

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, RELOCATION AND THE SECURITY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT AN INTERNATIONALISED UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The notion of *security* is an elusive concept that attracts varying interpretations. In this paper we adopt a definition that views security as a broadly applicable term that encompasses physical, social and economic dimensions that relate to human rights, cultural difference and relocation. The approach embraces the complexities of the security needs of international students in the context of a competitive and volatile education market. As Australia's largest international education provider, Monash University is an ideal setting within which to explore the security issues that arise for international students. Fifty-five interviewees including student representatives, front-line staff and senior management share their experiences of working closely with Monash international students. The data is used to show that there are complex cultural differences in the notion of security and that being in an unfamiliar culture affects students' sense and level of security. Understanding these influences usefully translates into reflections on how well and by whom students' security needs are met.

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of *security* is an elusive concept that attracts varying interpretations. In some instances, the term is equated with the likelihood one will not become the victim of crime. This application has been shown to be an important factor determining international students' decisions concerning their choice of host nation (Cohen, 2003; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Despite a broadening of the notion to include social and economic issues that threaten the wellbeing of international students (Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005), the term has gone largely undefined in most disciplines. In response and for the purposes of this article, an adopted definition advances security as a broadly applicable term that encompasses physical, social and economic dimensions that relate to human rights, cultural difference and relocation. The approach embraces the security of international students in the context of a competitive and volatile education market in which students have become more discerning and vocal about their perceived lack of security in their host country. Monash University is Australia's largest education provider to international students and as such is an ideal setting within which to explore international student security. Fifty-five interviews are used to show there are complex cultural differences in the notion of security and that being in an unfamiliar culture affects students' sense and level of security. It is anticipated that an understanding of these influences will usefully translate into reflections on how well and by whom students' security needs are met and where responsibility should lie for dealing with international student security needs.

The article has five main sections. The first considers the notion of security, which is discussed in terms of human rights, cultural differences, and how relocating to an unfamiliar culture is likely to affect students' sense and level of security. An overview of the security issues that arise for international students is presented in the second section. In part three the notion of security is contextualised within the international education market and the legal structure established by the Australian Government. The fourth section examines the data generated by the interviews and illustrates difficulties that can arise due to differences in the notion of security within a framework of an unfamiliar culture. The final section presents a summary and conclusions.

DEFINING SECURITY

Though scholars have advanced varied notions of what security involves, most skirt the need to define the term by discussing the sources of security, and indeed insecurity. For the purposes of this article, an abstract sense of the term security is adopted by drawing on the work of Baldwin (1997, p. 13) who defines security as '*a low probability of damage to acquired values* [italics added]'. This understanding emphasises the preservation of acquired values and recognises that one can have greater or lesser security depending on circumstances (Wolfers, 1952). Baldwin (1997, p. 17) suggests specification requires "at least some indication of how much security is being sought for which values of which actors with respect to which threats." Such specification points to the range of perspectives encompassed by the definition. Apart from an international relations/security studies approach economic, human security, psychology and sociology standpoints all suggest humans *need* security (Adler, Bell, Classen, & Sinfield, 1991; Alkire, 2003; Baldwin, 1997; Cameron & McCormick, 1954; Clements, 1990; Commission on Human Security, 2003; Doyal & Gough, 1991; King & Murray, 2001/2002; Maslow, 1943; Nesadurai, 2005; Norwood, 2005; Scholte, 2000; Straub, 2003; Walt, 1991). Indeed, from a sociological standpoint, Clements (1990, p.2) argues that without security "social life would be both meaningless and relatively dangerous."

The Right to Security

While many observers assert access to security is a human right, the limits of this claim are problematic. It is not difficult to imagine individuals have a right to fundamental needs such as secure housing, nourishment and physical safety. However, it is more difficult to argue that people have a right to security beyond what is considered necessary within given societies. This variance can be accommodated by assuming humans have a right to have their needs satisfied to the "optimum" extent (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Straub, 2003). This application fits with Doyal and Gough's (1991, p. 155) assertion that "basic needs ... are always universal but their satisfiers are often relative." Milner, Poe and Leblang (1999, p.408) support this notion when they note security, subsistence and liberty are recognised as rights having been "referenced in, and guaranteed under the provisions of the International Bill of Human Rights." This document provides statements concerning various rights ultimately supportive of the notion that security is indeed a human right. The topics of "subsistence rights", "security rights" and "liberties" allow Milner et al to guide us through forms of security that are guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both components of the International Bill of Human Rights. These include the basic needs of adequate food, clothing, and housing, health care, social services, and the right to "the continuous improvement of living conditions," and the highest possible level of mental and physical health. Milner et al also note the UDHR recognises the right of freedom from violations, such as execution, torture or imprisonment, arising from arbitrary, political or religious vilification. Protection from such extreme violation must necessarily be considered in relation to the concept of security. However, violations of lesser severity that are nonetheless still damaging to the person may also infringe one's right to security. The example of Muslim female students having their scarves pulled from their heads is an indication of a violation of personal/physical rights that directly relates to culture and relocation (Deumert et al., 2005).

