GENDER ROLE DISRUPTION AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG WIVES OF
CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2007
To my parents, who are always my supporters
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Suzanna Smith and Dr. Marilyn Swisher from the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and Dr. Danling Fu from the Department of Educational Psychology, for their patience and guidance. I especially want to thank Dr. Smith for spending so much time assisting me with this study by listening to my struggles, giving advice, and editing every single page of the thesis.

I would also like to thank those Chinese sojourning wives who participated in this study. Their willingness to share their life experiences made this project happen. The perseverance and wisdom they showed when encountering life struggles inspired and encouraged me. Hopefully their insights will also help other people to understand the life of sojourning families who have temporarily relocated overseas.

Finally I would like to thank the Graduate and Family Housing Office at the University of Florida that helped me recruit the participants. I also want to thank my peers from Family, Youth and Community Science for sharing their experiences with research and their encouragement throughout the process of carrying out the thesis research.
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The purpose of this study was to examine how gender role disruption affects marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives of international students, through the mediating effect of self-esteem. This study was guided by two theories, symbolic interactionism and feminism.

The study sample comprised Chinese sojourning wives who registered with the international center at the University of Florida and held F-2, J-2 or H-2 visas. As dependents, they came to the U.S. with their husbands, who were advancing their education. I hypothesized that gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction were associated.

A self-completion questionnaire was conducted at the first stage with 40 Chinese wives to elicit the information about gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction. Ten of the forty wives were chosen for follow-up interviews. The interviews were used to achieve both complex and fuller explanations of the marriage and family experience of sojourning Chinese wives. This process generated both quantitative and qualitative data.

Findings of quantitative data indicated that gender role disruption did not significantly affect marital satisfaction. However, the findings of qualitative portion of the study suggested
that gender role disruption did appear to be related to marital satisfaction, although indirectly, through other variables not measured in the quantitative portion of the study. In particular, individual characteristics, spousal support, and adjustment to the new culture seem to be important to marital satisfaction in the sojourning context. Further research, using a larger sample and additional variables brought out through the qualitative data, would shed more light on this process. Implications for counselors, advisors, and others working with international students and their families are discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Adapting to a new culture is stressful for both individuals and families (Kline & Liu, 2005). International relocation often brings a loss of social support from the home country and alienation from familiar social institutions and cultural practices, and produces a highly stressful situation (Kline & Liu, 2005; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). As indicated by Zhou (2000), in order to adjust to the new culture, those who move to a new culture have to “redefine” (p.445) their cultural values, social norms and behavior patterns in new social contexts. Changes in family structure, gender roles and gender relations during the process of adaptation can lead to conflicts in every area of family life, and the marital relationship is no exception (Da, 2003; Zhou 2000).

Family Life and Marriage of Sojourning Students

A number of researchers have investigated the cultural adjustment of sojourners and indicated that sojourners are susceptible to stress and psychological problems caused by the loss of social networks and the confusion in roles and self identity due to the change of environment (Church, 1982; Kline & Liu, 2005; Li & Gasser, 2005). Sojourning adjustment refers to the “psychological adjustment of relatively short-term visitors to new cultures where permanent settlement is not the purpose of sojourn” (Church, 1982, p. 540). International students are defined as one segment of the sojourners (Church, 1982). Although some research indicates that spouses play an important role in the adjustment experience of sojourners, overall, very little attention has been given to the role of the spouse during relocation. Among different sojourner groups, the family and married life of international students and their spouses has received even less attention. As indicate by Goff (2004), research examining the marriages of international students is scant.
Gender and Marriage of Chinese Sojourning Families

Zhou (2000) explored the relationships of Chinese middle class women and their husbands through the perspective of gender ideology. These Chinese women were well educated and moved to the U.S. with their husbands who were pursuing higher education. Zhou’s (2000) research showed that changes in gender roles during the process of international relocation caused marital tension or even violence. Chinese women have an egalitarian gender ideology instilled during Communist regime, and when they come to the U.S., face dramatic changes that actually increase their dependence on their spouses. Furthermore, Chinese women’s self-esteem or self-concept may play a pivotal role in marital happiness that has not been addressed in work on other sojourning populations. However, there is very little research on Chinese sojourning couples and their marital satisfaction that can help us understand these issues. This research begins to address this gap in the literature by focusing on changing gender roles, self-esteem, and marital satisfaction among a very unique subset of Chinese sojourners, wives of Chinese students in the U.S.

According to Open Doors, the annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions remained steady at 564,766 in 2005-2006. Mainland China remained as the second largest sending country, with 62,582 students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2007). Similarly, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), a program of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, reported that as of March 31, 2006, China ranked third in active international students, with 54,486 students, and represented 8.9% of the international student population. The number of dependents reached 14,588 as of March 31, 2006, including spouses and qualifying children (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,
2006). With this large number of international students and their dependants in the U.S., more research is needed to understand their family life in the United States.

**Purpose of Study**

This research examined how gender role disruption affects marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives through the mediating effect of self-esteem. The results of the research will add to the limited existing literature about marital relationships of Chinese international students and further the understanding of gender and family life of international sojourners.

**Research Questions**

- **Research question 1:** How does gender role disruption among sojourning Chinese wives with dependent status affect marital satisfaction?
- **Research question 2:** What are the mediating effects of self-esteem in marital satisfaction in Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status?

**Hypotheses**

- **H1A:** Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status who report higher levels of gender role disruption will report lower levels of marital satisfaction.
- **H10:** There will be no association between gender role disruption and marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.
- **H2A:** There will be a positive association between self-esteem and marital satisfaction, such that the higher the self-esteem, the higher the marital satisfaction, among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.
- **H20:** There will be no association between self-esteem and marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.
- **H3A:** There will be a negative association between gender role disruption and self-esteem, such that the higher the gender role disruption, the lower the self-esteem
- **H30:** There will be no association between gender role disruption and self-esteem.
- **H4A:** Self-esteem accounts for the influence of gender role disruption on marital satisfaction
• **H4**: Self-esteem does not account for the influence of gender role disruption on marital satisfaction

**Definitions of Terms**

**Gender.** While sex refers to “biological assignment” (Ingoldsby, Smith & Miller, 2004, p.189), gender refers to “the social meanings and behaviors ascribed to one’s sex, particularly with regard to roles and behaviors expected of someone because of one’s sex” (Ingoldsby, et al., 2004, p.193). Important for this study, gender varies under specific social, historical and cultural contexts.

**Gender ideology.** In this research, ideology refers to “images, concepts, and premises that influence what people believe and value and how they are expect to act. In this study, gender ideology concerns the beliefs and feelings that men and women have about manhood, womanhood, and marital roles of men and women” (Morash, Bui, & Santiago, 2000, p.71).

**Gender role disruption.** Gender role disruption is used here to describe the process that occurs when Chinese women come to America as dependants and take a domestic and subordinate role that conflicts with the gender ideology instilled in contemporary China. Gender role disruption is the conflict between real gender roles and gender ideology.

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem is one of the most important parts of self-concept and is a frequently used concept within symbolic interactionism (Cast & Burke, 2002; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), one of the guiding theories of this research. Self-esteem generally refers to “how one evaluates one’s self” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, 1993, p.147).

**Marital satisfaction.** Marital satisfaction is defined here as the global evaluation of personal, subjective satisfaction with the quality of the marital relationship (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000).
**Chinese international students and scholars.** Chinese international students and scholars is a term that refers to those who hold F-1, J-1, H-1 visa while attending a university. The Chinese international students and scholars in this study are all attending the University of Florida.

**Chinese sojourning wives.** In this study, this term refers to the wives of Chinese international students at the University of Florida who hold F-2, J-2, and H-4 status.

**Significance of Study**

Little research has been done to examine the married lives of international sojourners. As a segment of international sojourners, international students and scholars have received little attention, even though Chinese students represent a large segment of international students. With this large number of Chinese international students and scholars and their spouses, more research is needed to explore the quality of their marital relationships. This information is relevant to families adjusting to life in the U.S., to international centers serving this population, and to advisers and counselors working directly with students and their spouses.

This research also has potential theoretical significance. It predicts that gender role disruption caused by international relocation could be a factor impacting marital satisfaction, and takes self-esteem into consideration as a potential mediating factor between the two constructs of gender role disruption and marital satisfaction. This research frames its research questions and hypotheses based on symbolic interactionism and feminist theory and develops and examines a conceptual model.

**Summary**

It is expected that this research will enrich the literature and expand the understanding of the family relationships of Chinese international students by focusing on marital satisfaction among a select group of wives of Chinese students in the U.S. In addition, this research will
contribute to discussions of the usefulness of theories of symbolic interactionism and feminism, particularly in a cross-cultural context.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

According to Open Doors, the annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions remained steady at 564,766 in 2005-2006. International students make up 16 percent of the graduate students in the U.S. (Goff, 2004). Mainland China remained as the second largest sending country, with 62,582 students in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2006). Similarly, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), a program of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, reported that as of March 31, 2006, China ranked third in active international students from China, with 54,486 students, and represented 8.9% of the international student population. The number of dependents reached 14,588 as of March 31, 2006, including spouses and qualifying children (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2006). More research is needed to understand the family life of this large number of international students and their dependants in the U.S.,

In fact, very little is known about the family life of international students and dependents (Goff, 2004). There is reason to believe, however, that their family life may be stressful because of the challenges of adjusting to a new culture and way of life, the demands of graduate study (Goff, 2004; Gold, 2006; Katz, Monnier, & Libet, 2000), the associated stress of financial pressures, and little time with romantic partners (Katz et al., 2000). As international students take on multiple roles in school and family, inter-role conflicts and stress may contribute to marital dissatisfaction or distress (Goff, 2004). This chapter presented a summary of the available research that involved “sojourner adjustment” (Church, 1982), and then focuses specifically on Chinese international students’ family and marriage life.
Family Life and Marriage of Sojourning Students

A number of researchers have investigated the cultural adjustment of sojourners, and have found that sojourners are susceptible to stress and psychological problems caused by the loss of social networks and the confusion in roles and self identity due to the change of environment (Church, 1982; James, Hunsley, Navara & Alles, 2004; Kline & Liu, 2005; Li and Gasser, 2005). Sojourning adjustment refers to the “psychological adjustment of relatively short-term visitors to new cultures where permanent settlement is not the purpose of sojourn” (Church, 1982, p. 540). International students are defined as one segment of the sojourners (Church, 1982). As indicated by James et al. (2004), despite the existing literature exploring sojourner adjustment, little attention has been given to the role of the spouse during the adjustment process. In a research exploring the marriages of a group of sojourners in Nepal, James et al. (2004) found that the spouse played an important role in the adjustment experience of sojourners. Among different sojourner groups, the family and married life of international students has received little attention. As indicate by Goff (2004), research examining the marriages of international students is scant.

