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GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE, AND ONLINE LEARNING:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF

INDIAN STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN U.S.-BASED

ONLINE COURSES

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE, AND ONLINE LEARNING:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF

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ONLINE COURSES

Mitsue S. Shiokawa
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Christopher Glass

This study correlates the impacts of globalization on higher education and the generation of online learning programs offered to global audiences. Concomitantly, it examines the sociocultural experiences of international students participating in United States based online courses. Of specific interest is the socialized culture of learning students from India bring with them into an online learning course, and how that socialized culture is negotiated through strategies of acculturation alongside the student's perceived American culture of learning. The overarching focus of the study explores the advent of cybercultures within online learning course environments as a potential result of the intermingling of variant cultures of learning.

This dissertation is dedicated to the souls who inspire me the most: Ma and Ayame

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Online distance learning (ODL) is an increasingly prominent educational avenue (Hanover, 2013) that provides learning opportunities to students from a distance through the Internet. An estimated 3 million (14 percent) of American college students participate in fully online programs (Eduventures, 2012). Additionally, 6.7 million (32 percent) of college students participate in at least one online class (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Increased enrollment has led nearly 70 percent of academic leaders within the United States to advocate ODL as a vital component to the future growth of their respective institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

ODL's growing trend goes beyond the United States. It is becoming a global phenomenon capable of "transcending national, political, and geographical boundaries" (Gunawardena, 2013, p. 185). Large amounts of educational courses are being developed within the West (United States, Europe, Australia) and exported through the Internet to other countries (Rogers, Graham, & Mayes, 2007). A "crucial need to explore questions of culture more thoroughly" (Gunawardena, 2013, p. 185) emerges as a result of increased ODL delivery worldwide.

The merging of variant cultural learning models through ODL can reinforce issues of hegemony between educational producer and consumer. Cultural learning models are "culturally constructed and shared domains of knowledge that serve to structure and constrain people's experiences (Li, 2002, p. 48). ODL involves a bringing together of diverse cultures of learning and increases the potential for the producing country to become dominant in the exchange (Moore, 2006). To generate culturally

inclusive and mutual exchanges, it is vital to address issues of culture and integrate

research and thoughtful approaches into the generation of educational courses. The

transport of educational courses occurs through delivery methods such as online learning

programs (Hanover, 2013).

Online learning programs are educational pathways that proffer all required

credits through fully online courses (Mayadas & Miller, 2014). Students electing to

participate in this form of education can complete their degrees or certifications from a

distance without face-to-face meetings (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Online learning

programs are generated to serve the truly distant student that will have zero physical

contact with an institution (Mayadas & Miller, 2014). These programs are paramount for

colleges and universities looking to expand their ODL operatives into a global space.

Online learning programs that serve international students strive to present

curriculum and instructional designs that appeal to global learners; however, these

structures are not culturally neutral and still possess Western bias (Li, 2002). An urgency

for educators from technologically privileged countries (countries that possess the fiscal

and network means to utilize high levels of technology such as the United States) to truly

comprehend the perspectives and needs of students from other countries and

backgrounds, such as India, exists in order to diminish the current inequities and generate

more culturally aware and inclusive online learning programs (Moore, Shattuck, & Al-

Harthi, 2005). Ultimately, ODL and educators that desire to provide high quality

education to learners around the world must be wary of potential hegemonic practices

that, despite best intentions, facilitate "the imposition of cultural values and practices"

(Latchem, 2005, p. 189). Hegemonic practices infiltrate through the social, cultural, and

linguistic assumptions that are woven into education via teaching styles, learning activities, curriculum, and instructional design (Gunawardena, 2014).

Institutions of higher education can thoughtfully approach educational exchanges via online learning programs by remembering that social institutions are "not a means for obtaining something for individuals, not even happiness. They are the means of creating individuals" (Dewey, 1920, p. 200). Social institutions instill cultural perspectives within the populace in variant ways, one of which is education systems that implement learning models that both directs and reflects societal and cultural constructs (D'Andrade, 1992; Li, 2002). This influence shapes an individual's belief systems regarding education and informs approaches to other cultural learning models that come into exposure. Thus, this dissertation will explore issues related to the impact of globalization and culture on online learning with a distinct focus on socialized and perceived cultures of learning amongst students from India, as well as, the potential generation of cybercultures.

Background of the Study

"Culture hides more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (Hall, 1959, pp. 29-30).

The use of variant cultural approaches and models possess a long history prior to the Internet and online learning programs. This section will provide a brief overview outlining the lineage of cultural theory pre-Internet and online learning programs, as well as, cultural theory post-Internet and online learning programs that stem from historical approaches. While the literature review will provide a more expansive exploration, this section seeks to provide a historical timeline that outlines the generally hegemonic, non-emic, and positivistic, Western frames that have long served as the traditional purview for

cultural approaches. These approaches have thus informed and continue to influence the examination of culture post-Internet and online learning programs.

Communication Styles and Thought Processes

A predominantly used framework for understanding culture addresses high-context and low-context communication styles (Hall, 1959). High-context cultures existing within countries like Japan, China, and India communicate in verbal and non-verbal ways. Individuals in high-context cultures engage actively in a discussion by examining the context, body language, and even discerning what is not being said within the silence. In contrast, low-context countries such as the United States and Germany engage in explicit dialogue that is direct and housed solely within speech and text.

Thought processes correlate to high-context low-context communication styles (Ishii, 1982; Hall, 1959) and highlight the relationship between high-context communication and indirect thought processes and low-context communication and direct thought processes (Ishii, 1982). Using a bridge metaphor to exemplify America's model of linear thinking, Ishii (1982) articulated the direct and explicit mode of thinking and language of low-context cultures. Adversely, a stepping stone metaphor was utilized to portray the Japanese high-context communication and thought process, which requires the listener to indirectly discover and organize a pathway amongst an array of stones in order to derive at the speaker's full message. The frameworks of Hall (1959) and Ishii (1982) are beneficial when examining online learning and culture due to its focus on the communication styles of participants, as well as their thought processes. However, they are limited due to their presentation of binary approaches that do not encompass the complexity and multifaceted nature of culture, and lack in their direct examination of

culture in correlation to online learning.

Cultural Dimensions Theory

A framework seeking to classify observed variations between cultural groups emerged in 1980, but ultimately further portrayed culture as a binary phenomenon. Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory effectuated from an analysis of IBM employees and expounded the following four cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Researchers examining the intricacies of online learning and culture have extensively used the four dimensions and have not given the fifth and sixth dimensions, added later, much attention. Long-term orientation, the fifth dimension, emerged from researched conducted in Hong Kong (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), and the final dimension, indulgence vs. self-restraint, materialized from an extensive World Values Survey taken by participants from 100 countries (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Despite the revision and enhancement of Hofstede's (1980, 1988, 2010) framework, a number of researchers (Ess, 2009; Fougere & Moulettes, 2007; McSweeney, 2002) have outlined the limitations embedded within the armature to adequately assess culture. The false dichotomies presented throughout the historical lineage of cultural approaches render limited value for transnational online education (Li, 2002). Rather, they further the linkages between a positivistic, Western, and non-emic perspective of cultural understanding.

Cultural Dimensions of Learning Framework

The influences of traditional approaches to culture have long informed thought in the post-Internet and online learning era, especially evident in the widely used theory

generated by Parrish and Linder-VanBerschot (2010). The Cultural Dimensions of Learning Framework (CDLF) was outlined as a subsequent modification of the models of its predecessors Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Nisbett (2003), Levine (1997), Hall (1959), and Lewis (2006). The CDLF identified eight cultural factors existing with the three areas of social relationships, epistemological beliefs, and temporal perceptions. In the realm of social relationships, Parrish and Linder-VanBerschot (2010) identified equality versus authority, individualism versus collectivism, and nurture versus challenge. Within the realm of epistemological beliefs are stability seeking versus uncertainty acceptance, logic argumentation versus the being reasonable, and causality versus complex systems. The concluding realm of temporal perceptions encompasses clock time versus event time and linear time versus cyclical time. The CDLF provides online educators with a framework outlining the cultural variations existing within their student populations and provides an opportunity to self-assess personal biases and its impact on online teaching. However, the CDLF's limitations exist synonymously to its predecessors in that it too presents culture as a phenomenon capable of being understood through dichotomous relationships. The frameworks delve into culture but are limiting and neglect to grasp the complexities and nuances of culture.

Research that provides emic perspectives and highlight participants' voices is needed within the existing academic literature. The lack of which limits our understanding of culture as perceived by cultural members, and provides an interpreted, external projection that has been informed and influenced by those not involved in the cultural group being explored instead. Thus, the historical lineage of hegemonic portrayals of culture will continue, cultural understanding will consistently be subject to

outside interpretations, and those who we seek to understand will be robbed of their voices in the process. Therefore, this study endeavors to give voice to students from India, and will relay their perceptions directly in regards to their socialized and perceived cultures of learning, how they negotiate the cultural variations within a United States-based online learning course, and whether cybercultures emerge as a result.

Conceptual Framework

"We have much to gain when we embrace and examine complexity" (Li, 2002, p. 48)

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the idea that historical approaches to culture are not sufficient, thus precipitating the need for cultural learning models to provide an emic perspective and give voice to the participants whose culture is being explored (D'Andrade, 1992; Li, 2002). Concomitantly, individuals who are engaging in areas of cultural diversity are employing variant acculturation strategies (Berry, 2008). These acculturation strategies will continue to become more prevalent in the landscape of higher education as globalization continues (McGrew, 1992; Berry, 2008), and demographics will continue to become more diverse. The advent of U.S. based online learning programs generates an environment to house the variant individuals and their subsequent cultures of learning. This idioculture (Fine, 1979) exists as a virtual location to bring individuals together and provide a shared experience, which for the interests of this study exists within an online learning course. Within this online learning environment, a cyberculture (Cole & Engestrom, 2007) may formulate as a new and fluid culture generated by the cultural interactivity of multiple cultural selves and identities.

Cultural Learning Models

This study is grounded in the understanding that traditional research on learning

and culture are deficient in examining culture for three main reasons: Western bias, culturally specific conceptual frameworks, and the lack of cultural models (Li, 2002). The presence of "preconceived notions about learning and achievement (a priori and etic), which were derived from Western traditional experimental research and applied straightforwardly to other cultures" (Li, 2002, p. 47) requires re-examination and a paradigm shift towards participant-based understanding. Few emic studies exist that examine the views of those being studied; rather, research has commonly generalized the Western culture of learning.

Additionally, the conducted research is controlled by "culturally specific conceptual frameworks" (Li, 2002, p. 48) that utilize dichotomies as a means of examining cultural perceptions of learning. Academics acknowledge that dichotomous approaches are a disservice to understanding culture (Bempechat & Drago-Severson, 1999; Li, 2001; Varenne & McDermott, 1998), but frameworks comprised of binaries maintain their presence due to the breadth of usage by researchers. Utilization of dichotomous frameworks thin the possibilities of attaining a real grasp of culture:

> Human learning and achieving experiences within any culture (including Western cultures) rarely involve only polar ends and isolated processes. These research frameworks reduce the rich but varied ways that humans conceptualize and approach learning. Including cultural differences as part of the inquiry requires even more recognition of the inherent limitations of these frameworks, as well as our effort to go beyond these boundaries. (Li, 2002, p. 48)

Dichotomies do not proffer the depth of analysis and appreciation of the complexity of culture necessary to achieve a viable understanding of how individuals from variant

backgrounds perceive learning and achievement.

Conclusively, a majority of research approaches seeking to examine culture have been deficient due to a lack of cultural models (D'Andrade, 1995; Quinn & Holland, 1987) of learning (Li, 2002). A genuine examination of culture necessitates the formulation of "meaning systems that are not reducible to single notions of intelligence, discrete or dichotomous concepts such as ability versus effort and success versus failure, or traditional delineations of achievement motivation" (Li, 2002, p. 60). Therefore, a cultural learning model approach will be utilized in this study in an attempt to reject binary thought processes and impressions. The researcher is in support of a more expansive examination of Indian students and their socialized and perceived cultures of learning.

Unlike historical models used to understand culture, *cultural learning models* are "culturally constructed and shared domains of knowledge that serve to structure and constrain people's experiences" (Li, 2002, p. 48). Further, cultural learning models proffer interpretation, inferences, and action goals as a result of people's experiences (Quinn & Holland, 1987). These meaning systems vary from culture to culture and begin developing in the early childhood stages of the lifespan; the socialization of children within their cultural context is a powerful influence that shapes their cultural learning model (D'Andrade, 1992). The cultural learning model then "exert a so-called directive force to their thinking, feelings, behavior, and outcome of learning" (Li, 2002, p. 60; D'Andrade, 1992). This directive involves their "purposes, values, processes, and social, and even moral, strivings, as well as the relationships among various components (Li, 2002, p. 48). This study seeks to cultivate an emic understanding of Indian students and

their socialized and perceived cultures of learning by going beyond binaries and exploring the larger meaning systems of their cultural learning models.

Globalization and Acculturation

This study is also conceptually grounded in the understanding that two processes occur that can incite change within individuals due to the intermingling of variant cultures: globalization and acculturation (Berry, 2008). *Globalization* is a "complex process" (Berry, 2008, p. 329) that "refers to the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system" (McGrew, 1992, pp. 65). The process of globalization exists alongside a second process, *acculturation*, which is defined for the purposes of this study as:

> Acculturation is seen as just one aspect of the broader concept of culture change; it is considered to generate change in either or both groups; and it is distinguished from assimilation. Perhaps more important is the explicit recognition that acculturation is *not only assimilation*. A second important feature is that acculturation is *mutual*; it is a process that can bring about changes in both (or all) groups in contact, rather than only among non-dominant groups. (Berry, 2008, p. 330)

These two processes impact the cultural identities of individuals and groups through cultural contact and interactivity. Examination of the attitudes and strategies utilized during the process of acculturation highlight the mutual influence of contact and the presence of more than one process type (Berry, 1980, 1997, 2008). Variegated avenues exist in which individuals and groups acculturate (Berry, 1997), and, therefore, demurs

the notion that individual's belonging to non-dominant groups will only assimilate and blend into the dominant (Gordon, 1964).

Although Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies are criticized as limiting (Rudmin, 2009; Ward, 2008), a first person interview is not limited. The researcher anticipates that participants will align themselves with a strategy, and will not confine emic perspectives to Berry's (1997, 2008) strategies if approaches exist outside of this theory. Therefore, this study will utilize Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies and its connection to globalization to explore the ways in which international online learners from India seek to acculturate within a United States-based online learning context.

Idioculture and Cyberculture

The concluding concepts framing this study are the notions of idioculture and cybercultures. An *idioculture* is "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (Fine, 1979, p. 734).   Within an idioculture, participants engage with one another within collaborative contexts: "members recognize that they share experiences in common, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation that they will be understood by other members, and further can be employed to construct a social reality" (Fine, 1979, p. 734). Online learning environments provide a central position of reference for participants, as well as, a locus of return for continued interaction.

A potential exists for new cultures to emerge within online environments as a result of the intermingling of variant cultural selves and multiple identities (Cole &

Engestrom, 2007). Culture is emergent and can form within a local activity system, which in the case of online education would be an online course (Cole & Engestrom, 2007). An online learning environment is a form of *cyberculture* that possesses "neither boundaries, nor limitations, nor inhibitions" (Breslow and Mousoutzanis, 2012, p. xii), and do not follow "predetermined paths, nor do they exist in predetermined states" (p. xii). Cybercultures are fluid, unrestricted, and free:

> Cybercultures do not articulate themselves according to a specific logic, fixed identity, or set of rules determined by one space or another. They flow from place to place, from node to node, from site to site. In so doing, they rewrite the logics, relationships, meanings, behaviors and subjectivities, heretofore found within any locale, any node, and any site, on the Internet (Breslow & Mousoutzanis, 2012, p. xii).

Cybercultures are subject to their volitions and develop within a medium, the Internet, that is itself culture. Online learning environments may flow and generate cybercultures that are unique for each course.

Problem Statement

Approaches to culture have historical lineages that perpetuate hegemonic, etic, positivist, and Western frames (Hall, 1959, Hofstede, 1980, Ishii, 1982, Li, 2002). These works have continued to inform binary cultural approaches in the post-Internet era (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Parrish & Linder-VanBerschot, 2010), and are still used widely in research despite criticisms (Li, 2002). Hegemonic and binary approaches are problematic because it withdraws participant voice and situates culture into pre-established categories, which thereby, minimizes the complexity and color of

culture into a two-dimensional space.

To complicate this issue further, American institutions of higher education are expanding their educational reach via online learning programs into international demographics (Hanover, 2011, 2013). These advancements raise significant questions and concerns about how to best support this diverse demographic of student. In an attempt to reject the hegemonic cultural approaches of old, research exploring culture and online learning from an emic perspective are necessary. Some research utilizes a cultural approach to understanding the experiences of international students participating in online learning courses (Jung & Gunawardena, 2014), but the field will benefit from additional studies that focus on the emic perspective and explore the complexity that is culture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students from India describe both their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context. Moreover, participants will detail utilized strategies of acculturation, if any, that assist in the negotiation between their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning. Finally, the researcher will examine whether the interactivity of cultures of learning results in the production or non-production of cybercultures.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the subsequent terms are defined:

Online learning - a form of distance learning that provides access to learning via some form of technology (Benson, 2002; Carliner, 2004; Conrad, 2002), and increases

access and educational opportunities for underrepresented and disenfranchised

populations (Benson, 2002; Conrad, 2002)

Online learning program - educational programs delivered by a university that

proffer all required credits through fully online courses and allows for degree completion

without face-to-face meetings (Mayadas & Miller, 2014).

International student – "students who are not residents of their county of study

or those who received their prior education in another country" (OECD, 2013; UNESCO

Institute for Statistics, 2014)

International online learners – geographically unbound students whose country

of origin differs from the country that has produced the educational technology and

curriculum in which they participate in online courses

Culture – "the patterns shaped by ethnicity, religions, socio-economic status,

geography, profession, ideology, gender, and lifestyle" (Branch, 1993, p. 7)

Identity – in the contexts of online learning, "the identities of the participants

become part of the knowledge constructed as well as the means of construction"

(Goodfellow & Lamy, 2009, p. 176)

Cultural learning model – refers to "culturally constructed and shared domains

of knowledge that serve to structure and constrain people's experiences" (Li, 2002, p.

48), "supplying interpretations" and "inferences" of people's experiences alongside

"goals for action" (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 6)

Socialized culture of learning – the educational paradigms, values, assumptions,

and philosophies embedded within a learner and derived from his/her upbringing

Perceived culture of learning – the educational values and philosophies that are

embedded within the course as perceived by the learner

Research Questions

The purpose of this educational ethnographic study is guided by the following four research questions:

1. How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?

2. How do Indian students describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?

3. What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?

4. How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to address the need for institutions of higher education, faculty, staff, and students in their recognition of the impacts of culture on an online learning environment (Gunawardena, 2013, 2014; Gunawardena et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2005; Moore 2006; Uzuner, 2009). Given the relative youth of online learning for international audiences, this study fills a gap of import within existing literature. Concomitantly, this study has the potential to impact the field of online learning by providing rich narratives of the cultural experiences of Indian students who are participating in United States-based online courses (Merriam, 2009). Their educational expectations, sense of academic identity, and negotiation of culture while in online courses will enhance understanding and inform future approaches to online learning (Moore, 2006; Gunawardena, 2013).

This is critical because a comprehensive understanding of participant's socialized and perceived cultures of learning is required in order to create an appropriate educational construct for student's success in the environment, and to foster necessary satisfaction in, and commitment to the program on the part of the learner. The presence of cultural patterns (Wolcott, 1994) will generate an emic learning model and provide a voice to students from India that participate in United States-based online courses. The results of this study could inform this and other institutions providing distance and online education experiences to overseas students about the sociocultural contexts that must be navigated by both faculty and students in the increasingly competitive world of online distance learning.

Delimitations

The target population for this study is comprised of international students from India who participate in online courses offered by one research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The participants are students who are currently residing within the United States while taking online courses. Living in country may affect their perceived culture of learning due to their increased contact with American culture in comparison to students who participate in courses while residing overseas.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter II presents an overview of published literature concerning globalization, internationalization, the knowledge economy, distance education, culture, online learning, cultural learning models, and cyberculture. Chapter III includes a detailed account of the methodological approaches used to collect and analyze data pursuant to the proposed research questions,

and Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis. The dissertation concludes with

Chapter V, which provides a thorough discussion of results and implications for future

research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two sections in this literature review: background literature and conceptual framework. The first section discusses globalization, its impacts on higher education, and the expansion of international online learning. Conclusively, the first section ends with a justification for increased research on culture and online learning. The second section will delve deeper into the conceptual framework that situates this study.

Background Literature

Globalization is a series of processes whose omnipresence is shifting the very nature of existence and could arguably be one of the most significant events in human history (Ritzer, 2010). Globalization is "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Giddens (1990) articulated the increased interconnectivity "between different social context or regions" (p. 64) as a "stretching process" (p. 64) to assist in the visualization of the networks transcending geographic barriers in the present day. While globalization is shrinking the world with great rapidity: "globalization is but one component of the transformative dynamics that underlie the emergence of a new epoch in the human condition (Rosenau, 2003, p. 9). The complexities of the current era surpass the assignment of responsibility and causality to one phenomenon; rather, such complexities can be thought of as "distant proximities" to highlight the non-linear, dual processes associated with the emergent epoch affecting change within the social spaces of human life (Rosenau, 2003).

The term "globalization" has become a word utilized in multitudinous discussions and debates in variant life sectors. Scholte (2005) highlighted how "people have linked the notion to pretty well every purported contemporary social change, with arguments about an emergent information age, a retreat of the state, the demise of traditional cultures, and the advent of a postmodern epoch" (p. 14). The arena of higher education, due to its deep relationship to social change and justice, is not devoid of dialogues concerning globalization. From a higher education perspective, globalization is "the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable in the contemporary world" (Altbach, 2006, p. 123). While the inevitability of globalization is debatable, the notion that its presence impacts institutions of higher education is not. These impacts begin with the global shift towards information.

Postmodern Knowledge Economy

Hardt & Negri (2007) addressed the transition from an industrial economy to a postmodern knowledge economy that correlates with what they term the "informatization" of industry towards service, information, and communication. The shift from society as a factory to society as a service-oriented and info-industrial system heralds in what is considered "a new mode of becoming human" (Hardt & Negri, 2007, p. 193). Concomitantly, this transition will stratify the global populace in new ways:

Today all economic activity tends to come under the dominance of the informational economy and to be qualitatively transformed by it. The geographical differences in the global economy are not signs of the co-presence of

different stages of development but lines of the new global hierarchy of production. (Hardt & Negri, 2007, p. 193)

The globalized economy is interconnected to the constructs that determine the wealth of countries; while this is not a new phenomenon, the need for information and knowledge directly relates to higher education systems around the world.

Further, Johnstone (2010) outlined the derivatives necessary to generate wealth as a nation in the new economy:

1. knowledge, the commercialization of which is protected by patents and copyrights, and licensing agreements;

2. universities and centers of research, which can constantly replenish knowledge;

3. scholars and scientists, who are able to create, apply, and manage the application of this knowledge to worldwide markets;

4. an educated and adaptable labor force, which is trained to produce the goods and services of this knowledge economy;

5. a system of education and training, embracing basic, secondary, higher, postsecondary vocational, and lifelong learning, which includes traditional and non-traditional forms and which has strengths in science and technology'

6. a political and legal infrastructure, including a stable and honest government, a predictable and incorruptible judiciary, a stable currency, and a benign regulatory and tax climate. (p. 18)

Each of the six points outlined relate directly to higher education institutions and further emphasize the significance of colleges and universities in the 21st century.

Globalization and Internationalization

Information and innovation are the two primary foundations of globalization, both of which "in turn are highly knowledge-intensive" (Carnoy, 2002, p. 130). The interconnectivity of today's world catalyzes the imperative for institutions of higher education to revamp and enhance, but tensions exist concerning the relationship between globalization and internationalization.

Globalization, as perceived within the arena of higher education, has often been portrayed as "something that happens to universities and internationalization is how universities respond" (Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009, p. 290). Some researchers, like Hudzik (2011), believe the relationship between globalization and internationalization is cause and effect: "The global reconfiguration of economies, systems of trade, research, and communication, and the impact of global forces on local life, dramatically expand the need for comprehensive internationalization and the motivations and purposes driving it" (p. 6). In agreement, some researchers stress that the current knowledge economy places additional strains on institutions of higher education to become "internationalized and fast-growing information industries" (Carnoy, 2002, p. 130) that produce knowledge and services. Altbach and Knight (2006) further articulated this cause and effect relationship through their definition of "globalization as the economic, political, and societal forces pushing twenty-first century higher education toward great international involvement" (p. 1). Essentially, some researchers perceive the emergence of a more globalized world as motivation for academic enterprises to internationalize, or undergo a "process of integrating an

international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

Internationalization, through this lens, becomes a reactionary by-product of global occurrences and neglects the complexities and nuances of global and local interactions. Reframing the concept of globalization can redefine the relationship it possesses with local institutions of higher education and diminish the power it has so frequently been given (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). This being said, "when globalisation is understood as a dynamic set of processes in which the global and local interact complexly, the construction and reconstruction of social structure becomes possible" (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009, p. 304). This is a significant alteration of previous modes of thinking; it reconfigures the local as a possessor of power and not a victim of globalization. Therefore, institutions of higher education can generate new ways of interacting with the global that is complimentary and mutual.

