EDUCATED WIVES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR
CLASS AND OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

SOCIOLOGY

May 2011

By

Gita Neupane

Thesis Committee:

Patricia G. Steinhoff, Chairperson

Valli Kalei Kanuha

Susan J. Wurtzburg
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a product of contribution and support from a number of people. In the process of formulating the research idea, Dr. Kanuha’s seminar on qualitative research in Spring 2010 was very helpful to shape this phenomenon as a researchable entity. When I talked to Dr. Patricia G. Steinhoff about the research idea, she enthusiastically supported it and showed me all the process from the very beginning to the end. It is my great pleasure having her as my Chair in the thesis committee. Her continuous support, encouragement, valuable advice and her understanding helped my research endeavor to turn in this academic level. Without her consistent support, this thesis would not have been possible in this form. Similarly, I am equally grateful to Dr. Vallie Kalei Kanuha for her all the efforts in her class that was instrumental to help me pursue this topic. Her continuous effort to teach grounded theory gave me a methodological tool to analyze the data in this thesis. Without her training for step-by-step process of data analysis, this study would not have taken this form. Similarly, I am cordially thankful to Dr. Susan J. Wurtzburg for passionately agreeing to be in my committee even in her very initial days in the Department. Her detailed comments on my both proposal and thesis provided a lot of space for the improvement of this thesis.

Similarly, I am also thankful to the Assistant Director of International Students Service, Martha Staff and the people from the East-West Center without whose help I could not have had an access to the research interviewees. I also appreciate all the interviewees for the time and their effort to share their valuable experience.

Similarly, I also would like to thank Hiroki Igarashi who helped me personally by providing not only his ideas, advice and materials in the very beginning but also his moral support and
encouragement for this research. Having participated in a writing group in summer 2010 organized by him, I was able to prepare my thesis proposal.

This acknowledgement will be incomplete without remembering Dr. Seio Nakajima for his generous and consistent help with his valuable ideas and suggestions toward my thesis.

I also thank Yoko Wang for the opportunity to present my thesis in Asia group. I was very benefitted by the comments and feedback by all the respected professors and my friends present there.

My parents also deserve many thanks for their continuous support, encouragement and their everlasting concern for my academic career. Their dreams for my progress always push me toward hard work and success.

Last but not the least, I owe my deepest gratitude to my husband, Bal Krishna Sharma, who not only made my US education possible but also provided the continuous, every possible support not only for this thesis but for my whole academic career and personal life in both sorrow and joy.

Finally, I want to offer my best regard to all the people who directly or indirectly helped to complete this project.
ABSTRACT

This study examines experiences of South Asian women spouses of international graduate students in the United States (US) from Hawaii in terms of their perceived social class and occupational mobility, and highlights socio-cultural and institutional factors affecting such mobility influenced by their employment and unemployment conditions affected by their visa status. The participants were accessed through my personal social networks and snowball sampling. In-depth interviews with ten such spouses and an intensive examination of their narratives though grounded theory as a methodological tool revealed five major themes specifically: academic qualifications and occupational mobility, class-based habitus and the feeling of declassing, negotiation of multiple identities, employment rights and restrictions tethered to their American visas, and the symbolic meaning of the US for the participants. These themes are interconnected and sometimes overlap with each other.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Researcher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Status of Educated Women in South Asia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, literacy and education in South Asia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and Marriage System in South Asia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States as a Symbol of Status</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and Social Status of International Students’ Spouses in the US</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Adaptation and Assimilation: Acculturation Model</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Negotiation and Transformation of Self: Identity Model</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Women and their Career Opportunities: Role of Habitus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Cultural Capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academic Qualifications and Occupational Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Devaluation of Academic Credentials and Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing Downward Occupational Mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement of Different Work Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class-Based Habitus and the Feeling of Declassing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation of Multiple Identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sacrificing Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender Role in the Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary Break from the Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment Rights and Restrictions Tethered with Visa Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic Meaning of the United States: Dreams and Realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 2:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 3:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 4:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

General Background

Demographic movement from one part of the world to another part for various purposes, including international education, has recently gained popularity in this increasingly globalized world. In this regard, the North American education system has attracted a large number of international students in recent years (e.g. Dreher & Poutvaara, 2005; McKenzie, 2008; Sakamoto, 2006). Open Doors data published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2010) reports that the number of international students coming to the US for their studies is increasing every year. For instance, in 2009/10 alone, the number of these students reached to 690,923, which was an increase of 2.9% compared to the previous year. Many graduate students enter the US with their families, and previous studies show that these accompanying spouses tend to be females (e.g., Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009). Based on the number of visas issued by the American embassies in their respective countries in South Asia, the total number of students entering the US in 2010 was 127,519, which is 18% of the total student population which entered the US in that year. Similarly, the same source reports that there were 4,512 spouses and children of principal student candidates who entered the US in 2009; this is 8% of the total student-dependent population (http://travel.state.gov/visa/statistics).

Some of these accompanying women are academically qualified and have had highly skilled jobs in their home countries. They usually leave their jobs for the sake of their husbands’ education. They are also influenced by the discourses, which suggest that the US is a land of freedom and endless opportunities. Such discourses lead them to make decisions to leave their home countries and quit their previous jobs without necessarily thinking about the potential
consequences of these decisions for their futures (Chen, 2009). This trend has also influenced South Asian women who are following their husbands motivated by their family values while simultaneously making the continuation of their careers less significant. In the following sections, I briefly explain my background as a researcher and then I provide a short introduction to the South Asian women, concentrating on their academic and social status in societies they come from.

**Background of the Researcher**

I came to the US from Nepal in 2008 as a “dependant” of my husband who was a graduate student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. My decision to come to Hawai‘i was greatly influenced by the imaginary image of the US as a “dreamland,” particularly for the younger Nepalese generation. Before I left for the US, I was working in a non-government organization (NGO) for disadvantaged communities in Nepal, while also teaching part time in a college. When I got the US visa, my career shrunk in value for me compared to the US dream. Traveling to America was very prestigious, and a desired achievement in the eyes of my family, friends and relatives. I was swept away by these beliefs, and I did not have a concrete plan, nor did I have necessary information for what I was going to do after my arrival in the US, though I had a desire to continue my university education. I was granted a J-2 visa by the US embassy but did not know its privileges and limitations.

It was only after a few weeks of my stay in Hawai‘i that I began to understand my visa privileges and its restrictions—crucial information for me since it encoded legal and socio-cultural challenges. I realized that I had very few options for my academic and professional possibilities in the new American context. For example, tuition for international students in the
US universities was very expensive. I was staying in a student dormitory with my husband and the environment and discourses that surrounded me were almost always related to academic topics. I rarely found dependent spouses like myself in that residence. For this reason, I had an intense feeling of exclusion from involvement and engagement with other people who were all students. I was also suffering from my loss of professional, career dreams. Contributing to this feeling, some students in the dormitory used to ask me which degree and program I was pursuing at the university. When I answered them that I was not a student and was in the US with my husband, some of them asked me a follow up question: if I was here for my vacation. Such circumstances in particular questioned my assumed professional identity as well my career goal. After I knew that I was eligible to apply for a job, with a legal work authorization attached to my J-2 visa status, I became more optimistic about pursuing my professional career, and thought I could continue what I was doing in Nepal. I looked for jobs that matched my academic credentials first. Finally, I ended up working in a local grocery store as a cashier for seven months before I was able to enter a graduate program.

Because of my frequent participation in spouse meetings at the East-West Center, I had an opportunity to listen to other spouses who were undergoing similar or more miserable conditions. I found many women with higher degrees and good professional careers in their home countries were struggling with manual work or another non-skilled job that did not match their academic background and experiences. At this point, I realized that I was not the only person in that situation.

After I became a graduate student in sociology, I continued thinking about this issue because of my own experience with this invisible social barrier, ensuring that these sojourn
spouses spend their life in limbo, with only vague expectations for their futures. The story of these women’s contemporary situations in comparison with their previous careers made me wonder about them, and how they define themselves in terms of their everyday life and professional careers in the US. Such questions helped me uncover the complexities and challenges of their lives in the new context. I thought this topic worth pursing for my research in order to explore this socially invisible sphere of the sojourner spouses of international graduate students in the US. Therefore, this research is inspired by the insider out (Collins, 1986) situation due to their exclusion from the campus and local communities, and their professional identity crisis. Through this study I will focus on the voice of these unheard people, whose narratives can be useful for the immigration policy makers, administrators, and advocates of marginalized groups like them. The recommendations from their narratives also give valuable suggestions to other future sojourning spouses. In addition to these practical purposes, I hope this study will make a valuable contribution in the field of sociology.

**Social Status of Educated Women in South Asia**

In order to provide the lived experience of international students’ spouses from South Asia, it is necessary to mention briefly their backgrounds. In so doing, I first explain the link between social status and professional identity of South Asian women in general. Then I discuss South Asian literacy, education, gender roles, and marriage systems, and the value of American education for South Asians in general, and for student spouses in particular.

The region of South Asia includes the countries of the Indian sub-continent: India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Saddled with “agrarian economics, deep-rooted religiosity and traditional modes of social life that are extremely varied and deeply
entrenched in patriarchy, the economies of these South Asian nations have for the past half a century moved slowly toward greater industrialization, modernization and urbanization” (Bhatia, Bhanot & Samanta, 2008:2). South Asian societies are strongly class, and even caste based—inherited in most cases. The phrases “middle class” and “upper class” tend to be associated with employment status and income. Sahni’s (1999) explanation of class in India, for example, connects middle class status with persons who hold office jobs, government positions, or teaching positions, while lower or “backward” class status is connected with persons who work as laborers, domestic servants, or artisans, or who are “unemployed slum dwellers” (p. 135).

Class in this region is birth related insofar as one’s inheritance determines future opportunities.

Though the global movements for improving women's status have always emphasized “education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society” (Kamat, 1976:3), the Human Development Center (2000) in Pakistan reports that the representation of women in educational institutions and the job market is minimal in South Asia, due to the factors associated with a long rooted patriarchal society, a gender-biased legal system, and the religious and prescriptive cultural background. The region and population is not homogenous, and women’s status manifests differently in different parts of South Asia. There are, however, some common indicators that characterize the South Asian women in their adverse social, political and cultural status as women. These factors include low levels of education, poor health conditions, trafficking, unequal employment opportunities, and increasing violence against women (Bhatia, Bhanot & Samanta, 2008). In this regard, many women are excluded from the mainstream of socio-political life in education and professions in this region. In this context, I find it useful to use Agnihotri’s (2008) terms ‘South Asian women’ for the purpose of my study to refer to “a descriptive though non-homogeneous category… to lay out the contextual
terrain within which women’s issues and experiences need to be examined” (p. 151). Applied to the context of receiving country, Rajan and Sharma (2006) note that ‘South Asian’ as a category has been an “accepted and acceptable nomenclature” in the US because of the people’s proximity with each other from the region, and “their perceived racial difference from other Asian Americans” (p.4). They are distinct from other migrant groups in terms of their bilingual abilities (Prasad, 2000) in that they can speak English well, along with their ability to speak their native languages (Rahman & Rollock, 2004). Because of this reason, I continue to retain and use ‘South Asian women’ as a category in the context of the United States for the purpose of the present study. My tendency is not to differentiate among the participants from different South Asian countries, though the participants at times make their individual, country-specific backgrounds relevant during the interviews.

Though most South Asian women are marginalized and poor, some women from the “upper sections have made gains” and their “power and status are in stark contrast” (Agnihotri, 2008: 145) with the rest of the women in their societies. Those who have better education are able to enjoy higher status. Their educational attainment in most cases is traditionally linked to social benefits like finding a better partner for marriage and/or in some cases gaining higher social status through their career. In what follows, I briefly provide a rough sketch of women in relation to education and literacy in their respective countries.

**Women, literacy and education in South Asia**

Women in South Asia have very different rates of education, or opportunities in general, depending on which socio-economic background they come from. Moreover, the urban and rural differences, and people’s lifestyle vary depending on their nation’s social and economic class
structure. However, for all nations, there is a huge gap between women and men in every type of opportunity, from nutrition to education, and work division to decision-making issues. For example, according to the census 2001, India’s literacy measure is 65% for all adults and 56% for women, at a time when the literacy rate worldwide for persons 15 years of age and above is 79% (UNESCO, 2002). Similarly, based on the census 2001, the literacy rate of Nepal is 48% although men attain 62.7% literacy, while only 34.9% of women can read and write. Sri Lanka’s case is much better having a total literacy rate of 91%, plus the female literacy rate has risen tremendously with an increase from 67% in 1963 to 89% in 2001. Similarly, the total literacy rate of Bangladesh comprises 47.9% and males are 54% literate while females are 41.4%. In Pakistan’s case, the total literacy rate is 49.9% and the gender gap there is much wider than in the other countries. For example, the male literacy rate is 63% while only 36% of females are literate. In all these nations, school enrollments from primary to tertiary education demonstrate that fewer women attend, when compared to men. The statistics included here demonstrates the gender disparity in literacy in the region. This pattern is present in other South Asian data, and there are indigenous reasons for this situation.

The long rooted traditional patriarchal South Asian society is slowly moving toward more opportunities and careered life for women though a large part of women’s work is not considered an economic activity. Teresita Schaffer in America.gov mentions that women make one fourth of the salaries of all workers in Indian information technology. She presents the data which show that women in India held 8% of the engineering jobs in the mid 1980s, while in 2010 they occupied 40 percent of the employment opportunities in this sector-- which is a big rise. Thorat (2006) from The University Grant Commission in India reports that the gross enrollment rate by males in higher education in 2003 is 15.25% while female enrollment is only 11%, but still this
is a better picture of women in Indian higher education compared to previous years. Due to higher education and better economic participation of these women, the traditional perception of gender roles is changing—though limited only to educated and employed women. According to the Ministry of Education report in Nepal, there are 37.3% of female students in higher educational institutions in the academic year 2009/2010. However, according to the Review of Research Literature on Girls’ Education in Nepal reviewed by UNESCO in 2004, women constitute only 7.5% of the total bureaucratic workforce. The UNESCO study also shows that women have fewer chances of earning higher level academic degrees and of being selected for in-country and overseas courses and study tours, both of which are important for promotion opportunities. Nepalese educational policies are not gender sensitive, and it can be argued that gender neutrality has fostered the low participation of women in education. Although I presented only a few statistics about educated women in India and Nepal, these data give an idea of the proportional participation of women in employment in the region. Only a few South Asian women, in comparison to men, are educated and employed, meaning that this small group may have higher status and class value in their societies.

**Gender and marriage system in South Asia**

In this section, I briefly introduce the marriage system in South Asian countries because a woman’s social status highly depends on her marital family’s status. The marriage arrangements in South Asia in general, and in these women’s lives in particular provide broader understanding about the family composition, and women’s roles in their family. Though South Asian marriage systems vary depending on the regions, caste, class, and other factors, they are arranged by family or relatives in most cases. Economic sufficiency and social status play a big role in
determining a marriage (Banerjee et al. 2008). Marriage normally takes place within the same socio-economic class (Banerjee et al., 2008; Miller 1994) and these types of marriage are largely of an arranged type. The traditional notion of daughters in this South Asian region as “alien’s wealth” are normally taken to mean that they are their parents’ liability until a suitable match is arranged (Sandhu, 2010). Following this tradition, arranged marriage takes place on the recommendation of families and relatives, based on the social status of the two families.