Some relevant information comes from Gold (2006), who proposed that graduate school was a transition confronting the whole family system, and revealed that graduate study put great emotional and financial stress on students’ marriages. Compared with their non-married peers, married graduate students adapted relatively poorly to graduate study. International students face the additional challenge adapting to a whole new culture, which may make their marital life even more stressful. However, despite the negative influence of graduate school on marriage, graduate school may also promote family unity when the whole family works through this process (Gold, 2006). This positive influence may exist among the marriages of international students but has remained unaddressed in the existing research.
Marriage among Chinese International Students

In order to explore the family life of Chinese international students, Gao (1998) interviewed 28 Chinese men and women who came to the U.S. to attend school or to join their spouses, and were divorced or in a process of divorcing when interviewed. Gao approached the dissolution of marriage of these sojourning students from the perspective of power by examining the timing of entrance to the U.S., couple’s visa status and their economic status. Gao stated that the process of international relocation represents “an invisible but omnipresent symbol of empowerment and disempowerment” (p.93). Usually one partner, either man or woman, initiated the move to the U.S., came earlier, and then sponsored their spouse’s journey. Those who came earlier believed they gained prestige in the marital relationship by initiating the move, and in turn they perceived that they owned the decision making power in their marital relationships. The research showed that when this power was challenged or violated, marital tension appeared in couples. Visa status was also attached to power. Gao found that those who held an F-1 visa, especially men, believed that they were the owner of their marriage and had privileges in their marriage. One husband emotionally and physically abused his wife when she did not serve as he expected, and he justified his cruel treatment as a punishment. Usually, Chinese international students funded their life with graduate assistantships, which enabled the students to be the provider in their marriage. As the research showed, the spouses who were in the “provider” status thought they have the right to ask their partners to do what they thought was right, although their partner might not agree.

Goff (2004) interviewed ten Chinese couples to explore how ecological factors influenced international students’ marriages, and also how gender affected relationships between husbands and wives. In most cases, the husbands initiated the trip to the U.S. and the wives gave up their careers to join their husband. These wives reported their feelings and concerns about the new
environment. For example, one wife, who identified herself as a career woman, talked about her boredom and frustration about being left at home doing nothing and feeling lonely. Another wife felt distressed about financial dependence. Goff also found that not having enough time together due to the husband’s busy school schedule was identified by wives as a problem in the marital relationship.

**Impacts of Immigration on Marriage among Chinese Immigrants**

Adapting to a new culture is stressful for both individuals and families (Kline & Liu, 2005). Immigration often brings the loss of social support from the home country and alienation from “familiar social institutions and cultural practices” (Schwartz et al., 2006, p.2), producing a highly stressful situation (Kline & Liu, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2006). In order to adjust to the new culture, immigrants have to redefine their cultural values, social norms and behavior patterns under new social contexts (Zhou, 2000). The change of family structure, gender roles and gender relations during the process of adaptation can lead to conflicts in every area of family life and the marital relationship is no exception (Da, 2003 & Zhou 2000;).

Although sojourners are different from immigrants in term of the resident’s status, they may share the common experience of adapting to a new culture. According to Zhou (2000), some Chinese immigrant families first came to the U.S. to pursue their education; later at least one partner got a job, and they gradually changed their resident status. Since little research has been conducted about the family life of Chinese sojourners, literature about immigrants was reviewed to shed some light on the adjustment experience of Chinese sojourners.

Some research has examined gender relations and marriage among Chinese immigrants in Western countries. Da’s (2003) research studied the marital relationships of Chinese immigrant couples in Australia and found that the different impacts of immigration on men and women’s expectations of marriage contributed to marital dissatisfaction. Due to the change in the social
environment, wives expected husbands to be more supportive, caring and romantic, which made the husbands feel stressed (Da, 2003). In a study of Chinese immigrants in America, Zhou (2000) explored the relationships of Chinese middle class women and their husbands through the perspective of gender ideology. Zhou’s (2000) research also showed that changes in gender roles of the spouses as a result of immigration caused marital tension or violence. However, other research has found that immigrant women reported increased intimacy with their husbands after immigration (Man, 1995).

In a research about women from Hong Kong immigrating to Canada, Man (1995) showed that immigration drew the husband and wife closer. Having fewer career demands allowed husbands to spend more time with their wives, and husbands and wives depended on each other more to overcome the “common struggle” (p.316) with a new culture. Certainly the cultural background of the spouses, including the gender role ideologies of home countries, frames the impact of international relocation on marriage. Therefore, I now take a closer look at the nature of Chinese marriage, to better understand the potential impact of international relocation on the marital relationship.

**Marital and Gender Relationships of Chinese Couples**

Although marriage is a universal institution in almost all societies, it is also culturally specific and needs to be examined in light of a specific cultural background. According to Ma (1996), “marriage is a culture-bound and societally-defined bond celebrated, structured, and experienced in different ways according to the cultural framework in which it occurs” (Ma, 1996, p. iii).

Compared with Western marriages, formed on the basis of romantic love between two people, traditional Chinese marriage has historically been dominated by Confucian values that emphasize filial obligations, rather than romantic relationships, as a foundation for marriage.
Under this interpretation, divorce was seldom viewed as a solution for marital dissatisfaction (Ma, 1996). However, after 1949, during the regime of Communism, and especially after 1980 when China moved to an open door policy, people began to hold more liberal attitudes toward marriage, and couples began to marry for the sake of love. There is research indicating that “traditional Chinese family values have gradually been replaced by Western family values,” and “more egalitarian gender roles have replaced the traditional gender roles in Chinese marriage” (Shek, 2006, p. 278). Divorce in China also increased as a result of liberal attitudes toward marriage, from 5% in 1981 to 12% in 1996 (Goff, 2004).

However, despite more liberal attitudes toward marriage, a patriarchal attitude is still common in modern Chinese marriage. For example, Goff (2004) reported that Chinese husbands still want wives to take care of the housework and do not like the idea that wives have a higher education level or a better career. In addition, research on gender relationships of Chinese couples showed that “while women held egalitarian values across cohorts, men’s identification with egalitarian gender attitudes appeared to decline across cohorts” (Shek, 2006, p.280).

Shek’s (1995) study of 738 husbands and 761 wives suggested that gender differences in Chinese marital relationships exist, and men enjoy more marital satisfaction than women (Shek, 1995). One explanation for this difference is that the homemaker role taken by women in a marriage is inherently unfavorable. In addition, women encounter role conflicts if they are responsible for the housework while at the same time holding down a full time job. The other explanation is that women have higher expectations for intimacy and emotional support from their marital relationship, which intensifies their unfavorable situation if husbands do not provide this. Shek (1995) also found that females define their identities based on marital roles and “rely more on marriage as a source of gratification” (p.700).
Gender Role Disruption among Sojourning Chinese Wives

During the Communist regime beginning in 1949, the promotion of gender equality encouraged women to enter into the labor force. As a result, most women migrating to the U.S. have received a good education in China and have had work experience before moving (Zhou, 2000). As Zhou (2000) has observed, “paid employment is an indispensable part of womanhood for contemporary mainland Chinese” (p.449). Zhou’s (2000) research explored how migration impacted gender ideology and household relationships among a group of middle class women who came to the U.S. with their husbands, who were pursuing higher education. Zhou defined middle class women as those who were well-educated. This study showed that only a small proportion of those dependent wives had opportunities to go to school. Zhou explained that the husbands who came to the U.S. earlier became the center of the family and women who came later as dependents were supposed to support their husband by taking care of the children and housework. Many women also worked in restaurants or as nannies to contribute to family income. These factors hindered their opportunities to go back to school to for their own development, and increased their dependence on their husband. Although most of the women took a domestic and subordinate role at first, in the long run this situation became intolerable because it challenged “the most fundamental gender discourse they were indoctrinated into in China” (Zhou, 2000, p.455). For these women, unemployment meant that they were “useless and amount to nothing” (Zhou, 2000, p.455). For example, a wife who was interviewed showed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the role to of housewife and complained that the role change impaired her dignity. She tried to go back to school but her husband wanted her to be a housewife and resorted to violence to stop her from attending school. In addition, Zhou indicated that Chinese men have very negative viewpoints about the role of housewife. One woman complained that even though women contributed to their husbands’ development by
taking on the role of housewife, men do not show respect or appreciation. Thus, it appears that there is a disconnection between Chinese gender role ideology and the real life experiences of Chinese women who come to America as dependants and take a domestic and subordinate role. And, while it appears that this gender role disruption negatively affects how women relate to their husband, there is little if any information about these processes. Some research suggests that self-esteem may play a pivotal role.