Culture, Relocation and Security

The influences of culture and relocation impact upon security - together they present a combination of cultural elements that interact to shape understanding of what constitutes insecurity and who has responsibility for ensuring communities and individuals are secure. Both religious and secular influences, for example, can impact on the issues concerning security. All major religions have an understanding of what these issues entail. Islam, for example, provides security through a system that strikes "a balance that provides individual motivation, and emphasises co-operation and mutual responsibility, social justice, and the equitable distribution of wealth" (Bouma, Haidar, Nyland, & Smith, 2003, p.54-55). Liberal Christianity, on the other hand, calls on the goodwill and charity of individuals, especially those in positions of leadership to provide what is necessary for people's security. Various streams within religions ensure a diversity of perceptions of security that manifest in secular relations within the family and gender relations.

Ideas relating to the provision of security are influenced by who is believed to have responsibility for ensuring individuals are secure. Bénabou and Tirole (2005) note dominant views on this question differ across nations. In the US individuals tend to be held responsible for their own security while Europeans are more inclined to accept the community is a primary source of security. This equates to the US spending significantly less than Europeans on the security needs of citizens. According to Bénabou and Tirole (2005), this variance suggests attitudes shape policy but they also note that policy and perceptions are mutually reinforcing. Regardless, this diversity demonstrates the importance of national characteristics. Communities that have been indoctrinated by neo-liberal values, for instance, tend to believe effort is the catalyst for bringing about security and that responsibility rests with the individual. China presents a stark contrast. Sixty years of Marxism has shaped Chinese cultural understanding of who has responsibility for people's security. Consequently, Chinese people maintain a relatively strong belief in the need for the state to provide social protection. Wong and Lee (2000, p.114), for example, found that even within market oriented Shanghai there exists "a strong reliance on the state ... rather than on oneself or the family for meeting practical social needs such as housing, health care, and retirement."

The significance of the fact that different cultures have divergent understandings of what security entails comes to the surface when individuals relocate to a foreign environment. People relocating are confronted with a new set of complex cultural issues that impact upon their security. Likewise, the host country is also confronted with a new set of complex cultural issues that may appear to be threatening. Consequently, relocation compounds the need for security and illuminates the necessity for a closer look at the implications for those who are relocating as well as the implications for the host country, and in the case of international students, the host institution.

For most people, migration is a means of improving lives and for many it is “vital to protect and attain human security” (Commission on Human Security, 2003, p.41). However, it seems security can not be assumed for all incoming groups. Regrettably, many international agencies do not address the issue of student security. For instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) specifically excludes students from its definition of “migrants” (Deumert et al., 2005). According to Graham (2000, p.196), “the problem for the security of some sections of diasporas is that of rejection by the host because of racism, ethnic tension, economic jealousy, cultural friction or political instability.” Cultural security relates to being “one of us” and differences relating to “physical appearance, language, religion, [and] cultural practices” can often create mistrust (Graham, 2000, p.197). This juxtaposed with the fact that those who relocate often have fewer rights in a new locale in addition to the loss of many rights they enjoyed at home, means the incoming group may be seriously disadvantaged. The earlier suggestion that the right to security is relative to cultural expectations becomes complicated in circumstances that encompass more than one culture, thus raising the question: which cultural expectations apply? In the case of migrants or those who are temporarily relocated in a host country as are international students, is it the cultural expectations of a person’s originating country that apply when considering security or is it the cultural expectations of the host country? Perhaps it is both.

SECURITY ISSUES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students encounter difficulties seldom experienced by domestic students that relate to both academic and social aspects of their stay in the host country (Zhang, Sillitoe, & Webb, 2004). Not only do international students need to adapt to a foreign education system and a foreign language and culture, like migrants they also need to adjust to being part of a social minority – that is, they encounter difficulties associated with being different (Burke, 1994). While some of the problems faced by international students are related to adjustment in a foreign culture, “some of the more serious challenges are due to inadequacies within the host society” (Lee & Rice, 2005, p.1). With language and culture embedded in the social structures of the host country, it is not surprising that Heggins and Jackson (2003) found Asian students often place great importance on informal networks as opposed to utilising the host country’s formal structural procedures when in need. Zhang, Sillitoe and Webb (2004, p.7) highlight the importance of “being aware of the differences in language, culture, expectations and teaching and learning approaches ... in making a successful adjustment.” Lack of awareness of the implications of differences in learning styles can lead to misinterpretations on the part of both students and lecturers. For instance, students who are unaccustomed to independent learning feel a lack of direction that is often viewed from a staff perspective as unsatisfactory performance (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). Even becoming accustomed to the informal norms of addressing academic staff in Australia can be a major hurdle for international students. For many, the initial “honeymoon”¹ stage of an international education experience is quickly consumed by the demands of the academic course (Oberg, 1960). While most students develop coping strategies as they experience the inexplicit norms of the host society (Hofstede, 1991), others tend to fall through the cracks. The unfortunate circumstances of some international students show that relocation has affected their sense and level of security, thus highlighting the inadequacies of support systems and existing social structures.

¹ Oberg (1960) discussed four emotional stages of culture shock associated with cross-cultural sojourns: the euphoric ‘honeymoon’ stage, followed by the crisis, recovery and adjustment stages.

