant programs, continues to grow. According to UNESCO, in 1950 there were only 107,000 international students throughout the world (Barnett and Wu, 1995). The number of globally mobile students has continued to rise throughout the years. In 2009, the number reached 2.1 million (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). In 2012, the figure doubled to nearly four million students studying in another country (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). In 2015, there were around 4.5 million international students (OECD 2015). “Countries are striving to develop ‘world-class universities’ that will spearhead the development of a knowledge-based economy” (Salmi, 2009, p. 18). “The rise of international student mobility is intertwined with larger trends in globalization, the global economy, and the internationalization of higher education” (Shields, 2013, p. 65). Students are also interested in studying abroad because many who return to their home countries are able to find employment (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011, p. 2). Depending on the country, students may have no choice but to leave their home countries in order to have access to higher education. For example, in India the growth of the college-age population has surpassed the country’s existing places in higher education

institutions. This trend adds to the growing demand for international education (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011, p. 2).

In addition to students looking for opportunities for education in another country, top economies recognize that international students could be a natural solution, not only to meeting the lack of national skills, but also to making up for funding shortfalls while still being seen as an international competitor (Geddie 2015; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). UNESCO lists the top five destination countries for hosting international students as the United States (18%), the United Kingdom (11%), France (7%), Australia (6%), and Germany (5%) (2014). New countries emerging as educational destinations include New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Spain, Russia and Korea. The top five countries of origin for international students include China (694,400), India (189,500), Republic of Korea (123,700), Germany (117,600) and Saudi Arabia (62,500) (UNESCO, 2014).

1.1.1 International Students in the United States

As the top destination for international students, the United States continues to be affected by these numbers in terms of state economic development, especially in the case of cash-strapped academic institutions (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). Between 2007 and 2010, fees at public universities in the United States increased by 27 percent to make up for the continued cut in state funding, while according to the Federal Reserve, the inflation-adjusted median family income declined by 7.6 percent (Dennis, 2014). According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2017), there are 1.18 million international students studying at nearly 9,000 schools in the United States as of May 2017. These students contributed \$41 billion to the U.S. economy, making higher education one of the major export service industries in the country (“NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool”, 2020). In addition,

international students directly or indirectly have created and supported more than 458,000 jobs in the country during the 2018-2019 academic year (“NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool”, 2020).

Considering the magnitude of the impact of international students on the country's economy, the actual proportion of international students is about 5% of the total student body. It appears the United States hasn't taken any action on public policy regarding international student recruitment until very recently (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). The country has been able to comfortably attract international students as it is home to some of the world's leading universities and because its culture has spread to all corners of the world (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). Any policies regarding international students are mostly tied to national security concerns and there seems to be a continued, balancing act between national security and the growing importance of attracting students in science, technology, engineering, and math (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). Douglass and Edlestein (2009, p. 2) argue that policymakers have not been able to develop a “strategic approach to capitalizing on the global pool of mobile students”. For example, in 2008 legislation was introduced that would have created a pathway to legal permanent residence for international students in STEM fields (Haddal, 2008). Though this attempt showed good intent, this has not materialized into a law.

Not having a strategic approach may have resulted in the United States finding itself in a particularly interesting situation as a result of recent political events not only at home, but also abroad. Approximately 97% of international enrollment growth since 2006 in the United States can be attributed to China, India, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam, but changes in policies, as well as the changes in the general population in these countries can be attributed to the downturn in student numbers (Usher, 2019). In addition, other possible reasons for the decrease in international

students could be the decline in the country's appeal. This includes tuition costs and reasons falling under what has been referred to as the "Trump Effect": students not feeling welcomed and the interpretation of a harsher visa regime, although the decline in student numbers started before President Trump's election in 2016 (Usher, 2019). College administrators explain that President Trump's nativist policies are leading students, particularly those from China and India, to enroll in other countries (Quinton, 2018). The slowdown in international students hit universities located in the Midwest the hardest, as many institutions in this region are not well known (Quinton, 2018). Dennis Dunham, the executive director of global affairs at the University of Central Oklahoma, explained in the article "*As Students Head to Campus, Colleges Fear International Student Decline*" that while he travels abroad to recruit new students, he takes a letter from Oklahoma's congressional delegation explaining that international students are still welcomed in the United States (Quinton, 2018). According to the Pew Research Center, the reputation of the United States has suffered under the Trump Administration. The center references the results of the ICEF i-graduate Agent Barometer survey that reported a percentage decline in international student agents calling the United States "very attractive" from 67% in 2016 to 57% in 2018 (Usher, 2019). Lastly, university administrators report that the increase in visa denials has had a significant impact on enrollment numbers. In 2018, the Institute of International Education reported that 83% of institutions that participated in their survey said that the decline in international student numbers could be attributed to visa denials (Usher, 2019).

Furthermore, administrators attribute nationalism and neo-racism to the "Trump Effect" and argue that the presence of international students on their campuses is challenged by prejudice (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). While international students studying in the United States may have faced prejudice long before the election of President Trump, it seems the

impression of being “unwelcomed” has reached potential international students before they even have the opportunity to enter the country. Families “look at the TV and see all of this news” regarding travel bans and delays in receiving visas (Benderly, 2019, p. 26). Such an example occurred in December of 2015 when President Trump first announced a complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until the country’s representatives could “figure out what was going on”, and that U.S. workers needed to stop losing their jobs to foreigners (Johnson, 2018, p. 421). A survey of 40,000 prospective international students in 118 countries conducted in 2016 revealed that 60% said they would be less likely to study in the United States with Donald Trump as president (Johnson, 2018). In addition, international students already in the country expressed uncertainty about continuing their studies because of fear of being unable to reenter the country if they travelled to visit family or attend professional conferences (Johnson, 2018).

At first glance, it may seem that numbers of international students in the U.S. have declined in recent years, since there was a 6.6% drop in new enrollments of foreign students between 2017–2018 (Usher, 2019). However, in 2018, the number of international students reached a new high, exceeding one million for the third year in a row (Usher, 2019). This is because while the total number of first-time students may have decreased, the total number of students in the country still increased because students have not graduated yet. And those who did graduate and stayed in the country to work are still considered being on a student status. “Since most degrees take more than one year to complete, new enrollments don’t need to rise for total enrollments to do so: the number of new students just needs to equal or exceed the number of students leaving the system via graduation or dropping out,” (Usher, 2019, p. 44).

So even though the effects of new enrollment decreases have not as yet been felt, there is the potential that the ripple effects will come to the U.S. years down the road when perhaps the number of international students graduating and leaving the country will finally outpace declining new enrollment numbers. “In autumn 2017, U.S. universities and colleges experienced a ‘flattening’ in the overall number of enrolled international students as well as an average decrease of 7% in the number of newly enrolled international students” (Johnson, 2018, p. 424). While other countries, such as Australia, Canada and Germany, have implemented strategic plans when it comes to attracting and retaining international students (Quinton, 2018).

1.1.2 International Students in Other Top Hosting Countries

Countries such as Australia and Canada in particular have realized the potential advantages of attracting international students who may possibly migrate permanently to these countries (Hawthorne, 2012; Tremblay, 2005). In Canada alone, the number of international students has increased 200% between 2000–2001 and 2013–2014 (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). While left and right politics view long-term immigration routes differently, both have supported that such routes involving international students are needed in order to meet the country’s labor needs (Mas 2016). Unlike the United States, Canada has implemented policies aimed at the attraction and retention of international students and has introduced the Express Entry, a new visa system that streamlines the management of applications for permanent residency (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). “Graduate students with post-graduate work permits are eligible to apply through Express Entry” (Sa & Sabzaleiva, 2018, p. 242).

As for Australia, this country is seen as the leader in the recruitment of international students (Adams et al., 2012) with a quarter of all the

country's students coming from outside the country (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2018). International students provide Australian universities with 21% of their revenue (Adams et al., 2012). In 2016, the Australian government published a cross-government plan that would bring together the Department of Education and Training, Austrade, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the first cross-collaboration strategy for the education sector (Custer, 2015).

1.1.3 International Students' Adjustment and Integration

As countries continue to see the benefits of student mobility, competition between countries to attract and retain these students is growing. There is now what is called the "great brain race" (Wildavsky, 2012). When it comes to deciding where to study, students consider the reputation of a country's higher education and programs, immigration policy, language and tuition (OECD, 2015). However, one factor that ultimately influences students' decisions and satisfaction with their education abroad is how they feel when they are on campus and in the community. This has become particularly apparent with the advent of the "Trump Effect" in the United States, as administrators and educators campaign to drive the notion that international students are still welcome in the country. It is one thing to attract international students, but often the importance of having a sense of belonging is missed by researchers and administrators when it comes to retaining both international and domestic students. As Quinton (2018, p. 156) puts it:

International students do not exist in a vacuum. The host society and its individual members play a crucial role in the international student experience, and researchers have noted the need for a better understanding of this core part of international student life.

Global debates continue on how students are integrating on campuses, not only in the United States but also around the world. "The social

environment is one important aspect of the university experience that should not be ignored” (Guidry Lacina, 2002, p. 26). A plethora of research indicates challenges international students face when it comes to integrating into university life in another country. Major themes include language barriers in academic coursework and daily life, cultural differences, and homesickness. Some steps and theories exist on how to approach these concerns. However, one theme of concern that international students may face above all else is social connectedness, also referred to as belonging in a community. Research consistently indicates that one of the main struggles international students face is finding a sense of belonging in a new environment. I refer to some of these studies specifically in the following paragraphs.

Snow Andrade (2008), who conducted in-depth interviews with 17 international students at Brigham Young University, argues that cultural integration and campus climate are particularly relevant to international student persistence in completing a degree. “Campus climate affects students’ sense of belonging, and is determined by how the institution welcomes, supports, and validates students” (Snow Andrade, 2008, p. 436).

A study in which 84 international students at the University of Hawaii were surveyed examined the relationship between friendship networks and students’ sense of belonging, their homesickness, contentment, and satisfaction. Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune (2010, p. 281) found that “international students with a higher ratio of individuals from the host country in their network claimed to be more satisfied, content, and more socially connected”.

In Australia, establishing the “belonging factor” is growing even more important owing to the recent fluctuation in the numbers of international

students entering the country. According to the Department of Education within the Australian Government, international student enrollment in higher education had a significant jump to 242,030 in 2010 (Australia Education International, 2014). However, the numbers continued to drop each year until 2013. As of that year, there were 230,440 international students in the country. Only in 2014 did the numbers start to increase significantly.

As it has seen the positive impact international students can have on the country in terms of culture and boosting the economy, Australia is quickly becoming a new destination for international students. In order to maintain this status as popular destination, it is important that the country determines the belonging factor that is becoming increasingly important. Lin et al., (2012) argue that international students interviewed while studying in Australia were caught between seeking a sense of belonging by staying with other, similar international students, and networking with domestic student peers by extending themselves to those of different backgrounds. A simple task, such as choosing where to sit in class, determined outcomes of international students feeling that they belonged (Lin et al., 2012).

1.2 CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

It is apparent that having a sense of belonging in a community could be a critical factor in international students' success at university. However, there is an assumption that is made by international students that is not addressed in current research. Through my work as a university administrator working with both international and domestic students, many international students assume that domestic students already have a sense of belonging in a new campus environment because they are studying in their country of origin. However, that is not always the case, considering my

interactions with domestic students, as well as the work done by other researchers. Kane, Chalcraft, and Volpe (2014) note that research conducted at three universities in London suggested that domestic students develop a sense of belonging within the first seven weeks of the first semester. However, a significant minority continues having trouble settling and integrating socially in the university environment. This is an example showing that if it's the United States or the United Kingdom, domestic students may not have an immediate sense of belonging just because they are studying within their country of origin.

There is a gap in current research on how both international and domestic students construct sense of community in an unfamiliar campus environment. While considering related research, the proposed study focuses on how international students and American¹ students construct belonging in an unfamiliar American campus environment. Examining the parallel narratives of international students and domestic students would fill this gap in our knowledge of what similarities and differences there are among these students when it comes to renegotiating and constructing belonging on campus. This study could have practical implications when thinking about student support services, not only for U.S. universities, but for universities around the world. Examining narratives of both international and domestic students, and identifying similarities and differences in how each group and individual constructs community and belonging will help administrators to strategize the use of resources and improve the quality of campus life. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of 10 international students and 10 American students, with the following questions in mind:

¹ It is important to recognize the cultural hegemony of the United States and its use of this term. In regard to community psychologies, how communities in Central and South Americas construct "American" are radically different than how this term is constructed in the United States (Fryer & Lang, 2008). For the purpose of this study, I adopted the day-to-day term "American" based on its construct and use within the United States of America.

- What can we learn about the sense of community by listening to the perceptions of domestic and international students at a U.S. university?

Sub-questions were:

- What perceptions of community do international students have?
- What perceptions of community do American students have?
- How do American and international students negotiate belonging on campus?
- What are the community dynamics when international and American students interact?
- How do international and American students negotiate their own and others' cultural identities?

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When examining how one constructs belonging in a new campus environment it is important to consider that both American and international students will be referring to previous experiences and their current identity. In order to deal with this aspect, I applied acculturation theory, social-representation theory, and third space theory. In addition, when examining the data, the impact of community on student retention and the concept of mattering were evident, so I also used Tinto's model on student retention and the theory of mattering. These theories provided the framework for this study and I discuss them here briefly, providing a more in-depth discussion in chapter three.

1.3.1 Acculturation Theory and Social Representation Theory

Acculturation describes the process a person or group experiences when they are consistently in contact with another culture, resulting in social or behavioral changes (Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok, 1987, p. 491-492).

Howarth et al. (2013, p. 3) argue that “Constructing one’s cultural identity is a situated process of making meaning where personal life history and the representations of others meet”. Additionally, it is an on-going process that involves a multitude of representations an individual might hold in various everyday interactions (Needham, 1973). In other words, acculturation does not suddenly happen; rather, it occurs each day through several interactions through what is also referred to as acculturation in movement. Acculturation theory and the concept of acculturation in movement provides the route for examining individual cultural contact and maintenance, while social-representation theory considers how one fits within a dominant society. “We are constantly plunged into an environment where we are bombarded with information and required to deal with it”, observe Rateau, et al. (2011). “Social representations are systems of opinions, knowledge, and beliefs particular to a culture, a social category, or a group with regard to objects in the social environment” (Rateau, et al., 2011). Both international and American students are in the process of constructing their cultural identity while placed in a situation where they are interpreting a new social environment.

1.3.2 Third Space Theory

The third theoretical foundation that is relative to this research involves the idea of third space theory. When people are brought together, a hybrid third space is created and it is this type of space that helps determine an individual’s identity through a variety of interactions with different cultures (Bhabha, 2004). This theory is a postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of

identity and community, emphasizing the uniqueness of each person in the hybrid third space (Bhabha, 2004). Bhabha explains that in a largely postcolonial modern world, the third space is a response as people in their daily lives try to understand the constant change around them. He argues that there is no holistic definition of culture (Bhabha, 2004). This theory also emphasizes the fusion and the effect that colonizers and the colonized had on each other when it came to the overlapping of different views (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006).

Several studies have looked at third space theory in an academic context. Idrus (2015) examined a type of classroom hybridity in the diversity of students as well as the combination of the official and unofficial curriculum. Pane (2007) identified the creation of a third space in her study resulting from the blending of face-to-face and online instruction. Pane (2007) and Idris (2015) described being able to facilitate constructing a shared identity by getting students to reflect on their own experiences in a way that helped them recognize their differences from others, but also the importance of unity. In contrast, Kostogriz (2002) emphasized that the third space should not necessarily be concerned with finding solutions to differences or looking for common ground. Rather, the main purpose of the third space is for students to become aware of these contradictions and their ambivalence, and how this might help them in their learning. This would make students better prepared for conflicts and give them a better understanding of differences that exist (Kostogriz, 2002).

In a more culturally focused setting, Howarth et al. (2013) observed how individuals negotiated cultural identity in a type of 'third space'. They observed British mixed-heritage children and adults at community art workshops. The participants in the present study are frequently found in

'third spaces' or 'in-between' spaces, having to think about negotiating their cultural identities within a larger society.

The use of third space theory, acculturation theory and social-representation theory will help me to examine how each participant maintains his/her own culture while interacting with another culture and how this influences his/her sense of belonging within a campus community.

1.3.3 Tinto's Model of Student Retention

Tinto's model on student retention (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 1997, 1998) states that the university not only provides an academic system, but also a type of social system. Integration into this social system is just as important and critical to the success of the student as integration in the academic system. The academic system focuses on the student's integration when it comes to intellectual development and academic performance, while social integration is about the development of an informal relationship with peers, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1975). Based on this theory, for both international and domestic students, success in terms of integrating in a new campus community academically and socially is crucial when it comes to being able to graduate. Taking these two systems into consideration, Tinto developed 13 dimensions that have an impact on students' decision to stay at a university or leave (Tinto, 2004). I elaborate on these in chapter three.

1.3.4 Theory of Mattering

"Higher education practitioners and researchers alike consistently espouse the value and impact of the concept of mattering on college students," observe Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009, p. 154). Sociologist Morris Rosenberg first described mattering. Rosenberg and McCullough

(1981) stated, “Mattering refers to the individual’s feeling that he or she counts, makes a difference...” (p. 163). Schlossberg (1989) built upon the theory of Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) in the theory of college students’ mattering and marginality, linking the feeling of mattering to others to the academic success of college students. The five components of mattering developed by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) are explored later in chapter three of this thesis.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study was framed within an epistemological constructivist paradigm. First, as an epistemological version of a constructivist paradigm, the study looked specifically at what students count as knowledge and how their reasoning justifying that knowledge is true (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This reinforces the subjective understanding that comes with a constructivist paradigm, which is defined as our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth. We recognize that what people perceive and believe is shaped by their assumptions and prior experiences as well as by the reality that they interact with (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43).

This also means that along with the respondents, the knower, or in this case the researcher, can help to co-create the understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). We have to rely on respondents’ perspectives, and how they view the context of community (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, this research focuses on the ways students describe their reality and how we can start to understand their actions (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Using the epistemological constructivist paradigm, I adopted a qualitative approach to the research. Qualitative research involves understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and

what meaning they place on their experience (Merriam, 2009). This fits perfectly with this study, which aimed to determine how domestic and international students construct belonging, and their reasoning behind it.

Since I was looking to students to explain how their interactions and experiences helped them construct their sense of belonging, I decided that a case study design would be most useful to explore and interpret individual narratives. A case study is a strategy used to find the same phenomenon or dynamics within a single case or a bounded system within a specific context (Rule & John, 2011; Yin, 2009). This would allow the examination of students' everyday life while conducting a qualitative study. In addition, it would allow me to gather narratives that would help to make sense and truly understand students' surroundings and the culture at their university (Vincent, 2015). These narratives would allow individuals to express their thoughts and explanations, and gathering these narratives would allow me to conduct a context of discovery. "Researchers may explore open-ended narrative accounts for broad patterns, themes, images, and qualitative characterizations in order to generate new theories about lives or to understand a single (and typically noteworthy) life in full" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012, p. 16).

In summary, a case study research design was best suited to this research study because it focused on specific groups of American and international students within the specific context of a university, which allowed for further exploration and understanding of developing a sense of community.

1.5 PARTICIPANTS

This study draws on the narratives of 10 international students and 10 domestic students at a large, American public university. In a large qualitative study, conducting random sampling of participants may make

sense for generalizability; however, with a small number of participants a purposeful selection approach should be taken. I had to select students from whom I thought the most could be learned for the purpose of this study (Merriam, 2009). Students who fit the criteria of being international students in a new campus environment in the United States, as well as domestic students who were attending a university for the first time were eligible for selection in this study. Purposeful selection also helped achieve variation in the sample of international students in the U.S. and domestic students. “When deliberately selecting individuals, it provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the populations than incorporating substantial random or accidental variation” argues Maxwell (2013, p. 98). This allowed me to ensure that the international students were from a variety of countries and that domestic students were from different areas in the U.S. When only a limited number of individuals is required, purposeful selection eliminates having to rely on the idiosyncrasies of chance (Maxwell, 2013).

1.6 DATA COLLECTION

The qualitative approach adopted in this study allowed for several steps in the data collection. The methods of data collection included narratives from semi-structured focus groups and journals kept by participants. By collecting data through these types of narratives, I hoped to gain an understanding of the individuals and their perceptions of developing a sense of belonging. I decided to collect narratives using multiple methods because participants may share different kinds of information when using different methods. This would also allow for triangulation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, a student may not feel comfortable stating something during a focus group, but would be happy to write about it in a journal entry.

Data collection started at the beginning of the academic year and continued until the end of that year, which was a period of about nine months. The first method of collecting data was through student journals. Selected students were asked to keep journals as a way of documenting experiences that stood out for them each week. Each student had a blog set up through a Google document, accessible only to the student and the researcher. No other participants or other individuals were able to access the journals. The second method of data collection was through focus groups. These focus groups took place once a month. These methods helped me follow up on questions about the journals and assisted the students in reflecting and sharing experiences with me and the other participants. The third form of data collection was a journal that I kept as the researcher. Annink (2017, p.1) believes that “Reflective data is often omitted from the final written report because the researcher may seek to conceal and suppress certain relevant, and at times, personal aspects during research”. However, in the complexity of examining narratives of different students from different backgrounds, I decided to keep a personal research journal to reflect on any issues that arose during the phase of data collection, as well as to record my thoughts as the research progressed over the nine-month period. “Reflexivity emphasizes an awareness of the researcher’s own presence in the research process, with the aim of improving the quality of the research” (Annik, 2017, p. 3). In addition, there may be pieces of data that are worth consideration. A research journal can be “a melting pot for all the different ingredients of a research project” (Newbury, 2001, p. 3).

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed the data by utilizing thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2013). This is the process of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns, also known as themes, within the data (Braun & Clarke,

2013). In regards to qualitative data, thematic analysis is a way to read through the entire data set and initially generate codes, a method of identifying pieces of data that helps answer the research question and sub questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By being able to identify sets of codes, I was able to consolidate those codes into themes. Those themes are able to capture the larger patterns that appeared in the data set and observed by the researcher (Saldana, 2013).

The goal was to gather specifics from these narratives on how international and American students renegotiate and construct their own sense of belonging in a university environment, using acculturation theory, social representation theory, third space theory, Tinto's theory of student retention and the theory of mattering. By identifying these themes, this study would possibly help fill the gap in current research, help grow the field of international student recruitment and retention, and provide a more satisfying experience for students attending universities.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2001, p. 94) believe that "The purpose of qualitative studies is to describe a phenomenon from the participants' points of view. The intention of the researcher is to listen to the voice of the participants or observe them in their natural environments". They add that "...researchers have the obligation to anticipate the possible outcomes of an interview and to weigh both benefits and potential harm" (Orb, Eisenhauer, Wynaden, 2001, p. 94). In this study it was important to let the participants know that the data collected would be part of the requirements for my thesis and that the information would be shared with interested parties in the academic community. I also explained that participants' identities would be kept confidential and that they would not be named in written documents. However, the 20 participants would be

known to each other, as they would have participated in focus groups. Participants signed a confidentiality agreement that indicated that they would not share information outside the group. In order to best document and summarize narratives from focus groups, I asked permission to audiotape the sessions. The transcripts of these focus groups were also given to all participants so that they had the option to delete parts with which they did not feel comfortable. Since students talked about experiences that may have initiated the need to seek resources, such as psychological services, I was also ready to provide contact information of those available at the university in case students felt any level of discomfort. Lastly, since the participants were from a public U.S. research university, I requested permission from its institutional review board to conduct this study. I also received ethics permission from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, where I am registered for a PhD.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.9.1 International Student

For the purposes of this study, the term international student means a student who is enrolled at a university outside his or her country of citizenship. Those who have permanent residency in the United States are not considered international students. International students in this study are those who arrived in the United States on some type of student visa for study purposes.

1.9.2 American (domestic) Student

In this study, the term domestic student is interchangeable with the term American student. This means that a domestic student is studying inside of the country of his or her citizenship, which in this study is the United States.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND STRUCTURING THE REMAINDER OF THE THESIS

The first chapter provided an overview including the justification of the study and a discussion of the research process and design. In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the literature that is relevant to this study. Chapter three covers the theoretical foundation in depth. Chapter four covers the research design and methodology, including the methods, ethical considerations and researcher reflexivity for this study. Chapter five presents the research findings, along with a discussion and interpretation of the data. The last chapter provides the conclusion of the study and recommendations based on the findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to community, both in the sense of basic human need as well as community in higher education. There are numerous definitions of what community means and how it is developed. This chapter highlights how the definition of community has developed through the eyes of various researchers, the similarities and differences between the definitions, and how the fluidity of community today. Since this study is focused on exploring narratives of community among international and domestic students at a public, research intensive university in the United States, this chapter will also explore the idea of community specifically in the context of higher education, and why it may be an important factor in one's educational experience. Lastly, this chapter reviews research to explore what may make it difficult to feel part of a community while attending a university, for both domestic and international students.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

Communities could be important when it comes to human survival. The importance of community can be traced back to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy explains the core principals of Maslow's theory of human motivation. Maslow (1943, 1954) argued that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Once basic needs have been met, such as food, water, safety and security, psychological needs are significant (Maslow, 1943). "If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs" (Maslow, 1954, p. 20). Psychological needs include love and belongingness, such as friendship, intimacy, trust, acceptance, sense of

connection and affiliation with a group (Maslow, 1943). Maslow refined his theories over several decades, noting that perhaps the stages were not as rigid as he previously thought (Maslow, 1943, 1962, 1987). The theory has been expanded and is now referred to as Maslow's motivation model (McLeod, 2017). However, the need to love and belong is still one of the crucial steps if someone is to reach self-actualization and transcendence. Maslow (1962) emphasized that belongingness is a basic human motivation because all people have a need to belong.

In terms of the importance of community in higher education, what could be one of the most important aspects remembered from a college experience is the long-term relationships that are established during these years. "It involves understanding aspects of one's personal and social identity that converges (or diverges) from the many college cultures or subcultures that constitute communities in college," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 123). When there is no sense of belonging, Hagert et al. (2002) describe the result as a sense of alienation, and link it to dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and depression. In addition, when a student does not have a sense of belonging this can undermine academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007) and affect an individual's plans to finish his or her university studies (Berger, 1997).

2.3 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENTS IN DEFINING COMMUNITY

As stated, communities can be very important when it comes to human survival, including succeeding at a university, but what exactly does being part of a community mean? In order to understand the definition of community, I felt it was important to do a historical overview to examine and better understand the variety of approaches to defining community throughout the decades. Additionally, I found it helpful to take a broader, historical look at defining community and then focus on community in a higher education setting.

Several researchers have taken on the challenge of defining community. Initially George Hillery (1955) catalogued 94 different definitions of community and conducted a qualitative and quantitative analysis. He concluded that 16 commonly agreed upon definitions indicated that communities possess geographic areas inhabited by people with common ties who have a sense of identification and engage in social interaction as groups.

Building on the foundation laid by Hillery (1955), Thomas J. Glynn (1981) conducted a study to measure a psychological sense of community (PSC). According to his research, the strongest predictors of PSC were the expected length of time residing in the community, the satisfaction one had with the community, and the number of neighbors one could identify by first name (Glynn, 1981). Glynn (1981) also indicated that the rise of industrialization, the growth of centralized bureaucratic and governmental structures, and the maintenance of an improper balance between local and centralized structures could cause a decline in PSC. However, some researchers believe that people have not inherently lost their sense of community; rather, they have simply traded it for mobility, convenience, and privacy (Keyes, 1973).

A Sense of Community Scale (SCS), created by Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) examined specifically the relationship between communication and sense of community. The scale was based on five factors: informal interaction with neighbors, safety (feeling safe living in the neighborhood), pro urbanism (privacy, anonymity), neighborly integration (pro frequent interactions with neighbors), and localism (wanting to take part in neighborhood activities/affairs). Doolittle and MacDonald's (1978) results led them to three generalizations: there is a counter relationship between pro-urbanism and neighborly integration, there is a direct relationship between safety and neighborly integration, and lastly, as safety increases pro-urbanism decreases.

Several other researchers have continued the attempt to define community. Riger and Lvrakas (1981) and Riger, LeBailly, and Gordon (1981) state simply that a sense of community involves two factors: social bonding and behavioral rootedness, also known as the number of years one has resided in the community. Roseland (2005) defined community as a “group of people bound by geography and with a shared destiny” (p. 12) that shares both strong natural and social capital. Natural capital refers to resources such as transportation and economic development while social capital refers to civic engagement and trust among individuals.

2.3.1 Ferdinand Toennies (1955, 1974 (as cited in Lee, 2013))

One of the major evolutionary views of society is referred to as the *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* concept. Ferdinand Toennies was one of many European social thinkers who presented this evolutionary view by examining the change in social relationships as populations grew and urban centers of social activity developed (Lee, 2013). *Gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* translate as “community” and “society” respectively. *Gemeinschaft* communities were an early form of social organization where individuals or groups would make simple, informal agreements (Lee, 2013). In this type of community, connections between people mostly arise from geographical vicinity and daily, face-to-face proximity (Lee, 2013). *Gesellschaft* societies, however, are more complex and more focused on formal agreements rather than informal ones (Lee, 2013). As communities become more urbanized, more formal agreements are established because more goods and supplies are needed (Lee, 2013). Table 1 summarizes the differences between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* as explained by Tilman (2004, p. 585).

GEMEINSCHAFT	GESELLSCHAFT
Kinship	Neighborhood anonymity of relationships
Friendship	Barter monetary exchange
Custom	Contract
Tradition	Innovation
Inertia	Progress
Habit	Novelty
Customary law	Legislative law
Religious	Secular
Man as social animal	Atomistic individualism
Value absolutism	Value relativism
Fusion of ends-means	Separation of ends-means
Natural will	Rational will
Communal (common) ownership of land and means of production	Pursuit of individual self-interest – rational calculation of personal gain – egoism, narcissism and will to power – insensitivity to common needs and public interest
Hybrid	
Natural will	Rational will
A priori qualities Normal conduct, behavior or judgment and A. Sentiment interest (intention) B. Mind and heart calculation C. Conscience consciousness	New and special qualities (artificial)
Regulatory and welfare state collectivism	

Table 1: Characteristics of Gemeinschaft & Gesellschaft (Tilman, 2004).

In summary, contemporary sociologists explain that *gemeinschaft* communities are closely identified with primary or informal relationships in rural communities with daily face-to-face interactions. Secondary relationships, on the other hand, are more formal and daily interactions are not necessarily needed with *gesellschaft* societies in urban areas (Lee, 2013). Although some have disagreed with Toennies' theory, one argument being that it is Eurocentric, one point that remains valid is that both *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* emphasize that social relationships are important ideas when it comes to different types of communities. Not surprisingly, people are members of more than one community, so the importance of communities and one's allegiance to them will change based on time and circumstances (Fisher & Sonn, 1999).

2.3.2 Seymour Sarason (1974) (as cited in McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

Seymour Sarason (1974) believed that a sense of community (SOC) was the key to understanding one of society's most pressing problems, which he saw as the dark side of individualism that caused alienation, selfishness and despair (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001). Sarason (1974) argued that the lack of a sense of community was extraordinarily frequent, that it was a destructive force and that working on the prevention and consequences should be one of the most important concerns in community psychology. He first introduced the term 'sense of community' as

the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure. (Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2015, p. 974)

This definition incorporated some of the key aspects of community psychology, such as an individual being part of a macrosystem and a microsystem (Jason et al., 2005).

Two researchers who heard Sarason's call to action were McMillan and Chavis, who argued that "feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (1986, p. 9) was crucial when it came to having a sense of community. But in order to understand what a sense of community was and how it operates, they proposed a four-component model.

1. Membership

The first component of SOC is that someone has membership, which means there is the factor of boundaries, where some are "in" and some are "out", a shared history, emotional safety and personal investment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Having membership implies someone has a set of rights as well as responsibilities that indicate that they belong to the community and how they draw their identity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

2. Influence

The second component of SOC is influence, where McMillan and Chavis (1986) explained that this means someone's perceived influence has an effect on the decisions and actions of the community. In return, it also refers to the amount of influence the group has over someone. However, there is a balance when it comes to this influence. There may be a positive result, as an individual is allowed to make his or her own contribution to the community, as well as some type of level of freedom and self-expression (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). On the other hand, the influence of the group may be so strong that it demands conformity, or the influence of one individual might dominate the entire group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

3. Integration and fulfillment of needs

This component represents the benefits someone gains by having membership to the community. When individuals have their needs met through the community, this continues to motivate them and reinforces their desire to stay with the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). They may have their needs met simply through membership, such as status or the shared values of the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

4. Shared emotional connection

The last component of SOC is the shared emotional connection. This means people sharing in significant events and the amount of contact they have with one another. Some type of bond is created when people take part in a significant event, whether it is positive or negative. The number of events, the salience, and the importance of these events in conferring merit or status on the community and its members influence the shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

One way to test McMillan and Chavis' four-component theory is the Sense of Community Index (Perkins et al., 1990). This index has three items that measure each of the four components. However, several researchers have not succeeded in confirming the four-component theory using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Stevens, Jason, & Ferrari, 2011). This means that there has been no success in finding a measurement that is consistent with the researcher's understanding of sense of community, nor any ability to identify the underlying relationship between measured variables. Additional scales created in the hope of testing the four-component theory are the Brief Sense of Community Scale (Peterson et al., 2008), which has two items representing each of the four components, and the Perceived Sense of Community Scale (Bishop, Chertok, & Jason, 1997), which is a scale divided into

three constructs—mission, connection, and reciprocal responsibility. However, both of these scales have proved flawed in testing the four-component theory.