According to the Voss, Markiewicz & Doyle’s (1999) sociometer hypothesis, “self-esteem systems serve as an index of the degree of inclusion vs. exclusion by others. Low self-esteem, or negative feelings about the self, is believed to reflect exclusion from interpersonal relationships” (p.107). In marital relationships, people with low esteem will dramatically underestimate how their partner loves and values them, while people with high esteem will better understand how their partners loves and values them (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2006). There is research empirically indicating that self-esteem is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Shackelford, 2001). And, while there is reason to believe that Chinese women’s self-esteem suffers as a result of their new domestic life, this topic is unaddressed in the literature about sojourning families.

Theoretical Perspectives

The two theories guiding this research are symbolic interactionism and feminism. Each of these is discussed below.

Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic interactionism “occupies a unique and important position in family studies” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p.135). It has been used since early 1900s and is still commonly used in today’s family research (Ingoldsby, Smith & Miller, 2004). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the concept of self, stating that people develop a sense of self through interaction with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). According to Weger (2005),
Cooley (1922) stated that an individual’s beliefs about the self “are created and maintained through observing the way others act toward the self” (p.20).

Self-esteem is one of the most important parts of self-concept, frequently used within symbolic interactionism (Cast & Burke, 2002; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Self-esteem generally refers to “how one evaluates one’s self” (p.147). According to Cast and Burke (2002), self-esteem is a frequently used concept being studied in the area of social psychology; however “there is there is no overall theory of self-esteem” (p.1041). Self-esteem received much attention during a period in the research concerning “self,” and it seems to be synonymous with self-concept (Cast & & Burke, 2002, p.1041). Symbolic interactionist theorists believe that “the desire to have and maintain a positive self-esteem is a powerful motive for behavior, and that behavior exerts an important influence on self-esteem” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p.147). Symbolic interactionism is relevant to my research because it encompasses this notion of self-esteem. I am going to examine how the self-esteem of wives who come to the U.S. as dependent changes, and how these changes in self-esteem impact their interaction with their husbands.

**Feminist theory.** Feminist theory originated from feminist movements that seek equality for women. According to feminist theory, gender is not a biological concept but a socially constructed concept (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). While sex refers to “biological assignment” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p.189), gender refers to “the social meanings and behaviors ascribed to one’s sex, particularly with regard to roles and behaviors expected of someone because of one’s sex” (Ingoldsby, et al., 2004, p.193). Gender varies under specific social, historical and cultural contexts. One must understand “the larger context to understand the position of women in family” (Ingoldsby et al., 2004, p, 190). Women are put in an unfavorable position in the power
relationship with men because of the roles assigned to them by their societies (Ingoldsby, et al., 2004).

Shek’s (1995) research about Chinese couples has shown that one of the reasons that the Chinese husbands reported more marital satisfaction than wives was that the labor division, where women take on the less rewarding role of housewife, inherently favors men. Zhou’s (2000) research has also shown that Chinese women, instead of pursuing their education, devoted themselves to supporting their husband’s education and family responsibilities out of the pressure of “the Chinese ideal of a virtuous wife and good mother” (p. 455). This previous research on Chinese couples corresponds to the Bernard’s (1972) finding that the experiences of men and women in marriage are different. In this study, I am going to adopt a feminist perspective to examine how wives feel about their marriage in a new environment, and particularly, how changing gender roles in the new sojourning context influence their marriage. I will include a qualitative component that will allow wives to speak independently of their husbands about their own views of the sojourning experience and their marital relationship.

**Conceptual Framework of Study**

There are gaps in our understanding of gender role disruption due to cultural adjustment and marital satisfaction and the role of self-esteem. Previous literature examined the association among gender roles, self-esteem and marital satisfaction, but never put these three variable together to examine the association pattern. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a mediator is a variable that accounts for the association between predictor and outcome variables. The mediator model explains how predictor variables impact outcome variable via the mediating effect of internal psychological factors. In my research, based on the literature about the associations among gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction, I propose that self-esteem, which is an internal psychological variable, may play a mediator role that accounts
for the relation between gender role disruption and marital satisfaction. Based on symbolic interactionism and feminist theory, in this research, I am going to examine how gender role disruption relates to self-esteem and marital satisfaction. The conceptual framework of this research is as follows.

![Conceptual model](image)

**Research Questions**

- **Research question 1**: How does gender role disruption among sojourning Chinese wives with dependent status affect marital satisfaction?

- **Research question 2**: What are the mediating effects of self-esteem in marital satisfaction in Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status?

**Hypotheses**

- **H1**: Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status who report higher levels of gender role disruption will report lower levels of marital satisfaction.

- **H10**: There will be no association between gender role disruption and marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.

- **H2**: There will be a positive association between self-esteem and marital satisfaction, such that the higher the self-esteem, the higher the marital satisfaction, among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.

- **H20**: There will be no association between self-esteem and marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent status.

- **H3**: There will be a negative association between gender role disruption and self-esteem, such that the higher the gender role disruption, the lower the self-esteem.

- **H30**: There will be no association between gender role disruption and self-esteem.

- **H4**: Self-esteem accounts for the influence of gender role disruption on marital satisfaction.
• **H4₀**: Self-esteem does not account for the influence of gender role disruption on marital satisfaction.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how gender role disruption and self-esteem affect marital satisfaction among Chinese sojourning wives with dependent visa status. This chapter explains how this study was conducted, including the research design, sample selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

The research design of this study included two stages. A cross-sectional design was used at the first stage and a case study design was used at the second stage. As suggested by Bryman (2004), a cross-sectional design is used to collect data of two or more variables from more than one case to examine the variation in each variable and discover the pattern of association. A cross-sectional design was used in this study to examine the variation in marital satisfaction, gender role disruption and self-esteem, and to explore how these three variables were associated with each other. A case study design was used at the second stage to “achieve both complex and fuller explanations of phenomena” (de Vaus, 2001, p.221) and to maximize explanatory power (de Vaus, 2001). At this stage, I chose cases based on marital satisfaction scores so that I could compare cases with high score and low score on marital satisfaction. I intended to explore how these cases varied from each other with regard to gender role disruption and self-esteem, and what other factors might cause differences in marital satisfaction as well. According to Tashakkori and Teddies (2003), Erzberger and Prein (1997) stated if the results revealed from two designs converge, “it can be seen as an indicator of their validity” (p.17). On the other hand, the results may be divergent, which is valuable since “they lead to a reexamination of the conceptual frameworks and the assumption underlying each of the two components” (p. 17).
Sample Selection

The theoretical population for this research was all female spouses of Chinese international students and scholars who have dependent status in the U.S. The sampling frame was the 110 wives of Chinese international students with dependent status who registered with the International Center at the University of Florida (University of Florida, 2006). These female spouses held F-2, J-2, and H-4 types of visas. The F-2 visa is intended for dependents of students (F-1); the J-2 visa is intended for dependents of exchange visitors (J-1); and the H-4 visa is intended for dependents of temporary workers (Embassy the United States Beijing, China).

For the cross-sectional design portion of the study, the sample size was determined based on variance, alpha level, and precision level. For this study, the confidence interval was set at 95% (z=1.96), the precision level was set at 0.2 (d = 2), and the variance was ten times of the precision level (s = 2). The precision level is decided by the nature of instrument included in the questionnaire. The scalar responses included four, five, or seven choices for each instrument and the precision level was decided at 0.2. The sample size yielded as 384. The formula was as follows:

\[
n = \frac{z^2 s^2}{d^2}
\]

Where \(n\) = sample size  
\(z\) = value from the tale of z values based on desired confidence interview  
\(s\) = standard deviation  
\(d\) = precision level

Since the sampling frame was 110 cases, the adjusted sample size was 86 cases. The formula was as follows with \(n_0 = 384\), \(N = 110\).

\[
n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0-1}{N}}
\]
Where \( n = \) adjusted sample size
\( n_0 = \) sample size has been already calculated
\( N = \) population size

The participants for the cross-sectional portion of the study were recruited by means of referral sampling. Referral sampling was chosen as the best technique for identifying potential participants. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, it would be hard for the participants to trust a stranger and talk about their private life. The first contacts were the Chinese wives with dependent visa status recruited through a Chinese church, the Association of Chinese Students & Scholars, and graduate family housing. This first group of contacts then helped recruit other Chinese wives. This recruiting procedure continued until very few new participants could be identified. I was not able to recruit the target number of 86 participants. I did recruit 40 participants, a minimum number for regression analysis involving two predictor variables. Other sampling procedure (e.g., an online questionnaire) was considered, but referral sampling was ultimately chosen because of the higher probability of success in locating a responsive sample.

A maximum variation sample was used for case study based on marital satisfaction scores. Participants who had the highest and lowest scores on the dependent variable, marital satisfaction, were chosen to be interviewed. The reason to use this maximum variation sample was to compare these two groups that differed in the scores of marital satisfaction and to examine what factors make the difference. As stated by Yin (2003), case study would help to “corroborate” (p.91) results of the cross sectional stage, and also to identify the variables that were not included in the conceptual model but that may contribute to the difference of cases. According the results from the cross-sectional proportion, the score of marital satisfaction ranged from 20 to 45, I selected eight participants with scores ranging from 20 to 28 and six participants with score ranging from 33 to 48. Four of the participants with low marital satisfaction scores
refused to participate in the interview for a non-response rate of 50%. All six of the spouses with high marital satisfaction scores responded. Not an even number of participants with low and high marital were obtained. As the interviews continued, I began to see repetition in responses among the participants with the relatively high marital scores, which is an indicator of saturation. I therefore did not interview more participants. A total of ten respondents were interviewed.

**Instrumentation**

A self-completion questionnaire was used for the cross sectional stage and an interview guide was developed for the case study design. The self-completion questionnaire contained questions about demographic characteristics, an index of gender role disruption developed for this study, Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, and Norton’s (1983) Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983). Before the data collection began, a pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with two Chinese wives to determine the time needed for completion and whether there were any wording problems. The questionnaire was modified based on their feedback, and submitted to the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB). The form was three pages long and was written in Chinese. On average it took ten minutes to complete.