International students are required to make a major cultural shift, and whilst underlying cultural factors are not always obvious, language differences clearly pose great difficulties (Sawir, 2005; Zhang et al., 2004). In an examination of the language difficulties experienced by international students, Sawir (2005) convincingly argues the scholastic approach that focuses on grammar and correct usage that has been traditionally adopted by East and Southeast Asian nations is not adequately preparing students for a global environment that is linguistically driven by the English language. The lack of attention to communicative English language limits students' ability to understand spoken English and leads to staff dissatisfaction with their articulation ability, particularly in relation to class presentations and written work. Ideally, students' "lack of confidence with English" (Sawir, 2005, pp.568-569) is something to be addressed by the English language teaching methods of the country of origin (Hellsten, 2002; Hellsten & Prescott, 2004). However, the immediate responsibility rests with the host universities who need to find ways to deal with the problems associated with the phenomenon. The concept of a one-year bridging program in the country of origin is suggested as a possible solution to assist students with English language skills, reduce the anxiety associated with the inability to communicate effectively and reduce the overall sense of "culture shock."

The concept of culture shock refers to a negative state generated by being in an unfamiliar cultural environment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). International students affected by this phenomenon may experience "confusion, anxiety, disorientation, suspicion, bewilderment, perplexity and an intense desire to be somewhere else" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 270). Varying degrees are attributed to individual personality traits and the principle of cultural distance². The concept of culture shock can be translated into change that is threatening to individual security, that is, a threat to one's acquired values. Insecurity has long been associated with students and arises from many sources (Murphy & Ladd, 1944). Early studies (Cameron & McCormick, 1954; Schmalhausen, 1929; Van der Hoop, 1939) point to our highly competitive society to explain feelings of inferiority and insecurity. Schmalhausen (1929) and Van der Hoop (1939) trace insecurity back to a lack of social support. They explain that a lack of collective security support leads to deprivation, which results in harsh competition and, ultimately, misery. Consequently, a lack of collective security means a lack of individual security. Given that a sense of belonging is one of the most important sources of security (Farnham, 1951), it is reasonable to assume that clinging to family or indeed cultural values is part of the need for a sense of belonging. For international students in particular, the need for a sense of belonging and feelings of security apply beyond the boundaries of day to day campus life.

Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2006) capture the essence of "loneliness" and what loneliness means to an international student. Loneliness can be caused by both biological and social influences. Regrettably, unchangeable personality traits can dictate an individual's level of loneliness, however, loneliness caused by social influences such as relocation is more malleable. Sawir et al (2006) identify *cultural loneliness* as an important addition to Weiss' (1973) categories of emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Whilst giving due acknowledgement to the emotional (personal) and social loneliness experienced by international students, Sawir et al (2006, p.24) identify "the absence of the preferred cultural and/or linguistic environment" as the trigger for *cultural loneliness* and the reason why access to social networks and support does not always eliminate feelings of loneliness or isolation. Sawir et al (2006, p.25) found "Hofstede's distinction between individual and collectivist cultures [to be] powerful in explaining cultural loneliness" amongst international students and noted that loneliness or isolation was strongly related to the barriers encountered in making friends across cultures. Improving relations between international students and local students needs to be addressed from a holistic perspective where both cultures can adapt to a new set of circumstances – rather than expecting international students to forgo their original culture in order to adopt the unchanging culture of the host country.

² The principle of cultural distance refers to 'the adjustment and coping difficulties of sojourners [that] increase with the distance between their culture of origin and that of the host society' (Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001:169).

Difficulties experienced by international students go well beyond the classroom. For instance, they are confronted with organising their accommodation and employment in an unfamiliar environment. As Lee and Rice (2005, p.6) suggest, “negotiating basic academic procedures and living arrangements are daunting tasks for some international students.” Issues identified as likely to “greatly hinder ... social integration as well as ... academic progress” include “language, teaching and tutoring, finances, housing accommodation, making friends, and homesickness” (Lee & Rice, 2005, p.7). In Australia in particular, language, tuition cost and feelings of isolation and loneliness have been reported as the problems most likely to affect international students (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2006). Language difficulties, for instance, have been shown to have a huge impact on student security due to the inability to effectively communicate socially and academically (Sawir, 2005). Issues such as health, financial security and the need to work also impact significantly. Compounding these issues are the underlying dimensions of discrimination and exploitation and the availability of suitable food (Hanassab, 2006; Maggio, 1997; Sawir, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Deumert, 2007).

THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION MARKET AND SECURITY

Government funding cuts in the 1990s saw Australian universities turn successfully to the international education market. Marginson and Considine (2000, p.4) assert: “Some elements of this ‘market’, particularly the education of international students, are driven by a frankly commercial and entrepreneurial spirit ...” However, despite “proactive policies” bringing Australia recruiting success, “it appears unlikely that foreign students will be able to prop up ... our universities ... indefinitely. [Indeed], the bubble may have already ruptured” (de Wit, 2005, p.193). This suggestion coincides with a slowing in the growth of the enrolment of international students studying in Australia (AEI, 2005). With fears enrolment growth may further decline, universities are faced with a heightened need to clarify the factors considered by students and parents when deciding in which country they will study and this includes the desire for security.