Jason, Stevens, and Ram (2015) developed the Psychological Sense of Community Scale (PSC), based on three ecological factors: self (individual), membership (microsystem), and entity (macosystem). Jason, Stevens, and Ram (2015) tested the four-component theory of McMillan and Chavis by using three ecological factors with undergraduates at a Midwestern university. This allowed students to change reference points when asked about sense of community as they had a different sense of community depending on the factor. The researchers found that PSC appears to be a generalizable, three-factor measure that could be applied to a variety of contexts, (Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2015).

2.4 WHY SO MANY DEFINITIONS OF COMMUNITY?

Having reviewed only a few definitions of community and sense of community by a group of researchers (please refer to table 2) over several decades of research, the question as to why there is no common definition arises. As I explored this question more, when it comes to sense of community, Chipuer and Pretty (1999) explained that there was a debate over the definition because there was no consensus on whether a sense of community is cognition, a behavior of an individual affective state, an environmental condition or a spiritual dimension.

Researcher(s)	Defining community
George Hillery (1955)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Area 2. Common ties 3. Social interaction
Thomas J. Glynn (1981)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expected length of time residing in the community 2. Satisfaction one has with the community 3. Number of neighbors one can identify by first name
Robert J. Doolittle and Donald MacDonald (1978)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Informal interaction with neighbors 2. Safety 3. Pro-urbanism 4. Neighborly integration 5. Localism
Riger and Lavrakas (1981)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social bonding 2. Behavioral rootedness
Riger, LeBailly, and Gordon (1981)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feelings of bondedness 2. Extent of residential roots 3. Use of local facilities 4. Degree of social interaction with neighbors
Mark Roseland (1998)	<p>Group bound together by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Geography 2. Shared destiny 3. Natural and social capital
Tyler Norris Associates (1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economy 2. Health 3. Education 4. Government and civic engagement 5. Livability 6. Housing 7. Neighborliness
Ferdinand Toennies (1955, 1974)	<p>Gemeinschaft (community, rural)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simple, informal agreements between two individuals 2. Connections arise from geographical vicinity and daily, face-to-face interactions <p>Gesellschaft (society, urban)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complex economic bonds 2. Formal contracts that dominate and organize social life
Seymour Sarason (1974)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perception of similarity to others 2. An acknowledged interdependence with others 3. A willingness to maintain interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them 4. The feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure
David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis (1986)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Membership 2. Influence 3. Integration and fulfillment of needs 4. Shared emotional connection

Table 2: Summary of the definitions of community and sense of community

Additionally, Puddifoot (1996) explained one of the major problems surrounding the definition of community is that researchers still refer to community as a catch-all term for diverse entities such as neighborhoods, community groups, institutions, religious groups, work organizations, professional organizations, family units and nationalities (Dalton, et al., 2001). Based on this point, I reviewed a variety of research that looked at defining community based on changing environments.

Some examples include Nasar and Julian (1995), who examined the sense of community within a neighborhood to see whether a declining sense of community correlated with urban problems. As a result of their study, Nasar and Julian (1995) claimed that people had a great sense of community when they had a neighborhood park. Also, families instead of single residents felt more sense of community. Another study conducted by Phipps et al. (2015) explored whether their college students demonstrated a link between their sense of community and playing intramural sports. Phipps et al. (2015) stated that there was a link between community and intramural sports and the link grew stronger the longer the students played. Another example of how sense of community may change depending on the environment includes a study by Vieno et al. (2007), who researched social support, sense of community, and self-efficacy as resources change among adolescents in Northern Italy. Their findings supported that self-efficacy and school sense of community were affected based on changes of social support and psychosocial adjustment (Vieno et al., 2007). Lastly, in a unique study regarding community in prisons, Phillips (2007) examined ethnicity, identity and community cohesion in prisons in Great Britain. This study reflected how prisoners were able to create a community between them and the guards, but also highlighted inconsistencies regarding the treatment between the prisoners (Phillips, 2007). By looking at just a few examples of how community changes based on environmental factors, this underlines one of the reasons why it is difficult to have one definition of community.

2.4.1 Community today

Upon further research, while the environment can be a factor when it comes to developing a sense of community, the fact is community has become a concept that has moved beyond simply a set place or environment. And when reviewing the variety of previous research in an attempt to provide a definition, there seems to be an underlying suggestion that community implies the assumption of an undifferentiated identity, and rather emphasizes unity instead of diversity (Young, 1990; Wiesenfeld, 1996 in Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). But community has become more fluid and flexible (Harris, 2018). People can have multiple belongings, identify themselves as members of different communities, and the way people perceive community can affect both their sense of community and their participation (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). As Harris (2013) argues, especially for young people, there is no single, physical community to which they can share an attachment. While studying young people in Australia, Harris (2013) emphasised that young people have ties to family and friends across the world and “engagement with a global youth culture meant that their sense of community was simultaneously being radically ‘displaced’ as they created multiple affiliations with cultures and spaces beyond their neighbourhoods and cities,” (p. 107). Additionally, in today’s world, contemporary workers are constantly moving, roughly changing jobs thirty-eight times in their lifetimes resulting in roughly 1000 million people moving around the world (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). In summary, community is no longer a fixed sense of place or continuous networks of trust embedded in a particular place, but instead, community is developed through connections that are built virtually and transnationally (Harris, 2013). People are also moving through communities at a much more rapid pace, and participating in multiple and often contradictory social representations (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). I explore social representation theory, one of the theoretical foundations of this study, more in chapter three.

And just as community is much more fluid today, the same can be said about culture and identity. As communities become more fluid, so does the fluidity of people's identities and their freedom to rewrite their own identities (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). As for culture, it's often utilized to refer to the property of a group, something to help describe or explain a groups' behaviour (Gillespie, Howarth, & Cornish, 2012). However, considering the fluidity of communities and thus identities, common problems arise when categorizations or cultures, such as nationalities or social groups, are used (Gillespie, Howarth, & Cornish, 2012). Culture is always changing with the movement of people and with globalization. As people move, they are doing more than just moving from one place to the next. They are also moving through different social roles, life stages, genders, abilities, social classes, and yes, cultures (Gillespie, Howarth, & Cornish, 2012). While there could be a creative hybridity of cultures, there could also be cultural clashes or the pressure to conform.

2.5 CAUTIONS WHEN BUILDING COMMUNITY

With the movement of people and the fluidity of communities, the concerns surrounding social cohesion and conflict have appeared. These concepts refer to the pressure someone might feel to fit in to the 'core' values of a community, and the assumption that when there is conflict, this hinders the sense of community. This next section explores both of these concepts.

2.5.1 Social Cohesion

In the broadest sense, social cohesion refers to having common values and purpose in a society, providing a sense of belonging and solidarity for people from diverse backgrounds (Cheong et al., 2007 in Harris, 2013). While in practice social cohesion programs are thought to increase the interaction between different cultural groups in order to help improve intercultural understanding,

reduce conflict, and facilitate participation in a mainstream society on the basis of shared values, this often leads to assimilation (Harris, 2013).

Harris (2010) explains that in recent years, many Western governments have shifted their focus from multiculturalism to social cohesion in order to adapt to the increase in cultural diversity within communities. As a result, many are concerned about the marginalization of young people from minority backgrounds and demands for assimilation of minority groups into the mainstream community (Harris, 2010, p. 574). This prompts the question: what is considered good participation in a community? Harris (2010) argues that participation in a community is only recognized in conventional, formal ways, but these ways are usually inconsistent with many young people's own experiences of community participation.

What does it mean to shift from a multicultural community to a community where people assimilate? Harris (2010) explains it as a shift from shared identification with social and political institutions to integration into 'core' cultural values. For example, Harris (2010) cites the former Australian Government Minister for Immigration and Citizenship as saying in 2005, "the government believes that the successful integration of migrants is essential for a stable and cohesive society". That is, migrants were expected to integrate with the common national identity and participate actively in membership of a shared community. That same year, the then Australian Prime Minister met with Islamic leaders and instructed that Muslim schools teach 'Australian values' as stated in *The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* education policy (Harris, 2010). Just a year later in 2006, the Australian government released *A National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security* as another way of supporting social cohesion, harmony and increased national security. The underlying goal was to reduce radicalization by reinforcing Australian values and civic education, through targeting mainly Muslim communities.

Young people are most frequently 'caught between two cultures' and an integrationist social cohesion approach fails to engage with the complexity of the type of experiences young people have when participating in a community (Harris, 2010). Harris (2013, p.33) also shares several other factors regarding young people and the issues that accompany an integrationist social cohesion approach:

1. Young people have increased mobility and may have multiple affiliations with spaces beyond their neighborhood.
2. Community may not be formed in a physical place, but may be a sense of relationships built virtually and transnationally.
3. Young people are becoming "self-actualizing citizens", meaning they are choosing the forms of belonging, which are normally more fluid, short-lived, informal commitments.

Conversely, Wood (2010) explains that much research in this area of youth participation in community in New Zealand has concluded that young people are often disinterested, cynical and disengaged from formal political and social activities. Wood (2010) notes that two theories have been used to explain declining social and political engagement and participation, one being the increasing tendency towards "individualization", and the second being a perceived loss of social capital.

Bauman (2000) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that individualization suggests that life patterns and biographies are increasingly individualized, in the sense that decisions are increasingly being placed on the individual instead of the government making the decisions. As a result, there has been an increase in cynicism towards government and a loss of engagement (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Putnam (2000) believes that the loss of social capital is related to the deterioration of community and cultural institutions, such as falling church attendance, declining enrollments in social organizations, and the tendency to meet less frequently with friends and neighbors.

In conclusion, many young people are not engaged in traditional forms of associational and civic social life and instead are using informal and peer-to-peer activities as involvement and emphasizing their own behavior in terms of taste, lifestyle, and consumption (Harris, 2010). Vinken (2007, p. 53) calls this “interactivity and connectedness with intimate circles”. Harris et al. (2007) argue that young people tend to participate in different groups and settings known as “neotribes”, “lifestyles”, and “scenes”, terms that describe loose networks and shifting affiliations.

In order to consider the ways in which young people can participate in community, it is important to avoid the trap of the social cohesion agenda that promotes a homogenous, stable community (Harris et al. 2007). Rather, a community should consider all modes of sociality and the different ways young people constitute “place”. Harris et al. (2007) believe that one way to achieve this is to conceptualize politics in a less restrictive way by having a more flexible definition of civic engagement. Diller (2001, as cited in Adler and Goggin, 2005) defines civic engagement as “experiencing a sense of connection, interrelatedness, and, naturally, commitment towards the greater community,” (p. 240). This takes the focus off perceptions of the ideal and instead places it on the lived reality of placing oneself in community and the everyday experiences of dealing with social and political issues that arise through this process.

2.5.2 Conflict

Another factor that many try to avoid in community is conflict. It might be assumed that if there is conflict then there is not a stable community. However, conflict may actually help further develop sense of community.

Social cohesion efforts promote conformity and rewards non-confrontations, so as a result promote conflict-free versions of civic life and limits youth of different backgrounds to think about and talk about cultural differences. Rather, young people are encouraged to think about cultural differences as objects of

appreciation or facts of individual identities that should be tolerated (Harris, 2013). According to Harris (2013), when a diversity of people come together and conflict arises, this is actually an opportunity for legitimate feelings of frustration and anger to emerge and as a result, creates a single identification. In other words, “Imagine conflict not as the opposite of togetherness, but instead as the foundation of solidarity,” stated Mary Thomas (2011) in Harris (2013). However, the challenge comes in making sure to acknowledge the legitimacy of those feelings while also navigating the complex matrix of causes of unproductive discord and violence (Harris, 2013).

The main goal is not simply try to avoid or ignore conflict. Rather, it’s important to teach ways on how to talk through and deal with conflict, and focus on “the economic, social and geographic disparities that fuel such conflict” (Mary Thomas, 2011, in Harris, 2013).

The second point in regard to conflict helping develop a sense of community relates to moral development theory. Kohlberg (1976) stated that when a young person has types of conflicting interactions, that is when moral reasoning is developed. Kohlberg (1976) places the responsibility on the individual when it comes to changing and reorganizing principles and moral reasoning, keeping in mind the fact that the environment can play an important role. “The individual is always inventing or constructing new responses to each situation encountered” (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, p. 4). According to Mayhew and Engberg (2010), Kohlberg explained that, when it comes to moral development, there are sequential stages. Each new stage of development represents an opportunity for an individual to change a pattern of thought, and each new reorganization brings a broader perspective.

In response to Kohlberg’s theory, Gilligan, who argued that Kohlberg’s research mainly focused on men, responded with moral development research focused on women and how women develop relationships, reflect on their lives, and develop

their senses of self (Torres & Garcia, 2019). Gilligan named this moral orientation the ethic of care or care orientation, suggesting that those with care orientation seem to have moral conflict when it comes to the rights and responsibilities between the self and other (Fisher, 2017). Contrasting to Kohlberg's model, when one with a care orientation cultivates moral development, it's not because of competition between rights and responsibilities, but rather responsibilities in relationships (Fisher, 2017).

In the context of higher education, Gurin et al. (2002) developed the idea of conflict by emphasizing the benefits students gain when placed in diverse, educational environments that encourage interactions across race. Gurin et al. (2002) believe that if students are in homogenous learning environments, they are provided limited opportunities to confront "the relativity or limitations of their point of view" and the opportunity to achieve moral development (p. 340).

While there continues to be several definitions of community, both in theory and how it's now considered to be a fluid concept, this overview provides a foundation from which to examine the environment in my study: how students develop community on a college campus. I hoped that by focusing on first-year college students I would be able to provide more insight into what community meant to them within this environment. Having sketched some of the ways in which community has been defined and explored, I now focus on research that has been conducted in order to define the term "community", specifically research on college campuses.

2.5 DEFINING COMMUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the concern for community was thrust back into the spotlight. This applied in particular to community in higher education, in light of a report written by Ernie Boyer from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Bogue, 2002) entitled *Campus*

Life: In Search of Community and published in 1990. Higher education institutions face pressure to ensure that students, now referred to as “customers”, are “marketplace ready”. But what does community look like at a university and how is it created?

Bogue (2002) explains that a sense of community in any setting should signify the presence of what he calls an agenda of common caring and grace. “This agenda of common caring embraces a love for soul, for standard, and for system” (Bogue, 2002, p. 7). Bogue (2002) adds that there is a vision for shared purpose, shared giving, and a sacrifice to cause beyond self. Colleges and universities are expected to go beyond simply developing knowledge and skills. They should also serve as “incubators of intellect and integrity, sanctuaries of personal and civic values”, where students will learn the values of the community (Bogue, 2002 p. 8). A campus is more than a string of buildings: “[i]t must be a set of relationships that recognize and celebrate a shared vision of purpose and values” (Bogue, 2002, p. 8). Those shared purposes and values surround the one responsibility that all students, faculty, and staff have—to ask what brings meaning to their lives and makes them glad to be alive (Bogue, 2002).

What does it take to form a university community that brings all stakeholders together in a shared purpose? Boyer (1990) drove research with the publication of his definition of community on a university campus. He argues that six adjectives can describe community: purposeful, just, open, disciplined, caring, and celebrative (Boyer, 1990).

1. Purposeful

Boyer (1990) describes purposeful when applied to community as “a place where the intellectual life is central, and where faculty and students ‘work together’ to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus” (p. 4). Boyer (1990) argues that learning be the central focus and that both faculty and administrators be viewed as teachers not just in the classrooms, but everywhere else on campus.

2. Just

Boyer (1990) described a just community as a place where “the dignity of every individual is affirmed, and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued” (p. 7). Boyer (1990) saw campus communities as places where racial, ethnic, and sexual prejudices should be challenged and in return, be reflected in the larger society.

3. Open

Boyer (1990) explains that an open community is an “honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected, and where civility is powerfully affirmed” (p. 10). In addition, offensive language must be denounced (Boyer, 1990, p. 13). Boyer (1990) believes in the importance of students being able to learn how to communicate, not only with accuracy but also with civility.

4. Disciplined

A disciplined community is “a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group, and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good” (Boyer, 1990, p. 14). Boyer (1990) describes a balance of treating students like adults while still providing a clear structure and enforced regulations.

5. Caring

A caring community is “a place where the well-being of every member is sensitively supported, and where service to others is encouraged” (Boyer, 1990, p. 17). Boyer (1990) believes that while there is a need to be purposeful, just, disciplined and open, caring is the glue that holds the community together. “Does someone really care?” (Boyer, 1990, p. 17). While students are not looking for administrators or faculty to replace their parents, they do want someone to be occasionally concerned about their lives and to feel as if they belong. Boyer (1990) argues that it is not the length of time students spend on campus that is

important, but the quality of the relationships they establish and the opportunities they have to do service in order to connect what they learn and how they live.

6. Celebrative

Boyer (1990) describes the importance of a campus community that embraces its heritage, rituals and traditions. It is important to celebrate the past, but also to anticipate the future. “While colleges affirm the sacredness of the individual, they also—through ritual and tradition—should celebrate community as well” (Boyer, 1990, p. 21).

Following the outline set by Boyer, Moore and Carter (2002) shared their experiences in creating community at Pennsylvania State University, a large, complex research university. Penn State University has more than 80,000 students at 23 campuses throughout the state of Pennsylvania, with more than 40,000 students on the main campus. Some community-building endeavors occur only on the main campus, while others are university system wide. Boyer’s outline of universities as purposeful, where faculty, students, and community members share academic goals, and the as a caring community is what drives student services programming involving partnerships with faculty and staff. Moore and Carter (2002) explain that shaping purposeful interaction through the collaboration of faculty, staff and students requires a paradigm shift that must be reflected in strategic plans that direct resources and personnel. One example at Penn State is the educational programming council that addresses programming priorities on a collaborative basis. Following Boyer’s model, this council sets strategic themes for cross-unit educational programs and workshops. These focus on addressing matters related to diversity education, programs that expose students to a variety of cultures and international perspectives, programs that foster a humane community where everyone feels valued, workshops to develop character and a sense of social responsibility, and programs that support leadership and service opportunities (Moore & Carter, 2002). In addition to all students system-wide receiving a Statement of Principles, which outlines

expectations of being a citizen of the university, several other programs have been set in place. While the Boyer model helps provide guide points, it is an on-going challenge creating a community in a multi-campus system. Moore and Carter (2002) believe that in this regard assessment tools, and the gathering of feedback from students are important.

Five institutions, including Penn State, that follow Boyer's model of building a university community agree that it is a tough task. Representatives from these institutions note that in order to develop community, there must be a core group of people committed to a shared vision, who trust one another and have open communication, are passionate and committed, invite others to collaborate, and have a reward structure to encourage the involvement of faculty, staff and students. Obstacles faced when trying to build a university community include the absence of an agreed-upon definition of community, the constantly changing nature of the campus population, and insufficient resources.

2.6 SENSE OF BELONGING AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As noted above, it is important to gather feedback from students when it comes to community on a university campus. I have considered community from an administrative angle, but what does community mean from the student perspective?

My reading on what community on college campuses means to students has led me over and over again to the term "sense of belonging" and what it means to have this sense of belonging. A sense of belonging generally refers to a "feeling of connectedness, that one is important or matters to others," (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Having a sense of belonging goes back to Maslow (1962) and his explanation that belonging is a basic human motivation. Not having a sense of belonging can be described as having a "sense of alienation" or "marginality", which can be linked to dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and

depression (Hagerty, Williams, & Oe, 2002). Strayhorn (2012, p. 20) argues that, “college students face serious difficulty in attending to the tasks at hand (i.e., studying, learning, retaining) until they resolve one of their most fundamental needs—a need to belong”. A college student’s need for belonging must be satisfied before any higher-order needs such as knowledge and self-actualization, which some would argue are the desired outcomes of a college education, can be achieved (Strayhorn, 2012, as cited in Strayhorn, 2005).

What does it mean for a student to have a sense of belonging? For more than 40 years, researchers have realized the importance of both social and academic integration as they correlate with a sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2008) explains that developing a sense of belonging is a subjective evaluation a student makes of his or her relationship with others on campus, comparing it to Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) explanation of a sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2008) argues that the sense of belonging is where an individual assesses his/her position in relation to the group. This is cognitive and in return results in some type of response or outcome (affective). For example, some students may measure a sense of belonging based on how much others would miss them if they left (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, as cited in Strayhorn, 2008, p. 505). Many scholars have drawn the same conclusion that a sense of belonging contributes to college student adjustment and persistence (Melendez, 2016; Hurtado et al., 2015) and for marginalized students it may be an even more important factor in their success (Hurtado et al., 2015; Kuh, 2016; Yearwood & Jones, 2012). As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Tinto (1975, 1987) described a sense of belonging as how students see their “fit” within the social and academic systems at a university. The subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community is what Tinto (1975, 1987) describes as a sense of belonging.

What are some items students consider when determining whether they “fit” into the social and academic systems of a university? One aspect of a sense of

belonging is having perceived support from one's peers, teachers and family members (Hoffman et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). In the case of college students, peers play an important and powerful role in facilitating a sense of belonging, since it is the peer group "that serves to meet the need for belonging, feedback, and new learning experiences" (White & Cones, 1999, p. 42). In addition, engaging students in a holistic, social connectedness, such as interventions during orientation, first-year seminars, mentoring and generally more intentional engagement with campus activities has had an impact on students' sense of belonging (Jorgenson, et al., 2018).

Faculty can also play an important role when it comes to students feeling a sense of belonging. Tinto (2014) points out that only 20% of students attending university in the United States live on campus. Commuter students tend to have more responsibilities than those living on campus, such as longer working hours (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013) and family commitments (Graunke, et al., 2012 as cited in Holloway-Friesen, 2018) so they are thus less likely to be involved (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013; Newbold et al., 2011). This means that commuter students in particular often struggle more to develop meaningful relationships with their peers. Much of the time, the only interaction they have with other students is in the classroom. "For most students, the classroom is the only place where they meet each other and engage with their peers and faculty in learning activities" (Tinto, 2014, p. 6). It is also important that members of a community feel they are important to that group and that the group is important to them. "Feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" is important, argue McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 9). Lastly, having a sense of belonging also means that the individual's sense of identification or positioning is in relation to a group or to the college community (Tovar & Simon, 2010, p. 200). Since peer interaction influences the sense of belonging, it is important to encourage positive interactions among students at college (Kuh, et al., 2005). Students have a deeper sense of belonging when they are able to meet peers

who reciprocate with genuine caring, have similar interests yet are able to express diverse opinions, so that they are able to reach a point of emotional safety (Holloway-Friesen, 2018).

Some researchers argue that it is possible to influence a sense of belonging before the student even reaches the university campus. Walton and Cohen (2007, 2011) and Yeager et al. (2016) demonstrated that a short, online activity addressing the transition to university and concerns from students had a measurable impact on retention, particularly when it came to students of color and first-generation students.

One of the key terms when considering sense of belonging is “mattering”. Schlossberg (1989) explains that mattering is when someone feels, rightly or wrongly, that he/she matters and is valued or appreciated by others. As the theory of mattering is one of the theoretical foundations of this study, I explore this theory more in depth in chapter three.

In conclusion, research has shown how critical it can be for university students to feel part of a community while on campus. This allows them to feel a sense of belonging to a community where they matter to their peers and faculty and have influence in the community. The definitions of having a sense of belonging is closely related to the variety of definitions of community shared in section 2.6.

Several researchers attempted to create a reliable measurement of students’ sense of belonging. First, Cheng (2004) described three factors that contribute most to a student’s sense of community. These factors are being cared about, being valued as an individual, and being accepted as part of the community. Cheng (2004) also noted that feelings of loneliness had the most negative influence on students’ sense of community. According to the Campus Community Scale modified by Cheng (2004), six factors influence campus community: teaching and learning, residential experience, diversity and acceptance, history

and tradition, loneliness and stress, and socialization across backgrounds. Elkins, et al. (2011) used the Campus Community Scale to assess students' sense of community, concluding that students' involvement outside the classroom did increase their sense of community, but only when engaged in a targeted way. For example, participants in faith-based activities or participants in intercollegiate athletics had a greater sense of community when it came to history and tradition, while those who participated in recreational sports and fine arts had a greater sense of community in the residential experience (Elkins, et al., 2011). Similarly, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) piloted in 1999 and launched in 2000 set five benchmarks that contribute to student engagement: level of academic challenge; active and collaborative learning; student-faculty interaction; enriching educational experiences; and a supportive classroom environment (Kuh, 2001). Since 2000, more than 1,600 universities and colleges have participated in the NSSE, which has surveyed more than 6 million students in the United States and Canada (NSSE, 2017 as cited in Kuh, 2001).

Davis et al. (2019) also sought for a more reliable way to measure students' sense of belonging in order to more easily identify at-risk students at St Cloud State University in Minnesota, United States. They developed the Sense of Belonging Index, which provided a more complex and complete picture of the students' experience, looking not simply at their academic performance. The index measures Social Belonging, which is belonging to the institution, and Academic Belonging, which is belonging to the major (Davis et al., 2019). Based on these indices, the researchers developed a survey for first-year students in 2014, 2015, and 2017. The data showed that there were at least two different kinds of at-risk students: those who were at academic performance risk and those at social belonging risk. Neither predicted the other (Davis et al., 2019).

In a study by Garcia et al. (2019), however, socio-academic interactions played a significant role in a sense of belonging for international students at community

colleges in the United States. The concept socio-academic derives from Tinto (1997) critiquing his own model of persistence and describing interactions that reflect both the components, social and academic integration (Deil-Amen, 2011). Garcia et al. (2019) found that socio-academic integration was crucial when it came to a sense of belonging. Moreover, international students who reported more interactions with university staff and faculty had a greater sense of belonging (Garcia et al., 2019). Brazzell and Reisser (1999) argue that “the greater the opportunity for students to participate in a range of activities, the more likely they are to feel a part of their community and to become productive contributors” (p. 173).

2.6.1 Roadblocks to community for international students

Taking into consideration these definitions of the sense of community and a sense of belonging, one must add several layers comprising other factor that have not been mentioned when it comes to an investigation of international students and how they perceive belonging to a university community. Berger (2000) theorizes that each campus is composed of students who already generally share a habitus in common with the institution, that is an institutional habitus. This means the way the students view and react to the world around them is similar to that of the university. Students who already have routinized behaviors and who are adept at reading normative cues will more easily adjust to fit in with the dominant peer group(s), in addition to their similar shared backgrounds, aspirations, and attitudes (Berger, 2000). Clearly, those from different backgrounds will find it more difficult to adjust.

In the case of international students in particular, researchers have found that more attention should be placed on research, cultural understanding, and peace building when it comes to these students’ sense of belonging (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Knight, 2006; Osfield et al., 2016). While international students bring beneficial interactions to their domestic counterparts, such as exposure to

cultural diversity (Brennan & Dellow, 2013; Manns, 2014), institutions are not necessarily doing what they can to retain and serve the international student population (Center for International and Global Engagement, 2012; IIE, 2011). While institutions focus mostly on the recruitment of international students rather than on how to serve them, many believe that international students are the forgotten minority (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005).

Arthur (2004) pinpointed four phases international students experience while studying in a new country: the honeymoon or tourist phase, the crisis or disintegration phase, the reorientation and re-integration phase, and lastly the adaptation or resolution phase. The honeymoon phase is that period when students are excited about the new experience. The crisis phase occurs when students experience dissatisfaction with the host culture, when they have language problems, accommodation difficulties, changes in eating habits and loneliness (Arthur, 2004). During the crisis phase students often need to learn skills to manage, which allows them to transition to the reorientation phase and finally the adaptation phase. During this process, international students are constantly re-examining and re-adjusting their assumptions, values, and beliefs.

If students feel as if the cultural differences are too great, they will not interact with their hosts, even though they would experience a reduced culture shock if they did (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). If they do not interact with the host culture, international students will not learn the sociocultural rules for effective interaction. Instead, they will follow their own cultural rules and that may result in communication difficulties (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Having a domestic-based support system is crucial for an international student who is experiencing culture shock (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

As far as their academic studies are concerned, international students enter a new educational system with different challenges. The “lack of international standards for educational programs in many countries leads to variability in the

knowledge base of students,” (Arthur, 2004, p. 35). Trice (2003) argues that professors feel that international students’ difficulties with English skills have a negative impact on academic performance and communication, and contribute to segregation and ineffective group work. Additionally, professors have varying views about international students, including concerns about “the extra amount of time required to work with them” and “considering them a threat to funding and reputation,” (Andrade, 2009, p. 18). Barker (1997) believes that international students are concerned about the shape of their career and advancement by attending university in another country. As a result, they may not feel a sense of belonging when a curriculum is irrelevant to their circumstances (Barker, 1997). In addition, other studies have shown that when international students have domestic students as friends, they may have higher grades than those who do not have domestic friends (Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Westwood & Barker, 1990).

Wang et al. (2015) cite researchers who conducted studies showing that communication behaviors are determined by culture. For example, Confucianism is deeply rooted in Chinese culture; together with these values, Chinese students often have particular characteristics that are reflected in their communication in the classroom. Examples include respect for the teacher, saving face, indirectness in verbal communication behavior, facial expressions and gestures, and quietness (Wang, et al., 2015). This also applies to social interactions outside the classroom and may explain why some international students struggle to form relationships with domestic students. Students from collectivistic backgrounds may prioritize relationships, but when interacting with American students they are confused because these students prioritize individualism, independence, assertiveness and self-reliance (Cross, 1995). Cross (1995) argues that international students see social relationships in the U.S. as superficial.

Language difficulty seems to be the most challenging issue for international students (Mori, 2000) since this affects both academic and social integration. The

stronger students' English skills, presumably, the fewer challenges they will face in their studies, social life and adjustment. More interaction in the target language will result in cultural support acquisition, adjustment, and cultural learning, (Andrade, 2009, p. 19). However, many students do not learn English in the right context while in their home countries and it can be difficult for them to follow others and respond once they arrive to an English-native speaking country. Coward (2003) argues that an international student's learning experience is constructed and reconstructed moment by moment because a student may understand the word, but is still trying to learn the actual meaning.

In the pursuit of making sense of community and belonging, international students face a different set of hurdles than those facing their domestic counterparts. However, the impact of having a sense of community and belonging on campus can be just as crucial for international students to succeed. Understanding the needs of international students and investing in programs and services across campus that are organized and supported by all faculty and administrators, and preparing professionals and students of different cultures and academic backgrounds are key when it comes to developing sense of belonging for international students (Osfield et al., 2016).

2.6.2 Roadblocks to community for domestic students

While one may assume that domestic students easily transition to university life and immediately find a sense of belonging, this is not always the case. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes how high school graduates going to university in the United States undergo an ecological transition, where freshmen have to negotiate new roles in their academic contexts and deal with separation from their high school support groups. Lee et al. (2009) cite several factors students face during this transition that may impact on their developing a sense of community. These include relocating, separating from family and friends, adjusting to academic life and the expectations of faculty and staff, and needing

to make new friends. This transition from high school to university is more than just a linear process of moving from one academic context to the other, where students need to make sense of a new social and cultural arena. Ecclestone et al. (2010) observe that there are processes through which students work on their identity to become 'somebody', in order to fit into what they recognize as institutionally and culturally acceptable pathways to belonging. Identities are always in transition and students are involved in a continuous process of making meaning in this new setting (Holmegaard et al., 2014). Polkinghorne (1988) explains that we understand our existence as a single, progressive story, and this storyline is at our core and carried within each of us. Therefore, new students perceive themselves as having a coherent self but must now construct new narratives about how they belong and how this aligns with their perceptions of themselves (Holmegaard et al., 2014). Sometimes there may be a mismatch between how students perceive themselves and their expectations of who to become, perceptions of family and friends, and the expectations of their academic program (Holmegaard et al., 2012).

In their study, Freeman, et al. (2007) found that as with international students, a sense of belonging for university freshmen is closely tied to their academic motivation. Academic motivation including the perception that their professors are concerned with their academic success, that they are engaged in the classroom, and that they feel general social acceptance on campus (Freeman, et al. 2007). In particular, studies investigating ethnic minority students have revealed that these students often feel they do not belong and this results in their dropping out (Just, 1999; Swail et al., 2003; Zea et al., 1997). Berger's (2000) theory of institutional habitus can also be applied to domestic students. If students do not feel they 'fit in' and they believe that their social and cultural practices are not appropriate within the institution, they feel they do not belong. Heisserer and Parette (2002) argue that those students who are more 'at risk' of not finishing school and are linked to feeling they do not belong are mostly from ethnic minorities, are academically disadvantaged, are students with disabilities,

students of low socioeconomic status, probationary students, students with mental illness, and first generation college students.

Several researchers agree that developing a sense of belonging is particularly challenging for students of color at predominantly white campuses (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). “A chronic state of belonging uncertainty” (p. 1191) is the phrase Stephens et al. (2012) use to describe students of color at a university. Other research supports the notion that students of color attending predominantly white campuses often feel alienated, marginalized, isolated and lonely (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Loo & Rolison, 1986; McCormack, 1995; Tan, 1994). Vaccaro and Newman (2016) looked specifically at 51 first-year university students categorized as either privileged or minoritized to determine each group’s sense of belonging. Privileged students were defined as those “from historically dominant social identity groups who have access to power, resources, and opportunities and who enjoy the psychological freedoms associated with being the norm” (Goodman, 2011, p. 18-23). The students selected as privileged identified as white, Christian, middle/upper class, heterosexual or without disability (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). The description of minoritized students provided by Harper (2013) was students who were determined to be minorities in particular university environments that had an overrepresentation of whiteness. In this case, the minoritized students were students of color, members of other historically oppressed social identity groups, such as those with disabilities, LGBTQ students, students with a low socioeconomic status, or students who had a religion that was not Christian. The three main influencers of belonging for both groups included the environment, relationships, and involvement; however, each group had different meanings for each of these influencers. For example, when it came to involvement, minoritized students said opportunities for being their authentic selves and developing authentic connections were important, while privileged students said it was important that the involvement opportunities were fun and that they felt they mattered through the involvement (Vaccaro &

Newman, 2016). Minoritized students also viewed safety and respect as key components to belonging. To sum up, this study emphasized that even though students are considered domestic, not all of them have the same definition of a sense of belonging.