**Demographic information.** The demographic variables included the age of participants, education level, years of marriage, number of children, and motives for coming to the U.S. The demographic information provided an overview of participants’ background.

**Gender role disruption.** An index was developed by the researcher with the help of a team of experts to measure the construct of gender role disruption. In this research, gender role disruption was defined as real gender roles conflicting with gender ideology. This construct was used to describe the situation when Chinese women come to America as dependents and take on
a domestic and subordinate role, which conflicts with the gender ideology that has been instilled in their minds in their homeland.

Seven experts from Departments of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Anthropology, Sociology, and Education Psychology were recruited to be a panel of experts. In the first email communication, these experts were asked to provide five to seven indicators of gender role disruption. The indicators listed more than one time by experts were chosen for the next step of index development. Once indicators listed relatively frequently were chosen, the expert panel was contacted again to assign weight to indicators in terms of relevance and ability to predict gender role disruption. Weights ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 represents the least important and 5 the most important. The mode was decided based on the frequency of weights assigned most often to each indicator. The final index used a scalar response format. Participants were asked to rate their degree of gender role disruption (never = 1, rarely =2, sometimes=3, frequently=4 and 5=always). A total score was obtained by multiplying the weight assigned to each item by the respondents’ score for the item and summing. This procedure transforms the respondent’s ordinal score for each item into to a summative interval score for the index as a whole.

**Self-esteem.** Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess the construct of self-esteem. Culp and Beach (1998) stated that this scale is “a well-validated measure of global self-evaluation” and “test-retest correlations greater than .80 have been reported” (p.651). This instrument includes ten items measured with a 3-point scale (3=strongly agree, 2=agree, 1=disagree, and 0=strongly disagree). Examples are, “on the whole, I am satisfied with my self;” and “at times, I think I am no good at all;” and is. Negatively worded items were reverse-scored. Item values were added to get a individual score ranging from 0 to 30.
Marital satisfaction. The Quality of Marriage Index (QMI) (Norton, 1983) is a measure that has been used to tap “participants’ perception of the overall goodness of the relationship” (Weger, Jr., 2005, p. 24). The QMI includes six items such as, “We have a good relationship”; and “My relationship with my partner is very stable”. The first five items are measured by a seven-point scale (1= very strongly disagree, 2=strongly disagree, 3=disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree and 7=very strongly agree). The sixth item is rated on a ten-point scale ranging from one (unhappy) to ten (perfectly happy). Items value were added together to obtain a total score ranging from 5 to 45.

In an analysis of research about marital satisfaction, Bradbury and colleagues (2000) reviewed the commonly used measurements of marital satisfaction, such as Locke and Wallace’s (1959), Marital Adjustment Test (MAT), Spanier’s (1976) Dyadic Adjustment scale (DAS), and Norton’s the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI). These scholars encouraged researchers to use QMI as an appropriate, global measure that could allow for useful comparisons across studies. In addition, Xu (2004) and Culp & Beach (1998) both stated that there is extensive research showing that QMI has an excellent validity and reliability (a = .97).

Interview questions. For the case study portion of the study, an interview guide was constructed based on the theoretical constructs and research questions. The interview questions were reviewed by two committee member and revised based on their input. The questions were pretested with one Chinese wife.

Data Collection

The self-completion questionnaire was sent out through the group listserv of the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars (ACSS), however no one responded. At the same time, I went to the activities held by the Chinese church, ACSS, and graduate family housing to recruit the first contacts. These first contacts filled out the questionnaire and then helped me
contact other Chinese wives. This process continued until 40 Chinese wives were recruited. Paper, email or telephone questionnaires were provided, depending on the participants’ preference. Using the approved IRB protocol, I provided the participants with an overview of the study before they began to complete the questionnaire and informed them of their rights and responsibilities and the confidentiality of the study.

After the cross-sectional portion of the study was completed, participants with either high or low marital satisfaction score were chosen to participate in the interview. Again, the IRB approved procedure was followed. The interview, lasting 30 minutes to one hour, was conducted in Chinese. Participants chose the places for interviews at their convenience. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then translated into English.

**Data Processing and Analysis**

Regression analysis was used to test the mediation model in this research. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), three regressions were run to test the mediation model: (a) regressing the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) on the independent variable (gender role disruption); (b) regressing the mediator (self-esteem) on the independent variable; and (c) regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable while controlling for the mediator. According to the conditions for mediation to be established (Baron & Kenny, 1986), the independent variable must affect the dependent variable, the independent variable must affect the mediator, and the mediator must affect the dependent variable.

The qualitative data were analyzed by using thematic analysis (Kossak, 2005). Concepts, categories and themes are identified and elaborated by comparing and contrasting participants’ responses. Line-by-line open coding was the first step used to organize the data. After the open coding was completed, concepts were identified and then grouped into categories and then themes. The researcher first coded the transcripts and developed the coding concepts categories;
then the advisor reviewed the coding and discrepancies in interpretation of data were discussed. This process continued, and revisions were made on coding strings until both sides came to a consensus about codes and a list of core categories was finalized.

**Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, the sample obtained for this study may not be representative of the theoretical population. Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, and Chinese women’s psychological nature of being unwilling to share private family life, it was difficult to obtain volunteers who were willing to report that they were unhappy about their marriage. In addition, the first contacts and participants recruited later were those who participated in group activities. Perhaps Chinese wives who do not go to group activities are more isolated and unhappy. However, due to the time and budget constrains, I was not able to locate these wives. As a result, I did not get a full range of participants, from very unhappy to very unhappy with their marriage.

Second limitation was that, I did not really get a maximum variation sample at the stage of case study. Because I did not get participants with very low marital scores at the stage of the cross sectional design, the four participants interviewed were chosen from an already biased sample. Compared with a full range sample, these four participants’ marital satisfaction scores may not be really low relative to the theoretical population. In view of the limitations related to the sampling, the findings of this study, either from quantitative or qualitative data, may be only able to explain the situation of Chinese wives who are relatively happy with their marriage and cannot be applied to people who are unhappy about their marriage. A number of different variables and a very different association pattern may exist among unhappy wives.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses. The research objective was to explore the associations of gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction among Chinese wives of Chinese international students who hold F2, J2 and H4 visas. A questionnaire was distributed to 40 Chinese wives recruited in a referral sample. Following the questionnaire, ten women were chosen for a follow-up interview based on their score of marital satisfaction (Appendix).

Following are the descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the sample. The results of the analyses of the three theoretical variables, gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction, are presented.

Demographics

Demographic summary statistics include age, education level, number of children, ages of children, and years of marriage. As shown in Table 4-1, 38 out of 40 participants reported their age, and these participants ranged in age from 24 to 40 years, with a mean of 31 years, a median of 29 years, and a mode of 28 years. With regard to years married, 34 out of 40 participants reported their years of marriage, and the years married ranged from 1 to 17, with a mean of 5.56 years, a median of 4 years and a mode of 2 years, most married less than 10 years. The results were also presented with a histogram (Figures 4-1 and 4-2).

Table 4-1. Summary statistics of age and years of marriage of wives of Chinese international students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.24</td>
<td>4.057</td>
<td>16.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of marriage</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>4.320</td>
<td>18.663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education level was reported by 38 participants. Most participants, 71%, had at least an undergraduate degree; and another 20% had advanced degrees: either a master’s or Ph.D. (Table 4-2, Figure 4-3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Sample percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4-1. Distribution of participants by age groups

Figure 4-2. Distribution of participants by years of marriage
When asked about their reason for being in the U.S., all 40 participants responded. Most, 62.5% (n=25), came to reunite with their husband who was already living in the US; and 30% (n=12) came to take care of their husbands and help them concentrate on their schooling. In addition, 7.5% (n=3) of the participants came to the U.S. for their own goals, school or education.

The largest proportion of couples, nearly half, had no children (45%, n=18). One-quarter had one child (n=10, or 25%). A few participants had two children (n=5, or 5%) or three children (n=1, or 2.5%). One participant was pregnant. Five participants did not respond to this question. The ages of the children ranged from 4 months to 16 years, with a mean of 5 years, a median of 3 years and a mode of 3 years.

**Statistical Analyses**

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the associations between gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction, and the mediating effect of self-esteem. This process involved three steps: (a) regressing marital satisfaction (dependent variable) on gender role disruption (independent variable); (b) regressing self-esteem (mediator) on gender role disruption (independent variable); and (c) regressing marital satisfaction (dependent variable) on
gender role disruption (independent variable) while controlling for self-esteem (mediator). The results are presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3. Relationship between martial satisfaction, gender role disruption and self-esteem among the wives of Chinese international students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>R² Adjusted</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender role disruption</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender role disruption</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.01*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem (model 1)</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital satisfaction</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender role disruption (model 2)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p ≤ .05

**Marital Satisfaction and Gender Role Disruption**

Standard linear regression was used to determine the effects of gender role disruption on marital satisfaction. The model was not significant (R² = -0.02, p = 0.65). The Beta coefficient was -0.04 and p value was 0.65. Gender role disruption was not strongly associated with marital satisfaction.

**Self-Esteem and Gender Role Disruption**

Standard linear regression was used to determine the effects of gender role disruption on self-esteem. The model was close to significant (R² = 0.07 and p = 0.06). The Beta coefficient was -0.09 and p value was 0.06.
**Mediating Effect of Self-Esteem**

Hierarchical multiple regressions were used to determine the mediating effect of self-esteem with all the variables entered into the regression equation. Model 1 was significant ($R^2 = 0.13$, $P=0.01$). The Beta value 0.74 and the p value was less than .02. Model 2 was significant ($R^2 =.11$, $P=0.05$). The Beta value of was .03 and the p value was.76.

**Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data was obtained at the stage of case study. Line-by-line open coding yielded a total of 42 concept codes, based on participants’ words or meanings and theoretical concepts relevant to this research.