Recognising the benefits of international education and the expectation to provide quality service to international students, Australian Governments require education providers to register on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) under the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (The National Code). The Code was established under the federal *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000* and came into force in 2001. Originally dealing with the “mechanics” of international education this legislation recognised international students’ rights as consumers of education but did not address international student security in a general sense. However, the evaluation of the ESOS Act that began in 2004 culminated in a new National Code in July 2007. A broadening of the scope of the original legislation is evidenced in sections 3.1 c. and d. of the objectives stated in the Preamble the 2007 Code (DIAC, 2007, p.1):

The objectives of the National Code are to:

- c. protect the interests of overseas students by:
 - i. ensuring that appropriate consumer protection mechanisms exist
 - ii. ensuring that student welfare and support services for overseas students meet nationally consistent standards, and
 - iii. providing nationally consistent standards for dealing with student complaints and appeals
- d. support registered providers in monitoring student compliance with student visa conditions and in reporting any student breaches to the Australian Government.

In 2005 Deumert et al. argued that Australia lacked a coordinated code of practice for the security of international students and it appears this argument still holds. Reference in the new National Code (DIAC, 2007) to the welfare of international students is scant and it is too early to assess if

any benefits deriving from the reference will make a significant difference. It stands to reason that without overarching mandatory regulation that ensures student security is afforded due attention, universities will be left to develop their own practices. These practices are bound to be of varying quality and while a market focus continues to prevail in the sector are likely to be under-resourced.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SECURITY AT MONASH

As a major provider of education to well over 15,000 international students, Monash University is an ideal case to explore the security issues that concern this community. Our study utilises data obtained through 55 indepth semi-structured interviews with informed Monash staff and student representatives (20 male, 35 female) conducted during the period September 2006 to January 2007. The interviewees, chosen because of their interactions with international students or with formulating university policy, were categorised within four groups - student representatives (SR) and university staff who provide a service to the students (SS) (eg counsellors and advisors), senior management (MGT) and academic staff (A). Participants were coded with a number (P1 for Participant 1; P2 for Participant 2). The body of existing literature relating to the security of international students provided the basis for the range of issues canvassed in the interviews, which include health, cultural practices, exclusion, legal status and housing. Elaborate responses were obtained to interview questions concerning the security needs of international students and how the University provides for those needs. The interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. From the interviews, quotations that offer a “window” into the international student experience have been extracted and expanded upon to clarify how Monash staff and student leaders cope with issues that are seen to constitute a threat to acquired values. In brief, we offer *snapshots* that convey a richer understanding of how university staff manage the difficulties associated with international student insecurities than tends to be generated by the many surveys researchers have undertaken to gain insight in the international student experience. The snapshots highlight the complexity of cultural differences in notions of security, how students’ sense and level of security is affected by relocation to Australia, how well students’ security needs are met at Monash, and who tends to bear responsibility for ensuring international student security.

Health: “We don’t know how to treat them”

Cultural differences were highlighted as a matter of concern by staff involved in the provision of health services. Interviewees suggested more information about health care needed to be provided to students prior to arriving in Australia and the University needs more information about students before they arrive. There are often difficulties encountered when students from a different culture need medical treatment. According to one interviewee:

...medical services can be so different ... we hear some strange stories and we don’t really know what’s happened before. They often don’t know the names of their medication, which is fair enough because it would be in Chinese [for example], but not in English. ... They’ll often say, “oh, I had Chinese herbs there, in my home country” so we don’t know how to treat them. (P25 female SS)

While it was recognised that medical services vary from culture to culture, it was often not known in exactly what ways they are different and as a consequence the information given by international students is sometimes interpreted as “strange”. Adding to this complexity, without knowledge of Australian medical care, it is likely students expect the medical service provider to know what treatment is required. The interviewee suggested that these difficulties could be avoided and appropriate care given if prior to arriving in Australia students obtained a confidential report on their health, particularly “anyone who’s had a previous operation or an illness or ongoing treatment of any sort.” It was further suggested the report should come from the student’s doctor in their home country directly to the university doctor for the purposes of ensuring other formalities such as visas would not be affected. It was thought that a health report would also assist in decisions relating to health insurance cover. The advice given was that the standard health cover for international

students was adequate if they were “relatively healthy, fit young people” however those with pre-existing illness may need additional cover (P25 female SS).

The notion of providing a confidential health report with information about pre-existing illnesses is problematic given that students in these circumstances are required to provide the information when applying for a visa. It appears that an increasing number of students are not declaring prior illness and as a consequence are undermining their own and others’ security. The University’s reliance on these government processes is demonstrated by the absence of back-up procedures such as a confidential medical report. Nonetheless, there would be inherent health security risks for both students and universities if confidential medical information that has visa implications was not declared. It is concerning that it has been suggested that prior psychological illness “maybe one of the reasons why they came away to make a new start here” (P25 female SS). Even more concerning is an apparent escalation of students arriving to study at Monash with pre-existing illness. Several accounts, including the following affirm that there has been an increase in the numbers of students who are unwell: “We’ve had more difficulties, we’re finding more students that aren’t coping – severe emotional problems ... there is a lot of pre-existing illness ...” (P6 male MGT). The interviewee told of circumstances in 2004 when a student had to be escorted back to their home country due to severe mental illness. It later became known to Monash staff that the student had previously been returned home from a university in the United States but had subsequently managed to enter Australia without declaring their pre-existing illness as required by visa conditions. The responsibility for dealing with students who arrive with pre-existing illness tends to fall on frontline University staff. This outcome suggests Government processes are failing to identify those who are medically unfit to study in Australia. Compounding the situation for universities is the Government’s failure to monitor students’ requirement to maintain medical insurance for the duration of their stay. Universities are being encouraged to undertake this administrative task and Monash is in the process of so doing. In one sense, this is to the credit of Monash and to the benefit of Monash international students. However, the development appears to be aiding a trend for governments to shift responsibility for providing security for international students to education providers.