These factors do present obstacles, according to Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Theory refers to the physical and psychological energy a student invests in the college experience. This energy could be applied to their academic work, extracurricular activities, interaction with faculty and staff, and so on. The theory holds that the more involvement a student has in college, the greater the learning outcome and personal development (Astin, 1984). The factors listed above prevent both international and domestic students from becoming more involved, affecting their ability to feel part of the community.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the concept of community, both in the sense of basic human need as described by Maslow and in the context of higher education as referenced by Tinto. I also explored the various definitions of community, first by taking a broad view of previous research and then narrowing the focus to higher education to demonstrate how the components of community change depending on the environment. Special attention was paid to the concept of a sense of belonging and "mattering" as factors that play a major role if students are to feel part of the campus community. I also explored the fluidity of communities today and certain cautions when it comes to building a community, such as social cohesion and conflict. Finally, constraints that may prevent international and domestic students from feeling part of the community were discussed.

The next chapter provides further details of the theoretical foundation of this study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It was important to build a theoretical framework for this study as it related to how students construct their own reality in a given context. While there are both foundational and emerging theories of a sense of belonging, a sense of community, identity development and moral development among certain minority populations on university campuses, few of these have been applied to international students and how their experiences compare to those of domestic students. When it came to selecting the theoretical foundation of this study, I took into consideration the international student experience and how it differs from that of other groups on campus. In addition, this theoretical foundation would also have to be applied to domestic students, taking into account their experience of being placed in a new campus environment. Lastly, the common thread tying together these experiences is the concept that communities are fluid, always changing and adapting as individuals “move through” them and how the individuals may change themselves based on the diverse interactions they encounter.

The theoretical foundation for this research included acculturation theory, social representation theory, third space theory, and the theory of mattering. As this study was based at an American university, it was also important to have a theoretical foundation as it relates to the impact of community on student retention. Tinto’s model of student retention provided the foundation for this portion of the study.

3.2 ACCULTURATION THEORY

As stated in chapter one, acculturation theory is the process through which people from diverse cultural backgrounds are consistently in contact with one another, resulting in social or behavioral changes (Ngo, 2008). However, this is a process that occurs in several interactions over a period of time with a multitude of different representations (Howarth et al., 2013).

Acculturation may take three different forms: unidirectional, bi-dimensional, and interactive. Unidirectional acculturation is synonymous with assimilation, when a person adapts to standards of the host. Gordon (1964, 1978) describes seven types of assimilation and their sub-processes (see figure 3.1) that show the gradual way in which immigrants are absorbed into a dominant culture. While other researchers such as Gans (1973) and Sandberg (1973) developed a less “straight-line assimilation” involving intergenerational steps of integration, all unidirectional acculturation is oppressive and deliberately mirrors colonization (Ngo, 2008). It reinforces the notion that one culture is dominant or superior to others and unless one assimilates into the dominant culture one will not be accepted.

Cultural assimilation and acculturation	•Change of cultural patterns to those of dominant culture
Structural assimilation	•Large scale entrance into institutions of dominant culture
Marital assimilation or amalgamation	•Large scale intermarriage
Identificational assimilation	•Development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the dominant culture
Attitude-receptional assimilation	•Absence of prejudice
Behavioural-receptional assimilation	•Absence of discrimination
Civic assimilation	•Absence of value and power conflicts

Figure 3.1 Gordon (1964, 1978) described seven steps of unidirectional assimilation and their sub-processes.

Bi-dimensional acculturation developed out of a criticism of unidirectional acculturation. While it addresses some issues arising from unidirectional acculturation, it still has conceptual limitations. Bi-dimensional acculturation gained traction with Berry (1974, 1980), who explained the two foundational dimensions: one, that a person adapts to the standards such as language in the new society and two, that the person also maintains other behaviors of his or her home country. This created a space with four sectors: assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration, as reflected in figure 3.2. One of the main points of issue in bi-directional acculturation was that while it had more various acculturation outcomes, it still held the underlying notions of assimilation (Ngo, 2008). Depending on the relationships with the dominant culture, an immigrant may develop a false sense of identity. Identity is an ongoing process of negotiation, creation, deconstruction and re-creation (Dominelli, 2002). Without a deep understanding of social justice when it comes to the formation and reformation of identities while interacting with the dominant culture, bi-

dimensional acculturation does not provide a holistic explanation of the realities immigrants face (Ngo, 2008).

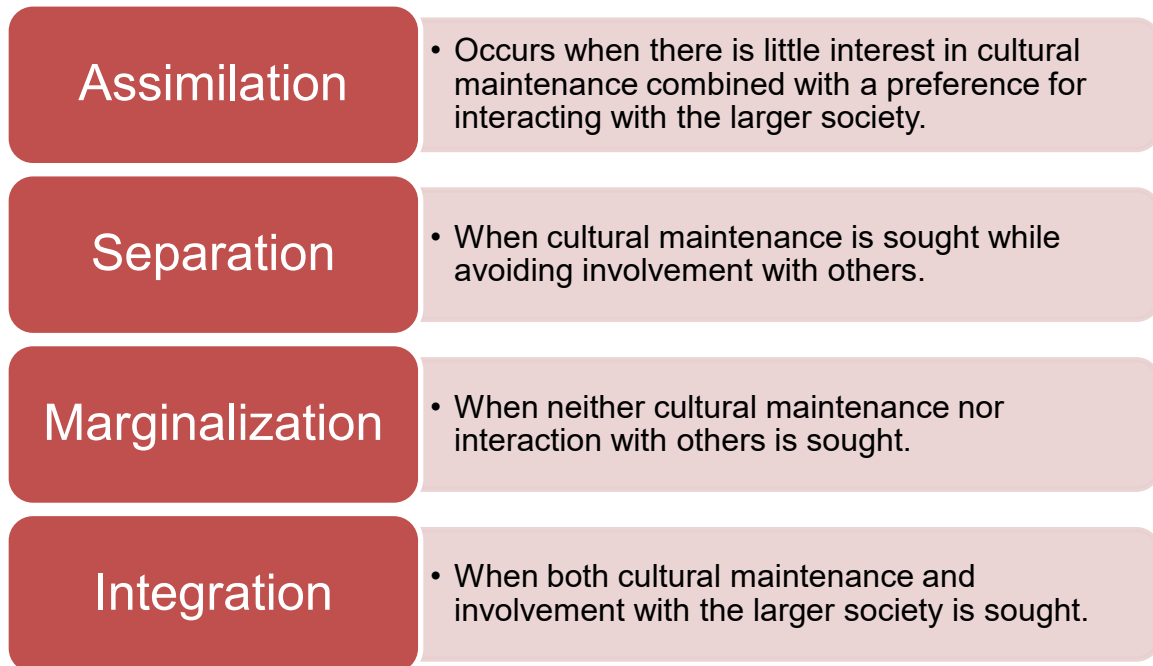


Figure 3.2 Berry's (1980) four sectors of bi-dimensional acculturation

While unidirectional and bi-dimensional acculturation focused primarily on how immigrants acculturate into a dominant culture, Bourhis et al. (1997) developed the interactive acculturation model in an attempt to explain more clearly the interactive relationship that immigrants have with the dominant culture. Bourhis et al. (1997) described three components of this interactive relationship:

1. Acculturation orientation adopted by immigrant groups.
2. Acculturation orientations adopted by the dominant culture towards specific groups of immigrants.
3. Interpersonal and intergroup relational outcomes that represent combinations of immigrants' and the dominant culture's acculturation orientations.

Acculturation orientations are defined as a combination of attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions that guide the way people think and behave (Bourhis et al., 1997). A basic premise of the interactive acculturation model is that acculturation orientations are more stable and more strongly and deeply embedded cognitively and emotionally than intergroup attitudes (Bourhis et al., 2010). The interactive acculturation model proposes that members of the dominant host majority may endorse six acculturation orientations toward different immigrant groups.

Bourhis et al. (1997) addressed what Berry (1980) did not: the anomie and individualism of people who do not necessarily lose their identities to assimilation, but experience alienation or rejection. In addition, they addressed how the dominant culture accepted immigrants who maintained their cultural identity, as well as how they accepted immigrants who adopted the culture of the dominant group. Assimilation, segregation, exclusion and individualism were the resulting acculturation orientations of the receiving community (Bourhis et al., 1997), as shown in figure 3.3. While considering the relational outcomes of the receiving community and the acculturation orientation of immigrants, Bourhis et al. (1997) argued that there would be any of the three relational outcomes: consensual (intergroup harmony), problematic (partial agreement), or conflictual (intergroup conflict), as reflected in figure 3.3.

Host Community	Immigrant Community				
	Integration	Assimilation	Separation	Anomie	Individualism
Integration	Consensual	Problematic	Conflictual	Problematic	Problematic
Assimilation	Problematic	Consensual	Conflictual	Problematic	Problematic
Segregation	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual
Exclusion	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual
Individualism	Problematic	Problematic	Problematic	Problematic	Conflictual

Figure 3.3: Bourhis et al.'s (1997) relational outcomes of acculturation orientations between the dominant, receiving community and immigrants

While Bourhis et al. (1997) attempted to capture the more interactive nature of the relationship between the dominant culture and immigrants, this model still focused on what immigrants should do when it comes to acculturating into the dominant culture. It did not suggest that the dominant culture consider a two-way acculturation process, one where the dominant culture would ask itself how to maintain its own cultural identity, as well as to adopt the cultural identities of immigrants.

An example of research using the interactive acculturation model shows that host community undergraduates in North America and Western Europe endorse Individualism and Integrationism more than Integrationism-Transformation, Assimilationism, Segregationism, and Exclusionism (Barrette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Schmidt, 2009). Most participants in these studies are undergraduate students for whom strong endorsement of Individualism and Integrationism is concordant with the meritocratic and individualistic organizational culture of higher education institutions. Acculturation theory, and the various types of acculturation models, is important for me to understand when it comes to the possible outcomes of interactions the international students and American students have with each other, as well as other diverse interactions on campus.

While I have discussed how acculturation refers to groups of people, it is also important to consider the psychology of acculturation and how it can vary in relation to the individual. Within the psychological context of acculturation, the focus is on the individual experiencing cultural processes and keeping in mind that not all individuals participate to the same extent or adapt in the same manner in the general process of acculturation (Ozer, 2017). Personal factors such as age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status can affect the acculturation process and the immediate effects may range from physiological to psychological stress (Ozer, 2017). Another important factor is the reason behind the relocation into the new society. For example, was the group an indigenous

group that was colonized? Or perhaps refugees who had to flee their home country to escape danger? In the context of this study, some international students may be leaving their home countries for the first time to embark on an educational journey in a completely new environment, including language, societal rules and values, and education systems. In terms of the American students, they also have to adapt to a new environment, away from family, friends and networks. Reasons such as these could have a great impact on the acculturation process and the stress it might cause. The changes to an individual can happen immediately or may extend over a longer period of time (Ozer, 2017).

When it comes to the management of acculturation, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) categorize these changes as affect, behavior, and cognition. From the perspective of affect, acculturation is recognized as a stressful event where an individual will be successful or not and this can be explored through possible changes in general psychological well-being, such as anxiety, depression, or life satisfaction (Ozer, 2017). When it comes to behavior, this focuses on sociocultural adaptation when acquiring culture-specific skills and adapting to a new cultural context of everyday life, such as communication and negotiation (Ozer, 2017). Lastly, the cognitive aspect focuses on social identification and how individuals identify themselves ethnically and culturally in “ingroups and outgroups” (Ozer, 2017, p. 4). This is a crucial part of the psychology of acculturation as this is where prejudice can originate; an individual decides how he or she wants to be affiliated with certain groups, ultimately affecting self-esteem.

Overall, there are some benefits to acculturation theory, but there are also limitations to the application of this theory. I have mentioned some of these already, but generally there are limitations because acculturation theory lacks flexibility, has a weak notion of diverse forms of cultural contact and reduces complex phenomena to simple scenarios (Ozer, 2017). Acculturation does not

happen along a linear timeline. It is complicated, embedded in ambiguity and contradictions at various stages. An acculturating individual's interaction with the new society is not fixed in a certain time or space, and it may differ depending on that person's relation to the dominant society. Ozer (2017) shares an example of how an immigrant may feel American when he or she is with American friends, but may feel Indian when with Indian friends.

Further limitations of acculturation theory concern the role of the researcher. In the case of acculturation theories, the researcher is just as important as the research participants. American philosopher Ken Wilber used a map and a cartographer analogy to explain the importance of the researcher, noting how people quickly accept a map, even though many do not pay attention or even question the cartographer (Gans, 1997). Just as it's up to the cartographer to decide how to create a map, it is up to the researcher to determine the process and outcomes of acculturation. The lens through which the researcher views acculturation can have a considerable impact on the context. For example, anti-oppressive and social justice perspectives of feminists and critical race theorists, among others, may see a society as changing not through a cooperative experience, but through conflicts of interest, power, and resources (Howe, 1987). Oppressive relations can divide people into two separate groups, the dominant and the subordinate. The dominant culture can use its resource to exercise power over and exclude the other group (Domnelli, 2002; Tew, 2006).

Secondly, many acculturation theorists hold a position of objectivism (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Gans, 1997) and are focused on drawing facts and compartmentalizing constructs, such as language use, social affiliation, and cultural traditions and values (Zane & Mak, 2005). The issue raised by compartmentalizing acculturative experiences is that it does not allow insights into the processes and interactions of acculturation (Ngo, 2008). Considering the importance of the researcher role in this study, it is important for me to understand the concepts and limitations of acculturation theory, keeping in mind

the epistemological constructivist paradigm. It is important while analyzing the data collected I am aware of my own thoughts and views and how those may influence the way I analyze the data. I go more into detail about this in chapter four when discussing the research design of this study.

Lastly, many early acculturation theorists have been white males of European descent who often do not speak immigrant languages and who are not readily able to discuss their own limitations when it comes to their understanding of languages, cultural nuances, and histories (Gans, 1997). As the researcher in this study, I was able to provide a different lens from earlier researchers who have used acculturation theory as my own background is different from many of theirs. As an immigrant to the United States and having been through the U.S. higher education system, I am able to see this research through a different lens from these researchers.

Considering critiques of acculturation theory as inflexible, having a weak notion of diverse forms of cultural contact, and reducing a complex situation to something simple, I wanted to ensure that in this study I discussed two main schools of thought to counter these critiques. Ozer (2018) explains that it is important to consider the importance of intercultural contact that globalization has brought about and focus on the differentiation of various components of acculturative change.

Globalization has escalated the acculturation experience and it can now be experienced anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, it is still unique for each individual. This is known as globalization-based acculturation; acculturation experiences occur as a result of direct or mediated intercultural contact that combines local and global traditions, norms and values through a selective incorporation of various cultural elements (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Bond, 2008). Remote acculturation, which refers to indirect intercultural contact such as access to different cultures through music, television, movies, food, or the

Internet is also a phenomenon. Remote acculturation has affected the majority of the world's population and can be regarded as contributing to more complex cultural lives.

When focusing on acculturative change, it is important to keep in mind that understanding acculturation means recognizing distinct components such as practices, values, and identity related to the exposure of a new culture. Acculturation is not a single process happening in a single space (Schwartz et al., 2010). First-year students on a college campus experiencing the acculturation process have constructed their understanding of the new society around them informed by previous and current experiences unique to them. This understanding is based on a variety of components, including the diverse backgrounds of various cultures. When I examined the experiences of students in my sample, it was important to keep in mind that while following the students throughout the year, each student followed his or her own acculturation process. While there might be some similarities between students, all of their experiences cannot be simplified or compartmentalized to provide straightforward answers.

3.3 SOCIAL REPRESENTATION THEORY

In this study, international and domestic students both entered a new environment bringing with them their knowledge, opinions and beliefs about different groups of people and about the new environment itself. This is known as social representation, specifically defined as a “system of opinions, knowledge, and beliefs particular to a culture, a social category, or a group with regard to objects in the social environment” (Rateau et al., 2011). Serge Moscovici developed this theory in 1961, arguing that a social representation is defined as “the elaborating of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating” (p. 251). Phenomenology was a popular concept in France at the time and this had a significant influence on Moscovici's theory. First, there was the idea of “Lebenswelt”, which emphasized life experience as dynamic and

open, not a gradual passage of cognitive stages to maturity and logical adult thinking (Merleau-Ponty, 1964 as cited in Markova, 2017). “Instead, he thought that a child’s representation at the given time is adequately adapted to his/her lived experience” (Markova, 2017, p. 365). The second notion from phenomenology that contributed to the theory of social representation was that of language. Merleau-Ponty (1960, 1964) as cited in Markova, 2017 believed that the analysis of speech and how one expresses oneself is one of the most important kinds of activity in an individual’s sense-making. Lastly, Moscovici used Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception to round out the theory of social representation (Markova, 2017). Moscovici explained it thus: “This is what fixed this notion in my mind, how it was associated with certain ideas on the relationship between communication and knowledge, and the transformation of the content of knowledge,” (Moscovici & Markova, 2000, p. 233).

Through his own experiences of living through WWII, Nazism, and Stalinism, and through his experiences of anti-Semitism, persecution and humiliation as a Romanian immigrant to France, Moscovici also explored ethical values, justice, and the desire for human immortality (Markova, 2017). Through these explorations, Moscovici concluded that making ethical choices is a fundamental feature of the epistemology of common sense and the theory of social representation (Markova, 2016).

When do we start developing social representations? As Van Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins (2012) explain, this process starts when we are young, through what we see and learn from school, family, institutions and media. These entities instill in us a certain way of seeing things and we grow up with these values invested in us. Through these entities we create categories that govern how we understand the environment around us (Van Lange et al., 2012). When Moscovici (1961) developed the theory of social representation, he argued that this happens when one is in an unprecedented situation and as a result of having one’s normal course of events disrupted the brain tries desperately to understand what is

going on or even to defend oneself. It is this interaction that overloads an individual with several meanings, and it is the interaction that contributes to the ontological significance of social representation theory. This interaction constitutes a new reality and the interacting components define one another as complements (Markova, 2008). This is also known as the Object, the Ego, and the Alter. There is a basic triangularity, the Ego-Alter-Object, where the object (representation) is generated jointly by the Ego and the Alter (Markova, 2008). For example, in an electromagnetic field there is a force that exists between two charges, but not resulting from the individual charges themselves. It is the forces between these charges that bring the change about, rather than the behavior of the single charges (Markova, 2008). The Ego-Alter-Object is a dynamic and infinitely open triangular relationship (see figure 3.4).

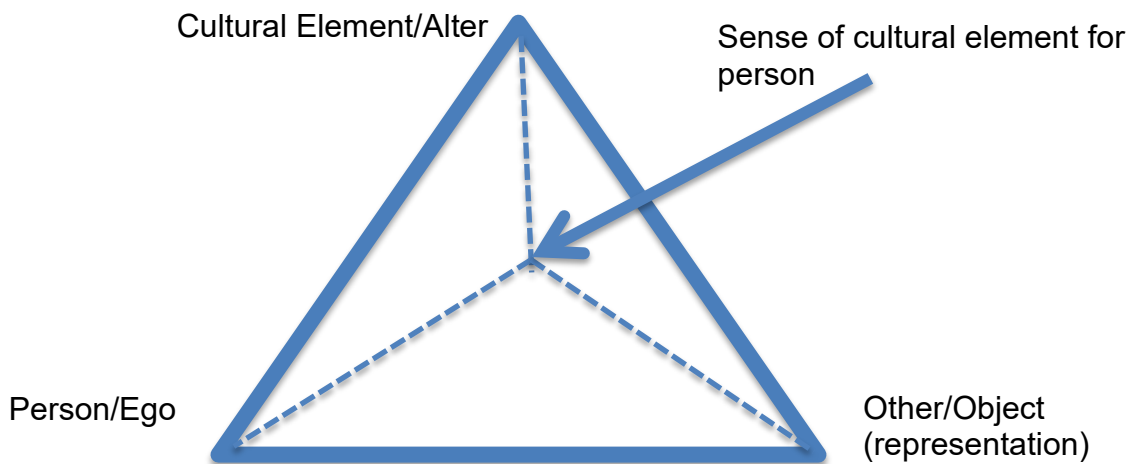


Figure 3.4: The triangle relationship of the Ego-Alter-Object in social representation theory

One example of how one can use this triangle is in a situation where a student encounters a new type of interaction. The student refers to his or her previous knowledge and experiences, or “personal culture”, and then tries to learn from the interaction based on what is socially and culturally accepted as knowledge.

When someone is faced with a new object, he or she will try to incorporate new elements of knowledge into a network of more familiar categories (Doise, Clemence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2013). Zittoun (2014) observes that this process involves internalization, reorganization of previous knowledge and then the construction of new knowledge. The student then establishes a relationship with the object of knowledge (Markova, 2008). Many researchers have used this triangle method as a foundation, but have found that incorporating other elements is necessary.

There is significant evidence of the interdependence of the Ego-Alter relationship. The Ego defines the Alter and they ultimately transform one another (Markova, 2008). For example, Moscovici studied social representations related to the political power of the Communist Party and of the Catholic Church, and the thinking and the communications of its citizens. The patterns he discovered showed how there was interdependence between the Communist Party and the Catholic Church and its citizens, and together they generated new patterns of knowledge, beliefs, and images (Markova, 2008). When the Self and the Alter are interdependent and both contribute to empirical data, this is classified as a single case study (Markova, 2008). A meaningful methodological approach in a single case study is to focus on the interaction and interdependence of the Self and Other and how they transform each other, rather than trying to manipulate variables (Markova, 2008).

In summary, as Moscovici (2008) explains, individuals will create reality through their interactions. These interactions will result in social representations, and these representations will direct individuals' behavior, decisions, and attitudes. The social setting, also known as the alter, is crucial in understanding how these representations occur. In this study, the alter is the university campus community. Moscovici (1988) argues that it is impossible to construct or represent an object without considering the Ego or the Alter. In other words, "meaning is not an individual or private affair, but always implies the 'other',

concrete or imagined. While individually cognized, in form, function and content, the presence of the 'other' is always implicated based on past social experience" (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999, p. 170).

3.3.1 Social representation theory in communities

By establishing the concept of social representations, Moscovici showed that contemporary knowledge systems are not universal, but rather demonstrated that social knowledge is systematically related to particular social locations, situations, roles and identities, also known as communities (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). As I shared in chapter two, communities have become more fluid as a result of globalization and the movement of people, but the concept of community does not disappear. It still has meaning in how people develop a sense of belonging (Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). In order to understand today's complex societies is where social representation theory can be useful.

Just as communities are fluid, so are social representations. One example is the Brixton community in south London, where there is such a breadth of diversity of people that social representations can be used by people to locate themselves as members within that community or perhaps distance themselves (Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015). Actually, with the increase of mobility of people, people are being seen as "moving through" communities instead of being "in" communities (Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015). This results in people participating in multiple or contradictory social representations, which is called cognitive polyphasia (Provencher, 2011; Gillespie, 2008 in Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015). This is a form of adaptation that allows people to move in and out of different communities. One example of this is a study of Turkish adolescents in London who moved between attending a British school during the week and a Turkish school during the weekends. These teens had to adapt to being British, but then while at home have to adapt to their Turkish families and surroundings. "Cognitive polyphasia at the representational level can be made

comprehensible by considering not only the way in which representations are bound into communities, but also crucially the way in which people move about the social world...adapting to multiple communities,” (Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015, p. 185-186).

While there is a movement of people, there is still a need for community. And perhaps the competition between social representations can help evolve communities. Social representation theory is useful in that it demands a focus on how community, and the various competing versions of community, are produced and made valid through people’s interactions, identities and corresponding systems of knowledge exchange and social action (Howarth, 2001 in Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015). When there is diversity within a community, according to social representation theory, this means the diversity of people can help evolve that community through projects and social activities that allow them to integrate diverse representations into an interrelated whole. “Communities are not found, but made, stated, contested, defended, transformed,” (Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015, p. 190) and this depends on the natural tensions associated with social representations.

In the context of this study, social representation theory helps analyze the social representations students have when entering this new environment and perhaps, how they are able to shape not only their own social representations, but also perhaps the representations others have.

3.4 THIRD SPACE THEORY

The concept of third space theory applies when someone is trying to balance two worlds: his or her own world and a new one (Kung, 2007). While people are constantly interacting with a new culture and acculturating, they could be what is also referred to by Kung (2007) as “dancing on the edge of two worlds”. Such individuals are caught between maintaining their own culture, and a desire to

engage and adapt to another group (Howarth, et al., 2013). A person decides, consciously or unconsciously, to adapt to the culture of the host or keep the other behaviors.

Bhabha (1994) developed this theory from the hybridity of interactions and cultures during postcolonial times as a response to people trying to understand the constant change around them in their daily lives. However, as the definition and use of “postcolonialism” was defined mainly by Western theorists and did not originate from worldviews that were lost by marginalization, a dual epistemological foundation of “postcolonial” versus “western” was created. Ochoa (1996) argues that postcolonial theory has been reduced to the antithesis of “western” discourse and hinders its own development by relying on the “us” versus “them” dualism. Current postcolonialism argues that colonialism never ended, but has simply continued in other types of subordination (Prasad, 2003; Young, 2003). Seremani and Clegg (2016) argue that a third-space does not necessarily have to be the result of postcolonialism. They observe that the Oxford Dictionary defines colonialism as the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically, thus resulting in a postcolonial settlement. However, there is evidence of many exceptions, especially in the case of countries and territories that were never explicitly or formally colonized, but were instead historically subject to colonial relations (Seremani & Clegg, 2016).

What is needed is an ability to see the world through a different perspective and not through what has already been established under the current label of “postcolonialism” written for “western” consumption (Seremani and Clegg, 2016, p. 173). Seremani and Clegg (2016, p. 174) suggest using epistemological thinking as a platform that will allow “genuine” voices to be heard without being caught in the “us” vs “them” trap, allowing for the inclusion and coexistence of all voices in an “epistemological third space”. Bhabha (1994) explains that it is in these spaces that the negotiations and renegotiations of identities and

worldviews occur over time. This is not to say that one should ignore history or disregard power relations, but rather one should allow true hybridity and the inclusion of all voices by collapsing the “us” versus “them” boundary (Seremani & Clegg, 2016). While the third space is created by interactions between the colonizer and the colonized, Seremani and Clegg (2016) argue that to extend the notion of the third space is to allow different worldviews, where diverse epistemological standpoints and perspectives are allowed and appreciated, and where they can coexist and provide rich insights, embraced without one being privileged over another.

I felt it was important to explore the background of postcolonialism and the development of third space theory to emphasize the importance of inclusiveness when exploring the narratives of both the American and the international students in this study. It is obvious that while international students may perceive themselves as “outsiders” on arriving in the United States, American students might also be perceived as “outsiders” entering a new environment. A concern has been voiced by critical and cultural theorists that ideologies of a culture that is perceived to be dominant have the power to undermine other ideologies through social institutions and media (Ryoo & McClaren, 2010). Ryoo & McClaren (2010) stated that individuals have their own version of their “first space”, which is the sociocultural context of their previous learning environment and then they encounter a “second space”, which is the new sociocultural context. When both the first space and the second space come together, a third space is created. For this study, one group of students is not superior or inferior to the other. All students are participating in what Bhabha (1994) describes as a transformational and transformative space for creating a new identity, where students can negotiate meaning and representation. The third space is not a physical location, but rather an ongoing renewed space for creating a new identity and participating in the creation of new cultures and contexts (Wood, 2015). Remaining inclusive of the third space of all students in this study will

address the research question by exploring the epistemological understandings of the students and their world.

3.5 TINTO'S MODEL OF STUDENT RETENTION

Several theories on student persistence confirm that it is during the freshman year that a student is most likely to drop out of college. The first six weeks are the most crucial time because the student is particularly susceptible to feelings of marginality during this period (Tinto, 1988). The fourth element of the theoretical foundation to this study is Tinto's model of student retention. As stated in chapter one, Tinto (1975, 1993, 1997, 1998) argued that the university provides not only an academic system, but also a type of social system where integration is just as important and critical to the success of the student as integration in the academic system. As reflected in figure 3.5, Tinto developed 13 dimensions based on academic and social factors that influence a student's decision to stay at university or to leave (Tinto, 2004).

Tinto's model of student retention (Tinto 1975, 1993, 1997, 1998) postulates that within the university there is an academic system and a social system. In his original theory, Tinto (1975) explained that academic integration is viewed as grade performance, the student's intellectual development, and the student's identification with the beliefs, values, and norms of the academic system. Social integration refers to informal peer group development, faculty and staff interactions, and extracurricular activities. According to Tinto's (2004) interactionist theory of college student departure, there are several interactions, both formal and informal within the academic and social systems of the university that determine whether a student will finish college. Tinto (2004, p. 10) concluded that the greater the student's level of academic and social integration, the greater the commitment to the college and to the goal of graduation. However, Tinto (2014) argues that it is also important to remember that people act according to what they perceive; a better question to ask, therefore, is whether the

engagement leads the student to see himself/herself as a valued member of the academic and social community.

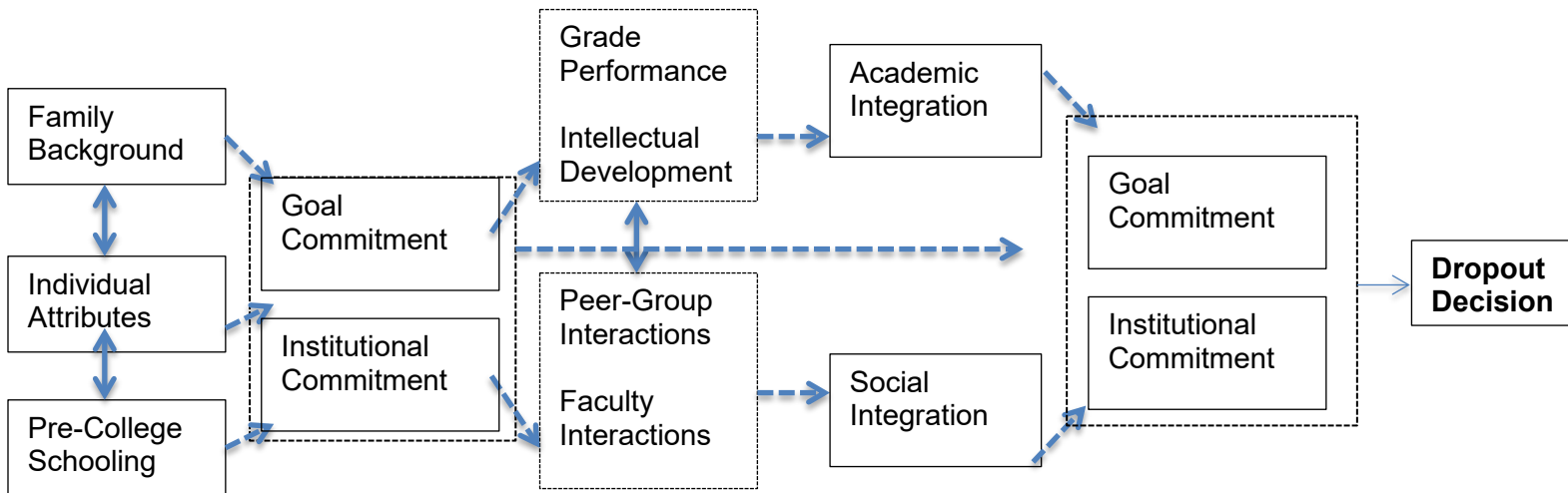


Figure 3.5: Tinto's (1975) 13 dimensions of the Student Integration Model

Tinto's (1975) model suggested that students come to college with background traits, which lead to initial commitments when it comes to goals and selecting the institution. Then the two systems, the academic system and the social system come into play. The initial commitments made will influence academic and social interactions. The greater the integration into both the academic and social systems, the greater the commitment to both the goals and the institutional, and this will ultimately lead to graduation.

Following this theory, it was important in this study to consider how both the academic and the social system contributed to the narratives of community among both American and international students. This model includes factors that play a role in student interactions, such as family background, individual attributes, the type of pre-college schooling and what each individual student brings to the new community. This is also closely tied to social representation

theory. Additionally, I found this theory to be helpful when analyzing what students said about sense of community to their academic success at the university. When analyzing the data, I realized I needed additional theories to draw upon and Tinto's model was one theory I pulled in to help complete the analysis. More of this will be discussed in chapter five when I go more in depth about the findings of the study.

3.6 THEORY OF MATTERING

The last theory used as a foundation of this study, as well as a second theory I pulled in to help analyze the data, is the theory of mattering. As mentioned in chapter two in section 2.6, when discussing the concept of a sense of belonging, a term that is closely related is the theory of mattering. A sense of belonging is closely tied to the perception of mattering, both emotionally and cognitively, because the latter reduces the feelings of being marginalized and disconnected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Mattering, as an influential concept that informs someone's self-concept, was first described by sociologist Morris Rosenberg. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) argued that, "Mattering refers to the individual's feeling that he or she counts, makes a difference..." (p. 163). They identified five dimensions of mattering (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). The first dimension is attention, as in someone being noticed in positive ways. The second is importance, that is being cared about or being of concern to someone. Next is dependence, a feeling of being needed that is reciprocated. The fourth dimension is being appreciated, which is the same as being respected. Lastly, ego extension is the final dimension, when someone believes others share in his or her success.



Figure 3.6 Rosenberg and McCullough's five dimensions of mattering (1981)

Building upon the work of Rosenberg and McCullough, Schlossberg's theory of college students' mattering and marginality (1985, 1989) states that mattering is when someone, rightly or wrongly, believes that he/she matters, is valued or appreciated by others, and that others are concerned with his/her fate.