**Qualitative Concepts and Categories**

Following the first round of coding, the 42 concepts were grouped into 23 categories (listed below) and then into themes.

- Gender roles and responsibilities
- Power
- Sense of independence/dependence
- Individual personalities
- Self-evaluation impacted by new environment
- Self knowledge
- Sense of closeness
- Conflicts with spouse
- Comments and attitudes toward partners or relationships
- Marriage change overtime
- Spousal support
- Language ability
- Use of time
- Observation and reflection on new environment and adjustment
- Reflections on other’s situation and adjustment
- Loneliness/unhappiness/boredom/depression caused by change of environment
- friends and family
- Adjustment of gender role and gender ideology
- Long term expectations
- Reasons for coming to the US
- Prior occupation experience
• Work experience in America
• Factors of new environment that impact marriage

The names of the categories came from language used by participants (the data) or the established concept in the literature. These 22 categories were grouped under the themes existing in the theoretical model of this research to respond to the research questions. The categories that did not fit into existing constructs were grouped as emerging themes that contribute to the marital relationship. Several topics emerged pertaining to work experiences that were not addressed in the analysis.

Table 4-4. Categories grouped by themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretically-Based Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Gender role/ Gender ideology | Gender roles and responsibilities  
|                             |   Power  
|                             |   Sense of independence/dependence                                        |
| Evaluation/Reflection on self (self worth, self value, self esteem) | Individual personalities  
|                             |   Context of the new environment                                          |
|                             |   Self knowledge                                                            |
| Marital Satisfaction        | Sense of closeness  
|                             |   Conflicts with spouse                                                    |
|                             |   Attitudes toward partners or relationships                                |
|                             |   Marriage change overtime                                                  |

**Emergent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband’s Support</th>
<th>Expressions of comfort and support offered by the husband</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors of New Environment That Impact Marriage</td>
<td>Factors of new environment that impact marriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Adjustment to New Environment | Language ability  
|                                | Use of time  
|                                | Observation and reflection on new environment and adjustment  
|                                | Reflections on others’ situations and adjustment  
|                                | Loneliness/unhappiness/boredom/depression caused by change of environment  
|                                | Friends and family  
|                                | Adjustment of gender role and gender ideology |
Theoretically-Based Themes

Gender role/ gender ideology

It was expected that Chinese women would have egalitarian gender roles and beliefs when they came to the U.S., because of the egalitarian ideology promoted during the Communist regime. However, when Chinese women come to America as dependants, they typically are placed in a position to assume a domestic and subordinate role. I expected that this would conflict with the gender ideology instilled in their minds and that this conflict would cause tension in the marital relationship.

In the interviews, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions about their work and household division of labor and their feelings about these matters to tap into their views on gender roles and gender role ideology. Three related concerns emerged, gender roles and responsibilities, power, and sense of independence/dependence.

Gender roles and responsibilities. Husbands and wives shared the housework and adopted flexible roles in accomplishing household work in most of the case study families (80%, n=8). The participants indicated that their husbands were willing to help them with housework when they were not busy with their school work. One participant said that her husband did most of the housework while she prepared for an exam for her application to attend university. Two participants thought that the husband could be trained to do housework and that was not good to indulge them by doing all the housework.

Some participants (40%, n=4), regardless of their ages, obviously agreed with the traditional Chinese value for the marital relationship, where the husband plays a leading role and the wife plays a supporting role. At the same time, some emphasized the importance of equality and self development, such as seeking more education. Some participants were taking or planning to take the TOEFL or GRE in the near future. Some had already finished the exam and
were applying for school. Some had already attended school, such as taking community college
courses. Ying, one of the participants responded,

I think it is right that the man plays the leading role and the woman plays a supporting role, but they should be equal… I hope I can still support myself. I cannot completely sacrifice myself for his success.

Qing, the other participant, while thinking about giving up her job in China in order to support
the career development of her husband, said,

It is impossible for women with a good education to stay at home to be housewives. We need to get a job.

**Power.** Power dynamics in the relationship between the husband and wife were expressed
in several ways. The first was with regard to the decision to move to the U.S. For all of the case
study families (100%, n=10), husbands initiated this relocation and their wives followed, even
though it often meant personal sacrifices on the woman’s part. For instance, one participant, Mei,
struggled for awhile and finally gave up her job as a university teacher to stay with her husband
in America.

Another expression of power was through financial control. Some participants (40%, n=4)
emphasized the importance of making money themselves and showed their concerns and
unhappiness about having no income of their own.

**Wen:** At the beginning [in the U.S.], my husband didn’t limit me from spending money, later he always reminded me that I spend too much money… I used to spend up my money when I was in China; after coming here, suddenly someone keeps whispering in your ear that you cannot buy this or you cannot buy that…it is not as free as before. I feel uncomfortable because I cannot spend money according to my wishes.

**Ying:** Before [in China], I could use the money I made to support my family, or my
husband. But in the U.S., I am not able to do this [because she could not earn money].

Another participant, Mei, not only expressed her concern about financial control but also
responded that having an income herself would be good for the marriage,
The most important thing is that now I don’t have a job, I have no income. I have to depend on my husband. At least in China, I can spend the money I earn according to my wishes and I do not need worry….

For example, [now that I am working] I have my income, he has his income, if I want to do something, such as shopping, I can make my own decision. I do not need to ask my husband: do you allow me to do this with the money you make? …Now he will look up to you even though you just take a meager job…he will think you are great that you can use a second language to deal with a lot of things in a new environment. This is an increase of respect [in marriage].

**Sense of independence/dependence.** A few (20%, n=2) participants strongly expressed that they do not want to depend on their husband. One participant, Mei, said,

[Work] is better than staying at home. I think as a woman, I don’t want to rely on my husband. I think I have a job, though the income is little, I make the money, I feel good. If I didn’t have this job, I would do some labor work; I don’t want to rely on him.”

Another participant, Ying, responded,

I want to support myself. I don’t want to depend on anyone…it doesn’t matter how much money he makes, I have to make money. Even though I just make 1000 dollars a month or a year, I am making money.

**Evaluation/reflection on self (self worth, self value, self-esteem)**

Although this concept was originally conceived of as self-esteem, the qualitative analysis revealed that in this situation, participants were talking and thinking more broadly about their self-worth, their value, and indeed evaluating and reflecting on themselves in their new environment. Some women were proud of themselves and the adjustment they made, attributing this to their positive attitude and personality, while others felt defeated and unsuccessful.

**Individual personalities.** Some participants (50%, n=5) thought that their personalities helped them adjust to the life in the U.S. Several participants talked about how their personality impacted the way they relate to their husband.

**Hui:** I think I am a very special person. Other F2s are not as positive as me. At the beginning I didn’t realize this. I talked with them for awhile and I found they are very negative and I don’t like staying with them. I found they are not as passionate as me about
education. They pay too much attention to their husband. I am not saying it is not good, it is just not necessary. They always worry about when their husband is coming back.

**Huo:** I am a very positive person, if we have a problem, we solve the problem…we have been in the U.S. for such a long time, I have been very positive, even though I sometimes have been depressed, but the positive attitude helps.

**Mei:** I think attitude matters, if you are active, you will look for opportunities, for example to make friends, with other Chinese people, and these friends will give you information [about living here].

**Xin:** I am a very unique person, different from other people. I think it is sort of an opportunity. I think this is a way of living. I was already very successful before I came.

**The context of the new environment.** Participants talked about how they feel frustrated, defeated and have no sense of success because of the environment. The majority of participants (60%, n=6) found that this self evaluation impacted the relationship with their husband.

**Ying:** I do not have a lot of feelings of successes. Now there aren’t a lot of things I can do to get the feelings of success.

**Yang:** I do not make money and so I don’t have sense of success.

**Hui:** I found it is frustrating not to work because I think that how much money you make represents your value. Now I don’t work and depend on my husband and I think I have no value.

**Huo:** I stay at home everyday and my husband comes home and eats; it is unavoidable that he will say which dish is good, which one is not so good. I make every dish, I hope he will say every dish is good…if he is a little bit unsatisfied, I will feel, I am a housekeeper now….Actually, my husband speaks thoughtlessly: this dish is salty or not salty enough…He does not mean to attack me; however this is what you doing now, you are not like before anymore. It seems that your value is reflected by whether the meal is good.

**Self-knowledge.** Some participants talked that the new environment helps them gain a peace and know themselves better and this may contribute to marital relationship.

**Hui:** I changed a lot. [Before in China], I thought I was very cool, surrounded by a lot of boys, job was good, always had things to do on weekends, it was not pride, I felt I was at a high level…it was not practical, life here is simple, you do what you want to do, before I always got distracted by surroundings, now I calm down… I think I know myself better. I have dreams and I think my current situation makes me close to my dream.

**Mei:** Now I feel peaceful, no one will control what you are doing. Gradually, you learn how to communicate with your mind. What is the most important thing, it is something of
spirit. In China, people are unsettled and follow the crowd when they do things. Finally the meaning of doing this thing is lost, everyone feels tired at heart. Now it is good...before I never think how good two people can be in a relationship, I am not sure whether we will be together for our life. Now I will think about this. For example, I think my husband is the one who matches me most, the most satisfying one. My husband thinks I am the best wife. We both think we will be together forever, and to go through our marriage in a best way, high quality way. I never thought about this before. Now I thought of this naturally.

Marital satisfaction

**Sense of closeness.** Half of the participants (50%) n=5, said that their relationship with their husbands had improved since coming to the U.S., compared with their prior marriage experience in China. In China, these participants either stayed in a different city from their husband or were kept busy with their work, which gave them less opportunity to be together. Their responses showed that they feel closer to their husband now. Some of the responses can be seen in the theme of factors of the new environment that impact marriage.

**Mei:** Now, our relationship is much better than before, more harmonious, we don’t have that kind of feeling when we stayed at different places in China--I can live my life without you. Now we think we will be together for our life.

