# CHALLENGING U.S. UNDERGRADUATES

# CONSTRUCTIONS OF INDIA:

# OPPORTUNITIES TO (RE)IMAGINE THE OTHER

By

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Abstract: Recently, the study of popular culture has expanded into its effect on students' perception of the "Other." Scholars argue that students use popular culture (e.g. news media, movies, television, internet, etc.) at all educational levels to understand and relate to academic material, particularly in geography. Therefore, popular culture is directly involved in the creation of what Edward Said coined "imaginative geographies," or collections of facts and stereotypes of places in the world. Although studies consider the imagined geographies of younger students (K-12), little research in geography explores undergraduates' imagined geographies. In this study, I use qualitative inquiry to examine the ways in which US undergraduates at three universities create, perpetuate, and challenge imagined geographies of India, especially via popular culture mediums. Using participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE) (including photographs, focus groups), I explore the ways in which students construct and may better nuance their perceptions and discussions centered on India. I use Said's theory of Orientalism as a lens for analysis. Additionally, through semi-structured interviews with thirty geography instructors across the United States, I explore how educators witness undergraduates' knowledge of distant places in class, and evaluate their varied attempts to complicate these imagined geographies. Overall, my findings indicate that students in higher education rely more on media and popular culture, rather than formal academic learning, although various types of personal relationships played an important role in the development of their perceptions of India. Also, students from different universities and at different points in their educational experience had noticeably different ways of describing India, and thus require unique approaches by instructors to effectively deconstruct their imagined geographies of place. Moreover, I argue for the usefulness of the PDPE approach as a means to help interrogate and nuance undergraduates' knowledge of the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION

Imagined Geographies and Geography Education ............ 5
A Lacuna: Understanding How Undergraduates Construct Imagined Geographies ... 6
PDPE as a Research Method and a Critical, Empowering Pedagogical Tool............ 7
An Overview ............ 8

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction ............ 11
Edward Said and Orientalism ............ 12
Orientalism and India ............ 15
Hinduism as the "Mind of India" ............ 17
The Caste System ............ 18
India's "Poverty" ............ 18
Primary and Secondary Students Imagining Distant Places ............ 20
Formal Learning about Places and People through Popular Culture ............ 24
Popular Music ............ 25
News Media ............ 26
Popular Film ............ 27
Television ............ 29
Development Stages of Primary and Secondary Students of Distant Places ............ 31
Opportunities in Nuancing Imagined Geographies of Undergraduates ............ 34
Conclusion ............ 37

III. METHODS

Introduction ............ 41
Research Questions ............ 42
Study Area ............ 43
India as a Distant Place and Focus ............ 44
Theoretical Background ............ 46
Photovoice ............ 46
Participant-Driven Photo-Elicitation (PDPE) ............ 48
Focus Groups and Semi-structured Interviews ............ 50

Data Collection ..... 51
Participants and Recruitment ..... 52
Employing PDPE ..... 55
Orientation Details ..... 55
Between the Orientation and Focus Group Meetings ..... 57
Focus Group Meetings and Locations ..... 58
Facilitating Focus Group Discussions ..... 59
Semi-Structured Interviews ..... 62
"Meeting" Details ..... 62
Facilitating Interview Discussions ..... 65
Instructor Background ..... 66
Locations and Positions ..... 66
Specialties/Interests ..... 68
Teaching Experience ..... 69
Preparing and Analyzing the Data ..... 71
Transcribing ..... 71
Coding, Categories, and Themes ..... 71
Reflexivity and Positionality ..... 73
Conclusion ..... 75

IV. HOW UNDERGRADUATES CONSTRUCT AND PRESENT GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATIONS OF INDIA

Introduction ..... 77
Constructing an Imagined India: Sources Undergraduates use to Build Imagined Geographies ..... 79
Popular Culture ..... 80
Film ..... 82
Television ..... 84
Other Popular Culture Mediums ..... 86
Relationships ..... 89
International Students ..... 90
Work ..... 93
Indirect Personal Contact ..... 94
Formal Education ..... 97
Previous Educational Experiences ..... 98
Documentaries ..... 101
Presenting an Imagined India: Discourses Undergraduates Employ with Imagined Geographies ..... 103
"Us and Them": Words and Imagined Geographies ..... 105
Indiana Jones and "Outrageous Foods" ..... 110
Domestic or Wild?: Discussions on Cows and Elephants ..... 113
India as Past in Present: An Example of Latent Orientalism ..... 117
The "Comfort Zone": Fear, Anxiety, and Imagined Geographies ..... 120
Conclusion ..... 123

V. HOW UNDERGRADUATES' EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND EXPERIENCE CREATES UNIQUE IMAGINED GEOGRAPHIES

Introduction ........ 126
Differences between First-year and Final-Year Students ........ 127
Coursework ........ 128
Travel ........ 132
Relationships ........ 135
Implications ........ 136
Variability between Undergraduates at Different Universities ........ 139
Learning about India through Missionaries ........ 139
Using Positive versus Negative Cultural Ascriptions across Universities ........ 142
Western Ideals of Beauty: HBCU Students and Indian Women's Hair ........ 147
Implications ........ 153
Conclusion ........ 156

VI. REFOCUSING AND RETOOLING: AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT GEOGRAPHY EDUCATORS' ATTEMPTS TO NUANCE IMAINGED GEOGRAPHIES

Introduction ........ 160
Inside the Classroom ........ 162
Reading ........ 162
Group Discussion ........ 168
Visual Aids ........ 170
Outside the Classroom ........ 172
Fieldtrips ........ 173
Fieldwork ........ 177
Conclusion ........ 181

VII. PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATIONS: PDPE AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN UNDERGRADUATE GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOMS

Introduction ........ 183
Limitations of PDPE ........ 185
Creating PDPE Projects ........ 188
The Visuals: Photographs, Pictures, Images ........ 189
The Text: Descriptions, Captions, Citations ........ 190
Synergistic Discussions ........ 191
Overlapping Imagined Geographies: Three Types of Conflation used by Undergraduates ........ 195
Indirect Conflation: *Aladdin* ........ 196

Direct Conflation: "Dubai, India" ... 197
Mixed Conflation: Which "Indians?" ... 200
Arranging and Coding Photographs ... 204
Negotiating Photographs into Stacks ... 204
Reflecting on Individual and Collective Imagined Geographies ... 210
Expanding Imagined Geographies and Stereotypes ... 214
Conclusion ... 217

VIII. CONCLUSION

Introduction ... 221
Contributions and Significance ... 222
Future Possibilities with PDPE and Research in Undergraduates' Imagined Geographies ... 227
Conclusion ... 230

REFERENCES ... 232

APPENDICES ... 249

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

3.1 Selected demographics of undergraduate participants ..... 53
3.2 Selected demographics of undergraduate participants, by institution ..... 54
3.3 Focus group details ..... 58
3.4 Abbreviations used for undergraduate participants ..... 59
3.5 Breakdown of interviews with instructor participants ..... 63
3.6 Abbreviations used for instructor participants ..... 67
7.1 Images submitted via PDPE projects, by institution ..... 189
7.2 Labels (codes) used by focus groups for stacks of images ..... 205