Students purchase health insurance in accordance with visa requirements, however, they are often unaware of the security it provides and many neglect to renew it after the first year, or they take it out and then cancel it. According to one interviewee, “Students ... take health cover out and then cash it in ... and if we find somebody gets in a bad car accident or somebody needs hospitalisation – they don’t have health cover” (P9 male MGT). Having health insurance cover is an expense students often do not fully understand. This is particularly so if they come from a culture where healthcare is automatically provided. Health care providers, on the other hand, are looking for means to reduce costs of services provided to international students who use the system in ways not intended. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that the practice of terminating pregnancies as a form of contraception is a relatively common practice amongst international students (Healy & Bond, 2006; Wu, 2004). Given the practice appears to be accepted in some Asian countries from which Australia attracts students, medical practitioners have advised there is a need to provide education in more appropriate methods of birth control. One interviewee shared her experience of assisting a young Indian woman in difficult circumstances:

We hear everything...bloody pregnancy and having spent all your tutorial money on an abortion. ... Because if you’re a young Indian woman you can’t tell your parents you are pregnant by your Australian boyfriend and you don’t really want the child [and] there’s no money to procure an abortion is there. ... So they had to use their tutorial money. (P19 female SS)

The above account highlights how cultural differences in the notion of security can play out when a young woman finds herself in circumstances that she is unable to explain to her parents. The fact that she relinquished the security of her familiar culture and family support network is likely to have contributed to these complicated circumstances that encompass two cultures. As a consequence, her level and sense of security has clearly been affected by the temporary relocation in an unfamiliar culture. Yet it is within this unfamiliarity she seeks and receives support to deal with her

dilemma, while at the same time not wishing to be seen to shun the expectations of her original culture. This example reflects on how well students' security needs are met in two opposing ways. First, the circumstances suggest the student's security needs may not have been properly met in regard to health education and advice about relationships and contraception in Australia. This fits with the Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, and Sawir (2007) observation that the Australian Government focuses on the financial access to health services rather than the provision of the services themselves and that "the services are seen as the responsibility of the educational institutions and the public and private health sector between them." Regardless, it is reasonable to expect government or institutional agencies to impart knowledge before students' arrival in Australia or, at a minimum, upon arrival, that would assist with avoiding the unfortunate circumstances described above. Second, and to the contrary, frontline staff at Monash were found to be providing well for the student's security needs by showing understanding and giving as much support as possible within their means, both measures contributing to the young woman's ability to successfully complete her studies. Previous research has revealed students seeking terminations tend to approach medical practitioners outside the university (Healy & Bond, 2006; Wu, 2004) and therefore, universities are often unaware of the extent of the problem. This unawareness may explain why there is not a greater focus on sex education for international students.

A less traumatic but nonetheless important concern demonstrating cultural differences in the notion of health security is the use, or overuse, of health services by international students for the purposes of seeking medical certificates for academic assessment extensions. It was reported that:

They [international students] frequently need extensions to get the work done. At exam time we do large numbers of special considerations for students, and 98 per cent of those would be for the overseas students, but very rarely for a local student. If they are for a local student it's usually for something else ... it's usually something [like] a parent has died or in a serious car accident or something. The international students certainly believe and it's probably right that minor illnesses will affect their performance ... Fifty per cent of the people we see at exam time will be wanting "special consideration" [relating to their academic assessment] ... Thirty to 40 a day ... The bulk of this would be in ... the middle two weeks of the exam period ... And this is just on one campus. (P25 female SS)

The notion of allowing "special consideration" is normally reserved for serious ailments or circumstances. However, it needs to be acknowledged that for the international student under enormous parental and/or cultural pressure to succeed any circumstance that reduces academic achievement is considered serious. The above interviewee suggested that "it could be stress, they probably get more sick than our other students do." As a consequence, the use of university medical services is stretching already scarce resources. The practice does not upset the Government's focus on financial access to medical services as the consultations are free of charge, however, it does indicate that there needs to be another way for students' special consideration applications to be assessed without placing inappropriate and excessive demands on university medical service providers or denying students who are in need.

Culture: "Why would you want to take your clothes off and shower?"

A personal or cultural sense of security can relate to something as simple as different bathing techniques. One interviewee provided an example of cultural difference that needed explanation and understanding to avoid personal levels of security being undermined:

...I had an issue where I had a Muslim guy staying with a local person and they came and complained that their bathroom was flooded many times a day because of the washing that they do. She said it's like he has a jug in there and he splashes and splashes around and then he won't shower for days and days and I said to her oh it might be part of the religious year where they don't wash, I don't know I'll get back to you, I'll find out. ... I know a whole heap of Muslim students, so I said to [another one] ... is there a whole thing about the

washing? Does it have to be messy? He said no, no that's just the person. He said there's a way of doing it and there's never a mess, he just needs to be spoken to so he offered to do it for me. (P22 female SS)

Aware that the bathing method may have been related to different cultural practices that she was unaware of, the interviewee chose to obtain more information before dealing with the issue. Her strategy of speaking with another Muslim student showed initiative and a level of acceptance and understanding necessary when dealing with international student notions of security. However, the fact that staff working closely with international students from many and varied cultural backgrounds need to acquire information relating to cultural practices *after* an issue is raised suggests that cultural awareness training is required. Monash has recently begun to train staff on how to be more culturally aware. The incident described above, however, suggests the training is not broad enough to include everyday living practices or is not sufficiently widespread to reach staff in all areas. The incident is also demonstrative of the understanding that small scale issues are dealt with case-by-case. This interpretation was supported by an interviewee who indicated that training was "not on a systematic basis, [it's] just ad hoc" (P14 male SS). Regardless, the responsible actions of the interviewee was typical of frontline staff who consistently assumed responsibility for the welfare of international students, and in this case, that of the landlady as well:

When I asked the guy why he didn't shower (I politely asked) ... he said he couldn't shower because it was too cold, which made perfectly good sense if you come from a tropical climate. Why would you want to take your clothes off and shower? So he didn't see any need to take his clothes off ... because he said when he was a child he was prone to getting chest infections so he was scared he was going to get sick so he didn't shower. I said to him well no, we talked about how to overcome [this], like have the hot water running and get in there quick. After that [the landlady] phoned me and said everything's fine. If you just say I'm doing this because I'm looking out for you, I don't want someone saying that you're a grub and kicking you out of the house. It could be just a misunderstanding which it normally is. (P22 female SS)

The importance of the interviewee taking responsibility for sorting out this issue relates to the preservation of security on a number of fronts. First, the issues relating to the student's bathing practices were quickly sorted avoiding a problem with his landlady. Without the intervention of the interviewee, the situation could have easily escalated and the student may have found himself looking for alternative accommodation. Second, the concerns of the landlady indicate her level of security was also affected by the student's bathing methods that were used to secure his notion of personal security, which in this case was to keep warm and not get sick. Third, finding an early solution to the problem most likely meant the landlady would continue to offer accommodation to students, and with even greater understanding of differing cultural notions of security.

Exclusion: "They get this branding of terrorist so people shun them"

The following extract from a student representative relates to another male Muslim student. The extract was chosen, not because it is representative of the general view, indeed it was an isolated perception, but because it provides a clear indication of cultural differences in the notion of security. In this particular example, both local and international students' levels of security appear to be affected by relocation.

the Muslim group [experience more difficulty] and right now because of the bad publicity on Islam and terrorism I think that Islamic students are treated poorly and ... maybe even targeted within recruitment and that kind of thing. I think they're treated poorly by almost everybody. I think they're treated poorly by fellow students, ... if you look around you certainly don't see a lot of Islamic students hanging out with other non-Islamic students. ... a good friend of mine ... from ... Saudi Arabia, very devout Muslim and he was a great friend, we really enjoyed spending time together and we even talked religion and discussed his faith and it was great, ... he was really disappointed that he didn't get to talk to more people, that other people wouldn't talk to him. ... there is really that desire but I think that

they get this branding of terrorist so people shun them so ... that is probably one of the biggest things going on right now. (P32 male SR)

The interviewee is suggesting fear is the catalyst for a perceived tendency of locals to “shun” Muslim students. This instance suggests that local students’ levels of security are under threat with the presence of Muslim students and as a consequence, Muslim students’ security levels are affected because they are denied the opportunity to mix with those outside their group. This may be true, however, there was no other evidence in the Monash interviews suggesting that the phenomena was specific to Muslim students. There is much evidence in both the literature (Zimmerman, 1995; Ward, 2006) and indeed in the Monash interviews that international students from all cultural backgrounds would like more opportunities to mix with local students, and that local students do not make much effort to accommodate this desire. In a contrasting view, another student representative refers to his Muslim community:

When they [do] not have any information about the society and the people, local people, communities, they [Muslims] will not mix and then it will be difficult...Because of the media ... some [of us] feel bad. ... they are worried that they won’t be accepted too and some cultural differences, language, they are also a cause of not mixing with the locals. (P21 male SR)

The above perspective indicates that some Muslims choose not to mix because of fear of rejection. The perspective points to the need for the students to have prior knowledge of the local community and opportunities to overcome damage caused by the media. Responsibility for providing for these needs should be shared between the University and government agencies. That the media is contributing to a lowering of the students’ level of security is a concern that needs to be addressed. In addition, it should be noted that Muslim students’ security levels appear to be affected significantly by a lack of service provision such as the availability of appropriate food (P21 male SR). The two preceding discussions show security, culture and relocation encompassing religious dimensions, all of which relate to the following example that has the added secular influence of sexual orientation.

Sexuality: “In this society [gays] are well accepted”

The need for cultural awareness and understanding in an internationalised university cannot be underestimated. The diversity of the student population appears to have no boundaries and therefore culturally related incidences are expected to be as diverse as the population itself. It was surprising, however, that in a University where many thousands of international students are of an age where they discover their sexuality, only one interviewee mentioned cultural issues relating to sexual orientation. The interviewee identified “the gay community” within the international student group as likely to experience more difficulty than others, despite believing the incidence was not high.

Some international students discover their sexuality here and they have a preference for homosexual relationships for example, and that is a big one for them because they will find it hard to explain that to their parents. ... [for] a lot of them it goes against their religion or their culture. ... they have to hide it and not be themselves. ... Part of them are very secret right, so they don’t really tell [their parents] unless they are really serious. But I’m aware they do struggle with the political fact. In this society they are well accepted. (P14 male SS)

Within a student cohort of more than 15,000 individuals it is to be expected that some would discover they have a preference for gay relationships. As Australian culture is likely to provide a more accepting environment for those in these circumstances (Kelley, 2001), students’ level of security may be greater than what might have been experienced in their original culture. General acceptance of diverse relationships in Australia means that international students are not under pressure to keep their sexual orientation private. That they appear to choose to do this seems to

be related to their home culture, particularly in relation to religious beliefs and concerns of non-acceptance by parents. That the incidence of gay international students experiencing difficulty is reported as “not high” could mean that most are coping in the unfamiliar culture. Alternatively, it may mean that greater effort needs to be made by the University to help this group understand their right not to be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. It is proper to suggest that this responsibility should be shared with the Government however this seems unrealistic particularly since legislation concerning gay rights remains discriminatory in some instances. These conflicting influences are likely to cause confusion and affect students’ sense and level of security because they are unaware of what is accepted behaviour. What constitutes *expected* behaviour is likely to be related to a number of influences, perhaps none less than the influence of the family.

Legal Status: “Until you get married you’re pretty much a kid”

The interviews reveal students frequently experience legal difficulties because they commonly sign documents without understanding the significance of their signature. One interviewee suggested that this tendency was related to the fact that the students had previously been under their parents’ control and that once this was no longer the case the student’s level of security diminished:

a lot of students, with a lot of Asians, until you get married you’re pretty much a kid ... where parents tell them what to do. But when they come to Australia, they do not realise how legally binding that signature is. (P16 female SS)

The above extract suggests Asian students’ security is based on parental guidance before marriage and that the level of security is diminished when the student relocates to an unfamiliar culture. Further evidence of how relocation affects students’ level of security is manifest in circumstances when “some students hire a car and then someone else drives it and if they have an accident they are in trouble and need legal advice” (P22 female SS). Students often unwittingly sign a contract or a lease – for cars, accommodation, phones, internet connection, and gas and/or electricity – and often do not know the consequences of breaking the contract or lease. One participant from student services was able to assist the students with the legalities of signing an accommodation lease: “I go along when they sign their leases so that every single sentence is explained” (P22 female SS). In this case responsibility was taken by the student service employee who was able to do so because they were situated in the smaller regional campus, where a greater level of security was afforded to international students because the staff student ratio was lower.

These examples exemplify the need for students to be aware of their legal rights and responsibilities and support the students’ call for information to be provided in introductory documentation so they have this information before they arrive in Australia (Monash International, 2003). Families and indeed the students themselves should take some responsibility for the transition from being “a kid” to having a significant degree of independence. However, the provision of information regarding signing legal documents and other legal responsibilities must necessarily rest with government agencies and education institutions.

Housing: “One of the landlords, he only got female students”

Accommodation in the private market has emerged as an area that in some instances seriously affects students’ level of security. The difficulties identified by the interviewees ranged from problems with co-renters, to problems with a landlord or landlady. A number of reports suggest students are being abused and exploited by others from their own culture. Most interviewees were of the opinion that international students would be well advised to live on campus for their first semester. The following view is representative:

[More on-campus accommodation] would be just fantastic because some of those things that they are missing, that family environment, caring environment and someone to watch over them and all that sort of stuff would be catered for to an extent in on-campus accommodation ... So many of our students will end up in houses with other new students

who might not be very worldly and be quite isolated in a sense. ... I can't imagine letting your first year just out of year 12 person - if they communicate as well with their parents as my teenagers do, it is with a series of grunts and groans ... (P13 male SS)

Because accommodation security has emerged as one of the most concerning elements of the Monash international student sojourn there is a need for both an increase in the availability of on-campus accommodation and greater dissemination of useful information as well as assistance to help students with their decisions relating to the type of accommodation that will best provide for their needs. The interviews revealed shocking reports relating to private accommodation over which Monash has no jurisdiction.

And the landlord I heard, one of the landlords, he only got female students and he charged them much less money, but they had to sleep with him. This person is living just outside Monash ... I think, if these students, I don't know, there is two sides ... maybe some that want to save money. This is a continuous case, and I am sure that is not the only one ... (P30 female A)

Another report tells of students being exploited by private property owners near the Clayton campus:

I'm just horrified to hear how some students are being exploited by people putting two students in one room and charging them both full price ... I've heard of students being holed up in a three bedroom house and there's seven or eight students living there and they just put some sort of a curtain up for a partition, they make one room like this and I suppose they know that - you don't have to be Einstein to work out that in their home countries sometimes what we live in, five families could live in that, so they think they're used to that there. The students don't want to make waves because often they're threatened with "you know we know people in immigration, we can get your visas cancelled" and things like that. This one lady, all she did was came there once a day with bowls of rice and stir fried vegetables and left them all on the breakfast bar, didn't even have a fridge in the place and that's what the students had to eat and that's what they paid large amounts of money for. (P22 female SS)

These disturbing circumstances were reportedly cases of students being exploited and abused by members of their own cultural community. It is reasonable to assume that the students would have believed that renting accommodation off a member from their own community would be a safe option. The reality, however, was quite the contrary, thus suggesting that the students need to exercise extreme care when choosing where they will live during their stay in Australia. While international student service staff tries to alleviate accommodation problems that are brought to their attention, overseeing all international students' private accommodation arrangements is not managed on larger campuses. At smaller regional campuses where international student numbers are much smaller, student accommodation can be monitored to prevent such circumstances from arising. Regrettably, the University does not provide anywhere near enough accommodation for students and it is an issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Also, the students consider the cost of on-campus accommodation too high and as a consequence they are attracted to the private rental market. Responsibility for student accommodation needs to be proportioned across all involved parties, the student, families, the University and government agencies, and property holders. Given the extent and seriousness of the problems relating to accommodation, a call for overarching legislation concerning this issue is well overdue.

CONCLUSION

Accepting that security means *a low probability of damage to acquired values* that encompasses physical, social and economic dimensions, we have related this broadly applicable concept to the dimensions of human rights, cultural difference and relocation. Human rights literature was used to support our assertion that security is a basic human right that cuts across culture and location.

The discussion showed how these dimensions encompass religious influences such as those relating to Islam and Christianity, and secular influences such as the family and gender. Two main streams of thought relating to the provision of security were considered. One view was shown to hold individuals responsible for providing their own security, the other held that the state should take responsibility. It was noted that attitudes relating to who should be held responsible for individual's security varied greatly between different countries and that redistributive policies vary accordingly. Students' relocation in an unfamiliar culture was discussed in terms of migration and a desire to improve life, however it was noted that international students are excluded by many global agencies such as the ILO. Different notions of security were discussed in terms of cultural expectations and a loss of rights through relocation. These elements constituted the first of the five sections of the article. The approach taken embraced the security of international students and a number of main issues that concern this group were discussed in the second section. These included the difficulties associated with language, and adaptation to both academic and social elements. The third section contextualised international student security within the competitive and volatile education market and discussed elements of Australia's ESOS Act 2000 and National Code 2007. We acknowledge that the National Code 2007 now includes mention of standards for the welfare of international students. However, the standard is not stipulated and the legislation remains provider focussed and it is unknown if the inclusion of the welfare clauses will benefit students. The fourth section contains empirical information on the perception of security. The data from the Monash 55 interviews provided a rich source of information. Discussion was based on a number of interview extracts to show that there are cultural differences in the notion of security, and that relocation to an unfamiliar culture affects students' sense and level of security. The issues raised canvassed topics such as health and health services, personal, behavioural and religious practices, exclusion, sexuality, family influences, abuse and exploitation in relation to accommodation. It appears the Government has successfully passed responsibility for the provision of health services and health insurance to the university. If the university is to cope with tasks of this magnitude new procedures will need to be developed. Those providing medical services appeared to be taking the brunt of this handing down of responsibility. The issues relating to the personal and behavioural practices show Monash needs to ensure there is increased training of both staff and students to ensure expectations coincide with actual behaviour. The information included in the training needs to extend to the practice of informing students about the local population and to give reassurance when media reports impact negatively on international students' sense and level of security. We acknowledge that cultural awareness training does take place, however, the suggestion that it is "ad hoc" appears accurate. This assertion is based on the observations that training is not broad enough in content to include students' off-campus experiences and/or it is not yet widespread. Regardless, the examples demonstrate that frontline staff take responsibility by trying to maintain the students' security. The university needs to take responsibility for promoting the fact that the gay community is generally accepted in Australia and that this group must be afforded the same security rights as other students. It is thought unlikely the Government would share this responsibility. For the students who do seek support regarding problems relating to their sexual orientation, it is once again the frontline staff that are there to provide. Because of the extent and seriousness of the issues raised in relation to accommodation, we argue that the responsibility for providing safe and suitable accommodation must rest with all involved parties - the student, the students' family, the university, government agencies and property holders. Currently, as far as possible frontline staff assist students with housing issues. We suggest that legislation is required to ensure all those attributed with responsibility fulfil their duty.

We maintain that there are cultural differences in the notion of security and that the international student experience of relocating to an unfamiliar culture inevitably affects their sense and level of security. These influences have usefully translated into reflections on how well and by whom students' security needs were met. The findings support our argument that Monash frontline staff working closely with international students take responsibility for providing for the security needs of this vulnerable group. In numerous instances, it was shown that government and institutional processes failed to provide. We suspect the picture painted in this paper is a norm across Australian universities and perhaps internationally.

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