**Wen:** After being together [coming to the U.S.], we have fewer arguments compared with before. When we were in different cities in China, we talked on the phone for around 1 hour every day for two years…We cannot see each other’s expressions, it is easy to misunderstand each other if our tone is not right or other reasons, and we had arguments. Since I came here, we stay together everyday; maybe because he is busy, not at home all the time, we have fewer arguments and feel better than before.

**Xi:** Here in America, every family has its life, everyone goes home after work. It is not like in China, there are a lot of social activities

Another participant, Xin, said her husband always thought he was much better than her in China. After moving to the U.S., her husband showed more appreciation since she was able to take care of a lot of things, despite not being fluent in English.
In contrast to those who feel closer to their husbands, a few participants (n=2, 20%) complained that their husbands were busy with their school work and seldom had time to spend with them.

**Ying:** According to my dream life expectation, this is not the life I want. I didn’t expect that my husband would be so busy and have no time to be with me, for example, to go with me for a haircut or shopping.

**Xian:** He is too busy; he has no time to talk to me… Every morning he turns on his computer, it seems to me that he has no time to eat. I ask him to eat when the meal is ready. He leaves when he finishes the meal and continues to work until two or three o’clock at night, every day is like this.

Generally speaking, most of the participants have positive comments toward their husbands. One participant mentioned that even though her husband is very busy, he squeezes out time to accompany her to go shopping. He read a research paper in the mall while waiting for her shopping.

**Conflicts with spouse.** Thirty percent (n= ) reported that conflicts often erupted during the first several months wives were in the U.S. and weren’t yet used to the life here. The participants said the situation improved after several months.

**Mei:** After we came here, that was the beginning of fighting. I quarreled with him everyday…I didn’t cook, I stayed at home, I felt bad and I quarreled with him everyday he came back from his work. He was exhausted after dozens of days of this. It was that stage. After that, things got better.

**Wen:** I tell him that I want to go home. I feel lonely everyday. My husband comes home very late at night, around 9 or 10. I feel unhappy through the day. If he said that meal I make doesn’t taste good I will get angry with him

**Huo:** Those were trivial things that never caused confusion before, but the situation had changed now, the same words hurt. Actually, he didn’t mean that [some things he said], but my mind led me to think that way.

**Emergent Themes**

Several themes emerged in the interviews that were not part of the original conceptualization of the factors affecting marital satisfaction. In particular, the support wives
received from their husbands, factors in the new environment, and adjustment to the new environment appeared to be important to marriage.

**Husband's support**

An emergent theme from the interviews was the importance of spousal support when wives experienced changes in gender roles as a consequence of their dependent visa status. Their comments revealed that the support they received from husbands helped them adjust to these changes, and that both support and adjustment contributed to the marital relationship. In contrast, lack of support from the husband appeared to cause marital tension. This can be seen from the responses of the following participants.

**Mei:** My husband is nice. He always encourages me, he never discourages me. That is why we can be together. My English was not good at the beginning…now it is good, the encouragement and support from my husband helps.

**Hui:** I found it is frustrating not to work because I think that how much money you make represents your value. Now I don’t work and depend on my husband and I think I have no value. Then my husband comforts me, [he says], “You stay at home and take care of the housework, you do some work.” I think he is right.

In contrast, another participant, Huo, expressed unhappiness about her dependent position:

I felt like I went from being a professional woman to staying at home, doing laundry, not understanding English well…I had no common topic with my husband. He was busy with his studies, it was hard for him to understand, he thought I was comfortable staying at home; this not understanding made me feel frustrated…I stayed at home, doing laundry and cooking meals, and I didn’t know about my future, I was not sure what my future would be like. I was seeking his support. However, my husband had just come to the U.S. and busy with his study…

**Factors of the new environment that impact marriage**

Two factors in particular seemed to affect Chinese couples’ marriages, changes in their social opportunities that had the effect of giving them more time together and decreased opportunities for their husbands to know other women, and husbands and wives depending on each other more to overcome the common struggle with a new culture. Several participants (n=...
4, 40%) responded that, compared with China, the new environment decreases the social opportunities available to both husbands and wives, which gives them more time to be together and ultimately makes them closer. In addition, the new environment increases the security of marriage since husbands go back and forth between home and school and have no opportunity to get involved with other women.

**Yang:** I have a friend, her husband has a lot of business trips, he seldom stays at home during a month…it is hard to tell what will happen when he is out, with colleagues or other opportunities…I am not going to gossip about other people’s marriage…but generally speaking, there is sort of crisis, it is not as secure as here, [here] two people always stay together and watch over each other, more secure.”

**Xi:** In China, after work, we have friends to see and other social activities, much more than here, therefore our time being together is less and our communication is less. Here in the U.S., my husband comes home after work. We have more time to be together. There are not a lot of places to go on weekends; therefore, most of the time it is me and my husband and the child being together. We have more communications and our relationship is more harmonious compared with China.”

Another participant explained that in America her husband and her need to work together for their future, which makes them closer.

We are one body. If I am successful with my exam, our family will have a good future; or if my husband gets a job, we will have a good future…we are one body.

**Adjustment to the new environment**

**Language ability.** All participants (100%, n= 10) talked about how language ability influences their adjustment to life in the U.S., including communicating with people who speak languages other than Chinese, opportunities to take courses, and career development.

**Wen:** My original plan was to go to school right away after I arrived. It seems unrealistic now. The classes are taught in English, my English is not good and I will not be able to understand the class…I am not afraid when I am in China because there isn’t any language problem. After I came here, at the beginning, I was afraid to go out; I was afraid that people would talk to me.

**Mei:** Language is the biggest barrier. Even though you learn the language very well in China, it is hard for you to speak here.
Xin needs to pass an oral English test to be qualified for the job she is going to do. She said that oral English is the most difficult part of being here for her, and has now become a barrier to her own career advancement.

In contrast, Xian said that her English ability as good. Since she can communicate well in English, she has made a lot of English-speaking friends, and has participated in activities and had a good time.

**Use of time.** Far from sitting idly by while their husbands advanced their education and careers, half of participants (50%, n=5), were preparing to take the necessary tests to apply to universities or colleges and other schools. One participant’s visa status allowed her to work in the U.S. Her English was good, and she was able to obtain employment. Another participant, whose English was good, made friends and took some courses provided by the local community college. Most participants (60%, n=6) were working at improving their English, by attending International Friendship held by a local American church, English classes held by a Chinese church, English classes held by the university’s housing office to study English and attended activities held by the Chinese church and Chinese students’ association.

**Observation and reflection on new environment and adjustment.** Some participants (n=3, 30%) expected that the U.S. would be very developed and that life would be wonderful, but felt disappointed that the realities in the U.S. did not meet their expectations.

**Huo:** I expected that the U.S. would be very developed; we came from the big city in China and feel that life in U.S. is like in the countryside.

**Xi:** I didn’t expect that it [the U.S.] would be desolate like this. It may be because this is a university town. I don’t expect that there would be so few people. It seldom has places for entertainment or a lot of restaurants.

Some participants (n=4, 40%) explained that the culture is very different and it is hard to integrate into this culture.
Mei: We didn’t have a car. I walked to the grocery under the burning sun. At the beginning, I held an umbrella, and everyone looked at me in a weird way. Everything is different here.

Xi: We are Chinese in America. We are not locals and we are not familiar with the culture. Now matter how close we want to be friends with Americans, we are not the same. We just learn English from them and study the Bible.

Reflection on peers’ situation and adjustment. Reflection on peers’ experience and adjustment help the participants adjust to the life in the US.

Mei: My mom found it is unbearable that I do this [labor work]. As parents, they think I suffer in America, going from a university teacher to a labor worker. I don’t care; those older (Chinese) are doing the same thing. Why cannot I?

Xi: I don’t think this impacts [self image] a lot because…how the value is reflected depends on the environment. Most of the people come to America…besides those [women] who go to school; most of the women stay at home.

Friends and families. Most participants (40%) explained that they do not have friends with whom they can get together to have fun and that at times at least they feel lonely.

Xi: People just say something like: How are you doing recently? How are your children? There is little real communication.

Xi also said that friends here are not stable, people come and go. She made some friends and after one or two years these friends left. She feels lonely in spirit. She finds that life in America is not so exciting.

Wen: The Chinese are still in a minority and they are busy. They don’t have time for chatting. In China, I went to work every day, and went out with friends to have fun, to go shopping. It is impossible here. I never had the experience before that I have no one to talk to me in a day. Now, my husband leaves in the morning, he doesn’t come back until 10 at night, I have no one to talk to me.

Mei: In China, I have a big family; I grew up in an environment full of family members and friends. Suddenly I came here and I feel lonely.

Yang: I have a lot of friends in China and we go out to have fun. I have relatives. I feel it is torture [not to have this in the U.S.].
Adjustment of gender roles and gender ideology

The participants talked about how they felt about the change of roles. The change of roles caused confusion about their self worth and frustration. For some women, this change of role impacted their perspective about how they relate to their husband.

Mei: I am confused about [my] self value. I don’t work and I have no idea what I can do, I have no idea about my future…

Huo: I felt like [I went from being] a professional woman, to staying at home, doing laundry, I do not understand English well…When you can create social value, and you are independent, equal to your husband, you feel an equilibrium. This equilibrium was broken after coming to the U.S.

Ying: If I have my life, we are both busy; I will think this is more equal. He is busy while I have a lot of spare time now; I feel this is not equal.

Wen: In china, I work and am busy; I sometimes work overtime on my work at home at night. After coming here, I have nothing to do but make meals. I don’t have a goal now.

Xi: I think it is better to go back to school right away if you come to the U.S. If you don’t go to school and stay at home like this every day, it is a waste of youth. Anyway, it is boring. I am still young but cannot work but here to stay at home to raise the child.