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1.1 Aswin and me enjoying a coffee in 2016 .......... 2
3.1 University sites .......... 43
3.2 Participants job titles/positions within respective departments .......... 67
3.3 Instructor years of experience .......... 70
4.1a "Buddhism and Hinduism." .......... 87
4.1b "I chose a picture of my Nirvana t-shirt…" .......... 87
4.1c "I like to watch YouTube a lot trying to find ways to grow my hair fast…" .......... 87
4.2 "India is a country with a very diverse set of languages…" .......... 91
4.3 "The Indian turtle represents good luck…" .......... 93
4.4 "This is my textbook for Intro to Human Geography…" .......... 98
7.1 "A boy who went to my school and was from Dubai, India…" .......... 199
7.2 "This picture always reminds me of how the majority of India is Hindu…" .......... 206

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

> The earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces virtually do not exist. Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings. (Edward Said 1993, 7)

In the Fall of 2013, during my first semester as a PhD student, I became friends with Aswin. Originally from India, Aswin was another doctoral student in the geography program, and I had initially met him during my official visit to the university the previous spring. As an experienced doctoral candidate in the throes of writing his own dissertation, Aswin quickly became a tremendous source of mentoring as I adjusted into being a graduate student again, particularly as we also shared the same doctoral advisor. Luckily, Aswin and I were on a similar teaching schedule as graduate assistants and regularly grabbed coffee or lunch in-between our respective classes. During these times, Aswin and I would discuss a whole range of topics, from similar research interests and graduate coursework, to issues as geography

educators and on many occasions our personal backgrounds. We even managed to find time to discuss our favorite sports, and as a kid from Wisconsin and a kid from South India, we soon found a common interest in the Green Bay Packers (Figure 1.1)!

*Figure 1.1 Aswin (left) and me enjoying a coffee in 2016.*

Indeed, Aswin was the first person I really ever knew who was from India. While I had past introductions to or acquaintances with transnational or first-generation Americans of Indian decent, Aswin became a source of great cross-cultural learning. In many ways, that learning was not a one-way street, but rather a continuous loop of information and experiences being offered between two human beings. Despite our vastly different backgrounds, we shared a common interests in learning about the "Other." Our professional and personal relationship became an open door policy, where we felt comfortable enough to ask the other anything about their cultural background or perspective. I probably learned much more from Aswin than he from me, but we both recognized the productive nature of our conversations towards mutual respect, empathy, and appreciation of our diverse experiences.

The point of this story concerning my relationship with Aswin is that, in many ways, these conversations spurred much thinking on my part about what I *thought* I knew about India as a place, especially as a relatively educated person (in geography nonetheless), even though I had never been to India, or (until that point) had a direct relationship with someone from India. In fact, the idea that eventually grew into this dissertation was seeded in one particular early conversation we had. Aswin and I were both teaching sections of World Regional Geography and found ourselves discussing things we would like to change to better engage students in the material – particular in terms of projects. I thought a good idea might be for students to watch and discuss a film related or set in one of the regions we covered. At that point, Aswin recalled a time a student had asked him a question after class: "Is the movie *Slum Dog Millionaire* a good representation of India?" Aswin said his reply was instantaneous, "Is the movie *Deliverance* a good representation of the United States?" My jaw fell open, as I was quite impressed with his quick-witted response. However, as he went on to assure me, this was not the first time students had asked questions regarding his home country with only a handful of films to contextualize their inquiries.

Serendipitously, and parallel to the conversations I was having with Aswin, I found myself in a graduate course entitled Popular Culture in Education. Here, I was introduced to a bevy of cultural theorists that further stoked my interests in the ways that I developed perceptions – "learned" – of other places, peoples, and cultures. While that list included scholars such as Raymond Williams, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Louis Althusser, Anonio Gramsci, Jaques Lacan, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault, two scholars in particular were instrumental in transforming my personal interest into eventual dissertation research, namely Edward Said and Stuart Hall. While Said's book *Orientalism* (1978)

gave me the framework of understanding how discourse (from Foucault) creates perceptions of places – and in his own words, "imaginative geographies" – Hall's (2013) work concerning the representation of the Other (predominately in popular culture and media) began to help me peel back the layers of my own imagined geographies of places and people.

Over time, I kept coming back to the conversation I had with Aswin. Although I had not experienced the same interactions as Aswin with students, I had similar episodes as an instructor at both the secondary and post-secondary level, whereby my students used popular culture as a framework to describe places and people they had never had contact with before. Admittedly, I recalled times while as a high school teacher, where I unwittingly obliged to watching a popular movie under the guise of "learning," for example *The Jungle Book* or *Aladdin*, without considering the reinforcement of stereotypes and the uncritical lens on the representation of the Other.

I became curious about the ways my current students, like myself, created their own imagined geographies of places based on representations in popular media, such as film, television, news, and the internet. Did undergraduates develop more complex ways of building knowledge of places outside of popular culture, similar to how they developed more complex ways of understanding other subjects such as math or physical sciences? Moreover, as a teacher at heart, how could I provide students with better opportunities to think critically about and discuss these imagined geographies as communities of learners? Ultimately, these interests and questions converged into the research presented in this dissertation. To better situate my study, I use the remainder of this opening chapter to briefly establish my research territory of imagined geographies and geography education, identify my niche within that territory, namely, the existing gap of studies concerning undergraduates' imagined geographies, and finally how I

address that niche through several methods of qualitative inquiry. I conclude this chapter with a roadmap to the remaining chapters in the dissertation, providing a brief synopsis of each.

**Imagined Geographies and Geography Education**

Numerous studies conclude that young people are heavily influenced by their consumption of popular culture, especially in terms of gaining knowledge about distant places and peoples (Morgan 2001, Picton 2008, Lee et al. 2009, Hall 2011, Taylor 2015). Scholars concerned with popular culture and geographic education often argue for the usefulness of Said's *Orientalism* (1978) as a theoretical lens from which to contextualize issues of stereotyping/Othering (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Nozaki 2009, Taylor 2013, Somdahl-Sands 2015). Orientalism divides cultures between the West and East, with one (West) often portrayed as "rational, developed, humane, superior," while the other (East) is relegated to the identities of "aberrant, undeveloped, [and] inferior" (Said 1978, 300). Orientalism, therefore, allows researchers to consider the possible negative consequences of students trusting popular culture as a viable source of knowledge about distant lands and the "Other" (Said's "imagined geographies").

Many geographers argue students' imagined geographies of places and people must be addressed in order to, as Somdahl-Sands (2015, 26) writes, "show how we selectively encounter, interpret, and act on geographic information." Moreover, as students are increasingly connected to the world through communication, transportation, and information technology, the goals of geographic education are in need of realignment to meet these new realities, "to engage students of the knowledge generation and involve them in a culture of inquiry" (McInerney 2010, 27). One such realignment is in the reinvigorated movement toward Freire's (1970, 1973) critical

pedagogy (Vanderlinden 2008, Wellens et al. 2010, Wharf 2015). In this model, students' perceptions of the world are challenged and deconstructed, but simultaneously encouraged to create synergistic learning environments, reconstructing the world around empathy and appreciation of the Other.