Subramaniam (2006) gives an example from India, highlight that family status is supposed to be equal between groom and bride, but men tend to enjoy higher status in their family interactions, as well as in society. This is also mostly true in other parts of South Asia. Similarly, the dowry plays an important role in marriage in this region. Often the groom’s family makes outrageous demands of cash or other forms of material wealth like apartments, cars, motorcycles, gold, etc. from the bride’s family. Sandhu describes the general marriage system in this region in the following way:

This important step in the arranged marriage process normally has the man visit the woman’s house, along with his family, where the prospective bride and groom meet each other for the first time. In this meeting, he ‘sees’ her, or looks her over. Usually prior to this meeting, pictures of the two of them have also been exchanged. Once the initial meeting is over, the man and his family decides if they wish to make the match. They convey their decision to the woman’s family, who then either accept or reject the offer. Depending on how ‘modern’ the families are and also on the families’ urban or rural geographical location, the two people may meet each other a few times on their own, or go on dates before making the decision. (p. 127).
Though marriage arrangements are very diverse across the region, the arranged type is still predominant. Sandhu’s study on Indian women documents that educated women have greater control over their marital lives compared to the uneducated, although there is still a major role played by families in determining whether a marriage is suitable. She mentions that due to their education, high salary, and social prestige, these urban women are able to choose or attract suitable marriage partners, allowing them to redefine gender, sex and marriage norms by finding their marriage partners by themselves. Ahlawat (2008) argues that in addition to social class, educational qualifications and professional career types also play an important role in arranged marriages due to their economic value. Sandhu also echoes a similar observation in her study that depicts this turn from traditional rigid regulations to the acceptance of multiple social behaviors of urban women due to their career opportunities and economic independence.

These middle class or career oriented women have a different lifestyle than uneducated and working class women. Many of these privileged women can avoid manual work because they can afford to hire maids and family sitters. For example, in a case from urban India, Dickey (2000) states that such domestic workers take care of these middle-class and upper-class women so that the latter can use their time for productive, status oriented work outside their homes. He further mentions that having a servant working for the family is a sign of class achievement, and argues that these women protect and produce their class boundaries in two ways. First, with the help of these domestic workers inside their homes, they minimize their household chores, which symbolize higher class attainment. Second, they can engage in their professional careers and contribute directly to the economic and symbolic basis of their class standing. In this regard, Dickey provides four main factors associated with their lifestyle: it allows these women to define their work realm outside their homes; it provides an important stage for class reproduction in
everyday basis; it creates a class difference inside the family based on inner and outer intimacy with the family members; and both servants and these women form their class on the different side in the same sphere. In this way, these highly educated, economically privileged women form a distinct group, attaining a luxurious life, and augmenting their social class with an “additional and largely distinct hierarchy and source of identity” (Dickey, 2000: 464).

Adams and Dickey (2000) also argue that middle class or upper class people in the South Asian region distinguish themselves by their awareness of and expectations about their personal and social life in terms of education, occupation, family life and social accessibility. Poor or lower class people hardly have any opportunities to get an education or to pursue professional careers in white-collar jobs. In spite of having different social hierarchies in their society, educated and economically privileged women in these countries enjoy their professional careers with higher social status and respect compared to those who are not educated.

The South Asian region is experiencing rapid population growth and change, especially for women, with a noticeable growth in successive generations of women regarding their involvement in social and political movements resulting in women’s greater empowerment (Milward, 2009). While there is social momentum resulting in improvements in the legal and social systems for women, and there are many positive indications that increasing numbers of women are being educated and finding good careers, there are social as well as familial expectations and responsibilities that these women have to fulfill. The social construction of ‘women spouse’ in South Asian societies closely interacts with other social ideologies of social class, caste, religion, and social status in the region. In this patriarchal social structure, the conventional and traditional gender roles for women largely assign them to the sphere of family
matters and household chores (Agnihotri, 2008). Many women do abide by the marriage rules, which culturally oblige them to be the dependents of male member of the family, even if they have their own careers (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009). Educated women, particularly married ones, in this changing context have to face dual responsibilities: their professional career goals, as well as their familial role as a ‘wife’, ‘mother’ or ‘daughter-in-law’. Socially and economically privileged women, however, as mentioned above, tend to enjoy freedom from household chores.

If we review the marriage tradition and patriarchal family structure, the role of female as well as the marriage practice have been mostly influenced by the religious practices in the region. Religious life is also very diverse in South Asia. Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives are Islamic countries with their Muslim population of 96%, 90% and 100% respectively. In India and Nepal, most people follow the Hindu religion (about 80% in each), although India has large number of Islamic and Christian population. In Bhutan and Sri Lanka, large populations follow Buddhism, 70% and 75% respectively (The World Factbook, n.d.). It will involve a lot of risk to characterize the role and status of women from a single religious perspective in the South Asian region because such a phenomenon depends on context and culture of the place where women live. Generally speaking, Hinduism regards a married woman as someone who should never be independent, but follow her father before marriage, husband during married life and son during widowhood. Similarly, in Islam, a woman is given the role as someone who needs to be protected by men, and their husbands are responsible for financial prosperity of their family. In Buddhist’s philosophy as well, women are mostly regarded as limiting to motherhood or household duties while men go for enlightenment. Though the participants in my study are educated and may not articulate their strong belief in religion, the social and family structure is more likely to reinforce their subordinate role in their married life.
**The United States as a symbol of status**

Migration trend from the South Asian region traditionally has been largely class based, migrants predominantly being a highly educated, middle class population (Rajan & Sharma, 2006; Prasad, 2000). Because of their highly patriarchal social structure, South Asian women immigrants to the US come as dependent wives of their husbands, rather than on their own, or as the principal candidates (Abraham, 2000). This is generally true in the case of South Asian graduate students who come to the US (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009). Many women with professional careers are morally obliged to follow their husbands, and quit their own careers, thereby giving less attention to their own professional, academic identity in their home countries.

Previous studies show that many of the students from the South Asian region studying in the US tend to look for professional work, and to apply for permanent immigrant status in the US (Chen, 2005; Davis, 2010). If they are successful in finding a job, or they migrate permanently to the US, they feel a sense of great accomplishment. If they acquire qualification from the US institutions of higher education, this not only increases their possibility of attaining better professional positions, but also may result in better earnings when they return to their home countries. If a person studies in the US, this fact alone is likely to confer higher status and prestige at home. This means that studying in the US does not only offer the cultural capital necessary for today’s competitive job market, but also has symbolic value to them in their societies back home. If one’s son or daughter is studying in the US, even the parents are regarded as increasing their social status not only because they are economically sound as they can afford to send their children for study abroad, but also because their children are in “America”. The high value of American education is evident in finding a bride as well. If a prospective groom is
a student in a US university, this fact alone can overshadow other characteristics of the groom, and the bride and her family may be ready to compromise on other issues, if necessary. This fact alone provides some indication of why women want to get married and come to the US, even if they have to compromise their own educational and professional careers.

**Legal and Social Status of International Students’ Spouses in the US**

International students’ women spouses are different from immigrant women from the same region because they are in the US for a short time, and many of them do not have a visa that allows them to work legally. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) classifies students and their spouses as ‘non-immigrants’ to the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) defines the term ‘non-immigrant’ as “a foreign national who requests temporary entry to the United States for a specific purpose” (Mongar & Barr, 2010). USCIS further shows that students, their spouses and children comprise 45% of the total number of non-immigrants. The data report that these principal students are accompanied by their spouses and children— 88,198 such spouses and children in 2009. The international graduate students at American universities are granted either F-1 or J-1 visa, and their spouses and children, who are called the students’ ‘dependents’, are granted either F-2 or J-2 visas respectively. The length of stay of these dependent categories varies based on the principal students’ duration of stay. On average, one ‘dependent’ person spends only about 260 days in the US (USCIS, 2006).

There are a number of other legal and political provisions that make the students’ spouses a distinct category. USCIS (2006) makes a distinction between the principal candidates and the dependents J-2 and F-2 status in the following way:
Congress also recognized that provision needed to be made to permit the spouses and minor children of foreign students and exchange visitors to enter with the family member participating in such programs. It is important to distinguish between the principal alien (the students or exchange visitor) and his or her dependents because the principals may be authorized to do things that the dependents cannot, such as attend college or work in the United States. Thus, Congress created new subcategories of nonimmigrant to accommodate the spouses and children of foreign students and exchange visitors. The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act created the J-2 categories for exchange program participants’ spouses and children, and the F-2 category for the spouses and children of foreign students (p. 22).

The spouses have two different types of visa status, with different rights and obligations. For instance, accompanying spouses of F-1 students, classified as F-2 non-immigrants, cannot apply for work authorization, and they can only stay in the US until the valid D/S (Duration of Status) of the corresponding F-1. In the case of J-2 visa-holders, they can work with the permission of USCIS, but their employment will not be authorized if such income is needed to support the J-1 principal alien. The duration of their stay is also determined by the period specified on the J-1’s SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitors Information System) form— D/S-2019 (Baker, 2008).

Overall, the number of women, who are dependent spouses entering the US on dependent visas (either F-2 or J-2) is larger than the number of male dependent spouses (Baker, 2008; Sakamoto, 2006). This is also true in the case of students and spouses who come to the US from South Asian countries (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009). This trend of sojourn migrants conforms to the overall immigration patterns that also skew further in favor of men—men making up the larger
proportion of immigrants in this category—and the law in the US also requires that the immigrating wives get their legal status through their husbands (Das Gupta, 2006). It can be argued that these women spouses from different cultural backgrounds have different perceptions and experiences in the US and any study that overgeneralizes ‘international students’ spouses’ as one category is likely to miss details that can be attributed to their different epistemological and ideological backgrounds (de Verthelyi, 1995). Because of a number of common characteristics that the South Asian educated women share, the current study will provide much-needed information about their personal, social and professional lives during their stay in the US. This study deals with a population group which deserves more research than has been devoted on them to date.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The issues of population movement from other countries to the US have occupied an important space in studies of international migration as well as in international education. Recent scholarship on international migration and globalization has documented the life stories of immigrant populations, and provided greater insight into these broad population movements (e.g. Ho et al., 2006; Ho, 2004; Suto, 2009). The studies on international education, on the other hand, have focused on the students themselves, exploring their academic expectations and achievements, adjustment to challenges, and related negotiation strategies (e.g., Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Though rigorous and robust, these studies and their findings are incomplete, since this research on immigrant women and on international students does not address the distinct characteristics of the international students’ spouses. The body of literature that deals with international students’ spouses is relatively small (Chen, 2009). There have been, however, some studies on international students’ women spouses that have investigated the topics of gender, identity, and cultural adjustment. It is helpful here to review previous studies on the international migration of educated women sojourners, as well as immigrants, focusing on the different theoretical perspectives of this literature. Studies on this topic demonstrate three different theoretical strands: theories of acculturation, theories of identity, and theories of social class and occupational mobility. I will briefly review each of them in the sections that follow.
The U-curve theory of cultural adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960) has long been used in studying the process of immigrant acculturation. According to this theory, people adapt to a new cultural context by passing through three successive stages: the honeymoon phase, disillusionment, and finally, adaptation. Another similar model of acculturation attitudes by Berry (1997) has also been increasingly influential in studying the phenomenon of cultural adaptation. According to this model, the degree of an individual’s acculturation is based on the extent to which he or she is willing to retain their old culture or to adopt a new one. According to Berry (1997), there are four acculturation attitudes that determine the success or failure of one’s adjustment: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

However, there have been criticisms of both the U-curve theory (e.g., Lello et al., 1980; de Verthelyi, 1995), and of Berry’s psychological acculturation theory. For instance, de Verthelyi’s (1995) sojourner research shows that international students as well as spouses in a university in rural Virginia share similar adjustment challenges. Unexpectedly, many international students’ spouses followed a pattern contrary to the U-curve theory, with the initial stage often being loneliness and depression, rather than excitement. Berry’s model has also been criticized because of its lack of consideration for structural issues that influence individuals’ cultural behaviors (Rudmin, 2003).

Moreover, little is known about how people actually perceive and negotiate their old and new cultures in their daily lives (Sakamoto, 2006). Sakamoto’s (2006) study is particularly strong in addressing the gaps in U-curve theory and Berry’s acculturation model. Sakamoto (2006) explored the family and gender roles of 30 Japanese academic sojourners (students and
scholars), and their spouses focusing on how these academic sojourners dealt with multiple cultures in all three stages—pre-sojourning, sojourning, and post-sojourning—in an American Midwest research university. Considering the broader framework of cultural adaptation theory, the study focuses on how these people construct, negotiate, participate, and redefine the self in their daily life. Based on her findings from the inductive coding and analysis of interview data using grounded theory, Sakamoto developed the Model of Cultural Negotiation consisting of six stages: cultural encounters, acculturation, resistance to the host culture and re-enculturation into the ‘original culture’, reevaluation of the ‘host culture(s)’, reevaluation of the ‘original culture’ and ‘transculturation’ (p. 561). Though my proposed study is limited to the sojourning period of the student spouses, the findings from Sakamoto’s (2006) study provide insights into gender roles as well as the roles of cultural factors in acculturation and the negotiation of self.

A few other studies based on theories of accommodation and adaptation have examined the initial immigration challenges due to cultural and other differences, and people’s coping strategies in the new location. Using accommodation and adjustment theory, a study by Toyokawa (2005), informed by grounded-theory analysis, explored 26 Japanese sojourners’ wives’ experiences and activities for about 1.5 years on the East Coast of the US. The study participants’ husbands were engaged in academic or business work at the time of the research. The findings show that these Japanese women were able to form social networks among themselves, and engaged in homemaking and good mothering rather than experiencing psychological problems—a finding that is again contrary to the traditional U-curve theory.
Identity Negotiation and Transformation of Self: Identity Model

There is another strand of work, based on symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), which may enrich our understanding of how these women discursively negotiate their identities and ‘transformation of self’ (McMohan, 1995) in the process of cultural adaptation. Symbolic interactionism, which also informs grounded theory methods, “assumes society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction” and “that interaction is inherently dynamic and interpretive (emphasis in the original) and addresses how people create, enact and change meanings and actions” (Charmaz, 2006:7). Such discursive theories of identity construction have provided a useful theoretical tool to examine how these women view and categorize themselves in their social interactions (Goffman, 1963). In this sense, identity refers to the social meaning of the self (Liamputtong, 2006). Since identity is enacted in interaction through different social relationships (McMahon, 1995), identity tends to be an “unstable, multiple, fluctuating, and fragmented nature of the contemporary ‘self’” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:8). These identities of self that emerge in interaction challenge the essentialist, static views of identity, as well as the narrowly interpreted individualist psychological sense of identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Park’s (2009) study, for example, shows that gender identity is constructed in diverse contexts for multiple recognitions. She reports a one-person case study of a Korean woman who quit her Ph.D. study to accompany her husband to the US in her attempt to adhere to the prescriptive patriarchal Korean social norms. Her findings from the interview narratives, applying a critical feminist perspective, reveal that each participant negotiates multiple gender identities like “daughter”, spouse”, “mother” and “language teacher” that are imposed by her socio-cultural, socio-political, and familial context. Their narratives produce the participant’s identities that connect to the ideologies of education, employment, and gender roles in her family.
A more recent study by Chen (2009) also uses theories of identity, and definition of self to offer a closer analysis of the life of international students’ spouses in the southeastern US. She interviewed international graduate students’ wives who accompanied their husbands to the US in order to find out how they negotiated their identity while they were confined as housewives at home. She chose nine non-American married women aged 25 to 45 years, who were college graduates, and had jobs in their home countries. The findings show that these women negotiated between their career development and family obligations. This study, however, does not go into the details of how their visa and legal status played a role in their transformation of self. Moreover, her selection of the study population was confined only to those women who were housewives in the US, leaving out a larger population who are doing deskilled and/or illegal jobs.

