INTRODUCTION
In recent years, globally international students (IS) are growing at 8% per year, slightly ahead of total tertiary enrolment. 7%, IS mobility is one of the fastest-growing components of total global migration. Straddling temporary and permanent migration IS represent a particular group of migrants who experience unique and diverse life course trajectories.

Most research within the Canadian context has studied the experiences of international students in the ‘host’ society and consequently making invisible the transnational threads of relationships that impact and shape the experiences of this group of migrants.

Hence this paper examines one theme in the transnational – that of care and responsibility; and how the need of transnational care and responsibility leads to different ways of ‘doing family’ between the student migrant and their relationship stretched across the transnational space with their parents, siblings, spouses, and friends – particularly those located in the ‘host’ country.

THEORIES

Research on the theme of responsibility and care within transnational space is often engaged with two points of the life course: care of children, and care of elderly, aging parents. The literature on maintaining family and kinship relations across transnational spaces is extensive. Recent works focus on transnational parenting (most notably Parreñas 2005; Waters 2006; Widling and Baldassar 2009) and care for aging parents (for example Baldassar 2007; Vulliet and King 2008; Widling 2006). However, the extant literature is much more limited in reference to single, young mobile individuals. It focuses on couples/married professionals, operating with heteronormative frames and negotiating their married life abroad while simultaneously managing relations with family members at ‘home’.

International student mobility research also discusses the role of family relations stretched across the transnational – however the discussion is limited, particularly in Canadian context. Students experience loneliness and isolation as they learn to adapt to the new culture without the support of family or friends networks. The long distance conversations, even if regular sometimes does not appease or provide relief to students during their time abroad. In fact, the stretched relations with their power geometries may become stressors (Sondhi 2013).

Family, in functionalist perspective is to be understood as the site of emotional and functional support for its members, as a well a site of socialization.

METHODS

QUALITATIVE

Toronto, Canada

22 international students: 10♂ and 12♀

Parental support and keeping them apprised of their well-being.

Parents and friends are introduced; and at some who would be defined as family in traditional models (parents, siblings) and particularly those located in the ‘host’ country.

Some siblings are made responsible for the well being of their sibling by parents and keeping them apprised of their well-being.

Parents draw upon existing registers of ‘care’ and responsibility such as those of ‘traditional family’ in India.

The student migrant ‘does family’ by regularly keeping in touch with their family, in particular parents and the other family members in India. They ‘bring in’ their offspring for the well-being of their parents, siblings, and other family members in India. The student migrant is often asked about the daily going-ons of people in their neighbourhood, and social networks.

METHODS

Toronto, Canada

22 international students: 10♂ and 12♀

New Delhi, India

22 ‘returnee’ international students: 10♂ and 11♀

Capella Survey: 157 completed responses: 87♂ and 70♀

Geographic coverage: global

Sharma: studying abroad at the time of survey, completed studies abroad and living abroad, completed studies abroad and living in India. (sample not representative)

Conclusions

• ‘Doing family’ in the transnational context involves the interaction of different groups and individuals – some who would be defined as family in traditional models (parents, siblings) and others who would not be (friends).

• It appears through activities of ‘caring’, ‘supporting’, and feeling or made responsible for another’s mental and physical well-being.

• Technology plays an important role in enabling migrants to be able to perform the activities from afar with the same ease as they did when they were closer to their parents/siblings ‘at home’.

• Students and parents undertake more regular communication talking about the everyday mundane things of life. Migrants ask parents about the local happenings – in the same manner as would they if they were physically present.

• Parents draw upon existing registers of ‘care’ and responsibility such as those of ‘children’s expected lifecycle (job, marriage) and ‘managing’ behaviour to ensure it’s in line with cultural norms and expectations of ‘home’ society.

• Siblings also fulfil the same role as they would do if they were in close proximity. Again this is managed relatively ‘semiautomatic’ due to ability to communicate easily via technology which also creates a sense of privacy.

• Friends in ‘local’ provide emotional support along with physical proximity on which to build a relationship. Students, with the ‘friends’ do family by reproducing the activities they would do ‘at home’ with parents, siblings and extended family.

• ‘Doing family’ at it is a reciprocal process in which all members have to contribute and also receive from the relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

REFERENCES