Nonetheless, whether working as a catalyst or not, globalization has served as an evocation of change in academia. Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg (2012) asserted the significance of internationalization on higher education: "today internationalization is a core issue of concern to the higher education enterprise, touching directly on questions of social and curricular relevance, institutional quality and prestige, national competitiveness, and innovation potential" (p. 3). The drive to internationalize has institutions of higher education incorporating changes in frameworks, policies, faculty, and curriculum. Internationalization has great impact on universities: "It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students,

and all academic service and support units" (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6). Institutions elect to pursue variant routes towards internationalization such as the development of study abroad programs, overseas branch campuses, increasing the number of international students on campus, and attracting and hiring international faculty members. Online distance learning operations are an additional mode for institutions to utilize in their efforts to integrate international dimensions on campus.

Online Distance Learning

The epoch of knowledge has become centrifugal in international demand, competition, and its influence within the realm of higher education (Hardt & Negri, 2007; Johnstone, 2010). An elevated demand for higher education from all quadrants of the globe emerges from the need for a more educated society and the rise of democratic ideals pressuring universities to increase educational access to underrepresented populations (Carnoy, 2005). This need combined with the increase in technological availabilities and telecommunications establish a landscape of great possibility for global institutions to reach audiences outside the borders of their home countries (Gunawardena, 2014). There are two downsides to this phenomenon. One hinge on the impact of globalization on competition:

> The process of globalisation, characterized by increasing global economic
> interdependence and international competition, leads to the emergence of an
> international higher education market in which a growing number of traditional
> and new types of higher education providers compete with each other. (van der
> Wende, 2002, p. 2)

The increased competition does not necessarily equate quality online distance learning programs; rather, it translates into the competition of financial backing, adequate marketing, and institutional branding that leads to the acquisition of large numbers of international students. The second downside resides in the potentiality for institutions, especially those who are seeking solely to augment fiscal strain, to generate online programs that are culturally insensitive and imperialistic.

Online Distance Learning and Issues of Power

Foucault (1980) explores the relationship of power and knowledge that correlates to online distance learning (ODL) as a mode of international education:

> Power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of the great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because it produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. (as cited in Rhoads et al., 2013, p. 93)

The complex power relationship between knowledge becomes a vital component when considering ODL as a form of internationalizing and extending reach. Who has the right to determine what is knowledge? Nation-states with the fiscal means to generate a society possessing strong intellectual prestige are controlling what is considered knowledge due to their sole capacity to generate courseware for the masses, including international audiences. All of these components conjoin to produce a new kind of arms race for the production, dissemination, and consumption of information.

Edward W. Said (1993) defines imperialism and colonialism while revealing the relationship the two concepts possess:

> 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distance territory; 'colonialism,' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. (p. 9)

The "imperialism" of the United States system of higher education through international ODL consists of the transference of knowledge through the implantation of intellectual "settlements" overseas. The system of power, as is perpetuated by those determining what knowledge is and disseminating it others, directly correlates with Said's (1993) quotation of Doyle:

> Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire. (as cited in Said, 1993, p. 9)

ODL provides a platform for empires to continue their expansion via intellect and information. This poses a complex tension that grapples with the "American attitudes to American 'greatness', to hierarchies of race, to the perils of other revolutions" (Said, 1993, p. 8) and the positionality of "overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom" (Said, 1993, p. 8). ODL can either become a pathway towards establishing dominion over others or a cause for enhancing and empowering others.

Online Distance Learning as a Global Flow

Appadurai (1996) highlights the imaginary as a way to perceive culture today through the generation and explanation of his five scapes. The imagination has become powerful in its presence as a social practice; it has become "an organized field of social practices, a form of work, […] and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31). The world of ODL, why seemingly positioned within the strata as domineer, is but one of Appadurai's (1996) "imagined worlds" (p. 33) that encompasses and reflect his five scapes: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. ODL is a mediascape in that it possesses the "electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35). Meanwhile, it is part of the ethnoscape as a result of its ability to move people across borders via the technoscape. As people engage intellectually through their computers, cultures are crossing, and knowledge is being transferred through pixels, videos, and online exchange. These three scapes, thus, impact the financescape as monies transfer in the process of producing, disseminating, and producing these educational programs. Finally, ODL is an ideoscape, defined by Appadurai (1996) as "concatenations of images" (p. 36) that are "political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it" (p. 36). As highlighted, power is associated with wealth, and wealth in the postmodern world resides in information.

From an Appadurian perspective, ODL exists within the global flows of the five scapes and thus is a part of the imaginary. This borderless form of education removes the

limits of spatiality and, therefore, shifts the imagination is ways that are yet to be named. Furthermore, it provides individuals with opportunities and possibilities that may not have been a part of the imaginary before. These opportunities and possibilities may be diminished if a lack of cultural understanding exists within ODL programs.

Culture and Online Distance Learning

Institutions and educators working with international online learners approach education and student needs from a unique point of understanding (Moore, 2006). Rather than "addressing international students who have removed themselves from their own culture to be in the culture" (Gunawardena, 2013, p. 185) of the institution and teacher, international online learners are "students who remain physically and socially within their culture, a culture that is foreign to, and mostly unknown" (Gunawardena, 2013, p. 185) to the university and teacher. Each culture has its approach to learning; the culture of learning being delivered can be quite different from the culture of learning being adopted, and the former can become dominant in the exchange (Moore, 2006). Therefore, institutions and educators need to remain culturally aware and sensitive to potential hegemonic practices (Gunawardena, 2013; Latchem, 2005; Moore, 2006).

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

This section of the literature review will delve deeper into the conceptual framework that guides this study.

Learning Models

Research conducted on varying cultural perceptions of learning has focused primarily on views of intelligence, attitude towards learning, and the motivations behind learning and achievement (Li, 2002). Distinctive differences underlie learning structures

between cultures and are worthy of exploration. Li (2002) summarized research conducted on cultural groups and their respective perspectives on intelligence: Africans stress trust, social attentiveness, and responsibility (Dasen, 1984; Serpell, 1993; Super, 1983; Wober, 1974); Westerners emphasizes logic through mathematical and verbal ability (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985); Japanese emphasize social competence (Azuma and Kashiwagi, 1987); and the Chinese advocate self-cultivation and improvement (Yang & Sternberg, 1997).

Attitude towards learning has been examined within school settings and reveal variances in perspective (Li, 2002). Westerners emphasized individualism (Hess and Azuma, 1991; Varenne and McDermott, 1998); Japanese students are part of a collective, comply with authority, and are thorough learners (DeVos, 1973; Hess and Azuma, 1991; Lewis, 1995); and Chinese students are positive and possess high standards for achievement (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Motivations for learning is considered a result of one's sense of independence by Westerners (Li, 2002), but research has also shown that cultures possessing a sense of collectivism can also possess high levels of achievement motivation (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Li (2002) provided a new research approach for ascertaining cultural perspectives of learning by focusing on the emic and utilizing terminologies used by participants only. In a research study whose cynosure was on the cultural learning models of Chinese and American college students, Li (2002) utilized the most commonly used terminologies by both groups to describe end points of cultural learning models. Participants from both cultures were asked to generate a list of terms associated with either the words

"learn/learning" and "xuexi." 242 terms were collected in English, and 145 terms were collected in Chinese. Li (2002) then conducted a cluster analysis on the sorted groupings of terms to generate two structures of learning.

Findings revealed varying conceptions of learning between Chinese and American students. Li (2002) asserted that most significant conception for Chinese students to be the "heart and mind for wanting to learn" (p. 53) of which four components emerged: (1) lifelong pursuit; (2) diligence, hardships, steadfastness, and concentration; (3) humility; and (4) desire. Further, Li (2002) discovered that learning as an end itself, status, and contribution to society comprise the purpose for learning. In regard to kinds of achievement, the Chinese group emphasized deep understanding of a subject and scholarship, extraordinary abilities, unity between learning and one's morality, and originality.

American students had a variant set of terminologies associated with learning and achievement. These students emphasized active learning, thinking, inquiry, and communication as integral portions of the learning process (Li, 2002). Moreover, individualism was stressed and highlighted the internal skills necessary to learn: cognitive skill, motivation, open-mind/creativity, and intelligence (Li, 2002). Finally, Li (2002) noted the American focus on "subjects of learning" (p. 53) as the types of knowledge that are valued: basic skills and school subjects.

The value of Li's (2002) research study is the use of participant terminology as an avenue to achieving an emic understanding of how the respective cultures perceive learning. The findings presented "confirm the conceptual position that learning models are complex meaning systems, that differ from culture to culture, and that children begin

developing them early in life" (Li, 2002, p. 60).

Acculturation Strategies

Berry (2008) describes acculturation as "just one aspect of the broader concept of culture change" (p. 330) that can "generate change in either or both groups" (p. 330) that are engaging in cultural contact. Furthermore, Berry (2008) disassociates acculturation from assimilation and emphasizes that acculturation is a process of mutual influence within both the dominant and non-dominant group. With this in mind, Berry (1997) highlights the variant ways in which individuals desire acculturation and expresses them in his concept of acculturation strategies.

Working as an extension of earlier works on acculturation attitudes (Berry, 1980), Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies challenge Gordon's (1964) notion that non-dominant groups will over time inevitably assimilate into the dominant culture. Berry (1980) pinpointed two general issues that individuals experience in the process of acculturation regarding her/his orientations towards one's own group and her/his orientation towards other groups. Berry (1997) distinguishes these two issues as a "preference for maintenance of one's heritage culture and identity" which is held in contrast to the lack of maintenance, and a "preference for seeking relationships with other groups" where individuals seek out interactions with populations outside his/her group rather than avoid such exchanges.

Berry (1997) articulates four acculturation strategies that emerge from orientations that vary dependent upon the ethnocultural, non-dominant or dominant, group being addressed. Individuals from the non-dominant group that seek consistent and daily encounters with members of differing groups and do not wish to hold onto their

cultural identity are employing the Assimilation strategy. Adversely, individuals who do

not seek interactivity with individuals from other groups and hold firmly to his/her

cultural identity are part of the Separation strategy. Integration occurs when individuals

elect to maintain cultural identity while also participating in the larger society, and the

final strategy, Marginalization, occurs when outside forces decrease the potential of an

individual to possess a cultural identity and/or fosters only a small interest in maintaining

a particular cultural heritage. Additionally, individuals within this strategy possess little

or no interest in connecting with others due to isolation, discrimination, and exclusion.

Figure 2.1

Intercultural strategies in ethnocultural groups and the larger society (Berry, 2008)
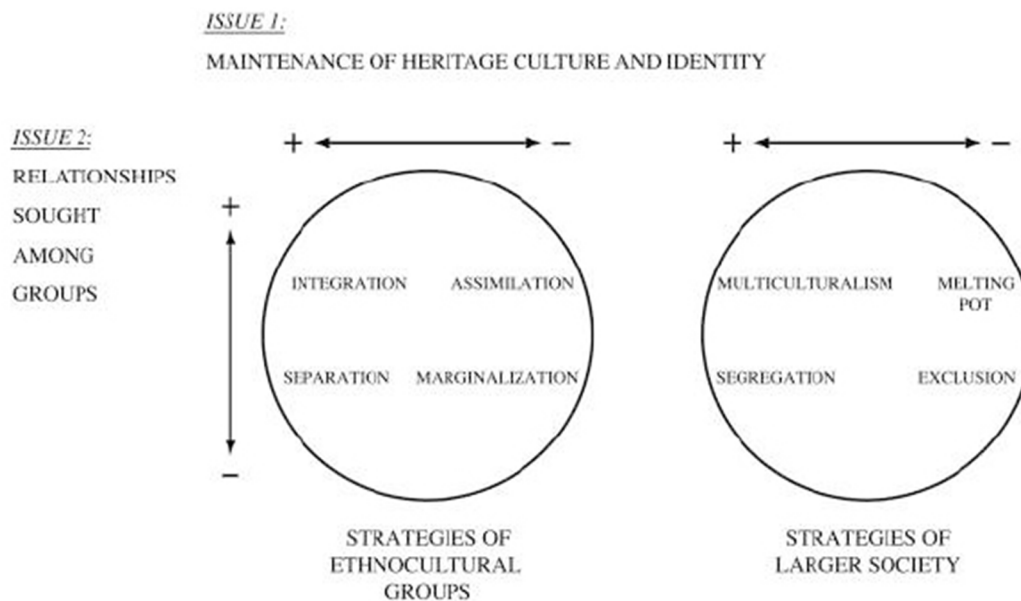
Berry's (1997, 2008) four acculturation strategies are applied to the vantage

points of individuals of the non-dominant group and highlight the role of society

encompassing these populations. Acculturation strategies can and/or cannot be

dependent upon the society within which individuals exist; the sociocultural environment

may enforce particular strategies, for example: some individuals may experience forced

assimilation while others are marginalized due to societal pressures and norms.

However, a mutual exchange can exist, Integration, when the social environ available to

individuals is one of inclusivity and valued diversity. Although Berry's (1997, 2008)

acculturation strategies have been criticized as limiting (Rudmin, 2009; Ward, 2008), a

first-person interview is not limited. The researcher anticipates that participants will

position themselves with a strategy through their descriptions of experiences and

meanings.

Idiocultures

Gary Alan Fine (1979) developed the concept of *idiocultures* to describe "a

system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an

interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further

interaction" (p. 734). This system generates a unique, shared space in which "members

recognize that they share experiences in common, and these experiences can be referred

to with the expectation that they will be understood by other members, and further can be

employed to construct a social reality" (Fine, 1979, p. 734). Fine's (1979) definition

emphasizes culture as experienced within a communication system of a small group of

diverse individuals (Cole & Engestrom, 2007), where "multiple cultural selves and

hybrid identities interact with each other to form unique cultures of their own"

(Gunawardena & Jung, 2014, p. 7).

Cole and Engestrom (2007) emphasized that Fine's (1979) focus of culture within

a unit reveals the unique culture (idioculture) that emerges within the unit; this coincides

with Swales (1990) concept of a *discourse community* that stressed communication as the

means of achieving goals or objectives. In the same spirit, idioculture is a unique culture

generated as a result of "communication, by dialoguing, sharing experiences, and interacting with each other" (Gunawardena & Jung, 2014, p. 7). Gunawardena, Idrissi, Alami, Jayatilleke, & Bouachrine (2009) utilized Fine's (1979) definition of idioculture to best conceptualize the generation of online cultures and "accommodate the notion of culture as negotiated by online participants whose ethnic, gender, and religious identities are enacted, concealed, or merged into hybrid identities" (Gunawardena & Jung, 2014, p. 7). The interactions that occur within an online learning environment may potentially provide a common space for individuals of diverse backgrounds to dialogue and share, and thereby may generate an idioculture.

Cybercultures

Breslow and Mousoutzanis (2012) developed the concept of cybercultures to explain the fluidity and openness of the cultures that are generated in an online environment:

Cybercultures know neither boundaries, nor limitations, nor inhibitions. They are the *ne plus ultra* expression of flow spreading as, when, and how they can. Cybercultures do not follow predetermined paths, nor do they exist in predetermined states… Cyber-cultures do not articulate themselves according to a specific logic, fixed identity, or set of rules determined by one space or another. They flow from place to place, from node to node, from site to site. In so doing, they rewrite the logics, relationships, meanings, behaviors and subjectivities, heretofore found within any locale, any node, and any site, on the Internet. (p. xii)

Breslow and Mousoutzanis (2012) addressed the complexity of cultural interactions online by highlighting the free flowing and ephemeral-nature culture embodies in an

online context. Concomitantly, it is the members of the online environment that determine the cybercultures that are created. Thus, this research study will explore how members negotiate cultural variations as a precursor to understanding the cybercultures that are generated as a result.

Conclusion

Globalization has heralded a postmodern knowledge economy that values the "informatization" (Hardt & Negri, 2007) of industry, service, information, and communication. This shift has altered the competitive global landscape and generated increased pressures on universities and colleges to replenish knowledge, create inventions, develop a more educated labor force, and elevate education specializing in science and technology (Johnstone, 2010). Institutions are internationalizing in order to integrate global dimensions into existing structures (Knight, 2003). Online distance learning provides one avenue for institutions to integrate such dimensions into the campus. However, the delivery of online learning programs to international learners raise questions of power and necessitate additional analyses of the relationship between culture and online learning (Gunawardena, 2013; Latchem, 2005; Moore, 2006).

Cultural perspectives of learning require emic research studies that utilize terminologies used by participants only (Li, 2002). Each individual possesses a socialized culture of learning as a result of societal influences (D'Andrade, 1995; Li, 2002). Additionally, each individual possesses a perceived culture of learning that involves perspectives of outside cultures of learning that are different from one's own. An online learning course is an idioculture (Fine, 1979) that provides a central location and shared experience for the numerous individuals, of which teach possess both a

socialized and perceived culture of learning. Within the idioculture, international online

learners employ variant acculturation strategies to negotiate the differences between their

socialized and perceived culture of learning (Berry, 1997, 2008). When these

international online learners interact with other participants in the course, a cyberculture

may emerge as a result of the intermingling of diverse cultural selves. See Figure 2.2

below for a visual representation of the conceptual framework for this study.

Figure 2.2

Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework

Indian Student → Socialized Culture of Learning / Perceived Culture of Learning
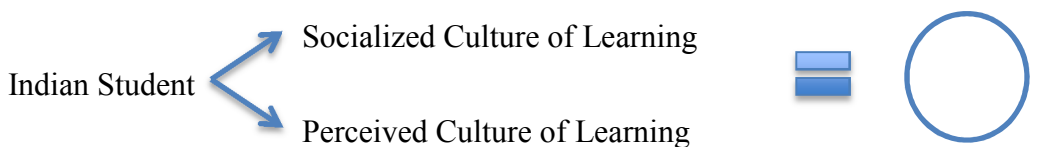
Online Learning Course = Idioculture
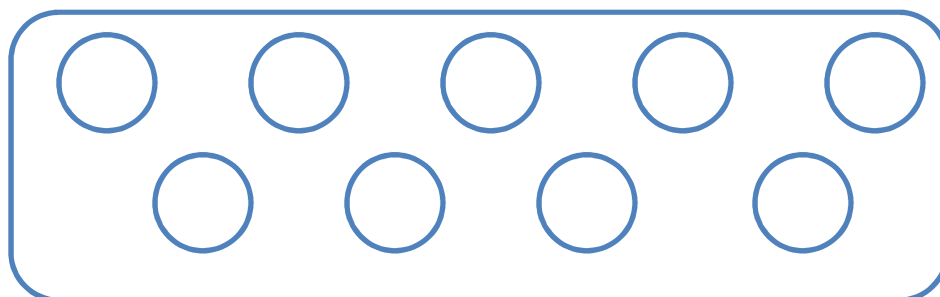
Within the idioculture, international online learners employ acculturation strategies

ISSUE 1:
MAINTENANCE OF HERITAGE CULTURE AND IDENTITY

ISSUE 2:
RELATIONSHIPS SOUGHT AMONG GROUPS

INTEGRATION   ASSIMILATION

SEPARATION   MARGINALIZATION

STRATEGIES OF ETHNOCULTURAL GROUPS

MULTICULTURALISM   MELTING POT

SEGREGATION   EXCLUSION

STRATEGIES OF LARGER SOCIETY

Cyberculture Emerges

Cyberculture Does Not Emerge
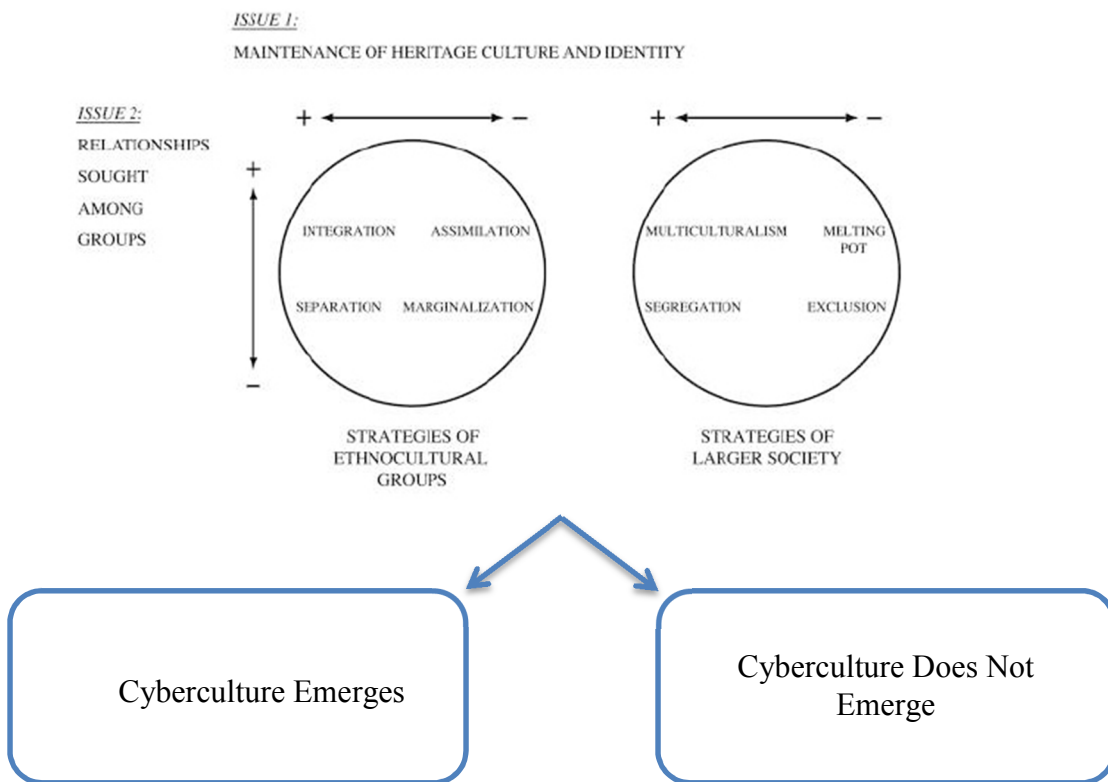
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students from India describe both their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context. Moreover, participants will detail utilized strategies of acculturation, if any, that assist in the negotiation between their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning. Finally, the researcher will examine whether the interactivity of cultures of learning results in the production or non-production of cybercultures.

The purpose of this study is guided by the following four research questions:

1. How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?

2. How do Indian students describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?

3. What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?

4. How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?

This chapter articulates the methodology of the research study. It does so by providing an overview of the research design, detailing the site and participant selection process, depicting the procedures for data collection and analysis, and outlining how the privacy of the human subjects will be established and maintained.

Overview of Methodology

32 graduate level international students from India who have current enrollment in a synchronous online learning course in the computer sciences will be recruited to participate in an educational ethnography. This educational ethnography will explore the negotiations between their socialized and perceived cultures of learning, what acculturation strategies they utilize to assist in the negotiation of their socialized and perceived cultures of learning, and the potential generation of a cyberculture subsequent to their interactions within an online learning environment.

The qualitative study will occur in three phases and will rely on interviews and focus groups to collect qualitative data. Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3 sequentially build on each other to collect rich data capable of capturing any potential cultural patterns housed within the emic perspectives of participants. The subsequent Table 3.1 outlines the study design.

Table 3. 1

Description of Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
16 participants	32 participants	16 participants
Interview (30 minutes)	3 Focus Groups (60 minutes)	Interview (30 minutes)

Research Paradigm

This research study is approached from a naturalist-constructivist paradigm due to the belief that reality exists, but that "it cannot be measured directly, only perceived by people, each of whom views it through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and expectations" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 15). Background experiences then shape how we perceive and interpret knowledge; thus, knowledge is not objective. Knowledge

is subjective due to its consistent interpretation by an individual. The complexities of reality and knowledge are emergent since people construct their understanding of the world based on their interpretations.

A qualitative research approach is proposed for this study to derive thick narratives from the data. The researcher desires to gain an understanding of what a particular phenomenon means to participants, and approaches meaning within this study as something that "is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it…. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 42-43). The emphasis of this research study is to understand how students from India describe their socialized and perceived cultures of learning, how they negotiate these cultural variations in an online learning environment, and how they interpret the potential presence of cyberculture. The qualitative researcher will be listening to how participants describe these experiences, construct their perceptions of the educational interaction, and what meanings they ascribe to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Educational Ethnography

Essentially, "Culture is not a power, something which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, *thickly* – described" (Geertz, 1973, p. 14). Thus, an educational ethnography is utilized because of its use of a cultural approach to understand the learning cultures of students from India and the subsequent need to acquire "rich, thick data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 201). As a research method, ethnography is "both a process and product" (Merriam, 2009, p. 27) that focuses on particular

sociocultural contexts. For a research study to be considered ethnographic, it "must provide the kind of account of human social activity out of which cultural patterning can be discerned" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 8).

An educational ethnography seeks to discover the cultural perspective and is "necessarily reflexive. We have no choice but to study that which we also make. There is no privileged position from which to escape culture" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 23). It is a research approach that requires skepticism of what is considered the norm and societally known (McDermott & Varenne, 2006). Otherwise, research outcomes will be constructed and articulated through the lens of already existing statements that have been pre-shaped and influenced. Thus, an educational ethnography's goal is to embark on a "quest to find stances that allow for uncovering not only what we know we do not know, but also, and controversially, what until then we did not know we did not know" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 24).

For cultural approaches, "the core activity involves a search for positions and instruments demonstrably 'different' from those that have produced what, at any point in time, is acknowledged as truth" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 23). This is because "new knowledge, or better, new statements about the world, will not come from replication but from the struggle to demonstrate the relevance of the new research to the fields it addresses" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 25).   Therefore, researchers engaging in educational ethnography's cultural approach generate new statements through "the discovery of new instruments that can be used from different positions and with different populations. Precisely because of the power of plausibility and common

sense, a cultural approach requires that one move away from plausibility and common sense" (McDermott & Varenne, 2006, p. 25).

This educational ethnography seeks to discover the cultural patterns, if any, which may exist within the sociocultural experiences of students from India within a United States-based online learning course. The researcher will be listening for patterns within students' descriptions of their socialized culture of learning, perceived culture of learning, and usage of acculturation strategies to negotiate the interactivity of the two. Concomitantly, the study will examine whether a cyberculture emerges as a result of the sociocultural interactivity within the online learning course environment.

This educational ethnography is liminal because it exists within the temporary space of a one semester (16 week) online course. The focus on acculturation strategies and cybercultures disallow research to continue into another semester and another online course. This is because both formulate from a particular set of circumstances and experiences that may change when the environment shifts and adds new cultural identities or loses familiar ones. Cybercultures strictly emerge within a shared locus and ends when that shared locus disintegrates.

Site Selection

This study will be conducted at a single, Carnegie Research Extensive University (High Research Activity) in the MidAtlantic sector of the United States. This institution was selected due to its diverse student population and large distance learning operation. The university is planning an expansion into international online education, as well.

Participant Selection

This study utilizes purposeful sampling to identify and select students who are

participating in online courses that are in the computer sciences. Purposeful sampling is integral to ensure the viability of each participant: "when obtaining a purposeful (or theoretical) sample, the researcher selects a participant according to the needs of the study (Morse, 1991, p. 129). To identify and select participants who can meet the criterion required for the study, key players who are knowledgeable and can assist in pinpointing where to begin in the participant selection process will be contacted. These exchanges are significant in the initial stages of a study and emphasize how researchers will:

> go to the groups which they believe will maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question. They will also begin by talking to the most knowledgeable people to get a line on relevancies and leads to track down more data and where and how to locate oneself for a rich supply of data. (Glaser, 1978, p. 45)

To increase the overall quality of the research study, a nominative process will be utilized to discover the participants that will best serve the needs of the overall study.

The nomination process will be vital to the research study, as it will systematically identify professors who have a known effectiveness in teaching the content and course. This process aims to eliminate teacher effects by examining teacher ratings and gathering recommendations from key players such as the Associate Vice President of Distance Learning, the Dean of the College of Sciences, and the Department Chair. Once identification of professors and course sections occur, enrollment will be examined and selected if minimums of 12 international students from India are registered for the course. Four course sections will be chosen, and students will then be contacted

via email to solicit consent. Student selection will be further based on voluntary consent to participate in a semester-long educational ethnography that will explore their interpretations of the cultural variations and negotiations that occur within an online learning environment.

Data Collection

This section will outline the data collection procedures that will be utilized in this study. To attain a cultural understanding of Indian students within United States-based online courses, significant time must be spent as a participant observer (Merriam, 2009). The final ethnographic product will need to be a description of the culture that thus necessitates the researcher's immersion into the group:

> The result of ethnographic inquiry is cultural description. It is, however, a description of the sort that can emerge only from a lengthy period of intimate study and resident in a given social setting. It calls for the language spoken in that setting, first-hand participation in some of the activities that take place there, and most critically, a deep reliance on intensive work with a few informants drawn from the setting. (Van Maanen, 1982, pp. 103-104)

The researcher will achieve immersion by observing the semester-long online class sessions and maintaining a "fieldworker's diary" (Merriam, 2009, p. 28) of each class that includes "personal feelings, ideas, impressions, or insights" (Merriam, 2009, p. 28) of the session. The study will occur in three phases.

Phase I. One-on-one interviews with 16 international students from India will occur. Students will be randomly selected from the overall 32 participants in the study. Interviews are 30 minutes long; data collected will describe each participant's socialized

culture of learning and perceived American culture of learning. Participants will receive an introduction to the concept of cyberculture as a flowing phenomenon that can emerge as a result of the commingling of multiple cultural selves. The interview will provide insight in the further generation of questions for the Phase II focus groups and final Phase III interviews.

Phase II. Phase II will involve three focus group sessions. Three students from each course will be randomly selected and placed into Focus Group A, Focus Group B, or Focus Group C. There are two aims of the Phase II focus groups: (1) to discuss the strategies participants employ to assist in the negotiations between the socialized and perceived cultures of learning, and (2) whether cybercultures have begun to form in their online learning environment.

Phase III. Phase III will involve a final individual interview with the same 16 randomly selected participants from Phase I to engage primarily in dialogue about cybercultures and whether one was evident or not. Additionally, the final interview affords an opportunity to ask any probing or follow-up questions necessary to finalize the data collection process.

Relationship Between the Phases. Phase I allows participants to describe their socialized and perceived cultures of learning as two separate phenomena. Phase II builds on Phase I by exploring how these two phenomena connect for the participants and what acculturation strategies, if any, they use to negotiate the differences. Cybercultures span each phase from the introduction of the concept (Phase I), participant perception of potential development midway through the course (Phase II), and the final analysis (Phase III).

Interviews

Data collection is procured from pre and post one-on-one, semi-structured interview sessions. The researcher has a specific topic to explore for Phase I and Phase III and will generate a small set of questions to utilize during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As the interview progresses, the researcher will ask follow-up questions in response to the interviewee's statements. The semi-structured interview encourages participants to respond at length and with great detail, while remaining focused on the topic of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Probing questions are used to facilitate a deeper response that has vivid details. These semi-structured, cultural interviews will utilize more "active listening than targeted questioning" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 34) and will serve as an "extended conversation between researcher and interviewee" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31).

Phase I interviews are exploratory with a focus on three components: (1) participant's socialized culture of learning, (2) participant's perceived American culture of learning, and (3) introduce the concept of cyberculture. Phase III interviews will also be a cultural interview that is exploratory with a focus on two components: (1) participant perspectives on the emergence of a cybercultures within the online course, and (2) follow-up on any lacking information from Phases I and II that are in need of clarification.

Focus Groups. Focus groups are "socially constructed within the interaction of the group" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 93-94) which aligns with the naturalist-constructivist paradigm. Phase II focus groups will explore the sociocultural contexts of Indian students and their negotiations between their socialized and perceived cultures of learning

within a United States-based online courses. It is imperative to proffer and create an environment for discussion:

> Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. Nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. (Patton, 2002, p. 386)

The focus group dialogue will "work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don't" (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004, p. 65), and will thus serve as an opportunity for the participants to share insight on their socialized and perceived cultures of learning. Concomitantly, participants will proffer insight on how they are negotiating the variances within the online learning class, and whether they believe a unique cyberculture has arisen as a result of the intercultural exchange.

The 32 purposefully sampled participants will be divided into three focus group sections that will allow for three students from each class to be gathered with three from the others. The function of the focus group will be to bring "together a group of individuals representative of the population whose ideas are of interest" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 30), and who possess knowledge of the topic (Kreuger, 2008; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2006). Questions are prepared in advance (see Appendix 2); the role of the researcher will be that of a facilitator who ensures the conversation moves and progresses towards a conclusive idea. The researcher will use probing questions as

needed. The focus groups will each last 60 minutes and provide data that will later be

explored from a cultural perspective.

Table 3.2

Description of Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3 Focal Points

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
Socialized culture of learning	Acculturation Strategies	Cyberculture
Perceived culture of learning	Midpoint Cyberculture	
Introduce cybercultures		

The semi-structured interviews and focus groups are designed to address the

research questions of the study. The researcher acknowledges how "research questions

provide the scaffolding for the investigation and the cornerstone for the analysis of the

data" (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). Therefore, each interview question

correlates with a research question and is outlined in a table adapted from Anfara, Brown,

and Mangione, 2002) below:

Table 3.3

Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?	Phase I: 1, 2, 3 Phase II: 1, 2
2. How do Indian students describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?	Phase I: 4, 5, 6, 7 Phase II: 3
3. What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?	Phase II: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

4. How does the interactivity of variant   Phase II: 11, 12
    cultures of learning produce or fail to   Phase III: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
    produce a cyberculture?

Data Analysis

      This educational ethnography will utilize a naturalist-constructivist approach and will thereby generate its own classification scheme via data collected (Merriam, 2009). The data analysis will manifest from the reflective memos, interview notes, summary review and transcription, and In vivo and axial coding. Triangulation (Denzin, 1978) of data collection will occur from interviews, focus groups, and observations.

      Prior and throughout the data collection process, the researcher will maintain a reflective journal that addresses personal subjectivities to ensure researcher awareness. Amidst the interview, the researcher will jot down in shorthand observations and highlight particularly notable occurrences and statements. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher will immediately generate both observational and analytical memos to serve as a detailed account of interview happenings, subjective reflections, and analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher will finalize with a brief audio recording that provides a summation of the encounter overall to be retrieved and reviewed prior to writing a summary review. A hired transcriptions company will convert interview audio data into documents within a week of the interview date.

      In Vivo and Axial Coding. The researcher will utilize *in vivo* and *axial coding* processes to gain an emic perspective of the sociocultural experiences of the participants.

      In vivo coding. The researcher will use in vivo coding for the first cycle. The Latin root of in vivo means: "in that which is alive"; this style of coding that emphasizes the voices of the participants and highlights "the term used by [participants] themselves"

(Strauss, 1987, p. 33). The researcher will use the direct words and short phrases of the participants rather than ascribe generated words and/or short phrases. The researcher will then be able to frame the participant responses in terms "that participants use in their everyday lives, rather than in terms derived from the academic disciplines or professional practices" (Stringer, 1999, p. 91), and achieve an emic cultural understanding of the participants.

The researcher will go through the transcripts line by line and create in vivo codes from words and phrases that "seem to call for bolding, underlining, italicizing, highlighting, or vocal emphasis is spoken aloud" (Saldana, 2013, p. 92). These words can be "impacting nouns, action-oriented verbs, evocative word choices, clever or ironic phrases, similes and metaphors" (Saldana, 2013, p. 92). Additionally, if words or phrases are frequently used, then an in vivo code will be applied. In vivo codes "provide a crucial check on whether you have grasped what is significant" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) and will be shown to participants as part of a member check. Member checks will be conducted to ensure the participant feels sufficiently understood; this is vital to establishing a genuine emic perspective. Here is a fictional transcription that will provide an example of how the researcher will use in vivo coding:

Transcription	In Vivo Codes
My parents expected good grades in school,	"EXPECTED GOOD GRADES"
and I worked hard to keep up.	"WORKED HARD"
I wasn't the smartest kid,	"WASN'T THE SMARTEST"
but I tried hard.	"TRIED HARD"
I think Americans are different.	"AMERICANS ARE DIFFERENT"

They are very social and fun.	"SOCIAL AND FUN"
College is an experience for them.	"COLLEGE IS AN EXPERIENCE"
For me, it's work.	"IT'S WORK"
I must do well.	"MUST DO WELL"
My family depends on me.	"FAMILY DEPENDS ON ME"
I don't have a choice. I have to.	"DON'T HAVE CHOICE"
So, you see. We're just different.	"WE'RE JUST DIFFERENT"

Coding frequency may not be one for each line; rather, the researcher will have to "trust your instincts" and apply a code "when something in the data appears to stand out" (Saldana, 2013, p. 93).

Analytical memos are vital to in vivo coding and "serves as a code- and category-generating method" (Saldana, 2013, p. 93). The memos will have the participant words integrated throughout and reference the in vivo code as justification for analysis. The following is an example of a fictional analytical memo:

26 January 2016

CODE: "WE'RE JUST DIFFERENT"

Sambasiva highlights the variation between his socialized culture of learning and his perceived American culture of learning ("WE'RE JUST DIFFERENT") by examining the collegiate experience: "I think Americans are different. They are very social and fun. College is an experience for them. For me, it's work." Sambasiva's socialized culture of learning involves working hard to give back to his family: "I must do well. My family depends on me. I don't have a choice. I have to."

The in vivo codes will assist the researcher in distinguishing what the participant

perceives as an issue and how it is "resolved or processed" (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). It provides an emic perspective that captures participants' vantages and the meanings they ascribe to them (Charmaz, 2006).

Axial coding. The purpose of axial coding is "to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones… [and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected" (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). The researcher will use this coding process because it "relates categories to subcategories [and] specifies the properties and dimensions of a category" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). These categories will generate categories and lead to an understanding of the sociocultural contexts of Indian participants socialized and perceived cultures of learning, negotiations between the two, and their perception of cybercultures.

The researcher will review the in vivo codes and analytic memos generated in the first cycle to begin determining the dominant codes. These codes will be pooled into categories or "dimensions of categories" (Strauss, 1987, p. 160), which is the "continuum or range of a property" (Saldana, 2013, p. 93). The researcher will select dominant codes by looking for saturation, which occurs "when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). In order to achieve saturation, the researcher will review materials and generate second cycle analytic memos that "think through" (Boeije, 2010, p. 112) the data and examine the contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences (Richards, 2009; Saldana, 2013). Axial codes will then be mapped as a tree diagram to provide a visual of

the participants' perspective.

Figure 3.1

Axial Code Example Tree Diagram

Socialized Culture of Learning

Instilled Attitudes   Familial Expectations

Obligation   Privilege   Childhood   Adulthood
                                    Grooming   Obligations
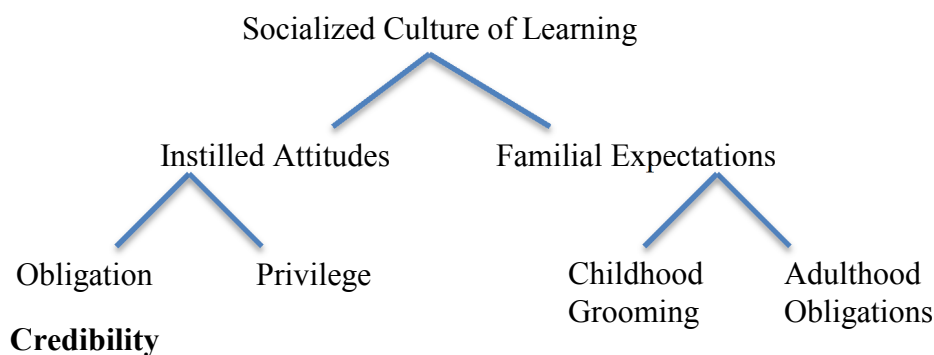
Credibility

This section will address the issue of credibility and discuss the use of rigor

within the educational ethnographic study. Qualitative research has long been challenged

as an inferior research methodology (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln,

2006; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Guba, 1981; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990) from both external

and internal the world of qualitative researchers (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

However, the researcher defends the utilization of this methodology by designing a

rigorous design. Rigor is effectuated when the researcher makes "data and explanatory

schemes as public and replicable as possible" (Denzin, 1978, p. 7). Otherwise, hypocrisy

exists within field: "Since we are committed to opening the private lives of participants to

the public, it is ironic that our methods of data collection and analysis often remain

private and unavailable for public inspection" (Costas, 1992, p. 254). To create rigor, the

methodology will include tables and graphics that outline the protocol and procedures

used during data collection and data analysis.

A researcher inevitably influences a study simply by association: "data do not

speak for themselves; there is always an interpreter, or a translator" (Ratcliffe, 1983, p.

149). The translator subsequently "cannot observe or measure a phenomenon/event

without changing it" (Ratcliffe, 1983, p. 149). Therefore, the assessment of validity is

derived not from "reality" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1994) since it is a multi-

faceted and subjective concept with unique vantages. A researcher then should seek not

validity, but that "something else, a quality that points more to identifying critical

elements and writing plausible interpretations from them, something one can pursue

without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version,

the Truth" (Wolcott, 1994, pp. 366-367). That 'something' is understanding (Wolcott,

1994). This study strives to understand the sociocultural intersections experienced by

Indian students within a United States-based online learning context. Thus, this research

study seeks credibility, and will do so in three ways: (1) a reflexive journal will be

maintained to record researcher bias and subjectivity; (2) triangulation (Denzin, 1978) of

data collection: interviews, focus groups, and observations; and (3) member checks will

be performed with participants. The following is a table adapted from Anfara, Brown,

and Mangione (2002) that highlights the strategies employed in this study to ensure rigor:

Table 3.4

Description of Research Rigor Strategies Used in this Study

Credibility	- Immersion into all four courses throughout the semester - Triangulation: interviews, focus groups, observations - Member checks
Transferability	- Provide rich description - Purposeful sampling
Dependability	- Triangulation
Confirmability	- Triangulation - Reflexive journal

Consideration of Human Subjects

The confidentiality and privacy of this research study's participants will be thoroughly protected. From the initial consent process, through each interview and focus group, participants will be ensured of the protection of their privacy. All exchanges will occur in locations that are private and soundproof to avoid overhearing by others. For students who are unable to meet in person, a private meeting session will be generated on WebEx to allow for a recordable, and inaccessible by others meeting environment. Participants will be told the potential risks of participating in this research study, and how participation is voluntary. Participants will not be asked to share any information that is uncomfortable, nor will the researcher probe on exchanges that reveal signs of emotional duress or discomfort.

Data files containing course enrollment information, audio/video recordings, reflexive journal, observation notes, and other related materials will be secured within locked file cabinets and on a password protected server space. The data will be accessible only to the researcher associated with the study and the Institutional Review Board. During the data analysis, names selected by the participants will be utilized on all information gathered to disassociate the data from the actual participants. Data will be stored for a maximum of five years from the completion date of the research study, and will be destroyed at that time.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION

Chapter IV presents the results of this qualitative study in four sections, each of which identifies themes derived from participant comments as they correlate to the four research questions this study sought to explore. Participant demographics are visually charted to provide a brief background of each student. Participant comments and reflections are provided to give voice to their lived experiences and analyses.

Organization of the Study's Findings

The purpose of this study is to investigate how students from India describe both their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context. Moreover, participants will detail utilized strategies of acculturation, if any, that assist in the negotiation between their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning. Finally, the researcher will examine whether the interaction of cultures of learning results in the production of novel or distinct cybercultures.

The qualitative analysis presented in this chapter are divided into four major sections. The four sections represent each of the four research questions this study sought to explore. Within each section, emerging themes are identified and explored with quotes serving as an emic representation of participant responses.

Methodology Summary

This qualitative study began in Fall of 2015 and concluded in Spring of 2016 with a purposeful sampling of 12 graduate level international students from India concurrently enrolled in at least one asynchronous or synchronous online learning course. The study

occurred in three phases and relied on interviews and focus groups for data collection.

Data were collected in three phases, hereafter labeled as Phase 1, Phase II, and Phase III.

Each phase sequentially built on the previous to collect rich data capable of capturing any

potential cultural patterns housed within the emic perspectives of participants. Phase I

consisted of thirty-minute, one-on-one interviews with each participant. Phase II

involved two focus group sessions. Phase III involved a final individual interview with

each participant. Approached from a naturalist-constructivist paradigm, the data

generated its own classification scheme. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal

throughout the data collection process, as well as observational and analytical memos at

the conclusion of each interview. A hired transcription company converted interview

audio data into documents within a week of the interview date. In Vivo and Axial

Coding were utilized to gain an emic perspective of the sociocultural experiences of the

participants. Dominant codes were identified by looking for saturation and then mapped

as a tree diagram to provide a visual representation of the participants' perspectives.

Population, Sample, and Participants

This study was conducted at a single, Carnegie Research Extensive University

(High Research Activity) in the MidAtlantic region of the United States. This institution

was selected due to its diverse student population and large distance learning operation.

The university has also launched its distance learning operation in international locations,

including South Asia.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify and select Indian graduate students

participating in synchronous online courses in computer science and engineering. A

nominative process that involved professors, department chairs, the Dean of the College

of Sciences, and the Associate Vice President of Distance Learning was employed.

Identified and selected students were emailed to solicit consent. Student selection was

further based on voluntary consent to participate in a semester-long educational

ethnography that explored their interpretations of the cultural variations and negotiations

that occur within an online environment. Though the researcher desired 32 participants,

12 were attained for this study. See Table 4.1 on the next page for a description of the

participants.

Table 4.1

Description of Participant Demographics

Participant's Selected Name	Gender	Hometown	Field of Study
Su	Female	rural village	Master's in Engineering Management
Chinnu	Male	Southern India	Master's in Computer Science
Zoyi	Male	Hyderabad and Madhya Pradesh, large metropolitan city	Master's in Engineering Management
Paul	Male		Master's in Engineering Management
Shreya	Female	Kerala, Southern India Schooled in the Middle East at an Indian school in Bahrain	Master's in Engineering Management
Uthara	Female	Undisclosed	Master's in Computer Science
Eragon	Male	Calcutta, Eastern India, large metropolitan city	Master's in Computer Science
Akshay	Male	Mumbai, large metropolitan city	Master's in Electrical and Computer Engineering
Kedar	Male	Mumbai, large metropolitan city	Master's in Computer Science
Kitty	Female	Father was military, so moved a great deal including, but not limited to New Delhi and Delhi, large metropolitan cities	Ph.D. in Public Administration
Rocklee	Male	Haridwar, Southern India, large metropolitan city	Master's in Aerospace Engineering
Niki	Female	Alberta in the state of Gujarat, Western India, medium metropolitan city	Master's in Business Administration

Table 4.2

Overview of Findings for Research Questions

Research Question #1	Findings
How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?	* Parental Pressure for Academic Success * National Perspective Emphasizes Educational Excellence * Competition for First Rank * Strictness in the Classroom * Appreciation for Pressure to Succeed
Research Question #2	**Findings**
How do Indians describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?	* Social Influences as a Determining Factor * Deep Divers versus Jack-of-all-Trades * Variations in American student motivation * Memorization versus Practical Application * Positive Relationships with Faculty * American Independence and Work-Life Balance * Racism in American Education * Isolation and Fakeness * Little Interaction in Online Classes * Lack of Culture in Online Classes
Research Question #3	**Findings**
What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?	* The Self and Integration * Participants Employ Varied Acculturation Strategies * Acculturation Strategies Change * The Self in an Online Environment * Acculturation in Teaching and Learning

Research Question #4	Findings
How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?	* Culture is Ever-Present * Culture Depends on Levels of Interaction * Culture Determined by Professor * Culture Determined by Students * Production of Cyberculture * Failure to Produce Cyberculture * Culture Matters

FINDINGS

Research Question #1

The first research question guiding this study is: *How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?* India's socialized culture of learning reflects the paradoxes of a post-colonial modernizing society. Although the culture promotes scientific and technical achievement, parents and students alike continue to measure educational 'success' regarding social factors – including prestige and status both within schools and in broader communities – rather than economic ones. Although India has formally abolished the caste system, the culture of standardized testing and tracking paradoxically limits social mobility and reproduces economic stratification after the completion of one's education. The culture likewise exhibits a mix of progress and tradition for women. While many more women today enjoy access to educational opportunities, traditional gender roles shape their experiences, from the form of support from their parents to the differing classroom practices of men and women teachers. The enduring practices of arranged marriages and dowries likewise tacitly devalue women's educational achievement, particularly for students from rural areas of India. In these ways, India's post-colonial development strongly conditions the country's culture of

learning, which in turn reproduces traditional social stratification and gender roles. The
following analysis illustrates how this culture shaped the study's subjects as they
completed their primary, secondary, and undergraduate educations.

Background on the educational structure. The participants shared the structure
of education in India. Primary school was comprised of lower kindergarten (LKG) and
upper kindergarten (UKG). These years were described as being both "fun" and
"academic." Many participants continue to hold a strong affinity for these "simple" years
where physical activity was just as important as learning. Primary school was "cool" and
"exciting" due to the abundance of play and co-curricular activities. These are the
participants' only memories of a time when studies came second to play; participants
described large classrooms of up to 60 students where teachers were "so friendly and so
helpful", and there were many opportunities to make a large, great circle of friends.
Some smiled widely when reminiscing about these early years of ages 5 and 6, but those
smiles transformed into grave seriousness when explaining the beginnings of standard
grade 3 and the subsequent transitions through upper primary (standard 6 – 8), secondary
school (standard 9 -10) and senior secondary school/junior college (standard 11 – 12).

Standard grades 3 through 12 brought increased levels of academic rigor, exams,
and stress. Indian educational policy mandates the administration of a national exam
during 7th standard that subsequently initiates the trajectory for each student's future.
Student exam percentages and ranking become even more critical as the results organize
students in categories of academic potential and intellect. These categorizations or tracks
provide a perspective of what the student's future will hold.

A regional high-stakes exam in 10th standard ranks students from around the state,

and "decides everything. Just one exam, 100 percent decides your career. Your life." Based on the percentage earned on this exam, students choose from three tracks: science, commerce, or the arts. Performance on examinations and ranking among others determines which track they can successfully enter. Once a track is determined, students are committed to that track "for the rest of our lives." Once a student qualifies for and selects a track, they "cannot even think of competing in the engineering stream or the medical stream. So that is where the decision happens." Unlike the United States, students are locked into their academic and career track. Re-educating oneself or switching careers is not an option.

The years of 9th and 10th standard is stressful due to additional high-stakes examinations, but also "because the grade 10 standard is the base for what junior college you will be going. And the better the junior college, you get better crowd, better people. And that determines what undergrad school you'll go. Because I believe, what people you roam around with influences you a lot." The drive to achieve the best marks and attend the best junior colleges derives from the Indian belief that success is based on relationships. A cultural perception exists that posits the necessity to be surrounded by excellence to become excellent: "So, if you have good company, trust me, you're gonna end up in a good place." After 10th standard and entry into junior college during 11th standard, students then push towards achieving the highest marks possible to differentiate from their peers and gain admission into a good undergraduate university.

Parental pressure for academic success. All twelve participants reported parental pressure to have a profound impact on their approach to education. Variations amongst the participants occurred as to when this pressure began, but each felt the strain

as they moved closer to secondary school years, especially 7, 10, and 11 standards. The significance of the aforementioned academic years is grave, as these are the years in which a young person's future is determined.

For some participants, mothers present more of the parental pressure for their children's academic success while father's express more of a "just tell me when you need something" mentality. The idea that "always the mother knows best for her children, right?" prevailed throughout each interview. Niki's mother was increasingly more strict and competitive than her father when it came to education. Her mother was "always on top of me for studies and everything" while her father focused on business and cricket. Similarly, Kitty's mother "worked really hard on" her and "used to read out to me, make me write from the beginning, even when I had not started going to school. So, before I even went into a school, she had prepared me." The pressure from her mother only increased with her rise in performance. When she met these high expectations, her mother set even higher expectations and expected her to perform even better.

However, some parents presented a united front for their child's academic success. While the mother would be the verbal force for education, the father's role centered on enforcement. Zoyi shared how his father would wake him up at 5 a.m. because it was chilly at that hour. He would be told to "Go study now" and would open his books and occasionally doze back off to sleep. He can recall multiple times when his father would pour a bucket of cold water on his face. His parents refused to let him become negligent in his academics and reinforced the need for high grades and good rankings. Both of his parents had diplomas and emphasized that without good grades, he would not gain admission to a good university. His parents tirelessly told him that

"When you get into a good university, that's when your life will excel." The union of his parents' sometimes forceful emphasis on education made a difference for Zoyi, who attributes his current success solely to their guidance and push.

Three participants recount their parents' wishes for their academic success and career track to be more supportive than pressuring. Akshay, Kedar, and Shreya noted how their parents were actively engaged and frequently involved in their education but classified their experiences as supportive. Akshay articulated: "I'm very lucky, I don't have such parents" since a majority of his friends were experiencing high levels of parental pressure. One even committed suicide after performing poorly on an examination. Akshay's mother is a graduate of commerce and his father a graduate of automobile engineering; he articulated that both hold a vision for his future that involves the acquisition of a terminal degree. His mother urged him to study commerce and become a chartered accountant, but his interests were more towards engineering. Nonetheless, Akshay's parents were able to support his personal goal to become an engineer and emphasized instead that he "make sure whatever you're doing, you are marrying it, you're honest, you're loyal to it, and make sure you do best whatever you do."

Similarly, Shreya's parents communicated their dreams for her attainment of a degree in the sciences but did not pressure her to the point of despair: "What my parents did was, as I was growing up, they had an idea where what was my potential. If any time I dropped below that, they would scold me and stuff." The overall message she received from her parents was to study to the best of her abilities and that it was only when they felt she was not living up to her potential that they would "shout" at her.

Finally, Kedar shared how his father would lovingly tease him about his aspirations to go into the medical field. His father would ask, "How can you get into medical [school] with such low grades? You'd have to read a book the night before to remember how to perform a surgery." Kedar laughed with the memories of his father's gentle teases, but also accentuated the seriousness his mother exhibited when approaching his educational ambitions. She came from a rural background, attended college and earned a BABE (bachelor's in arts and bachelor's in education degrees). Kedar noted that she even became the principal of the school he attended. Her educational background influenced her supportive approach to Kedar's education and career choice in engineering.

Indian children also experience parental pressure to earn the percentages to follow the most prestigious track: science. Shreya articulates how "it's a very common thing in India where parents want their kids to be doctors or engineers. It's a big thing, you know. It's their dream. It's changing nowadays, but early on it was more, everyone wants their kid to be a doctor or engineer." The desire for students to take such careers in the STEM fields is "because they are evergreen, and they can help you have a secure life in the future." Parents may not disallow their child to pursue a less prestigious field such as psychology or journalism, but they will not encourage it. Encouragement is directed towards STEM fields because the career track one chooses is a reflection of one's academic performance and rankings.

The outward impression by others equates what is considered successful. Thus, "it's just there in people's minds that if you're a doctor, you're someone really up in society." There has been a long history of this social perspective:

>They associate success with professions related to science. I don't know how that came about, but that's just how it is. They also have the notion that if you are in the science stream, if you work in some science related area, you're more smart. Earlier on, the only people who used to take humanities or commerce, were people who weren't smart enough to take science. That was the case really long back. Probably even older than my parents. A parent is embarrassed to tell somebody that 'my child has taken humanities,' because they feel everybody's going to think my child is stupid. It's kind of lame.

The apex is science and those who have scored high enough to go into the science stream are "considered to be the cream, and those who are in the commons, the arts, are the lowest." However, participants noted how this perspective is changing as parents are allowing children to pursue personal passions and interests versus societal pressures to be the best.

Converging on the intersection of culture and wealth, the educational climate is changing for students who possess passions for the arts and humanities. Culturally, Indian parents feel a strong sense of responsibility for their children:

>Parents feel they are responsible for their child. They are responsible for their decisions, their child's mistakes, and their child's success. And so they are the ones who have to guide them. So, it comes instinctively, basically, through culture. They have to take charge of their child's future, because the child doesn't know how to make the right decision.

This sense of responsibility is the basis for the parental pressure many Indian students

experience to succeed to the highest degree. Concomitant to this aspect of Indian culture exists an increase in resources throughout the country. The wealth of individual families in India is increasing, for which reason the pressure for high-paying success is decreasing. Parents are not so stressed about what will become of their children or how they will live a decent life without a high-paying position. In the recent years, children have the autonomy to decide their studies and future. Parents welcome their decisions and stand by them no matter the choice. Creative programs like music, dance, and fashion are on the rise with parents happily supporting these dreams.

National perspective emphasizes educational excellence. The national perspective holds that education is a top priority. So much so that "growing up, it wasn't even a question. You just knew that education was important." For a majority of Indians, education "is a must thing. No matter what. Even if the parents cannot afford your education, they'll take loans, do whatever they need to make sure the children get educated." All twelve participants grew up in households and communities that stressed education as the "sole focus" for young people. Some even noted how they cannot remember a time when education was not part of a daily discussion, even before entry into formal education settings.

Outside of the participants' personal experiences, they did elucidate the significance and emphasis on education as dependent on which regions of India a person resides. A divide between northern and southern India exists. The migration of students for university moves from the north to the south. Very few students will mobilize from the south to attend school in the north. Zoyi accentuated that even in students traveling abroad to the United States, many come from southern areas like Hyderabad, "below the

belt, below that particular part of the country." This migratory phenomenon in Indian education is not due to economics, but due to the mindset of the people: "It's not something of economics because people who are in the northern areas are very rich. In fact, they're business men, or anything, but then they don't consider this education to be that big of a deal." Overall, those residing in metropolitan cities place a higher import on academics as they exist within areas that serve as hubs of intellectual capital. Participants are aware of the disparities in educational opportunities for those living in villages and rural areas.

Su was born and raised in a very rural part of India. Her experience with education was quite different than her counterparts in the city. Within the village, elementary school "was never a pressure for me. It's like, just go, play, spend some time. Not much homework, no mental worries, nothing. It's just to pass time and come back." The villages did not possess the resources for extracurricular activities or to provide students with exposure to other modes of thinking or living, but Su recalls her experience as "fun." Towards the end of Su's secondary schooling, she became competitive and pushed herself to consume and understand all aspects of computer technology and dominate the percentages and rankings. Prior to this shift, Su had no recollection of a competitive environment even existing. For her it was a sudden transition in how she perceived her education. Concomitant to the new sense of competitiveness came the pressure and subsequent depression of not excelling as much as she would have liked. It was within her down period that she experienced the pressure of her community around gendered traditions. Not only was she in the village, but during this time, she found herself combating the cultural push to get married.

Gender has played a role in education and continues to do so for some families in India. Kitty, Niki, Su, and Shreya expressed how the gender divide existed for girls in both rural and metropolitan areas for a long time. Some parents stress the significance of girls getting married more than getting an education and cultivating a career because "in many parts, you will find that girls are not considered that important to be pushed for studies. And then there's very rural areas, there are other areas where girls are not educated at all." Girls born into such families are prepared for marriage by learning "household chores, cooking, and that kind of stuff." Su would overhear relatives scolding her mom, "Why do you need to educate your girl so much? She is not anyway reading well, so go get her married." The gender norms in India were an obstacle that each female participant highlighted, but it was Su that delved deeper into the cultural perspectives that she battled.

Life in the village as a female taught Su from early childhood that she was lesser than her male counterparts. She explained how she never felt like an equal within her village, let alone her educational experience. The society to which she was exposed "is basically misogynistic society, and it shows every way the difference between boy and girl." She articulated how girls were not allowed to laugh out loud, walk with their heads raised or even look around while in public, and she was never permitted to visit her friends' homes. This cultural perspective of females "was very conventional and orthodox in our villages." Her relatives were not educated and consistently berated her mother asking, "Why do you need to educate a girl? It's just a waste of money. Why do you waste money on studies rather than saving for the dowry and getting her married?" The idea of a dowry and the variations of value between a female and male is

"disrespectful" to Su: "This is always the challenge, whereas if you invest in a guy's education, the more he gets educated, the better his salary is, the better the dowry will be." While sharing these reflections, Su stares down passively at her overlapped hands positioned femininely on her lap. She sits perfectly still, no fidgeting, no movement, not even from her eyes; her posture is perfect. So far from the village, and now in a metropolitan city in the United States, one can see that her socialized sense of self is still intact to a certain degree. Her traditional attire, her hesitancy to make eye contact, the quiet steadiness of her dictation: she is different from the other eleven participants. She has defied the odds for a girl from the village, but in many ways, her soul is still there.

Su shared the impacts of her socialization: depression, loss of confidence, a deep rage within her, and finally social disconnection. She decided to channel her rage into studying technology. Computers were just making a presence in India at that time. She decided to pursue computer science and has made her way into a graduate program in the United States. She is painfully aware that she broke through and laments that her two other sisters, one older and one younger, did not have the same fortune. Her pursuit of education has made her a social outcast back in India. She wonders how people perceive her and what they say. She believes "they're saying all negative things about me." Her somberness is heart-wrenching. To break free and achieve something so few, including herself, believed was possible should be a source of pride and liberation. Rather, a prevailing sense of guilt and sadness rests in her eyes and her voice. When complimented on her courage and determination, Su humbly brushes the words aside and shifts the discussion to a sense of appreciation for her mother "being stubborn and all. Because going away from the family is a big thing. Though my father didn't really

oppose me studying, he was like 'It's okay if you study, if you don't study, doesn't matter to me. But if you study, I'll never have to give a dowry." Her mother's desire for a different life varies from her father's indifference. The value he sees in her studies is not for her fulfillment or development; rather, it is because it frees him from paying a dowry to a future husband. Perhaps Su's melancholy derives from the internal conflicts she experiences as a young woman defying the odds, feeling alone, and possessing a different life perspective from her family members.

A cultural shift has changed India's perception of girls and education. Akshay, Eragon, Shreya, and Su all note that as late as 2003 and 2004, parents were planning marriages for girls upon their graduation from high school, and some from the earlier age of 16. However, multiple participants emphasized that the "trend has changed. Right now, everyone wants their daughter to go further, further education." Su was able to defy the odds because of her mother who was from a "metro city" and "didn't like the idea of a girl need to be homemaker. She likes being studying, and competitive, and having goal in life, and all." Kitty, Uthara, Shreya, Niki, and Su are from starkly different backgrounds with different experiences, yet they all are grateful that the national perspective on gender and education is changing, and that they had the opportunity to focus on themselves, their educations, and soon their careers.

Historical social stratification through the caste system has had impacts on education. The top caste, the Brahmans, are the educated caste that controlled the entire population and disallowed other classes to become fully educated. Being in control of knowledge and scriptures, they could interpret it and maneuver society the way they deem fit. The government, however, has generated a few policies and reservations for

the "backward classes" that lowers the cost of education and increases access. Nonetheless, Kitty doubts the integrity of the changes since so few have been able to utilize the policies and reservations, and so few have risen through the social schema successfully. She emphasized how similar to anywhere in the world, not just India, it will take generations to diminish the spaces of social inequity. At this time, the policies are new and "the backward classes are still backward classes." The societal perception of the variations within caste remains and runs through the social fabric of the country.

An additional aspect that influences the national perspective on education as a top priority is the population size versus the available opportunities. The modest number of opportunities available and large population size enhance the competition among students. Kitty, in particular, articulated the sheer competition for each and every position. If an Indian student desires to have a "decent life, then you need to be educated to a certain level. That way you can become competitive enough in your achievements so that you're able to position yourself for the job." The "sheer size of the population creates that competition" whether it be for seats in school, college, and later for jobs. The Indian student is raised in a society where competition is the norm, and if you seek to excel and be successful, you must abide by the social norms of percentages, rankings, pressure, and competition.

Competition for First Rank. All twelve participants delved into the levels of competitiveness that prevails within the Indian culture of learning. Competition began in primary school: "Even as a little, little kid you had a lot of exams. The exams generated stress for the participants since one's ranking would impact one's reputation: "you have to be like first, second third, there will be positions. Everyone would know like you are

the first boy, you are the second boy, you are the third." For Indian students, they understand that "every single point is a competition." All 12 participants reported a desire to compete amongst their classmates to achieve the highest rankings. This acquisitiveness to rank began in primary and continued throughout their entire academic careers in India.

A sense of competitiveness is reinforced in family and community functions primarily by mothers. Niki shared that she would overhear parents, especially mothers like hers, bragging, "my kid did this, my kid did that." She revealed how she and her friends would feel stressed and even embarrassed by these kinds of conversations. Overhearing such discussions increased the amount of pressure she felt to perform and outrank her peers. Similarly, Uthara lamented that some parents would "force their children to get first rank because when their friends get together they want to be able to say my son, my daughter has achieved first rank." Her concern was the stress levels children would experience, especially for those who did not like to study. Zoyi highlighted how the pressure was multi-directional:

> The pressure is from your school, but then it's also from your parents, it's from your relatives, neighbors, friends, or anybody. It's something like every time there is a test or something your neighbors, your friends, your relatives, the only thing that they need to know is what your rank and grade is and all of your masters. They have a son and would be like, 'My son got 91, how much did your son get?' And then my mum would be like, 'Look at his son! He got 91 and you got a 90. What the hell? What are you doing? Go study!'.

The tension between parent and child over academic performance played into the competitiveness of the classroom as students challenged themselves and others to rise to the top slots.

According to Akshay, the competition is fierce because there are high numbers of people who are all engaging in tremendous work, all earning high percentages on examinations, and who are just all-around good people. He emphasized how just .01 of a percent could separate you from others and articulated that it is commonplace for 400 people to all have a 98.94 percentage. The need to achieve the highest ranking is vital to standing out and earning a seat in a science lab that only has 25 seats. The scarcity of opportunities and high levels of peer achievement catalyze intense competitiveness, which in turn results in few weak students. When asking Niki what happens to students who do not perform well, she responded with a puzzled look, "To be honest, I have no idea." She notes that she had always done well academically and floundered to remember what may have become of students who did not rank. She speculated: "Maybe people just don't talk about it, or I just focused on those who were strong in their studies. Or maybe the competition and expectations was so high that nobody really was very weak. Everybody worked really hard." All twelve participants represent a grouping of Indian students who have experienced "success" in socialized terms. Surely all Indian students are not successful, but participants could not recall students who struggled or what became of such students. Perhaps this is indicative of a social disconnect among the successful or non-successful; perhaps it suggests a shunning and ignoring of those who do not show and manifest promise.

Variations occurred in how each participant perceived the competition. Some

shared perspectives similar to Paul's: "From a young age, we are taught to compete. That one mark or one grade more than another person is a better thing for you. You're not competing with yourself […] in India, you have to score better than the others." Others, like Eragon, perceived competition as more individualistic: "When you grow, you understand that competition means you have to compete with yourself, not with others. It's about you and you are getting chances in different colleges. It's about you. You are given the exam, not the other people." For one participant, the competition was perceived as "healthy" albeit "intense" as it was normalized from such a young age. Each participant felt the pressures of competition but internalized the stress in variant ways.

One participant, Chinnu, developed a strong disdain for academics because of the judgement that comes with the competition. He struggled in school not because of capability, but because it was "always about grades, marks, and they used to compare everyone, so I really disliked it." The consistent judgment and ranking does not take into account the diversity of a person's capabilities. Chinnu passionately asserted:

> Everyone has their ups and downs. Everyone has their strong beliefs and bad beliefs. Everyone has their strong opinion and bad opinion, so no one can judge any person by saying that you can't do that. Because no one knows what other people have in them. Only he himself knows what he is capable of doing, so I hate grading.

Chinnu's aversion for grading and judgment prevailed throughout the first one-on-one interview. He expressed himself with intense emotion, squinted eyes, and furrowed brows. While he never directly acknowledged a personal struggle in being ranked lower

than his peers, he was defensive and on guard when discussing the current education system in India that focuses on percentages and class rankings.

The competitiveness of the Indian education system precipitates a work ethic that, for some participants, took away from their ability to have a childhood. Niki had to wake up so early for primary school that she would cry each day, and Chinnu would wake up at 5 a.m., get ready for school, begin studies by 6 a.m., return home at 6 p.m. and study until 10 p.m. The downside to intense hours of studying in order to compete is the isolation it brings: "They think education is prior to everything else, so you see a person doesn't eat anything, becomes sick just by studying rigorously for 10 hours, 20 hours. They don't come out of their room; they'll just study. They don't have any human contact, or they don't talk." The pursuit of educational excellence was a source of social isolation for some of the participants. As the sense of competition increased, so did the loneliness and isolation. The weight of which imbued participants with a sense of melancholy and stress.

Strictness in the classroom. All 12 participants discussed the strictness they experienced in school throughout their childhood and adolescence. Whether they went to a Christian convent school, public school, private school, or even an Indian school in Bahrain, each participant described school as "quite strict." The culture of education in India was communicated primarily through its teachers. The relationship Indian students have with their teachers was described as "very formal", "very strict", and "very disciplined." While teachers, for the most part, were patient and would thoroughly explain material "one hundred times or one thousand times" without yelling or treating students poorly, the relationship was one that was rigid with a sizeable power distance.

Zoyi's recollection of his relationships with male teachers was one of fear, especially in elementary school. What catalyzed this fear was the use of physical punishment and intimidation within the classroom. He described this fear in detail:

> We would really be afraid of our teacher, because when I was in my elementary school, I was really afraid. You know, maybe now it's different, but back then we had teachers who used to really hit us. Like he got a cane and everything. I remember once I didn't cut my nails. Every day we had something to do. We had to show our nails to them, and then we had to polish our shoes, and comb our hair. Something like that. I didn't cut my nails one day, so I had to stand outside on the field in the sun. I was not given a warning or anything; just go stand over there. I don't know, one day, something happened like I didn't polish my shoes or something, so I was hit with a cane. You are just hit with something. It didn't seem different because it was common, because I got used to seeing people getting hit.

He continued to catalogue instances of corporal punishment at school all the way through to his junior college years where teachers would pinch really hard or pull arms backward to cause sharp pain in the shoulder joint, or simply hit him on the back of the head when he did not understand the material. He articulated that "there were different people, different teachers, and they all had different ways to punish students, so we were afraid of the school teachers. The gender ratio for teachers was predominately male in his schools, and he reflected on how it was the male teachers who used corporal punishment. The few female teachers in the schools were more "sympathetic" and would punish with

"emotional rant." He was grateful when he was assigned a female teacher. Not surprisingly, Zoyi refrained from asking questions or engaging with his male teachers; he did his best to avoid having to participate or draw attention to himself for fear that he would incite the teacher's disapproval and punishment.

Another male participant, Paul, reported similar recollections of regular corporal punishment.

> They [are] allowed to punish us. They are allowed to yell at us. They are allowed to be strict on us because that's what an Indian community believes. You have to be stern on a kid for him to do stuff because all children are naughty. That is what they believe in and I had pretty strict teachers. I would almost get beat up every day. That is fine. It was tolerable. They wouldn't go beyond the limit, but yes – there was punishment.

The strictness of Indian teachers was normalized for the participants from a young age. Some participants even showed appreciation for the beatings and contributed their success to the strict rigidity of their teachers' blows and pinches. Interestingly, female participants did not mention corporal punishment at all. In fact, they did not discuss punishment of any kind.

Other participants commented on how they would not engage with their teachers, as well. Their fears were not concerning punishment, but the fear of appearing unintelligent or unprepared. Rocklee revealed that part of the competitive edge was ensuring that one's reputation was one of confident knowing. To ask questions increased the risk of seeming unintelligent, as an indicator that one is struggling to comprehend

material.

Appreciation for pressure to succeed. All participants shared a sense of appreciation for the pressures they experienced as children. The parental push for education, the competitiveness of the classroom and the community, the culminating stress of exams and percentages, even corporal punishment, all of these aspects of their lives are now a source of benefit and appreciation.

Female participants all shared appreciation that their parents were supportive of their education and dreams. They feel great pride to share the progressive way of thinking their parents possessed in their desire to educate her. Often, they recounted fondly of their mothers, who were the driving force for their academic success.

Male participants expressed appreciation for differing reasons, but usually it had to do with monetary success in career choice. Paul articulated the significance of his education:

> For me personally, this is weird, but for me personally, it's all about the money. Ultimately, I want to have a family, I want to settle down, I want to give them a good life. That is all I want from education. Going ahead and getting a job. It kind of sounds shallow, but it's not. For me it's [pause] practical.

One can sense from Paul's perspective that the national and parental influence is ingrained. He wants the "good life" promised by a solid education and career in the sciences. His degree in engineering serves as a means to attain the financial means to have a family. He is a reflection of the culture and his desires to continue the traditions of his family are critical.

Similarly, Kedar's appreciation for the rigors of his childhood academic experience relates to his desire to "become someone" in order to take care of his own family one day; he also has plans to assist in global issues. Nonchalantly, he shares how "I would obviously go for having some sort of wealth, but I also believe in being a philanthropist for needy people. I mean, I don't know, people have just pictured it that way or what. But I've seen people in Africa and all struggling a lot there. Many backward countries today." He believes that adults must do something to care for innocent children as they are not at fault for social and worldly ills. The children "deserve something good" in the form of educational opportunities. Schools available to the poor have limited resources, and schools for the wealthy have an abundance. Kedar wants to use his education to "make a common ground where both poor and rich come across." A place where he could support the poor, which in turn would support the parents of those children, which in turn would support the community, and ultimately all of society.

India's socialized culture of learning derives from a national perspective that filters into the community and homes of its youthful students. Their educational approach includes a system of exams that limits social mobility after secondary school; this restrictive social mobility paradoxically reflects India's history with the caste system. A valorization of science with less ascribed value to the humanities and arts prevails. Students and parents both believe that academic and professional success is grounded in personal relationships. In addition, Indians possess a valuation of educational success that emphasizes social factors (prestige; status; ties to neighbors and community) as much as profession, technical or economic ones. These social factors catalyze a promotion of

intense interpersonal competition in learning environments that are formal and disciplined. Finally, gender roles deeply condition the socialized culture of learning, and ultimately reproduce gender roles in India's society at large. The final emerging theme from participants is a sincere expression of gratitude for their educational upbringing, despite the factors that caused them stress, depression, and strain.

Figure 4.1

Tree Diagram of Indian Participants' Socialized Culture of Learning
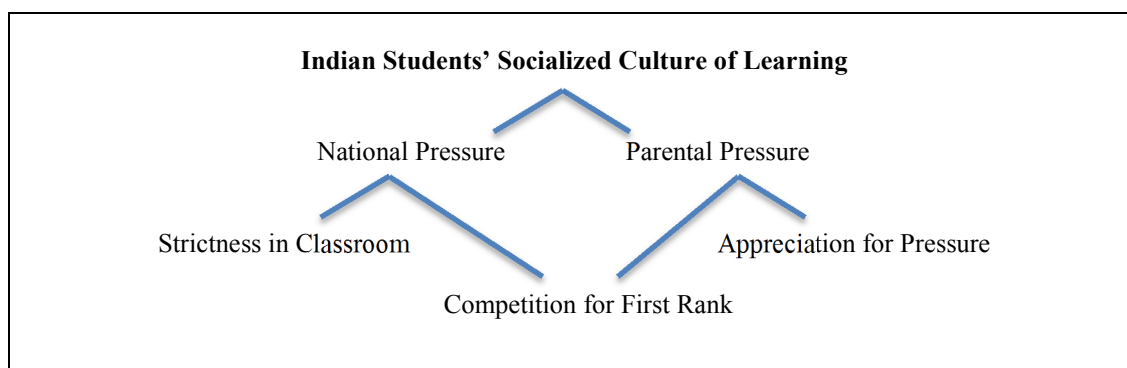
Research Question #2

The second research question guiding this study is: *How do Indians describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?* Participants answered this question by juxtaposing the two cultures of learning; by sharing cultural artifacts that had precipitated particular impressions of the United States prior to their engagement in the education system; and the word-of-mouth advice and impressions they received from peers and family members who had studied in the United States in the past. The following analysis illustrates their perceptions about American education and how it varies from their socialized Indian culture of learning.

Social influences as a determining factor. The parental propensity to compare children academically also informs other life decisions for Indian children, including

pursuing an American degree. Many participants discussed how "usual" it is for parents to point out not just the academic performances of peers but also the life choices of others to create a pathway for their own children. Many opted to pursue an American degree because their parents emphasized how a friend's daughter or a friend's son had taken such a path and was now studying in another country. Participants also noted social influences other than their parents; participants all spoke with family members, friends of the family, and friends of friends prior to making the decision to earn a degree from an institution outside of India. Rocklee spoke with "seven or eight families" before deciding to pursue a degree from the United States. Uthara "came to the conclusion from my conversations with friends and cousins, that classes would be cool, more interactive." Word of mouth plays a large role in the decision process for Indian students to pursue an American degree.

Indian colleges also provide a description of what an American education would be like, but participants like Paul believe "We had a wrong idea of how education over here is." He relays that students are told that "in the United States it gets real. You need to pour yourself into education and you need to study all the time to even get anywhere. That is something that we were told, and it was frightening." Despite the fear and despite knowing that he was not the best student during his undergraduate years, Paul opted to pursue an American degree. Now that he has experienced United States higher education, he articulates that "It's much different to what I thought. I thought it would be tougher and much more advanced", but he has discovered American coursework to be less rigorous than what he experienced in India. The lack of rigor is not because of the content, but because of the approach. Unlike his experience in India where study

occurred after class, he enjoys having his lessons prior to class. The role of the professor is to then clarify student thinking; for Paul, the material makes more sense and his confidence in education has increased. He emphasized that he is "quite comfortable studying this kind of a system and I like it. I would definitely recommend it."

American cultural artifacts observed while living in India also created a sense of what to anticipate about American education and life. Participants, usually with an embarrassing smile, shared how movies and television shows impacted their ideas of the culture in the United States. Rocklee believed that every city throughout the country would be "huge and very happening" and lamented to discover that rather, American cities are "a bit dull." Shreya admits how she watched "a lot of shows" and engaged in "major binge watching." From her love of television, she "had this whole idea of how the country is, or how the system is", but her engagement in a graduate-level program is dramatically different from the American coming-of-age stories she watched with fervor. Niki also watched movies, but always wondered, "How do they do so much stuff in just one day?" After experiencing American culture, she believes that the movies were not exaggerated, that people truly do a great deal in one day: house chores, work, social time, gym, and relaxation in the evening. Prior to actually engaging in the education system and culture of the United States, participants developed a sense of understanding from the experiences of others and from American media. Overall, the social influences of family, friends, and even cultural artifacts generated a desire to pursue an American degree and were utilized as a preview of what that decision would entail.

Deep Divers versus Jack-of-all-Trades. Participants were asked to identify a few key words to describe the American college student. Several noted the American

culture of learning emphasizes specialization and expertise, whereas the Indian culture emphasizes integration and general skills. Kedar's response emphasizes the "deep diver" mentality he perceives in American students: "

> I would say they are kind of extremists, in a good sense. I have seen one best quality in Americans which is that they don't look at mechanical as mechanical. It's more focused. If he needs to do something in computer software, he'll do everything in that software and become a master of it.

For Kedar, this varies from Indians who are "like jack of all and master of none." He believes that Americans are "too excellent with whatever they're doing because they have been focused and looking in one direction, and then there's the broad perspective, like Indians, that try to know everything, but how big are our arms?" Similarly, Rocklee highlighted "Indian undergraduate education is like jack in all, good in many things", but "American education is more expert in one. They know stuff from different things, but they try to be expert in one." Akshay emphasized that "one thing I really loved about them [American college students] is their focus. They have sheer focus. They hone in on one aspect of a subject and become an expert. It's impressive." Not all participants shared this sentiment, however.

Kedar recognized "there are a few students who are particularly focused on what they want in life, where they want to go." He articulated an approval of how Americans "visualize themselves where they want to see themselves in ten years. Indians never imagine themselves beyond a day." But, he felt that "Americans are too specific" and they "focus on small things instead of going for the bigger picture." Kedar's concern is that Americans may "miss out" on something great because their eyes are focused on

only one goal. American students have a goal and become blind to other opportunities. He noted that these students are "not exploring things" and therefore do not live to their full potential. The concern that American students "are too stubborn" or they will "just quit" if they do not particularly "enjoy" something disturbs Kedar as he wishes his friends would push themselves to excel at full capacity.

Variations in American student motivation. The high levels of variation among students for drive, ambition, dedication, and creativity posed difficulty for Eragon. In his graduate computer science courses, collaborative work on programming projects is common. In contrast to India where all students work hard, Eragon experienced a range of student motivation and drive. He finds it extremely difficult to work alongside unmotivated and less serious-minded students. The experiences he has in collaborative learning has brought frustration at times, but when working with serious-minded American student, he claims to have "fun" and finds the work "enjoyable." He also criticizes a lack of creativity among American students; he observed that Americans will follow instructions solely and not push the boundaries of computer science.

Multiple participants perceive the American college student as "casual", "balanced", "laid back", and "well-rounded." Unlike the constant studying that occurred in their Indian academic careers, participants like Rocklee emphasized how "Americans have a good social life, parties, and also education." Akshay highlighted how "because I'm coming from a country where you want to be at the top percentage wise, I think college students in the United States are laid back and casual. They don't seem to mind if they get a B+ and not an A. I'm trying to be casual like that, too."

For participants like Niki, education in the United States does not carry the same

stressful burdens of education in India: "I agree that there is pressure for college students here for completing the homework and submitting assignments on time, but the way I've seen it before and the way I see it now makes me think it's really laid back here. College is really laid back." The stress levels are significantly lower for the Indian participants now in U.S. degree programs. There are fewer exams, but more importantly, a leniency within class expectations exists. Niki notes that there are no pre-exams or make-up exams in India; all exams must be taken on the dates and times they were scheduled. If you miss the exam, you fail the class. Period. She is amazed by the option students in the United States possess to re-schedule exams, and even more amazed by the "lightness" of the repercussions, if any, of having an assignment or exam lowered a letter grade for not being on time. The absence in the United States of the strictness found in India provides opportunities for students to "have liberty to just have fun and do what they want to do. You still get the education required to get a job, but at the same time, you get to enjoy life. It's nice." She balances the stress of graduate school work but has discovered a new way of studying that allows for more individual time.

For some participants, the decrease in stress levels was a positive aspect of the culture of learning in the United States. However, for Uthara, it was a disappointing characteristic:

> As far as I have seen, not everyone takes education seriously. Not many care about their education and career, maybe because parents aren't as involved in what they are doing. Elders in the US don't say, "you have to do this, or you have to do that." But, children make mistakes and need direction. Here, students just hang out with friends and waste their quality

time. Everyone thinks they can become Steve Jobs without putting in the

hard work.

Similarly, Kitty, perceives American education as "very liberal" in its grading and

lassitude. The lack of rigor and discipline in American courses results in poor quality of

work. The liberal grading contrasts with the lack of leniency in the Indian culture of

learning:

>Mostly everyone will pass, but I expect that if a poor assignment was
>
>submitted in India, it wouldn't go through. That student would fail. The
>
>quality of work submitted by US students is just so poor. In India,
>
>teachers are so strict they're not going to even listen to excuses or take late
>
>responses, and they surely wouldn't mind giving a student a zero.

The difference in strictness has consequences for both Uthara and Kitty. Their concern

here is that while students in the United States will earn a degree, there will be "many

who don't know anything. So, what's the point?" Both participants questioned the value

of an American degree after experiencing the lack of rigor in courses. Kitty "knew that

the education system is good here because it is considered to be good. All over the world

it is considered to be one of the best." While she has no regrets and approves of the

American culture of learning, she is conflicted by the variance between international

perspectives on education in the US and her experience. She associates strong education

with strictness and shared concerns about what an educational system that is too lax will

produce in the long run.

Memorization versus practical application. Multiple participants juxtaposed

the American practical approach to learning to the Indian memorization approach to

learning. They highlighted a heavy reliance on textbooks in India and noted the more individualistic approach to learning in the United States. A key explanation for why memorization is stressed in India resides in their grading system. High-stakes tests and exams provide little buffer for an Indian student's grade point average. Thus, memorizing material for the test to acquire competitive percentages takes precedence in the Indian learning model. While the United States has seen a shift in K-12 education with the advent of standardized tests across the nation, higher education still promotes a more hands-on, individualistic approach in comparison. Niki appreciates her ability to memorize information effectively but highlights the value of the simulations and case studies she has been working on in her American online courses. She is given a problem via simulation, and she must in turn "fix it." This practical approach is something she "never had the chance to do in college. Nothing this interesting or practical. I really enjoy it." Kedar describes the American approach to learning with this metaphor:

> An American professor teaches you a concept, a small part of it, like he gives you a straightforward concepts example. He then gives you an assignment that does like, I would describe, he teaches you a seed of a watermelon and then asks you to prepare a watermelon.

This emphasis on creativity instead of memory "makes you think" and "makes you work yourself" in order to "really learn the material." Kedar then bursts into laughter and exclaims, "Thank gosh for Google!" Similarly, Uthara expressed gratitude for the interactive lesson and shift away from textbooks. She identified that in the United States, "what we learn, we implement. The knowledge here is more practical. Here we go beyond the books." This approach to learning starkly contrasts the Indian emphasis on

memorization and required a period of adjustment for the many of the participants.

Similarly, Su believes the American approach to learning contrasts with India's approach in that it is mostly "experimental" and "really makes the student learn on her own." This cultural shift was challenging at first since her Indian peers prepared her for her studies saying, "Education in the US is so simple, so interesting." In contrast to her experience in India with memorization of facts, formulas and lessons, when she began her American coursework, she was astonished to discover there was no textbook, that all of her work would be conducted online, and that she would have to learn and study on her own. It took her around a month to adjust to the new cultural approach to learning, but she credits this difference with forcing her to be more observational, work harder, and ultimately with spurring original ideas. She articulates: "I think it's important to get creative because while everyone has some ability and some creativity, the goal of education is to bring it out. I think that's where the US university has succeeded." The shift from memorization, to independent learning with experiments, projects, and research papers was intimidating at first because Su did not "have any awareness on how to write a research paper or how to do a project, how to do assignments on my own without any material, and just going online and do it." However, she noted that "later on when I got used to that, I understand the main, you know, the motivation behind that kind of education, and this style makes me understand my inner capability."

The differing approach to education is one of the appealing features for Akshay, as well. He appreciates not having to memorize and understands that the:

> importance is not given on direct learning, but more on hands-on learning. In fact, the professors want you to learn things by yourself because things

I learn by myself is going to be etched in my memory for my whole life.

I won't forget it, so things that I memorized, there is a high chance I will

forget it. But a project I worked on, or a program I designed, or something

else that I put in great amounts of effort, I'm sure it's going to be etched in

my memory somewhere.

Akshay's approval of the American style of learning resides solely in his appreciation for

a hands-on, practical approach that contributes to his memorization of the material. In a

way, this is a reflection of his socialized learning that attributes memorization to

successful learning.

For Eragon, the American style is a more "balanced approach, where it's not just

about the theory about things." Contrarily, he highlights how the American system

moves beyond the textbook and correlates information to producible outcomes:

They approach it in a more practical sense, where even in a course, you

would have more project work or interaction, there is some kind of

activity instead of just learning from the textbook or notes and exam or

something. If you tell an Indian about the American education system,

they're like, "Wow, that's so cool!"

The strategies for learning used by American professors were met with appreciation from

the participants due to the shift from textbooks and mote memorization to applicative and

actionable learning.

Positive relationship with faculty. Participants highlighted the relationships

they generated with American faculty as a standout difference between Indian education

and American education. Shreya found her professors "very accommodating" and, like

the other participants, used Webex and email regularly to connect and ask questions. Su, who had often in her academic career doubted her capability, began experiencing the same trepidations in her U.S. courses. She stressed over how her family would react if she did not succeed: "I struggled a lot to convince my family to come here. If my grades go down, it's like a personal insult, like I'm proving that I am not capable." However, it was her professors who came forward and assisted:

> Professors really helped me a lot. They are so friendly. They are so supportive. I feel like I can go to them and admit that I don't understand something. They then tell me how to get them done, who can help me, the resources, references, everything.

She reflected on the feelings of isolation and resulting depression she experienced during her undergraduate studies in India. As a first-generation college student, she felt she had no one in her family to talk to and no one at university either: "Back in India, we never can contact professors normally, it was formal, you can't just knock on the door and go into their room." She is grateful for the change and highlights how American professors "are really jovial. I don't have any intimidation because of them." This contrast between Indian and American cultures of learning was most poignant to Su because she attributes her ability to become accustomed to the new learning approaches and increase her confidence to the relationships she has generated with her professors.

Similarly, Zoyi's interaction with his professors is a key difference between the Indian and American cultural learning models. He emphasized how he exerts the same efforts in his American coursework as he did in India; he emphasized how his devotion to working to his best potential exists in both places. The main difference between the two

systems is that "you get to interact with your professors on a more friendly basis when you meet with them." Zoyi struggled to describe how the relationship was different after noting that some Indian university professors were indeed friendly, but he relayed that no matter the amicability, the strictness and power distance still exist.

Paul's experience with faculty in India transferred into his approach to faculty in his U.S.-based online courses. He refrained from asking questions in class and thought "it might also have to do with a bit of the way things are in India for me." He was not sure if it is "the language barrier, I don't know if it is just fear, I seriously don't know, but I would rather prefer emailing my questions than asking them in class for some strange reason." Due to this unknown reason, Paul was grateful for the online learning format and its use of email to engage with his professors. He is comfortable not having to ask question face-to-face, but notes that occasionally, he must still engage in real time:

> A few of my professors have asked me to schedule a WebEx conference during virtual office hours. A few of those sessions have gone really well, a few of them not really. Maybe it's in my mind. I see that commonly in Indian students that if you don't understand something, you're fearful. If I don't know some particular thing and I go in and ask, and I fail to answer something that I am expected to know, I'm scared. I don't know, it's strange, but it happens to me a lot. Perhaps that is the reason Indians don't ask questions in class about things we don't understand.

American independence and work-life balance. In contrast to the high social interactivity found within Indian families and communities, Chinnu "respects a great deal the privacy Americans maintain. I love that because I love privacy. I've learned so much

from Americans about that." He appreciates the combination of privacy and independence in their work style: "I'll say this, if you want to be a private person, and if you want to work on your own, do everything on your own, build your own career, feel good about yourself whether your career isn't so good or you're in a high position, then study in America." The idea of having time to oneself after studies and/or work, of having "some space in their own life because everyone has so much going on", to "sit in their own comfortable chair", and have "quiet privacy" is an admirable characteristic of the American balanced lifestyle.

Indian participants discerned a balanced lifestyle to result from additional variables found within American students. The American sense of independence requires planning in order to maximize efficiency, thus American students are perceived as punctual and non-procrastinating. This trait is seen as "motivational" even though at times Americans may be "a bit slow with work, but time management is perfect with Americans. It's like they will manage everything, they'll be like 'I need to divide the work into 10 parts, 10 days, I have 10 days, that's doable'." According to Kedar, Indians are stark procrastinators and will wait until the final hours to complete an assignment. All-nighters and high stress are described as a requisite for meeting a deadline in Indian culture. Many participants including Akshay, Niki, and Paul discussed the Indian propensity to procrastinate. Cramming for examinations is the norm, and since examinations are the predominant factor for percentages, many students would rather memorize at the last minute to have it "fresh in the brain." Thus, the American students with whom they have interacted, in comparison, are highly paced, organized, and efficient in time management.

In addition, the American sense of independence and work-life balance can be evidenced in the presence of non-traditional students. India's higher education institutions have few if any non-traditional students because, as Rocklee outlined, education is a continuous process in India. Students graduate from secondary school and go immediately to an undergraduate program, then graduate school. There are no pauses in between. The Indian culture of learning is one of intense rigor until one's educational pursuits are complete. As discussed earlier in the chapter, students must work toward and choose their life trajectory while teenagers. In the United States, anyone has the ability to educate or re-educate themselves at any point in life. They have the autonomy to switch careers in mid-life even. This concept is foreign to Indian students. Rocklee asserted that "here there are many people who are double my age. I'm 23 right now. One student was like 40. In India this wouldn't happen." An Indian student does not possess the same sense of autonomy in their educational and career trajectory.

Due to the Indian socialized culture of learning, even the thought of returning to school later in life seems exhausting. Indian students experience an upbringing where education is the central focus and "almost everybody's educated"; thus, "a master's degree isn't such a big deal actually. It just feels like something you got to do." However, it is something you do as a student in one's early 20s. For Shreya, the differing perspective within the American system is laudable:

> I feel American students are doing it [getting a master's degree] because they really want to do it. It's like there are many people who are working and studying. I couldn't do that. If I'm 30 or 40 years old, I don't think I would have the drive to go to school. I find a lot of Americans do that. That's pretty great.

They come to school because they really want to learn.

Multiple participants reported being "astonished" by how many older Americans attend graduate school while working full-time jobs, raising families, and running a household. All participants concluded that they would not even consider returning to school after beginning a family and a career. This variation in desire generated a kind of barrier between Indian graduate students and American non-traditional students.

Participants shared the distance they felt from American non-traditional students. While Rocklee and Niki both felt these students are "interesting" since they have work experience, the two participants felt it hard to develop any kind of friendship due to the age difference. Perhaps this a due to the cultural perspective regarding the way Indian youth perceive their "elders" as participants have described. Eragon, Zoyi, and Su emphasized a great respect for the older American students, but admitted to feeling "intimidated" and afraid to reach out. When probed to further explain their hesitancy, Su shared feelings of being "not as apt" and worried that her lack of life and career experience would be exposed. Eragon emphasized his desire to just "learn from them", but that directly engaging with them was not an option because "I would have been embarrassed. I mean, I'm a kid compared to them. What do I know?" The American perception of equality despite age may prove to be a cultural variance that presents a sense of discomfort within Indian participants of befriending the American non-traditional student.

Participants consistently pondered is the American sense of work-life balance exists due to the lack of rigor in academic schedules. Universities within the United States require three graduate courses to be considered a full-time student. However, in

India, the course load would be closer to seven and would span the five-day week like a full-time job: "We have classes five days straight. And not like some time in a day, but from morning until mid-afternoon straight each day. There are no night classes, like here." For this reason, Zoyi feels the American "education system is a good way, because you are not burdened with so many things to learn in the same semester. There's more time to actually learn material and later remember it." The schedule in the United States is less rigorous and provides an opportunity for social functions, for working out, for raising families, for holding full-time jobs, and for independent, deeper learning.

An online learning platform further exemplified this sense of American independence and work-life balance for the Indian participants, none of whom had ever participated in an online class prior to their current experiences at the time of interviews. Participants noted that online courses, by design, requires self-motivation and independent learning from students. Because Indian students have a great deal of motivation to learn and excel, many participants enjoyed online learning "because a person can be self-motivated, a person can educate himself." This form of learning "is the best way of education, rather than someone telling what's already in the textbook." Chinnu posited that "if a person is really talented, has much enthusiasm, has self-motivation, he can do anything, and an online class is the best way to make him feel better about a course rather than some guy saying something." Akshay shared Chinnu's perceptions: "I prefer to study alone, and in an online class, I can do that. I can learn and skip ahead lessons if I'm curious. It's kinda like liberating learning – to be self-paced and go at my speed." Not that Indian students did not study alone in India, but they did not have a classroom environment similar to a United States-based online course. As

discussed prior in research question one, Indian students were guided closely by their teachers. An online class presented a new, American way of learning that required self-guided exploration and understanding.

Even discussion boards were seen as an example of the American independent style of learning. Seen as a positive feature by most participants (except Chinnu who dislikes written communication forms), some participants felt discussion boards provided rich conversations, especially since "there were students from multiple countries, not just one, so the ideas were expanded and it's very, very good, I think" (Paul). Eragon utilized discussion boards as an extension of the classroom lectures:

> I think that there are more online students, so everyone's ideas are different, so you can get more help outside of lecture. Lecture time is limited, so talking with classmates is important. In online classes, there are more students, so I had lots more interactions with others.

Yet, participants noted that discussion boards were only beneficial to students who adopted an independent and intrinsic desire to learn from their peers. For some courses, it was not a requirement and participants had to discipline themselves to read responses despite a strong lack of desire to do so.

The advanced technology and resulting flexibility present in online courses greatly benefited the participants who were self-motivated and independent learners. Uthara enjoyed being able to run Google searches during the lesson and whenever questions arose in her mind, while Paul appreciated being able to watch online videos and tutorials from the class whenever` and however many times he desired. Shreya, too, found the flexibility of online courses to be beneficial: "I had to miss a lecture once and I

was able to go back and watch the archived video from home. I did not miss that class, I just made it up when I could. It's so flexible. I really like that." Eragon believes online classes provided him the opportunity to "learn more in comparison to lecture classes." Face-to-face lectures do not proffer students video recordings of class sessions. For Eragon, these videos were invaluable: "In online classes, the videos and tutorials are already online, so I could go and watch them anytime and you can go back, go forward, and when you get confused, you can just go back and review what the professor was saying." He utilized this feature a great deal and perceived this to be a route to deeper learning. Similarly, Paul returns to the videos for review material every week. Prior to reaching out to faculty members with questions, he attempts to answer them himself by delving into the video archives and "re-watching it time and time again."

Not one of the twelve participants of this study had taken an online course prior to the semester in which they were interviewed. Indian students reporting struggling to the new environment and learning expectations initially, but, overtime they each found transitioning into an online setting enjoyable and enriching. The ranking and percentage system in which they were socialized has generated a population of students are self-motivated and determined to excel. The flexibility and use of technology as a tool for more in-depth learning provided them with an educational platform that was beneficial and allowed for their intellectual growth. While interaction between peers was lower than what they would have experienced in a face-to-face, participants felt that overall the learning was rich, and they were integrated into their courses smoothly.

Indian participants respected the sense of American independent and work-life balance they discovered in United States-based online courses. The privacy, independent

learning, time management, scheduling, technology, and flexibility found within the American culture of learning all attribute to work-life balance the participants found appealing within the educational system. Yet, even within these spaces where one learns at their own pace, within the comforts of their own environments, and where they could blend learning and a personal life, Indian students felt disconnected in some ways, while one, Chinnu, felt rejected.

Racism in American education. Race played a large role in Chinnu's perception. Chinnu lamented his infrequent interaction with American peers and admitted that "I don't know why, but it's like they see Indians as like inferior or something. I don't know why they don't talk. Yeah, I'm having a problem with that." When asked if he possessed feelings of isolation, he affirmed that he was. When asked from whom he feels isolated he responded:

> Everyone. I haven't talked to many professors, so I can't say about the professor, but the students why, I don't know because if you go into statistics of Americans and Indians in the American industry, anywhere you go, you see the Indians excel. I don't know why they see us as inferior because we lead them in computers, we lead them in so many different aspects of life, but just because of the color, or maybe I think they say that the racism is gone in America, I believe it's not all true. It's the same. I think the world's most racist country even in the universe is America. They said blacks and whites, but they treat all the others like they have racism in caste country; color is everything. Like just because you have whiter skin doesn't mean that you superior to us. I don't think

so.

In an attempt to delve deeper into Chinnu's sense of isolation, he was asked to share experiences that led him to the conclusion that racism is why he is unable to connect with American peers. He relayed how "they don't come to us, so let's go and talk to them. I have tried talking to people, and some are good, some are really good, but some think that all Indians are from Planet of the Apes or something." He continued on to share that while classism exists in India through the caste law, everyone is "brown" and that to determine what caste an individual is from, you must know their surname or through researching their family line. Thus, friendships can be established fairly quickly before the caste system impacts the potentiality of connection. Here, skin color is an immediate indicator that he feels disrupts the ability to connect.

In contrast to Chinnu's perspectives on racism, Akshay, the only other participant to bring up the topic, discussed the openness of American college students. He was advised to maintain an open mind in his coursework and found that American students "are people also. It's only our colors that are different, that's it." He stated that he did not mean that comment in a racist way, but that he wanted to emphasize that Indians must "just stay open. You can make friends. There's nothing like that, like racism. Sure, at some places it exists, but that hasn't been my experience. People are very open and that's what I love. People are open." He continues to express encouragement for possessing an open mind:

> To be honest, I never felt any racist-like comment or whatever towards
> me. You know, they made me feel like, okay, affirmed. It's only that you
> have to approach first, and they won't unless you approach. It takes time

to open up. They take a little bit of time, but when they open trust me,

they can be the bestest of your friend. They can take a bullet for you.

Trust me, that's why I'm telling you.

Akshay and Chinnu are on polar opposites in their experiences with race. Akshay opted to push through the initial barrier to experience a breakthrough and connect with his American peers; adversely, Chinnu was disappointed that he must initiate the conversation and massage a relationship and ultimately decided to isolate himself.

Isolation and Fakeness. One participant was passionate in his claims that there is no difference between the American and Indian cultures of education. For Chinnu, the core of both India and the United States is the same: fake. Life in India was fraught with disappointment. He admits that he did not pursue an American degree for the studies and knowledge; rather, he did so because he wanted to change his life. He wanted to see the world differently. He shared his disappointment that "there is not much different. It's so fake." Chinnu struggled with the idea that every country's people "think that whatever they do is correct" and that "Americans are more fake than Indians." When asked whether he believed differences exist within the educational environments, his response was a frustrated refutation: "No, nothing's different. It's the same as in India, just instead of brown people, I see white people. That's the only different I see." He lamented that "no one is really teaching" and that education systems are "all about the money really. They made education as a business which I hate to say." Chinnu continued to emphasize that no difference existed between the two countries, but it became clear that it was not the countries that were the same, but Chinnu's transference of culture from one to the other.

Unlike his participant peers, Chinnu did not connect with faculty members in the United States because "I have a problem I got from my India about speaking in class. I sometimes get very nervous. I can't ask questions. I am very afraid of asking sometimes." He worried how he would be perceived by his professors and peers if he asked questions, just like he did in India, so he refrained from asking and ultimately from connecting. This characteristic remained the same in both educational experiences due to Chinnu's "problem" that he developed in India. He opted not explore the potential of these relationships by holding onto his own cultural patterns.

Chinnu seemed frustrated and angry for each phase of this research study. At the final interview, he was asked to return to this idea that education systems in the United States and India are the same. He still held tightly to his assertion and stated that the situation had only gotten worse. Through the discussion, Chinnu realized that his frustration stemmed from a strong sense of isolation. He had not encountered a friendship or relationship that would catapult him forward. He longed for this. He had hoped for this before pursuing an American degree. He felt lost in a sea of people, an abyss of ideas. The penultimate realization he had was that he felt alone. Phase one of his isolation was within his online courses, and he was not alone in this assertion.

Little interaction in online. Multiple participants reported having little interaction in their online courses. Shreya noted that in "some classes, the professors encourage interaction. They encourage involvement from the students, but still, not much happens." When asked whether the lack of interaction impacts her learning, she relayed that it did "not affect my learning, but I guess the experience would have been better with more interaction." Some Indian participants, like Zoyi, utilized the chat

features on the WebEx platform and relied on classroom discussion to hear from other students. The interaction also occurred during group projects.

One participant purposefully opted not to connect with peers due to his clear disdain for "texting" and "typing an email." Chinnu, a participant who has shared multiple examples of his inability to connect with American professors and peers, emphasized that despite the discussions that occur within the course, he was skeptical about what he really knew about anyone in the class. He would rather speak on the phone because it is "more real than texting in the mobile. Because I think texting is so fake because they can't write their heart out." He possesses a mistrust of others and emphasizes:

> If a person comes face-to-face and likes to talk, then I think he may fake things for like a half hour or an hour. No one is that good of an actor to fake it for a month or two months. At some point, his character will be broken down. So, coming face-to-face is more real and natural, and you can learn more than just texting or typing an email. That's why I never text. I hate texting.

His personal preferences for connecting catalyzes his desire not to connect. He confirmed that he purposefully remains disconnected from his online classes and peers because there is no real way to create a meaningful connection to other students via online discussions. In this scenario, it seems typing is in itself a language barrier that hinders one's ability to fully express and connect with others.

Interesting, some participants reported a high number of Indian students within their online courses, but later shared this did not equate to a level of interaction they

desired. Understandably, the Indian students naturally gravitated to one another and developed friendships amongst themselves. Culturally, they felt comfortable in their courses because they "have the opportunity to speak in our mother language" and "continue to interact with Indian students." They also gravitated towards other international students within the class. This created a comfortable environment for the participants, but participants noted that there "is little interaction with other American students in the courses." Zoyi, Shreya, Uthara, Eragon, Niki, Paul, and Su all reported that they interacted with Indians first, international students second, and Americans third. Ethnic silos within the classroom were experienced by all the participants in their online courses. What broke the barrier and connected Indian students with American students were group project assignments. Group projects forced Indian and American students to interact and work together. In this setting, friendships developed, even if only professional ones. While one would think this would foster a sense of interaction and fulfillment, participants remained firm on the notion of little interaction in their online courses.

      Lack of cultural differences in online class. All twelve participants perceived their online classes to be devoid of any feelings and/or experiences of cultural differences. Interestingly, despite juxtaposing a large number of variations between the Indian culture of learning and American culture of learning, within the course itself, students could not perceive their own perceptions about the differences. At the conclusion of the first semi-structured interview, after sharing their personal histories with education, their perceptions about American education, and the differences between the two, the participants felt that no cultural differences were present in their courses.

Paul would acknowledge examples of cultural differences, but then conclude: "I don't see a cultural difference there." This pattern occurred with each participant; a clear discussion of how the two socialized cultures of learning are different, with a final statement that cultural differences did not exist in their courses.

Yet, there seems to be, per their responses to research question one and two, a number of cultural variations; there are a number of possibilities to consider as to why this was a unanimous observation by participants: (1) there are genuinely more similarities than differences; (2) Indian participants have become enculturated into the American system, so much so that they do not recognize the differences as such (perhaps an online student in their first semester who remains in their country of origin would perceive of these differences more profoundly); (3) perhaps the culture of online is a mélange culture, on that has hybridized elements of multiple cultures of learning such that to Indian students it feels familiar; (4) Indian students reproduce their own culture of learning in the online world, given their homophily; (5) given the different "levels" of cultures of learning, respondents may have focused on similarities at a very personal level and not thought about the differences at the institutional level; (6) culture is elusive in that while participants could pinpoint direct differences, they could not see how those differences compile to reflect stark variations between the two cultures of learning.

Figure 4.2

Tree Diagram of Indian Participants' Perceived American Culture of Learning

Indian Participants' Perceived American Culture of Learning

American Students

Deep Divers

Varying Motivation

Independent/
Work-Life
Balance

Racism

Isolation
&
Fakeness

American Pedagogy

Positive
Relationship
with Faculty

Memorization vs.
Practical
Application

American Online Classes

Little Interaction

Lack of Culture
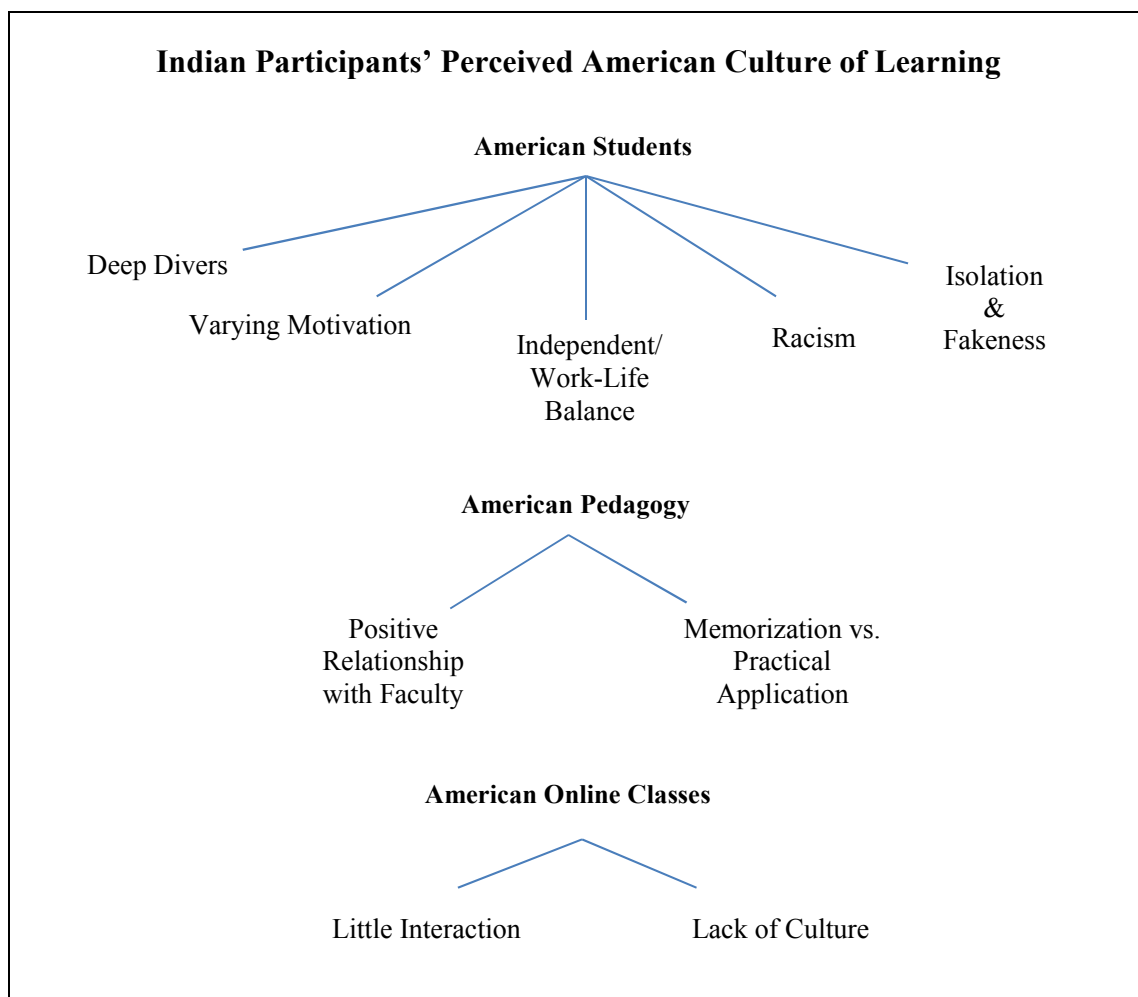
Research Question #3

The third research question guiding this study is: *What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?* The study explored this question in focus groups, dividing participants in half for two sessions. Participants received the following handouts based on Berry's Acculturation Strategies:

Figure 4.3

Visual Representation of Berry's (1997, 2008) Strategies of Ethnocultural Groups

THE SELF

INTEGRATION When there is an interest in both maintaining one's Indian culture and engaging in interaction with American culture	**ASSIMILATION** When one does not wish to maintain Indian cultural heritage and seeks interaction with American culture instead
SEPARATION When one places a value on holding onto his/her Indian culture and avoids interaction with American culture	**MARGINALIZATION** When there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relationships with those in American culture

Figure 4.4

Visual Representation of Berry's (1997, 2008) Strategies of Larger Society

SOCIETY

MULTICULTURALISM Cultural diversity is a feature of the society as a whole, including all ethnocultural groups	**MELTING POT** Assimilation sought by non-dominant group
SEGREGATION Dominant culture forces you to separate and not intermingle	**EXCLUSION** Marginalized by the dominant group

During the guided focus group discussion, participants received sticky-notes of two different colors to place in the boxes according to their own experiences and perceptions during the guided focus group discussion. The exploration of acculturation strategies occurred in four phases: self, society, online self, and online social environment. The following analysis illustrates their perceptions about acculturation strategies within themselves, American society, themselves within an online course, and the social environment of a United States-based online course.

The self and integration. First, participants were asked to contemplate their personal approach to acculturation. All twelve participants reported their individual belief, actions, and desire for integration. While acknowledging the "strong Indian culture within us", each participant detailed their motives for engaging in, learning about, and developing an understanding of American culture. The overall macro perception was similar in that "all cultures hold equal value. All are unique in their own way." This fundamental belief was shared by the other participants, one of whom felt it important to highlight that integration does not mean rejection of one's own culture: "I feel as my culture is important to me, I need to integrate with other cultures and doing that doesn't necessarily mean I am insulting or neglecting my own culture."

For one participant, delving into culture is a must-do in order to ensure social survival in a new environment: "you will get along with people only when you know about their culture. And if you don't you will be separated and isolated and there will be a lot of opportunities which you will be missing out on." Showing interest in American culture ensures social interaction, for which the consequences of not doing so could be dire. For another, understanding another culture "makes one stronger. When I

communicate with them [Americans] there's a difference, definitely. And the best thing is, noticing those differences in opinion and how our minds think." In the process of seeking to understand those differences, so long as it is a mutual investigation, one participant found that "it actually improves bonds, at least in my experience." One's social experience while embedded within a new culture relies on one's ability to interact meaningfully with those from the variant culture. By doing so, participants avoided social isolationism.

Integration can provide an opportunity for individuals to pick and choose components of a new culture to adopt into their own lifestyle. One participant described himself as "a bit selfish because I just take the pros from both sides, mix it up, and use it for my benefit. That's it." His perspective holds that "I can't say that this culture is good or that one is bad. They have their own, I would say, uniqueness. So why not just take the best of them, learn from them, and make our own use of them?" The ability to do these kinds of cultural mashups is "the final goal of mankind, to make the best use of what you have right now." Interactions with differing cultures is a way of progressing one's self and one's understanding of the world. He continued to explain his motives for integration: "Right now, I have American culture. I don't forget my Indian culture. But I am grateful that this university, this country has accepted me. So, there is no harm in learning their culture and taking the best part of it." Being accepted into a new culture proved a humbling experience for this participant; the acceptance gives him the courage to explore and reciprocate his acceptance of American culture into his developing sense of cultural identity.

Due to the diversity of America, one participant emphasized that integration does

not include simply American culture. Integration includes learning about numerous cultures since it is "not just pure American culture. So, yeah, you have a good opportunity to learn about all kinds of cultures." This is a cultural feature that varies greatly from the social fabric of India. Thus, a majority of participants agreed that the notion of American culture includes a vast array of cultures within their current educational experiences. In contrast, one participant emphasized the presence of subcultures in all cultures around the world. To her, the complexity of culture predicates our consistent integration of cultural variances simultaneously and all the time, even while existing in one's own native country. Integration is an organic process that "just happens" because "we are all raised doing it."

Participants employ varied acculturation strategies. Participants were next asked to contemplate how they experience American society on a broader level. Indian students were encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences while engaging with Americans both within and external to a college campus.

American society as a melting pot. A majority of the participants identified American society as a melting pot based on their personal experiences. One articulated this aspect of acculturation:

> I think even though American culture and society accepts and receives all cultures around the world, there's still a dominance by the locals here. Like we have to bend to their rules and regulations, and how they work in their society in the norms, culture over here. So, I think it's very normal for every culture if they go to another place - like they say, be Roman when in Rome.

This reality was not perceived as a negative aspect, but just a realistic one. Participants agreed that if one were to navigate "professional and personal relations with others, we need to act as them." Thus, it is not a form of coercive assimilation, rather, it is a personal choice. A participant clarified that assimilation is "not forced, well, I forced myself to choose. I mean, I needed to come out of my comfort zone of my culture and go to others to build relations." The reality for Indian students, though, is that American students will not approach them, rather, "we had to go and seek them. In our country, if a new person comes in a locality, the people there go to them and have dinner with them and all, but here it's opposite, at least in my experience." A wall of separation exists between Americans and others; it is not unsurmountable, but it exists. Another participant described it: "America's idea is that even though you are in the society, you can't say that they widely accept you. For them to accept you, you'll have to be in a majority of something like that." Thus, in order to bridge the two divides, the Indian students felt they needed to take the first steps to reach out while assimilating to the culture in which they found themselves.

American society and multiculturalism. Three participants identified multiculturalism to represent their perceptions of culture in the United States. However, as they discussed their reasonings, two participants added a sticky note to exclusion. Multiculturalism was primarily selected due simply to the amount of diversity within the country. From the big picture view, America is just diverse. However, one highlighted that she selected multiculturalism solely because of her limited experiences on a college campus where global friendship dinners take place and she has multiple opportunities to meet other international students. In these spaces, participants found that members of the

academic community are "ready to accept what culture you are from. They like to try new foods and ask questions about the people, so, yea, I guess its multicultural." Interestingly, the culture of college campuses may be different than American society as a whole, particularly on questions of multiculturalism and acculturation. None of the participants identifying this acculturation strategy could apply it to the nation as a whole and acknowledged their perspective to exist within the context of their time on campus. Ironically, acculturation on a college campus may isolate students from acculturation in the larger society as a whole.

American society and exclusion. Two participants identified exclusion as representative of their experience within American society. One emphasized that while many diverse cultural groups exist within the American social fabric, Americans are very judgmental about with whom engage. This participant has been accepted within social groups, has felt welcomed and accepted, has shared meals, shared beers, gone hiking, and even spent time in each other's houses. Despite all of this, he noticed that this is not the case for all people who are "others." He notes, "We can mingle very easily but at times, if they're not sure of a person, they won't even hang out with them. In fact, they just outright ignore them." The attitudes of Americans led this participant to believe that at large, American society is exclusionary.

Another indicator of exclusion within the United States resulted from the juxtaposition about how Indians and Americans maintain relationships. For Indians, on the day-to-day, relationships take precedence. Thus, even if an assignment is due, an Indian will "never ask you to leave" and will "continue working with you or talking with you" because "that is how we maintain our relationships." As a society, Indians are very

giving of their time and efforts toward evolving and deepening interpersonal relationships. In contrast, American culture is more self-serving. Students will pull out their calendars and block off time to connect, they will cancel plans at the last second and sometimes without notifying others at all, and they will provide numerous reasons as to why they cannot connect in the first place. Relationships with others, at least from the perspective of these participants, is not a hallmark of American social culture.

The final perspective on exclusion comes from perspectives of the nation as a whole. One participant described the difference within America depending on education levels and the how much a person has been exposed to other cultures. For her, "within the nation as a whole, are pockets. Some really exclude others and do it openly and without care. Of course, there are some spaces that are different." She emphasizes that her experience on the university campus is more multicultural, but outside is a different experience. She exists with a strong precaution to not offend Americans; this need to ponder her every word sometimes results in her decision to just remain by herself.

Acculturation strategies change. Participants highlighted how acculturation strategies vary depending on where in the United States they found themselves. One shared an experience while in Miami where he felt he was in "an entirely different country. Everyone was speaking Spanish and I was yelled at for not being able to order my food in Spanish." However, while this participant was in New York, he was accepted, and people showed great interest in his experiences as an Indian in the United States. The point is that at times he experiences exclusion and at others multiculturalism, while at the university, he aligns with melting pot. For this reason, a few participants emphasized how they did not feel comfortable picking only one strategy. These

strategies flow depending on "the individual and the place." Their discomfort of selecting only one strategy suggests the participants' possible "meta-acculturation", or the learning of the cultures of acculturation, as we discussed their experiences and strategies.

Based on the participants discomfort with selecting one of Berry's (1997, 2008) strategies, they were asked to align their experience with the idea of alternation, where a person can move back and forth between his/her own culture and the host's culture depending on the situation. This idea was true "up to a certain extent." Each participant agreed that due to Indian culture, courtesy was a primary component of their interactions with Americans. Even in scenarios where "I would not be okay with something on the inside, just to be curious I would be like, yeah sure. I am a man pleaser though. I think all Indians are." Others noted the same experience: "I would feel that I would be fake but just to put up with it, or just to be good and nice to them", and "so just because of that obligation I try to be a bit more nice than what people would show to me." The prevailing need to be kind and courteous to others preceded their individual needs and perceptions while interacting with American peers. Overall, Indian participants expressed a propensity to accommodate others and employ whatever acculturation strategy works contextually all while retaining their Indian culture internally.

The self in an online environment. When contemplating the relationship between the self and the environment of an online class, one participant articulated that "this one's a little more difficult, isn't it, to kind of situate." Many participants placed sticky notes in two quadrants versus one. The fluidity of their acculturation strategies results from their own fluidity determined by the course: "what the class required, I

would behave that way." The nature of the course and the professor's expectations determined how the student culturally navigated the class. This is a key interacting variable of this study because it suggests that, knowingly or not, individual professors strongly condition the acculturation approach of the students. Due to the participants' realization of this factor, the responses vacillated between integration, separation, marginalization, and for some non-existent.

Integration. Two participants identified integration as an acculturation strategy and highlighted how "in certain classes, it would be necessary to interact and try to work with others." While all twelve participants held a desire to interact with their classmates, the reality was that few opportunities arose in an online course. Therefore, integration was not strongly sensed in their online course experiences.

Separation. One participant purposefully opted to separate himself from his peers within an online class. His decision was due to a personal learning preference of working alone. He emphasized that oftentimes he would:

> shut myself down, just with the computer, and nothing else. I prefer that way in a few classes, most classes, actually, and just a few where it was pushed on me, I did notice that integrating with other people would help me. It also broadened my horizon in that particular post.

Despite his recognition of a deeper understanding when he was forced interact, he enjoys online courses because he could work more individually and more in line with his own learning style.

Marginalization. Participants identified marginalization as the overall acculturation strategy experienced in their online classes. Mainly because there "was

really no opportunity in the way the class was created to actually have a cultural interaction." The course design did not incorporate any "interactions on a personal level or whatever. They were more based on what is needed for the class itself. Even though we interact, everything is just based on the subject." That lack of personal connections removed a sense of cultural interaction from this participant's experience. Similarly, another participant highlighted that even in situations where team projects were assigned, the interactions were conducted on Google Hangout or over the phone. These collaborative connections were "strictly business" and the conversations did not present any form of cultural exchange. Finally, some courses were "just purely class. You would just log in, attend class, and then log off. So, the chances of interacting with your classmates are very limited."

A sense of marginalization prevailed in how Americans responded to the participants' attempts to connect, as well. One participant shared of an online discussion group session where American students were present:

> It was always like, okay, we have to study this, we need to discuss that, and so and so. And then, we try to socialize with them, but they were not interested. Like when I tried to share ideas about Indian food, they were like, no, we don't like those kind of things. It's not that they cannot tolerate difference, I think, but they don't seem interested in things they aren't used to. It's like they have this unseen wall around them. I observed it. They have respect, but they don't really let anyone inside their arena.

While course design prohibits social interaction, their experiences also show a barrier

between themselves and their American peers. These two elements were primary in their overall sense of marginalization in their courses.

Non-existent. Some participants felt none of the acculturation strategies expressed what their experience was, which was completely impersonal and non-interactive. They could not place their sticky notes on integration because they perceived no American culture present in the class. They could not place their sticky notes on assimilation because they all wanted to maintain their Indian culture; they could not place their sticky notes on separation because they wanted to interact with American culture; they could not place their sticky notes on marginalization because it was not that they possessed little interest in either their Indian culture or their American culture, but that there was zero opportunity to do so. Thus, these four participants placed their sticky notes on the outside of the box. Their online courses were "impersonal" and a space where "nothing special happened in it." These courses were asynchronous and required students to simply do the work and submit assignments. These students felt "completely separated from everyone else." Even group projects were conducted through one email where parts were divided. In the end, one student collected all the parts, made it a whole, and submitted it to the professor. These asynchronous courses had "no culture and no interaction at all."

Acculturation in teaching and learning. Lastly, participants were asked to identify how the American educational system teaches and expects them to learn. The acculturation strategy selected was the melting pot due to their need to assimilate to and produce knowledge in accordance to American modes of learning.

Melting pot. Participants stressed the melting pot as the dominant acculturation

strategy they experienced in United States coursework. The expectation of professors for participants to "write research papers in a professional way" posed acculturation stress for all the participants. Research papers, citations, and plagiarism are not components within the Indian culture of learning; the participants identified these components as a hallmark for assimilation sought by the dominant group. Another example focuses on the level of technology available to American students. Students were expected to master software that replaced having to conduct mathematical equations manually like they had learned in India. A couple of participants struggled with the software and wanted to write out the equations themselves, but the professor would not allow it. The software needed to be mastered. Oftentimes, despite the learning curve, professors would "expect you to do something on your own and then they'd say they are here to guide us, not to teach us. They, in fact, say that. They are open to different cultures, but we still need to do things as they want it done. Period." Participants did not feel this was necessarily a negative aspect of American higher education, but just the reality of it.

The Indian participants perceived the melting pot as a matter of necessity by the Indian participants. The expectations of professors for Indian students to assimilate to the American culture of learning was something to be expected:

> I don't necessarily see that as something wrong that they did. I mean, when it's an education system, it has to be standardized. We cannot expect them to teach us in a different way, and then our American classmates in a different way from that. I guess when we chose to earn an American degree, we should've expected a different system. So, we are not forced to follow the American system, but I guess that's part of what

we have to expect. I don't think they can help it.

Another participant pushed back on the idea of whether assimilating to American culture within the classroom is forced or not:

> Sure, it was our choice, but if something is the way it is, isn't it in a way being forced? I guess if you feel like your choice includes not taking any more classes and dropping out of your program, but I mean, who wants to give up? We came here with an idea of what it would be like, we have had to adapt to this system. I don't know where I stand. It was a choice to study in this system, but we are forced to assimilate, ya know? I am forced to follow the American culture, but I guess I just see that as something that I have to do.

The participants discussed this point at length, vacillating between whether assimilation is a choice or forced. In the end, they decided it was both. Ultimately, it is a choice to pursue an American degree, and each person has the right to decide whether or not they want to assimilate into the system. The forced aspect comes from knowing that if they want to succeed, if they want to compete with people for jobs in America, then they must not only learn the culture, but also excel on all fronts. Thus, they choose to adapt, to learn, to assimilate, and dream of the future.

Three specific findings emerged from participant perspectives concerning strategies employed to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context. First, each participant articulated an appetency for integration as an ideal way to interact with American culture and education system. This desire was

actualized in a bifurcated experience where participants experienced American systems as a melting pot where in order to succeed, assimilation is a must. Notably, participants highlighted college campus experiences as differing from the broader culture of society in which they reside. Whereas higher education institutions emphasize a multicultural strategy, American society emphasizes a melting pot assimilationist strategy.

Secondly, due to the participants' existence within both American and Indian cultures simultaneously, no one personal strategy of acculturation will suffice. Ironically, the Indian students' embrace of multiculturalism may complicate his or her acculturation within the broader society. Therefore, students must have strategies that flow with the context of place and social setting. There is, in a sense, a culture of acculturation that specifies students possess a repertoire of acculturation strategies to employ dependent on the situation.

Finally, professors strongly condition the students' perception of whether a cyberculture of learning exists. When professors discourage students' inherited culture of learning (i.e.- when a professor insisted that students use software rather than manually calculate a solution as they would do in their home culture of learning) the students perceive classroom culture as indistinct from the broader culture of learning. Likewise, students whose professors encourage or require online peer-to-peer interaction are more likely to perceive a distinct cyberculture. These three findings bridge to research question four which examines the production or failure to produce cybercultures.

Figure 4.5

Participants' Use of Acculturation Strategies
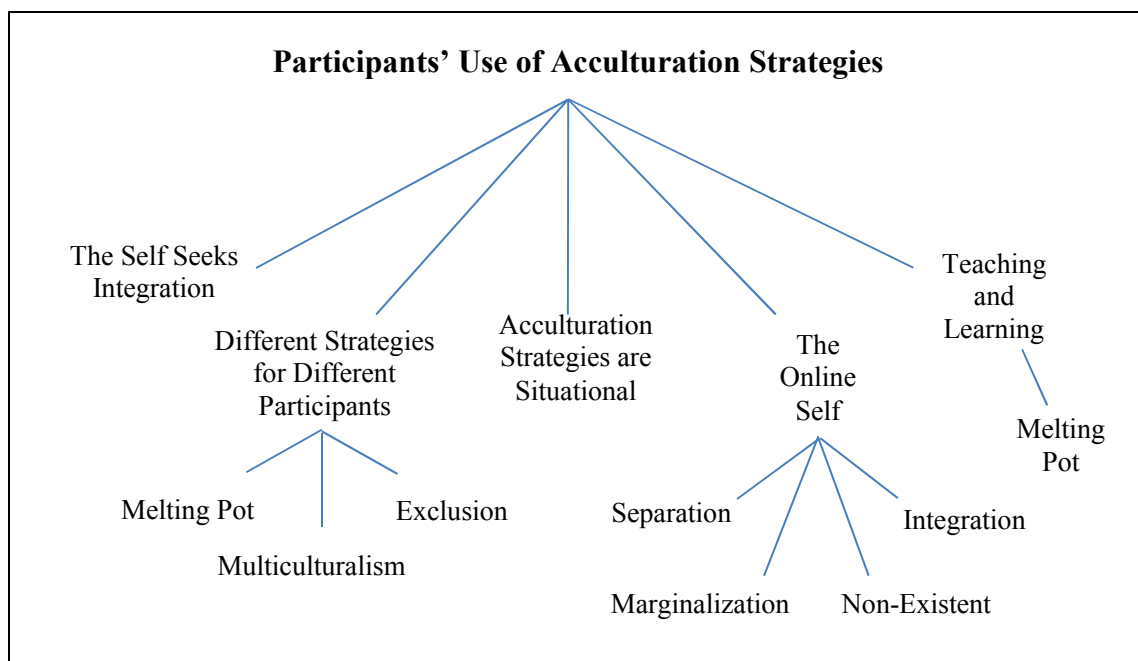
Research Question #4

The fourth and final research question guiding this study is: *How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?* Participants were led into the discussion of cyberculture by sharing their own definitions of culture, their perspectives of whether or not culture existed in their synchronous and asynchronous online courses, and finally whether or not a distinctive cyberculture was experienced within each course. The following analysis addresses the participants' beliefs of social interaction as the key component to the presence of culture, the role of both professors and students in the generation of culture, and whether a cyberculture was present in their online experience.

Culture is ever-present. Multiple participants highlighted the ever-presence of culture: "Culture exists everywhere"; "My Indian culture does not just leave because I

left India. It's always in me"; "Sure, I study American courses, but I am Indian no matter what." At some point throughout the interviews, all twelve participants emphasized that culture is embedded socially from your family and country of birth, and that it is an aspect of existence that we carry with us until death. Thus, as Kedar points out: "Culture exists everywhere, but it's a matter of degree on how it plays out." Similarly, Zoyi expressed culture as:

> Something that comes with your background and your surroundings. It's how you behave, talk, interact with a person. What customs you follow and is influenced by your parents, by your friends, by your neighborhood, and then surroundings and everything. It doesn't have to be just a language or a religion, it's in everything. It's everywhere.

This idea of culture prevails in participant experiences concerning their online courses. The question is not then whether or not culture is present. The question is: to what degree is it present?

Essentially, being a human being is in and of itself an embodiment of culture; philosophically then, even if an individual were on a deserted island by herself/himself, one could argue the presence of culture. Even at the most basic level, culture exists in online courses simply because human beings are interacting with something that was constructed by other human beings. Foundationally, all educational constructs are a reflection of the culture of its maker, and the consumer of the educational system approaches it from his/her socialized culture of learning. So, what enriches the presence of culture from simply present to a deeper hue?

Culture dependent on levels of interaction. One common thread through

participant perspectives was the need for peer-to-peer and peer-to-faculty interactions to facilitate culture in an online course. While all participants noted culture as a socialized learning process where their belief systems are shaped by their social upbringing, in order to gain a sense of culture in any educational space, interaction is a requirement. Interaction is vital to Kedar because "you can talk with people, you can understand what they are thinking and where they are coming from. This is where I feel cultural exchanges happen." Kitty concurs and emphasizes that in order to gauge culture in a classroom there needs to be social interaction: "Some kind of exchange between people has to happen. Exchange between the ideas versus just solely assignment-based with lecture videos." Similarly, Rocklee articulated how culture is a byproduct of human beings interacting with one another and that without it "no culture is there because I don't even know who was in that class with me. We didn't connect." Interaction prevailed as the necessary pre-requisite for the generation of culture within online courses.

Paul, who had participated in both hybrid synchronous courses and asynchronous courses felt that culture exists "mostly when it's most interactive." In his experience, "hybrid classes are more interactive than the straight-up online classes." Online classes are mostly "silent" and consist primarily of teaching by the professor and "if there are any insights, it's just put in the chat." The chat was devoid of conversation and was simply a space for students to "fill in what you feel or what your inputs are on the topic. So, there's no conversation running. No one's commenting on your comment, so it's one sided. That's not really interaction, at least that's how I see it." Su concurs that interaction is a prerequisite for culture in an online course "I don't think culture exists in my classes. It's hard to correlate culture in my classes because we barely know each

other, we barely know our classmates. And we never interact." When asked to delve

deeper into what culture means to her, Su shared:

> Culture is context dependent. There are many shapes of cultures, but
>
> coming to the class, I think culture is dependent on how well we can see
>
> how others behave, think, talk, how we interact together. I think we are
>
> missing that in my classes. We don't have much culture sharing.

All twelve participants correlated the presence of culture within their online courses to

the level of interaction present.

Culture determined by professor. Participants believe professors in United

States-based online courses determine to what degree culture is experienced within the

course. Participants highlighted their participation within an American education system

that is reinforced by professors. Cultural exchanges are happening in an online

educational environment because "professors mostly want you to learn things in a

different way, in the American way, versus my conventional Indian way." As students

acculturate to the learning environment, they hold onto their Indian ways of approaching

learning.   Likewise, Niki asserts that "you will have a taste of American culture

everywhere in your academics", so culture is always present in any course. The

American culture of learning can be "a little dominating because I could see it from my

perspective, but couldn't implement it how I wanted to, how I am familiar with which is

the numerical way, because my professor wasn't familiar with it that way." Indian

students reported having to alter their expressions of knowledge by learning a new

system, often moving from handwritten calculations to the use of a particular software

system. Students are expected to assimilate to the American culture of learning within

these online courses.

Participants did note that not all professors are American and that courses vary slightly based on the professor's country of origin. Akshay was concurrently enrolled in three hybrid online courses. One of his professors was Chinese and he could see a difference in the cultural approach to learning in comparison to his American professors. His Chinese professor was more teacher-directed, more technical, and class was solely lecture driven. After lectures, the professor would encourage peer-to-peer discussion of the topic taught that day. In comparison, his American professors were more student-directed, more interactive, and encouraged, and even required, student participation in the class discussions. However, there was little encouragement for peer-to-peer interactions outside of the class discussion. Nonetheless, Akshay perceives all of his courses, no matter where the professor is from, follows the American cultural learning model.

Most importantly, professors provide a structure within the classroom that determines the levels of interactions among students. As participants emphasized social interaction as important to the generation of culture within a class, the professor becomes the decider on whether or not culture will arise at levels beyond the basic structure of the American educational system. Kitty believes the vital role of professors reside in how they "set the guidelines for how interactions are going to take place, for what he or she expects in the classroom, and doesn't expect. So, based on those cultural sets, students will then follow." Similarly, Paul claimed that culture "depends on the professor":

> It's depends on how they are able to integrate the class and work together. Mostly, I would say 99% of the courses had no interaction, unless you are forced to work on a team for a project. Unless that's the case, there's no

interaction. So, for me, that means no culture.

Professors are the architects of these online courses and set the tone that determines to what extent culture will be present.

Culture determined by students. Participants highlighted students as the next critical component to what creates culture within a classroom setting. Kedar aptly likened the role of students to drops of paint:

> Every single student has a different identity. So, it's kind of like the mixing of colors. It depends on how much color you put in. Like suppose the paint is white and you put like three drops of red. The color will be very light, like pale pink. But, if you put in like ten drops of red, it will be a darker shade. So, everything has an individual identity, and if you want a paint a wall with rich color, there needs to be more drops of red.

Essentially, Kedar is highlighting the role of students within an online course. He emphasized that while professors are responsible for setting the tone of the course, proffering guidance, and "getting everyone on the same page" it is the students who bring a sense of richness to the constructs of a class, who determine "if it ends up great." Thus, students play a vital role in whether or not culture emerges faintly or strongly.

Cyberculture. Participants were provided an operating definition of cyberculture and then asked to articulate whether its presence existed within their U.S.-based online courses. Some participants grappled with the idea of cyberculture philosophically, but each came to the conclusion that cybercultures do indeed exist, though not its whole definition.

For some participants, a cyberculture existed in some sense and on a basic level.

Niki perceived cyberculture to exist in her online courses because she experienced a

different sense of culture in each of her classes:

> I would say it does exist. How to put it? With an online class, we have a
>
> group of people signed up for that. So even the discussion boards, we
>
> interact only with those people. But when the class ends, it ends. I mean,
>
> after that, even if I was on another online class, I know this culture would
>
> be totally different because there would be a different set of individuals.
>
> More or less it's always different. There will be some new people. There
>
> will be some people who are no longer there. There will be some people
>
> who will be there throughout your online experience. So, I mean, it's a
>
> mix of old, new, totally different people. I mean, if that class ends, that
>
> interaction ends. When a new class begins, it's a totally different
>
> experience.

For Niki, a cyberculture existed within her online experiences because it was a new and

different experience each time. In this way, the culture was unique and non-replicable.

For other participants, an online course began as an entirely new culture and way of

learning but over time the structure of the courses removed any possibility for a sense of

unique culture for the course. Kedar reported that over time, however, his online courses

became quite similar. The constructs of an online course did not vary greatly between

professors or topic areas. The use of discussion boards, submitting assignments through

BlackBoard, using WebEx for synchronous lectures or to watch videos later, and the

implementation of group projects created a sense of monotony in structure and

experience. When asked if culture varied despite similar foundational pieces, participants

reported that it did, but "very little."

Failure to produce cyberculture. Due to participant beliefs that interaction is a key component of the production of culture within an educational setting, participants had varying perspectives regarding culture in synchronous and asynchronous online courses. All twelve participants have experienced at least one fully online course, and all twelve reported that these courses do not present culture per se. Kitty struggled to put it into words: "In the online module class, it's difficult to gauge the culture because mostly it's assignments given and then assignment received, so you do not interact with others. It's not in the classroom set up." The limitations on interaction are high in this environment, but Kitty believes that discussion boards may provide a small exchange. However, in order to ascertain culture, "you have to really read between the lines based on the responses to see any culture. I guess sometimes it's pretty clearly stated, but I think overall trying to find culture in discussion boards can be a reach." Yet, these discussion boards are often perceived as just another assignment and not perceived as a form of social interaction:

> Very few students would really take it as an interaction. Rarely did we see a debate or something in the discussions either. It hardly ever goes to that level and so it's just an assignment that needs to be completed for course requirements. And even then, some professors don't grade those discussion boards, so nobody is really interested in doing it. If you put grades to it though, it just becomes an assignment, so it's not really something that has stimulated their thought or used as a way to interact with classmates. It just becomes more like an assignment again so it's

difficult to get that interaction we're expecting.

The need for interaction in order to generate culture is what prohibits Kitty from believing that cyberculture existed within her online courses.

Similarly, Rocklee believed cyberculture was non-existent within his online courses. For him, "everything feels the same" so no unique culture was created. The environment was the same: "I just log on, attend class, listen, take notes, submit assignment, log off." The process for all of his online courses followed this same format, but the largest concern was the lack of interaction. He could not sense a culture aside from the baseline of knowing he was in an American course with other students from around the world. For Rocklee's experience, there was no difference between a synchronous or asynchronous course. They were all equally devoid of interaction and followed the same processes. There was nothing unique to this environment and no cyberculture was present.

This pattern continued with Paul, who stressed the lack of interaction as the reasoning for the lack of culture in his online classes: "There's no contact, so people don't know what you are, your thoughts, and how you process information that the professor has given you. I think online classes, to answer your question, has no culture. No, I would say no." He emphasizes further that culture is possible, that "there would be but there is no interaction, so that is not coming up." Similarly, Zoyi shared that asynchronous courses that are module based are the least effective course design due to the lack of interaction. For Zoyi, the videos and slides become monotonous and one-sided since, "after some point time, even a movie gets boring, you know?"

Culture matters. Participants were asked whether or not culture even matters in

the learning process. Kitty believes it is "definitely vital because it brings in diverse responses." The diversity of thought in a classroom setting then "affects my responses, affects the way I see content." Naturally, Kitty reflected, "I gravitate towards certain things that goes with my own understanding or world view. So, I'll be ready to accept that and not ready to accept things are aren't aligned with my worldview." She highlights that this propensity within human beings must be challenged though, that it is not "safe" to stay within a particular lens of thought. Thus, for Kitty, culture within the classroom is important and only occurs when there are interactions that allow for the diversity amongst students to emerge: "different students bring different thoughts because different parts of the work align differently with each of us. That's what brings the diversity and debate and discussion into the classroom." Essentially, the open exchange of student perspective is critical because "otherwise, I'll go on thinking the same way throughout my life with no debate or discussion. Nobody's informing me that another aspect can also be true because I will always look at life from my worldview." Diversity that is not merely present in the classroom, but explored through interaction, increases student learning and encourages more open-minded analyses of one's personal beliefs and truths.

Motivation in courses where interaction and cultural exchanges were low did not generate enthusiasm. In online courses where professors did not require students to turn on their videos, students felt anonymous and detached. Rocklee articulated how this disconnect from his peers in the asynchronous online course was "worse than a YouTube video." He shared his disapproval of the low level of interaction:

I mean, one-minute YouTube videos are more engaging than a 15-minute lecture. In many of those classes, I don't feel like much interaction is

> happening. They go through a few slides. If the student asks them a
> question, they will answer. But they don't ask interesting questions to
> each student in any class. All it is is lecture then assignment, so no, I
> don't feel enthusiastic about it.

Students in these types of course designs felt "like strangers" to him, and while he knew that students from all over the world were in the course, he knew nothing else about them. The lack of interaction concerned Rocklee, who later opined that the education he has received via his online classes is not worth the money he has paid for it. In contrast to the rigors of education in India, Rocklee is disappointed with how little he has learned:

> If I did my math in India, I would have classes from morning to evening
> and everything would be directed and very specific. The professor would
> lecture you clearly and then will give a closed book test that is really
> tough. But, American classes is a bit of a breeze. You just go through the
> lectures and submit assignments. People should work hard for
> assignments. I don't feel it's value for money in any way because I pay
> much, much more when compared to India, but I am learning so much
> less.

When asked what would have increased his learning, he responded increased expectations by professors, increased interaction with professors, and increased interaction with peers.

Su experienced a hybrid online course where the professor-mandated student interaction made all the difference in generating culture and ultimately impacting her learning. In this course, four students attended on main campus and 31 students attended

from a distance. Her professor required student to post biographies at the beginning of the semester, include pictures and mandated the use of webcam during class time, required each student to participate every class and made sure WebEx would place them front and center on the screen while the student spoke, and finally she encouraged students to share personal experiences. Su enjoyed the course because of all of the non-content related learning she did:

> It wasn't just classroom culture because classmates share their own experiences. Maybe life experiences or professional experiences, doesn't matter. So, it brings us close to what happens in real American society. And we get to learn how to deal with things and how people speak. And when we look at them, we look at their house, their background through the webcam and suddenly their children sneak into the camera. The connection gives it a lighter feeling. It feels as if we're not in a very strictly confined and very regulated classroom atmosphere.

Su was then asked to describe her learning and take-aways from this course. She shared that her learning was heightened, that she felt more enthusiastic about the material, she did not feel alone in her learning, she felt more open and comfortable, and she felt more connected to her American peers. When asked what made all the difference for her in this class, she replied, "The professor, absolutely." At the foundational level, it is the professor who determines the structure of the course, the levels of interaction students will engage in, and ultimately, the presence of culture in the course. The figure below provides a visual representation of the relationship between culture and interaction among the variables of ever-presence, professor, and students.

Figure 4.6

Culture in Online Courses

Culture in Online Courses

Level Three: Students

Level Two: Professors

Level One: Ever-present

Level of Interaction

Impact on Educational Experience
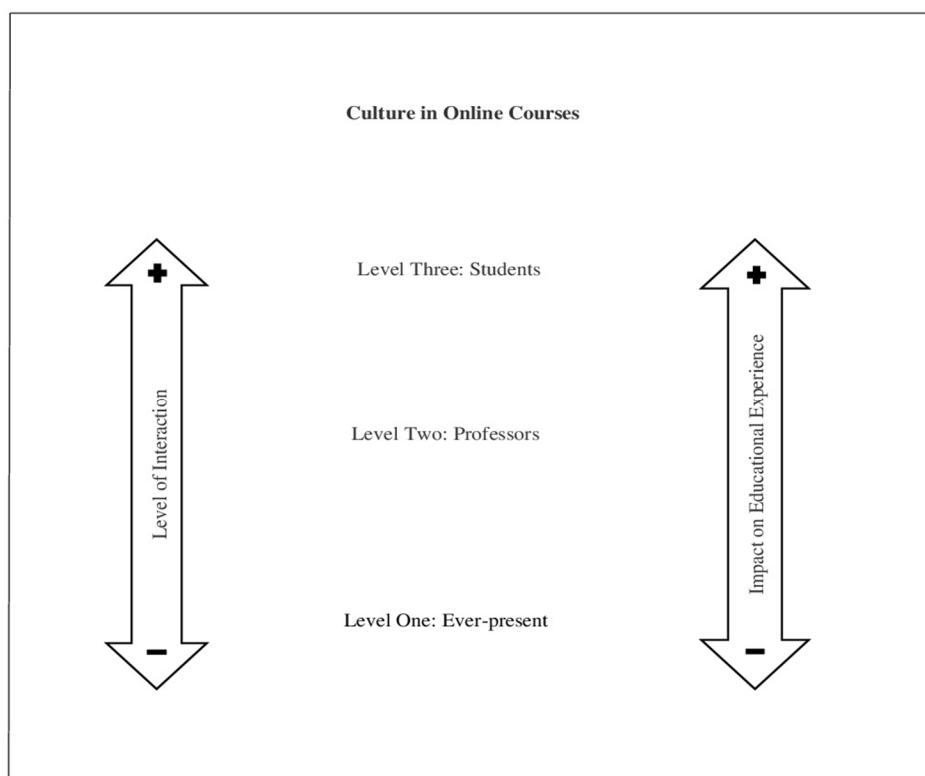
Figure 4.7

Culture and Cyberculture in Online Courses

Culture and Cyberculture in Online Courses

Levels of Culture Depend on the Levels of Interaction

Cyberculture

Culture is Ever-Present

Faculty

Students

Cyberculture on a Basic Level

Cyberculture Non-Existent
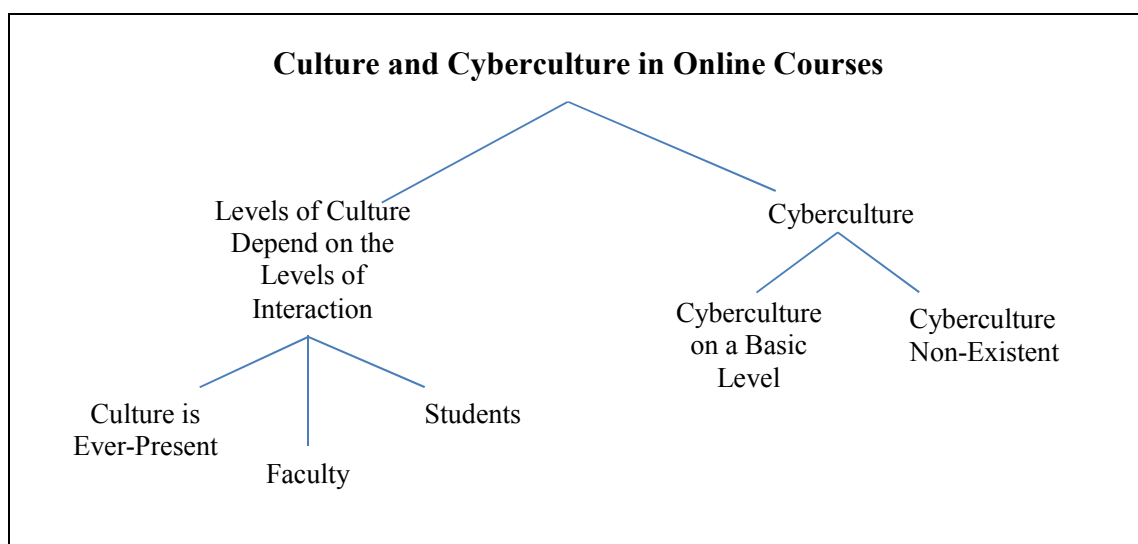
Summary of Findings

India's socialized culture of learning derives from a national perspective that filters into the community and homes of its youthful students. Their educational approach includes a system of exams that limits social mobility after secondary school; this restrictive social mobility paradoxically reflects India's history with the caste system. A valorization of science with less ascribed value to the humanities and arts prevails. Students and parents both believe that academic and professional success is grounded in personal relationships. In addition, Indians possess a valuation of educational success that emphasizes social factors (prestige; status; ties to neighbors and community) as much as profession, technical or economic ones. These social factors catalyze a promotion of intense interpersonal competition in learning environments that are formal and disciplined. Finally, gender roles deeply condition the socialized culture of learning, and ultimately reproduce gender roles in India's society at large. The final emerging theme from participants is a sincere expression of gratitude for their educational upbringing, despite the factors that caused them stress, depression, and strain.

All twelve participants perceived their online classes to be devoid of any feelings and/or experiences of cultural differences. Interestingly, despite juxtaposing a large number of variations between the Indian culture of learning and American culture of learning, within the course itself, students could not perceive their own perceptions about the differences. After sharing their personal histories with education, their perceptions about American education, and the differences between the two, the participants felt that no cultural differences were present in their courses.

Three specific findings emerged from participant perspectives concerning

strategies employed to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context. First, each participant articulated an appetency for integration as an ideal way to interact with American culture and education system, but experienced American culture as a melting pot assimilationist strategy. Second, due to the participants' existence within both American and Indian cultures simultaneously, no one personal strategy of acculturation will suffice. Acculturation strategies flow and are employed in accordance to the situation and place. Third, professors strongly condition the students' perception of whether a cyberculture of learning exists.

Participants perceived culture as ever-present and articulated how the levels of culture's presence depends on the levels of interaction between peers. The higher the levels of interaction, the higher the levels of cultural presence. Levels of interaction are determined mainly by professor and followed by student participation. For a few participants, cyberculture exists within online United States-based courses because each course is new and generates a different experience. However, a majority of participants disagreed and noted that the very structure of online courses prohibits a free-flowing, organically growing environment. Alongside the structural foundation of online courses, the lack of social interaction is prohibitive and deters the generation of a unique educational experience that is inimitable when the course concludes.

Summation

The Indian culture of learning differs from the American culture of learning. While participants were able to identify differences between the two, they concluded that variations did not exist. Acculturation strategies selected did not match their personal

hopes for integration and represented American culture of learning as a melting pot that requires assimilation into the education system. Due to the overwhelming lack of interaction in their online courses, Indian participants perceived culture as present solely because it is ever-present. They identified that the sense of culture and the generation of cyberculture are both dependent on the level of interactions available and achieved in courses. Professors were highlighted as the sole decider for whether interaction occurs. Overall, Indian students are willing to assimilate to the American culture of learning in order to succeed within the system. While they would have enjoyed courses that proffered interaction and connection to American peers, participants still "succeeded" in their courses evident in completion. Nonetheless, they emphasized the need for increased culture within their courses.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter V interprets the results of this study in relation to the research questions and analyzes the results in juxtaposition to relevant theory. The strengths and limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and an outline of how this study contributes to new knowledge and assists those engaged in academia are also presented.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates how students from India describe both their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context. Moreover, participants detail utilized strategies of acculturation, if any, that assist in the negotiation between their socialized culture of learning and their perceived culture of learning. Finally, the researcher examines whether the interactivity of cultures of learning results in the production or non-production of cybercultures.

Problem Statement

Approaches to culture have historical lineages that perpetuate hegemonic, etic, positivist, and Western frames (Hall, 1959, Hofstede, 1980, Ishii, 1982, Li, 2002). These works have continued to inform binary cultural approaches in the post-Internet era (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Parrish & Linder-VanBerschot, 2010), and are still used widely in research despite criticisms (Li, 2002). Hegemonic and binary approaches are problematic because they withdraw participant voice and situate culture into pre-established categories, which thereby, minimizes the complexity and color of culture into a two-dimensional space.

To complicate this issue further, American institutions of higher education are

expanding their educational reach via online learning programs into international demographics (Hanover, 2011, 2013). These advancements raise significant questions and concerns about how to best support this diverse demographic of student. In an attempt to reject the hegemonic cultural approaches of old, researchers must explore culture and online learning from an emic perspective. Some research utilizes a cultural approach to understanding the experiences of international students participating in online learning courses (Jung & Gunawardena, 2014), but the field will benefit from additional studies that focus on the emic perspective and explore the complexity that is culture.

Research Questions

The following four research questions guide this study:

1. How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?

2. How do Indian students describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?

3. What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context?

4. How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?

Methodology Summary

This qualitative study began in Fall of 2015 and concluded in Spring of 2016 with a purposeful sampling of twelve graduate-level international students from India who were concurrently enrolled in an asynchronous online learning course. The study

occurred in three phases and relied on interviews and focus groups for data collection.

Data were collected in three phases, hereafter labeled as Phase 1, Phase II, and Phase III.

Each phase sequentially built on the previous to collect rich data capable that captures

any potential cultural patterns housed within the emic perspectives of participants.

Phase I consisted of thirty-minute, one-on-one interviews with each participant. Phase II

involved two focus group sessions. Phase III involved a final individual interview with

each participant. Approached from a naturalist-constructivist paradigm, the data

generated its own classification scheme. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal

throughout the data collection process, as well as observational and analytical memos at

the conclusion of each interview. A hired transcription company converted interview

audio data into documents within a week of the interview date. In Vivo and Axial

Coding were utilized to gain an emic perspective of the sociocultural experiences of the

participants. Dominant codes were identified by looking for saturation and then mapped

as a tree diagram to provide a visual representation of the participants' perspectives.

Summary of the Findings

This study focused on questions regarding India's socialized culture of learning,

Indian graduate students' perceptions of the American culture of learning, what

acculturation strategies they employed to navigate the differences in the two cultures of

learning, and whether their online courses produced or failed to produce a cyberculture.

Findings revealed India's socialized culture of learning moves from a macro, national

perspective to the micro, community and parental influences, as is a strong emphasis

throughout. India's educational approach includes a system of exams that limits social

mobility after secondary school; this restrictive social mobility paradoxically reflects

India's history with the caste system. A valorization of science with less ascribed value to the humanities and arts prevails. Despite the national system of promotion exams, students and parents alike believe that academic and professional success is grounded in personal relationships. In addition, Indians possess a valuation of educational success that emphasizes social factors (prestige; status; ties to neighbors and community) as much as profession, technical or economic ones. These social factors catalyze a promotion of intense interpersonal competition in learning environments that are formal and disciplined. Finally, gender roles deeply condition the socialized culture of learning, and ultimately reproduce gender roles in India's society at large. The final emerging theme from participants is a sincere expression of gratitude for their educational upbringing, despite the factors that caused them stress, depression, and strain.

Indian participants perceive the American culture of learning as more independent, relaxed, balanced, and practical. Their commentary regarding the American educational system showed stark differences from their observations of the Indian educational system. All twelve participants perceived their online classes to be devoid of any feelings and/or experiences of cultural differences. Interestingly, despite juxtaposing a large number of variations between the Indian culture of learning and American culture of learning, within the course itself, students could not perceive their own perceptions about the differences. After sharing their personal histories with education, their perceptions about American education, and the differences between the two, the participants felt that no cultural differences were present in their online courses.

Three specific findings emerged from participant perspectives concerning strategies employed to acculturate in an online learning context the perceived similarities

and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning context. First, each participant articulated an appetency for integration as an ideal way to interact with American culture and education system, but experienced American culture as a melting pot assimilationist strategy. Second, due to the participants' existence within both American and Indian cultures simultaneously, no one personal strategy of acculturation will suffice. Acculturation strategies flow and are employed in accordance to the situation and place. Third, professors strongly condition the students' perception of whether a cyberculture of learning exists. This suggests some variation in both students' experiences and the content of cyberculture from professor to professor.

Participants perceived culture as ever-present and articulated how the levels of culture's presence depends on the levels of interaction between peers. The higher the levels of interaction, the higher the levels of cultural presence. Levels of interaction are determined mainly by professor and followed by student participation. For a few participants, cyberculture exists within online United States-based courses because each course is new and generates a different experience. However, a majority of participants disagreed and noted that the very structure of online courses prohibits a free-flowing, organically growing environment. Alongside the structural foundation of online courses, the lack of regular social interaction prohibits the production of cyberculture and deters the generation of a unique educational experience that is inimitable when the course concludes.

Discussion of Findings

This section analyzes the implications of this study derived from the data

collected for the four research questions this study explored. Analysis and reflection of the implications are divided into four sections and detailed after each research question revisited below.

Research Question #1

The foundational question for this research study focuses on how Indian graduate students perceive their own socialized culture of learning. With the desire to collect data that is not hegemonic, non-emic, and positivistic, it is vital to ascertain participant experiences and perceptions surrounding their socialized education and upbringing. Thus, the first research question guiding this study is: *How do students from India describe their socialized culture of learning?* In response, participants detailed a nation that emphasizes educational excellence, parents who emphasize academic success daily in the home environment, high levels of competition to achieve first rank, a strictness in the classroom that focuses on learning for high-stakes exams, and ultimately a strong sense of appreciation for the pressures experienced to succeed in their academics. The use of participant terminology served as an avenue to achieving an emic understanding of how Indians perceive a culture of learning.

Li's (2002) emic approach to generating cultural learning models relates to the findings within this study and confirms "the conceptual position that learning models are complex meaning systems that differ from culture to culture, and that children begin developing in early life" (p. 60). The Indian participants, with the exception of Su who was raised in a rural village, were socialized to perceive education as a top priority prior to beginning formal academic studies. Even Su developed this sense by the time she was nine years old. The details of their experiences highlight the intensity of their

communities' and specifically their parents' concern for their academic success as a means to a more financially and socially successful life. The complexity of the system in which they were raised emphasizes intense interpersonal competition for limited job positions. This competition catalyzes a system of examinations that limits social mobility after secondary school and is reminiscent of India's history with the caste system. The cultural system also valorizes education and ascribes prestige to the sciences and places less ascribed value on the humanities and arts. Social factors such as prestige, status, and ties to neighbors and communities reveal a valuation of educational success as a necessary precursor to professional, technical, and/or economic success. Gender roles condition the socialized culture of learning and reproduces gender roles in India's society on a broader scale. While these perceptions are now shifting in some populations with higher social affluence, they are still present throughout the country among the less privileged. Despite the multitude of factors resulting in stress, depression, and strain, Indian participants emphasized sincere gratitude for their socialized culture of education and upbringing.

The findings generate a portrait of India's socialized culture of learning and is significant for practitioners and faculty members within America's higher education system for two reasons: (1) understanding the socialized culture of learning for Indian students rejects academia's propensity to homogenize international students into one category and thereby strip each demographic of their unique cultural learning model; and (2) online educators, graphic designers, and online administrators can harness this understanding and incorporate new strategies into online courses that reject a positivistic, Western frame and generate inclusive practices that integrate Indian students into the

fabric of the course, especially as in today's global knowledge economy Indian students are being increasingly recruited by American institutions in today's global knowledge economy. After attaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' socialized culture of learning, research question two explored Indian participants' perceived American culture of learning.

Research Question #2

The research explores Indian student perceptions of the American culture of learning.   Synonymous to research question one, the goal is to collect data that is not hegemonic, non-emic, and positivistic; therefore, it was vital to gather participant experiences and perceptions and relay emergent themes in their own words. The second research question guiding this study is: *How do Indians describe the perceived culture of learning in a United States-based online learning context?* Rather than utilizing an already conceptualized culture of learning for American students (Hess and Azuma, 1991; Varenne and McDermott, 1998; Li, 2002), this study sought to gain the emic perspectives of Indian participants in order to avoid potential Western bias and the dichotomies such models typically present.

Participants cultivated a portrait of the American cultural learning model as independent, expert, and practical, but shared experiences of their sense of isolation and disconnect. Indian graduate students revealed that the catalyst to pursue an American degree was based on social factors and influences from family, friends, and community. Their reflections of the American college student and the American educational system articulated American students as deep divers who focus on a primary area of expertise. This desire to become deeply knowledgeable in one area contrasts the Indian approach to

broader learning. Another variation highlighted was the differing motivation levels by American students. In their socialized culture of learning, everyone is motivated to succeed due to the abundance of national and parental pressure to be number one in the rankings. Indian students perceived American student motivation as inconsistent and varied across the spectrum. Coursework in United States-based online courses was identified as independent and contrasts the Indian culture of learning that presents more involvement from faculty members and peers in the learning process. Indian students exposed the differences between their educational propensity to memorize for exams versus the American education propensity to engage in practical applications through projects and simulations. Indian students emphasized the positive relationships they generated with faculty members and how this differs from the relationships they experienced with educators in India. By contrast, participants experienced racism within their interactions with Americans, some classmates and others while engaging with the broader society. Some participants experienced isolation and inauthenticity from American students, especially in online courses that proffered little interaction and ultimately a lack of cultural exchange and development.

The findings provide a depiction of the American culture of learning through the lens of Indian graduate students. Ascertaining such perspectives provides higher education practitioners with an understanding of how the American system, faculty, and students are perceived. This knowledge is foundational and serves as the components for understanding how these perspectives interact within the Indian student experience, and ultimately what acculturation strategies they utilize to navigate the dissimilarities between the two cultures of learning. By utilizing their emic perspective, this research

study attempts to comprehend the perspectives and needs of students from India in order to diminish the current inequities and generate more culturally aware and inclusive online learning programs (Moore, Shattuck, & Al-Harthi, 2005).

The findings from research questions one and two confirm how binary conceptions of cultures of learning do not allow for the fluidity and expansiveness of culture. Traditional approaches to culture include models such as Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory, Parrish and Linder-VanBerschot's (2010) Cultural Dimensions of Learning Framework, and the works of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Nisbett (2003), Levine (1997), Hall (1959) and Lewis (1995). These approaches all present culture as a phenomenon capable of being understood through dichotomous relationships. These frameworks delve into culture but are limiting and neglect to grasp the complexities and nuances of culture. Participant perspectives, in this study, demonstrate a range of responses that cannot be captured in binaries. Perhaps trying to harness culture within models and frameworks are all too limiting and constraining.

Research Question #3

The third question built upon the findings from research questions one and two. After participants disclosed their socialized culture of learning in India and their perceptions of the American culture of learning, focus groups gathered an understanding of how they navigate these dissimilarities via acculturation strategies. The third research question guiding this study is: *What strategies do participants employ to acculturate the perceived similarities and dissimilarities between the two contexts of socialized culture and perceived culture of learning in an online learning course?* The findings for this question revealed an appetency for integration as an ideal way to engage with American

culture and education. Despite this desire to integrate, participants experienced American

culture and education as a melting pot due to their need to assimilate in order to be

successful. In addition, participants highlighted their inability or unwillingness to select

only one acculturation strategy for their experiences with American society and

education. Acculturation is a process that flows, and the strategies employed vary by

situation and place. Within an online class, specifically, participants detail professors to

be the foundational element that determines the degree to which culture is present.

Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies was used conceptually as a starting

point with confidence that participants would share experiences and approaches that exist

outside of the theory if needed. Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies proved to

be limited in the data gathered from participants concerning their employed strategies

within society and within a United States-based online course for two reasons. First,

while Berry (2008) dissociates acculturation from assimilation and emphasizes that

acculturation is a process of mutual influence within both the dominant and non-

dominant group, participants shared their experience within American society and online

classes as a melting pot. As a means to succeed within the class and within American

society at-large, Indian participants felt it a necessity to subscribe to the educational and

social system in these environments. Coursework and class atmosphere did not involve

Berry's (1997, 2008) theory that embraces mutual influence within the dominant and

non-dominant group. Rather, Indians graduate students felt forced to assimilate to the

American system and culture. Some expressed that even though they had assimilated to

the system, they still felt like outsiders and shut out by American peers. It is important

that note that all twelve participants held onto a desire to maintain their heritage, culture,

and identity (Berry, 1997), but they did so in silence. They did not feel forced to assimilate in that they opted to leave their culture behind; rather, they felt they must assimilate to the cultural educational structures or risk failing their courses.

The second way in which Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies proved to be limited was due to the lack of fluidity between the strategies. According to the participants, acculturation strategies change according to the situation and place. Thus, numerous strategies are employed within the day of an Indian graduate student. Just as culture varies by situation and location, so too do the strategies used to navigate them. Even within one course, an Indian student can experience multiple acculturation strategies depending on the interactions engaged in. Thus, Berry's (1997, 2008) acculturation strategies lacked the situational fluidity necessary to encompass the experiences of Indian participants.

Research Question #4

The final research question of this study sought to determine if the creation of cybercultures occurs within the participants' online course experiences. Participants recognized that culture is ever-present and determined that certain factors increase or decrease the amount of culture present. The final research question guiding this study is: *How does the interactivity of variant cultures of learning produce or fail to produce cybercultures?* The findings for this study disclosed that cybercultures (Breslow & Mousoutzanis, 2012) were not present, but did affirm Fine's (1979) concept of idioculture. Participant narratives also reinforced that idiocultures can exist within an online course (Cole & Engestrom, 2007).

Participants emphasized that every space that involves human beings is a cultural

space. The ever-presence of culture proffers the understanding that it is a matter of degree to which culture is present. Within an online course, participants determined professors to be the foundational element that determines to what extent culture will be present. The course design, the cultural climate of the course, and the levels of interaction offered are all decisions made by a professor. The second factor that impacts the level of culture is the students. The degree to which students interact in meaningful exchanges determines the cultural exchanges possible between academic peers. Many participants felt that no culture was present in asynchronous online courses that consisted of professor-made videos and discussion boards alone. Participants shared a variety of levels of culture within asynchronous courses with the professor's course design to be the variable with the strongest impact.

Breslow and Mousoutzanis (2012) defined cyberculture as an environment that possesses "neither boundaries, nor limitations, nor inhibitions (p. xii) and that does not follow "predetermined paths, nor do they exist in predetermined states" (p. xii). While research is being conducted regarding the presence of cyberculture in online distance learning programs, this study highlights a lack of cyberculture in participant experiences. The very nature of cybercultures is open and free, but participants described educational environments that are structured and controlled. They noted that it is not the technology that causes such restriction; rather, it is the professor and the course design that determines the potential of the formulation of a cyberculture. Thus, the existence of their online courses as an idioculture was an easy connection. However, the emergence of a cyberculture was not present.

Summary Statement

In summation, Indian graduate students engage in United States-based online courses with a socialized culture that is complex and focused on rankings, social prestige, and the sciences. Participants perceive the variations between their socialized culture of learning and their perceptions of the American culture of learning but concluded interviews by stating that no difference exists. As individuals, participants seek integration into the American education system and at-large but experienced more of a melting-pot assimilationist strategy as a means of succeeding within the cultural systems of the United States. In conclusion, cybercultures did not emerge within online courses due to the professor and course design.

Implications for Future Research

Often international students are clustered together and presented as a homogenous demographic. Future research should focus on a particular population and thoroughly examine their cultural approaches to learning, their success and challenges within an American educational system, and what components work well and what needs improvement to ensure their academic success. For online research, examining pedagogy and generating instructional designs to includes not just teacher presence but also integrated peer-to-peer interactions to ensure a sense of culture and belongingness to the course exists would be beneficial for international online students. Cybercultures and whether or not they can, by definition, ever exist within an online educational platform is a research area needing further examination.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

All twelve participants correlated interaction within an online class to higher

presence of culture and greater experiential and learning outcomes. This finding presents

faculty members and instructional designers who are generating and teaching online

courses with an evocation for increased interaction. Recommendations were collected for

both synchronous and asynchronous courses and are outlined below in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Recommendations for Faculty Members and Instructional Designers

Synchronous Courses	**Asynchronous Courses**
1. Have students upload bios with a picture as a graded assignment. 2. Make use of webcam during class time mandatory. 3. Provide a consistent structure for students that consists of lecture, discussion, and questions. Share lesson plans. 4. Allot class time for students to interact with one another to discuss material and ask questions of each other. 5. Randomly select partners for group projects to ensure students do not gravitate to those they are already comfortable with. 6. Ask questions to individual students directly to ensure each student participates every class. 7. Provide clear guidelines for how class participation will be measured; incorporate the need for each student to speak and share ideas.	1. Have students upload bios with a picture as a graded assignment. 2. Randomly select partners for group projects to ensure students do not gravitate to those they are already comfortable with. 3. Require WebEx conferences for students during group project work. 4. Provide opportunities within the curriculum for students to share lived experiences in relation to the topics, if applicable, through video logs and not discussion boards.

Limitations

The target population for this study was comprised of international students from India who participated in online courses offered by one research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The participants lived within the United States while taking online courses at the time of the interviews. Living in-country may have impacted their perceived culture of learning due to their increased contact with American culture in comparison to students who participate in online courses while residing overseas.

Participants in this study were also considered "successful" by India's social standards. These students comprise part of the educational elite and had the financial, social, and emotional support to attend university in the United States. This may have deep impacts on how they perceived their socialized culture of learning in India. Students who do not experience success in India's socialized terms may have variant perspectives on what the country's culture of learning consists of and how it is exemplified for differing demographics.

Summary and Conclusion

Information and innovation are the two primary foundations of globalization, of which both components are knowledge-intensive (Carnoy, 2002). The interconnectivity of today's world catalyzes the imperative for institutions of higher education to revamp and enhance. Online distance learning is becoming a global phenomenon capable of "transcending national, political, and geographical boundaries" (Gunawardena, 2013, p. 185). Within this capability comes the potential for educational imperialism since large amounts of educational courses are being developed within the West and exported

through the Internet to other countries (Rogers, Graham, & Mayes, 2007). Thus, understanding students from other countries who participate in online distance learning programs is a vital step in bridging the gap between cultures as they interact within online courses. In an attempt to understand international student experiences within online education, with specific focus on Indian graduate students, this study sought to reject the traditional hegemonic, non-emic, and positivistic, Western frames that have long served as cultural models of understanding.

This study reveals that Indian students possess a complex culture of learning that defies the binaries and dichotomies of traditional learning models. The study also provides the perceptions of the American culture of learning from the lens of Indian graduate students. The juxtapositions between their socialized and perceived were evident and clear, yet Indian students concluded that little variation exists. This furthers Hall's (1959) exposition that "Culture hides more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (p. 29-30). In addition, this study discloses how United States-based online distance learning courses are not culturally neutral and possess a Western bias. Participants felt the need to assimilate in order to succeed and in some cases felt that online courses were culturally empty due to a lack of interaction and exchange with peers. Finally, this study highlights that while idiocultures exist within distance learning courses, cybercultures were non-producible due to the structure and constraint that subsequently exists.

In conclusion, this study is an evocation for faculty members and practitioners engaging in online distance learning to truly ponder their own cultural approach to teaching and international partnerships. Inclusivity should be the hallmark of higher

education, but it does not consistently exist for our students, for our future. As an educational system housed within a nation founded on the ideals of acceptance and the dream of increasing social equity, we are falling short. As a nation and as an institution, we are falling short. It is time to understand that globalization is happening, that internationalization must be more than a catch phrase, and that online learning possesses the power to unify minds by transcending geographical, political, and social borders. Online distance learning needs thoughtful engineers, faculty members that seek to practice inclusive classroom pedagogy and design, and administrators that work to ensure mutual cultural and educational exchanges occur. Let us not forget why we engage in this work; let us embrace the souls of people miles away and share knowledge and cultural mutually for the sake of humanity.

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APPENDIX 1

Phase I One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Purpose: Phase I interviews are exploratory with a focus on three components: (1) participant's socialized culture of learning, (2) participant's perceived American culture of learning, and (3) introduce the concept of cyberculture. (30 minutes)

Questions

1. What was it like going to school in India as an elementary school child? How about when you got older? Intermediate, College, etc?

2. How would your parents approach your education?

3. How would you describe the country's stance on education?

4. What did you think of American's and school prior to taking a U.S.-based course?

5. Now that you're taking a class, has that idea shifted?

6. How do you think American's view education overall?

7. If you had to describe the American college student in three words, what words would you select and why?

APPENDIX 2

Phase II Focus Group Questions

Purpose: There are two aims of the Phase II focus groups: (1) to discuss the strategies participants employ to assist in the negotiations between the socialized and perceived cultures of learning, and (2) whether cybercultures have begun to form in their online learning environment. (60 minutes)

Questions:

Lead in to the focal point of the discussion:

1.   How would you describe India's perception of education? Is it of great import or is it placed after other components of life, ie: work, family, etc.?

2.   Can you share any memories from your childhood that would characterize how learning is approached and perceived?

3.   Do you think American's view education in the same way? What are some of the similarities? Some of the differences?

Focal point:

4.   What are some of the challenges you face in your class because of the differences?

5.   How do you negotiate between the way education and learning is approached in India versus the United States?

6.   Would you describe yourself as integrated into the classroom environment? If so, how? If not, why?

7.   Do any of you feel like outcasts? If so, in what ways?

8.   How do you feel treated by the professor? Do you feel as though the professor understands your cultural approach to learning?

9.   Do you feel connected to the other students participating in the course?

10.   Does the environment embrace the Indian culture or learning? If yes, how so? If not, please explain.

Brief conversation about cyberculture:

11.   We are now at the midpoint of the semester. Do you feel as though your course has a unique flow to it?

12.   Do you feel as though the different cultures of learning have blended and created something new?

APPENDIX 3

Phase III One-on-One Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Purpose: Phase III interviews will also be a cultural interview that is exploratory with a focus on two components: (1) participant perspectives on the emergence of a cybercultures within the online course, and (2) follow-up on any lacking information from Phases I and II that are in need of clarification. (30 minutes)

Questions:

1. Looking back over the last 12 weeks, have you noticed any changes in the culture of your course? In how it "feels"?

2. Has it evolved or shifted in any way since the first few weeks?

3. Do you feel as though you have blended into a new culture?

4. Do you think either the American or your Indian culture of learning dominates the course culture? Or do you believe it has morphed into something unique?

5. Do you think that cyberculture exists within your online learning class? Explain.

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