Previous studies show that cultural adaptation and identity negotiation are affected by the socio-political structure of the host culture, as well as family dynamics and gender roles of the participants’ home culture. In the case of women in particular, cultural norms, values and obligations play an important role in their lives (Park, 2009). Rigorous as the previous studies are, they yet leave a critical gap for research regarding how these women experience their social mobility in the new socio-political context of the US in terms of their perceived professional status and identities. In order to provide a more comprehensive picture of these skilled and educated women’s experiences in the new context, I argue that the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s class theory and concepts of cultural capital and habitus provide useful insights for understanding social class and occupational mobility. I will discuss it in more detail in the section that follows.
Educated Women and their Career Opportunities: Role of Habitus and Cultural Capital

Social mobility has been one of the major concepts applied to the study of social structure and stratification in sociology. It usually refers to the degree to which an individual or group is able to change their status and position in the social hierarchy. Most historical studies of social mobility use occupation as the indicator of social position and this type of mobility has been referred to as occupational mobility though other related concepts like job mobility or career mobility are also occasionally used (van Leeuwen, 2010). Occupational change can be expressed as either upward mobility or downward mobility (Kerr, 1973) characterized by any change in occupational or employment status over the life course resulting in the individual’s placement in a higher or in lower social status. What is labeled as occupational mobility can also be indicative of class mobility. For example, it is evident in the case of international student spouses who perceive themselves as experiencing downward mobility, not only in terms of their occupation, but also in their affiliation to a particular social class, and its related status and identity. In order to better understand this mobility, I review Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus below.

People’s interpretation of a cultural context different from their own is largely influenced by their previous experiences and individual perceptions as well as the existing objective social and cultural conditions in society. In this context, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s class theory and the concepts of cultural capital and habitus provide a theoretical apparatus for this study. For Bourdieu (1987), social class is viewed from both subjective and objective perspectives “mediating between objective conditions and subjective perceptions and practices, and so unconsciously constituting the unity of class” (Bourdieu, 1977: 80). For him, this is an
outcome of historical accumulations of all its effects termed as capital, which is accumulated in its “materialized form or its “incorporated” embodied form” (Bourdieu, 1986). This capital, though it takes time to accumulate, produces profits, and reproduces itself in an extended form, thereby creating a pattern of a social world in which the practice of these capitals brings success. In this context, the concept of class as an everyday social process (Reay, 1997) gives an understanding of the broader realization of both subjective and objective aspects. Here, the class complexities are viewed in terms of gender in the shifting location of South Asian women and their everyday practices. In the section that follows, I first review the concept of cultural capital which is helpful for examining how the US labor market rules and workplace conventions constrain or enable the international student spouses. Then I provide a detailed overview of the concept of habitus in order to understand the women spouses’ attitudes and responses toward the job market norms and culture.

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is helpful in understanding and investigating the social and occupational mobility of educated women as they confront their new socio-geographical context. Cultural capital is an advantage that a person gets as a result of education, skills, or knowledge, and that gives him/her higher social status. It is the “cultural knowledge as resources of power used by individuals and social groups to improve their positions within the social class structure” (Joppke, 1986: 57). It refers to the cultural knowledge, connections, and experiences, which allow people to better understand of social events and material culture, meaning that they are more likely to succeed in that society. This is the symbolic internalizing process of cultural values by socialization normally through books, historical things, arts, pictures, movies, sports, etc. Homes and schools are helpful for acquiring this type of cultural
capital. As a result, upper class people’s cognitive competencies are more refined in a cultivated culture (Lareau, 2003).

Bourdieu also introduces educational credentials, or degrees as the institutionalized aspect of cultural capital, which Joppke (1986) recognizes as the “incorporation of the symbolic, cognitive and aesthetic competences via implicit learning process mainly within the family socialization” (p. 57) and also reinforced by the school environment helping to develop certain type of habitus that fit into a particular class. Bourdieu further mentions that the education system helps to reproduce class due to the hierarchical occupational position. Therefore, education provides higher professional positions in the society and it helps to form a distinct social class.

Institutionalized cultural capital gains institutional recognition usually in the form of an individual’s academic qualifications or credentials, and this in turn plays a prominent role in the labor market. Findings from studies that have focused on educated and skilled women immigrants’ work experiences in the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia show that their time abroad has negative impacts on their careers, nudging them toward downward occupational mobility (Meares, 2010). Such a phenomenon has been variously labeled as ‘de-skilling’ (Man, 2004), ‘feminization’ (Ho, 2004), and ‘compromised careers’ (Suto, 2009). The major reason for downward occupational mobility among the skilled migrant women is the devaluation of their foreign credentials and foreign work experience (Suto, 2009), which leads to deskilling of their profession. I review two of such studies below.

Suto (2009) recruited 14 immigrant women aged between 20 and 55 years old in Vancouver, Canada. These women had completed baccalaureate and master’s level education
and were employed in good positions in their home countries. At the time of the research, they were married, with children living at home, having immigrated to Canada after age 19, and feeling comfortable speaking English. Her findings from semi-structured interviews showed “downward career mobility of many skilled professionals, especially those in regulated professions” (p. 423). Most of them worked below their capacity, and some of them were unemployed and were limited to household chores. She refers to such a phenomenon as ‘compromised careers’.

Purkayastha (2004) reports findings from interviews with 45 “dependents” of skilled male migrants to the US from India. The women highlighted in this study were highly educated (ranging from BA degrees to doctoral and professional ones) and worked in diverse fields: medicine, academia, banking, insurance, and social services. The principal candidates were recruited to work in the US for a period of three to six years with H1-B visas, giving their wives two options—either living in a split household in order to continue their careers (i.e. they remain in India, while their husbands temporarily move to the US), or they accompanied their husbands to the US, becoming a full-time homemaker. Those women who chose to immigrate were thrust into homemaking gender roles, irrespective of whether they have the training or inclination to pursue careers of their own. All the women encountered a severe devaluation of their credentials. Even those with medical degrees (which is officially defined as high-skilled), had to struggle to get back into their fields as they encountered segregated access to jobs based on where their medical degree was acquired.

The common thread across both these studies is that women’s cultural capital, in terms of academic qualification and work experience from their home countries does not give them
similarly ranked positions in the labor market compared to those women with qualifications and experiences gained from the host countries. In addition, some of these women immigrants have increased domestic and family roles that are inexorably intertwined with their cultural and social responsibilities in the family.

Although these studies apply critical and feminist theories to the study of the discriminatory labor markets in the immigrant-receiving countries, an important aspect is missing in these studies. An unacknowledged factor is the role of habitus in connection to labor market circumstances and cultures; that is, what preconceptions, attitudes, and motivations the immigrants and sojourners bring with them. In the following section, I provide the overview of habitus from Bourdieu’s class theory as it relates to the present study.

Bourdieu (1977) mentions that habitus refers to the cognitive embodiment of outside structure in a person’s given circumstances. It is a system of disposition and a key to social reproduction since it helps to create and monitor the ordinal practices of social life. Class specific lifestyle and choice of taste by an individual actor qualify and designate as a member of a particular class (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus supplies the practice of certain action in terms of taste of likes and dislikes. This is not the immediately acquired outcome of any endeavors but the result of conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence (Bourdieu, 1980). The following definition of habitus gives a clearer picture:

The system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a
conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 1980: 54).

Therefore, habitus is the product of belonging to a particular class, which allows people to develop certain features distinguishing them from other classed people in their thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions. Bourdieu suggests that habitus is conditioned by historically and socially situated conditions. Habitus is visible in people’s practices and actions in their day-to-day activities, and even though class is not articulated, habitus still remains in relation to people’s practices and action (Reay, 1997).

When the concept of habitus is applied to the American labor market for the international student spouses, it can be argued that the employment situation has certain rules and requirements that are expected from those who want employment. On the other hand, sojourners from South Asia have their own set of behaviors and expectations that defines their habitus—“a system of schemes of perception and thought” that “acts… as an organizing principle of behavior” (Bourdieu, 1977: 18). When habitus comes in conflict with the existing labor market situation, people may be denied access to the full spectrum of labor market opportunities. Bauder (2005a) makes a similar case when he mentions that immigrants embody the habitus of a foreign place and this habitus may not match with the rules of the labor market in the new context. In his study of the employment situations of South Asian immigrants in Vancouver, Canada, Bauder interviewed immigrants, employers, and employment counselors, and reported that “being unfamiliar with the rules of the Canadian labor market, immigrants may fail to navigate the labor market effectively or may even inadvertently communicate to Canadian employers that they are not culturally competent for an advertised job” (p. 83). In another study, Bauder (2005b) reports
that attitudes and perceptions of work also shape one’s habitus and vice versa. Bauder’s (2005b) focus was not on the type of work immigrants were doing, but on the purpose behind their employment, and he found that South Asian respondents leaned more toward ‘work for living’ and ‘for paying the bill’. The implication of the findings from his study is that South Asians tend to have hierarchical attitudes about different types of jobs, and classify them as tied to the people of a particular social class. That means working in a restaurant, for example, can be tied to working class job while owning a restaurant would be more middle or higher class. One important difference between Bauder’s (2005b) and my study, however, is that while his participants were in Canada through family migration and were not highly educated, the women in my study are highly educated and career-oriented, and working for a living is not necessarily their primary purpose when looking for a job.

I argue that it is only through investigating the objective labor market situation, and the rules that govern it, and the dispositions and tastes of the immigrants and sojourners that we can obtain a comprehensive picture of social class, profession, and the employment market. These related factors of habitus and cultural capital assist with understanding South Asian women’s life in the US. These concepts are relevant in the present study for several reasons. Before arriving in the US, these women had higher education degrees from their countries, and most women lived in cities with some knowledge of how the ‘metropolitan environment’ works (Suto, 2009) in their respective contexts. Their institutionalized cultural capital and consequential class status had conferred on them a relatively prestigious and higher-class life than most other people in their society. They also had a better social and economic capital as a consequence of their elevated status. Their occupational position helped them to hold these special positions in their societies because only a few women have higher educational qualifications and professional
careers in their fields. When these women hold these special social positions, they bring their habitus along with them while coming to the US. Their previous education and work experiences constituting competencies and confidence make them expect to obtain relevant employment in the US, and this expectation is not upheld. In the new context, they have the same habitus acquired in the home countries about their work attitudes (Bauder, 2005); however, their institutionalized cultural capital is not recognized in the new context, and they need to acquire new capital. They arrive in the US with the impression that their education and work experience will be an invaluable resource in reconstructing their lives (Suto, 2009).

These findings from studies with skilled immigrant women provide useful insights, but as I argued above, the international students’ educated wives are different from these studied immigrant women in terms of their visa, the length of stay, and their goals in life, and, therefore, they deserve research, which occurs in this study. This naturally creates a niche for a study that explores how the international students’ spouses, who have come to the US accompanying their husbands experience downward social mobility in terms of such indicators as unemployment, under-employment, or deskilled work experience, and how understanding of their habitus helps to interpret such mobility. This investigation of the intersection between the objective job market and the subjective experience of the participants provides useful insights about their social class mobility.

**Research Questions**

The general objective of this study is to explore the experiences of international students’ educated wives, in order to understand their changed occupational status, and professional
identity, in the context of the US. More specifically, I want to approach this issue through the following research questions:

1. How do the international graduate students’ women spouses perceive their occupational and class mobility in the new context?
2. To what socio-cultural and institutional factors do they attribute such mobility?
3. How do they interpret the meaning of their lives in the new context of the United States?

**Methodology**

**Research design**

A qualitative research design was used for data collection. Such an approach helps with “exploring life histories or everyday behavior” (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008:9) of the people as well as allowing researchers to identify and qualify their own experience while doing research (Tedlock, 2000). Since I was also a part of this community, my experiences and regular informal conversations with these people, and events, such as attending the spouse meetings organized by the student spouses’ organization at the East-West Center enriched my understanding by “being native” (Kanuha, 2000). Kanuha (2000) explains the benefits of being native as “being an insider researcher [which] enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population” (p. 444). I have used a qualitative approach that incorporates native and insider knowledge (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) as well as an inductive analytical approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987) in order to make sense of the data.
Research setting

The multicultural environment and its unique landscape make Hawai‘i a different society and location from mainland America. The mixture of different ethnic groups provides a feeling that members of most ethnicities can be a part of this larger community. No majority ethnic or racial group monopolizes the island in terms of its demography. According to the US Census Bureau (2009) Asian people compose 38.8% of the population in Hawai‘i while Caucasians make up 30.2% and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders 9.2%. There is also a large number of people, who identify themselves from two or more ethnic backgrounds, and this group comprises 18%. Multicultural Hawai‘i may seem welcoming to diverse population. In comparison to the continental United States, I believe that international visitors, or students and their spouses are less likely to experience racial discrimination because of the state’s plurality. Colmenares (2008) taking data from the 2006 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) reports that about 22.3% of the Hawaiian population speaks a language other than English at home. He lists the top ten languages of Hawai‘i after English: Ilokano, Japanese, Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Bisayan (Cebuano), Cantonese, Other Pacific Languages (Chuukese, Marshallese, Yapese) and Spanish. These data show that people maintain language loyalty because they speak their mother tongue in their homes. In addition, people who are already proficient in English in their home countries due to their colonial history, their education in English or the influence of foreign media and technology, may not be linguistically vulnerable because of their non-native English identity or accent while speaking English in Hawai‘i. Hawai‘i’s multilingual environment would seem to make their language and cultural adjustment relatively less challenging.
While Hawai’i is multicultural, this advantage is offset by the high cost of living, which makes a significant impact in the everyday life of international students, as well as their spouses, who depend on their limited income or their husbands’ stipends. An online travel guide http://www.alternative-hawaii.com/overpop.htm shows that the cost of living in Hawai’i ranges from 30% above the national average for a single person to 60% above for two or more people. It also shows that in 2006 a family of four renting accommodation in Honolulu needs to earn $111,695 or 55% more income than on the mainland to maintain a lifestyle similar to a comparable family earning $72,000 in the continental United States. This implies that students and their spouses are likely to have economic hardships due to their limited income.

The participants of this research were living in Hawai’i and their husbands were studying in the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. The participants who did not have children were staying in an East-West Center dormitory, and the ones with children were residing off campus in rental apartments. Due to the cultural, linguistic, and economic features of Hawai’i, the spouses of international students may have different experience from student spouses in other states.

The data

Recorded interviews were the major means of data collection in this study. With a belief that interviews unravel the narratives of individuals and they help with understanding the world from the subject’s point of view, I completed intensive interviews of 10 women spouses of international graduate students. Charmaz (2006) argues that intensive interviews explore the in-depth experience of information from the participants’ world view. With this conviction, I prepared open ended, semi-structured interview questions to uncover participants’ stories. The interview questions are attached in Appendix 1. Interviews were held in informal settings.
emphasizing the fact that “it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:2).

Since my participants were scattered in different places, after their voluntary agreement to participate, I emailed or made a call to them to set the interview location. In order to interview them, I went to four participants’ residences, and for rest of the participants I reserved a guest lounge at student dormitories in the East-West Center. Though I had an interview guide with me, I encouraged them to share their experience in a detailed, explicit way. The interviews ranged from one to two hours. With their permission I audio-taped the interviews, and also took notes. The interviews were conducted in a friendly and interactive environment.

**The participants**

The participants for this research were the female spouses of international male graduate students from South Asia. Their husbands were pursuing their graduate study at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I interviewed those participants who:

- had higher levels of education (minimum undergraduate) and were professionally employed in their home countries
- came to the US to accompany their husbands as dependents, and have either a J-2 or F-2 visa status (i.e., they were not currently students)
- quit their job in their home countries and were currently working or unemployed in the US

These women’s spouses have fellowship support, or are affiliated to programs administered by the East-West Center and are pursuing graduate degrees in the university. I
contacted them using snowball sampling, also known as “chain referral sampling” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) because of the specific characteristics of the research population. This sampling was carried out in three stages. In the first stage, three people having the requisite characteristics were identified and interviewed, based on my own familiarity with them or with their husbands. In the second stage, I went to the visa office at the East-West Center, and the International Student Services (ISS) of UH Mānoa, and requested their help to access the participants. ISS sent an email to all the international students to inform their wives about the study encouraging participation. The letter sent by ISS is attached in Appendix 4. Only one participant showed interest about my project through this solicitation. In the third stage, I met some other students at the East-West Center who helped me find potential participants who qualified for this study.

According to Marshall (1996), such a reference from initial participants can be a useful strategy for finding more research participants. My interviews ranged from one hour to two hours. After I interviewed seven participants, I found similarities in the themes of their narratives. I had a sense of “theoretical saturation” (Charmaz, 2006) in the data after interviewing the tenth participant. In this way, snowball sampling was the most effective method for me to locate and access the participants. Snowball sampling has been found to be a useful procedure in social science (Bailey, 1994) and has been widely used by many researchers (e.g., Chen, 2009).

I also collected some basic demographic data for the analysis, including the person’s country of origin and her educational background. In order to reduce the possibility of respondents being personally identifiable, I collected this information on a separate and brief survey form at the end of the interview, and stored it separately from the interview transcriptions, linked only by the code name. Because these participants were fluent enough to communicate in
English, I used the English language to interview them. Basic information about the participants is provided in the following table and all the names are pseudonyms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Home country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
<th>Work experience in home country</th>
<th>Visa type</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meena</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>MA in English Education</td>
<td>2 year teaching experience in college</td>
<td>J-2</td>
<td>Cashier in a store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamala</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>MA in English literature</td>
<td>10 years teaching experience in school and college</td>
<td>F-2</td>
<td>Babysitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soma</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>MA in English Literature</td>
<td>6 years teaching experience in school and college</td>
<td>F-2</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanuja</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>MA Public Health</td>
<td>11 years working experience in an INGO</td>
<td>J-2</td>
<td>Fast food restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preeti</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>MA in Travel and Tourism</td>
<td>9 years working experience in Travel and Tourism company</td>
<td>F-2 + J-2</td>
<td>Pre-school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepali</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>MBS</td>
<td>One year experience in a bank</td>
<td>F-2</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padmini</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>BBA</td>
<td>2 years teaching experience in an elementary school</td>
<td>J-2</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooja</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Masters in Information</td>
<td>3 years experience as IT personnel</td>
<td>F-2</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Coding and analysis procedures**

Grounded theory was used for coding and analyzing the data. Beginning with Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory originally emerged as a “a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and, often narrow empiricism, and analyzed a basic social process” (Charmaz, 2006: 8). However, the debated issue of developing theory from data (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006) has been modified recently. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) explained the transition from traditional grounded theory to evolved grounded theory in terms of four conceptual practices: theoretical sensitivity, treatment of the literature, coding and diagramming, and identifying the core category.

Theoretical sensitivity focuses on the researcher’s blank slate to go to the field to develop the sensitivity that connects to the theories. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize the theoretical orientation to determine a committed approach in doing research. Similarly, the traditional grounded theory forbids a literature review in the area of study for fear of contaminating the data (Glaser, 1992), while the modified version of grounded theory views reviewing the literature positively since: “if the technical literature is used for comparative
purposes it can foster identification of properties and dimension of relevant concepts” (Strauss &
Corbin, 1998: 42). More contemporary practitioners of grounded theory further explain that such
literature reviewing stimulates the researcher’s thinking and provides for coding and
diagramming in a more flexible and creative way – “as [an] approach that is reflective of their
constructive intent” (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). In traditional
grounded theory, the emergence and construction work together in the identification of the core
category, but Strauss and Corbin argue that the core categories are identified through the
theoretical reconstructing by the researcher. In this process, the construction of findings is
emphasized rather than their discovery. Charmaz (2000) makes a distinction between the
traditional grounded theory and the modified one as objectivist and constructivist respectively.
According to her, the objectivist approach requires the author to be detached from the data and
views the researcher as an external authority. While the participants relate their situations, the
constructivist approach sees both the data and the analysis as “created from the shared
experience of the researcher and the participants” (p. 677) and the method is viewed as only a
means. This process places more emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge between the
researcher and the participants. In the present study, my aim is to use the modified version of
grounded theory in which the researcher and the participants co-construct their knowledge
through interactions. This methodological application does not expect to discover a new theory.
At this point, it is helpful to draw insights from Michael Burawoy’s (1998) extended case
method in which research is built on existing theories in order to expand them. Here, I am not
aiming to discover or construct new theories, but I hope to connect my major findings with
theoretical concepts (Wilson, 2008) in sociology useful for understanding the issues related to
the research topic.
The idea of the present research first occurred to me while I was taking a qualitative research seminar in my university. In order to collect data for my term paper for the seminar, I selected three persons purposively from my own social network. In this process, I first prepared an interview guide based on my research questions. Then I contacted the possible participants and requested an interview. When my participants were ready, I went to their homes and interviewed them. I interviewed in a relaxed and conversational way. While interviewing, I tried to elicit specific information from their response as much as possible. The interviews were almost one hour for all three interviews. For all this systematic process, I used the outlines given in Charmaz’s (2006) and Kvale and Brinkmann’s (2009) book. The findings from the data from these three participants provided a basis for a more comprehensive study. These findings were helpful for sensitizing theoretical concepts while “starting with a focused question” (Tavory & Swindle, 2009) as: How do their experiences construct their occupational mobility in the new context and what are the issues and problems they are suffering from?

In the second stage, I interviewed seven more participants and transcribed their narratives line by line by listening to their audio recordings. Here again, I used analytic procedures from Charmaz (2006) consisting of two phases: initial coding and focused coding. In initial coding, my strategy was motivated by the technique that “we study fragments of data—words, lines, segments and incidents—closely for their analytic imports” (p. 42). This process requires a close observation of data to come up with action in each segment of data I used a way of coding mentioned by Charmaz as “coding incident by incident” (p.53) because it works better than word by word or line by line coding. Since action is revealed in chunk by chunk segments, rather than word by word, or line by line, I realized coding incident by incident is a more useful way in the initial stages. In addition, this process relates to the context and meaningful action that
helps the researcher to make sense of the data. In the transcripts of all the interviewees, with the constant comparison of concepts derived from actions, events, and other phenomena in the data, the relations among categories of concepts were clarified.

In the second stage, I used focused coding, which is broader phase of coding. “Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize the data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2009: 57). It gives a more analytic sense for broader categories from earlier frequent and significant code of initial phase. Charmaz opines that these codes are more directed, selective, and conceptual than in the first step. In this second stage, the broader codes are compared from data to data within and across the participants.

After the two abovementioned phases of coding, I wrote memos based on the focused coding, comparing the data, and putting things together to create broader understanding. As this process reveals the novel relationships within the data, it also gives some structure for the final write up. This process works based on comparisons across the data corpus, as Charmaz notes “memos catch thought, capture the comparisons and connections … and crystallize questions and directions to pursue” (p. 72). However, I also paid attention to peculiar cases to incorporate any deviant or unique contexts. At the final stage of this procedure, I reexamined the adaptability of the central phenomenon to the data of each participant, in order to confirm the validity of analysis. I then moved to a literature review to connect my findings to the existing sociological theories and concepts. Based on the qualitative methodology, statements of participants that represent the phenomena which emerged in this study are provided as evidence of the findings. These findings are analyzed systematically in the analysis and interpretation section below.
CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, I analyze the experiences of the educated wives of international graduate students and draw implications for their class and occupational mobility, and professional identities. I also discuss the implications of socio-cultural and political regulations for them in the new context of the US while considering how they are influenced by their previous professional lives and activities. Through the narratives of the participants, the key findings are presented as five major themes: academic qualification and occupational mobility, habitus and social class, negotiation of multiple identities, employment rights and restrictions tethered with visa type, and the symbolic meaning of the US.

Academic Qualifications and Occupational Mobility

In this section, I discuss the role of educational institutions and show how academic qualifications may be valued or devalued in another location. In this case, it is important to discuss the academic qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience gained in the countries of South Asia and the way they are valued/devalued in the context of the US. I discuss three issues related to academic qualifications and occupational mobility: the devaluation of academic credentials and experiences, the experience of downward occupational mobility, and the acknowledgment of different work cultures.

Devaluation of academic credentials and experience

The participants made their academic qualifications and occupational mobility relevant in their interview narratives. They compared the value of their academic qualifications earned in their home countries with the ones in the US. Nine of the ten participants had a master’s degree, and one
had an undergraduate degree. All of these credentials were granted in their home countries. The participants each worked in professional careers in their home nations, which built on their academic qualifications. Their narratives about applying for jobs show that the qualifications gained in their home countries are not acknowledged as having equal value with US degrees. It means they require education and experience from the US in order to be successful in finding employment. In this regard, Preeti from India mentioned her experience:

When you come to the USA, they [employers] always want you to do their course in their universities in their level. Maybe they think that their level and our level is not the same and maybe different and they cannot accept the degree from there. I was very sad, and India is of course a well-known country and we are very progressed country. People here ask how you could speak such good English. They have a little policy that whoever comes here no matter what you have, get your degree from this county [the US] and then only you approach for a job.

In her narrative, Preeti was disappointed, noting that her master’s degree in Travel and Tourism from India, and years of Indian work experience had no application to getting a job in the US. Her expression indicated that though India is held in high esteem in terms of providing a high quality education and the use of English in professional life, such qualifications and English skills are not commensurate in the US. American recognition is regulated by the US’s own system where there is little space for designations from foreign institutions in countries like South Asia. Many studies (e.g., Salaff, 2000; Man, 2004) show that highly educated women with foreign qualifications have difficulty in finding employment appropriate to their academic standing. Another participant, Devika from Sri Lanka recounted her experience of not getting a job in the US due to the fact that American employers did not trust her skills, qualifications, and experience. She mentioned:
I never have had degree from this country [the US] and though my English is good, it is not my first language. I applied several places for the job even where the educational requirement was less than mine, even though I have several months experience working in Philippines and Sri Lanka, I could not get the job, perhaps the problem lies in their [employers] thinking, they doubt my skills and qualification.

Devika’s narrative resonates with that of Preeti, in that proficiency in English is not a major criterion for finding a job for people like them. These examples contrast with the results from other studies (Cho, Lee & Jezewski, 2005; de Verthelyi, 1995; Chen, 2009) that report language as one of the principal factors in finding employment in English speaking countries. Moreover, Devika’s work experience was not limited to her home country Sri Lanka but she had also worked in the Philippines. However, this did not seem to add to her employment value. Her excerpt suggests that employers in the US do not evaluate the job applicants’ ability in terms of their skills and experience, but largely presuppose deficiency in candidates with non-US academic credentials and experience. This indicates that possessing a US education and having American employment experience is a major gate-keeping factor for employment purposes.

The devaluation of foreign academic credentials, and working experience from their home countries did not fit with the participants’ ideas about the American educational system and labor market. Most of the participants claimed that they could work well according to their qualifications if they got an opportunity. Nevertheless, they could not get a job, although they applied at several places. For example, Tanuja, who was working in an international NGO for HIV/AIDS and reproductive health in India, with more than ten years of work experience, had an expectation of finding a similar job in the US. She commented: “I was hoping that there [in the US] might be some job on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health and I can go and work”. Her expectation, however, was...
not met when she applied for a job. She expressed her disappointment in the following manner: “I was frustrated for not getting the similar kind of opportunity here and I do not think they will offer any opportunity of my level and I could not get the job when I applied even for a bit lower level job”. She further added that “the labor market is not that what you think”. Tanuja’s employment qualifications were unacceptable, not only in positions that required master’s degree graduates, but also in positions with lower qualifications.

Pooja from Bangladesh, who was currently unemployed because she was not authorized to work with her F-2 visa, stated that “if in case I am allowed to work here, I must have a degree from US, then only I can think of my work”. Pooja was suffering from a double disadvantage due to her visa status, as well as her lack of American qualifications. She did not differentiate much between a visa that allows work and one that does not permit employment, but strongly emphasized the requirement for a US-acquired qualification for employment. Another participant from Nepal, Kamala, who had ten years of college teaching experience recollected that:

The only hope is to get the higher study here that is the primary thing. I already have master’s degree from there but that is not equivalent over here, so I would have to continue my master’s degree again. I was planning that I would join the University here and get degree and maybe I get a job over here and life would be better but it did not happen.

Kamala also had a similar feeling about the value of a US education and the devaluation of her home country’s qualifications. Even if she already possessed a master’s degree from Nepal, she strongly felt the need to obtain another master’s degree in the US in order to find a
job. Such a feeling by student spouses is not unique to this study only. Chen (2006) and de Verthelyi (1995), for example, also reported similar experiences from their participants.

Another participant, Meena, from Nepal also mentioned that she had a master’s degree from a prestigious Nepalese university, and extensive Nepalese work experience, but she also encountered similar situations in finding a job. She shared her experience of attending job interviews in the US: “I attended so many interviews, I even cannot remember all, every time they asked me if I have any degree from the US, I am tired of it and then finally I ended up working in a store”. This excerpt shows that participants like Meena had an expectation of getting a job in the US similar to their work in their home countries, but this expectation does not turn into a reality due to their non-US education and experience. Meena’s choice of words “ended up working in a store” explicitly shows that this was not the job she wanted.

There is a striking similarity among the participants’ reporting of their qualifications and experience from their home countries, and their limited possibility of getting jobs in the US. In the interview, most of the participants spoke English fluently, and were confident of their skills and abilities. The problem of language proficiency does not seem to apply to this group of women. The problem for them is the lack of acknowledgement and recognition of their previous qualifications and experience by American employers. All these narratives show that they were tired of applying for jobs or already had the impression that a degree from the US is necessary to get a job here. Studies on skilled immigrant women have also reported similar challenges in finding jobs by non-US educated women. Mears (2010) argues that the requirement for local labor market experience places such women in an impossible situation—“they cannot obtain employment because they lack local
experience, and they cannot obtain local experience because employers will not hire them” (p. 477). Suto (2009) also argues that such women are forced to live with “compromised careers” because of the “devaluation of foreign qualification” (p. 417). Such factors result in career uncertainty for these women during their stay in the US with their foreign degrees.

**Experiencing downward occupational mobility**

As the academic credentials and work experience from their home countries were less valued or not valued at all, the spouses of the international students mentioned that the only option was to do whatever work was available for them. What is required in such situations is to negotiate with the available options. This meant that these women had to change their expectation and to accept the new reality (Chen, 2009). In such a transition, some of the participants said that they went through frustration, or even depression. This particular condition was much more problematic for those who were unemployed because of their visa that lacked a work permit. In such circumstances, they were frequently haunted by their previous professional careers and abandoned social status in their home countries. In this section, I first report their narratives that show their experience of downward mobility. Then I discuss how such experiences invoked memories of their former professional and social status.

The participants experienced denigration of their previous occupational status when they started working in low-level jobs, based on their cultural conceptions. For instance, Tanuja recalled her feelings about a time when she was advised by her friend to work in a restaurant: “I was very shocked when I heard that I will work in the restaurant, it was like “What?””. This response shows that working in a restaurant is an unexpected and dreadful situation for her. She seemed to have never thought of working in a restaurant. According to Shaffer and Harrison (2001), foreign
nationals in new contexts can have such unexpected situations because of different work cultures. Similarly, Kamala from Nepal mentioned that when her friends recommended her for babysitting, she had a very negative impression about that kind of job. She seriously expressed her initial reaction as “the word babysitting itself bothered me a lot”. It shows her attitude toward babysitting and any assumed social status attached to it. Because this is not only an instance of downward occupational mobility, but also a case of class mobility for Kamala and other women like her, this issue deserves a more detailed discussion, and will be revisited in the section dealing with habitus and social class later.

Despite such expectations and attitudes toward the jobs that they did not initially want to pursue, these sojourners do not have many employment options. When Kamala eventually had to prepare herself for the only available choice of babysitting, she had a strong feeling of aversion toward the job as evident in these words: “when the baby was coming to my house, it was a kind of nightmare to me”. In this situation, she expressed her helplessness, sadness, and sympathy toward herself. The understanding of her occupational status, and career expectation were contrary to her current situation. She questioned the use of her qualifications: “what is the use of my study that I completed in my country?” These examples of feelings and experiences show that the devaluation of academic credentials and qualifications earned in their home countries led many women to experience a downward occupational mobility.

Such mobility is also vividly depicted in Meena’s narrative. Since she did not get a job matching her qualification, she eventually applied for a store position. However, she was rejected from this type of job because she was overqualified. Moreover, she was not hired in a restaurant, grocery store, or other stores because she did not have applicable work experience. Then she
disguised her previous qualifications and experience, in order to match with the job requirements she was applying for. She recalled her experience as follows:

   Even applying two or three places where my qualification and experience meet, I immediately knew that I cannot get the job there, then I started applying in manual work, I had to struggle hard for a long time even to get this type of store job. Now I have to do a lot of physical work that I had not expected before. Sometimes, I feel I am discriminated in my workplace.

This piece of discourse shows Meena’s feeling of downward occupational mobility from high expectations to an unanticipated compromise in settling for a store job that requires physical effort. Guida (2004) also reports that the labor market is not fair, and the immigrant groups feel greater challenges to establish themselves in the labor market. He shows that there is also heavy earning reduction because “immigrants are treated as a source of cheap labor and relegated to low paid, manual position[s]” (p140). Though Guida was presenting a case of Chinese immigrants in Canada, the narratives in the present study show some similarities.

   An interesting aspect of such narratives is the participants’ understanding of the nature of work in the US through their own cultural lenses, thereby, devaluing their current jobs and assessing themselves in terms of their preconceived cultural notions. Work divisions and job hierarchies attached with the level of education and social status are clearly visible in their attitudes. This shows the participants’ interpretation of work culture from the South Asian perspective in which the social status of people is inherently tied to their type of work. The cultural norm practiced in their home countries that educated people do not work in stores, or restaurants, or similar places made their compromise very challenging in the US context. Therefore, this realization made them experience
feelings of intense downward mobility. Here, the cultural understanding influences action (Swindler, 2001) and produces its own level of interpretation and categories of job-status interrelation. Tavory and Swindler (2009) argue for such a relation of prevailing cultural notion with the activities that the cultural semiotic code determines the meaning of particular action and this action constrains people’s behavior in their daily lives.

In this situation, these women not only suffered because of the low status of their new work but also experienced an intense feeling of professional loss in terms of their occupational identity, knowledge, skills, and capacity. de Verthelyi (1995) also observed similar experiences of professional identity loss by the “dependent” wives of international students who previously were full time employees in their countries of origin. Raijam and Semyonov (1997) assert that the women immigrants from developing countries to developed countries are at a disadvantage due to their assumed lesser value in labor force participation, and occupational attainment, including their nation of origin and ethnicity. He argues that in this process, immigrant women face great occupational loss. My data also show a similar picture of how the women from developing countries like South Asia immigrating to developed countries like the US suffer from their experience of downward mobility in terms of their professional careers and job status.

When the participants felt depressed by their downward occupational mobility, they were frequently haunted by their previous career status. Such nostalgic feelings usually occurred in contexts when people were comparing and contrasting their situations. The participants also recalled their previous status, and compared it with their current jobs, and then became disappointed, depressed, and even frustrated. Such psychological phenomena are frequently observed in situations when people move from one place to another place, and are unprepared in terms of socio-cultural
and economic issues (Cho, Lee & Jezewski, 2005). For example, as mentioned above, the word ‘babysitter’ disturbed Kamala a lot when she was going to start babysitting. In this situation, she was frequently haunted by her previous identity as a respected teacher in Nepal. She recalled her experience in the following way:

I used to be very good teacher I can say and then so, people around me used to respect me as a teacher and then I had a pride that I was doing my job really good over there. When I came here, nothing like that. So, just taking care of kids at home and just changing the diapers. I don’t need any knowledge or something like that to change diaper and take care of kids. I think that all my capacity has been just freezed. One day, one Nepali person called me on the phone and called Ma’am, because I had not heard that word for two year or so, and when I heard that word I was just felt oohhh, so happy to hear that word. I can imagine my feeling. You know that actually, my being was lost and that word reminded my being.

It shows that the nostalgic feelings about her previous career and her perception of her current job status are major sources of stress for her. This also implies that the difference in her self-pride, self-worth and competency linked to her previous work, and the lack of these feelings about her current job, which is assumed to be of low status haunted her and pushed toward the dissatisfying and disappointing work life. This shows her feeling of identity loss and social invisibility and at the same time her obligation to work as a babysitter. She does not view babysitting as a career or as a valuable work. She further noted “I always hated that typical housewife but here I had to do all that job”. Therefore, her stressful situation was the result of a complete mismatch between her expectation and the job she was currently doing. This caused strain and anxiety as expressed in her words: “it is very frustrating to be a typical housewife”. She admitted that this kind of situation was just a
psychological feeling as a result of valuing and devaluing certain types of jobs. Such complexity makes a remarkable shift from “professional women” to “housewives” in a unidirectional, causative flow … and “involves ongoing movement between the emotional and practical demands of work and home” (Meares, 2010:475).

Soma also felt bad when she compared her unemployed situation with that of being a college teacher back in her country. She often remembered her previous career when she had nothing to do and was limited as a housewife in the US. She expressed her feelings as:

My job and my career back in my country used to haunt me all the time. It would always, I used to think that I had a very good job in Nepal. Besides working in college, I used to do translation job too. I used to write articles in the newspaper.

But here I am not like that. I am working as a housewife.

She compared her previous independent career with the current limited role of housewife, which she did not like to be. It shows that she was more attached to her previous career. However, this comparison invokes a sense of her losing her identity and being haunted by her previous career. In the hierarchical Nepalese society, jobs like translating, writing articles for newspapers, and college teaching are regarded as more prestigious, and deserving of greater respect. She constructed an extreme contrast between her previous academic life and her current housewife role.

Similarly, Tanuja remembered her previous work saying “career opportunity was really good over there. If I had been there for six years, which I am here after leaving my job, by this time I would have been really in a good position in my career and I would have been doing really great”. She discussed the possibility of promotion in her previous job. In this way, participants frequently
expressed their feelings of sadness about missed opportunities. Devika also compared her situation with that of her previous co-workers commenting:

> Sometimes, I received email from friends or my ex-co-workers. And they kind of improved what they want. And I feel like I stopped. I don’t get anything like target as my coworkers or friends. As a mature woman, I also wanna have a good career and have future dreams.

Devika became emotional while recollecting her experience of working in Sri Lanka. She felt a sense of professional loss and of being left behind. She portrayed herself as somebody who did not get what she desired. This was a result of her feelings of being excluded from a mainstream professional career in the US.

In this way, the participants reflected on their previous respected professional life and frequently compared it with the work that they were currently doing in the US. They often found their professional identity in conflict with their current lack of participation in their chosen profession and often this conflict became a major source of stress, anxiety, and even stigma in their community. Such unmet expectations were translated into the experience of downward mobility in the occupational hierarchy.

**Acknowledgement of different work culture**

Over time, most of the participants changed their perspectives about the American work culture. Though they initially had intense feelings of denigration and devaluation because of working in jobs that did not require university degrees, they later realized that different countries have different work cultures. Once they understand the situation in this way, they started thinking about it
from different perspectives. Sometimes, they had conflicting discourses on how they saw and interpreted the new work context at different times. In this particular stage, they tried to negotiate and legitimize what they were doing. An understanding of American society as different from their own enabled them to acknowledge the differences in work cultures between their home countries and the US.

Tanuja, an executive in a reproductive health program in India, was offered a job in a restaurant that primarily sold bakery items. Though her initial feeling was a shock and frustration due to her preconceived notion that such jobs were of low status, once she started working in the restaurant she changed her attitude: “I stopped thinking in a traditional way like you have to have a super job this and that”. At this point, she had already compromised, and accepted a job of the type that she initially found unexpectedly shocking. Part of the reason for this changed opinion was the result of her isolated feeling on being alone at home. In addition, she thought that working in a restaurant was a better option for supporting herself and her family financially. Her perceptions about viewing various types of work as “this is low level job and this is high level job” also changed. The internalization of new cultural ideas about valuing this type of work was clearly understood in her narrative as she mentioned “If I were there I would never ever work in a restaurant because back home people do not see it as a good way but when I came here, I later realized that people respect work here not what you are doing”. As she spoke, she interpreted the situation in a different way, acknowledging the cultural differences between the US and her home country in order to legitimize her current job. This changed value is influenced by the new work culture in the US context because “culture affects human action through values that direct it to some ends rather than others” (Swindler, 1986: 274). Tanuja was negotiating her current employment situation independently of her previous career, and identifying values that directed her action in the new cultural context.
Another participant, Preeti, mentioned that her teaching in an American preschool provided her with a new and different experience compared to the one that she gained while she was an officer in an Indian travel and tourism company. She treated her current work as something that she enjoys doing when she said “I was able to sharp my motherhood more intensely when little kids come close to me”. In this regard, she recognized new circumstances, and interpreted them in a different way that gave her motivation and a fresh outlook to judge herself and her work. Similarly, another participant, Kamala, who went through depression in the beginning of her work started negotiating with the situation, and recognizing it as an another socio-cultural reality when she said: “I knew life goes that way, so I just started thinking that’s ok, it’s just for four or five years. This is how things work here in America”. She accepted the situation as an inescapable reality. It shows that these women validated and recognized the new American work situation which allowed them to make a transition from their initial unexpected, shocked and frustrated feelings to an awareness of cultural differences in the perceptions of work. In this way, participants differentiated in work cultures between their home countries and the US, with a change in their previous understanding that those women who are educated normally are employed for professional work and those without education and from lower social stratum work non-skilled and manual jobs. This means many South Asian women from middle class families do not do non-skilled or manual work outside their homes. In contrary to this, these women later realized that most or all the people in the US are employed and work is primary for them; one does not have to lose prestige if he or she, for example, works in a restaurant or store or babysitting.

Following Shaffer and Harrison (2001), the mismatch between such spouses’ expectations and ground realities can result from the difference in task-related mastery in their respective cultures, and when they feel that the “skills and mechanism[s] they have developed in their native
environment do not work in the new or foreign environment” (p. 250), they can become more frustrated. Though the participants initially found their new situation incongruent with their previous professional standard, they started creating new meanings about their situation that provided them with relief. The negative emotions and attitudes they initially experienced gradually lessened, and new understandings of cultural differences prevailed. Burke (1991) defines these kinds of revival through causal input as the formation of revised self concept and this kind of concept helps oneself to establish in a new situation. The participants at this stage acknowledged the new context and started to look for practical way to adjust in the US rather than comparing the existing situation with the previous one.

**Class-Based Habitus and the Feeling of Declassing**

The participants’ responses show that they had an intense feeling of status loss. Their life in the US existed in contrast to their previous understandings and expectations, and their institutionalized cultural capital gained in their home countries did not work in this new American context. They also brought the same status-oriented habitus from their home countries in order to interpret their life in the US. All the interviewees of the present study came from the capital cities of their respective countries, and their interview responses show that they enjoyed high social class in their home countries. When they came to the US with their upper social class backgrounds and their habitus, none of these formerly powerful social constructs worked in the context of the US. They experienced a loss of their pervious social class and status, which I call ‘declassing’. Some of the excerpts in this section may repeat previous themes, but my discussion of them here focuses on the participants’ perspectives about social class. For example, Kamala from Nepal narrates her feelings about babysitting:
Our community people, some Nepali people gave me some idea of taking care of kids and earn some money. That was also kind of cultural shock to me because in our country that the work babysitter is considered as a very low level job. And here I have to do that. I used to be a ma’am over there but here a babysitter. So, when I heard the word babysitter, that just bothered me a lot and I was disturbed by all way.

This excerpt shows her intense feeling of status loss, which is not only an indication of deskilling or non-recognition of her academic credentials, but also is connected with her low status job that is not supposed to be worth for educated, high class people. She clearly links her feelings to her middle class or upper class background in her home country, and her privileged life there. Her habitus that made her interpret the job of babysitter as being low level work forced her to question her assumed superior class based identity in the US. She further shows the contrast between her two lives when she mentions how she started babysitting in the US:

How start is, before baby came to my house first, it was a kind of nightmare for me because I was a mother but I did not have to babysit my daughter in my country. She was with her grandparents and house maids.

Here, she compares her situation in the US with that in her home country, where she was an upper class family and did not have to look after her daughter. However, she herself had to become a babysitter in the US, and it is a bitter reality to accept it for her. Her idea of her identity as an upper class woman, with a prestigious life collapsed once she perceived her status as a babysitter, and she had to struggle hard to accept her supposedly low status occupation. In her own words, her new occupation bothered her a lot, which she expressed in a very emotional tone in the following way:
It is me, not the baby that made me cry because baby, that baby cries, that’s normal thing, I knew that, because I was a mom. But the pressure that made me cry. Somebody’s baby there, and I am considered as a babysitter and then you know that my identity crisis. Yeah, what I was doing was not I wanted to do. What is the use of my study that I did in my country?

She defines her current job as demeaning and declassing when evaluated through her strong social class, and habitus lenses. Here, she is making a contrast with white-collar jobs, or the jobs relevant to her academic qualifications. Therefore, the nature of work plays an important role in maintaining this class-based position. This relation of class based working conditions can be understood from the following excerpt as well.

Identity crisis like I used to work there as a teacher, and then teaching is I think very good profession. From my very childhood, my dream was to become a teacher, not doctor or engineer or anything like that. I love my profession very much. I used to be very good teacher I can say and then so, people around me used to respect me as a teacher and then I had a pride that I am doing my job really good over there and then when I came there, nothing like that. So, just taking care of kids at home and just changing the diapers. You know, just, you know the low graded job that used to be considering back in my country.

This also shows her crisis of class identification, and the loss of what she valued for being recognized within that particular class. It not only shows her feeling of doing a low-level job in the US, but her feeling of exclusion from what may be called her high class-based background.

Another participant from Nepal, Meena also applied her strong class based habitus to her way of classifying jobs into high level and low level categories. When she started working at a local store, as a last option, she felt that it was not a match for her class background. Standing during work hours and working without enough break time for chatting and resting was a very
challenging work culture for her. She recalled her experience of working in the store in the following way:

We used to see such type of work as low level work and uneducated and low family background people do that type of job over there. You know when I touched the trash, I felt so bad, I cannot say in words how I felt, when I tried to mop on the floor, it was so panic for me because I have not done at my home also. It was panic, so hard for me adjust at that situation. I felt that what I am doing over here? …… I have never done this one, oh my goodness what is this? …… I felt like that every time like this and the job is so tiresome that I have to stand all the day

Meena distances herself from people who are not educated and are supposedly from families that do not have stronger social and economic backgrounds. It is interesting to see how the discourse of doing manual work like mopping the floor or collecting trash stands in contrast to the duties that are the part of educated and socio-economically sound people.

The nature of the work essentially carries prestige with it for these participants. Though she did not want to do a manual job, another participant Mallika was working in a bakery store. She was however very hesitant to share this with members of her diasporic community. According to her if people came to know that she was employed in such a store, her prestige as well as her identity would be questioned. Such news could carry a social stigma if relatives and family members in her country knew of her work. Mallika vividly remembered her experience of a day when a member of her ethnic community visited her work place.

You Know! One day what happened? I was working in a restaurant, and a person of our country came to our shop. He did not know I am working there. I saw him entering my place but he did not see me. Then I told my friend to take care of my duty for a while and then I went to the kitchen to hide from him. I still remember I was feeling so hard to face him that I was working in such a bakery shop.
Mallika’s activities can be strange and surprising if closely examined from the US work culture viewpoint. However, Mallika wanted to preserve her so-called upper class recognition in front of the members from her ethnic community, which is key to understanding her behavior.

Being in the US itself is a matter of pride for these women since they are viewed as successful by people in their home countries, even if they have not achieved any substantial gain for themselves. Preeti from India is a preschool teacher in the US, and has already negotiated with the new context. Before she came here, she was working in the travel and tourism field in New Delhi. According to her, high school graduates qualify for pre-school teaching jobs in India, and her current teaching job as a preschool teacher does not confer on her the same identity as a university graduate. Though she has acknowledged the fact of different work cultures in India and in the US, she still has some fear about losing her social status and prestige in her home country, if she makes her current employment public to her community back in India. Therefore, she has kept this reality secret, and told her parents and relatives in India that she is working in a community based organization.

In these women’s words, their husbands also had sympathy for them. After Devika applied for positions that matched her qualifications, but was not offered those positions, the only option left for her was to apply for available jobs. She however chose to stay home instead of doing presumably low-status jobs. The following narrative shows how she created a contrast between her qualifications and the status of job.

I don’t ignore like manual jobs or like that. My husband felt sorry because I had master’s degree in my country and he thinks I am little bit higher educated, and but why you have to work like that. Of course, he did not mean to ignore those kinds of jobs. But I have to work a lot of labor works, right? And I might be sick and he might feel much much bad.

58
In sum, the narratives above do not only provide information about these women’s psychological feelings or deskillung experiences, but more broadly they offer important insights for understanding their experience in moving from higher social class to lower status. Different factors may characterize social class for them, but the nature of their job is the principal one. In a sociological analysis, it can be argued that these women carry their hierarchical, class based habitus from their home countries to the US. From these narratives, it can be argued that this notion of habitus builds on the concept of culture and their cultural attitudes give them the strong feeling of their class being collapsed. However, this does not necessarily mean that they classify themselves as members of the American “working class.” Instead, they find their previous social class denigrated, and their present social class much more blurred and confusing, and they do not include themselves in the existing social class in the US.

Negotiation of Multiple Identities

Scholarship on skilled immigrant women and female sojourners has extensively discussed how they negotiate their multiple identities both at home and at their workplaces (e.g., Chen, 2006; de Verthelyi, 1995; Park, 2009). In the process of giving meaning to their life, the participants in the present study understood themselves from various perspectives. As explained in the previous section, the narratives showed their admission that their previous occupational status was not valued in the new context. As they entered a different environment, their previous realization of work-tethered identity was loosened, and they started seeing themselves in terms of multiple roles and responsibilities. Such roles and responsibilities often become more explicit in unfamiliar environments (Sakamoto, 2006). The narratives in the present study generated the following themes
about how these spouses saw their multiple identities: sacrificing their career, gender role in family, and temporary break from career.

**Sacrificing career**

Social and cultural roles assigned to women can often lead them to give up their ambitions and goals for the sake of their husbands and other family members (Cho, Lee & Jezewski, 2005). Most of the participants in the present study also revealed the key theme of sacrificing their career for the sake of their husbands and children. Sacrificing is not only leaving their previous job, but also adjusting themselves to what they call low level jobs, or being housewives. Therefore, what is interesting here is that sacrifice is not exclusively referring to their act of quitting their previous job, but also to the prominence given to their family life in the US, compared to their professional life in their home countries. Feelings of responsibility and family duty are push factors, which encourage them to sacrifice their careers and to look for alternatives.

All the participants said that sacrifice was necessary for the sake of their families. Here, they emphasized their gender role, which is biologically and culturally associated with rearing children and taking care of other family members in the South Asian context. They believed that being a woman, one needed to learn to sacrifice and to cope with the situation, and to perform mother’s role that gave them strength and courage to adjust to any given situation. In addition, this role can create conditions for sacrificing other options, such as their academic or professional careers in both their home countries and in the US. It is a type of voluntary sacrifice motivated by their culturally ascribed roles. For example, Kamala expressed her experience in the following manner:

I think it happened because I am a woman. If my husband has had the same situation then he would not just sacrifice all these things. You know that it’s a male
dominated society and then we have to support the male and that’s the tradition and
if we do not do that, we feel guilty, if we do not support them, we have that kind of
upbringing, we have that kind of thinking.

This extract shows the social structure and the gender role, and the way this role is played in
the prescribed social structure. It justifies why women need to sacrifice for the sake of family and
why a man does not have to make the same level of sacrifice. In other words, this piece of narrative
provides an example of cultural justification for women’s sacrifices. The male dominated patriarchal
tradition, and their upbringing encouraged them to enact voluntary sacrifice, which Kamala believes
is necessary for women. It gives a culturally rooted orientation for one’s responsibility and supports
the unequal family hierarchy in South Asian countries (Das Gupta, 2006). In this context, women
have to take the male’s dominating role for granted and accept their own female role as inferior and
subordinate in the family and society. Park’s (2009) case study on a Korean woman also showed a
similar situation when her focal participant sacrificed her continuing Ph.D. in Turkey in order to
accompany her husband in the US. There are templates for such female roles across South Asia and
in East-Asia, as in the Korean example.

As a consequence of their career sacrifice, these women experienced an identity crisis. When
they recalled their previous independent professional career in their home countries, they realized
their loss of identity. Though they were displaying multiple roles and identities in their narrated
discourses, they were interpreting the term identity as a fixed entity that somebody could possess or
lose. Once they started a new job in the US, they had a feeling of losing this sense of self, which they
valued. For example, Kamala expressed her feelings about this issue: “I am considered as a
babysitter and then you know, that my identity is in crisis‖. Here, she questioned her fixed identity because of her babysitting job.

The cultural ideal that all family members should live together was a compelling premise tightly connected with their notion of sacrificing their own careers. The cultural prescription of gender roles, as well as their personal desire to be with their husbands led them to quit their jobs without thinking much about the consequences. For instance, Deepali recognized her role in this behavior: “I got married and as per our culture, getting married and living with husband is the thing I had to do”. She showed her subordinate role as she depended on her husband when she said “I am happy, I am waiting for my husband’s decision what he thinks to do to me, I do not want to make my own decision”. This directly showed her reliance on her husband in particular, and her subordinate gender role in the family in general. Other participants also switched their emphasis immediately to their husbands whenever I asked them about their roles in the decision making process about moving to the US. For example, Soma spoke about her lack of culture as agency, when she said: “it’s all depend on how my husband does and I am happy for that. It’s the thing that I was brought up with. In our nation, my mother thinks about my father; I have been brought up in the same way”. She further felt that “I have a big role to play to my husband’s success; if he is happy I am happy”.

These examples above show how these participants became emotionally disappointed, and how their career sacrifices affected their lives, even though the sacrifice was voluntary and desired. Sacrifice had both positive and negative connotations for them. For example, because of these women’s sacrifices, their husbands and children could get high quality educations, and experience a better life in the US. On the negative side, the women had to undergo unemployment or underemployment. They realized the extent of their sacrifice more intensely after they did not get the
jobs they had expected. Their narratives show that these women take their husbands’ academic or professional success as their own, and this orientation makes their current sacrifice and status reduction tolerable. Therefore, the discourse about family gained more prominence when compared to statements about their individual careers, though they mourned their lack of career advancement. In this kind of discourse, their subordinate role in the family was evident when they mentioned that their future actions depended on their husbands’ decisions and suggestions. Findings from Sakamoto’s (2006) study on students and their family can be applied to the sojourners in this study, since immigration goals were set by the male members of the family, and their spouses often followed them.

**Gender role in family**

The participants in the narratives describe, distinguish, and identify their female gender role in connection with South Asian patriarchal cultural perspectives. These women are occupied with family work, particularly due to their responsibilities for children. In interviews, the respondents viewed their family roles differently from those of their husbands. They prioritized their husbands’ career over their own. As I explained in the previous section, they justified this notion of priority by referencing the male dominated tradition in their societies of origin, and they themselves were raised in and influenced by that culture. In this regard, Kamala’s statement is highly relevant:

> My husband and baby could not stay separately and he missed family and I had to come so I have to decide my family is more important than my career so just left my job there and came here.

This shows that the responsibility she fulfilled for the family is a matter of her gender role and she places importance on her family over her career. She supported this argument by mentioning the
traditional belief that the husband, or the male is the authority of the family. In many cases, the husbands’ opinions play a decisive role in their wives’ activities. Kamala further mentioned “actually my husband wants me to take care of my kids and be at home and he does not allow me to work at night or something like that. He thinks that he cannot take care of kids”. In Kamala’s words, household chores and taking care of children are gendered practices that males are not supposed to do. Reliance on her husband in decision-making, and receiving his support in times of need, and being comforted when she was troubled were important for her. She felt that her family and her home were her whole world, and she did not think about herself. Her daughters’ needs and demands were her primary concerns. She explained that “I just think every day about kids”. The overwhelming family responsibility created a different role that she expressed in her feelings as “when mothers just see their kids, they feel that oh I am only for these kids. I should not think about myself. I have to do everything for my kids”. Therefore, Kamala’s opinion is that women are emotionally attached to their children and family, and the societal structure itself makes them docile.

Soma also thought that women’s first and foremost duty was to take care of their children. Her motherly duty, and the feelings she got from that duty made her feel that she did a great job. It also gave a sense of satisfaction, and moral accomplishment when she said: “the responsibility makes you feel that you have to do because you are a mother. It makes you responsible to do everything until your baby becomes independent”. In most of her responses, she tried to accommodate herself to her husband’s identity, and did not separate herself from his goals. She tried to see the world through her husband’s eyes. Her concentration was to have children and to make a family. This aim was intensified after she had an ectopic pregnancy. Her priority in life was to help her husband gain an education. She made this clear to me by noting: “our first plan was my husband getting good education”. She thought that her husband provided her with meaning for her life. Her
identity and her desire was very much dependent on her husband, and her life goals were all directed toward her husband’s success and happiness. Her feeling of happiness was largely dependent on her husband’s happiness. For example, she said: “whenever your husband becomes happy, you also become happy”. It is interesting that she sees her husband’s achievement as her own success. In the narratives, she also included herself in all the decisions that her husband made. She also admitted that having a baby and taking care of it and becoming a housewife was a very important part of a woman’s life. Similar to Kamala’s perception of her family role, Soma also indicated that “family life is much more important than career”.

In a similar vein, Deepali also clarified her choice of her life as:

One option is you can get higher education here but the problem with that is if you study higher you cannot take care of your family. The way I was brought up is men will work and women will take care of the house. The same thing… when I see… in the future I will have kids. And when they grow, I do not want them to grow on their own while I am working outside. I should guide them and at the same time I have to work too. I do not want to do PhD; I do not want to work full time. I am not thinking of those types of jobs. I want to take care of my babies. I want to cook for my family. But I want to learn something and I want some exposure and I want to be with people.

Deepali’s narrative was slightly different from that of other participants in terms of the degree of importance she gave to her family and her work. She was neither worried nor disappointed about her previous and potentially future career. All she wanted was to have children and perform an ideal mother’s role in the family. If possible, she was interested in obtaining only a part time job as opposed to the other participants, who aspired to full-fledged careered lives.
Another participant Meena also says that her life plan turned in a different direction due to her husband’s career, for which she quit her previous job, and joined her husband in the US. Her spatial movement, and career choice were decided by her husband’s situation. She explained to me: “I saw the family aspect and other aspect of life like being together with husband. So, finally I decided to come to US. Then I quit my job and plan and everything there and came to the US”. This excerpt also confirms that husbands play the decisive role in the family, and that women are likely to follow their migration lead. In this context, their cultural role and domestic responsibility play an important role for any decision. They have culture and family based domestic responsibilities, and has also an aspiration of the prestige of foreign degrees for their husbands (Verthelyi, 1995). Similar to other participants, Preeti also regarded her child as her primary concern, as she mentioned: “When you become a mother, the child becomes a focus of your life especially when the child is something you care about”. This statement shows her attachment, feelings, and responsibility as a mother, and her commitment to perform well. Liamputtong (2006) in her study of motherhood argues that becoming a mother makes women feel a new self by transforming their previous self, and they are happy and eager to perform the moral motherly role and this role is reinforced by the ethic of care and responsibility.

This kind of family focus, combined with the subordinate role of women has an indirect link with the culturally accepted structural pattern of South Asian marriage systems. The notion of marriage is highly influenced by the difference between the marriage partners. For example, a man should have higher education, greater age, and a higher status job, and should earn more than his potential marriage partner. Therefore, the marriage pattern is influenced by partner disparity, in which the women mostly have lower qualifications and capacity than their men. This family emphasis on looking for a higher status, more educated groom for a bride is the initiation of
subordination and disparity in the family. This pattern helps men maintain superiority in family and social settings, and this fact marginalizes women’s careers, skills, knowledge and identity. In their marital role, affection and attachment are interconnected in such way that these women feel this role to be their moral responsibility, which they are happy to fulfill, and their professional identity becomes secondary.

**Temporary break from career**

Although all the women participants had hoped for further study before they left for the US, it did not happen due to different reasons like economic hardship, rearing and caring for children, and the high educational costs for international students. Contrary to their previous expectations, they had to undergo the profound experiences of being limited, and obliged to take domestic and low-paid work. Despite this feeling, most of them still had a great desire to pursue further study in the US, and rejuvenate their careers. With this hope, they seemed to compromise their desires temporarily either to raise their children or to improve their financial situation in order to be able to economically support their future studies. Therefore, they thought the job they were doing would not extend for a long time. Once their husbands finished their studies and started working, they hoped to pursue their further education. When I asked Kamala if she had any plan for the future, she reported her desire in the following way:

I knew that life goes that way. So, I just started thinking that’s ok, it’s for four or five years. May be I can do after that. When my little one starts going to school, I can have some time to do something like taking some classes in the university.

Kamala’s husband was doing his Ph.D., and she had a little baby when I interviewed her. The extract above shows that she was ready to compromise for a period of four or five years, but was hopeful
that she could study in a university. She was comforting herself by thinking that her supposedly low-level babysitting job was not her career. When I asked the same question to Soma, she highlighted the importance of the husband-wife relationship in both partners helping each other. However, in thinking about mutual help, she gave prominence to gender roles explaining her husband’s study was the first priority, while she would be rearing the children. She said:

When my baby grow up and my husband also finishes his study, I can do something because he can give me some time. It’s a kind of time management and helping each other.

She emphasized her motherly role in the family, and her husband’s education, with the idea that later she hoped to do something for herself. For her, this phase of her life was not the matter of terminating her career, but effective time management so she could later pursue her studies. Thus, women’s decisions and actions are largely guided by prioritizing tasks in terms of their importance. In this process, their husbands’ future career and family needs always came first. Economic difficulties also obliged them to accept limitations, and prevented them from pursuing their educational plans. These women’s prioritization made them feel that they were doing something meaningful for their family, while also hoping for a better future.

Pooja, who was an information technology specialist in Bangladesh, thought that her life became very limited in the US because she was not allowed to work. However, she hoped that she could revive her career in the future. She explained: “in future, I want to study in the US, I want to study the subject that can provide me the job and I want to work. If I cannot work, my life becomes very small”. Her motivation for study was not only for the sake of education per se, but also to pursue studies that would provide her with a job. Her feeling is that all types of study might not be
helpful for getting a job. Though her restricted visa status offered a limited number of opportunities, her hope for a future career was noticeable in her expression. In response to the same issue, Meena from Nepal revealed some fluctuations in her earlier feelings of how she felt restricted by the limited opportunities available in the US:

I first had a plan to do MA in America but after I came here I realized that we had more challenges than I thought. I was restricted from opportunities here. Then I became less hopeful for my study. But after some months, I have developed my confidence and hope that I will study in the future.

She reported that her dream was marred after she arrived in the US. Because of challenges like economic hardship and adjustment, she gave up her study plan. This decision limited her in terms of other opportunities available in the US. In the course of time, because her economic condition also improved and she explored university options for graduate students, she rebuilt her confidence and revived her plan for higher education in the near future. Further education in the US was a dream for another candidate Devika. She mentioned that she tried to get an admission to the university where her husband was doing his graduate study, but could not get financial support. She still dreamed about education in the future.

I was a MA student in Sri Lanka and I kinda wanted to study more. We got married right before my graduation. I had a dream of studying higher [further] education in America. After I came to Texas, I prepared TOEFL and GMAT, and tried to actually apply for the same school as my husband was studying but they did not accept me. That town was very small. There were not other schools. Then I tried distance program and was accepted in it. I did not finish it because I later found that it did not fit my interest. Later
we moved to Hawai‘i and my study plan was dismissed because I am expecting a baby.

But I am still having that dream to get a university degree from here and get a good job.

Devika was the only participant who had tried pursuing an American university degree. However, she had to terminate her study plan due to two reasons: distance education did not fulfill her expectations, and she had a baby. Nevertheless, this did not mean that she gave up her dream of education; she in fact was very optimistic about pursuing university education in the US and finding a job.

While most of the participants were eager to pursue their careers in the US, Padmini showed reluctance to stay and work long term in the US. With the hope of promoting her career in her home country Pakistan, she wanted to complete Montessori training in the US so that she could open a similar school in Pakistan on her return there. This example shows that North American higher education is not only valuable in the US context, but also is instrumental for upgrading career opportunities and social status in countries outside the US.

Even though these women were happy to fulfill their family responsibilities, they were still committed to pursuing a career. In this direction, these women wanted to earn the US qualifications that would be helpful for their careers both in the US and in their countries. de Verthelyi (1995) also made a similar observation about her participants, and noted that the women spouses of students had better expectations for the future although they were struggling with initial challenges. Therefore, all the participants in the present context knew that there were opportunities in the US, but the current situation was not favorable for them due to the various aforementioned reasons. The current situation was a temporary yet necessary part of their life.
Employment Rights and Restrictions Tethered with Visa Type

I discussed two different types of visa (F-2 and J-2) that international students’ spouses hold, and their legal provisions in the first chapter. Here, I explain the implications of visa provisions for the research participants’ employment opportunities, and other aspects of their lives. US Immigration Law has defined this population as non-immigrant aliens. A non-immigrant alien is someone “who has been granted the right by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to reside temporarily in the United States” (www.irs.gov). The trend shows that there are more female dependent spouses than male dependents among non-immigrant aliens, and such a gendered practice reinforces gender inequality among this population (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009).

As I explained earlier, F-2 visa holder aliens are not allowed to have work authorization while the ones with J-2 visa may be employed, but only with special authorization from INS that says “income from the employment of a spouse of dependents may be used to support family’s recreational or cultural activities and related travel. Employment is normally not authorized if this income is needed to provide support for the J-1 visitors” (ibid., p. 83). This implies that even if J-2 spouses can work, the legal system prohibits them from supporting their husbands financially. Therefore, such visas fail to address the needs and difficulties of these spouses, and policies associated with these visas force these women to remain invisible in the US society (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009).

Here, I examine the participants’ narratives in order to better understand the limited rights of the student spouses with these visas. The law and rules constrain people by withholding some specific rights and privileges. Das Gupta (2006) mentions that these laws create conditions that sometimes can punish immigrants. Her view is very helpful for understanding the fact that spousal
subordination is not only created by the family and patriarchal culture, but also it is nourished by US law.

As non-resident aliens to the US, these people have a unique set of problems (Singh & Gopal, 2002). Unlike immigrants, student families have limited temporal permission to be in the US and they often tend to think of their stay and adjustment in the US only lasting until their husbands finish their study. However, this initial goal of temporary adjustment can sometimes become a permanent immigration status in the US. It is very hard to predict how many of them will be in the US temporarily, and how many will extend their stay permanently, which adds uncertainty to their lives. The historical data (Lowell, 1999; Singh & Gopal, 2002) show that this population falls into two major types of category by their intention: those who want to live in the US after their husbands finish their study, and the others who want to return to their home countries. However, a permanent stay in the US cannot be guaranteed until their husbands get a job and their visas are sponsored (Singh & Gopal, 2002). The narratives also show that J-2 visa holders have a less complicated life than F-2 visa holders because the latter cannot get work authorization even after their husbands change their student visa to an H1-B working visa (H1-B Visa Support Center, 2011).

The effects of these two types of visas can be seen differently in their everyday life as well as work life as evidenced in the narratives of the participants. Since F-2 visa holders are not allowed to work legally under the US Immigration Law, they are more likely to face economic as well as social challenges. For example, Kamala mentioned that the F-2 visa provision shackled her in a way that there was no option for her career in the US. She explained, “it’s like putting you in a jail but in jail probably you may not have to worry about your food. I am well educated from my home country but the US is not using me for its benefit”. Her narrative revealed that due to the work restrictions, she
was not able to apply for a job legally. In addition to that, she also seemed to claim that the US could not utilize her previously gained skills and experience in its labor market. She further explained to me that when the stipend from her husband’s graduate assistantship was not enough for their living, her only option was babysitting. Nevertheless, such unexpected work, which she used to think of as low-level, led her to frustration and eventually to depression for more than a year. She interpreted the current visa provision as “a big punishment to the people like me” and she added “it’s inhuman”.

Similarly, Deepali, another F-2 visa holder without an authorized work permit, did not want to work illegally. She mentioned that if she had a visa that would allow her to work, her life would be better. She noted “just even for part time job, I could go and work but I cannot work now”. Though she was reluctant to strongly criticize the existing US immigration policy toward foreign nationals like her, she spoke about her uninteresting daily life due to her visa status. Since she could not work, there was nothing to do at home except sleeping for long hours and cooking. She poignantly described her daily life as “you know! My husband is always busy in his study and work. I go crazy sometimes, even I cannot talk to my parents and friends due to the time difference, it’s a big psychological punishment”. She complained about the visa system that did not allow her to work. Pooja, who had her MA in Mechanical Engineering, and years of work experience in Sri Lanka mentioned similar experiences: “I have an F-2 visa; that does not allow me to work. I just spend my time in cooking and watching TV; I feel so lonely. If I am allowed to work, my life would be better”. She was also critical of the F-2 visa policy which restricts her from employment.

Among these ten participants, Preeti was the only person who held both F-2 and J-2 visas successively at different times while in the US because she was able to change her visa from F-2 to J-2. She mentioned two different types of her hardship while she was on her F-2 visa. First, she
experienced economic hardship because her husband had a very limited stipend, and she was not allowed to work. Second, there was nothing for her to do, and her loneliness led to frustration. This situation is a huge punishment for those who are not just housewives but professionals in their home countries, since the F-2 visa provision leaves these women with no possibility of professional advancement. Typically, the husbands’ limited earning from their graduate assistantship or scholarship was not sufficient for their living expenses. When Preeti was able to obtain a J-2 visa, she had a relatively better life. I will return to her J-2 visa experience later. The F-2 participants thought that their visa barred them from looking for employment options. The women in this visa category with their small children were more economically vulnerable than those who did not have children. Kamala felt bad when she could not fulfill her daughters’ everyday expenses and necessary demands. She explained: “these days I only think about my kids but when I cannot fulfill their demand, I feel very bad”. The narratives show that having children causes more economic hardship at this particular stage when their husbands are students and the wives are not allowed to work.

Students’ spouses who hold J-2 visas have different stories, and they tell a relatively better life although the J-2 visa also has implications for work restrictions and opportunities compared to permanent immigrants (Park, 2009). Tanuja, who held a J-2 visa, mentioned that “if I were not allowed to work here, I immediately would go back to my place, you know! I am a very active person; I cannot live as a handicap. I bet I even could not stay more than a month here, how I can think of these six years. No, no, no”. Her expression also shows that F-2 visa holders had problems and it was a big punishment for them. Tanuja was unlikely to stay in the US if she was not allowed to work.
As I explained earlier, when her husband first came to the US for study with a federal funding, Preeti converted her visa from a F-2 into a J-2 after two years of suffering. This change gave her a sense of achievement, as narrated in these words:

Change from F-2 to J-2 was really something to me. It was a big achievement. I could feel something, I could learn something. I had not thought that I could become a teacher where I could say something confidently that so much love and so much they have felt about me in the school where I work.

Her expression “I could feel something” shows that her F-2 visa status had restricted her from certain kinds of valued opportunities. This visa change gave new meaning to her life. At least she could legally look for a job in the labor market, even if there remained a question of whether she could find a job suitable for her qualifications and experience.

As evidenced in these two types of narratives above, the effect of J-2 visas on these students’ spouses’ daily life was better than that of the F-2 ones. Since J-2 visa holders could work, they explored employment opportunities, and made their lives economically better. The J-2 participants mentioned that though they had not been able to get a job equivalent to their qualifications, whatever job they got provided them with economic support. In this regard, Tanuja explained her situation: “I thought that it’s a different place and it does not matter whatever I work and decided that I should not be going to the depression and sitting alone which I was not, but if I don’t work for a year, I might go”. Since she had a J-2 visa, she emphasized that working in a store and earning some money was far better than doing nothing. She further indicated that long time loneliness could invite depression; therefore, she wanted to suggest that other people like her accept available options.
Though Padmini had a J-2 visa that allowed her to work, the limited duration of her visa was a hindrance in getting a job. As her J-2 visa was valid only for seven more months, her prospective employer was unwilling to hire and to train an employee, who would potentially terminate her job after a few months. She shared her experience: “all the employers asked me how long I am going to stay in the US. But I never heard back from them since I told them that I have the visa of only seven months”. This excerpt shows that unlike permanent immigrants, the temporary status of students and their spouses’ visas constrains them from getting employment. Similarly, another J-2 visa holder, Meena mentioned that: “For some reason, I had to wait for more than five months to get my work permit, and my husband was very busy in those days, I had such a hard time, you know! I started crying”. She remembered her initial days when she had nothing to do. She further defined herself: “I was a more career oriented woman, and those days haunted me more intensely than now” and added “though I am not satisfied with my work now, I have something to do, If I was not allowed to work, I would have three options: to have a baby or going to depression or going back to my previous work in my country leaving my husband here”. She felt her life was much better after she started working.

In sum, the narrative pieces that were connected to visa types and their related privileges and restrictions show that students’ spouses have distinct types of problems and challenges in getting as well as continuing with jobs in the US. Though these visa types have major implications for the participants’ employment opportunities, they also bear meaning for their everyday life. As discussed above, even if women with J-2 visa reported that they had a feeling of diminishing their social and career status by doing presumably low level jobs in the US, they were in a better economic and psychological condition than those who had F-2 visas. Women with F-2 visas have relatively uncertain future and opportunities.
Symbolic Meaning of the United States: Dreams and Realities

Studies that explore the adjustment challenges as well as the identity negotiations of immigrants and sojourners have shown that before entering the US, such a population has an imagined image of the US that may be very different from its reality (de Verthelyi, 1995). In spite of having dealt with different challenges and problems, the participants in the present study also admitted that the US was a country of opportunities. Given the narratives of the participants, the image of the US in their countries can be easily inferred. The following quote from Mallika can best represent the voice of the participants while they were in their respective countries: “it is a dreamland and everything will be alright once one is here. One is very fortunate if she can come to America”. Because of such an image, people may have unrealistic expectation and misconception of life in the US (Cho, Lee & Jezewski, 2005). Accurate information is both necessary and helpful for sojourners in order to plan in advance (Weissman & Furnham, 1987). The women spouses in the present context also lacked social, cultural, and other visa-related institutional information about US society before they moved. de Verthelyi (1995) also made a similar observation in the case of student spouses:

The majority relied on their general knowledge, on descriptions by travelers, and many used as their basic source as the image portrayed by the mass media, especially films and TV series. Thus, they imagined “America” as being urban, affluent, and violent (p. 394).

In the participants’ narratives, they suggested that other women like them who would be coming to the US should make a plan based on their personal backgrounds, and be prepared for any type of challenges they might encounter in the US. In this regard, Kamala felt that women who are coming
to the US need to plan in advance, rather than moving just because their husbands moved. Her suggestion that spouses should be prepared to negotiate in the new environment indicates her unhappy work experience that she narrated on several occasions during the interview. This is echoed in her words when she said “US is not land of only dream because this is the land of struggle and land of misery”. Having lived in the US for several years, participants developed an understanding that people can have different challenges and they need to cope with the situation not based on what they did or did not do in their home countries but what is an available option to do in the US. Kamala further advised that the job hierarchy as ‘small job’ and ‘big job’, ‘educated do this’ and ‘uneducated do that’, ‘upper class do this’ and ‘lower class do that’ etc. based on social status perspectives should be discarded before coming to the US. Her advice to other newly immigrating spouses stands in contrast to her own belief regarding the nature of jobs in the US in her initial days. As explained above, her own interpretation that a babysitting job was of low status bothered her a lot, but in the course of time, her cultural understating of this job changed. In this respect, the way work is understood in the US was different from what she had been conceptualizing in Nepal. Similar reasoning was reiterated in Meena’s description of the prevalent discourse about the US in her home country Nepal:

    In developing countries like ours, people assume that America is a dreamland,
    America is everything. Everything will be fine, everything will be solved, everything-
    everything, your life will be in heaven. This is completely wrong conception.

Meena’s response here also gives some indication of why students from Nepal come to the US. According to her, students come to the US not only for higher education, but also to escape from political and economic problems. Meena later understood that these Nepalese descriptions of the US
were simply not true. She recalled her challenges when she first arrived in the US, and she was busy working days and nights without sufficient sleep, and also was far from her relatives. The following narrative describes how she later reinterpreted the meaning of being in the US for her.

This is a country of struggle. This is a country of opportunity also. How you go, how you manage, it depends on that. If you choose this and that, if you want to do this and that, that’s really hard for you. But if you really want to do something you really have to work hard. If you have any education from here, may be it will be better for you to adjust the situation. So this is not only the dreamland.

She accepted that the US is a land of opportunities, but she also understood that it is a country where people struggle and work hard. Her opinion here also resembles with that of Kamala: if one becomes selective and thinks that one wants to do only a particular type of job, then the transition to the US would be very hard. While, she recognized that an American education would be helpful for initiating as well as continuing one’s career, she also felt that it was necessary to diminish her previous status oriented and hierarchical job prospective. Another participant, Devika from Sri Lanka, had thought that the US could be a better place to pursue her dream of getting a higher education, working, and staying here. She added, “my dream is to make my career in the US and to be a US citizen”. This statement shows her strong motivation and eagerness to stay permanently in the US. However, this goal did not come easily for her and her husband. She was expecting that her husband would find a job first, and then apply for a Green Card, and eventually citizenship. Her opinion also shows the traditional role of South Asian spouses who normally depend on their husbands for their ethnic and national identities.

Two of the participants, Padmini from Pakistan and Mallika from Bangladesh, mentioned
that it was very hard to maintain their social as well as professional status in the US. Once their husbands had finished their studies, they wanted to go back to their countries. Padmini narrated her everyday life in the US in the following way:

America is different from what I thought. I just stay home and care the baby and wait for my husband to come. When I was in Pakistan, I had a maid to look after baby and clean all the stuff. Now I am like a maid. I don’t like to stay here for long. I don’t know why people have to be so busy. People respect me in my country, but here nobody knows me.

Padmini’s response can be interpreted in two ways: it shows her dissatisfaction toward the US’s busy work culture, as well as her feeling of identity loss. When she found that American life was not as she had expected, she had frequent reminiscences of her social status in Pakistan and wanted to go back. Most of the other participants, however, were happy because of the fact that their husbands and children were enjoying American opportunities. It meant even if they were not able to meet their initial expectations, their husbands and children were likely to have a better future. For example, Preeti mentioned that though her career was not as she expected, the good part of the US for her was that her husband and daughter were getting high quality educations, and this was the most satisfactory aspect of her life.

Another advantage of staying in the US was the opportunity to get rid of prescriptive cultural roles for women in their home countries. Since they had to follow cultural and family norms in their home countries, they had their freedom restricted in terms of clothing, working, and other family and interpersonal relationships. The culturally assigned gender responsibilities, such as looking after in-laws and following family values in their countries obliged them to behave in a certain prescribed
manner in their home countries. The participants thought that these cultural values and norms were no longer obligatory in the US. Tanuja mentioned that:

Living in US is like more open and enjoy and live for yourself and make yourself happy. Though back home, we prefer to make them happy. Most of the time we used to sacrifice for others’ happiness, which I think I never did over here. It was living your life for yourself. My husband is fond of cooking but back home, he could not cook because people see negatively if guys cook at home but here he cooks more frequently than me and you know! I never think about wearing swim suit and short skirt after marriage, but here who cares, you are free.

These remarks show that women in India have familial responsibility, not only for their children and husbands, but also for other members of the extended family. The absence of other family members including in-laws in the US made these women’s life easier. Deepali also mentioned that her brother-in-law’s wife was living with her mother-in-law and father-in-law and she thought that her life in the US was far better than that of her brother-in-law’s wife in term of their family responsibility. Meena also expressed a similar opinion that “although my in-laws do not complain against me not following the traditional family culture, I was obedient to them mainly because their neighbors and relatives were concerned about that”. This example shows that even if the family situation is supportive, there are neighbors and relatives that indirectly reinforce cultural norms for women to behave in a certain way.

To summarize this theme, the participants believed that there were both advantages and disadvantages in living in the US. They agreed with the popular motto that if people can work hard, they can fulfill their dreams. They believed that the way to those opportunities was not as easy as the
prevailing myths about the US in their countries. Most of them came to realize that social status alone was not enough for successful American lives; they had to actually perform actions and activities to be a part of the US society. On a positive note, they also reported that travel to the US was an escape from cultural burden in their home countries.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, I have examined an important globalization issue, sojourn populations, and international education in the US. I studied the perceptions of South Asian women spouses, married to graduate students, in terms of their social class and occupational mobility in the US. I also analyzed the consequences of such mobility for their socio-cultural and economic lives. In order to address these issues, I interviewed ten such spouses, whose husbands were studying at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. All of the women that I interviewed, except one had a graduate degree, and were previously employed in their home countries. They, however, had quit their jobs to accompany their husbands to the US. At the time of their interviews, these women could be grouped into three broad categories: employed full time in work that did not require their academic qualifications, underemployed for only few hours a week, and unemployed. This last group was mostly confined to their homes as housewives. Using principles of inductive coding of grounded theory, I developed some sensitizing concepts that were later grouped into analytical themes. From the narratives of in-depth interview with the participants, five major themes emerged: academic qualification and occupational mobility, role of habitus and cultural capital, negotiation of multiple identities, employment rights and restrictions, and the symbolic meaning of the US for the participants.

I explained what socio-cultural and institutional factors led to their downward class as well as occupational mobility in the US. Finally, I reported how these women through narrative interpreted the meaning of their lives in the new context of the US. Since these women participants’ academic credentials were devalued in the US, they were unable to find work at their level of qualifications and experience, and such devaluation resulted in them experiencing significant downward social class and occupational mobility. After some initial struggle by these women, who were employed or
underemployed, they started acknowledging the American work culture, which they realized was different from that in their respective countries. Despite the fact that these South Asian women negotiated with their situation, their cultural capital and educational credentials were not valued in the context of the US in an equivalent way. This kind of non-recognition is nourished by institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991), since in the US, American educational credentials are more valued than the ones from other parts of the world, such as South Asia, resulting in downward occupational mobility for those who possess such credentials. The downward mobility created by working in a supposedly low level job in the US created a feeling of status loss because these women’s prevailing attitudes toward these occupations were highly influenced by their habitus acquired in their home countries. Since their habitus informed them that white-collar jobs were more prestigious, working in a blue-collar job gave them a feeling of denigration and declassing.

The specific educational system and the choice of employer which Bourdieu (1987) terms as habitus, follow the legitimate code of the society. Therefore, the education system in the US and its societal and economic value is more compatible with its own arbitrary standard in its institutionalized professional structure. As a result, the women with foreign degrees, for instance, especially from developing countries, are usually at a disadvantage. Such cases of credentials devaluations and experience of downward mobility often led these women spouses to recall their previous career and get haunted by their past status. However, in the course of time, they were able to minimize their negative emotions and attitudes by attributing it to the differences in work cultures.

When these professional women with non-US credentials relocated to contexts where their backgrounds were devalued, they began to understand themselves as possessing multiples roles. For example, when they could not get the expected opportunities in the American labor market, their
negotiation of multiple identities were more noticeable, and they had a sense of sacrificing their career. In these circumstances, the increasingly shifting identity from traditional gender roles toward professional and careered positions, thus, has changed the individual lifestyle and social status of these women. However, their family dynamics and gender specific roles still gives them a distinct meaning when they start intensifying their perception of themselves also as wives and mothers responsible for their domestic chores. In this regard, though they felt that they were sacrificing their career for their families, they still were committed to pursuing their further educations, and rejuvenating their careers in the US, which would be an added benefit for them in the contexts of the US, as well as in their home countries. Therefore, this is not a permanent “deskilling” by working in the domestic arena (Man, 2004), but a temporary break for them. This expectation is also a source of consolation to these women, since they feel hopeful about their employment futures.

The findings show a distinct gender role which is largely affected by their previous South Asian cultural background. These women accept the patriarchal social structures and subordinate female roles in their countries that result in women taking familial responsibilities, while they are still hopeful of future career improvements. In this context, they are obliged to prioritize the significance of their husbands and children, while considering their own needs, goals, and interest as secondary in importance. These women are culturally oriented to regard their husbands being in authority, while assuming their husbands’ achievement as their own success, which allows these women to tolerate their sacrifice and status loss. This worldview can be attributed to the underlying social structure of traditional South Asian marriage systems and family dynamics. South Asian women are “socialized to place complete trust on their husbands and to be reliant on them for their financial and social wellbeing” (Dasgupta & Rudra, 2009:10). This marriage system reinforces the inequalities between husband and wife in terms of their age, social status, educational qualifications,
and job; men almost always assume the superior position of greater power compared to their wives. This fact prioritizes men’s social status and career possibilities, and wives’ status is attached to their husbands’ status; it intensifies the requirement for men’s career development while their wives’ careers, skills, knowledge, and identity are less valued. In most cases, this fact is taken for granted, and these women assimilate their husbands’ success as their own, and feel an intense emotional attachment with their family. These attitudes support their accepted subordinate role in the family. Therefore, all these factors motivated the participants in this study to take on familial duties first while also having an expectation of continuing with their careers in the future.

US institutional laws and policy toward international students’ spouses also has a profound effect on their life experience in the US. These short-term sojourners are different from long-term immigrants in various ways. Most importantly, the students’ spouses possess a US visa that has well defined rights and restrictions. They are basically categorized as J-2 visa holders, who are permitted to get work authorization and F-2 visa holders, who are not allowed to work. Visa status has a profound effect on women’s daily lives, particularly due to its employment restrictions.

F-2 visa holders are at a great disadvantage compared to J-2 visa owners because of the F-2 visa restriction on work authorization, which subsequently closes off American career opportunities. As a result, these women often experience loneliness, frustration, and economic hardship. This situation converts professional women into illegal workers, or homemakers, and their previous professional skills and career goals are lost, while they simply experience their life in terms of their domestic responsibilities. Therefore, this visa not only restricts them in their career advancement, but also challenges their social and economic status. This visa creates more uncertainty for these women because most South Asian students want to stay in the US after the completion of their study, by
adjusting their residency status from temporary to permanent. These women may find it challenging to visualize professional lives for themselves, while remaining in the US (Sheth, 1995; Rahman & Rollock, 2004). In such a situation, it not easy for these women to earn university degrees due to the high fee structure in universities and increased family responsibilities. It is also not possible to return to their countries leaving the family behind in the US. Immigration complicates these women’s lives as they swing between familial roles and their career expectations.

J-2 visa holders have an easier life than that of F-2 visa holders because of the provision for work authorization. They can explore their career possibilities, and experience economic empowerment. However, these women also suffer from a biased job market because their academic credentials, skills, and experiences are not valued in the labor market and they are obliged to work as low paid or deskilled workers (Meares, 2010). This situation creates a feeling of their diminishing social status as they experience downward occupational mobility. Moreover, they frequently possess time limited visa and employers do not usually want to hire those who do not possess extended visas. Despite these practical challenges, J-2 visa holders feel better about their working life in the US compared to F-2 visa holders.

Sojourners’ life in the US can be more challenging because of previously held unrealistic beliefs about the US. When these people enter the US for the first time, their fantasy turns out to be false. After new types of social challenges emerge, they realize that the US is not only the “dream land” but other realities also prevail. The narratives in this study show that the US is a place of struggle and suffering for them, and this situation is mostly unanticipated. The image of the US in the developing countries of South Asia allows most people to dream about US immigration, without much thinking about the consequences. Many of them are not familiar with the restrictions of their
visas in the US. After facing the challenges, their understanding and interpretation of meaning of the US can take other turns that they had not thought about before. However, these women also admitted that the US is also a country of opportunity; various opportunities are available and the life is better in terms of accessible facilities. Similarly, it is also an easy way to escape from the cultural obligations of their home countries. Their responsibilities for the in-laws and other extended family members in their home countries no longer bother them in the US. Therefore, there are both advantages and disadvantages to these sojourners’ life in a new country. However, necessary preparation in terms of visa information and available American opportunities can improve these women’s abilities to adapt to the new environment.

Though rigorous and thorough this study is, there are some limitations that I could not address in this research despite my conscious efforts for them. Due to the time limitation and scattered living and working situation of the research participants collecting and incorporating ethnographic data became an impossibility to me though this would have significantly strengthened my analysis. Therefore, I had to rely on the information obtained from interviews only. Though this study is based on the participants from South Asia, I could not find the spouses from Bhutan, Afghanistan and the Maldives. In addition, this study is exclusively limited to Hawaii, so the findings may be less generalizable across other states of the US.

Despite its unavoidable limitations in a limited time, this study has many sociological implications due to its significance in various ways. This study unravels the narratives of those populations that are under-researched in the field of sociology. Their narratives have implications for policy makers, administrators and advocates of marginalized groups like them. This study also informs the valuable suggestions for the future sojourning women spouses. It also provides valuable
insights for gender studies, non-immigrants and immigrants literature and opens the way for further exploration.

This study also opens doors for further research related to the issue of women spouses in this age of globalization. A next step can be to examine the similar types of participants in their home countries focusing on how they prepare themselves and what image and expectations they carry before coming to the United States. In this study, most of the participants mentioned that their current situation is temporary and they want to rejuvenate their career with the North American education in the future. Therefore, a further work can be to make a follow up of whether, to what extent, and how they meet their future expectations in the US. Such a study can be longitudinal and ethnographic in nature.
REFERENCES


*Antipode, 35*, 698–717.


Working Paper for Center for Economic Studies and Info Institute of Economic Research 
CESifo, working paper No.1490, Institute for the study of labor IZA Discussion paper no.1612


Park, G. (2009). I listened to Korean society. I always heard that women should be this way: The 
negotiation and construction of gendered identities in claiming a dominant language and 


Purkayastha, B. (2005). Skilled migration and cumulative disadvantage: The case of highly 
qualified Asian Indian immigrant women in the US. Geoforum, 36, 181-196.

Asian Students in the United States. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and 
Development, 32, 130-142.

turn of the twenty-first century. In G. Rajan & S. Sharma (Eds.), New cosmopolitanisms: 

Women’s Studies International Forum . 20, 2, 225-233.

Rudmin, F. W. (2003). Critical history of the acculturation psychology of assimilation, 
separation, integration, and marginalization. Review of General Psychology: Journal of 
Division 1, of the American Psychological Association,7, 3-37.

Sakamoto, I. (2006). When family enters the picture: the model of cultural negotiation and
gendered experiences of Japanese academic sojourners in the United States. *Cultural
Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 12*, 3, 558-77.

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Sen, P. (1999). Enhancing women’s choices in responding to domestic violence in Calcutta: A
comparison of employment and education. *European Journal of Development
Research, 11*, 2, 65–86.


Sewell, W., Jr. (1999). The concept(s) of culture. In V. E. Bonnell and L. Hunt (Eds.), *Beyond
the cultural turn: New directions in the study of society and culture* (pp. 35-61).
Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shaffer, M. A. (2001). Forgotten partners of international assignments: development and test of a


Cambridge University Press.


Review 5*, 273-286.

Subramaniam, M. (2006). The power of women’s organizing: Gender, caste, and class in
India. Lanham: Lexington Press.


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guidelines

Interview Questions (semi-structured)

1. Tell me about how you decided to come to the United States?
2. What were you doing before you came to the US?
3. If you were working, how did you make the decision to leave the job?
4. Before you came here, did you have any plan for what you would do during the stay in the US?
5. Tell me about your initial experiences after coming to the US?
6. Tell me about your visa/legal status to work in the US?
7. If you are working now, how did you get the job?
8. Tell me about your job experiences in the US?
9. How did you adjust or how are you adjusting yourself in the new working environment?
10. How do you see your present life compared with the previous one in your home country?
11. Is there anything you are experiencing now that you had not expected before?
12. Is there any advice or suggestions you want to offer for other people who would like to come to the US to accompany their husband?
13. Is there anything I missed in the interview that you would like to tell me about?
14. Finally, would you like to ask me anything?
Background Information

1. What is your home country?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. Do you have any special professional licenses or qualifications in your home country?
4. Was any part of your education obtained outside your home country? (if yes, please explain)
Appendix 2: Exempt Approval from IRB

(please see a separate page in the CD)
Appendix 3: Sample Consent form

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Topic: International Students’ Educated Wives and their Employment Experiences in the US

Investigator

Gita Neupane, MA Candidate
Sociology Department
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
1890 East-West Rd., Honolulu, HI
96822 USA

Email: gita@hawaii.edu, Phone: (808) 956-7983

Purpose of This Research

This research will be used for my MA thesis in Sociology. It aims to explore the experiences of international students’ wives who have accompanied their husbands to the U.S. but are not currently students themselves. Only wives who were doing work requiring high education or skills in their home countries will be included in the study. I am asking you to participate in the study because you are the wife of an international student who seems to meet these criteria. I plan to interview between ten and twenty wives. I would like to interview you for about an hour, although it might take longer if you have much to tell me. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interview so that I can transcribe it and check the transcription for accuracy. All data will be treated with absolute confidentiality. After the interview is completed, I will ask you to fill out a very short survey about your educational background, which I will keep separate from the interview in my records. I will not collect your name, and in my data I will use a simple code name to identify your interview and the short survey. All audio recordings will be destroyed after the analysis.
You are free to refuse to answer any questions, or to stop participating at any time. You may ask questions about this research at any time by emailing me at gita@hawaii.edu or by calling (808) 944-7983.

Possible Risks: I believe there is little risk to participating in my study, although you might feel some emotional pain in describing your experiences in the United States to me.

Signature

I certify that I have read and understand the above, that I have been given satisfactory answers to any questions about the research, and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the research at any time, without any prejudice. If I cannot obtain satisfactory answers to my questions, or have comments or complaints about my participation, I may contact: UH Committee on Human Studies (CHS) at (808) 956-5007.

Print your name: ___________________

Date: _______________

I agree to have my interview audio-taped for the purpose of transcription and analysis, with the understanding that the audiotape will be destroyed when the analysis is completed, and would not be used for any other purpose. (Please circle response)

YES    NO

Signature  _______________________________________

cc: Signed copy to participant
Appendix 4: Email sent to international students and their students through university email listerserv

From: XXX <xxxxx@hawaii.edu>
Date: May 28, 2010 6:25:47 AM GMT+08:00
To: iss-l@lists.hawaii.edu
Subject: Request for study participants: International spouses

Aloha,

My name is Gita Neupane, from Department of Sociology. I am doing a study on international students’ spouses’ experiences the United States.

Eligible candidates are invited to participate in the study. I will award a $5 dollar gift card for your participation.

Who: International students’ women spouses who have at least undergraduate degree from their home countries

What to do: I will interview you about your living experience in the US. It will last about 30 minutes.

When: As soon as possible but during summer is okay

Whom to contact: Please send an email to Gita Neupane (gita@hawaii.edu) to participate.

This research has been approved by Committee on Human Subjects.

I appreciate your participation and contribution for the research.

Thanks.

Note: international students with spouses: Please inform your spouses about this study. I am grateful for your help.

Gita Neupane