Besides expressing feelings about the changes, some participants (n=5, 50%) talked about how they adjusted their views about these changes. One participant responded as follows:

Xi: I will not say I am not happy [not working but staying at home]. The reality is like this, I have no choice [but to stay at home]. You have no choice unless you are outstanding and much better than other people and you may get a good job. I am not that excellent and I am an ordinary person. So I have to live like this. The only thing I can do is to go back to school ASAP and improve my English ASAP.

Another participant addressed her feeling by trading off between work and marriage:

Yang: Marriage is important for women. It is Ok for women not to work in the short term, it is acceptable. But if their marriage is not good and in addition, [women] have to stay at home doing housework, it is not bearable. It is Ok that marriage can make up for [not working in a short term].
**Long-term expectations**

Some participants (n= 4, 40%) reframed the current unpleasant situation as a temporary situation, which gave them hope that their circumstances would improve in the future. For example,

**Yang:** Sometimes I feel stressed about this [not working]…but it is not like I will not work for my life and no hope in the future. It is not like that.

**Ying:** Nothing but boring. Three months is bearable [longer is not bearable]; but now there is hope, I expect he [the husband] will graduate soon and the environment will change.

**Unaddressed Themes**

The study participants also talked about their reasons for coming to the U.S., their prior work experience in China and work now in the U.S. These categories did not appear to be associated with other themes. Therefore, they were not addressed in the analysis.

**Summary**

In summary, this research examined a mediation model including three constructs, namely, gender role disruption, self-esteem and marital satisfaction. The quantitative data indicated that the mediation did not hold up, since gender role disruption (independent variable) was not associated with marital satisfaction (dependent variable).

In contrast, the findings of qualitative data analysis indicated that the links between gender role disruption and marital satisfaction may indeed exist, but may be working indirectly through other variables that have to do with adjustment to the new environment. This contradictory finding will be addressed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research tested a theoretical model of how gender role disruption affects marital satisfaction through the mediating effect of self-esteem. The regression analysis showed that the association between gender role disruption and marital satisfaction was not significant. Therefore, contrary to the hypothesis, the proposed mediation model was not supported.

These insignificant associations could be attributed to the non-representative study sample as discussed in the Limitation section of Chapter 3. To further understand the study sample, frequency distributions were used to examine the normality of the distribution of the data. A representative sample should include a full range of marital satisfaction score from low to high; however, as seen in Figure 5-1, the distribution of marital satisfaction was skewed to the right. This suggests that the participants for this study tended to have higher marital satisfaction scores that did not reflect the expected range of marital satisfaction of the theoretical population. Chiu (2004) provides a possible explanation: Chinese women believe that family life is personal and it is shameful to seek external help. With regard to this study, Chinese wives who were unhappy about their marriage may have felt ashamed and therefore did not volunteer to participate. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, participants may not have been honest with themselves or the interviewers, and may have inflated their marital satisfaction scores. For a cross-sectional design, validity greatly relies on a statistically representative sample, which was not obtained for this study. Also, the sample of a cross-sectional design should reflect theoretical population with respect to predictor variable. Frequency distribution was run for the predictor variable, gender role disruption. As shown in Figure 5-2, the distribution did not really show a normal pattern, suggesting that the sample was not representative. In fact, the distribution for
gender disruption appeared to be somewhat bimodal, indicating that participants fell into two identifiable groups. The difference between these two groups is a topic for future research.

In summary, the sample obtained for this study may be not representative of the larger population, which may account for results that are contrary to the hypotheses. Another concern is related to the sample size. The result of the second regression showed that gender role disruption accounted for 7% of the variance in self-esteem and the model was close to significant (adjusted $R^2 = .07$ and $p = .06$). With a larger sample, the association between these two variables may be stronger.

![Figure 5-1](image1.png)  
Figure 5-1. Frequency distribution for the variable, marital satisfaction

![Figure 5-2](image2.png)  
Figure 5-2. Frequency distribution for the variable, gender role disruption
Previous literature (Gao, 1997; Zhou, 2000) suggested that changes in gender roles impact marital relationships. In this study, however, gender role disruption did not appear to be significantly associated with marital satisfaction in this study. This discrepancy in research findings may be attributed to the different methodologies employed here. Zhou’s and Gao’s research was based on the descriptive accounts of participants: no quantitative analysis was done to examine causal relationships between these two variables, or to determine the amount of variance explained in outcome variables.

Consistent with the study hypothesis, self-esteem was significantly associated with marital satisfaction. However, this finding did not prove that a causal direction between self-esteem and marital satisfaction existed. Possibly, a reciprocal relationship existed between these two variables. Self-esteem may affect the marital satisfaction of sojourning Chinese wives but in this study it was not a mediator. Longitudinal research should be used to in the future to explore the associations and causal directions among these three variables.

The findings of the qualitative portion of the study suggested that gender role disruption did appear to be related to marital satisfaction, although indirectly, through other variables not measured in the quantitative portion of the study. For example, three participants responded that the change of roles, such as not working and not having an independent source of income, caused confusion about their self worth, as well as feelings of frustration. This change of roles impacted their perspective about the equality of the relationship with their husband, which in turn appeared to affect marital satisfaction.

In contrast, another two participants showed concerns about not working and having no income, but their responses did not indicate tension in their marriage. Instead, they felt closer to their husbands. One described how her husband comforted her when she felt unhappy, and the
other described her husband as always encouraging her. Another participant who showed more
tolerance to the change of roles had fewer arguments with her husband. A fourth participant who
compared herself to how well others were doing seemed better able to accept the change of roles.

As shown from qualitative data, participants varied in terms of individual characteristics,
spousal support and reactions to the new surroundings. These factors, which were not included
in the quantitative portion of study, appeared to buffer the impact of gender role disruption on
marital satisfaction. Further testing of the relationships among variables, using a larger sample
and additional variables brought out through the qualitative data, would shed more light on this
process.

It should be noticed that the conclusions drawn above may only apply to wives with
relatively high marital satisfaction. As discussed in Chapter 3, since the sample was biased, this
model may not be apply to wives with low marital satisfaction.

**Findings of Previous Literature**

Gao’s (1998) research emphasized that moving to the U.S. changed the power relationship
between husband and wife and caused the dissolution of marriage. Consistent with Gao (1998),
the findings of the qualitative portion of this study showed that for some couples, the move to the
U.S. did cause conflicts between husbands and wives, possibly due to the shifts that occurred in
control of resources. However, marital conflicts did not appear to be as intense as the cases in
Gao’s study, where the couples were already divorced or in the process of divorcing, indicating
they were extremely unhappy families. In contrast, this study was unable to obtain Chinese
wives who were extremely unhappy about their marriage.

As the qualitative data showed, these Chinese couples tended to adopt a flexible approach
to gender roles to support each other in a new environment. For example, the husband took care
of more housework when the wife was preparing for tests and university or college applications.
This seemed to be a strategy adopted by Chinese sojourning couples to respond to their changing family context. This finding is consistent with previous research findings indicating that Chinese couples took flexible gender roles as a strategy to survive in a new culture (Da, 2003; Goff, 2004). In addition, as shown from the qualitative data, among these Chinese couples, the gender ideology adopted by each family varied. Some families showed what might be considered greater equality than other families, at least in terms of household division of labor and negotiation of this division of labor.

Man’s (1995) research on Hong Kong women moving to Canada showed that living in a new environment drew the husband and wife closer, because fewer career demands for husbands allowed them to spend more time with their wives; or because husbands and wives depended on each other more to overcome the “common struggle” (p.316) with a new culture. Consistent with Man’s findings, Chinese wives in this study felt closes to their husbands since the time they spent together increased after moving to the U.S.

Although there are some similarities between Chinese sojourning wives and immigrant women in terms of adapting to life in a new country, this does not imply that the literature about immigrant population can be applied to sojourning population or vice versa. They are two very different groups in terms of their resident status that may pose very different family issues. Furthermore, the previous studies (Gao, 1998; Goff, 2004; Zhou 2000) have not included a time dimension when they have addressed the issue of adapting to a new culture. Adjustment in itself is a concept involving changes over time.

**Introduction of a New Conceptual Model**

The qualitative data revealed new variables that were not included in the conceptual model but appeared to affect the marital relationship for Chinese international student couples. In Figure 5-3, I propose a new conceptual model that includes the previously identified constructs,
as well as the new variables that emerged from the qualitative data. Definitions of each variable included in this new conceptual model are given in the following sections.

Figure 5-3. New conceptual model

**Wives’ adjustment to the new environment.** Chinese wives are in a process of adjusting to life in the U.S. How well they adjust impacts their self-worth and marital satisfaction. According to the qualitative findings, this adjustment appears to depend on language ability, specifically the ability to function well in English. Observations and reflections on the new environment and their own adjustment, and changes in gender roles and gender ideology, are part of the adjustment.

**Husband’s support.** During the process of adjustment, the wives who feel their husbands show understanding, encouragement, consolation, and comfort, and who respond quickly to their wives’ needs, seem to cope better with the adjustment to the new environment.

**Reflection on peers’ situation and adjustment.** Chinese wives compare themselves with other Chinese women also adjusting to life in the U.S. Those who feel positive about themselves seemed to be more accepting of the changes happening to them and, consequently, found adjustment easier.
**Long term expectations.** When wives view themselves as trapped in their current situation, they appear to have more difficulty adjusting. When they look at their situation as temporary and foresee that the future will become better as long as they get the opportunity to go to school and work, they show more tolerance of the current situation.

**Self-worth.** Although this concept was originally conceived of as self-esteem, the qualitative analysis revealed that in this situation, participants were talking and thinking more broadly about their self-worth and their value. Indeed, they are evaluating and reflecting on themselves in their new environment. Some women were proud of themselves and the adjustment they made, attributing this to their positive attitude and personality, while others felt defeated and unsuccessful.

**Factors in the new environment impacting marriage.** As the environment changes, new factors emerge as positively impacting the marital relationship. For example, the participants said that the new environment decreases the social activities of husbands and wives, and they have more time to spend together and to communicate with each other.