Schlossberg (1989) and Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) explained that the experience of marginality results in the opposite feelings, that is one experiences a feeling of not fitting in and not being needed or accepted. While researching university students in the 1980s in the United States and their transition from high school to college, Schlossberg (1989) found that students were uneasy about their ability to transition and often felt marginalized. In addition, they did not feel they could make a difference, they felt they did not matter to the university community, and this resulted in their not doing well academically or socially, increasing their self-consciousness (Schlossberg, 1989). This study concluded that when college students succeed it is because they feel as if they matter to others and are appreciated (Schlossberg, 1989).

Prilleltensky (2014) argues that mattering and thriving are what make life worth living. Prilleltensky (2014) described mattering as broken down into two essential moments: recognition and impact. Recognition occurs when someone receives signals from the world that his/her presence matters and that what he/she has to say has meaning and is acknowledged by family, colleagues, and the community (Prilleltensky, 2014). The feeling of impact occurs when someone feels he/she does make a difference and that the world depends on him/her:

We need to feel recognized, acknowledged, and appreciated in good measure, without demanding too much attention or privilege at the expense of others. At the same time, we must avoid the feeling of invisibility, which plagues so many minorities and oppressed communities (Prilleltensky, 2014, p. 151)

When people feel that they do not matter, the two extreme results are domination and helplessness. An individual will either take complete control of the environment and other people or feel completely powerless to make a difference (Prilleltensky, 2014).

The concept of mattering came about in focus group discussions and journals because many of the students described mattering as a way to feel a sense of community. When I asked them to elaborate on this more, I discovered patterns within their narratives that aligned with the theory of mattering. Pulling in this last theory to help with analyzing the data proved to be helpful, as mattering is one of the main themes in the findings of this study.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, these theories support the concept of epistemological constructivism and guide the foundation of this research study that explores what it means for domestic and international students to have a sense of community

and belonging in a new campus environment. It was important to be inclusive of all worldviews as students described their construction of and engagement with the new university community and the role their previous experience played in this construction of reality. In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the research design and methodology for this study, as well as discuss data validity and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides further detail about the methodology used in this study. It begins by providing an overview of the study's purpose and the philosophical worldview. Next, the chapter describes the research design and the research methods used in the execution of this study, as well as the role of the researcher and the value the researcher brought to the study. The last part of this discusses ethical considerations related to the study.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The basis of this study was rooted in the fact that students were sharing what they perceived to be reality, so my research methodology had to allow me to explore the complexity of these students' experiences and perspectives related to the concept of a sense of community at a university.

4.2.1 Purpose of the study

As expressed in chapter 1, the objective of this study was to listen to how international and American students construct belonging in an unfamiliar campus environment. By examining these narratives, I was hopeful that the findings and recommendations emerging from the study would help to fill the gap in our understanding of how students renegotiate and construct belonging on campus. Ultimately, filling this gap could enhance the retention and success of both international and American students. With the context and background of this particular university in mind, the goal was to explore the perception of community among both domestic and international students in an effort to answer the main research question: **What can we learn about sense of community by**

listening to the perceptions of American and international students at a U.S. university?

The sub-questions that will support the study are:

1. What perceptions of community do international students have?
2. What perceptions of community do American students have?
3. How do domestic and international students negotiate belonging on campus?
4. What are the community dynamics when international and American students interact?
5. How do international and American students negotiate their own and others' cultural identities?

4.2.2 Philosophical worldview

A basic set of beliefs that help to guide a research process is known as the worldview or paradigm (Creswell, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a paradigm is formed as a human construction that represents the most informed view in order to explain a phenomenon. Essentially, a paradigm is a scheme to assist in the organization of data and it is recommended to assist researchers in integrating a structure and process in which to think about cause and impact (Given, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (2000), characterize research paradigms as:

1. Ontology, which asks what is reality?
2. Epistemology, which asks how do you know something, and what is the relationship between the researcher and what can be known?
3. Axiology, which asks what are the underlying values?
4. Methodology, which asks how you go about finding it out?

By asking these questions, paradigms usually fall under positivism, constructivism, realism, pragmatism, or postmodernism (Maxwell, 2013).

The positivist paradigm holds that social reality can only be explained by science and by natural laws (Waliaula, 2013). Constructivism focuses on epistemology, which means that knowledge is what we know and how we know it, that knowledge is created through experiences and is not necessarily representative of the 'real world' (Kretchmar, 2019). Realism has an overarching philosophical idea that the researcher should strive to understand the world from an objective point of view (Given, 2013). Pragmatism focuses on what is the truth, that truth is relative to the current situation, and that truth can be used to understand the nature of reality (Given, 2013). Lastly, postmodernism, which can be defined in several ways, is often referred to as one of the most radically transformative movements, as it does not affiliate with a particular philosophical viewpoint, but has a "desire to transcend the limitations of the modernist viewpoint" (Given, 2013, p. 655).

Some qualitative researchers believe that following one of these paradigms may create "tunnel vision" in making sense of data, as qualitative research is inductive; any structuring creates a lack of flexibility (Maxwell, 2013). Having a less structured approach allows the researcher to focus on a particular phenomenon. Other researchers, however, argue that having a structured approach can help to ensure comparability of data (Maxwell, 2013).

Sociologist Andrew Abbott (2001, 2004) interrogates rigid premises and explains that philosophical positions should function as conceptual and practical resources that can be used to solve specific problems in research. Maxwell (2013) argues that this is similar to a bricolage approach to qualitative research, which is derived from Claude Levi-Strauss (1968, p. 42), a French anthropologist. Bricolage translates as "do-it-yourself", with the key idea being that, rather than having a logically consistent plan in advance, the researcher adapts to the situation and derives unique solutions. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Kincheloe and Berry (2004) and Kincheloe et al. (2011) have all applied this type of research method. Based on these concepts, the philosophical approach implemented by

Maxwell (2013) focuses on critical realism, a form of bricolage, which has two different perspectives. One is ontological realism and the other, which guides my research, is epistemological constructivism.

Firstly, constructivism is described as being more phenomenological, interpretive, relational, holistic and humanistic, with more focus on language, communication, subjective human experiences, and the meaning that people make of their experiences in a variety of contexts (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Maxwell (2013) explains that epistemological constructivism suggests that, “our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth” (p. 43). In addition, people’s perceptions and beliefs are shaped by their assumptions and previous experiences (Maxwell, 2013).

Engaging with questions of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology can help to further explain the deciding factor of choosing epistemological constructivism. Firstly, the ontology for this study is that there are multiple constructions of reality by students when they enact “community” because their reality is based on their own experiences (even though these are also socially constructed). This means that reality is not absolute, but rather dependent on those involved, and no one reality is more or less true than another (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Secondly, the epistemology of constructivism states that the researcher and individuals are interrelated, since there are multiple realities of community and the researcher creates the findings (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Together with this, the researcher and the participants bring their values (axiology) into the research process. Lastly, the methodology is based on a close working relationship between the researcher and the participants, where qualitative methods are used to understand values, meanings, and perceptions (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Mayo (2010, p. 33) argues that:

Constructivism stresses the importance of self-discovery and life experiences in examining the genesis of knowledge. Rather than focusing on knowledge acquisition as something that exists outside of the individual, constructivism sees it as a uniquely inner experience.

The goal of epistemological constructivism is to understand and interpret multiple realities. The design of this study allowed me to hear what community meant for international and American students attending a research-intensive university in the U.S. One of the criticisms of this type of paradigm is that the researcher has too much control over the interpretation of the findings; this will be addressed later in this chapter.

In summary, epistemological constructivism states that reality is something that is socially constructed and it explores how experiences are created and given meaning (Yilmaz, 2013). Keeping in mind that students are constructing their own reality in a given context, it was important as a researcher to listen to what a sense of community meant to students and how they negotiated belonging.

4.2.3 Qualitative research approach

I decided to take a qualitative approach to this research study, based on the theoretical foundation, philosophical worldview and cultural context presented. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the human element and capture individuals' thoughts, feelings and interpretations of meaning and process (Given, 2008). Qualitative research also assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and reality is neither static nor fixed, and not independent of a person (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher can focus on making meaning rather than trying to prove a theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This focus on making meaning allows participants to open up and share their stories in ways that are not hindered by what the researcher is hoping to find (Creswell, 2007).

There is no set design or structure for a qualitative study, argues Creswell (2007); however, there are some fundamentals suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013), which were followed in this study.

10 Fundamentals of qualitative research
Meaning, not numbers
Doesn't provide a single answer
Treats context as important
Can be experiential or critical
Is underpinned by ontological assumptions
Is underpinned by epistemological assumptions
Involves qualitative methodology
Uses all sorts of data
Involves "thinking qualitatively"
Values subjectivity and reflexivity

Figure 4.2: Ten fundamentals of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013)

In this qualitative study, I explored the narratives of community provided by international and American students in order to understand how they viewed and developed a sense of community in a new university environment. By taking this approach, I was able to elicit in-depth descriptions about their experiences and views, not only as groups but also as individuals.

4.2.4 Case study research design

With a complex topic such as sense of community and the selection of participants from a single university in the United States, a case study design for this study made the most sense. A case study approach allows the researcher to identify the question of interest and then, through various sources of information,

bring life to the complexity of the case being studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Given (2008) argues that when it comes to exploring ideas, case studies are better suited than large-N studies because researchers can invest significantly in interviews and focus groups. In addition, case study research has proven to be a major source of theoretical innovation and often focuses on pinning down specifics between causes and effects, rather than revealing the average strength of a factor that causes an effect (Given, 2008).

Woodside (2016) explains that the purpose of a case study is to obtain a deep understanding of the participants, their interactions, sentiments and behaviors. Having a deep understanding means having the knowledge of the “sense-making” processes individuals go through in particular situations, in other words gaining knowledge of how individuals focus and frame what they perceive and how they interpret what they do in that situation (Woodside, 2016, p. 6). In order to achieve a deep understanding from a case study, Denzin (1978) recommends triangulation, or having multiple research methods across multiple time periods.

A case study should not be confused with a sample study. It is irrelevant to say that a case study can be generalizable because that is not the intention of a case study (Schwandt & Gates, 2017). For example, I focused on exploring perceptions of community among international and domestic students at one university in the United States, so the main concern was to develop a description, an interpretation, and an explanation of this case, not to generalize these perceptions to all international and domestic students in the United States. As Yin (2014) explains, a researcher chooses to conduct a case study in order to understand a real-world case and what you find out is going to have important details and context to that particular case. Since my philosophical background for this was based on epistemological constructivism, I asked questions that allowed participants to share their in-depth perceptions, I listened and took notes while being aware of my preconceptions and ideologies, and remained adaptive (Yin, 2018) while studying this particular case.

Implementing a case study design does pose some challenges. Firstly, Yin (2018) adds a caveat when conducting a qualitative case study research, as there are concerns that case study research is not sufficiently rigorous. In order to avoid confusion, Yin (2018) suggests that the researcher highlights methodic procedures and is transparent and explicit about limiting or eliminating biases. Secondly, since a case study is the focus of a single bounded system, this may create challenges when it comes to the boundaries of the case and how it might be constrained by time, events, and processes (Creswell, 2007). Lastly, a case study may take too long and produce a huge amount of data that is cumbersome to analyze (Yin, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite these challenges, I decided that a case study was the best approach considering the goals of my research and the theoretical foundation of the study. In an effort to help overcome these challenges, it was important for me to keep in mind the topic of the case study and the main research questions. I also address these other concerns throughout this chapter when discussing data validity and ethical considerations.

4.2.5 Scope of research

The setting for this study was a public, research university located in the state of Ohio in the United States. This university has eight campus locations within the state and this study took place at the main campus, where nearly 29,000 students are enrolled. The university awards bachelors', masters', and doctoral degrees and has 12 colleges (faculties). More than 70% of the domestic student population is Caucasian. The breakdown of the domestic population is 61% female and 39% male. Of the almost 29,000 enrolled students, more than 21,000 are from the state of Ohio. At the time of the study, international students count for nearly 10% of the student population and represent more than 100 countries. The top countries represented are India, China and Saudi Arabia. The number of

international students includes those who are undergraduate, graduate, exchange and visiting students. All first- and second-year undergraduate students are mandated to reside in on-campus housing, while third- and fourth-year undergraduate students are permitted to live either on or off campus. There is no housing mandate for graduate students. The estimated number of students living on campus is 6,000, indicating that the majority of students commute to the university.

4.2.6 Target group/sampling

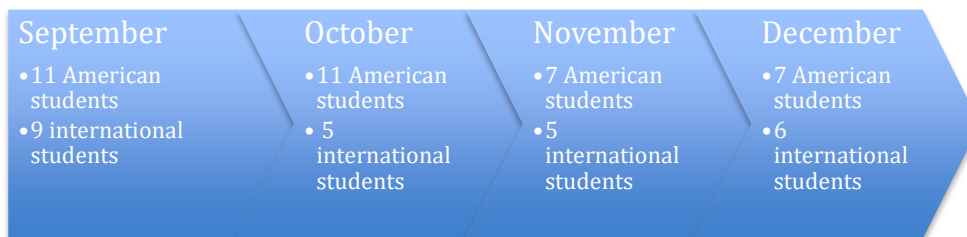
As stated in chapter one, when it came to the selection of student participants and setting for this study, I used purposeful selection. In purposeful selection, settings, persons, or activities are selected as they will provide information relevant to the study. Suri (2011) explains 16 types of purposeful sampling and I used a combination of a few. One is described as typical case sampling. The purpose of this selection is to “describe and illustrate what is typical to those unfamiliar with the setting” (Suri, 2011, p. 68). For this study, this meant it was important for me to select participants who are first-year students so they are unfamiliar with the campus environment.

In addition to typical case sampling, I used what is described as homogenous sampling. This type of selection ensures that the researcher will be able to describe a particular group in depth and that other researchers will be able to compare this study with other case studies with similar participants (Suri, 2011). For example, my case study could be compared to another case study that focused on first-year international and first-year domestic students at a four-year, public institution in the United States. Lastly, in the case of this study, having representativeness reflective of the first-year international student and U.S. domestic student populations at the university was important. This meant having demographic diversity, and ensuring the inclusion of those whose voices may otherwise have gone unheard.

At the same time, it is important to select individuals whom the researcher is confident will be able to establish effective relationships. This is purposeful selection because “it is intended to provide the best data for your study, although the potential unrepresentativeness of the participants needs to be addressed” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 99). In this study I endeavored to select participants who would be the most representative of the student population at the university, but I also tried to ensure that I selected individuals whom I knew would be dedicated and provide quality data. In summary, when it came to the participant selection decisions, it was important to take into account the feasibility of access and data collection and the relationship I would have with the participants.

I collected data at the beginning of the autumn semester of 2016 and concluded in the spring semester of 2017. In the U.S. higher education system, the autumn semester begins in late August and concludes in mid-December. The spring semester starts in mid-January and concludes in early May. Both semesters have a variety of breaks, including breaks for holidays and spring break.

Autumn Semester 2016



Spring Semester 2017

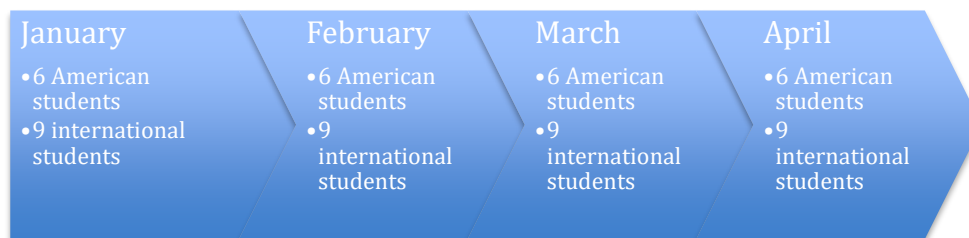


Figure 4.3: Timeline of student participation in the study from September 2016 through April 2017

I selected two groups of students, one of first-year international students and the other of first-year American students. The majority of the Americans who participated in the study were natives of Ohio, while two came from another state. Most American students were Caucasian, while two students were African-American. The international students represented Japan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Brazil.

My goal was to start with 10 students in each group, anticipating that there might be students who chose not to continue being part of the study. This ensured that I would have at least five or six students in each group throughout the course of the study. Since I work at the university where the research took place, I was able to meet both international and domestic first-year students through various student organizations, activities and by receiving referrals from older students. I was able to highlight the purpose of my research with students whom I thought would be representative and/or beneficial to the study and if they wanted more information, I would email them additional details. Since it is a large university and I do not have the opportunity to meet all students, I also worked with different offices and student organizations on campus to send a recruitment email to students. Students who expressed interest after receiving the recruitment email and those who interacted with me were given further details during an information meeting about the study. Those who wanted to continue received

further instructions on signing the consent form. This information included dates and times of focus groups and instructions for weekly journaling.

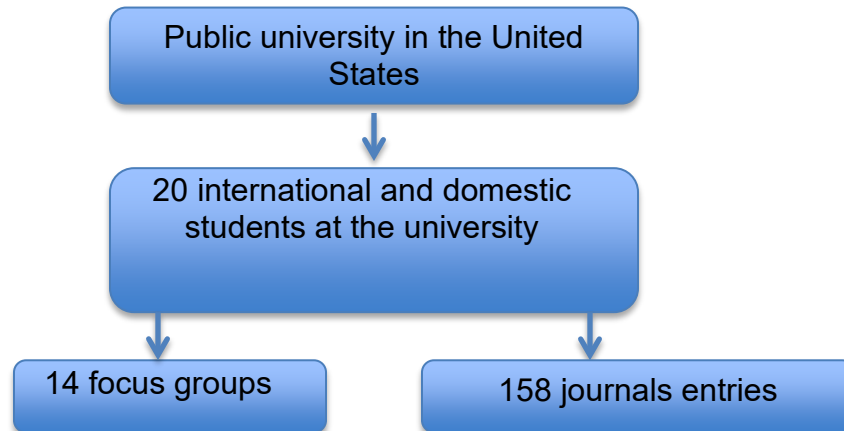


Figure 4.4: Diagram of participants and data collection

At the beginning of the autumn semester, I recruited nine international students and 11 American students to participate in the focus groups and to write journals. Over the remainder of the autumn semester, I lost and gained students. When the spring semester started, there was more consistency in students' participation. There were a total of nine international students and six Americans in the spring semester (see figure 4.3). When it came to planning the focus groups and the journaling, each student received a number in place to use instead of their name to protect their identity. In addition, the American students were named the B group and the international students the A group. The aim was that each group of students would participate in a focus group discussion each month and complete a journal entry that would be due at the end of each week. When the study concluded, a total of 20 students had participated, either at some point during the autumn semester, at some point during the spring semester, or over both semesters (the entire academic year).

4.3 DATA GENERATION

I have established that I used an epistemological constructivist paradigm, meaning that individuals constructed their reality through their own interpretations. Based on this, I decided to use two different methods of collecting data, following a case study design.

4.3.1 Research methods

In this section, I outline the research methods used in this study. In particular, I discuss the multiple methods of data collection and the methods of data analysis. Collecting data through multiple methods helps triangulate these data (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, multiple methods help complement and expand the data by exploring different aspects of what is being studied. While it is important to have aspects of the study laid out in detail, I also found that it was important to be open to any possibilities of adjusting. For example, students joined and left the study and I had to find new ways to adjust to this. As a qualitative study progresses, Maxwell (2013) explains that emerging insights may require not only new research questions, but also new participant selection decisions, unexpected relationships, different kinds of data, and different analytic strategies.

4.3.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are defined as a way of engaging a small number of people in informal group discussions and having them focus on a particular topic (Wilkinson, 2015). Focus groups are well suited to exploring sensitive topics, dispelling a common misconception that people will not reveal intimate details in a group discussion (Wilkinson, 2015). This form of qualitative interviewing requires a researcher to lead the group in discussion in order to generate data (Given, 2008). I chose to conduct focus groups as one way of collecting data because this would allow students to discuss the topic of sense of community and belonging freely, in response to the prompts provided. When using this methodology, students can talk to each other, ask questions, exchange

anecdotes, and provide comments on each other's experiences. The emphasis is not on posing frequent questions, but on the researcher keeping the discussion flowing and encouraging everyone to participate fully (Wilkinson, 2015). Also, having a focus group that brought together students who shared characteristics created an opportunity for them to participate in meaningful conversations about the topic and encouraged those who were possibly nervous to respond. For example, while they certainly had many different experiences and backgrounds, just the fact that the international students were together allowed them to talk more freely without being judged by English-speaking students.

The settings for the focus groups were lounges in a residence hall. Since all the students were first-year students, most lived on campus so conducting the focus groups in a residence hall was convenient for them. The lounge had movable seating, so participants could rearrange the furniture in a way that made them feel most comfortable. The focus groups took place once a month during the academic year, starting in September and ending in April. The focus groups were structured according to Kelly's (2008) four basic components: procedure, interaction, content, and recording. These concepts are explained below.

The term procedure refers here to the expectations and rules for each focus group. Examples of expectations and rules that I explained on each occasion were that the session was going to be recorded, that participants should show respect to other students by taking turns to share opinions, and being mindful of the confidentiality of what was shared during a session. Confidentiality implied that students should respect the privacy of others by not sharing what was discussed, and that the researcher should ensure confidentiality even though the session was audio-recorded.

Interaction in this case refers to the researcher being aware of interpersonal dynamics and making sure that all participants have the opportunity to speak. In

essence, this meant that I would take responsibility for maintaining the comfort level of the group from start to finish and ensure lively participation (Kelly, 2008).

The third component was content, which refers to what is discussed during the focus groups. As the researcher, I listen for commonalities and differences of opinion (Kelly, 2008). The content for each focus group was driven by a series of prompts to students relating to the concept of community and their comments. I remained aware of any similarities and differences during the focus groups by taking notes when I could, and where appropriate I allowed discussions to continue or asked follow-up questions to keep the conversations going. As Silverman (2007) argues, it is important that the facilitator remains flexible and if needed, removes him or herself from the discussion to allow the group to progress in conversation. I also summarized the content to ensure that I understood what participants were saying, especially during times of disagreement, to ensure the understanding of all views in the focus group.

Lastly, the final component of the focus groups was recording. Recording the focus groups played an integral role because as the facilitator, I could only capture so much information in hand writing while also managing the discussions. Recording the focus group conversations allowed me to focus closely on the discussions as they happened, and to refer later to the transcriptions for data analysis.

I conducted focus group discussions with the American group and the international student group in September 2016, November 2016, December 2016, January 2017, February 2017, March 2017, and April 2017.

Date	Number of students
09-28-2016	5

11-03-2016	4
11-25-2017	4
01-29-2017	4
02-15-2017	4
03-22-2017	3
04-12-2017	4

Table 4.1 Focus Groups with American Students

Date	Number of students
09-28-2016	9
11-01-2016	3
12-01-2016	6
01-25-2017	7
02-15-2017	6
03-22-2017	7
04-12-2017	9

Table 4.2 Focus Groups with International Students

I asked each group the same set of questions, adjusting them when necessary to fit the particular group better. Some students were not able to attend the focus group sessions, but still contributed by writing journal entries.

4.3.3 Participants' journals

“Using journals is one of the most effective research tools to mine the rich personal experiences and emotions of participants’ inner lives,” argues Given (2008, p. 214). I asked students to keep weekly journals in which they could reflect and write in response to prompts related to their sense of belonging and community. I found this method to be a mixture of interviewing and journaling.

Interviewing is a useful way of gathering data in that it allows the researcher to understand the meanings students make by having them describe and elaborate on their experiences and opinions (Kvale, 1996). On the other hand, journaling captures in writing emotions and self-reflection (Given, 2008). While discussing ideas and concepts within a focus group has its benefits, allowing the students the opportunity to continue their thoughts and perhaps share additional details they did not want to share in front of others in a private journal could provide additional rich data for the research project. I also found that this method was more convenient for students, as they could complete the journals at a time that was best for them. Journaling made them feel more comfortable in sharing information by typing it rather than sharing it in person with the researcher. In addition, since journals are seen as a way for individuals to keep record of ongoing events in their lives and in their surrounding social environment (Given, 2008) this seemed like the most logical approach. Alaszewski (2006) believes that if journals are to be effective, they should be used regularly and feature entries that include emotions and beliefs. In this study, I instructed students to complete a journal entry on a Google Document every week. I would provide weekly journal prompts in Google Document; students would use these to help them reflect and think about their sense of belonging and community. Depending on the content of the weekly journal entries, I would provide follow-up questions if appropriate when preparing the Google Document for the following week's journal entries.

Journal Number	Number of Student Entries
Journal #1	11

Journal #2	11
Journal #3	7
Journal #4	7
Journal #5	5
Journal #6	5
Journal #7	6
Journal #8	7
Journal #9	5
Journal #10	5
Journal #11	6
Journal #12	6

Table 4.3 American Student Journals

Journal Number	Number of Student Entries
Journal #1	9
Journal #2	9
Journal #3	4
Journal #4	5
Journal #5	2
Journal #6	6
Journal #7	5
Journal #8	7
Journal #9	7
Journal #10	7
Journal #11	8
Journal #12	8

4.4 International Journal Entries

4.3.4 Researcher's Journal

“There is an increasing practice of researchers themselves keeping detailed journals,” (Given, 2008, p. 214). Ellis and Bochner (2000) promote the idea of researchers keeping a journal as a tool for capturing their own experiences while conducting the research. Etherington (2004) also believes that this is an effective way of tracking the researcher’s feelings and insights so that these can be incorporated into the conclusions of the research. Etherington (2004) describes this as being reflexive, being aware of personal responses and social and cultural contexts and making choices about how to use them. Having chosen an epistemological constructivism paradigm, I created my own understanding of community and a sense of belonging, just as the students did. As I started to explore the world of community and belonging of these students, I was doing the same myself, not only sharing my own thoughts on the subject, but also my insights and thoughts about what students shared with me. This process also challenged and transformed my own thoughts:

When we are able to communicate explicit knowledge of our total experiences, ‘we can allow our perspectives to be transformed by discussion’, being open to including others’ views that might extend, challenge or validate our own. (Winter, Buck, & Sobiechowska, 1996)

Freedman and Combs (2002) suggest that the best approach starts with a “not-knowing” attitude. This means that while it is important to reflect on one’s own beliefs, it is also important to remain open to seeking new knowledge rather than trying to find knowledge that fits or reinforces previous theories or ideas. Keeping my own journal assisted both my internal and external reflection by helping me to identify any interpretations I may have based on my own experiences or personal and social culture. This is considered to be a good practice of qualitative research:

If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our

representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigor that is required of good qualitative research. (Etherington, 2004, p. 32)

In summary, keeping a researcher journal allowed me to be more fully conscious of my own culture and politics, as well as that of the participants, and ensured transparency between researcher and participants.

In conclusion, since I am an employee at the university where I was conducting my research, gaining access to the university and recruiting students for the study was a simple matter. Owing to the nature of my employment, I engage with both domestic and international students on a regular basis, so even when students dropped out of the study I was able to recruit new participants quickly. I collected data over a period of nine months, roughly an academic year, from September 2016 through April 2017. I conducted a total of 14 focus groups and collected 158 journal entries from a total of 20 participants. Data collection procedures were identical for the focus group discussions and journaling.

4.3.5 Challenges posed by data collection

Collecting the data through both focus groups and journals posed some challenges. In terms of the focus groups, the biggest difficulty was finding a day and time that was convenient for all the students who were interested in participating. As they all had very different schedules, this probably contributed to the drop off in numbers, especially in the case of the American students. Many of the American students did have part-time jobs in order to help pay tuition and other bills.

When it came to the journals, both groups of students had to be reminded each week to complete their journal entries. These were due every Friday, and I constantly emailed them the following Monday to remind them they missed the weekly journal deadline. A second challenge was making sure that students were

elaborating on their experiences and reflections. While some students did utilize the journal as an opportunity to share experiences perhaps they wouldn't share in front of others, for many students it became necessary to encourage them to share more details. I noticed that international students simply lacked the ability to fully express their thoughts in written English. In the case of the American students, the difficulty was getting them to explain in detail why they felt a certain way. They would write down *what* they were feeling, but not *why*. Overall, the journals required me to follow up on a constantly. The initial goal was to have the students complete weekly journals, but due to the constant reminding and follow up, I changed the journals to be bi-weekly and then eventually to monthly.

4.3.6 Gaining ethics approval

Since there were two universities involved in my research, I had to gain ethics approval from both institutions. The first process involved requesting ethics approval from the university located in the United States where I would actually be collecting the data. Before completing and submitting the application with the university's institutional review board (IRB), as primary investigator (PI) I was required to complete a course in human subjects protection training and provide the certificate to prove that I had completed this training within the last three years. After I had been granted ethics approval by this institution, I was able to apply for ethics approval from Stellenbosch University and received the following reference number SU-HSD-002263.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is described as the part of study in which the researcher 'mines' the data, digging under the surface to bring meaning to light (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). One of the most important steps in data analysis in qualitative research occurs during data collection phase. Maxwell (2013) argues that one of the most common problems during qualitative research is allowing notes and transcripts to

go unanalyzed, causing them to pile up at the end of the study. The researcher should constantly review and analyze data as the research study progresses, capturing interpretations and observations along the way. This point was particularly helpful in this study since the data collection continued for nearly nine months. This also highlighted an important step in data analysis because I also reviewed and analyzed the data throughout the course of the study.

4.4.1 Thematic content analysis and coding

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying themes within data and by identifying the themes, they can provide insight into the patterns that occurred within the data (Brandt, Dawes, Africa & Swartz, 2004). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide six steps to follow when conducting thematic analysis:

1. Become familiar with the data
2. Generate initial codes
3. Search for themes
4. Review themes
5. Define themes
6. Write up

These were the steps I followed to complete the thematic analysis of the data. When I had finished gathering data from focus group discussions and participant journals I reviewed all the data from beginning to end, as suggested by Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015). This presented an opportunity to familiarize myself with the data again, as well as to listen to the audio recordings and to write additional notes. This began the process of simply absorbing the content and seeing the data through an analytical eye (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015).

The next step was to determine a coding system, a process that requires deriving codes from the dataset (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015). "A code should convey the key idea in the data without the researcher needing to see the data themselves" (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015). Codes can be descriptive,

summarizing the content, or interpretative, which means that the code represents an interpretative insight by the researcher (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015). “You want your codes to capture both the diversity of perspectives evident in the dataset and the patterning of meaning”, argue Braun and Clarke (2012).

Since qualitative research produces such large amounts of data, it is important to simply code the most salient portions that help answer the research question (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Morse, 2007; Seidman, 2013 in Saldana, 2013). While other researchers may argue by deleting portions of data that might be unknown units that could pull everything together, it is really up to the researcher to determine that you have sufficient quality of data with which to work and as the researcher, you will know and feel what are important sets of data and which are not (Saldana, 2013). Additionally, Sipe and Ghiso (2004) state that when it comes to coding, it’s really a judgment call on behalf of the researcher since we “bring our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and our quirks” to the process (p. 482). As I read through the data, I had a copy of the research question and sub questions nearby so I could make sure I could revisit them while coding which parts of the data I felt provided the essence of answering these questions. I completed two cycles of the coding process, the first cycle included my initial codes and the second cycle included me reviewing the data set and codes again, adjusting any codes I felt were necessary.

However, despite this process being a subjective one on my part, there were still other strategies I implemented during the data collection phase, as well as the coding cycles that help validate the trustworthiness of my findings. One, as I have already described in this chapter and also described by Ezzy (2002), was maintaining a researcher journal during the data collection. This allowed me to take notes and reflect during the nine-month process. Secondly, as I collected the data, to ensure I had an understanding of the accounts shared by the participants (Ezzy, 2002), during focus groups I would ask questions and follow

up with questions after reading journals. This way I was able to check I was accurately capturing their narratives and thus be able to assign appropriate codes when analyzing the data. I further explain more strategies of data validity in section 4.5.

Once I was satisfied with the coding process, the third phase was to create a list of these codes and examine the data associated with the codes. This was an important part in the process as the next step in thematic analysis was to look for themes. This is described as a transition from coding to categorizing, not to arrive at a reduced answer but to move toward consolidated meaning (Saldana, 2013). In other words, themes help identify a broader level of meaning beyond a code and require different codes to be combined to create a potential theme (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2015). Braun and Clark (2006) explain that three questions should be kept in mind when looking for themes across codes:

1. Is the theme relevant to answering the research question?
2. Is the theme evident across more than one or two of the data items?
3. Is the central organizing concept, the clear core idea that underpins the theme, easily identifiable?

There are two levels of themes. The first is semantic themes, which describe explicit or surface meanings of the data; there is nothing else the researcher should look for when it comes to what a participant said or wrote. The second type is latent themes, which require the researcher to look beyond what someone says or writes in order to identify any underlying ideas, assumptions or conceptualizations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I felt that semantic themes were the best choice when consolidating the codes, as the initial themes did relate back to the research question and subquestions.

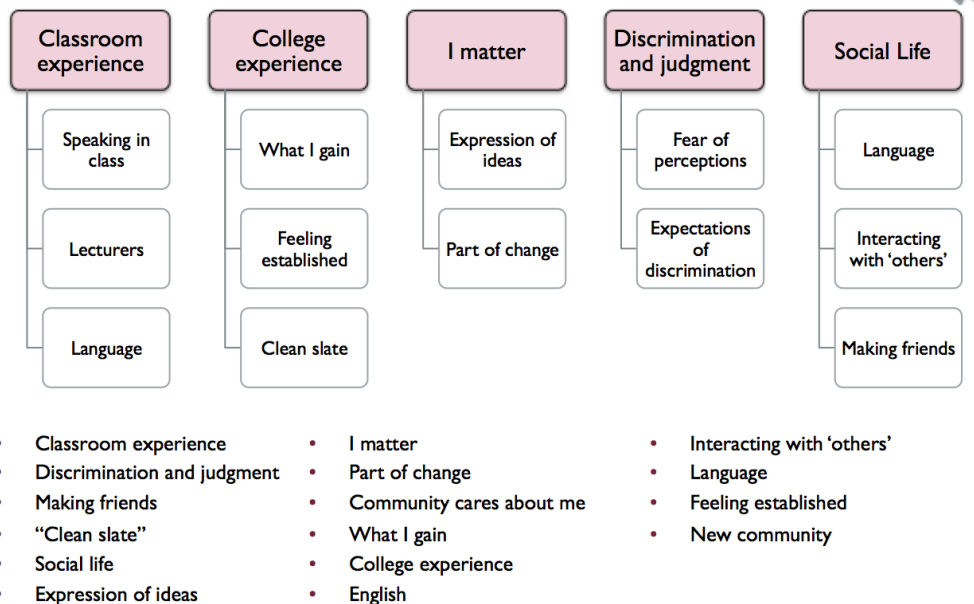


Figure 4.4: Initial themes of thematic analysis of data

However, upon following Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015) next step in thematic analysis, after reviewing the themes I determined I needed to make some readjustments. In this study, it was important to check the coded data when developing each theme to ensure the themes were in fact reflective of the entire dataset (Braun, Clarke & Terry, 2015). I initially reached five themes from the data, but upon reviewing the themes I realized the role social representation theory had on the lens of the participants and that one theme I called “college experience” represented the view of only the American students. Additionally, after reviewing the codes and data under the theme of “social life”, I realized what both sets of participants really meant by social life was the importance of having friends and the ability to create and sustain meaningful friendships. I did another review of the themes keeping in mind the research questions, and reviewing the theoretical foundation of this study also helped provide another way to interpret the codes and potential themes. After working through the codes again, I was able to finalize five themes, while also explaining the role social representation theory had on the lenses of the American and international student participants. The complete set of findings is explained in chapter 6.

This describes the final stage in the thematic analysis, which was refining the analysis, consider my interpretation of the data and explain why it was important in the context of broader issues. Babbie and Moulton (2010) note that part of the analysis is to explain what has emerged from the text. It was important that I present an analysis, not just a collection of data extracts. As Braun, Clarke and Terry (2015, p. 109) advise, as a researcher you should

Own your active role in developing the analysis and do not treat themes as something that merely emerged from the data. Rather, you work to identify salient patterns through the knowledge and perspectives that you bring to the data; you select and develop the themes, they do not exist prior to your analytical work.

At the beginning of the coding process, I utilized the software NVivo to create the codes. NVivo is able to store extensive data and search and retrieve data based on a coding system that shows relationships between elements in the data (Given, 2008). It is important to note when using NVivo that it has the capacity to store data separately from the journal of the researcher and any other memos and notes from the researcher. Given (2008) explains that NVivo does not analyze the data; it is a management tool that allows the researcher to conduct a deeper analysis by facilitating the searching of large quantities of data. Once I was able to identify codes, I was able to print the sets of coded data out and review them for possible themes.

In total, I completed four cycles during the thematic analysis of the data set. By the end of this research project I aimed to have gained greater insight into what a sense of community and belonging meant to international students, and to domestic students, based on their own experiences and interpretations, and to be able to communicate that insight to a broader audience.

4.5 VALIDITY

As validity regarding qualitative research may not be as straightforward as it is in quantitative research, but still just as important. I utilized a variety of strategies to ensure data verification, which includes methodological coherence, authenticity, reflexivity, and being conscience of bias.

4.5.1 Data verification

Validity, the final component of the research design, refers to the legitimacy of the research findings (Yardley, 2015). However, researchers have argued that validity is relative. Maxwell (2013, p. 121) argues that, "It has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions". Although validity in qualitative research may not be as clear-cut as in quantitative research, it is still a necessary component. It may present differently from how it presents in quantitative research, but it must nonetheless be addressed. How am I to address validity when I am following an epistemological constructivism paradigm, where individuals construct their own reality of what a sense of belonging and community means to them? Maxwell (2013) argues that the key aspect of validity in qualitative research is the concept of validity threats. This refers to the ways in which the researcher could be wrong. Some examples that might threaten validity are different methods the researcher used to conduct the research or the way the researcher interpreted the data. In order to reduce threats to validity in this research, methodological coherence, authenticity, researcher bias and reflexivity were considered.

4.5.2 Methodological coherence

Reliability is broadly described as the dependability, consistency, and/or repeatability of a project's data collection, interpretation, and/or analysis. (Given, 2008 p. 753)

Reliability is viewed differently when it comes to qualitative research. In the case of a quantitative design, reliability is specifically defined, while this is not always the case in qualitative research owing to the diversity of methodological approaches. Rather than focusing on reliability, I chose in this study to focus on methodological coherence. This requires the researcher to conduct appropriate and thorough collection, analysis and interpretation of data (Given, 2008). In other words, as a researcher, it is critical to create a methodologically coherent research frame where all the 'pieces' of the research process fit together and arise from the foundational assumptions inherent in the research paradigm (Davis, 2012). In this case, this involved reflection to ensure that all aspects of the methodology were synchronous. Considering the research question, research paradigm, and the theoretical foundation of my study, qualitative research was the logical approach and a case study was the suitable choice for the research design. Overall, the approach matched the research aim of the study.

Additionally, as the study continued, it was important to keep methodological coherence in mind. One example provided by Davis (2012) is how questions are posed to the research participants. If the goal is to ask questions to gauge their subjective experience, then asking "do" and "are" questions makes more sense than "yes" and "no" questions. In my case, I asked students about their reality regarding community. Since a student is the only knower of his or her own reality, the questions focused on encouraging students to share their perceptions, experiences and opinions. The best way to encourage students to share these experiences was to avoid "yes" and "no" questions and ask open-ended

questions that would allow them to fully elaborate. Examples of these questions can be found in the appendices.

4.5.3 Authenticity

I used Guba and Lincoln's (1989) ideas about authentic research. Authenticity provides another reassurance that the research conducted is genuine and credible. Guba and Lincoln (1989) list various criteria of authenticity, one of which is fairness. This is when the researcher ensures that participants have equal access to the research inquiry. For example, this means going beyond the stereotypical roles of question asking and question answering and developing research relationships. These relationships encourage participants to feel more responsibility for the cultural reproduction of the research inquiry and to have a greater investment in the outcomes of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This ensures that all voices are represented and avoids marginalization. It was important to me that students felt comfortable with me as the researcher and not hesitate to share their feelings and perceptions and for them to trust me with their narratives. I wanted to ensure they shared their true feelings and not just say things that they thought I wanted to hear. One example of building relationships between the participants and me included icebreakers before each focus group session. This allowed students to feel comfortable with one another and me as the researcher. As a result, students felt comfortable and shared both positive and negative narratives regarding their experiences.

Another concept related to authenticity is ontological and educative authenticity, where participants develop a raised level of awareness of the context being studied and develop an appreciation for people's different viewpoints (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The students who participated in this study demonstrated a strong investment in the outcomes and showed genuine interest in the results. By participating in the focus groups in particular, students shared with me that they had learned about viewpoints they had never considered. Some students also were open to respectfully disagreeing with one another during focus groups and

learned to appreciate each other's different viewpoints. Lastly, students indicated that they would look forward to the next month's focus group, as it was an opportunity to connect and continue discussions they normally don't talk about in their classes and with their friends.

4.5.4 Bias

Bias refers to a predisposition or partiality. In qualitative research, bias involves influences that compromise accurate sampling, data collection, data interpretation, and the reporting of findings (Given, 2008). Impartial or neutral research is not possible because researchers are not value-free and personal and political views will enter a research agenda (Given, 2008). It was important for me as the researcher to be aware of any assumptions I might bring to my relationship with the participants. Part of the motivation of this study was my own experiences as an international student, as well as my immigration journey to the United States. However, especially with the international student participants, it was important that I didn't project my own opinions onto the participants. Maxwell (2013) suggests some questions a researcher could ask to determine any assumptions brought to the research: are you concerned about presenting yourself as a competent researcher? Do you have a desire to demonstrate the correctness of your own views? Do you hold unexamined stereotypes about the participants? (p. 93).

By asking myself these questions and keeping a journal during the research project, I reflected constantly on my own position and ensured that I returned to my values and predispositions. This process of journaling helped me to become self-aware, open to alternative interpretations, and to acknowledge participants' and my own subjectivity in the research process (Given, 2008). I asked myself the questions suggested by Maxwell (2013) during the focus groups because I had to remind myself when I disagreed with what participants were sharing, not to interfere because this was their construction of reality and community.

Sometimes I felt the urge like I wanted to correct them, but this was based on my own bias and experiences as a former international student.

4.5.5 Reflexivity

While reactivity is defined as the researcher having influence on the individuals or setting being studied (Maxwell, 2013), reflexivity occurs when the researcher is part of the world he or she is studying and has an influence on the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). While it may be impossible to eliminate the influence of the researcher completely, nor is it necessarily desirable to do this, it is important in a qualitative study to understand these concepts and how to use them productively in order to avoid undesirable outcomes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). For example, leading questions should be avoided as these can lead to undesirable outcomes. As a researcher, it was important for me to understand how I might be influencing the participants and how this would affect the validity of the conclusions made from the data. This also related back to being aware of my own experiences as a former international student and making sure I was not asking questions in a way that would lead the international students to answer in certain ways that would be more reflective of my own experiences than of their own.

Facilitating the focus groups made me an inevitable component of the study, as I am a member of the university community as an administrator. Many of the things the participants said during the focus groups and journals were related to the university administration and it was important that I tried to detach myself from my role while interacting with the students in this study. This was another aspect I reflected on in my research journal, which I expand on in the next section.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During the majority of qualitative studies, researchers interact with participants face to face over a long period of time, and sometimes touch on sensitive topics. “Unlike most survey and experimental researchers, qualitative scholars learn what they seek to know by developing relationships with their participants” (Given, 2008, p. 277). Maxwell (2013) agrees that relationships between researcher and participants are crucial and can be developed depending on the context of the study. However, the researcher needs to keep in mind that the research project is always, to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants. “Ethical considerations require the researcher to remain attentive to ethical tensions, obligations, and responsibilities in their relationship with participants” (Given, 2008, p. 542). Keeping this in mind, I outline the ethical considerations when approaching the study, as well as ethical considerations during the study.

4.6.1 Ethical approaches to the study

The first step in the process was to obtain permission to conduct this study, not only from the with the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Stellenbosch, but also from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university in the United States where the research would take place. Both the Research Ethics Committee and the IRB approved this research project. These approvals can be found in Appendix B and C.

The next step involved recruiting the students to participate in the study. I made an announcement about the purpose of the study at various opportunities I had to meet first-year students at student organization meetings and student activities. I asked anyone who would like more information to could contact me. I sent additional details via email to those who contacted me and if they were still interested, they were invited to an information meeting where we discussed

further details of the study, such as how the weekly journals and focus groups would work. This was also an opportunity for the students to meet other perspective participants and also get to know me a little bit more.

This led to a discussion about anonymity. This is most desirable to protect participants from harm that might arise from the disclosure of their identity (Given, 2008). I ensured participants that their identity would not be shared in the research results. Additionally, I explained that only my supervisor and myself would be the only ones reading the content of the weekly journals. For added safety, at the end of each week I would save the journal entry for each participant on my computer and then delete the content from their respective Google Doc. This would eliminate the potential that if perhaps anyone's Google account was compromised or hacked, including my own, the journal content would not be available. In terms of the focus groups, I did indicate to the participants that given the nature of focus groups, the information shared during these discussions would be shared with other participants. Out of respect for each other, the group members should not repeat information shared at these meetings.

The next step during the information session was to hand out the consent forms. These consent forms stated the purpose of the study, what to expect as participant risks and benefits, and possible outcomes of the research study. The consent form included a statement on the option of withdrawing from the study at any point in the process. Faden and Beauchamp (1986) emphasise the importance of research participants understanding that they are authorizing someone else to involve them in research and what to expect when they are part of the project. Students were given time to read the consent form and they had the option of signing and returning the form at the meeting or taking it with them for further review and consideration. Those who signed the consent form received a copy for their own records. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix D.

4.6.2 Ethical considerations during the study

Maxwell (2013) provided useful guidelines for this study in the remark that “primary ethical obligation is to try to understand how the participants will perceive your actions” so that you can then determine how to respond. In order to do this, the researcher puts him or herself in the position of the participants and tries to think about what it would feel like if he or she were asked the same questions. It was thus important as the study progressed to learn something about the perceptions of students in order to gain a better understanding how they perceived this study and as a result, be able to build better relationships with them and ask questions that would resonate.

Before each focus group met, I reminded the participants that the session was going to be recorded. In addition, each week when I updated the Google Doc with new prompts for their journals, I included a “message from the researcher” at the top of the document that listed the purpose of the research as a reminder.

It is also of primary importance to a researcher that participants in a study suffer no harm. I therefore provided participants with resources if they felt that the discussions or journals revealed feelings for which they needed to seek additional counseling. Babbie and Mouton (2010) stress the importance of a researcher remaining alert to any signs of danger and if possible, guarding against them.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed in detail the process of executing this research project in which I explored the philosophical worldview of this study, why I chose a qualitative research approach and a case study design, how I selected the participants and the methods of gathering data. Additionally, I provided further insight into how I would analyze the data by expanding on thematic analysis and

the strategies I implemented to ensure validity of the findings. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the ethical approach to the research project, as well as ethical considerations while the research project took place. The next chapter will explain the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on exploring narratives of community among American and international students at a U.S. university. In this chapter I make sense of the data collected from both the American students and international students in focus group discussions and from journals. In total, 20 students shared their personal experiences and narratives as they related to community. Through these narratives, they were able to share how they navigated this new journey and what contributed to or hindered their sense of community.

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings. During this study, I made it a point to make sure I would read the journal entries each week, review my notes from the focus groups and read the transcriptions, and reflect any thoughts in my researcher's journal. When it came to start analyzing the data, I read through everything again to familiarize myself with all the data I had accumulated during the nine-month period. It was an intimidating task because of the volume of narratives, but it was important to have a view of the study from start to finish and capture any additional reflections by the conclusion of the study.

I then read through all the transcriptions and journals again using NVivo and created initial codes for quotes that helped answer the research questions. I then read through the data set again and made adjustments to the codes. By the time I completed this second cycle, I had assigned the data to 13 codes. I then reviewed the data associated with each of the 13 codes and I was able to develop five initial themes linked to the research question and sub-questions. The final and fourth cycle of the thematic analysis involved me reviewing the initial themes while not only reviewing the research question and subquestions, but also the theoretical foundation of this study. I was then able to adjust and

finalize the five broader themes of this study. I discussed these steps further earlier in chapter four, section 4.4.1.

In the spirit of epistemological constructivism, readers should review these narratives with an open mind and without judgment. As the approach of this study was to be all inclusive of narratives and thoughts, I hope that readers will appreciate the various worldviews, standpoints and perspectives and not privilege any one student over another.

5.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The data presented in this chapter were collected from 20 students participating in 14 focus group discussions and contributing 158 journal entries over a nine month period. The focus group sessions were recorded with the permission of the students and the data were transcribed. As described previously, the data from both the journal entries and the focus groups were then read, coded, and finalized in five broad, emerging themes.

The main research question that guided this study was: **What can we learn about sense of community by listening to the perceptions of American and international students at a U.S. university?**

The four sub-questions were:

- What perceptions of community do international students?
- What perceptions of community do American students have?
- How do American and international students negotiate belonging on campus?
- What are the community dynamics when international and American students interact?

5.3 FINDINGS

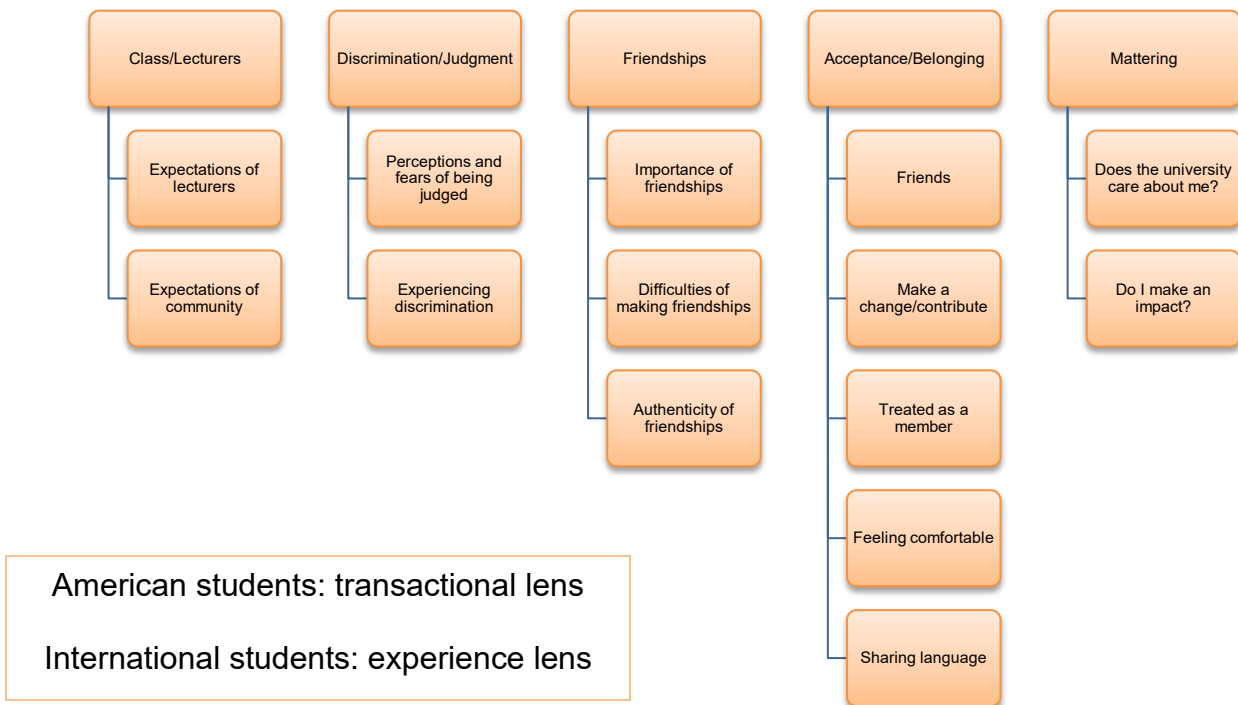


Figure 5.3 Structural presentations of the findings

Five themes emerged from the data set, which included classes/lecturers, discrimination/judgment, friendships, acceptance/belonging, and mattering. In addition, I discovered a pattern reflecting the role social representation theory played in establishing the mindsets of the students regarding the university community. I coined these as lenses, stating that the American students entered this new university environment with a transactional lens, while the international students entered with an experience lens.

I will first discuss the differences between these two lenses and why I felt it was important to highlight. In relation to social representation theory, I'll then discuss the views each group of students had when it came to entering their new community, and then discuss each of the five themes in detail.

5.4 DISCUSSION OF DATA

5.4.1 Transactional vs Experience: Attending a university as a transaction versus as an experience

It is important to recognize the type of lens through which each group of students viewed their experience while studying at this university. The data suggested that most American students viewed their experience through a transactional lens, while international students viewed theirs as just that, an experience. Several Americans reiterated that they were paying for the “college experience” and that being part of a community, which meant belonging, was something they expected because that was part of what they were paying for.

American Student 5: “It’s part of what you’re paying for, the college experience. If I don’t feel like I belong then I could probably save myself \$15,000, just go to community college².”

American Student 12: “[A professor] came out clearly and said you were paying for me to be here so I am here to help you whenever you want. I’ve met a bunch of faculty members that would gladly help me with really anything.”

American Student 8: “I think without a sense of belonging the college experience just wouldn’t be worth it. And then if I didn’t feel like I belong here I’d probably try somewhere else. Just to get that feeling that, you’re where you’re supposed to be.”

The international students, on the other hand, while they did not disagree that the feeling of belonging had a positive impact on their time at university, mostly viewed this through the lens of experience, with the simple objective of receiving

² Community college in the United States is a two-year school that provides affordable post-secondary education and is often seen as a pathway to a four-year bachelor’s degree (What is a Community College?, 2012).

an education. Being part of the community was not necessarily required nor was it expected; it was simply a bonus.

International Student 8: "If you're here to get a degree, you can get it without belonging. But it's always good to feel belonging."

International Student 2: "It just makes it easier to feel you belong."

International Student 3: "If I were to only focus on my degree and getting my degree, then I am not sure belonging is going to kind of affect it because when you make friends and you get a phone call every afternoon that says hello, I would say OK, even though I wouldn't be able to finish my homework. But I mean getting my degree is not the only thing that I'm here for. I think your social life matters a lot because, unfortunately, I don't like being alone. I'm not saying [belonging] should help my academics, but it makes you happy."

There were additional examples that highlighted the differences between these transactional and experience lenses, as I will showcase throughout this chapter. While there are five common themes for both the American and international students, the narratives the students have regarding these themes may differ because of how they view their community through their respective lenses.

5.4.2 Narratives describing culture

When students described their own cultures, it was fascinating to hear. The Americans struggled when I asked them to describe their culture. One student's comment encapsulated why so many struggled with this response.

American Student 10: "I'm not sure what this means since I am domestic."

It was as if the American students, mostly those who identified as white, believed that they had no culture, or had no knowledge of what it meant to have culture. After I had provided an explanation of culture, the American students mostly referred to their religion, either Christian or Catholic, their region, either rural or urban, as well as race and family structure. The majority of the Americans referred to themselves as being white, growing up in middle class families from conservative, rural areas. Only a few students referred to themselves as being from urban areas and of other ethnicities. It was the latter who seemed to have a better grasp of the concept of culture.

American Student: 7: "I come from a fast-paced, not as open and friendly or courteous area. It was a culture shock for me. Back home, it's mostly African-Americans."

American Student 9: "The culture that I best identify with would have to be either my Peruvian culture or just the culture of the inner city. My family is from Peru, so it is easy to identify with those of which you've always grown up with and have learned from through the years. That statement is also true for the culture of the inner city because of the high school I went to. Both cultures are very different and contrast more than they compare. However, they are both huge aspects of my life and I have learned equal amounts of life skills from both cultures."

What I found to be the most fascinating aspect of Americans describing their culture and describing where they spent their childhood was the fact that the majority described not feeling comfortable or being discouraged from speaking their minds. They observed that they had not had the freedom to share their thoughts and opinions, either with their own family or at school. This viewpoint runs counter to the notion of freedom of speech, perhaps the one freedom that the United States says it upholds. This was an important viewpoint to keep in mind when considering how Americans viewed their new community at university.

American Student 1: "I come from like a really like rural place, it's pretty conservative. Like, any opinion is wrong. It's a very biblical town, like everyone was Christian. So coming here, like I felt like instead of like pretending to be like all those things like, and just be complacent, and just be like okay like not being able to state an opinion."

American Student 12: "I grew up in a very conservative [place], and like I've always been fairly liberal and like that high school I went to, like I can count the number of liberal people on my two hands. If I tried like being outspoken about my opinion, like they kind of just shut it down like almost instantly."

American Student 6: "I live in Amish country, everyone is into sports. Everyone knows each other. I feel I can talk more freely here than back home."

As for the international students describing their culture, a few struggled just as the Americans in the beginning, but overall the conversation about culture came more naturally to these students since they were now living and studying in another country and the differences may have been more apparent. Most international students referenced communication styles when speaking about their culture.

International Student 2: "In Japan, it's a very conservative country and we don't get straight to the point. We try to say more, like we don't say anything directly. We try to pretend that we are all fine, but actually sometimes we are not really fine."

International Student 3: "If you keep staring at a person, like, if you keep talking to your boss, you can't look him in the eye. So here, I'm used to it. When I go back home and I stare at people they're like, what's wrong with you? Why are you staring at me?"

International Student 13: “Chinese seldom express themselves in public. We have ideas, but afraid we are wrong or maybe not speaking properly—it’s the same in the classroom.”

Other points that arose when discussing culture included family structure and religion. One student did mention how money and status were a huge influence in his culture.

International Student 15: “I was laughing when you asked what is your culture. You can ask any Saudi guy, if you’re not wearing Gucci or any brand clothing, they will be shocked at you like, why are you doing that? Yes, money influences my culture. If you own a BMW and not a Mercedes in Saudi Arabia, it’s like superficial people. They’ll judge you and it’s not good for your health.”

5.4.3 Narratives describing their new community

The majority of both American and international students felt their new community was more accepting of them and that they were in an environment where they could speak freely.

American Student 8: “Like, everyone’s different and everyone can have their own opinion and like it’s okay so, so now I feel like I have become like more open to talk like before, I would even, you know my belief systems like everything like that. I’m more comfortable to talk about it than I was.”

American Student 12: “You can express, you know, who you are and your ideologies and your belief systems and everything about you, because no one really like, no one gives a shit, like if you want to have blue hair, if you’re liberal or if you’re conservative, like no one cares. It’s college, no one really cares.”

American Student 1: “Here like people are more accepting and here more people are liberal for the most part. I’ve just become like more outspoken because like, I can now.”

International Student 3: “Yes, [more accepting]. Not only sexual orientation, but people who are different from normal, like, I saw a guy who was wearing a skirt and girls’ clothes one day in the library and I was really surprised, kind of shocked. What is he doing? No one cares. So here it is more free. We can do whatever we want.”

International Student 12: “Like if you go to other universities, like [name of another university], everyone there is preppy. But here there is a mixture of everything. Everyone is different, you have to find a group to fit in. So like that is one of the reasons why I came here.”

Bourhis et al. (1997) described one of the outcomes of the interactive acculturation model is the concept of consensual integration. In their study they investigated the way in which the dominant culture accepted immigrants who maintained their cultural identity (Bourhis et al., 1997). In the present study, most students, American and international, described the feeling of being “more free” to speak and be themselves. This might reflect an initial feeling of consensual integration by both sets of students when they entered this new campus environment. But later on in this chapter while discussing the themes in detail, the data also suggests perhaps as the students continued being in this environment, there wasn’t consensual integration, but rather partial integration agreement.

Students’ narratives about the feeling of being able to speak more freely also support social representation theory. Most students, both American and international, experienced this feeling as a new cultural element through the interactions they had with the new campus environment.

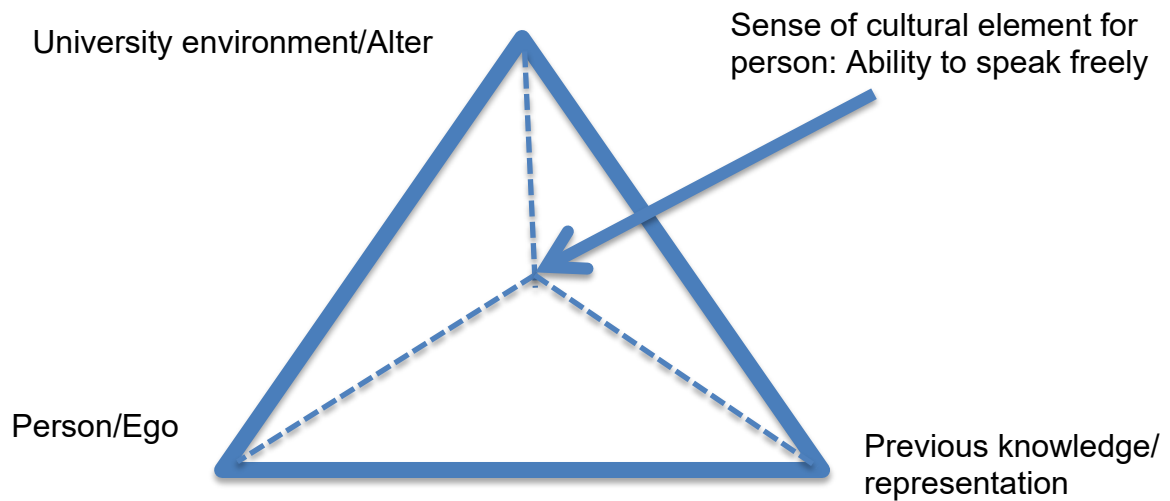


Figure 5.4.3: The application of the triangle relationship of the Ego-Alter-Object in social representation theory as it relates to both American and international students' narratives of the freedom to speak more freely in their new campus environment.

While most American and international students felt “more free” in their new university environment, there were some who did not feel as free as they did in their home community. One student who identified as African-American shared on three different occasions the difficulty not only of leaving his/her home community, but also the struggles faced, as an African-American and an athlete, in becoming part of multiple communities within the university environment.

American Student 11: “[The communities] are very different. At home, I am an African-American who speaks slang and improper grammar while here I have to speak proper grammar around professors, coaches, and new people I meet. At home, I can truly be myself while at school I have to be myself around different individuals.

As an African-American, I wanted to belong to my group and also meet other ethnicities on the way. I am part of the athletic community, which means I represent not only myself, but also my team and coaches.

I'm different from regular students because instead of staying out late, I have to stay in and prepare for practice. While others are talking to friends, I'm on the court running sprints and conditioning. While others don't worry about their grades, assignments or homework, I have to maintain a high GPA in order to play. While others worry about not letting their parents down, I worry about not letting my team down."

This narrative reflects this student's attempts to balance several "worlds", his/her own world and the several new ones as part of this new campus community. The balancing of worlds relates to Third Space Theory; individuals are caught between maintaining their own culture and the desire to engage and adapt to another (Howarth et al., 2014).

Another American student also shared that he/she was an athlete. Being part of the team made him/her feel part of a community when first joining the university. He/she did not have to try as hard to become part of the university community. However, later in the year the student stopped playing the sport and said that he/she no longer talked to the teammates. This highlighted the point that it was not only international students who felt like "outsiders" in their new environment. The data supported the fact that some American students did perceive themselves as outsiders on entering this new environment, having to balance several "worlds", as supported by Third Space Theory.

The notion of having a "clean slate" was repeatedly mentioned by the American students regarding their new university environment. This also reflects Third Space Theory. Several of the American students described feeling that their new university environment was an opportunity for them to truly be themselves or leave a part of themselves behind. When someone's "first space", which is the

context of their previous learning environment, meets the “second space”, which in this case was the university, a third space is created. Bhabha (1994, 1996) argues that this new space can be transformational in creating a new identity, where students can negotiate meaning and representation.

American Student 5: “I found that when I move to new places, which I have a couple of times, it makes it so I don’t have to hold on to my former self. So, if my former self was a certain way, very often even in high school, like I’ll try to stick with it kind of so people aren’t like, “wow, what happened to XX?” Like, so once you go to a new place you’re like okay, now I can be like my true self and I don’t have to like slowly ease out of what my old self was. But this provides an opportunity, it’s nothing to do with, it’s just fact it’s a new place and people won’t know you, just the fact that you are able to open up to who you are.”

American Student 12: “When you come to college with a clean slate, I agree with that because my senior year was the worst thing that ever happened on Earth. I knew coming to college that I had all these ideas for myself of what I wanted my new human to be and what I wanted her to look like and act like, and I think that a lot of these things did change with the responsibility and organization and motivation – those were like the main things in my senior year that brought me down. Yeah, it’s like factors but now those don’t play a part in my life here, so belonging, I don’t know that has to do with it, but I didn’t try to mold myself to please anybody, I am who I am because I want to be.”

American Student 4: “Being here helps figure out who you are and helps shape who you are.”

While the majority of the students felt that the new university environment was more open and this brought a feeling of freedom, based on their responses about culture and their reaction to the new university environment, it seemed to me that the African-American students did not feel the same level of openness. They had

not transitioned as easily as their Caucasian peers, or as well as their international peers. In addition, student athletes seemed to come into this new environment as a part of a group from the outset and did not have opportunities to branch out. Lastly, many of the American students felt that coming to university provided them with the opportunity to start with a clean slate; they could start afresh in shaping what kind of people they wanted to be as opposed to what they were like when they were at high school.

In summary, the foundation of acculturation theory and social representation theory provided the theoretical framework within which to explain the development of these students' mindset in the study. As the students started to describe their new campus environment, the narratives of some about having to balance several "worlds" made the role of third space theory more evident. To review, American students viewed their time at the university through a transactional lens. This meant that they believed that they should receive what they had paid for. When describing their culture, the majority identified as white, middle class individuals from rural areas while a few described themselves as minorities. Most, with the exception of those who identified as minorities, described a lack of ability to express themselves back home and felt that the new environment was more open and accepting. As for the international students, they viewed their time at the university through an experience lens and identified their culture through communication style, such as being more indirect and not making eye contact. The majority felt that their new environment was more open and welcoming than the one back home.

However, acculturation and social representation theories, as well as third space theory, are always continuous, can be complex, and will differ depending on the individual. Having established a foundation in the mindsets of both sets of students, I explored the data further and identified five common themes. Not only did themes emerge, but also experiences related to Tinto's Model of Student Retention, the theory of Mattering, and further experiences related to third space

theory. As students processed being in this new 'third space' and the impact this had on their motivation to complete a university degree, they continuously revisited acculturation and developing social representations.

The five themes identified in the data that were related to what we can learn about a sense of community by listening to the narratives of American and international students at an American university included:

- a. Class/lecturers
- b. Discrimination/feeling judged
- c. Friendships
- d. Acceptance/belonging
- e. Mattering

5.4.4 Theme 1: Narratives about class/lecturers

The first common theme to emerge among the American students and international students was in their discussion of classes and lecturers and the impact of these on their sense of community. Overall, the Americans had much more to share on this topic as it related to how they viewed their college experience through a transactional lens. The information from the international students aligned with their experience lens.

Overall, the Americans seemed split during the focus group discussions when it came to classroom experience and how it affected their sense of belonging. Some felt very strongly that it contributed to their feeling part of the community, while others felt as if it did not contribute at all.

American Student 12: "Classes made me feel a sense of belonging because you're all taking classes together. It's like, oh, we're all doing this thing."

American Student 1: "I don't know, I'd say when I first got here I felt kind of like a fish out of water. I was like, I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. I

didn't know anyone, so I kind of just stayed in my room a lot at the beginning. And then I finally made some friends in my classes that I have the same major, so now we have classes together and we do things together. At the beginning of the year, I wasn't sure if I liked [name of university] or if I liked my major. And so after I made friends, I kind of felt I was where I was supposed to be and I don't know. I felt like I did belong here."

American Student 10: "No, I feel like I belong here even though I'm awkward in class. I have a lot of different friend groups and I am always busy."

American Student 8: "I don't think how I feel in the classroom influences my sense of belonging on campus. I still feel like I belong, I don't think there is anything my professors or other students can do. It's a level of personal comfort that depends on me."

The discussion became more intense as a result of disagreement between the American students. The discussion evolved into an either/or situation about what contributed more to their sense of community, classes or social life.

Discussion about classes vs social life and their impact on sense of community

American Student 12: "If you're the kind of person that bases your happiness on going out and having a social life, then yes I think [having friends] would affect them more. But I'm the kind of person where I don't really have a social life, so me being in my classes all the time is the majority of my sense of belonging."

American Student 8: "I have a very different form of social life than she does, but like once in a while I go out with friends just for fun, but I'd say mostly the classroom because like that's where you're actually going to learn what you need

for the degree, so if I'm not wanted in the classroom why would I be or want to be at that university?"

American Student 1: "The classroom [is important] because if you don't feel comfortable in your classes, you hate them, like you're not going to want to be there."

American Student 5: "What do you all teachers do to you? To me I don't know like if classes matter if you show up, but like it's one teacher just talking to a bunch of people, like there's not a huge interaction going on. It's me taking notes, I don't feel like part of it because it's a one direction relationship. You give me information because I'm paying you, this is not a real interaction, this is kind of a made-up interaction. So it's important, but like the real interactions you have with your friends, they are on the same level as you."

Interviewer: "So what you're saying is that your social life contributes more to your feelings of belonging than the classroom?"

American Student 5: "Yes."

Interviewer: "Whereas you guys are saying the classroom contributes more to your feelings of belonging than your social life?"

American Student 12: "Finding me out as a person isn't made in the classroom, that's social life. But like finding out what I want to do for the rest of my life is in the classroom. I'm an extremely career oriented person, I have been here for an education so I can get a better job. I do have a personal relationship with a lot of my teachers, I take the extra step and I make myself be friends with them. I have most of their numbers in my phone."

American Student 1: "I'm just thinking about what you said, I do have a lecture that has like 300 people in it."

Interviewer: "Whoa. Do you feel like you belong there?"

American Student 1: "Uhm...no. I'm there because I have to for my major. But then I have classes that have like 20 people in it, and I know everyone's name and we do things together."

American Student 5: "I wouldn't be able to belong if I just liked my classes because it's not like if I'm lonely I could call my mom and say hey, pick me up I just want to spend some time with you, that's not realistic, so if I'm, you know somewhat feeling kind of bad today, I need someone to be around, like you know, you need to be able to have someone and say hey, like you're not feeling so bright today, want to do something and get my mind off of it, so I think that's important too."

American Student 8: "I could do with either one. I'm sure it won't be as fun to only have one or the other, but like I think I could survive with either one."

American Student 12: "I pick classes again, classes are more important. When my family members ask me how I'm doing in school, the first thing I talk about are my grades. I don't talk about friends."

It was interesting that in the weekly journal follow-up there were more American students who wrote on this topic. I was able to make the following conclusions from this:

- The size of the class influences whether students felt comfortable speaking in front of classmates and asking questions. They would talk to

the professor after class or send an email if they did not feel comfortable speaking in class.

- Most students wished that they knew more students in their classes.
- Most students said they would answer questions in class if they were completely confident of the answer or felt passionate about the topic.
- About half the students said they did not have someone to borrow notes from if they missed class. The other half said they knew at least one person they could borrow notes from if necessary.

In an attempt to decipher the data from the focus groups and the journals dealing with the influence classes had on a sense of community for the American students, it seemed that the classroom provided opportunities to have some initial interactions with other students, but it was still not a welcoming environment for everyone. Viewing the matter from through a transactional lens, one student felt that he/she had more community in the classroom than anything else because he/she was paying for the education in order to get something else in return: a better career. Similarly, another student felt as if this was not a genuine environment because students paid the professor to be there and share information. Again, other students felt that classes created some opportunities for initial interactions with other students. Lastly, most students did not feel comfortable in the classroom. But whose responsibility is it to make the classroom a welcoming environment? Most students felt it was the responsibility of the professor to create a sense of community in the classroom.

American Student 1: "I think that if teachers seemed more accepting of the students' lives and what goes into the class, I believe I would be more comfortable in the classroom."

American Student 12: "I think that a majority of the responsibility of creating a sense of belonging in the classroom falls on the instructor, not the students. Although I might not enjoy a class of disrespectful students as much as a

respectful class, the students do not directly affect my sense of belonging as much as the professors do.”

As for their international peers, I concluded from the data that international students had no expectations of a community in the classroom nor did they expect lecturers to contribute to creating a sense of community in the classroom. Most agreed that they felt this way because there were just too many students; nonetheless, if they had questions or needed help they felt they could ask questions.

International Student 2: “I feel like some faculty are really helpful and care about me and my success. Especially them who have a smaller class. The professors who teach a big class cannot focus on one student and give them the attention for a specific student to succeed.”

If anything, most international students expressed added pressure of interacting with faculty members because English was not their first language.

International Student 3: “I want to live up to their expectations. I always feel pressure every time I submit something.”

International Student 8: “Some of my professors expect me to be really a high level of English, like if you speak fluently you must really be a master of English or something. I’m not going to talk as much then because it makes me really nervous.”

One student shared that she had used her international student status to her advantage.

International Student 12: "I'm international and then [the professor] thinks I don't know English. So then, like, they're like easier graders. So I feel more comfortable."

An additional point to consider when examining the viewpoints of international students in the classroom is their culture. Many international students experienced the classroom as a place where the professor was the expert and they were expected to take notes and not ask questions. This was an important point to keep in mind as this related back to social representation theory and the experience lens I described for international students. Again, they did not see the lecturer being responsible for building a sense of community in the classroom.

In summary, the American students did not reach consensus on the role the classroom and professors played in their sense of community. Some felt very strongly that attending classes contributed to their sense of community and that a sense of community in the classroom relied heavily on the lecturer's attitude. Others felt that the classroom contributed nothing towards their sense of belonging. International students generally had no expectations that classes or the professor would contribute to their sense of belonging. They felt they could ask questions of their lecturers; however, they felt pressure and anxiety about their use of English when speaking to their lecturers.

According to Tinto's Model of Student Retention (1975, 1993, 1997, 1998), both the academic system and the social system contribute to a student's ability to complete a degree. Tinto (1975) explains that academic integration includes students, grades, their intellectual development, and being able to identify their beliefs, values and norms within the academic system. Social integration refers to informal peer group development, social interactions with faculty and staff, and extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975). Using Tinto's definitions of academic integration and social integration, while students focused on interactions in the classroom and interactions with the lecturers, the discussions focused mostly on

the components of social integration. While some students referenced intellectual development with their peers as contributing partially to a sense of community, when referring to lecturers and the classroom they focused more on the social interactions that occurred or did not occur.

5.4.5 Theme 2: Narratives about discrimination and feeling judged

At the beginning of this chapter, I described how most American and international students expressed that they felt the university community was more open and accepting than their home communities. They felt that they could be themselves in this environment. However, an interesting theme emerged from both groups on the topic of discrimination and feelings of being judged. As the academic year progressed, both groups shared their own experiences of discrimination and feeling judged, the fear that they would be perceived by other students as prejudiced or racist, or feelings of discomfort when they were in the presence of diverse groups of students.

For most American students, the university community was much more diverse than their home communities and, based on what they shared, some of them were not sure how to interact or seemed self-conscious when talking about how others perceived them. One student confessed that he/she had never associated race with his/her sense of belonging before.

American Student 12: "I become nervous that people of color assume that I am racist because I am white, but that is not the case. If I was the only person of my race in my friend group or the entire university, I might feel like I belonged less, but I am unsure as to what degree."

American Student 6: "[The university] is the most diverse place I have lived in, so there are times when social and racial stigmas affect my comfort level and sway my sense of belonging in specific groups. I have always felt like I belong in my

friend groups that are mostly white and at times when I became the minority, I was uncomfortable.”

American Student 4: “...I truly feel that the ethnicity of my friends does not negatively affect my sense of belonging, but there are implicit biases that might make me feel more or less comfortable depending on the ethnic majority of the particular group that I’m in.”

American Student 10: “Overall, the idea that race plays a part in belonging is not something that I ever thought about. Perhaps because I have been privileged to always be the majority.”

The American students also described how other students were quick to judge based on looks and having to adapt being in a judgmental environment.

American Student 1: “Assumptions make it hard to make friends. People judge you based on looks and who you’re talking to.”

American Student 12: “Personally, I have had to learn how to act around people with different intellectual abilities, different personalities, and anything else that makes us humans diverse. This has come in handy very much in college. People are so “judgy” or they are afraid to go and talk to someone because they fear that they are different. College is a place where everyone should feel free to talk to all kinds of people, yet some are too scared due to the one factor that separates them both.”

Several American students said that they felt more freedom coming to the university because they could finally be themselves and express what they felt. Listening to them talk later about feeling judged, and relating times when they had felt uncomfortable in certain situations, made me question the reliability of the feeling of freedom students said they had in the university community.

Students had a perception, or a social representation, that there was more freedom at university, and perhaps at some level they did feel more freedom than back home. However, as Ecclestone et al. (2010) explain, and as noted in chapter two section 2.7.4, there is a process through which students work regarding their identity. They try to become “somebody”, to fit into what they recognize as acceptable pathways to belonging. Holmegaard et al. (2014) argues that new students perceive themselves as having a coherent self, but in this new situation they have to construct new narratives about how they belong. From the analysis of what the American students shared, it appeared that many were still determining where they belonged in the campus community and perhaps in certain situations did not feel they had as much “freedom”.

Social representation theory played a role when analyzing this emergent theme. As the students interacted in the new campus environment and found themselves in unprecedented situations, they referred to their previous knowledge, opinions and beliefs about various groups of people. Van Lange, Kruglanski, and Higgins (2012) argue that social representations are formed by what we see and learn from school, family, institutions and the media. Being in an unprecedented situation, the brain tries desperately to understand what is going on and to defend itself, while absorbing the new interactions and forming them into new social representations. In this study, students described a fear of being perceived racist and feelings of discomfort in situations where they were in the minority for the first time. As a result, the students experienced a new cultural element and formed new social representations based on the new interactions.

One of the most interesting points international students shared was that most of them expected to experience discrimination while studying in the United States. As they described it, discrimination came with the territory of studying in another country and they had accepted that it would happen. Most international students described this feeling and had experienced what they called discrimination. A few

other students, though they had expected to experience discrimination, did not experience it.

International Student 8: "Coming here I expected like I'm going to face discrimination. It did happen, but I'm like OK."

Interviewer: "Do you feel OK because you were expecting it?"

International Student 8: "I expected it."

Interviewer: "So you were prepared to deal with it if it happened?"

International Student 8: "Yeah I guess."

International Student 3: "You expect something because like you're in another country where like there's not much Asians or like our race or our skin color. Then you expect you might get some form, some form of discrimination against you, but nothing's happened like that to me so far."

Unfortunately, one Japanese student did describe a discriminatory incident on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

International Student 2: "Back in early December I went back to my dorm and there was a picture on my door about Pearl Harbor. I was like, what is this? And I was also so scared because that's also the same day [the event] happened so somebody was planning to do this. I was like, wow, this is mean as hell, so I got so pissed off. I went to talk to my RA³ to say what happened."

³ Resident assistant (RA) is a student employee who enforces policies and builds communities on one or more floors in a residence hall.

Other international students described being treated differently based on their nationality. Section 5.4.7.5 later in this chapter is dedicated to language and this is discussed in more detail there. However, international students also described discriminatory behavior based on stereotypes related to religion and nationality.

International Student 17: “English has affected my social adjustment a little bit because of my speaking style, my accent is different from others, and I feel like they treat me differently.”

International Student 12: “I feel some people don’t treat me differently because of my language, but you get the stereotypes. Like, they expect something from me because I’m from Brazil. I like, I know people from India and stuff and they get treated differently.”

International Student 15: “Most people will be like, I tell them I’m Muslim. Then they say, you don’t look Muslim. I will say, but why do you say that? [They will say] Muslim people don’t wear stuff like that.”

International Student 16: “Sometimes when they just know my origin, they just distance themselves from me. Last semester in my communication class I had only one person who would just normally talk to me.”

Interviewer: You’re saying this has to do with the fact you are from Russia?

International Student 16: Yeah.

These international students described the feeling of anomie as described in the interactive acculturation model. This means they did not necessarily lose their identities, but experienced alienation or rejection by the community. It is important to keep in mind that not all individuals adapt in the same manner in the general process of acculturation (Ozer, 2018). While all international students

had expected to experience some form of discrimination, when it happened to some of them this it did not make the experience any less pleasant. These interactions are crucial as they can affect how individuals identify themselves ethnically and culturally, as part of the “ingroup or outgroup”. This is where prejudice can originate, depending on how the individual affiliates him or herself with certain groups (Ozer, 2018).

In summary, for most of the American students, the university community was the most diverse community in which they had lived. While they felt that they had more freedom in this community and could say what they felt and be who they were, there was still an underlying fear of being perceived in a certain way and of being judged. International students, on the other hand, were prepared to face discrimination while in the United States and some did in fact experience discriminatory acts. While these interactions did not seem to alter their perception that this community was a welcoming and accepting place, attention needs to be focused on how these interactions were processed during their acculturation to avoid any undesirable results of those unpleasant interactions.

5.4.6 Theme 3: Narratives about friendships

This particular theme that emerged from both the American and international students was probably the one I found the most fascinating. Looking back on my literature review, it emerges that one of the most important factors in feeling part of the community and having a sense of belonging is the ability to form friendships. In this study, both American and international students agreed that forming friendships was the most important factor in feeling part of the university community.

American Student 12: “Close friends are obviously why I feel like I belong here. It’s the friends part, it’s not any individual group itself because people go and leave. But it’s the idea of close friends and people that you are associated with

that happen to go to [name of university], there is way more sense of belonging. And [name of university], I love it because they gave me the friends, and besides that, if you were to rename yourself [name of another university], it doesn't really matter where you go, it's the fact that you've made those friends. So it wouldn't matter if you went to XX university or XX university or XX university. If your friends were at those colleges, making those friend groups would make you belong there."

For international students, it was important to make friends to have a sense of community, but particularly to have friends who were American.

International Student 3: "In my definition, to feel we belong to [name of university] is that we get American friends or interact with American students."

International Student 2: "I have a few American friends, I would say around eight. If I hadn't made any American friends, I think I would feel a little left out, as if I wasn't supposed to be in the U.S., so I would feel like I didn't belong here. Having friends from the country that you are in is really important for me because they give you a sense that you are in the right place and that you are welcome in the country."

Why is this fascinating? These students described how they went about forming their friendships and how they defined what friendship really means. In addition, the group of international students described the variety of interactions they had with American students. The section below opens with what international students said about forming friendships and their interactions with American students.

5.4.6.1 International students making friends with Americans

Firstly, the international students described a balancing of “worlds” as it relates to Third Space Theory, agreeing that they felt that they had to be careful what they said around American students. They described having to “tip-toe” around what they could talk about. Two students summarized this feeling in the following statements:

International Student 3: “I feel like here I am responsible. It’s a different country, I’m careful about what I say. I don’t want to talk about certain things. It depends on who I’m talking to and the situation.”

International Student 2: “I found, like somehow it’s a bit tricky when making friendships here, there is a difference in concepts. Like for example, there are some topics that in my case I can talk about in my country where probably here it’s not seen in the same way. So it can be a little tricky because you’re trying to share with people, but also be respectful about what they think about a specific topic. Maybe they will be more open minded for something, but at the same time they’re going to be more reserved of others.”

International students described that it was in their best interest to make American friends not only to feel that they were part of the community, but also to help them learn English. On the other hand, they believed that they would only be able to befriend American students who had an interest in their culture. To sum up, the friendships born were mutually beneficial based on fulfilling some kind of interest or need, but it was difficult to determine the sincerity of these friendships.

International Student 2: “It’s different [making friends here] because the reasons for making American friends is to learn English and it’s more of an effort. Back home, there isn’t any effort.”

International Student 3: “My close friends are from class. If I was American though, I’m not sure if we would be friends. They like me because I’m Japanese.”

International Student 14: “People talk to me because they are interested in my culture. That’s the difference between making friends here and back home.”

International Student 8: “I got the first American friend in my Chinese class. American students learning Chinese are highly likely to have an interest, not only about China, but other Asian countries including Japan. It was easy to find American people who are very welcoming to becoming a friend with me in this class. Compared to the Chinese class, in other classes I take here students are passive.”

International Student 17: “I’ve met my particular friends at a culture club. The meetings are once every two weeks.”

While these “mutually beneficial” friendships were formed, international students found American students to be more open about certain things, such as politics and sexuality, and they would say hello in passing on the street.

International Student 2: “I think one of the biggest culture shocks coming to America is when you’re walking in the streets people say hey and they just walk away. O.K., back where I’m from, when someone says hi in the street you’re supposed to like talk to them for like a minute or two. Here you just say hey what’s up and start walking away.”

International Student 12: “Here [Americans] are very superficial, when talking. At first it’s superficial, and then they start asking all these super personal questions. And then they are like your best friend and you don’t know where that line was crossed. It was just out of nowhere. I feel that’s really weird because there’s not like, you know, a bridge, they just jump in.”

International Student 3: "It's like really open here about sexual orientation, like people don't really care to confess their sexual orientation. I'm gay, I'm bisexual, I'm lesbian."

What international students found to be most contradictory was that even though Americans were open about personal matters such as sexuality, they did not seem to know how to be real friends. One of the aspects they described was the concept of personal space, physical and mental. The friendships could never take the "next step" because international students generally described American students as harder to reach.

International Student 3: "We value a lot like talking to people and getting to know them and being close. It's different here because people like their personal space, I mean they really like it. So you're always careful trying to comfort them and get close. Everyone here keeps their bubbles."

International Student 18: "So, in Honduran culture we are just enthusiastic when we meet people and when we visit someone and then all the family gets involved and they ask about the new friend, they share food. Here, it's just like, all about personal space. There was one time when I felt there was a huge line waiting for food, but actually it was not a huge line, it was just that everyone was just taking their personal space. I was like, dude, can you stand a bit closer in this line? It wouldn't look like this. We are more enthusiastic."

The international students explained that they could make friends more easily with other international students, and also that it was easier to make friends at the beginning of the semester.

International Student 3: "When I think about my close friends, I feel like I have more international friends. However, I can say I feel belonging because they are

a big deal to me. International students are in a similar situation and they also experience the same struggles as I do due to language and cultural differences.”

International Student 2: “I have international friends because we are in the same situation. I joined groups to meet new people. Yes, I interact with different cultures—we are all outsiders.”

International Student 12: “I feel like I made my best friends at the beginning of the year. I met other Brazilians and by the middle of the semester we started being really good friends.”

International Student 13: “It’s easier at the beginning of the year because everyone’s in the same situation, so it was easier to make friends.”

International Student 14: “I feel like when I first came here, at first I was more open to talking with people and getting to know people. Now I have my friend group, so I want to kind of close getting to know people. In class, if I need something I ask someone, I’m not trying to make friends.”

In fact, many of the international students explained that they still relied heavily on their friendships back home and not on those they had made while studying in the United States. Reasons included not feeling comfortable yet with new friends and being able to express feelings more accurately in their native language.

International Student 3: “I talk to my friends back home about problems. The friends I made here, it’s too early to talk about problems. I have one American friend I have known for a while.”

International Student 2: “Since English is my second language, at first I can’t talk to my friend as deep as I do with my friends in Japan. So I talk to my friends back home about more serious stuff.”

International Student 8: "Some friends I met here I can talk about deep stuff, even though I just met them a few months ago. But some I've been talking to for a very long time, but I still can't talk to them. It just depends."

International Student 12: "I've been friends with them for almost a semester, but back home, those friends are like five or 10 plus years. So obviously, I'm going to be more open to them than like the friends here."

The last point the international students made when it came to their friendships with Americans and other international students and what I found most surprising, was that most of them felt that once the academic year was over, the friendships they had made would not endure.

International Student 2: "Most of them will die I think. Yes, like more like half. At the end of the semester, I'll probably stop talking to them."

International Student 8: "I think I'm going to lose some of my friends because they're like international students, so they might leave after the year ends."

While social integration and developing peer-based relationships are important for student retention, one could draw the conclusion from these data that international students had superficial relationships with American students. Even though American students talked about topics that international students found to be overly personal, this did not necessarily mean that the friendships advanced. International students described their friendships with Americans further as "mutually beneficial"; they would learn English and the American students would learn more about the international students' culture. International students still relied heavily on their friends back home to discuss deeper issues and they felt that the friendships they did form at the university would probably fade once the academic year was concluded. Though research shows that friendships are

important when it comes to developing a sense of community, and international students agreed that friendships were important in making them feel part of the community, based on these findings I would say that international students in this study had American acquaintances rather than friends.

I concluded from the data that the international students were describing one of the drawbacks of the interactive acculturation model. This model was an attempt to explain more clearly the interactive relationship that immigrants have in a dominant culture (Bourhis et al., 1997). In this case the American students were part of the dominant culture. The model focused on what immigrants should do when acculturating and did not ask what the dominant culture should do to maintain its own cultural identity, or to adopt the cultural identities of international students. The data seemed to describe the international students having a desire to integrate, but the American students took more of an individualism orientation (Bourhis et al., 1997). This means that the dominant culture accepts that the immigrants will maintain their cultural identity, but interactions do not progress beyond to consensual integration. The narratives of the international student suggested that they had not reached the point where they were fully accepted as part of the dominant group and where they were recognized as individuals, not just representatives of a country or culture.

5.4.6.2 American students making friends with international students

American students agreed that forming friendships was an important factor when it came to developing a sense of community. However, they did not have much to say about making friends with international students as many of them said they did not have any international friends.

American Student 6: "Most of my friends are Americans."

American Student 7: "I know many internationals too, but we are not close friends."

Most of the American students said that although they interacted with international students, they did not have any international friends and did not know any international students personally. One American student, however, described what it was like being friends with international students and went on to say that he/she had more international friends than American friends.

American Student 5: "For me it's easier [to make friends with international students]. It gives me something to talk about, to talk about culture."

I thought people from other countries were really smart, but it turns out they just learn in different ways. I also thought they were really rich, but they are just like me.

I think I have more international friends because when I came here I decided to pursue more diverse friendships. Where I lived and the organization I joined did help me achieve this goal. If I hadn't done either of those I don't know if I would have more American friends than international ones, but I think those helped me in making international friends."

Interviewer: "If you had not made any American friends and just had international friends, do you think you would still feel as if you belonged?"

American Student 5: "Yes, because I would have people to be around. Although they may not know this place very well, having friends around you is important to be able to fit in anywhere."

A second American student described feelings of uneasiness when communicating with international students, similar to the uneasiness international students experienced when interacting with American students.

American Student 6: "I feel you have to put on a filter, I don't want to say anything disrespectful. I can't open up."

Overall, since this group of American students had little interaction with international students, they focused on how they went about developing friendships in their new university community. The American students agreed with the international students that it is easier to make friends at the beginning of the academic year. Most had met their friends in the residence halls. Some had met others in class, but they were in the minority. One said he/she was friends with someone, but that person had dropped the subject so they do not see each other anymore. Others said they had joined clubs. During the conversation, one American student realized that he/she never made a true friend.

American Student 12: "I wouldn't say that maybe ever in my life, and this is why I'm saying I'm questioning my entire life here because I don't think ever in my life that I've had a best friend or like even a very close friend who I spent a lot of time with. I've always lacked [friends] in my life and I never found anybody that their values and ideas lined up exactly with mine so I felt like there was never anybody that I wanted to connect with a hundred percent, there was never anybody that I wanted to put in enough effort to be complete best friends. If there's a trait that I see about somebody that I decide that I don't like I block them from my life and I shut it down before it gets any worse. There are definitely times when I get lonely and sad, but I think for me it's been long enough now where I haven't had any friends, why start now.

Like, I kind of feel hopeless in a way that like there's never going to be that person for me that is my friend and is that one person that I can always go to for everything, like it's been my sister for most of my life."

Another American student described the struggle in adapting to the new university community and making friends, even though the majority said it was easier to make friends at the beginning of the academic year.

American Student 1: "Coming to [name of university] was a change for me because I knew few people and it is much larger than where I come from. Right now, I am unsure if I truly belong. Campus is very big, and I am generally shy. I find that the people here are so sucked into their phones, when passing by each other nobody says hi or even acknowledges each other (maybe it is just the generation). This is weird to me, coming from somewhere where everybody basically knows everyone directly or indirectly. We are always talking and conversing. Being in [name of university], it is harder to make friends because you actually have to try harder than normal. I think everybody is scared to talk to everyone, so nobody tries."

In short, most American students in this study did not have much interaction with international students. The reason for this lack of interaction with international students, whether exclusion or simply an absence of opportunity, is unclear. However, one domestic student who did describe having more international friends than American friends explained that he/she made an intentional effort to meet diverse people. Two students in particular explained the struggle they experienced in making friends, both in general and at university. Again, these students agreed that it was important to have friends in order to feel part of the community. While most described being able to make friends in different settings throughout the university, some had difficulties connecting.

5.4.7 Theme 4: Narratives about acceptance/belonging

Both international and American students described the importance of feeling accepted and that they belonged when it came to being part of a new university

community. This section relates how the two groups of students described what it meant to them to be accepted in a university community.

The section opens with a discussion that focused on the concept of branding. At this university, there was a large sign in the center of campus that announced to all students “You Belong Here”. Could a simple sign such as this make someone feel that he/she did indeed belong?

Interviewer: “The large sign on the library says ‘You Belong Here’. Do you feel that’s true?”

International Student 2: “It doesn’t matter what I think, but definitely the sign would make me feel like I belong there.”

American Student 12: “It sounds like a fortune cookie somebody wrote it down one day and they’re like yeah, this is a great idea. We’re going to make a huge sign.”

American Student 5: “Not all 30,000 of us feel like we belong here. Like even me, it’s not 100%. I always feel like I belong here, but there are definitely times when I’m like, wow, that sucks, I wish I could change that, but I have no influence on certain things, but like in general I feel it’s just a blanket term, it doesn’t necessarily apply to everybody.”

A sign like this was not necessarily very effective, according to these students. So what did it mean to them to feel acceptance or belonging? After reading through the focus group transcripts and journals, I was able to create a list of things that students said contributed to their feelings of acceptance and belonging. There was a total of 21 items that students felt contributed to their feeling of acceptance and belonging and of these 21, international students and American students had 13 in common. Analyzing these 13 items and their

definitions more closely, I was able to condense them into five items. For example, I consolidated the item “feeling comfortable” with “feeling welcomed”, “be myself”, and “sharing values” since the students described feeling comfortable as being able to be themselves and share their own viewpoints. The five topics the two groups had in common included friends, make a change/contribute, treated as a member, share language, and feeling comfortable.

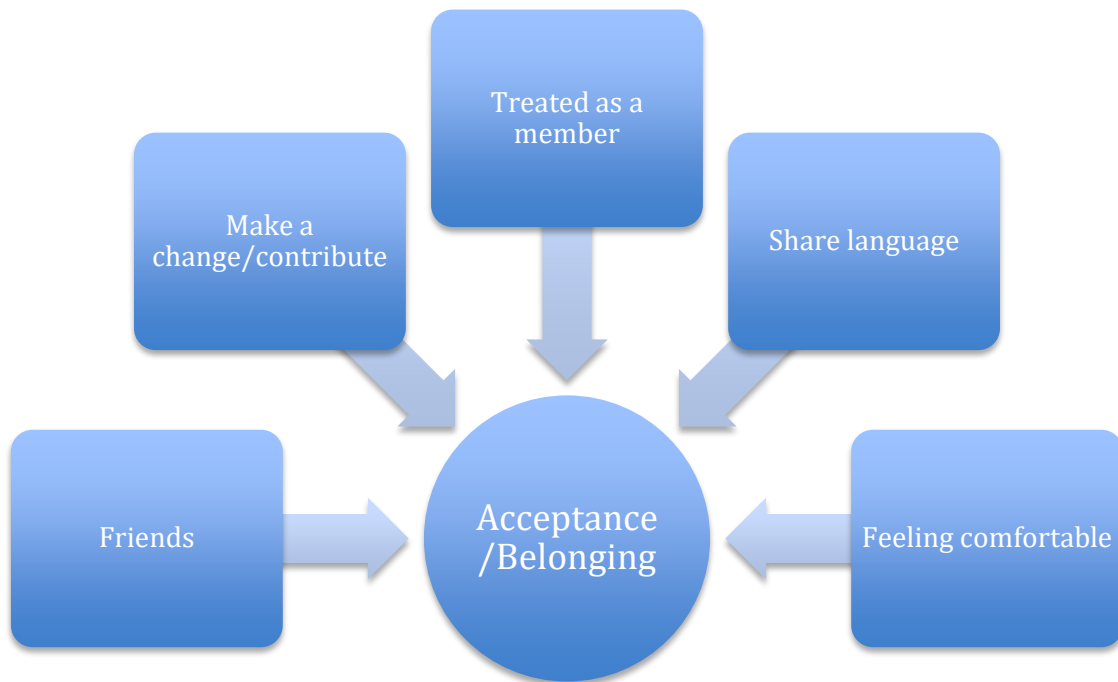


Chart 5.4.7 The top five items contributing to international and American students' said feelings of acceptance/belonging

5.4.7.1 Acceptance/belonging: Friends

Friendship constituted a theme on its own. As noted in section 5.4.6 of this chapter, international and American students both shared the importance of

friendships in feeling part of the University community. Students described what it was like trying to make friends and their interactions during the process.

Emphasizing the importance of friendships, students made the following remarks when describing friendships and what they meant to their sense of acceptance and belonging.

International Student 8: "Belonging means having intimate friends and we can have a chat and talk about some private topics that cannot just speak to with an ordinary friend. Friends can be the company for me and we laugh and weep together."

American Student 8: "All of my friends are here, I feel like I'm accomplishing something when I'm getting my degree or pursuing my degree, I have a social life and I live here."

When asked what contributed most to their feeling of belonging, friends, student organizations or classes, the majority of American students included those friends.

American Student 5: "I'd say friends solely for the purpose of the fact that if I was here and I didn't have anyone I wouldn't be able to focus on my major, like I wouldn't like...I would just be very lonely and I wouldn't like have social interaction so I wouldn't like be doing well in any other aspect of school."

American Student 1: "Friends. I enjoy organizations, but I think being completely alone I think it would be a pretty awful existence to never be able to talk to anyone of any interest or anything."

While both groups of students agreed that making friends was important to feeling part of the university community, tying this closely to their sense of acceptance and belonging, the data suggested that international students

believed that friendships formed with domestic students did not go deep enough to sustain any value.

5.4.7.2 Acceptance/belonging: Make a change/contributing

Being able to make a change and contributing to the community was an idea that occurred in both the American and the international students' narratives, although it was expressed in different terms. This aligns closely with the theory of mattering, the sense an individual has that he or she counts and makes a difference (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). While both groups agreed that being able to make a difference and contributing to the community was an important aspect of a feeling of acceptance or belonging, students gave different definitions and viewpoints of what it meant to make a change. When asked specifically whether they felt they could make a change in the university community, they gave very different answers.

First, when defining what it meant to be a person of influence and being able to make a change or contribute to the community, the American students said the following:

American Student 1: "Being part of a community means to work with others to create a better place."

American Student 12: "To be part of a community means to serve one's duties as a member of a community. For example, take part in community service programs, shop at local stores and markets and just becoming familiar with other members in a community and interacting with them."

American Student 8: "You have to be willing to participate in things, including but not limited to talking to someone else who is part of the community. I believe that I am part of [name of residence hall] because I have attended many different

things hosted there. I have a lot of friends that live there and we just get together and study and hang out.”

American Student 12: “I think to be accepted you have to have a sense of community and in addition be an active member of the community. I also think you have to have a meaning and purpose to be accepted. But I don’t think it’s as simple as that, I think all that adds up to being accepted. But you have to want to be accepted because you could have all the purpose you could ever need to be accepted, but you still have to want to be accepted. Not including myself, but I think it’s worth mentioning some people just don’t care if they get accepted to a community, so they don’t try.”

American Student 6: “Each week I am given emails, updates and invitations to so many events in the business community. There is a lot of collaboration and a lot of networking that makes me feel productive within myself and the community.”

One student described his/her experience of making a difference by being a member of a student organization, as well as having desirable skills that made him/her an asset to his/her particular group.

Interviewer: “Tell us about your experience with your student organization. Do you feel as if you belong?”

American Student 5: “Yeah, sure. Because they give me jobs and they make me do things. It is fun. I was bored before then and no longer am I bored. They are jobs I like to do.

To feel accepted in my opinion is to have a purpose in the group. Now this purpose is very hard to put in tangible terms because it is usually a mix of many things that we probably don’t think about very much. If I had to try to evaluate why I feel accepted in my friend group I would probably say it is a combination of

my humor, ability to drive a car, knowledge of the English language, happiness, etc. If you had little desirable qualities for a certain group then you are viewed as an unpleasant or undesirable person, which makes you unaccepted to the group.”

In the case of the international students, some did speak to the importance of contributing to the community and making a difference.

International Student 8: “In my multicultural communication class, I bring a different aspect of culture. When I am needed in a group or I can be of any help to someone, I feel I am part of the group.”

However, several international students perceived their method of contributing as one of following the rules.

International Student 3: “[Contributing to the community] it means to follow the rules. For example, I keep the community agreement on my floor in my dorm, this means cleaning my hair out of the drains, washing dishes in the laundry room or kitchen, keeping quiet from 8 p.m. to 10 a.m. during the weekdays, etc. On the other hand, another girl left stinky dishes in the laundry room again and again, so the RAs had to go talk to her and tell her to clean it up. I see other people get in trouble if they break the community rules.”

Both of these groups described being able to contribute to smaller groups, such as classrooms, dorm floors, and student organizations. However, when asked whether they felt they could contribute and bring change to the larger university community, they answered very differently.

The Americans believed they brought change to the overall university through their involvement in certain groups.

American Student 1: "My experience actually wanted me to be an RA because I don't want people to have to go through like, you know everything that I went through with this living experience."

American Student 8: "We are working to bring a free, introductory self-defense class here."

American Student 12: "I'm on the [name of advisory organization] and we definitely do a lot that's involved heavily with the [name of university office]. We speak directly with the people who are in charge of the program so anything that we say has a huge impact on what they feel about whatever topic we're talking about."

American Student 5: "I'm part of [name of organization], so we are a team so it's not just me, we are a team that brings events to help Americans and internationals talk with each other and learn more about each other and all the cultures."

Interviewer: "You feel that you've brought change through that?"

American Student 5: "I don't know if I can pinpoint a person, but I think overall a change, yeah."

Now that we had talked about specific examples of students bringing change to the university community, I asked again whether feeling as if they had had an influence on the community had affected their feeling of acceptance/belonging.

American Student 8: "I think it helps, but it's not the largest part of it. I feel like just being involved with the organizations even if you're not changing something you still feel like you're part of something bigger than yourself."

American Student 12: “Yes, and my reasoning is in a democracy where the people do have a voice and they can bring about change to a certain extent when, you know, then you’re happier in the community that you’re in and you’re more willing to be involved if you were in a very restricted environment where you weren’t allowed to say anything or do anything.”

Interviewer: “If no change is brought about; what you’re trying to say is that why would you want to stay there?”

American Student 12: “The voice has to bring change, yes. My favorite example of that is that they give you the evaluation sheets where you get to evaluate the class and the material and the professor. That for me is where I feel like that’s never happened to me before like my school never did anything like that. I really like it because it makes me feel like that, potentially, what I’m saying has influence.”

American Student 5: “I do a lot of work, I mean it was fun, I knew there was a lot of things that need to go into it and I’d be speaking in front of more and I knew that it would be a very good time for everyone who did it. I was feeling the impact of like how many people were going to see the proof of my labor.”

In the case of the international students, they agreed that being able to contribute to the community and bring change was an important factor that contributed to their sense of acceptance or belonging. However, they had different viewpoints when asked whether they felt they could be a person of influence who could bring change to the university community.

Interviewer: “Do you feel you’re a person of influence, meaning that you as an individual could contribute to change at the university?”

International Student 3: “Just by yourself? No.”

International Student 14: "Yes, I think I would say I kind of have my influence. [Name of university] welcomed another student with a \$23,000 scholarship every year and I am on that same scholarship. So, they welcomed us with that scholarship, and they wanted us to be good here. I think this will influence the perspective of those students. That is why I think I am an influence."

Interviewer: "So what you're saying is you can bring change by influencing the university and people's perceptions of its students?"

International Student 14: "Yes, I think because there were no undergrad students from my country before last year here."

Interviewer: "Anyone else?"

International Student 2: "Not really. I mean, if I insisted a lot, like really put a lot of effort into it, maybe. But like, I wouldn't try harder."

International Student 16: "One individual is not enough to make a difference on the whole university. If an individual joins a group and gives his input and views, maybe like they can change it."

International Student 13: "It's not impossible, but it's going to be really hard."

Interviewer: "Do you feel you're a person of influence in your student organizations?"

International Student 12: "In a student organization, yes. But out of it, no. I think I could feel like I belong if I did like have an influence over some people. Like, if I just have a group of friends or things that like attach me to the university, I could feel like I belong."

Interviewer: "So having influence, do you think it helps with a sense of belonging?"

International Student 12: "I would say it would. If you try to contribute to something you would feel more, you'll start feeling more confident about this being your place."

International Student 3: "It's like, it's a really big university, it's a huge campus, one person is not going to change anything. You know what I mean?"

While some international students felt they could bring change to the university community through their involvement in student organizations, overall they were not as optimistic as American students when considering their contribution to the university community. While both groups agreed that being able to contribute and make a change to the community influenced their sense of acceptance/belonging, they differed slightly in their belief that they could actually contribute to the overall university community. This supports research on the theory of mattering by Schlossberg (1989) and Rosenberg & McCullough (1981), who found that first year students felt accepted because they believed they could make a difference in their new university community.

5.4.7.3 Acceptance/belonging: Being treated as a member

While the matter of being treated as a member of the community was mentioned by both sets of students, the feeling of being "treated as a member" was one phrase the international students mentioned far more frequently than the American students. American students tended to refer to feeling of being "part of a community". Variations in expressing this idea among the international students included the following:

International Student 14: “[Belonging means] being treated as a member, not an outsider, but I can still be myself.”

International Student 13: “The attitude of the people living here toward you who are already here, like how they treat you is like what kind of vibe do we get from here.”

International Student 19: “To be part of [name of university] is to feel others treat me as a member, be proud of its achievements, be shameful of its shortcomings, and accept or give help to others.”

International Student 2: “I feel like I am accepted at [name of university] because they allow me to do the same things as other domestic students, such as participate in organizations and class.”

International Student 8: “I think I am accepted as a member of [name of university]. Not that I think [name of university] is caring about me as an individual, I don’t think I am particularly accepted, but I don’t find any reason that I am not. [name of university] provides me good enough facilities, classes, activities, food, and couches (I really like their couches). If I have some trouble, [name of university] would probably let me know how to fix it.”

International students felt that being a member of a community meant having the ability to be their authentic self and to be provided the same opportunities as American students. It also meant having the same access to facilities and other resources as American students. International students used the phrase “treated as a member” interchangeably with “to be part of”. When expressing this feeling, international students also mentioned the importance of having similar interests as the community, everyone being treated equal regardless of religion, race, and background, and being able to express opinions. This supports Prilleltenskey’s (2014) research related to the theory of mattering. He found that individuals need

to feel recognized and acknowledged without demanding too much attention at the expense of others; however, they do not want to feel totally invisible.

While American students did not use the same phrase “being a member”, some did describe what it meant “to be part of” certain communities.

American Student 10: “I feel like I am part of the [name of organization] community on campus. I just started and am very much a beginner. But I feel the most comfortable and supported there. I am starting to feel a little better as far as being involved in the deaf community as well. Last night, I helped out with DINGO, deaf bingo, and it was amazing. I was set on changing my major last week, but now I am wanting to be involved with deaf/blind people for the rest of my life.”

American Student 4: “I feel like I am part of the volunteer community. I go every week to [name of organization] and volunteer and it feels like a nice break from school. I am also part of [name of organization] on campus. I feel like I am a part of these because the members all talk to each other and we are always in contact with each other. I feel like I am part of these communities because we all work together and hang out outside of the meetings.”

American Student 8a: “I consider myself part of the residence hall community and the [name of leadership organization]. I feel like I am part of these communities because I’m surrounded by people who care about me and they are very similar to me, so I fit in with them very well. Each week I’m hanging out with people in my residence hall. And each week for [name of leadership organization] we have a meeting and we talk outside of that meeting.”

When American students were asked about feeling “part of” or “members” of a community, they described feeling supported and cared for by the community, as well as being able not only to help the community but to benefit from this

individually as well. This aligns with the concepts of importance and dependence as they relate to mattering; someone is cared for or of concern and there is a reciprocal need (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Lastly, being able to be with others with similar interests and being given opportunities to connect through conversations and projects added to their feelings of being “part of” a community.

In contrast to feeling like a member, American students also described what it was like not to feel “part of” or a “member” a community.

American Student 12: “I think that all the minuscule problems that I faced actually have to do with belonging because there are times you feel like ousted from a group.”

There are lots of times when I’ll see groups of people have their own conversation and they’ll have their own inside jokes and they’re kind of talking about things that are so far above me. I know hopefully I’ll understand what they’re talking about one day.”

American Student 1: “I live in [name of residence hall], but I don’t really feel like part of the community. I don’t really talk to the people on this floor all too much. I feel mainly part of [name of university] and [name of major] because I spend most of my time with people who are involved in the [name of university college].”

American Student 5: “I was in the [name of organization], which sounds, just trust me, it sounds really fun, but it’s not.”

Interviewer: “So you didn’t feel like you belonged to that club?”

American Student 5: No. I felt like a sore thumb sticking out. I felt like everybody else was on the same page, but I was not. I was somewhere else and they were all geniuses, but I was not on that same page.”

The feelings described by these American students suggest feelings of isolation, as described by Hagerty, Williams, and Oe (2002). These occur when people do not have a sense of belonging. One thing that caused these feelings of isolation was a feeling of being unable to connect with others in the community. Two students described “not being on the same page” as others in the group and alluded to the feeling of not having enough knowledge to be at the same academic level as other students. This aligns with experiencing marginality as described by Rosenberg and McCollough (1981) because an individual feels he or she does not fit in and is not needed. An additional reason that contributed to the feeling of isolation described by these students was not spending adequate time with others in the particular community. One student’s example indicated that even though this student lived in a particular community, this does not mean that he/she felt part of that community.

These views of international and American students on feelings of belonging to the community, led ultimately to the question posed by Tinto (1975): do interactions and engagement lead students to see themselves as a valued member of the community? Both sets of students described interactions and engagement with student organizations, classes, and so on that contributed to their feelings that they were valued members of the campus community as a whole, but in varying ways.

5.4.7.4 Acceptance/belonging: Feeling comfortable

The topic of feeling comfortable as it relates to acceptance/belonging was another area mentioned roughly equally as often by international and American students. The two groups of students had similar definitions of what it meant to feel comfortable. Those definitions included having the ability to be themselves, being able to share opinions and views, and feeling at home. Some more in-depth explanations included the following:

International Student 3: "Being accepted is being welcomed, respected and well-treated in the community. I feel like [name of university] accepts me. It is a place where I can be myself and there will always be people that I can call friends and rely on. [Name of university] is known for its diversity in the student population, meaning that no matter your personality, you are likely to find a friend group with similar interests and be accepted."

International Student 2: "Being part of a community for me is a feeling of home no matter where you are, even though it is in a faraway place which has a different culture from my original one. It means you know your way around a certain place, that you know at least the basics of the language, which is essential to communicate adequately, and that you have friends and people to trust."

American Student 12: "There are times when I'm walking and there's a lot of self-reflection going on when I walk and I'll be walking back to campus and I'll see a tree or a building or something as I'm looking around and I'm like, wow, that's really pretty. I'm glad I'm here and those are the things that trigger all those good feelings about all the organizations I'm in and my academics."

American Student 5: "I feel like I belong because it feels like home also."

Many of the American students talked about the concept of feeling at home; however, when I explored this a little further, there seemed to be a difference between the "feeling of home" and the university actually being considered "home". One student said he/she would consider the university his/her home, however, two other students said they would not.

American Student 5: "Would I even be proud to say that [name of university] was my home at some point, is that what you're asking?"

Interviewer: "Yes."

American Student 5: "Okay, yes I'd be proud to say that [name of university] is my home because it is my home."

American Student 8: "I mean, I have my home where my family is and then I have my home where my [name of university] family is."

American Student 12: "So when people ask me what is your home or like what is your hometown, I'll say Northeastern Ohio or the [name of town]. So that's my home and I don't think [name of university] is ever going to be a home for me. I live here and I'm going to be here for a few years, but four years in a scheme of most of my life it's not going to ever be the majority, so it's not my home."

American Student 5: "Okay, ultimate thing you committed murder and now you're sentenced to 20 years, is [prison] your new home?"

American Student 12: "No."

American Student 5: "Why not? It's 20 years."

American Student 12: "Because I feel like it's, you know, metal bars, why would that ever be my home? Like there are homeless people who say, 'I live in tent city'. Even if they were there for 50 years that's not your home. I don't know, like I feel like the concept of a home for me is like the place that I was living at the longest that wasn't actually home. That might be another reason that [name of university] is not a home for me, it's cause like thousands of people live here."

Interviewer: "So home is like where you have people who love you with all their heart? Would you say [name of university] is that place?"

American Student 8: "No, I think that's where my parents and siblings are. They're biologically forced to love you because you're the kid."

Interviewer: "So home for you is where you have people who love you?"

American Student 8: "Yeah, unconditionally."

In summary, the American students felt there was a difference between "feeling like home" and actually considering the university to be "home". They used the term "home" when describing whether they were comfortable in the university community, but the majority would not actually consider it their "home". This was based on the length of time they stayed at the university and the fact that they did not have family members at the university.

Other aspects touched on by international students when it came to defining what it meant to feel comfortable as this related to acceptance/belonging included the feeling of being supported and of being welcomed. These were two topics not raised by the American students.

International Student 17: "Here I found a lot of welcoming people, they do not care I am from another country and they often start conversations about it."

International Student 14: "People in my community know me and take care of me. When I'm absent from my class, my classmate texts me to ask how I am doing."

Both international and American students expressed that a feeling of being comfortable contributed to their feelings of acceptance/belonging. The narratives shared by both groups touched on emotions related to mattering. Feeling comfortable meant being able to be themselves, sharing opinions/viewpoints,

and feeling at home. American students expressed a difference between the feeling of home and actually calling the university home. The international students elaborated on defining comfort as feeling supported and welcomed by community members. These narratives relate to feelings of attention, importance, dependence, and ego (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

5.4.7.5 Acceptance/belonging: Sharing a language

It should not be a surprise that language was a frequent topic mentioned by international students in discussions on acceptance/belonging. But it was also a topic American students brought up as they believe that a shared language was related to acceptance/belonging. Language, one of the three main concepts making up Moscovici's social representation theory, is important because how one expresses oneself influences one's sense-making (Merleau-Ponty, 1960, 1964).

American Student 9: "Language plays a major role in belonging. If people don't understand what you're saying, then you start to feel like an outcast. I have to adjust my language so people would understand me and so we could relate to each other."

American Student 10: "I am part of the deaf culture because of my major. There is a deaf/blind community and other communities based on languages."

Not only did some American students recognize the importance of being able to communicate in acceptance/belonging, but they brought to light the different forms of language, such that of the deaf community. It became clear in the narratives even though they spoke the same language, they also had to adapt their language skills because how they communicated affected their ability to feel acceptance/belonging.

As for the international students, most students recognized that language posed an additional barrier in their academic coursework, but the majority did not feel that their academic work was significantly affected by this and accepted the challenge of improving their English skills.

International Student 3: "The language impacted me a little, even though I am fluent. Sometimes I lack the slang vocabulary or some specific word to keep the sentence going. However, I do not struggle in class because I can always pull out my computer and find something in the dictionary if necessary."

International Student 2: "Of course I struggle, but I have successfully coped with it so far with very helpful friends."

International Student 8: "Since I am not a native English speaker, of course, I sometimes strongly feel stress to keep using English every day. My poor English ability did affect my academic adjustment. For example, I took a Black Image class, which is about how media or social networks have affected people's image of African-Americans. This class was the hardest one for me due to my lack of English ability, plus basic knowledge. However, I firmly believe that this struggle will be a good experience when I remember my time in America."

However, the majority of the students observed that as English was not their first language, their ability to belong in the university community was affected. There was a variety of reasons for this, including the following:

International Student 3: "I feel like by speaking English, I don't feel like it's my home. I don't feel comfortable."

International Student 2: "Language acts as a barrier, so you might feel separated sometimes. There might be times like you don't belong here, but as you get to know people it gets better."

International Student 8: "If my English got worse, I don't think I would feel really comfortable because then it would create a communication barrier. I would have a lot of trouble expressing myself and I would be really frustrated with people not understanding exactly what I mean and this would affect my sense of belonging."

International Student 16: "Sometimes I feel really confident, like I can hold a conversation very fluently in English. But sometimes, I just, you know, bumble the presentation or something and I feel really bad."

International Student 17: "English has affected my social adjustment a little bit because of my speaking style, my accent is different from others, and I feel like they treat me differently."

International Student 3: "I personally believe that we cannot feel we belong to [name of university] without a certain level of English. There are about 20 Japanese exchange students right now and I often see them communicating with American students, but others stay with Japanese students all the time. The people who relish interacting with American students are highly likely to be students taking regular classes, while the people who are always with Japanese students tend to be ESL students. I guess this implies that people are not motivated to make American friends without a certain level of English."

International Student 15: "I feel that English ability is the most important factor for us non-native speakers because I think belonging at [name of university] means making many friends from different countries than mine."

In summary, international students did not necessarily feel the impact of being non-native English speakers in the classroom, but they definitely felt the impact in their lives outside the classroom. This aligns with the fact that these students described previously that they did not relate their sense of acceptance/belonging

to their experiences in the classroom or with professors. Many felt that their English-speaking ability did have an impact on their feelings of belonging and their ability to make friends and live life at the university. Most agreed that an international student needs some level of English in order to feel acceptance/belonging.

The narratives by the international students regarding the role language played in their acceptance/belonging relate to how individuals manage acculturation. Acculturation can be a stressful process during which an individual needs to acquire culture-specific skills to adapt and identify as part of the in-group or out-group (Ozer, 2018). The international students described examples of the stress they felt regarding language and learning how to adapt, and they agreed that knowing the language was essential to feeling part of the in-group. As language was also an important aspect of social representation theory, how these students expressed themselves contributed to how they made sense of the interactions around them.

This section provided a discussion of the five topics that the students described as contributing to their feelings of acceptance/belonging. Their thoughts on friends, being able to make a change or contribute, being treated as a member of the community, feeling comfortable in their community, and sharing a language were explored. Both groups of students noted the importance of friends, of feeling that they were members of the community and of feeling comfortable within the community. They agreed on the importance of being able to contribute and make a change; however, they differed on their ability to do so. Lastly, they agreed that language influenced acceptance/belonging, and significantly so in the case of the international students. But American students also felt that language was important since they had to change their communication style in order for people to understand them.

5.4.8 Theme 5: Mattering

The final theme to do with community emerging from both the international and American students was the concept of mattering. While other themes emerged in this study that related to the theory of mattering, specific narratives regarding mattering warranted it being categorized as a specific theme.

Mattering is when someone feels, rightly or wrongly, that he/she matters and is valued or appreciated by others (Schlossberg, 1985). Revisiting the five dimensions of mattering theorized by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), the students focused their perceptions of mattering on all these, but especially those of attention and importance. Attention means that someone is noticed in positive ways and importance is felt when someone is cared for or feels that he or she is of concern to another (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Both international and American students described their mattering to the university community and shared their various viewpoints.

Two separate conversations with the group of international students in which the concept of mattering emerged focused on the topics of feeling that they mattered to the university, and feeling that they did not. The first conversation focused on their responses when asked whether the university cared about them.

Interviewer: "Do you think the University cares about you?"

International Student 3: "As a whole, big picture, no."

International Student 2: "Yes, like whenever, like there's so many people to care about. They can't focus on specifically someone."

International Student 3: "Because like there's so many people to care about. The whole thing, they have bigger things to care about."

International Student 2: "I don't know, like I get an email from [name of university] and then we feel like they care about me? I don't know."

International Student 8: "Like, at last they provide us with all that information and the rest I feel like it's up to us and then like, we're all grown up and we don't really need all the help."

International Student 3: "But they're sending those kinds of emails automatically, right? So that doesn't really mean they care about us. They just send us like a bunch of junk mails."

International Student 2: "Like, whenever I have a problem and I ask like, what should I do? They give me some answers. Like when I had a toothache and I went to the health center. They gave me like a dentist, a possible dentist that I can go to and then I feel like they care about me."

International Student 8: "If you're talking the whole university then I will say no. But if you say like friends and I will miss them and they know that I will miss them and hopefully they will miss me. I will miss you and I want you to let me know if you're PhD is completed."

International Student 3: "I don't know if [name of university] cares about me since it's too big and abstract, but I do feel all my professors care about me."

The international students believed that the university was too large to care about any individual student. However, through their day-to-day interactions with friends, professors and administrators they felt these individuals did care about them. When I asked the students again if they mattered individually to the university, they answered with some similar thought processes, but with a slight variation.

Interviewer: "Do you as an individual matter to the university?"

International Student 3: "It's a really big university, like a huge campus. One person is not going to change anything. I feel like anyone can fill my spot."

International Student 2: "I feel like I matter because no one is kicking me out and they're not intending to do so. So I guess every student matters to them from that stand point."

International Student 8: "It's not like something will change if I'm not here, but still, I'm paying so it's like a small part."

Interviewer: "So you don't feel as if you matter, but you're saying that you matter because of your financial contribution, because of the money?"

International Student 8: "Yes."

Interviewer: "So you don't matter, but your money matters, is that what you're saying?"

International Student 8: "Yes."

International Student 2: "I feel like individually, it's not much. But when you're with like other students, they can't ignore it. So it depends."

Interviewer: "What you're saying is that an individual, you do not matter, but as a group you could bring change. So collectively you're saying you matter, but individually, not as much."

International Student 8: "I feel like I matter here because of my friends."

Interviewer: "Let's talk about the overall nature of the university. Do you feel as if you really matter, or are you just a number?"

International Student 2: "I think I would matter."

International Student 14: "Because I have a different voice than like most of everyone else. Like my voice will matter because I'm different. Everything is different, I see everything different. When talking about classmates, I am the only Nepalese student and my professor tells me every time to share my experiences. So I think my voice matters here because I'm from a different part and people here might not have experienced what I have experienced. And so that's why I think I would matter."

International Student 3: "I feel like my friends would miss me if I left. Like I don't have any contact with any of my professors. Like zero. I never talk to them so I don't think it would make a difference."

International Student 12: "Some professors are just like, do your homework and if you need extra credit, don't ask for it because I really don't care about that, I just want to give my class. They say it like they don't care. They specifically say it like you don't matter. Like you're just another student."

While the university was too large to care about individual students, the international students felt as if they did matter to some degree because they paid their tuition fees and in this way, they mattered collectively. In addition, one student added that he/she had brought a unique perspective to the classroom, and that was why he/she mattered. This led to a point that was mentioned earlier, that students mattered more on a smaller scale with friends and through classroom interactions, rather than mattering to the university as a whole.

For the American students, the same concept of mattering, on a smaller scale, did emerge in their conversations. However, the idea that the university did not care about them as individuals seemed unsettling for some of the students. This relates to the transactional lens through which the American students viewed their experiences. They felt that the university had an obligation to care because the students were paying for their education. It also relates to the importance and dependence components of mattering; individuals need to be cared about and need to be needed in the community (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

The first indication of this surfaced in a conversation regarding the university president, someone who was represented the university.

Interviewer: "Do you think the university president cares about the students?"

American Student 12: "Yes, she really shows her own initiative, she attends events, she is with the band, she's with the colleges, she's with the students, she makes herself very apparent in the university, like the entire body."

Interviewer: "Do you think the President cares about you?"

American Student 12: "I'm going to say on a personal level, no, but on the level I would expect of a university I would say yes, in fact I think the university has far surpassed my expectations."

American Student 8: "They do care about me they have to."

Interviewer: "That's the difference. Does the university treat you like a customer?"

American Student 12: "Or that's the question."

Interviewer: "Or they care because..."

American Student 5: "You're paying."

American Student 8: "OK, let me phrase it this way. So do you think they want your money or they care about you because they want your money?"

American Student 12: "Oh."

American Student 5: "Or need your money to be able to take care of you?"

American Student 12: "Oh."

American Student 8: "Oh this is getting way too psychological."

American Student 12: "Me as a student I think [the University] cares about me. I would say they care about students and I am a student so they care about me like by...there's an awful lot that tells me that. Because right off the bat if we're talking like university I'm going to say no, of course not, why would they care? But like my real like emotions and feelings like how I feel about the university tell me otherwise. But they have to care at least an extent otherwise you wouldn't bring your money here. But no, if I were to like transfer universities, they're not going to beg to keep me here because I'm [name of student]. So, the answer I guess then it would be no, no I don't matter to [name of university]. I'm not important to them, they don't care about me and that's an interesting one to take in."

American Student 8: "I say yeah they do care because most of their decisions are in my best interest. Most rules and policies are to benefit me and not to benefit the university."

American Student 5: "And the reason is because they want to keep us..."

American Student 12: "To make money. If we don't want to be here we're not going to succeed, we're going to drop out and then we're going to make money somewhere else."

Interviewer: "So do you think, really think, they do it because of you or because they need the income that you bring?"

American Student 5: "I don't think those have to be separated. I think that [the university] can do it because of the income and because they don't want you to drop out early. You know they have in lots of places like air dryers instead of the paper towels. They do that for the environment, but also they don't have to pay for paper towels. Like it can work both, you don't have to discriminate it can work for both."

American Student 8: "I don't see the problem with just thinking they're doing it for both reasons. They're doing it for a selfish reason that they want to make money and they're also doing it because they care enough to know that if they don't rates drop."

American Student 12: "I'm going to say that the business doesn't care, but the people really do care."

This conversation reflects a discussion the students had about whether the university cared about its students, and the intention behind the university's caring. These students concluded that the University cared about them for the sake of staying in business. In addition, they concluded that it was individuals who cared about the students, as reflected in the following conversation about mattering:

American Student 4: “Feeling like you matter and feeling like you belong for me are pretty much the same thing, so if I lose one I lose the other.”

American Student 12: “So you see the climate here is more of the climate where students are made to believe that they matter. They need to believe.”

Just like the international students, American students felt they mattered in their interactions with individuals. One thought shared by an American student was that students “need to believe they matter”. This could refer to all the students who participated in these discussions. It is unsettling to think one does not matter, so one needs to believe that one does.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter five explored what we can learn about sense of community by listening to the narratives of American and international students at an American university. It started by providing a background to how these students entered this new university community, and through their different lenses. The American students experienced this new community through a transactional lens; they were expecting a certain experience because they paid for it. The international students, on the other hand, experienced this new community with the experience lens, from the viewpoint that they were studying in a new country to gain different experience.

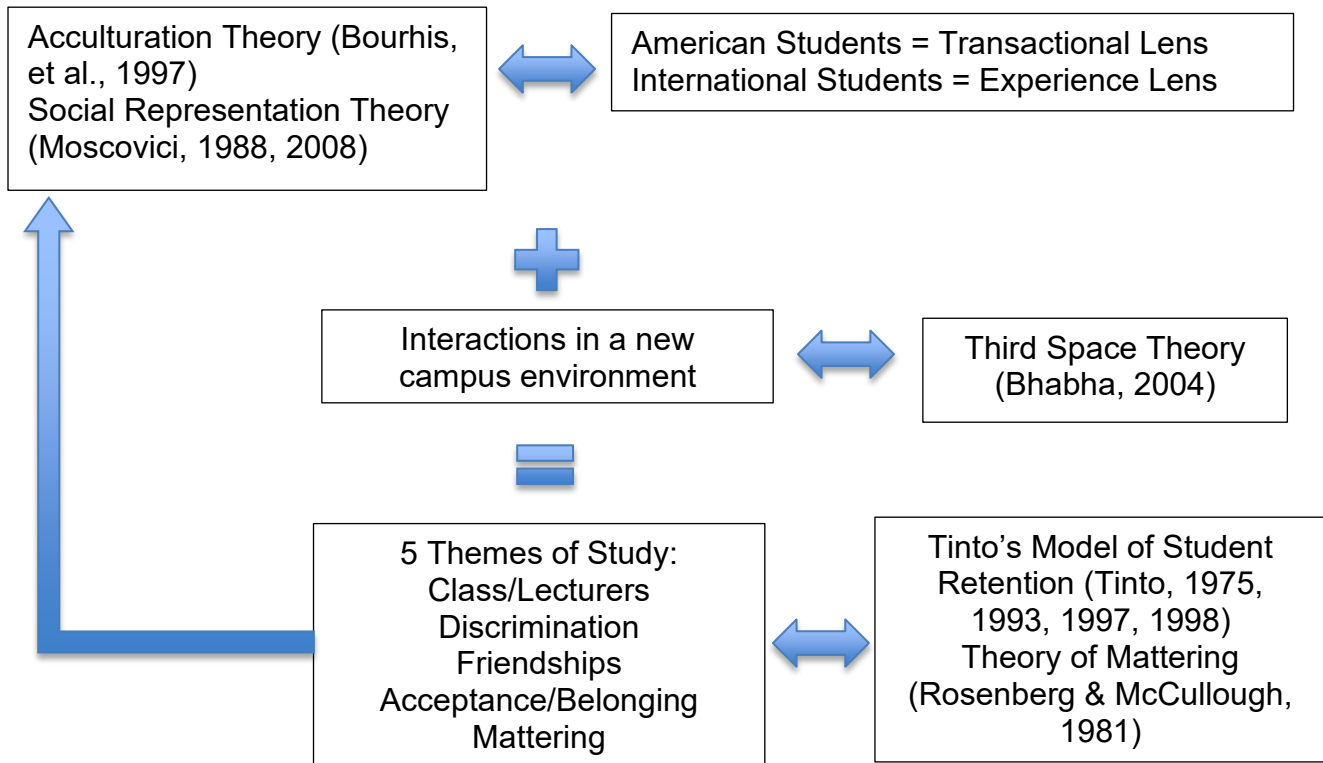


Figure 5.5 Students' interactional dynamics

By analyzing the data and referencing the theoretical foundation of this study, a continuous cycle emerged, as indicated in figure 5.5. Though the cycle may not always be this exact, this figure represents a form of a cycle students in this study experienced when entering a new campus environment.

Firstly, it is important to provide an insight into the views of these incoming students, based on how they viewed their own cultures and how they viewed their new community at this university. This aligns with the epistemological constructivism framework of this study, as it supports the concept that students develop their own understanding of the world around them. In addition, since globalization has escalated the acculturation experience to something that may be experienced anywhere in the world, it is important to recognize that both sets

of students had had some form of direct or mediated intercultural contact. Secondly, understanding the views of the incoming students also meant taking cognizance of social representation theory, as these students entered a new environment bringing with them the knowledge and opinions of different groups of people that they had accumulated over the span of their lives.

The second part of the cycle involves the experiences and interactions of living in a new campus environment. Five themes emerged from these data, including class/lecturers, discrimination/judgment, friendships, acceptance/belonging, and mattering. Third space theory, Tinto's Model of Student Retention and the theory of mattering provided additional support in analyzing the data. After these experiences and interactions, the students continued molding and changing their viewpoints, as hypothesized in acculturation theory and social representation theory.

The chapter continued to explore the narratives of community from both groups of students, how they negotiated belonging on campus and the dynamic of community when international and American students interacted.

The following summarizes the five themes that emerged from the discussion on community with both the American and international students:

1. **Class/professors:** American students were divided on whether their classroom experience and interactions with professors contributed to their sense of community, while the international students had no expectation that the classroom experience and professors would contribute to their sense of community.
2. **Discrimination/judgment:** While the majority of both groups of students observed that they felt more freedom and openness in this new university community, both groups nonetheless expressed feelings of being judged, and some had experienced discrimination.

3. **Friendships:** Being able to form friendships is probably one of the most important factors in determining one's sense of community. International students said that having American friends was an important part of feeling part of the university community. They did, however, mention difficulties in forming these friendships, believing that they were not sincere friendships, and that their friendships would probably end once the academic year had concluded. International students described being able to make friends more easily with other international students, and they still relied on their friendships back home for more in-depth conversations. As for the Americans, little was shared when it came to making friends with international students because most of them did not have any international student friends. Most Americans said it was easier to make friends at the beginning of the year, but did mention the difficulty of making friends in general.
4. **Acceptance/belonging:** In order to feel acceptance/belonging in the university community, both American and international students discussed the need for friends, being able to make a change or contribute to the community, being treated as a member of the community, feeling comfortable and sharing a language.
5. **Mattering:** Both American and international students described the importance of feeling that they mattered to the university community; however, both realized that perhaps they did not matter as individuals when it came to the university community in general. Perhaps this was the case within certain smaller groups, however.

The next chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the key findings as they relate to the theories and research reviewed in earlier chapters. The final chapter also makes recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I presented data in the form of narratives explaining the sense of community of international students and American students at a four-year, public university in the United States. I conducted this study in response to the growing importance of international students in higher education, not only for the United States but for many other countries as well. Although the United States remains the top destination, it did experience a decrease in international student enrollment figures of 6.6 percent in 2017 (“Number of International Students”, 2018). On the other hand, other countries are reaping the benefits of an increase in enrollments. Australia saw an international student enrollment growth of 11.4 percent in 2018, a second year of double-digit growth for the country (“Double-Digit Growth”, 2019). In 2018, Canada’s total international student enrollment reached 572,415, representing a 16.25 percent rise and the third consecutive year that the country saw a double-digit increase (“Canada’s Foreign Student Enrollment”, 2019). China also had an increase in international students in 2018; however, this was a marginal increase of less than 1 percent, bringing the total to 492,185 (“China’s Foreign Enrollment”, 2019). While the factor of community and belonging may not be at the forefront of the minds of international students when selecting where they will study, is it something that could be utilized as the United States tries to stop the decline in international student recruitment, and other countries look to increase and sustain their international student enrollment. The U.S. has several new initiatives, such as the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign launched by Temple University and fully endorsed by NAFSA, the Association of International Educators, the largest non-profit organisation in the world that advocates for international education. “The campaign offers an emphatic response to emotional questions” (Sandberg, 2017). International students are asking questions related to safety in the United States and whether they will feel

comfortable studying in this country. Many universities around the country have adopted this campaign in their own marketing strategies in the hope of making international students feel welcome in their own communities.

While international students may select their institution abroad based on academic rankings and perceptions of the academic quality and prestige of the university (Wilkins & Huisman, 2013), American students make their decisions based on the same factors, with one additional factor: they also consider the sense of community and belonging. Their sense of belonging at a university is closely tied to their academic motivation and their general social acceptance on campus (Freeman et al., 2007). While international students may assume domestic students already feel a sense of belonging when entering a university, this is often not the case. As Bronfenrenner (1979) explained, high school graduates in the United States undergo an ecological transition where they have to negotiate new roles in their university context. Ecclestone et al. (2010) add that these students are in the process of working on their identities in order to fit in and to behave in a manner they see as institutionally and culturally acceptable in order to belong.

As shared in chapter 2 in this thesis, there have been many different types of studies on defining community, and there is still no consensus on what this means. Definitions range from Hillery (1955) who argues that community occurs when people are in the same area, have common ties, and experience social interaction with each other, to McMillan and Chavis (1986) who argue that community is when people have membership, influence, shared emotional connections, and their needs are fulfilled by the community. And now with the movement of people and the fluidity of communities, culture, and identity, communities are now always evolving and changing based on the diversity of people in which inhabit it (Howarth, Cornish & Gillespie, 2015). As to what community means in a higher education setting, there are a variety of viewpoints with similarities and differences. Boyer (1990) believes there are six

characteristics that create community on a university campus in the United States: purposeful, just, open, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Cheng (2004) argues that being cared about, being valued as an individual, and being accepted contribute most to a student's sense of belonging.

While there has been research related to community in a general context and in a higher education context, and some definitions have overlapping elements, there does not seem to be one consistent definition. If that is the case, how can one fully explain the importance of community in a higher education setting?

Considering the potential importance of community as it relates to both international and American students, this study helped to provide an insight into the narratives that both sets of students had regarding community. How did these students negotiate belonging on campus and what were the dynamics when they interacted with each other?

Within a framework of acculturation theory, social representation theory, third space theory, Tinto's Model of Student Retention, and the theory of mattering, this qualitative study aimed to present and analyze the narratives of both American and international students during their first year at an American university. The findings of this study represent an epistemological constructionist worldview, as the students created multiple constructions of reality when it came to community, based on their own experiences. This study followed a case study design, which allowed the formation of a deep understanding of the participants involved, their interactions, sentiments, and behaviors (Woodside, 2016). By exploring the narratives of a group of students, this study provided a description, interpretation, and explanation of sense of community among students at a four-year, public research American university. By exploring these narratives, I also gained insight into how these students negotiated belonging, as well as insight into their interactions with each other. The data-collection methods included focus group discussions, journals by the students, and the researcher's journal.

In this chapter, I provide my interpretations of the findings and how they answer the research question and sub-questions and defend the methodology used to obtain the narratives. In addition, I make recommendations based on the results of this study.

- What can we learn about the sense of community by listening to the narratives of American and international students at an American university?

Sub-questions were:

- What narratives of community do international students have?
- What narratives of community do American students have?
- How do American and international students negotiate belonging on campus?
- What are the community dynamics when international and American students interact?
- How do international and American students negotiate their own and others' cultural identities?

6.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This section provides a brief summary of the eight key findings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of and how these findings answer the research question and sub questions.

Firstly, this study supports the key findings of many researchers on the importance of community, and community in higher education (Maslow, 1943; Strayhorn, 2012; Hagert, Williams, & Oe, 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Berger, 1997; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Narratives from both sets of students described how

feeling part of a university community enhanced their experiences. They felt freer, and their initial views were that the university was accepting of them. The American students felt that community was part of the university experience and that it was something they were paying for. The international students, while they believed that feeling part of the community was important, did not regard it necessarily as an expectation but rather as a bonus.

I described these viewpoints as a transactional lens for the American students and an experience lens for the international students. These viewpoints support social representation theory, a second key finding of this study. Social representation theory describes how each set of students entered a new environment bringing with them knowledge, opinions, and beliefs about different groups of people and about the new environment itself. When someone is in an unprecedented situation and has his or her normal course disrupted, the brain attempts to understand what is going on in order to defend itself (Moscovici, 1961). Throughout this study, both sets of students referred to their “personal culture” when they encountered new kinds of interactions. For example, feeling the freedom to speak more freely on campus than they would at home or the expectation of feeling part of the campus community because it was something they were paying for at the university. The American students expressed feeling an underlying discomfort of being judged or perceived as racist while the international students expected to experience discrimination on entering this new environment. This was the result of social representations they had formed before entering this new environment. For many students, both American and international, the university community was the most diverse community they had ever lived in and this was the first time they had considered race as playing a role in their sense of belonging. As social representation theory explains, a triangle effect occurs between the ego (personal culture), alter (cultural element), and object (representation), and in this case this resulted in a new cultural element for each student (Markova, Markova, & Jovchelovitch, 2008).

This study also provides a definition of community and a sense of belonging from the students' perspective, which aligns with many researchers mentioned in this thesis (Cheng, 2004; Strayhorn, 2008a; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Bogue, 2002; Boyer, 1990; Moore & Carter, 2002; Jorgenson, et al., 2018; Tinto, 2014; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Schlossberg, 1985). Both groups of students described feeling a sense of belonging when they were able to make friends, when they felt as if they could make a change and contribute to the community, when they were treated as a member of the community, shared a language, felt comfortable being their true selves in the community.

While both sets of students mentioned the same themes related to community and a sense of belonging, when it came to the specifics their viewpoints varied. For example, the American students described feelings of being able to contribute to the larger campus community as important, while the international students felt they contributed more to their smaller, intimate groups. Although both sets of students agreed on what contributed to their sense of community, this did not mean that they felt that the university always fulfilled their expectations.

This led to the third key finding of the study and that was the theme of mattering. As one of the theoretical foundations of this study, mattering is what someone feels when he/she believes that he/she counts, can make a difference, is valued and appreciated by others, and others are concerned with his/her fate (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1985, 1989). Narratives from both the American and international students supported this definition and many shared the feeling of being easily replaceable, which for some hindered their feeling of mattering. Specifically, American students said they felt that they did not matter individually; however, they came to a different conclusion that provided them with some hope that they did matter in some capacity. The American students concluded that, as a business, the university did not care about the students as individuals; however, the people who worked at the

university did care about them as individuals. One student realized for the first time that the university might not care about individual students and said towards the end of the conversation, perhaps trying to convince herself, "They have to care!" Prilleltensky (2014) argues that mattering is what makes life worth living; an individual needs to feel recognized, acknowledged and appreciated and when someone does not feel they matter the results are domination and helplessness. The international students, on the other hand, were straightforward in their claims that the university was not particularly caring about its students as individuals because there were just too many students to care about. However, they felt as if they still mattered because they did pay tuition and did matter to their smaller friendship groups. These differences in viewpoint relate to the transactional versus experience lenses of the students. American students felt that they paid for the expectation of mattering to the university, while the international students were there to receive an education. In summary, while both groups of students agreed that mattering was an important component of their sense of community, and they felt that as individuals they did not necessarily matter to the larger university community, they did matter to individual lecturers, administrators and friends.

The fourth key finding of this study underlines the caution implicit in social cohesion when it applies to building community. Harris (2010) explains that many Western governments have shifted their focus from multiculturalism to social cohesion in order to adapt to the increase in cultural diversity within communities. As a result, there are concerns about the marginalization of young people from minority backgrounds, and demands for assimilation of minority groups into the mainstream community (Harris, 2010). I suggest that there is an implicit reference to this in the narratives of the international students when discussing their interactions with the domestic students. While many international students described domestic students as having an interest in their culture and indicated that they did not necessarily feel unwelcomed by the community in general, they described not being able to develop deeper, enduring relationships with

American students. Most international students predicted that their relationships with American students would end with the conclusion of the academic year. The American students' narratives described feelings of unease and discomfort when speaking to international students because they feared misunderstandings. While the narratives support the interactive acculturation model, they also hint at one of the main limitations of the model, which aligns with the caution of social cohesion.

The narratives align with the individualism result of the interactive acculturation model, suggesting that international students did not necessarily lose their identities, but experienced alienation or rejection by the community. The interactive acculturation model was an attempt to explain more clearly the interactive relationship that immigrants have in a dominant culture (Bourhis et al, 1997). In this case, the American students represented the dominant culture. The international students' narratives suggest that, in order to go beyond simply telling people about their culture, they had to feel that their culture was fully accepted as part of the dominant group. They needed to reach a point where they felt recognized as individuals, not just representatives of a country or culture. The data suggested that interactions often did not progress to consensual integration. This goes back to the cautions of social cohesion when developing community. If an individual does not feel integrated in the community, the result may be that he or she will give in to the demands of assimilation. This is extremely important as most international students shared the feeling that in order to feel a sense of belonging to the university community, it was crucial that they develop relationships with American students. This also supports research that has shown that a domestic-based support system is crucial for international students in overcoming cultural shock and learning a new educational system (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Arthur, 2004). While international students generally felt accepted by the new university community and had positive interactions with American students, they did not feel consensually

integrated into the community and might be at greater risk of feeling pressure to assimilate.

This study also supports research on ethnic minorities' struggles to feel a sense of community on campus (Hausmann et al, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). If students do not feel that they 'fit in' and that their social and cultural practices do not fit within the institution, they believe they do not belong (Berger, 2000). While there were few American students in the study who could be described as from ethnic minorities, they did mention the demand of having to change and adapt to their new campus environment. Students from ethnic minorities are more at risk than some other groups of not completing school and are linked to not feelings of alienation (Heisserer & Parette, 2002). This underlines the point that just because students are domestic does not mean they will develop and maintain a sense of belonging in a new campus environment.

When navigating the new campus environment, both American and international students described having to balance two worlds. These narratives supported the next key finding of this study which was the role of third space theory. Particularly relevant to American ethnic minorities and international students, the narratives described "dancing on the edge of two worlds" (Kung, 2007), where students were caught in between maintaining their own culture, and a desire to engage and adapt to another group (Howarth et al., 2014). It was in this epistemological third space, created when the first space (home) and the second space (the university) came together, that students negotiated and renegotiated identities and worldviews (Bhabha, 1994). For example, international students agreed that knowing a certain level of English was crucial for them to feel accepted by the university community. American ethnic minority students, on the other hand, described having to change the way they talked on campus from how they would usually talk at home. Another domestic student described the importance of being able to communicate among the deaf community. These narratives support

the concerns of cultural theorists that one ideology in a culture may dominate and have the power to undermine other ideologies (Ryoo & McClaren, 2010). It was important that one group of students was not be perceived as superior or inferior to others.

The last key finding of this study was the importance of the social system as it related to Tinto's Model of Student Retention. However, the importance of the academic system remained unclear. Tinto (1975) argues that academic integration is viewed as grade performance, the student's intellectual development, and the student's identification with the beliefs, values, and norms of the academic system. Social integration refers to informal peer group development, faculty and staff interactions, and extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1975). One common theme that emerged from the data was the role of classes and lecturers in developing a sense of community, and the narratives focused more on the social interactions within the classroom and with the lecturers. The narratives did not focus on academic integration as defined by Tinto (1975). Some American students felt very strongly that attending classes, rather than their academic success, contributed to their sense of belonging, while other students said this was absolutely not the case. Some American students felt that since they were paying tuition fees, it was the duty of the lecturer to contribute to their sense of community through interactions in the classroom; others felt lecturers did merely what was required of them, and that was to lecture, nothing else. As for the international students, they had no expectations that classes and lecturers would contribute to their sense of community. However, many spoke fondly of professors who had been kind to them and who were willing to help them whenever necessary. While both groups of students clearly did not share narratives of academic integration contributing to their sense of community, they did agree that interactions in the classroom and with the lecturers were important in the development of a sense of community. This supported the social integration concept of Tinto's Model of Student Retention.

6.2.1 Trustworthiness of findings

In chapter four I reviewed the variety of methods to ensure the validity of the findings of this study, as validity regarding qualitative research may not be as straightforward as it is in quantitative research, but still just as important. First, this study had methodological coherence, which means I selected a research design and methodology that was appropriate based on the research question. Secondly, I built strong authenticity in this study, as I was able to build relationships with the participants beyond the role of a researcher asking questions. The participants in return felt more responsibility and interest in this study and cared about their investment and outcome of my research. Third, addressing researcher bias was important since my role, as the researcher is important in a study like this. I had to recognize any assumptions I might have, especially considering part of the motivation of this study included being a former international student in the United States and my own immigration journey to this country. By reflecting constantly through my researcher's journal, I was able to be self-aware, open to alternative interpretations, and continuously acknowledge everyone's subjectivity during this research process, including my own. This ties into the last strategy, which was reflexivity. It was critical that the participants felt comfortable sharing their authentic thoughts and opinions, not what they thought I wanted to hear. I can't completely remove myself from a study like this, nor was it necessarily desirable, however, I needed to recognize what influence I might have had on the participants and be mindful to not produce any undesirable outcomes. One example was making sure to avoid any leading questions during the focus groups, as this would have affected the validity of the data.

As for the data analysis, I followed Braun and Clark's (2006) steps for conducting thematic analysis. By following these steps, I was able to conduct a total of four cycles that included coding and theming out the data. Merriam (1998) as cited in Saldana (2013), states that our analysis and interpretations –our study's findings—will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories

that structured the study in the first place. Additionally, codes capture the essence of the research question and when put together, facilitate the development of themes (Saldana, 2013). Based on the philosophical worldview adopted for this study, in addition to consistently being guided by the theoretical foundation, this resulted in findings that provided meaning on developing sense of community in a new university campus based on this particular case study.

6.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study demonstrated how American and international students experienced community and negotiated belonging at an American university. It also demonstrated what we can learn when there are interactions between American and international students and how individual students negotiate their own and others' cultural identities. While the narratives provided data that indicated that both American and international students seemed generally satisfied with the university community on the surface, a deeper reading of the narratives provided a different story. While many universities in the United States use their unique community as a selling point, the data illuminated potential barriers that need to be further explored, as suggested by the theoretical foundation of this study. This study brought to light both the conscious and subconscious attitudes that these students at an American university had towards the campus community.

In this study, I employed acculturation theory, social representation theory, third space theory, Tinto's Model of Student Retention and the theory of mattering. This allowed me to create a theoretical framework that allowed me to be inclusive while exploring the dynamics of individual student experiences. This also assisted me in exploring not only their experiences regarding a sense of community, but also the influence of this sense of community on student retention. This serves as a unique and valuable contribution to the knowledge base in the research field of sense of community in higher education and attitudes of American and international students. In addition, the application of

acculturation theory, social representation theory, and third space theory to American and international students' experiences of community in higher education is unique and valuable.

Secondly, it is important not only to continue to add to the literature on building and assessing sense of community, but to include the individual experiences of students when interacting within a diverse environment as well. It is important to recognize that students bring with them their own set of experiences and knowledge and this determines how they process their new environment and the diverse interactions they encounter. I hope that this study begins a dialogue on the current attempts to build a sense of community on university campuses, not only in the United States but around the world. American students should not all be treated the same, just as international students and other groups of students on campus should not be treated the same when implementing sense of community strategies. This study reinforces the impact that a sense of community can have on university students; it may be a significant moment in their life affecting not only the development of their own identity, but also their understanding of others around them.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, I propose the following recommendations: define community and build intentional, measurable strategies, implement training and resources for students, lecturers and administrators, and provide platforms and opportunities for students to have diverse interactions.

6.4.1 Define community and build intentional, measurable strategies

While most universities have some type of strategic plan that guides its stakeholders in their common goals, I would recommend that universities attempt

to see building community through the eyes of their students and to ensure it is prioritized in their strategic plans and marketing. Some universities do pay attention to building community, but emphasise town and gown relations, service learning and so on. However, if a university describes community in a way that helps its students to feel that they belong, it is up to the university how it defines community as it relates to its campus culture. It should then build a more intentional strategy to make this as beneficial for students as possible. This may involve building deep, sustaining friendships among its students. It may include discussing strategies to enable lecturers to contribute to a sense of community through their teaching inside and outside the classroom. It may be a matter of addressing feelings of judgment and discrimination, or simply providing more opportunities for its students to contribute and make a difference in university projects to help counter feelings students have that they are easily replaceable. University officials could start by developing benchmarks for establishing a sense of community with its current students and, based on feedback, it could develop strategies to nurture this community with the continued involvement of students.

6.4.2 Training and resources for students, lecturers, and administrators

In order to help students to process new interactions in a diverse environment, a system of training and resources is necessary, in which students can learn and understand their own historical, social, and cultural background and that of those around them. Many of the American students in this study could not define their own culture because they didn't think they had one. In order to better understand diverse interactions, I believe one needs to have a better understanding of who they are first before they can understand the perspective of others.

This could include a series of discussions and activities on history, theories, prejudice, stereotypes and so on. These could take place in inclusive situations where students are encouraged to listen and ask questions. Data in this study suggested that when students engage in diverse interactions, they may not have the resources or knowledge to process these interactions.

I want to stress the importance of a system of training and resources, not just for American and international student interactions; such a system also has value when it comes to interactions between American-to-American and between international-to-international. This study has found that just because an individual is an American student does not necessarily mean that he or she will have a sense of community at university. Many students described the university community as the most diverse community they had ever experienced. They were referring not only to the presence of international students but also to being exposed to a diverse community that reflected the diverse population of the United States. Owing to the setting of this particular university, most American students in the sample came from rural areas. The data supported the need for resources when such American students interact.

It is also important for lecturers and administrators to have resources; they should be made aware of their own interactions so that they become more culturally sensitive. I realize that providing training for lecturers and administrators may be easier said than done, especially if they feel it is something forced on them in their already busy schedules. That is why it is important for the university to define and embrace what community means, and that lecturers and administrators join the university community. The expectation with them be that they embrace the importance of supporting such initiatives to assist in the development of students.

Implementing self-reflection activities would provide another resource for students, as well as lecturers and administrators. Such a self-reflection process would be beneficial, as individuals would be helped to analyze their own mindset, values, beliefs, and philosophies and to form a better understanding of how any prejudices, stereotypes and ideas about differences emerge. This would also provide a safe space for individuals to process their reflections before or after

participating in any discussions. Combining discussions and self-reflections could help to ensure a united approach to cultural differences.

6.4.3 Provide platforms and opportunities for students to process complex and diverse interactions

This study is an example of what can happen when students, who normally wouldn't have crossed paths, had the opportunity to interact with one another. As a result of participating in this study, each set of students ended up developing their own communities. With exception of perhaps the first focus group session, after every other session the students would continue talking in the lounge, decide to have dinner together, go to see a movie, etc. Additionally, by participating in this study, the students started to think differently about community and sense of belonging and I am excited to share with them my findings of this study.

If students are given the platforms and opportunities to have diverse interactions, this is another strategy to help them think about other concepts differently, be it societal concerns, campus issues, etc. It was through these interactions they were able to listen and learn from other students they normally wouldn't have met that expanded their viewpoints.

6.5 TRANSFERABILITY OF THIS STUDY

The meaning of transferability is that research findings and conclusions from one study can be applied in other contexts and with different participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Since this was a qualitative case study examining the narratives of a group of students in their natural setting at one university in the United States, the principal of transferability was not practical. The findings of this study may not necessarily have relevance to other contexts; however, the experiences shared by this cohort of students might reflect students' experiences at other

universities in the United States or in other countries. I hope that this study will motivate higher education administrators to analyze more closely what community means on their university campuses, the impact it has on the development of student identity. I hope that universities will be encouraged to develop strategies to help students process their interactions in diverse campus environments.

6.6 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The first item for discussion arising from my personal reflections when reviewing the researcher's journal and analyzing the data, was the community that developed between the students who participated in this study. I noticed that once the focus group session had been concluded most of the students stayed to continue discussions about academics, clubs, and other topics. This included both American and international students. International students who participated in the focus groups in particular had other international student friends who became curious about the study. Some other international students joined because all their friends were participating in the focus groups and they did not want to be left out. Those students who were involved during the entire academic year showed genuine interest in the results of the study and mentioned several times that they hoped they would be able to read the results when the study had been completed. This suggested to me that by participating, these students had begun to think more deeply about what it means to be part of a community, and had perhaps even thought about things they had never considered before participating.

The second reflection was based on the coined phrases of the lenses I proposed for these students. These lenses provided a foundation from which they viewed their community at the university. The American students viewed their community through a transactional lens, believing that they should experience a sense of community because they were paying for it. The perceptions of the international

students, on the other hand, were determined by their experience lens. International students viewed their time at the university as an experience and seemed to have few expectations regarding community; nonetheless, most observed that they felt welcomed and part of the university community. Upon further reflection, how higher education was portrayed and viewed by students related to the culture of higher education in the countries they came from. For example, it is common in the United States for students to be encouraged to ask questions in the classroom and to have discussions with professors, while in other countries this is discouraged. Students may appear to be contesting the knowledge and authority of professors if they ask too many questions (Smith, Alavinejad, & Zanganeh, 2013). When I considered the home countries of the international students who participated in this study, I realized that most of them originate from countries with a contrasting culture of higher education when compared to the United States. This meant that international students may have come to the U.S. with a different perception of what it means to have a sense of community at university.

As the researcher in this study and as a former international student, I found this to be a rewarding experience that validated the work I do as a university administrator in building sustainable relationships between American and international students. It also gave me more insight into how I could help students develop their identity through cultural interactions. I will always be grateful to the students who participated in this study and who trusted me with their thoughts and experiences. I plan to follow up with them and share with them the results of my study.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This study has implications for universities when it comes to the role they play in developing a sense of community among their students. The data from this study could assist universities in their thinking about the type of experience they want

to create for their students and, in return, could increase student engagement, satisfaction and retention in the competitive world of student recruitment. Universities could use these findings when considering how to define community on their campuses more specifically, in order to provide better services that might set them apart from competing institutions.

I hope this research study has highlighted the complexity of identity development, and of how students process cultural interactions. I hope lecturers and administrators will consider assessing and implementing strategies to support students socially and academically after reviewing these findings. The experiences and knowledge that students gain while being part of a university community are carried with them into later life. Lecturers and administrators should listen to students and to each other when defining community and implementing strategies. Everyone is an expert in his or her worldview and what he or she experiences on campus. There should be inclusive dialogue when designing and implementing strategies. Only by listening to students and what it means for them to feel part of a university community, especially considering the fluidity of communities today, will leadership improve its strategies. With time and resources, staff members can create the best opportunities for creating a greater sense of community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Subject: Invitation to participate in research

Dear (insert name),

My name is Eron Memaj and as a former international student, I can understand how exciting, and intimidating, it is to begin the journey of studying in the United States. It is a new culture, new language, and new university.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study that will investigate how international students and American students experience belonging in a new campus community. As you begin your new year at [name of university], I would like to hear your experiences of the successes and struggles of finding community in a new campus environment.

By participating in this study, nothing changes in your day-to-day activities for the academic year. The time commitment would be limited and would involve the following:

- Reflecting on your experiences by keeping a journal that would be updated once a week
- Meeting with other new students once a month to share experiences
- Meeting with me twice during the semester to share your experiences.

Sharing your experiences would help university staff to better understand what it means for new international students to find belonging and community in a new U.S. campus environment. It may also help them to create better programming for future students.

If you have any questions before making a decision, or would like to sign up immediately, please contact me at ememaj@xxxx.edu or call XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Eron Memaj
ememaj@xxxx.edu
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Subject: Study participation confirmation

Dear (insert name),

I hope you are well today! You are receiving this email because we talked previously about your participation in a research study on how international students and American students construct belonging in a new campus environment.

I am asking you to accept this invitation to participate in the study. We will have our first meeting on **Thursday, September 28 at 7 p.m. in the XXX Hall first floor lounge**. I will go over all the details of participating in this study.

Please reply to this email, letting me know whether you will be at the meeting.

Thank you and I look forward to seeing you next week.

Appendix 2

(University logo)

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study on how international students and American students construct belonging in a new campus environment. I am asking you to formally accept this invitation to participate in this study because you signed up via email on (insert date). Please read this form carefully as it explains important details about the study and your participation. You may ask questions before signing this form.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how international students and American students construct belonging in a new campus environment.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be part of this study, I will ask you to complete the following tasks from September 14, 2015 until May 16, 2016:

- Keep a weekly journal on Google Drive, reflecting on your experiences of finding belonging in the campus community. I will provide questions for you to think about when reflecting on these experiences.
- Participate in monthly focus group discussions with other participants in this study. This will allow you to hear from other participants and to share your experiences with your peers.
- Meet with me one-on-one twice each semester to discuss your experiences of finding belonging in the campus community.
- Complete two surveys, one at the beginning of the academic year and one at the end of the academic year.

Risks and benefits: Taking part in this study means being asked to participate in focus group discussions. Information shared by participants in focus groups should remain confidential and I will discuss this at the beginning of each focus group session, but there is no guarantee that confidentiality will be maintained by all participants. Apart from this, I do not anticipate any risks to you by participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. There are no direct benefits to you. I wish to know what is like for you as a student to find belonging and perhaps the data gathered will help administrators to better serve future students.

Your answers will be confidential: The records of this study will be kept private. Any report I make public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be coded in such a way that your information cannot be traced to you. Electronic records will be password protected and saved on a jump drive in a locked location accessible only to me. Handwritten notes I take during interviews and focus groups will be typed,

password protected, and saved on the jump drive. Handwritten notes will be shredded. No tape or video recording will take place.

Participation is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may ignore any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to ignore questions asked during this study, it will not affect your current or future relationship with [name of university]. If you decide to take part in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Eron Memaj. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Eron Memaj at ememaj@XXXX.edu or at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at XXXX XXXXX University at XXX-XXX-XXXX or Prof. Ronelle Carolissen (Supervisor) at rlc2@sun.ac.za.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____

Date _____

Your Name
(printed) _____

Appendix 3

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

September 28, 2016 (both American and international)

After going over the consent form and more details about the study, I started asking just a few questions to gauge what they thought before they came to the university and their initial thoughts on their transition to campus.

What were you most nervous about before coming to campus?

Do you remember your first day on campus? How did it go?

What was your first impression of the university? Did it match with what you previously thought before coming here?

November 1 and November 3, 2016

The focus group is an opportunity for participants to share their experiences in finding community in a new campus environment. The questions will be prompts to help begin and sustain interactions.

1. Can you describe your experience when you first arrived on campus?
2. What perceptions did you have of certain cultures before your arrival to campus?
3. Can you describe your culture and any cultural differences you've noticed since being on campus?
4. How are you making new friends on campus?
 - a. Are you encountering any difficulties?
 - b. What helps you make friends?
5. What does it mean to you to belong in a community?
 - a. What does "community" mean to you?
6. Do you feel a sense of community on campus?
 - a. What makes it feel like a community?
 - b. What could make the campus feel more like a community?
7. Do you interact with those of different cultures?
8. Can you say you are close friends with someone of a different culture?

9. Do you find it harder to meet someone of a different culture and be friends? Why or why not?
10. In order to feel part of a community, did you have to change any viewpoints? Or did any of your views change after joining a community?

November 29, 2016 (American) and **December 1, 2016** (international)

The focus group is an opportunity for participants to share their experiences in finding community in a new campus environment. The questions will be prompts to help begin and sustain interactions.

During the last focus group we talked about initial experiences when first arriving on campus, developing new friendships, and finding new communities. Tonight we'll be focusing on friendships, as friendships play a major role in feeling part of a community.

1. So you have been on campus for a few months. Did you make most of your new friends at the beginning of the semester or did you continually make friends throughout the semester?
 - a. Is it easier to make friends at the beginning of the semester?
 - b. Is it a goal to keep making friends throughout the year? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the friendships you made so far will last after this semester is over? Why or why not?
3. Do you find yourself acting differently with your campus friends than with your at-home friends? For example: speaking differently, thinking differently, etc.
4. In the last few journals I asked you to think about culture. Culture can be defined as a group or place having the same beliefs, customs, or the same way of thinking. Culture can be found everywhere—from small towns, to offices, residence halls, states, and countries.
 - a. What is the culture of your community back home? What influences that culture?
 - b. Are there similarities with your [name of university] community?

- c. Are there any differences?
5. Now thinking about your culture back home and the current friends you have made so far, do your friends share the same culture as you? What are those similarities?
6. Do you think you can be friends with someone who has a conflict with your culture? Have you been in that situation and what did you do?

January 25, 2017

International students

1. How did you feel about your English proficiency before you started at [name of university]? Confident or not confident?
2. Has that changed since you started studying here?
3. Learning English back home is different than speaking it here. What are some of those differences?
4. Do you find yourself struggling to communicate in English with students, faculty, or staff?
5. Do you feel people talk to you differently or treat you differently because English is not your first language?
6. On a scale of 1-10, one being not comfortable and 10 being really comfortable, how would you rate how comfortable you are speaking English to :
 - a. Someone you just met
 - b. A friend
 - c. A professor/staff memberWhy did you pick that number ?
7. Do you feel more comfortable speaking English to a group of native speakers or to a group of non-native English speakers? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel language has had any affect in your ability to feel like you belong at [name of university]?

Don't forget to do your journal! The question does ask about language, but more in a classroom setting.

American students

Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of new college students do not return for their sophomore year.

1. Why do you think students don't return for their sophomore year?
2. Do you plan to return next year to [name of university]? Does having a sense of belonging play a role in your decision to return?

Research shows that the first six weeks are critical to have students feel like they belong.

So now your first semester is completed ...or some of you have to think back to your first semester...let's see what, if anything, helped you feel like you belonged.

3. Everyone has to attend [orientation at name of university]? and welcome weekend activities. What do you remember about [orientation at name of university]?
4. Do you feel those things helped you in developing a sense of belonging?
5. You had to complete a first-year experience course. Tell me about that class—what did you like about it? What didn't you like?
6. Do you feel like taking that course helped develop your sense of belonging? Why or why not?
7. Out of everything you experienced your first semester—what do you think had the biggest impact on making you feel you belong at [name of university]? Why? If you don't feel like you belong—why not?

February 25, 2017

The purpose of this study is to find out how international and American students develop a sense of belonging in a new campus environment. We've talked about a variety of factors, such as developing friendships, cultural differences, academics, etc.

1. I wanted to start tonight by asking—has anyone had any negative experiences so far at [name of university]? Could be an interaction you had with someone or a bad class.
2. Do you think that negative experience had any influence on your feeling if you belong?
3. Has anyone experienced any type of discrimination? This means you were treated badly mostly related to your race, age, or sex.
4. If you think someone experiences discrimination, do you think that can affect if they feel like they belong on campus?
5. The main goal of attending college is to earn a degree. Do you think it's important for you to feel like you belong at the university in order to earn your degree?
6. What do you think contributes more to your feeling of belonging at [name of university]; your experience in the classroom or your social life? Why?
7. Can you feel like you belong with just one of these things? For ex: can you feel like you belong if you enjoy your classes, but don't feel like you have any friends at [name of university]. Or you hate your classes, but developed meaningful friendships.

Lastly—this is something you don't have to answer now, but have you observed yourself changing in any way since you started at [name of university]? Perhaps the way you think about certain things? Have you felt like you had to negotiate or change yourself to feel like you belonged here?

March 22, 2017

The purpose of the study is to learn how new students develop a sense of belonging in a new campus environment. We've looked at all different types of communities you are part of—residence hall, classrooms, etc. So now let's take a look at the bigger picture:

1. Do you feel [name of university] cares about you?

2. Do you feel that you matter at [name of university]?
3. Do you feel that you are a person of influence or that you can contribute to change at the university?
4. Do you think feeling like you can influence or change something at the university is important in feeling like you belong here?
5. What is your perception about the campus climate?

Appendix 4

NOTICE OF APPROVALS

[Name]
on behalf of
RAGS Research Compliance
Wed 8/26/2015 4:39 PM

RE: Protocol #15-382 - entitled “Exploring Narratives of Community of International Students and Local Students at a Research-Intensive American University”

We have assigned your application the following IRB number: 15-382. Please reference this number when corresponding with our office regarding your application.

The [name of university] Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:

- Exemption 2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation

This application was approved on August 26, 2015.

****Submission of annual review reports is not required for Level 1/Exempt projects. We do NOT stamp Level I protocol consent documents.*

If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted. Visit our website for modification forms.

[Name of university] has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP): [FWA Number 00001853](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at XXX-XXX-XXXX Researchcompliance@xxx.edu or by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX-XXX-XXXX.

[Name of university] Office of Research Compliance
[Name of building location] | Fax XXX-XXX-XXXX

[Name] Graduate Assistant | XXX-XXX-XXXX | [Email]

[Name] | Administrator | XXX-XXX-XXXX | [Email]

[Name] | Assistant Director | XXX-XXX-XXXX | [Email]

[Name] | Director | XXX-XXX-XXXX | [Email]

For links to obtain general information, access forms, and complete required training, visit our website at [website address].



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Approval Notice
New Application

14-Jun-2016
Memaj, Eron E

Proposal #: SU-HSD-002263

Title: Exploring narratives of community among international and local students at a research-intensive American university.

Dear Mr Eron Memaj,

Your **New Application** received on **07-Jun-2016**, was reviewed
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: **10-Jun-2016 -09-Jun-2017**

General comments:

The REC concurs with the DESC and their feedback provided in the DESC report. The researcher should therefore adhere to the undertakings as stipulated by the supervisor and the DESC.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (SU-HSD-002263)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles, Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Included Documents:

DESC Report

REC: Humanities New Application

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)