**A Lacuna: Understanding How Undergraduates Construct Imagined Geographies**

Students of all ages need to have critical engagement with popular culture, especially as they utilize popular culture to connect with formal education generally, and geography specifically, as they make sense of the world around them (Hall 2011). While much research exists regarding younger (K-12) students' imagined geographies of distant places, little research considers how undergraduates utilize popular culture as a means of "knowledge" building about distant places (but see Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Duffy 2012, Carter 2015). Moreover, few studies provide educators opportunities to help students nuance their imagined geographies (but, for example, see Dittmer 2009, Somdahl-Sands 2015). As globalization – which reduces the distance between people and places – continues to grow, geography needs to explore how and why students construct their respective imagined geographies. As the next generation of geographic educators begin to engage with students over our world's struggles, it is imperative that we empower and entrust our students with the necessary knowledge and skills to become what Martin (2011) describes as "critical global citizens."

As a means to avoid describing the complexity of the world at large, my study focuses on India, as it has received little attention within this field of research, despite 1) a growing presence of India within Western popular culture mediums, and 2) India residing as Said's "Other" to the West. Recently, rapid migration and diaspora to the West has put Indian culture within the

grasp of many Westerners (Raghuram et al. 2008), as well as through the increasing visible rise in representations of India/Indians in Western culture in, for example, popular films (Algeo 2007, Sigler and Albandoz 2014). Since India falls within Said's Orientalism model of Western culture versus Eastern culture, it affords opportunities to further explore undergraduates' imagined geographies using Said's theory of Orientalism as a critical lens. And, while previous studies use a variety of ways to gauge students' knowledge of distant places, such as essays or mental maps, this project incorporates photography.

**PDPE as a Research Method and a Critical, Empowering Pedagogical Tool**

To address this gap in research, I explored the sources and realms undergraduates used to build their imagined geographies, and how they reinforced or challenged those stereotypes. My research employed a modified Photovoice approach, known as Participant-Driven Photo-Elicitation (PDPE), to facilitate students' ability to deconstruct and evaluate their imagined geographies of India. In this critical pedagogical technique, I asked participants to take photographs or acquire images that represented their knowledge of India, and to then use these to build conversations in focus groups. As Kurtz and Wood (2014, 548) argue, PDPE "can spur reflexive evaluation by students, offering them insights into their own experience by allowing them to make novel connections and conclusions during the picture-taking and [focus group] processes."

First, I invited first-year and final-year undergraduates to participate in respective PDPE projects at three universities located throughout the mid and south central areas of the US. I visited each university, which included both an introductory meeting with students (i.e. consent process, individual surveys, PDPE project directions), and a follow up focus group (based on

cohort) to discuss students' respective PDPE projects. In total, I worked with thirty-three undergraduates and conducted six focus groups. Second, I collected data through interviews with thirty university geography instructors across the United States. The focus of these interviews was to better understand how undergraduates' display imagined geographies within coursework and classrooms, and to uncover methods instructors found most useful in nuancing imagined geographies. After transcribing the data from the focus groups and interviews, I used deductive and inductive coding methods to analyze my data through the theoretical lens of Orientalism. Finally, I considered the relationships within my data to interpret themes about undergraduates' knowledge of distant places through various sources (e.g. popular culture, academic), and ways to better engage students in the process of critical spatial thinking concerning their imagined geographies.

**An Overview**

As explained above, my purpose in this dissertation is to reveal sources by which undergraduates construct their imagined geographies of India. Additionally, I explore current and prospective pedagogical approaches for deconstructing imagined geographies. To guide these two main objectives, the following research questions were established: What modes and networks of popular culture, as well as other realms, assist undergraduates in their imagining of India? How do undergraduates reinforce or challenge stereotypical representations of India? In which ways may PDPE inform our understandings of student imagined geographies, and further develop critical (geographic) pedagogy of distant places, as well as to participatory approaches in pedagogy?

In Chapter 2, I review research from a variety of disciplines, beginning with a summary of Edward Said's work concerning Orientalism, and particularly how the West has come to imagine India. I then discuss how geographers and educators explore how young people (but seldom undergraduates), construct their imagined geographies of specific and general areas of the world. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of my methods and methodology. As my research questions invite an intimate exploration of undergraduates' individual and collective imaginings of India, I employed qualitative inquiry through PDPE and interviewing to create and collect data with participants. I review the details of how I implemented PDPE projects with undergraduates, and conducted six follow-up focus groups. Additionally, I offer an overview of my interviews with geography educators from across the United States.

Chapter 4 begins the analysis and interpretation of my data, with an in-depth case study of undergraduates' imagined geographies of India. This chapter includes two broad areas: 1) examining the major sources undergraduates rely on when constructing their imagined geographies of India, and 2) how undergraduates use these imagined geographies in particular ways that reinforce Orientalist discourses concerning India. I argue that much of students' discussions and images reflect a "comfort zone" by which students display relationships between fear (or more often anxiety) and imagined geographies. While Chapter 4 identifies many of the common patterns found among all undergraduates, Chapter 5 identifies unique patterns among students' imagined geographies based on two variables. First, I show differences that emerged between first-year and final-year students. Second, I identify differences between undergraduates at different universities. Additionally, I consider the implications for geography educators who must manage varying backgrounds and experiences from students who enter their classrooms.

In Chapter 6, I analyze educators' pedagogical approaches used to deconstruct undergraduates' imagined geographies. I draw two major themes from these conversations, including how instructors use opportunities inside and outside the classroom to nuance imagined geographies. I show ways to extend and enhance current techniques, as well as how employing a PDPE approach may be beneficial. In Chapter 7, I outline the opportunities (and limitations) of a PDPE approach in teaching undergraduates' how to deconstruct their imagined geographies. Namely, I argue for PDPE's empowering and engaging qualities to assist educators in creating learning environments that encourage synergistic discussions, while identifying issues such as conflation and stereotypes. Moreover, PDPE allows for a simultaneous examination of individual and collective imagined geographies, providing abundant "teachable moments" as students reflect and expand on their respective perceptions. In conclusion, I revisit my original contributions and the overall significance of my research in the context of my experiences with students and instructors, and additionally consider future research to explore undergraduates' imagined geographies.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

> Youths can and will draw on pop culture texts to inform their understandings of academic ones…in ways that promote stereotypes around issues such as race and gender and factual inaccuracies (Hall 2011, 304).