In summary, the core theme emerging from the qualitative data was adjustment of wives to the new environment. The data showed that the participants’ adjustment to life in the U.S. impacted their relationship with their husband. Also, spousal support, reflection on peer’s situation and adjustment, and long term expectations, appeared to affect their adjustment. Among these variables, spousal support was emphasized to be of great importance to the participants’ adjustment to new environment. Furthermore, factors in the new environment emerged as another important variable contributing to marital satisfaction. The majority of the participants indicated that the new environment gave their husband more time staying and communicating with them, and therefore, they felt closer to their husbands.
Again, it should be noticed that this conceptual model was established based on the responses of wives with relatively high marital satisfaction. This model may not apply to wives with low marital satisfaction.

**Theoretical Implications**

**Symbolic interactionism.** Self-esteem is one of the most important concepts used in symbolic interactionism. In this study, wives used a concept of self-value and attached a sense of failure and frustration to a perceived lack of self-value. As LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) explained, “the desire to have and maintain positive self-esteem is a powerful motive for behavior” (p.147); the qualitative portion of this study showed that wives felt that by not working they have little value, and this became one of the reasons they pursued education and tried to get a job. This theory also helped explain the feelings the wives experienced during the process of adjustment and how this impacted their relationships with surrounding people. The wives tried their best to redefine their self-worth under new circumstances. Those who felt uncertain about their self value seemed to be more likely to have conflicts with their husband. The findings of quantitative portion of the study also supported this theoretical perspective by showing that self-esteem was significantly associated with marital satisfaction.

**Feminist theory.** According to feminist theory, gender is socially constructed and varies across cultures (White & Klein, 2002). This proposition in itself implies that gender is a changing concept and contextually specific. Gender ideology is unique in contemporary China and must be understood in historical and social context. As indicated by Zhou (2000) and Pimentel (2006), during the Communist regime, the Chinese Communist Party promoted gender equality but only focused in the area of paid work outside the home. The fundamental patriarchal domination, shaped by years of Confucian history and ideology, remained unchanged. As a result, despite working as much as men for paid employment, women still take on much of
the housework and face a double burden of combining work and family responsibilities. This is a situation that Chinese women have in common with women world-wide, and these results confirm the power that patriarchal ideologies assert at the micro level. However, in the research on gender ideology in China with a sample of 2,170 women, Pimentel (2006) indicated that Chinese gender ideology has been undergoing changes. Pimentel suggested that, compared with older wives, fewer young wives do all the housework and some young husbands take on more domestic work. Consistent with Pimentel, the findings of this study showed that while most Chinese sojourning wives still held traditional beliefs about their duties as wives, husbands offered to help with domestic work and the division of household labor was somewhat flexible. Perhaps couples take on flexible roles as a strategy to respond to changes in their environment during the process of international relocation. This finding provides evidence to support that gender role ideology is contextually specific.

Another perspective of feminist theory is that economic conditions impact “internal dynamics of power and privilege” (White & Klein, 2002, p.194). The findings of the qualitative portion of this study provide support to this perspective. Basically, the findings indicate that moving to a new country changed the money-making ability of Chinese wives. This change impacted their power in the marriage, reducing financial control and increasing the wives’ dependence on their husband, and in some cases, appeared to lower their self-esteem and create tension at home.

**Limitations**

Some of the limitations of this study have been discussed previously, particularly related to the study sample. Other limitations include the measure of marital satisfaction, the retrospective nature of data collection, and variation in participants’ visa status.
Although in a decade review of research of marital satisfaction, Bradbury and colleagues (2000) encouraged researchers to use a global, standard measure that could allow for useful comparisons across studies, marital satisfaction is a contextually-specific variable and a global standard measure may not apply to culturally diverse of sojourning populations from other nations who are in a process of adjusting to a new environment. For example, when asked about the marital relationship, a participant in this research responded that she and her husband have no time to think about this. Their top issue in the current context is how they can get permanent resident status. It was hard to conclude whether she was satisfied with her marriage or not from her responses to the QMI (Norton, 1983).

Another limitation to this study is the retrospective nature of responses to the interview. As Pohl (2007) stated, people tend to exaggerate their experiences as they recall the past, and recollection has been proved to be biased. In this research, the participants may have failed to remember their exact thoughts and feelings in the few months when they first resided in the U.S.

Another issue that may impact the results of this study is the different visa type of the participants. F-2, J-2 and H-4 are very different visa types, although they all belong to the dependent visa category. Basically, a J-2 holder can legally work, and someone with H-4 status can pay in-state tuition to go to school. Consequently, wives with different visas may have different ways of living and this will likely impact their adjustment in the U.S. In this study, I did not take these visa differences into account: I did not categorize the wives by their visa type and did not examine how the visa status impacted their adjustment.

**Implications for Future Research**

In this research, it appeared that marital satisfaction changed in relation to participants’ adjustment to life in the U.S. It is important to recognize that adjustment to a new culture is a process, rather than something that occurs at one point in time. Longitudinal studies are
suggested to accurately measure changes in marital satisfaction over time for Chinese
international students or other immigrant groups. Also, a longitudinal design is needed to better
understand causal or reciprocal relationships. As Bradbury and his colleagues (2000) proposed,
a longitudinal design will be one of the important criteria for studies of marital satisfaction.

Mickelson, Claffey and Williams (2006) indicated that marriage appears to be beneficial to
women when the husband is highly supportive. As shown from the qualitative data, husband’s
support may be one of the important factors that influence marital satisfaction, and also buffers
the negative impacts of stressors associated with cultural adjustment. Future research could
explore how spousal support is associated with the marital satisfaction of wives who are
challenged by adjustment to a new culture.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this research show that husband’s support may help women better cope
with the challenges of living in a new environment. Mickelson et al. (2006) research indicated
that marriage quality appears more important to women’s well being and spousal support is
positively associated with marital satisfaction. Clinicians serving university students, advisors in
International Centers and the student’s home department, and others working with Chinese
international students and their families may be alert to the difficulties that cultural adjustment
may pose, not only for the student but also for his (or her) family. These professionals are in a
position to provide appropriate information and intervention point to address the issue and
facilitate the Chinese sojourning family’s adjustment to life in the U.S.
APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A
Please complete the following questions. All your answers are strictly confidential.
1. What is your age? ______
2. What is your education level? ______
   A. primary school  B. middle school  C. high school  D. vocational school  E. university  F. other ______ (please describe)
3. How many children do you have? ______
4. How old are your children? ______
5. How long have you been married? ______
6. Which is the following best describes your main motive for coming to the U.S. Select only one.
   A. to join my family/husband that is already here
   B. to take care of my husband, so he can concentrate on his study
   C. to go to school
   D. other: ________________________ (please describe)

Section B
Instruction: below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Put a tick after the choices that best describe your feelings.
1) I fee that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
   Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______
2) I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
   Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______
3) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
   Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______
4) I am able to do things as well as most other people.
   Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______
5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
   Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______
6) I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______

7) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______

8) I wish I could have more respect for myself

Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______

9) I certainly feel useless at times.

Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______

10) At times I think I am no good at all.

Strongly agree ______  Agree ______  Disagree ______  Strongly disagree ______

Section C

Instruction: put a tick after the number that best describes the degree of satisfaction you feel in various areas of your relationship with
1= very strongly disagree; 2=strongly disagree; 3=disagree; 4=neither disagree nor agree; 5=agree; 6=strongly agree; 7=very strongly agree

1) We have a good marriage.

1 _____ 2 ______ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

2) My relationship with my partner is very stable.

1 _____ 2 ______ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

3) Our marriage is strong.

1 _____ 2 ______ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

4) My relationship with my partner makes me happy.

1 _____ 2 ______ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

5) I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

1 _____ 2 ______ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____

6) The degree of happiness, everything considered, in your marriage

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

Unhappy  happy  perfectly happy
Section D
Instruction: put a tick on the line after the number that best describe your feelings. 1=never; 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently and 5=always.
1) I feel worthless due to my inability to make money
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
2) I feel disappointed that I am not able to pursue higher education
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
3) I feel pressured to be dependent on my husband since moving to US
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
4) I feel unhappy that the distribution of household labor is not fair (I do too much household work)
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
5) I feel pressured that my family and friends in China will be disappointed in me because my life is not suitable for someone who has as much education and professional experience as I have
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
6) I feel trapped due to obligations of taking care of children or maintaining household
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
7) I feel isolated, bored and frustrated during the day
   1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

Thanks for your time to help finish the questionnaire. There is a follow up interview that takes around 30 – 60 minutes that aims to further the understanding of the general feelings and experiences of female spouses of Chinese International students and scholars. Please be aware that your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your identity will not be revealed in the final thesis manuscript or any papers based on this study.

If you are interested to participate in this interview, please leave you contact information:
Name ____________________
Telephone No.____________________
Email address:_____________________________
I would like to ask you a few questions about your experience in the U.S.

1. Have there been any changes in your marital relationship with your husband in the U.S. compared with that in China? If yes, what kind of changes? Why do you think these changes here happened?

2. What’s your education level?

3. What kind of job did you do in China before you came to U.S.?

4. Do you work in the U.S.? What kind of job are you doing? How do you feel about this job? If you do not have a job (when I say “job,” I mean something that can bring income), what do you do during the daytime? How do you feel about this (not having a job bring income)?

5. What did you expect your life to be like before you got to the U.S.? How is your life different here, compared to China? How do you feel about these changes?

6. Have you ever been upset because what you do here is not what you expect?
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jing Zhang received her bachelor’s degree in economics from the Zhongnan University of Economics and Laws in China in 1998. After graduation, she worked in community development in rural areas of China for nearly 4 years, mainly with disadvantaged women and children. Jing Zhang later came to the U.S. to attend the University of Florida, receiving her Master of Science degree in 2007 in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences.