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**FEATURE**

**A Narrative Inquiry of One Female Married-Single:  
A Story of Loneliness and Isolation**

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**Abstract.** *The Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD, 2013) reported that, during the past three decades, there has been a steady rise in the number of international students studying outside their countries of citizenship. Those figures rose from 0.8 million in 1975 to almost 3.7 million in 2009, and to 4.1 million in 2010. There is an associated growing body of research that explores the experiences of international students in general; some exploring the experiences of married international students studying abroad with their families (see Arthur, 2004); but little exploring the experiences of married students studying abroad without their families with them (Wa-Mbaleka, 2013). Wa-Mbaleka and Joseph (2013) uncovered a phenomenon they termed “the married-single phenomenon,” referring to married persons who were studying abroad without their spouses or children. This narrative study documents the experience of one female doctoral student while studying in the Philippines without her family. Data was collected through extensive and repeated interviews, oral and written, formal and informal, an examination of the participant’s retrospective journal, and participant observation. The findings do not show differences between how this married-single woman coped with loneliness and isolation and the strategies reportedly used by other international students in previous studies.*

**Keywords:** International students, married-single students, loneliness, isolation, narrative inquiry, Philippines

**Introduction**

According to Paige (1990), international students are individuals who temporarily reside in a country outside their own country of citizenship to participate in an educational program. The Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD, 2013) reported that figures of international students studying outside their home countries rose from 0.8 million in 1975 to almost 2.1 million in 2000, and to 4.1 million in 2010. Further, statistics indicate that “women compose slightly more than half of all undergraduates, earn one-third of the doctoral degrees (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001) in general, and basically, women have been outnumbering men at all levels as students at higher education institutions (Borzelleca, 2012; Marklein, 2005; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Williams, 2010), a consistent trend since the 1970s.

Notably, Arthur (2004) informed that more than one fifth of international graduate student population studying in the United States of America (USA) were married and many of them had their families with them. Further, Sood (2012) submits that more women than men tend to travel to study abroad, and according to the Chronicle of Higher Education “women account for two-thirds of participation in overseas programs” (as cited in Sood, 2012, para 7), though figures to show whether they are married or single could not be obtained. The Institute of International Education Open Door statistics reveal that 65.1 percent of Americans studying abroad were women and 34.9 percent men. A decade earlier—when the total number of study abroad students was less than half its current total—the breakdown was 64.9 percent female and 35.1 percent male (as cited in Redden, 2008, para 5). Since more women are students at higher education institutions, and more women travel to study abroad, it is likely that some of them would be studying abroad without having their families present.

Some studies have explored the experiences of international students and their families while they studied abroad (e.g. Arthur, 2004), but little has been done to explore the experiences of married students studying abroad without their families. In a recent study, Wa-Mbaleka and Joseph (2013) investigated the experiences of international students studying in the Philippines. They found an undiscovered phenomenon they termed, the married-single phenomenon. This phenomenon researchers expressed exist when married persons studied abroad without their families. As such, these persons were then classified as “single” because they faced issues similar to those of single students studying away from home. These feelings include feelings of loneliness and isolation in the absence of having family support present.

### **Review of the Literature**

This study gives a voice to one female international married-single student who studied without her family in the Philippines. The study is based on the literature that deals specifically with gender differences, cultural influences, and personality.

#### **Gender Differences**

Studies have examined gender differences in loneliness, but there seems to be little consensus as to whether gender impacts feelings of loneliness among international students. For example, Rout (2005) reported that 67% of females and 62% of males have experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness while studying in Australia. Weiss (1973) posited that women are more prone to experiencing feelings of loneliness when compared to men; while Mallinckrodt and Long (1992) found that international female graduate students in comparison to their male counterparts encountered more problems socially, psychologically, and educationally. Fatima (2001) found that female international graduate students were more likely to experience more stress and anxiety when compared to their male counterparts.

On another hand, some studies have reported that men experienced greater feelings of loneliness (Deniz, 2005; Knox, Vail-Smith & Zusman, 2007; Schultz & Moore, 1986; Stokes & Levin, 1986). Notably, Archibald, Bartholomew, and Max (1995) found no significant differences among genders. This was supported by a meta-analysis conducted by Mahon, Yarcheski, Yarcheski, Canella and Hanks (2006), which uncovered that 19 out of 21 studies indicated no significant differences among genders.

#### **Cultural Influences**

Some authors have argued that a person's cultural background can contribute to feelings of loneliness when studying outside of their home country (Lee & Rice, 2007). For example, people from individualistic versus collectivist societies may have different experiences when studying abroad. Hui (1988) attributed that to the group as a "basic survival unit". As such, the regard for community support would be greatest among an international student from a collectivist culture.

Another cultural element is power distance. This element may affect some international students when dealing with teacher-student and student-student interactions (Hofstede, as cited in Smit, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 1997) since some students may find certain behaviors appropriate or inappropriate based on their cultural background. Yeh and Inose (2003) reported that Asian international students studying in the USA generally deal with additional

acculturative stress issues when compared to colleagues from Europe because of the greater disparities between their home and host cultures. Additionally, Yang, Teraoka, Eichenfield, and Audas (1994) suggested that cultural differences could even hinder international students from establishing meaningful relationships with persons in their host country because of dissimilarities in beliefs and values.

### **Personality Differences**

The literature also implied that people's personalities could impact feelings of loneliness. Accordingly, some researchers have even identified certain personality traits as being more prone to feelings of loneliness; these traits include shyness, introversion, depression, and neurotism (Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Stokes, 1985; Wiseman, Gutfreund, & Lurie, 1995). Conversely, Argyle (1992) intimated that people with higher social skills were more prone to having societal support than those with lower social skills; while Stokes (1995) found that social network and individual differences were both good predictors of self-reported loneliness. Consequently, his findings seem to support other researchers who found that personality could have an effect on social skills and eventually one's feelings of loneliness.

The questions guiding this research were:

1. How did the selected female married-single student cope with feelings of isolation when studying away from her family?
2. How did her social, cultural, and academic experiences differ from the literature?
3. What support did the married-single find most useful while studying away from her family?

### **Methodology**

The qualitative research approach allows participants to share their stories extensively since Hancock (2002) posited that this approach "is concerned with the opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals producing subjective data . . . and describes social phenomena as they occur" (p. 2). This study explored the experiences of one female married-single international students who studied in the Philippines without her family. The narrative inquiry approach was chosen since it is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). As such, this approach has allowed me to tell the story of the participant as an eccentric medium because, according to Kanno (2003), "other people's experiences can be understood and shared" (p. 8), especially because the participant crossed social and cultural borders.

**Bracketing Interview**

As a researcher, I had to remain aware that I was a research instrument (Merriam, 2002) and had to reflect consistently on how my perspective and experience would impact data collection in the manner in which questions were asked to ensure that the research process was not compromised (Cohler, 1982; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). I therefore embarked on what Thompson et al. (1989) referred to as “bracketing interview,” in which I had a colleague interview me using the same interview guide that I planned to use with the participant in this study. Thompson et al. (1989) posit that this strategy can make the researcher aware and truly open to his or her prejudices and personal experiences. I found the bracketing interview to have been quite enlightening because I was able to uncover and reflect on my own biases and feelings as international single student. Since that interview was conducted about a month before my first formal interview with the participant, I was able to minimize those biases by being deliberately open minded every time I interacted with the participant in all data collection interactions.

**Positioning and Reflexivity**

At the data collection of this study, I was a foreign single female student studying literally 24 hours by flight away from home. Notwithstanding my civil status-single and the fact that I had studied away from home for almost 8 years prior to my postgraduate studies in the Philippines, I found myself experiencing a different sense of loneliness when faced with the cultural differences, nuances of discrimination and racism, food choices, transportation options, and social activity options outside of my personal taste, exposure, and experience. Not being married did not exempt me from missing family and friends, but in no way could I fully understand the experiences of married-single people.

**Recruitment and Participant Selection**

Four participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Patton (1990) proposes that it allows the researcher to select subjects based on some characteristics. The criteria for selection were that the participant had to be (a) a female foreign student, (b) enrolled at a higher education institution in the Philippines, and (c) studying without her family in the Philippines (which includes husband and children). Out of the four, one woman had been studying in the Philippines for almost six years without her spouse but did not feel comfortable to share her story. The other three women were initially interviewed for the study, but due to time constraints in data collection process, two were unable to participate in repeated interviews. As a result, only one story was reported in this study.

### **Data Collection**

This narrative study was done to explore how one female married-single international student dealt with social, cultural and academic issues while pursuing higher education studies away from her home country without having their families present. For the purpose of confirmation and completeness (Shih, 1998), I ensured triangulation of data (Begley, 1996; Denzin, 1978) through lengthy interviews, informal conversations, examination of the participants' retrospective journals, and a graph of the participants' life story lines. I used these to analyze significant events that transpired and their recollection of the emotions attached to those events as proposed by Gergen (1988).

In an effort to collect data on the participant that may not surface from her own cognitive process, I constructed a series of semi-structured questions which I used during interviews and casual conversations since Kemper (1984) suggests that the participants' cognitive repertoire is part of the narrative process and they do not need to be taught how to tell their stories. This method was to ensure that there was always a "balance between the need for allowing [the participant] sufficient narrative space to articulate [her] experience and the need for information that is of interest to the researcher" (Tsang, Irving, Alaggia, Cahu, & Benjamin, 2003, p. 365). This technique was incorporated throughout the data collection period.

To ensure that the participant was well prepared to share her story, the interview protocol was emailed ahead of the scheduled official interviews (Creswell, 2003) in an effort for her to reflect before we actually met. In addition, I wrote up a story line that would guide me in ensuring that significant life event; especially those associated with her experiences as a married-single student were noted. These included questions such as, "What can you recollect about the following: your financial situation, academic life, social life, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and discrimination?"

The participant was a shy person. As such, to assist her in feeling more comfortable for face-to-face interviews, we began by using the written interviews via email; especially since Hughes (2004) suggested that in an effort to be sensitive to the cultural and communication differences of the participant, email can be used for data collection. Using the email for sending the written interview protocol proved to be effective since the participant was a non-native speaker of English. She felt more comfortable to share her story initially this way. Consequently, a second research instrument was developed in an effort to get a much broader picture of the participant's life before she moved to the Philippines and during her experience in the Philippines. During the writing process, I sent the document to the participant for her to check whether the written narrative truly reflected what she had shared. In addition, we had many informal

interactions where I was able to learn more about her, and also observe her behavior in a natural setting.

### **Setting**

All formal and informal interviews and sessions were held in the Cavite province of the Philippines. They were held mostly in my home, the library at my institution, and buses or other forms of transportation when the participant and I were traveling together.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Creswell (2013) proposed ethical issues associated with qualitative research, which guided the practice in this study. Accordingly, before data collection, I read information about the culture from which the participant emerged, and also asked friends from her country to share stories and essential information about their culture. A proposal was also sent to the Ethics Review Board of my university for approval before I began data collection. The context for the research was social constructionism since I was solely interested in the participants' understanding of her experiences to discover complexities of views "rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). Therefore, in an effort to establish trust with participant so that she would be comfortable to share her story, we shared many informal moments together such as having lunch or dinner, going out together, and interacting via Skype, text message, or email for quite a few months before and after the data collection process. All data was reported except when issues which were too sensitive or identifiable.

### **Data Analysis**

The flexibility of qualitative research helped collect and analyze data simultaneously (Creswell, 2003). Accordingly, data analysis began immediately after the first interview and throughout the duration of the different methods of data collection. Literature suggests that there are many modes of transferring knowing into telling (see for example Mishler, 1986). Contending views exist, however, among academic disciplines about what constitutes a story in narrative inquiry. Bruner (1986) distinguished two types of cognition in narrative inquiry, specifically, the paradigmatic and narrative inquiry methods. According to Polkinghorne (1988), the former occurs when people tell stories in a "virtually uninterrupted monologue" (p. 160), and simply put by Bruner, it occurs by recognizing elements as members of a category. The latter, however, presents meaningful structures for organizing incoherent data components (Dole, 2001),

and simplified by Bruner as combining elements into a story with plots (Bruner, 1989). A combination of these two methods was used in analyzing the data.

In the first aspect of data analysis, I applied the paradigmatic-type inquiry method. This approach permitted me to immerse myself in the data while transcribing the one-on-one interviews. After reading the transcriptions, I listened to recorded interviews repeatedly to get a sense of the emotions associated with what was said since Riessman (1993) suggests that is important for the research to include both words and selected features (crying, long pauses, laughter) on paper in a first draft.

Finally, the narrative analysis concept of Bruner (1986), which was further developed by Polkinghore (1988), assisted me in moving from the analysis to actual story telling since Gergen and Gergen (1986) suggest that this is “perhaps the most essential ingredient of a narrative accounting (or storytelling), [that] is, its capability to structure events in such a way that they demonstrate, first, a connectedness or coherence, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time” (p. 25). Further, Polkinghore (1988) also argued that the story “must fit the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves” (p. 16). Consequently, the purpose was not to report the data verbatim, but to gain an understanding of the data in the participant’s context since narratives emerge from the feelings of both the researcher and the participant. An attempt was made to incorporate that idea by telling more of her story rather than reporting the raw data, and later developing a few themes.

What actually constituted the units of analysis to be coded were the frequency of words and similarity in what was expressed. As such, basic descriptive coding allowed to simply summarize the topic or words expressed by the participant (Salanda, 2008), in addition to linking her expressed feelings to what was reported in previous studies reported.

### **Limitations**

Because this study took the narrative study approach, its contents should not be generalized outside the context of the participant (Reissman, 1993). Additionally, Reissman advised that the researchers ask pertinent questions such as “why does the participant structure her narratives in this way?” As such, persons reading the narrative can also keep that question in mind, especially since I had to keep reading literature on narratives throughout the writing process because of the complexities associated with retelling stories in a way to elicit meaning in the participant’s context.



### **Jae's Story**

Both Jae (pseudonym) and her husband were lecturers at higher education institutions (HEIs), but desired to earn terminal degrees. Jae recounted beginning her PhD program since 1999 in her home country, but up until August 2009, though she had finished her course work, there was little or no hope in ever finishing that program. She cited “technical difficulties” such as a demotivated advisor—who at the time had not given appropriate or timely feedback on her dissertation—work requirements, and family responsibility amongst other responsibilities as the contending factors.

Jae said that she wanted to give up, but her husband encouraged her to explore other options to make their dream happen. One day, one of his friends visited from the Philippines and told them that it was possible for Jae to finish her degree in a short time in the Philippines. They spent a few months deliberating on their desires for terminal degrees but knew that the two of them could not leave the country to study together since they had no outside source for financial support, in addition to having a large family that needed to be cared for. Finally, her husband decided that she should travel to the Philippines to complete her PhD program.

The decision to leave home to travel to the Philippines was not an easy one. The flying and layover time took Jae almost 20 hours before arriving safely in the Philippines. That was possibly the easiest part since Jae had to leave behind her husband of then 14 years and her thirteen children—biological and adopted. Jae recalled that she had nowhere to leave her children and had no financial means to take them with her to the Philippines. As a result, her husband decided that he would raise the children in her absence. Not very long after Jae's time in the Philippines, however, her husband had to move very far away from home to take up a new job in an effort to raise the necessary funds to support her in the Philippines and to take care of the children at home.

In addition to the changes that took place at home, Jae also encountered some unforeseen difficulties from the onset when she arrived in the Philippines. She discovered that she had arrived after the official registration date for HEIs in the Philippines. The calendar of the academic school year was different from that in her home country. In addition, she would have not been able to register even if she was on time for the school year because she had to get her documents processed by the immigration department in order for her to obtain a student visa and subsequently legitimately enroll at any school.

Jae also encountered other challenges. First, she thought that her program would take about two years since she had already completed course work in her academic area in her country. She, however, found difficulty in finding a school that was willing to transfer the credits from her previous program. Finally, Jae decided to enroll in an online program at one of the state universities,

but by the end of the first semester, the program was stopped and she was informed that she had to enroll in regular classes on campus. This change created another problem for Jae because all graduate classes were offered on Saturdays. This interfered with her religious beliefs and therefore posed a serious problem for her. She then had to explore the possibilities of a new school. The associated problem was that she was informed of the change in student status, from online to campus, in an untimely manner, and was unable to apply to another university by then.

Jae made an effort to address the issue with her school administrators, and they finally made appointments for her to meet with some professors to discuss the matter. The endeavor was successful since Jae and her professors were able to make adjustments to the school's schedule so that she would receive classes during the week rather than on Saturdays. As a result, Jae was able to finish her course work successfully within two years.

Jae felt that her overall academic experience in the Philippines was successful. Despite the shaky beginning in getting enrolled at a school and her initial inability as a non-native English speaker to make presentations in English; her inability to bond with her fellow colleagues for group work due to the language barrier in not understanding the local language (Tagalog); the willingness of her teachers to teach her outside the regular schedule and their effort in making things clearer for her when she could not understand—all contributed to a mostly positive academic experience.

### **Narratives and Findings**

Several themes are discussed in Jae's narrative. Specifically, six themes were developed: feelings of loneliness and isolation, financial support, social life, discrimination, racism, and family life. Discrimination and racism were joined because feelings expressed about them overlapped severely. In some instance, direct quotes of the participant are reported, except in making tense corrections.

#### **Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation**

Socially, Jae shared some of her experiences during her time in the Philippines. Overall, she attributed feelings of loneliness to the absence of having people she knew and those who could have easily helped her out. This is how Jae described her feelings of isolation:

*I experienced isolation and see it as worse than prison. For in the prison there are at least times when people can have opportunity to talk to other persons. Whenever I choose to stay in my house, I cannot utter any words, so my mouth becomes bitter and I am about to get sick, for this reason I use to stay in the library where at least someone may greet me or we can talk for a while.*

Jae further added that she desired to have someone around especially when she did something good, but she had no one who could appreciate what she had done or encourage her to keep on going. Even cooking became a major task because she had no one around to assist her. She therefore tried to shorten the cooking process by changing her diet to eat things that would cook quicker, but as a result, she suffered ill health. Jae shared,

*When I am busy I do not feel lonely. However, because I came from a large family, I really feel lonely especially on Fridays and Saturdays. These days are the ones I usually joined with my children after the other busy days of the week. I sometimes remember the times my family were celebrating the upcoming Sabbath day by singing and talking about the events of the week. This makes me homesick.*

Jae further expressed “loneliness is really a bad thing. Someone can have strange thoughts that they can forget that they are still alive.”

Jae revealed that for her to cope with feelings of isolation, she totally immersed herself in her schoolwork. In addition, having a deadline by which she should complete her dissertation made it even easier for her to feel comfortable to stay alone. At times she shared, “I sometimes comfortably stay alone without people disturbing me while I am working. I use to take breaks listening to music, chatting with people on Facebook or visit friends.” She reports that she thought of interacting with some groups of people in the different environments that she frequented; none of them really worked for her.

### **Social Life**

Overall, Jae expressed that her feelings about her social environment was mixed since “there are always good and bad people.” She expressed that she had friends in the Philippines who treated her kindly, fed her, and gave her birthday gifts. At a point she shares that

*One person in the market gave me food for free, whenever she miss me (sometimes I hid realizing that all the time she sees me she will give me) she will text me and request me to meet her so that she could give me something. Still another one gave me from what he crops from his garden.*

On the other hand though, Jae sometimes had bad experiences. She recounts one experience she had while using public transportation:

*The bad ones used to reject me. They did not answer even when I greet them. Furthermore, I was on my way going somewhere. I entered a van. After getting in, all who were seated left. The driver then told me that he would not go anymore. I then got off, and the same persons who had gotten out, went back in the van and it left. I was not too surprised because I had already heard about that kind of behavior.*

### **Racism and Discrimination**

When asked about racism, Jae had little to say. Overall she believed that persons were generally misinformed about her home country. Persons asked her questions such as, “Did you come here by swimming” or “Are there houses where you came from?” implying, according to Jae, that people from her country live under trees with animals. She was even asked if there were roads or airplanes in her country. Though Jae expressed that she did not focus on the discrimination or racism issues she faced, but rather, was grateful that most of her professors made accommodations to teach her in their offices. She recalled that

*One of them would speak kindly to me but never welcomed me in her office. We used to sit in the balcony for the sessions, and she always said that it is the place she prefers; but I never felt that this was the true reason.*

Jae was however appreciative that despite any kind of discrimination, she believed that the professors were fair in giving grades. Despite the cooperation of many of her professors, Jae found it difficult to find support in her school environment. According to her, speaking of support is hurtful because she had felt little support from her own advisor. To her, her advisor did not communicate with her effectively to shield her from some of the problems she experienced during her academic sojourn. Additionally, Jae had little support from her classmates.

*It was not easy to meet my classmates for some learning activities. It was very difficult to participate in groups that I belonged to for certain assignments because most of the time the group members expressed their opinions in Tagalog (local language), and no one bothered to even translate so that I could participate.*

### **Financial Difficulty**

Jae described her financial situation as challenging since money was not always sent to her on time due to extenuating circumstances. She recalls moments when financial challenges intensified, such as during a rebellion that took place in her country. Another unforgettable time was during her comprehensive exam when there were some serious political uprisings in her country. During that time, her husband was even kidnapped and was unable to provide the needed funds for Jae’s schooling. She emotionally expressed that she “felt weak and forsaken by God. I wondered what life would be like for me after that situation...” Though Jae’s family was only able to send half the amount they would have originally sent, she did her best in managing what she received and found kind enough friends in the Philippines (all of them foreigners), who absolved her of loans they had given when they became fully aware of her situation.

### **Family Life**

With mixed feelings, Jae recalls her family life like a small heaven. She reveals that “we showed kindness in talking to each other. The children were at an age where they may agree with some requirements without any question.” She however has concerns about how her family will continue to operate when she returns due to her prolonged absence and reveals that

*There may already be dysfunction. There should be a strong reeducation to correct some wrong habits installed during my absence because there may be some of my children who have already felt free to do whatever they want.*

Jae admits that it would have been challenging if she had to have a family around while pursuing her studies. In fact, she thought that it would have been a burden because she would have wanted to successfully be there for both her husband and her children. Consequently, she believes that as a wife, she made the right decision by taking a break to complete her doctoral studies, but woefully admits that she, even as a mature person, remained unstable throughout her stay, and was never able to adapt well to the Philippine environment. When finally asked if given a second chance how she would do it, Jae exclaims, “as a mother I would not accept to study without my family. No financial support for my family, no study!”

### **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to record and retell the story of married-single female international students with regard to their social, cultural, and academic experiences while studying in the Philippines. As mentioned earlier, the findings of Wa-Mbaleka and Joseph (2013) found a large undisclosed cohort of students—married students—who are studying without their spouses, which warranted further investigation. In examining the experiences of the participant in this study, it became clear that her gender, which was directly associated with her position as mother and wife, may have had partial influence on her coping abilities in all three aspects explored in this paper.

Socially, Jae was unable to carry out her regular role as mother while studying in the Philippines though her husband and children needed her in another social setting. For example, Jae shared that her cooking and eating habits changed because she was not required to perform in her regular role as mother—cook. As a result, she resorted to eating unwholesome foods that were easy to cook because she missed the interaction of being able to cook with her family in the kitchen and sharing the space and responsibilities with them. This new and disoriented social structure inevitably had a negative impact on her health. Another social factor was her large family structure. Things had changed dramatically for her from a household of 15 to an apartment of 1; with no family

time, no special occasions, a very fragile social system, and the absence of her “traditional” family role requirements.

Excluding all these, Jae was also unable to find an adequate social support system in the absence of her regular social circle in her home country while studying in the Philippines. Stokes (1985) found that college students could cope with loneliness better when they were able to broaden their network; but added that shy, introverted persons are less willing to take risks and may become more neurotic or depressed. Jae did not take a personality inventory test but through prolonged informal interactions and observations, it became clear that Jae was quiet, reserved, and unassuming. Nonetheless, she still tried to reach out to others by greeting them on the streets, something that was not always reciprocated. She was, however, able to make few friends with persons she says were interested in talking with her, but spent the majority of her time alone in her apartment. This situation did not positively affect Jae. Rather it had a negative impact on her to the extent that she described thoughts as “preventing someone from feeling alive” and overall, classifies herself as emotionally unstable, despite her maturity of age.

The cultural differences that Jae experienced stripped her of any desire to explore her new culture or to even have a social life. To her, of the few Filipinos she was able to befriend, many thought that there were no basic necessities, forms of transportation, or housing in her home country. As a result, she felt that her culture was generally misunderstood by the Filipinos with whom she had interaction.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Jae’s experience of loneliness and isolation in the three dimensions explored suggests that her inability to fully immerse herself in the Philippine culture should not classify her as anti-social or weird, but rather, a natural response to dealing with differences and change without proper structures to commensurate her academic experience in a foreign country. Though her story does not suffice for the experiences of all female students who fall in that category, it does give an in-depth picture of the experience of this unique cohort.

Future studies can consider exploring issues of gender, culture, and personality by using a larger sample of female students to ascertain whether there are similarities in their collective experiences. In addition, studies can be done using both male and female married students to compare coping strategies and feelings of loneliness and isolation in this unique group.

Additionally, it would seem that HEIs in the Philippines would probably need to invest in hosting culturally sensitive programs for both the foreign and host students in an effort to make students culturally sensitive to the needs

of their international colleagues and vice versa. Though Jae is a mature woman, she confesses that she never fully adapted to the new environment.

It is even more paramount for HEIs in the Philippines since it is promoted as the top English-speaking Asian country, possibly one of the reasons why so many international students opt to study there. The issues of loneliness and isolation that married singles face should be better addressed HEIs in the Philippines in an effort to make overall experiences of students in the host country more enjoyable and positively memorable.

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