### Introduction

Popular culture, as Hall argues above, influences students' perception of people and places, and as I argue, continues the cycle of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. During roughly the last decade, geography scholars and educators have made inroads to effectively recognize and dismantle these "othering" trends in primary, secondary, and higher education (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Hong and Halverson 2010, Duffy 2012, Castleden et al. 2013, Somdahl-Sands 2015, Taylor 2015). Studies show that students at all levels of education use popular culture, such as television shows, movies, music, novels, and the internet, to help them define people, places and cultures (Morgan 2001, Picton 2008, Lee et al. 2009, Hall 2011, Carter 2015). Little research, however, connects undergraduate students' utility of popular culture with their *knowledge* of other people and places. To clarify, I use "knowledge" in the Foucauldian sense, as the "truth"

being produced by discourse (Foucault 1977). As Stuart Hall (2013, 36) remarks on Foucault's principle, "the production of knowledge is always crossed with questions of power and the body; and this greatly expands the scope of what is involved in representation," and in particular (for my study), representation through popular culture. Moreover, how one's "knowledge" is applied to various places and people – to landscapes – is also of special concern to geographers. As Don Meinig (1979) argues, even the same landscape can be viewed very differently by an array of people based on their previous experiences and interpretations of that place (e.g as nature, as problem, as wealth, as ideology, etc.). Thus, in this review, I discuss Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), focusing on Orientalism's role within historical and contemporary representations of India. I then discuss research that examines how younger students (K-12) imagine distant places, and how geography educators use popular culture in an attempt to broaden students' imagined geographies. Although my own research was centered on undergraduates, it is important to understand how they constructed their imagined geographies at earlier points in their education in order to consider differences or similarities in those imagined geographies as older students. Lastly, after presenting an overview of theories describing how students migrate from simple to complex knowledge of distant places, I consider contemporary efforts by instructors in higher education to nuance these imagined geographies, and presently where gaps remain in these efforts.

**Edward Said and Orientalism**

Popular culture and media expose society to daily cultural discourses about distant peoples and places. Indeed, the way in which we understand much of the culture of others (and our

own culture) typically comes directly from media (Said 1978, see also Anderson 1991, Gregory 1994, Hall 2013). Edward Said (1978) first argued that the collection of facts and stereotypes about people and places in the world seen through popular culture creates "imagined geographies." Imagined geographies "help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said 1978, 55). Eventually, imagined geographies concerning the non-Western world develop out of a popular discourse that Said (1978) terms Orientalism.

Said's theory of Orientalism stems from this question: Why do those in the West have preconceived notions about people who live in the non-Western world? Western "knowledge" of the Orient, Said explains, is not developed from personal contact with places and groups of people. We do not obtain information about others in an innocent, objective manner, but through a process of highly motivated interests from the West – historically for empire building, contemporarily for political/economic motives. He argues that the West (Occident) views the East (Orient) through culture's use of stereotypes, which simplifies complex understandings of people and places. This lens for understanding the foreign or strange is what Said means by the process of Orientalism.

Said draws upon broad historical and cultural developments across the globe, specifically focusing on the history of European imperialism, as a catalyst for Orientalism. Said contends that these imperialist nations needed a way to "understand" the native populations in order to justify conquering and subduing them. Thus, Orientalist literature and descriptions of the East are presented by the West as "objective knowledge" – Truth – about other peoples and places.

Said's classic examples of this historical process of objectifying knowledge is Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798. He writes (1978, 80),

> [F]or Napoleon Egypt was a project that acquired reality in his mind, and later in his preparations for its conquest, through experiences that belong to the realm of ideas and myths culled from the texts, not empirical reality. His plans for Egypt therefore became the first in a long series of European encounters with the Orient in which the Orientalist's special expertise was put directly to functional colonial use… [Napoleon] saw the Orient only as it had been encoded first by classical texts and then by Orientalist experts, whose vision…seemed a useful substitute for any actual encounter with the real Orient.

Fundamentally, the French (and later other Western powers) created knowledge about a place that simply could not do the same about France (and other Western places). In other words, Egyptian rulers, scholars, and soldiers did not enter France and begin to rewrite French history, politics, and society. Yet, this production of knowledge by the West became unquestionable in both its authority and validity as it was weaved into the (powerful) discourse about the East.

Said distinguishes between imperialist European Orientalism (e.g. Great Britain and France) and American Orientalism through two primary differences. First, while Great Britain and France have an "archive of actual experiences" through colonial occupation, U.S. experience with the East is much less direct (Said 1978, 290). Due to the U.S.'s relative disassociation with the East, it is prone to apply more abstract stereotypes to the people and cultures of the East. The second major difference is that while imperialist Orientalism is created under the pressures of empire building, American Orientalism is developed more under the auspices of political relations and economic development.

Said argues that most Asian nations, especially those whom rely heavily on American aid/trade, do not challenge nor criticize these American views, failing to incorporate different voices in how knowledge is formed about the East. In doing so, these nations and regions (re)affirm the collective representation most Westerners have about them as being subordinate or inferior.

In summary, Orientalism divides cultures between the West and East, with one (West) portrayed as "rational, developed, humane, superior," while the other (East) is relegated to the identities of "aberrant, undeveloped, [and] inferior" (Said 1978, 300). Accordingly, Orientalism is an example of Foucault's "regime of truth" (see Hall 2013, 32-36). To illustrate, Storey (2012, 132) offers this historical reference, "before it was discovered that the earth was round, thinking the earth was flat was to be in the regime of truth of contemporary science and theology; saying it was round could get you tortured or killed." Said (1978, 321) poetically coins this same phenomenon as a "system of ideological fiction," and an obvious matter of power over knowledge/truth.

Orientalism and India

While Said focused his study of Orientalism predominantly on the Arab world, he in no way limited the experience of being seen through this lens (e.g. civilized/uncivilized, etc.) to this region alone. Orientalism extended well beyond these bounds into the rest of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (areas under direct colonial control). In South Asia, British India experienced many of the same practices as those in the Middle East under British subjection:

> I doubt that it is controversial, for example, to say that an Englishman in India or Egypt in the later nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was never far from their status in his mind as British colonies. To say this may seem

> quite different from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact – and yet *that is what I am saying* in this study of Orientalism (Said 1978, 11, emphasis in original).

Other scholars have taken up Said's implicit call to examine Orientalism within the context of India.

For example, Inden (1990, 3) employs discourse analysis to explore how Great Britain transformed the culture of the Indian subcontinent – both for the colonizer and the colonized – into a "distortion of reality":

> The subcontinent was not simply a source of colonial riches or a stage-setting in which Western hunters could stalk tigers, the sons of British merchants and aristocrats could make a financial killing, or the spiritualist find his or her innermost soul (or its Buddhist absence). More than that, India was (and to some extent still is) the object of thoughts and acts with which this 'we' has constituted *itself*. European discourses appear to separate Self from the Indian Other – the essence of Western thought is practical reason, that of India a dreamy imagination, or the essence of Western society is the free (but selfish) individual, that of India an imprisoning (but all-providing) caste system. But is this really so?

Inden and others focus on several major Orientalist themes as they relate to Indian culture: Hinduism (Inden 1990, Rocher 1993, King 1999), the caste system (Inden 1990, Appadurai 1993, Dirks 2001), and poverty (Liddle and Rai 1998, Banerjee 2006). While historically rooted, these themes help to construct more contemporarily, a particular Indian Other, similar to their counterparts as Orientals (e.g. Middle Easterners, as Said describes), but with their own distinct stereotypes affixed.

*Hinduism as the "Mind of India"*

As Europeans colonized South Asia during the 19th century, contemporary scholars and administrators attempted to develop a better concept of religion in India. More specifically, as Buddhism and Jainism were either nonexistent or minimal in membership, focus shifted to the "classical" religion of Hinduism. Early accounts of this religion were called "Brahmanism," as it was this caste within Hinduism that most intrigued Europeans due to its high standing (Inden 1990, 85-86). Inden (1990, 127) argues that the discourse of Hinduism built by Europeans "rest[s] on the assumption that [Hinduism] has an essence consisting of an ambiguous and inferior form of reason associated with the senses and called the imagination." Hinduism was thus likened to other "inferior" Eastern religions like Islam.

Taking this notion a step further, Rocher (1993) examines the British 17th century translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu texts describing various codes and laws. Through these translated texts, Indian society "was made to conform" to these ancient writings, further allowing Europeans to "manipulate" Indian society by particular histories rather than by contemporary situations (Rocher 1993, 242).

King (1999) argues that religious stereotypes of India that developed during the colonial era have survived into contemporary Western imaginations. Like Said, King (1999, 28) argues that depicting Hinduism (and thus *all* Indians) as "mystical" typically excludes Indians "from the realm of rationality." Furthermore, once the caste system was intricately tied to Hinduism, misrepresentations of castes added to the knowledge of and power over India.

*The Caste System*

The caste system separates India culturally from much of the rest of Asia. Therefore, to Westerners, the caste system is seen as India's "outer manifestation" – one of its dominate cultural markers (Inden 1990, 49). Inden (1990, 83-84) goes on to argue that the West uses the caste system as a means to understand the racial and labor division in India, as well as the more philosophic notions of India's "extremist" culture:

> [Westerners] have wished to see caste society as the very hypostasis of a pre-enlightened world where superstition and darkness reign, with poverty, exploitation, and political chaos as the result…[while] idealists have wished to see in caste an organic, hierarchical social order, even if static and stifling of individual initiative. The makers of both of these images give us a picture of caste as a type of society that has gone to the extremes.

Dirks (2001) further considers why the caste system has become such a focal point within Westerners' imagined geographies of India. He (2001, 5) argues that this imagined symbol "is a modern phenomenon…the product of an historical encounter" between India and Western imperialists. Dirks concludes that our understanding of the caste system is skewed by colonialism's hold on history; thus, we need more nuanced opportunities (e.g. formal and informal education) to "transform" our understanding of India. And yet, as Jouhki (2006) has highlighted, much of the Western knowledge building and imagining of India continues to center on the "degenerated" caste system.

*India's "Poverty"*

Although the two previous areas of religion and caste have been related, Western imaginations of India also focus on economic functions of the nation. Liddle and Rai (1998, 498) argue that two distinct imaginings are commonplace among those in the West, "those

of poverty and mystery." They go on to state that India's "exotic culture" appeals most to Westerners within the context of its poor economy. The representation of India as poverty-based is not new, however, and traces back to some of the earliest Western accounts (Banerjee 2006).

Banerjee (2006) addresses this topic by examining a series of historical Western writings concerned with the "poverty *of* India" (168, emphasis in original). Here, Banerjee (2006, 168) argues two major themes: the first is the "linguistic turn" from the poverty *in* India as opposed to the poverty *of* India, that "poverty [was] organic to, and…pervasive in, India;" the second, more underlying theme, is how this discourse allowed Britain to dominate India economically. Banerjee (2006, 168) contends the intent of British scholars and political authorities is to "represent India as a whole as a poor country in terms of its national product, per capita income and purchasing power," rather than depicting the country in diverse economic classes (i.e. upper class, middle class, lower class). Accordingly, this gave Britain more political, military, and economic influence over Indian (colonial) society, representing India's Western White savior. Regardless of era, both Liddle and Rai (1998) and Banerjee (2006) show that modern Western representations of India still employ poverty as a major theme. For example, the predominant themes (and scenes) of poverty within recent Western films depicting India – such as *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or *Million Dollar Arm* (2014) – confirm this assertion.

Indeed, as Jazeel (2012, 9) recently argues, "the idea of the East as somehow 'exotic' continues to haunt all manner of representations of places like India…and it is not hard to find the lingering trace of the 'exotic' in contemporary representations of India." Beyond Said's Orientalism, and the discourses built by Orientalists concerning India, a growing area

of research – all within the realm of education – addresses the ways in which students think about distant places, or Said's "imagined geographies." In the next section, I examine the ways in which young students (K-12) construct and imagine distant places, focusing particularly on the sources of this "knowledge." While there are no studies that link these three particular themes to student knowledge of India, the cases I do show below indicate that students often use stereotypes or abstractions of various Eastern (or distant) cultures.

**Primary and Secondary Students Imagining Distant Places**

Morgan (2001, 284) suggests that geography teachers must think about students' geographical imaginations, as they are "increasingly shaped outside the geography classroom." Catling and Martin (2011, 328) further this argument reporting that students certainly go to school with some form of background and skill in geography, however these typically are rooted within their "lived geographies." With popular culture and media as focal points within students' leisure and educational experiences, students are more apt to use popular culture and media to describe other places and people. Thus, several studies show how popular culture builds "knowledge," and how that knowledge is in turn employed by students in the classroom (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Heron-Hruby and Alvermann 2009, Hong and Halvorsen 2010, Hall 2011).

In their study of American middle school students' discourse about Japan, Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005) found students referring to popular culture as a way to confirm what they knew about Japan (see also Taylor 2011 for a similar study concerning British middle school students). Examining students' free writing about Japan, Inokuchi and Nozaki found students used popular electronics (e.g. video game systems like Nintendo) or name-brand clothes (e.g. Nike Air Jordans) as their only knowledge about Japan. Other students used

foods – such as sushi – associated with Japanese culture, but sold now as a popular American dish. Connections were also made between Japan and popular sports, for example Olympic figure skating. Students mistakenly accounted some knowledge as a part of what they knew about Japan: supposing Nike Air Jordans were from Japan (Nike being an American company), asserting that Hong Kong was the largest city in Japan, or assuming that Japanese and Chinese food were the same. The stereotypes and misconceptions of Japan by these students is, according to Said (1978, 168), "what is 'out there,' beyond one's own territory…all kinds of suppositions, associations, fictions [which] appear to crowd the unfamiliar and strange space." Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005, 72) also make note of several students who simply write, "I don't know much about Japan":

> Orientalism also carries a power, and as such, it is productive. It enables one to produce knowledge... although more than several students use expressions such as "I don't know much about Japan," they are, in fact, able to construct knowledge when they begin to employ discourse of Othering in conjunction with Orientalism.

Here Inokuchi and Nozaki make an important distinction between Othering and Orientalism. While I have described Orientalism in the previous sections, and it is a specific form of Othering, the process of Othering is a difficult one to define, although it is most closely associated with various processes of stereotyping. More specifically, as described by Stuart Hall (2013, 247-248), Othering "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference,'" as well as "[binds]…Us who are 'normal' in one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them…who are in some way different." Moreover, Hall (2013, 248) argues that these processes tend to be steeped in "gross inequalities of power."

The process occurs through various developmental stages, which I will explain further below.

Similarly, Picton (2008) shows how British middle school students identified and represented Brazil. Using discourse analysis, student drawings, and concept mapping, Picton argues that while newspapers, computer games, the internet inform their concept of Brazil, football (soccer) and television provided the most information. Picton concludes that stereotypical perspectives of Brazil are thus fed by popular culture, and ultimately lead to something Said referred to as binary contrasts ('Self'/'Other'). This, as Picton suggests, means that younger students need to be taught how to think about and see the world through a lens of diversity.

L. Hall (2011), in her assessment of 52 sixth-grade U.S. students, argues that students use popular culture and media in a variety of ways to connect to academic work in social studies. First, popular culture is used as a comprehension strategy. Students actively use examples from popular culture to help define and describe concepts from class, for example, comparing the arches of Roman architecture to the golden arches of McDonalds. Second, students use popular culture as evidence for knowledge as it connects to their academic texts, confirming previous studies (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008). For example, students referenced popular films to support their personal beliefs about the existence of Robin Hood. Finally, students employed popular culture by using it to silence students who offered opposing or different ideas (Hall 2011). For example, the role of women/girls in history as bystanders is reinforced within popular culture through video games and films, and students use these references to defend historical norms.

L. Hall (2011) recognizes that students rarely question the reliability of information used from popular culture, while simultaneously ignoring or dismissing literature presented in the classroom. This may stem from my earlier assessment from Picton's (2008, 245) work that "culture teaches children *what* to think and *how* to think – knowledge is cultural, and the tools of intellectual adaptation are cultural." Hall (2011, 304) suggests teachers need "thoughtful and systematic planning" when encouraging students to apply popular culture to academic work, in order to "challenge and empower…rather than quietly reinforce the status quo."

Researchers also examine educators' experiences in teaching about distant places and people, especially the influence of popular culture on students' geographical imaginations. Hong and Halvorsen (2010) interviewed six American secondary social studies teachers, and gauged both their personal beliefs when teaching about Asia, as well as their reflection on student achievement in this area. Despite the varied approaches and goals offered by the teachers, a sizeable gap existed between teacher expectations and student achievement when describing Asia. For example, one instructor, while preparing to discuss Iran, found her students were unreceptive to any new ideas about Iran due to existing media representations they held on to about that place. Hong and Halvorsen (2010) argue that a disconnect emerged between what teachers expected students to know about Asia after instruction and the powerful influence popular culture continues to have on students perceptions. They contend that while teachers expected to create new perspectives for students, in reality, the curriculum failed to stop the cycle of racial, ethnic, and cultural "othering." Therefore, Hong and Halvorsen (2010) argue for finding new ways to bring students and "others" together

through varied pedagogy and instruction (discussed below) to nuance their knowledge of distant places.

Given the wide variety of popular culture mediums, such as film, television, and sports, and internet platforms (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, etc.) to construct and modify young people's imagined geographies of distant places, I now consider research that examines how some instructors engage with these forms. Additionally, I evaluate the critical, and sometimes uncritical, nature using of popular culture as a means by which to learn about other places and people.

### Formal Learning about Places and People through Popular Culture

The use of popular culture within education, especially in the social sciences/geography, has been – and continues to be – encouraged when teaching about other people and places (Durbin 2002, Algeo 2007, di Palma 2009, Kelly 2013). Early on, Len Masterman (1985) argues that media needs to be employed across education, rather than confined to one specialized media classroom. He reasoned that although information and communication technology was improving and becoming more central to everyday social behavior, media literacy was still left to the margins of the broader educational system. Although he predominantly addressed the role of varying modes of technology and media as they are suited for various subjects, one may surmise that *what* is viewed through this technology and media, whether it be from popular film, television, books, magazines, or news, is viewed through a distorted lens (Said 1978). Masterman's call marked a shift in the way technology and media are and continue to be used in Western geographic education (Morgan 2001).

Accordingly, some scholars support Masterman's argument for media in the classroom (Burgess and Gold 1985, Buckingham 2003). Others question the relationship between media and geographic education (Ball 1994, Morgan 2001, Morgan 2007), recognizing the "superficial picture" (Ball 1994, 227) produced by popular media. Morgan (2007) contends that using popular culture in the classroom needs critical evaluation of the "knowledge" being represented. Regardless of stance, the use of popular media is widely apparent today within geographic education, and given popular culture's influence within students' knowledge of the world, it is important to consider these uses.

Popular Music

The use of music in geographic education pales in comparison to other popular culture mediums, music helps students define both physical and cultural landscapes. Connell and Gibson (2003) argue that one of the ways in which people understand place is through popular music, as it addresses political, economic, ethnic, religious, and other issues within a given society. Additionally, Kelly (2013) contends that music plays an instrumental role in the shaping of cultural identities. For example, Kelly argues while national anthems can foster national identity, the same can be said for displaced groups that wish to keep a cultural connection with historical homelands (e.g. traditional African music in the Caribbean – see Bodenheimer 2015). Consequently, some scholars describe music as a geographic teaching tool, particularly with K-12 students, in several ways,: as a means of describing physical landscapes or processes (Byklum 1994, Jurmu 2005, Allen et al. 2013), as ethnographic and cultural descriptions (Kelly 2013), as links between music and places (Paterson 1991, Nelson 1993), and as opportunities for developing map skills through exploring places within lyrics

of songs (Gordon 1984, Kelly 2013). Yet, more research attention has been given to news media's ability to construct students' knowledge of other places.

News Media

Scholars have researched the influence of news media – such as television programing (e.g. CNN, FoxNews, MSNBC), news magazines (e.g. Time, The Economist, The New Yorker), and newspapers – on students' understanding of other people and places (Perry 1990, Lutz and Collins 1993, Aspass 1998, Vujakovic 1998, Hay and Israel 2001, White 2004). For example, Lutz and Collins (1993, xi) reveal *National Geographic*'s strong influence within American culture, especially for students:

> Our parents and grade-school teachers led us to *National Geographic* magazine, and there we found immense pleasure in the views of fantastically decorated forest people, vivid tropical fish and flowers, and the expansive sense of a world large, diverse, and somehow knowable…Few of the specific ideas, images, or elements of text-based knowledge…remain with us, but of those that do, a significant proportion are from that magazine.

This point indicates that students tend to use popular news media to construct identities – "ideas, images, or elements" become the foundation of students' understanding(s) of other people, places, and the world in general. This foundation connects to the earlier assessment of Said's Orientalism, in terms of the role and influence of popular culture on the way(s) we learn about other places and people. As Lutz and Collins (1993, 220) write, "the *National Geographic* has…cultural authority, and the average white middle-class reader may find little in his or her everyday social experience to contradict it." Lutz and Collins agree that *National Geographic* provides only a limited – and skewed – lens to the world, especially the developing

world. As Dittmer (2010) suggests, *seeing is believing* the visual representations of other people or places.

In an attempt to expand the lens used by younger students, some educators incorporate a variety of news media, such as local papers and international websites, into the classroom (Vujakovic 1998, Hay and Israel 2001). Vujakovic (1998) provides direction for critically assessing news media's potential biases within an undergraduate geographic curriculum. He (1998) also provides a set of guidelines for both teachers and students when selecting news media for geographical purposes (i.e. lectures, discussions, research papers), including: the difference between fact, speculation and opinion, assessing reliability and the origin of information, awareness of omission, and bias in representation. As Alderman and Popke (2002) extend this conversation, instructors must show students how news programs and writing build a discourse that help its viewers and readers to make meaning of the world around them. Moreover, Conover and Miller (2014) argue that undergraduate instructors must equip their students with critical spatial and media literacy so that students develop reflexive skills to better understand news media. They suggest, in particular, instructors' utilization of ever-emerging technologies as a best practice for "creating powerful learning experiences" (Conover and Miller 2014, 93), which extends beyond news media, and into entertainment media such as popular film and television

Popular Film

Educators have utilized film as a way to give a "window to the world" (Lambert and Morgan 2010, 147). Eichen (1989) gives a brief, but comprehensive overview of how films are used for "geo-learning." He encourages the use of popular film as an instruction tool,

citing that it was, at the time, often discounted by geography educators. Eichen contends it could be used to ask a series of geographic questions focusing on the setting, the relationship between place and plot, the representations of cultures, and apparent contradictions. He offers the film *Lawrence of Arabia* as a good example of misrepresentation, both in a physical sense (filmed in the sand dunes of Libyan Desert, while representing the dune-less desert of Jordan), as well as a cultural sense (why use horses, when in a sandy desert camels were commonly used). The point here is that while these may appear to be minute details, they emphasize Said's argument concerning the West's power to create "truth"/"knowledge" about the East, what it *should* look like or how people *should* behave.

Scholars cite both the benefits and drawbacks of using popular film within geographic pedagogy (Aitken 1994, Rockler 2001, Algeo 2007, di Palma 2009, Monfredo 2010, Madsen 2014). Algeo (2007) argues that popular film allows students to be mentally transported to various locations across the globe. Moreover, films absorb students' attention through a cinematic storyline, although other geographers show that documentaries can be entertaining and educational (Alderman and Popke 2002). Similarly, di Palma (2009) claims that viewing landscapes via film are beneficial for both teachers, who do not have time and resources to access these locations, and students at all levels (although she addresses middle school students), who traditionally prefer watching movies over reading academic books (see Aitken 1994).

Moreover, each of these studies encourages teachers and students to be vigilant in identifying stereotypes of people and places. For example, Madsen (2014) shows that U.S. undergraduate students can quickly recognize how the film *Avatar* uses "not-so-subtle" stereotypes of Native Americans and applies them to the fictional alien species being

colonized by human explorers. He (2014, 55) cautions educators though, recommending that they keep a pulse on recent films, particularly as they might be able to connect to themes and issues presented in their courses. Indeed, as film transports students to different corners of the world, television can also provide students an impression of different people and places. However, television uses condensed formats, forcing complex cultural material to be presented into more abstract conceptualizations.

Television

Much like film, geography teachers utilize television programs (e.g. documentaries, educational programming, and entertainment) as a resource (Durbin 2002, Lambert and Morgan 2010, DaSilva and Kvasnak 2012, Smiley 2017). As Williams et al. (1981, 27) argues,

> Geography teachers are generally aware of the importance of children's leisure time reading and television viewing in their geographical learning…pupils are just as likely to quote from what they have recently seen in programmes on television…The geography teacher can use these experiences by encouraging the pupils to draw on them in their classroom discussions.

Lambert and Morgan (2010) suggest that although the use of television is a contemporary (at least in the scope of formal geographic education) addition to geography teachers' repertoire, the significance of television in influencing our perceptions of people and places is overwhelming, especially considering Said's claim that this understanding of the world is not innocent or objective. While this point is not lost on more recent scholarship – especially as television has become a larger part of globalized culture – television programs, whether they be live broadcasts, recorded, or purchased, still have a versatile functionality within the

classroom (Durbin 2002). Television's versatility comes in its ability to visualize distant and diverse landscapes and cultures, while introducing relationships between places and people.

Durbin (2002) gives a concise overview of teaching geography through television. While acknowledging that little research has been conducted on how K-12 students use television to learn, Durbin provides guidelines for teachers when selecting appropriate television programs. Although he does not provide any specific examples, these guidelines instead explore existing views of students in order to understand what guides the construction of their imagined geographies. Other uses for these programs include explaining geographical phenomena (such as varying climates), examining current issues, and valuing other people's views by supplying background information on respective cultures and places (Durbin 2002).

Similar to research previously mentioned on popular film, Durbin (2002) also warns about its limitations. Durbin (2002, 200) suggests that television should not be used as a "surrogate teacher." Television tends to oversimplify complex details about other people and places. Therefore, students often retain an incomplete picture. Durbin argues that using television has difficulties explaining things such as detailed maps, complex geographical data, delicate viewpoints, and usually are too short to allow students time to absorb information. Consequently, he suggests teachers use a *strict* evaluation of images, narration, graphics, and content within television programs prior to using them in class. The rise in precautionary guidelines such as these has prompted a more concerted effort to understand the ways – or stages – that students use to develop their imagined geographies. But as a final note, the increasing rise in access to and distribution of popular culture mediums (television, film, news media, music, as well as others) through the internet and various social media

platforms, is changing the way in which students consume information about distant places, both in formal educational settings, as well as during their leisure time (Leander et al. 2010).

### Development Stages of Primary and Secondary Students of Distant Places

As students tend to rely on popular culture and media for information, they typically employ cultural stereotypes when identifying people and places in formal educational settings (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Hall 2011). Most students lack general knowledge about other cultures, and therefore fail to identify misrepresentations of other cultures in popular media (Algeo 2007, Lee et al. 2009). Some argue this is a general consequence of current trends of standardized testing, where educators must "teach to the test" for subjects such as math and reading, in lieu of other subject areas such as geography (Hinde et al. 2007). Therefore, most scholars recognize that students tend to create simple binaries to learn cultural attributes they deem as similar ("us"/"self"), compared to those which seem foreign ("them"/"other") (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008). Taylor (2014, 278) claims stereotyping is an unfortunate human default to organize lots of information, and therefore, a "compromise between the infinite complexity of the world and the pedagogical need to create accessibility is necessary." To address this need, Picton (2008) and Tierney (2010) argue for a series of separate and independent stages to go beyond binary cultural stereotypes, while Taylor (2014) suggests a multi-faceted approach in the classroom.

Picton (2008) identifies a four-stage process that students utilize when learning about distant places. Picton examined a group of British high school students' knowledge about Brazil. Although the proposed stages take place over the course of many formal years of education (primary through secondary), Picton's study employed a pre and post examination

of student's knowledge of Brazil during a brief period of learning (non-longitudinal). In the first stage, students use stereotypes absorbed through popular culture and media. During the second stage, students create a binary distinction between 'self' and 'other,' "where culture teaches children *what* to think and *how* to think" (245, emphasis in original). In the third stage, as students are exposed to more varied geographical concepts, they apply more diverse and complex binary distinctions at different geographical scales (e.g. a region, a nation, a city), and between different groups of people (e.g. rich/poor, traditional/modern). In the final stage, building on the previous stages, teachers instruct students how to interrogate information from different perspectives – through broader vocabulary and/or appreciation of diversity and interrelationships (see Tierney's example below) – in order to "*actively* deconstruct binary distinctions" (246, emphasis added). Picton suggests that although the fourth stage is a desired outcome for students (to nuance binaries), most never fully reach this level by the end of secondary education, due to the emphasis put on other subject areas, such as math and science.

Picton's reflections indicate the strong influence popular culture and media have over the development of students' understanding of other people and places. Picton (2008, 247) concludes: "helping pupils develop geographical literacy…to deconstruct representations of place should be a key skill, although arguably an ambitious task with younger students." Perhaps this is an invitation to implement and study this model with older students, including undergraduates, as complexity is typically more readily a part of the learning environment in higher education.

However, Tierney (2010) shows some success employing Picton's four stages to break down stereotypes about Sri Lanka among fifteen British middle school students. The

four stages were divided over a series of five lessons – covering diverse topics of physical, cultural, historical, contemporary, and economical geography – building upon previous material in scope and scale. Comparing student drawings and writings both before and after the series of lessons, Tierney concludes that six students reached stage three, and eight students reached stage four. These results are in direct contrast to Picton's (2008) claim that most students fail to reach the final stage by the completion of secondary education. This might be explained by the varying degrees of educational systems, individual teaching ability, and instruction on diversity and critical media literacy. Moreover, he provides little attention to the various demographic makeup or experiences of the students.

While Taylor (2014) recognizes Picton's proposed binary model as an attempt to bridge the gap between stereotyping and geography curriculum, she contends that the model is not only unrealistic, but perhaps not conducive to more comprehensive understanding of distant places. As Taylor points out, the use of binaries and moving to more nuanced details (per Picton's argument) could be sidestepped (by going straight to nuanced learning) in order to avoid confusing students with multiple representations of distant places. Taylor (2014) tracked the "changing representations" British middle school students had about Japan over a ten-week period. She argues that students' understanding of a place is multidimensional and, therefore, so too should the chances be for students to express these representations. In this case, multidimensional implies that students create more than just simple binaries, but rather a complex network of interrelated perspectives about a place. Taylor (2014, 296) asserts that "it is important that [students] are given opportunities in class to express their ideas about a distant place in depth and in a number of forms," allowing teachers to "tailor" their instruction to address any confusion about distant places. While the debate about how

to properly instruct younger students on distant places and peoples is ongoing, I now shift my focus to undergraduates. More specifically, I address the following question: What opportunities exist in nuancing undergraduates' imagined geographies through geography in higher education?

**Opportunities in Nuancing Imagined Geographies of Undergraduates**

Due to the growing influence of popular media over students' imagined geographies, challenges to cultural stereotypes and Orientalism within geography in higher education are also on the rise (Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Nozaki 2009, Duffy 2012, Castleden et al. 2013, Carter 2015). Picton (2008) argues that geography, as well as geography educators, are well-suited for the task of leading students to "see" the world differently, especially given geography's panache for dealing with the complexity and connectivity of cultural diversity. Scholars see this challenge in several directions at the university level. Some echo previous work, calling for undergraduates to critically examine popular culture mediums used to learn about distant places and construct imagined geographies (Dittmer 2006, Somdahl-Sands 2015). Some approaches are more complex, like having undergraduates experience different cultures firsthand (Levy 2000, Duffy 2012, Castleden et al.. 2013), or introducing Orientalism theory into the classroom (Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Nozaki 2009, Smiley 2017).

Aspass (1998) argues for using online news media in developing undergraduate students' knowledge of other regions of the world, having them research online news media's coverage of the continent of Africa, and then evaluating this coverage in a writing project. Students are instructed to compare Western media sources with local news sources within Africa to highlight biases and inconsistences. By using this strategy, students became

increasingly receptive of nuanced information about Africa. Still others have argued for news media's utility to prepare undergraduate geography students in the "dos and don'ts" of media relations (Hay and Israel 2001). Some have insisted on incorporating media studies within university geography programs to better prepare students on how to use, relate, and even become informants to news media (Hay and Israel 2001).

Algeo (2007, 133) argues that using films within an undergraduate classroom atmosphere allows students to "apply critical thinking in everyday experiences, to uncover ideologies embedded in their taken-for-granted world, and to be sensitive to the construction of meaning in popular culture." Critical thinking, in this capacity, refers to a student's ability to, among other skills, collect appropriate information, identify assumptions and beliefs, interpret data, recognize relationships between arguments, draw conclusions, and importantly, reconstruct one's own system of beliefs within the existence of a wider experience. This process, according to Algeo, is accomplished through introducing basic information about the specific culture or people before watching the film representing this group, as well as providing a viewing guide to direct students' note taking. While viewing the film in short segments, students are then encouraged to discuss not only the plot, but more importantly, to critically analyze the representation of the specific culture. Algeo (2007) argues that this process helps students consider the complexity of culture, while not being "overwhelmed" by the film's performance. At the completion of the film, and based on the level of students involved, Algeo offers a number of appropriate debriefing activities, including writing a reflective essay, comparing the film to a similar film (e.g. issues of identity, migration, colonialism, etc.), and critical analysis through group discussion. She

argues this type of learning is engaging, as it connects with – and makes meaning of – undergraduates existing "media-rich" lives (Algeo 2007, 139).

As Smiley (2017) has recently shown using the popular reality television show *The Amazing Race*, geography instructors can pair entertainment programming with complex theoretical material, such as Said's Orientalism, as well as create engaging teaching methods that encourage undergraduates to apply geographical concepts. For example, Smiley suggests a number of themes that can be addressed, first through literature, and then through viewing particular episodes of *The Amazing Race* that highlight these themes. Students used the show and their readings to create discussion centered on popular culture's representation of these themes in various locations. Finally, Smiley had students create their own unique *Amazing Race*-like challenges based on locations of their choice, incorporating geographic themes and using theoretical lenses (such as Orientalism) to frame their challenges. As Smiley concludes, while there are notable issues of misrepresentations and stereotypes embedded within episodes, it also opens up conversations about experiences and perceptions outside those errors. The process of contextualizing episodes, therefore, is an important step towards critical media literacy.

These studies reflect research that is directed at interrogating stereotypes through formal education. However, studies have confirmed that students also deconstruct stereotypes by coming into direct contact with the Other (Levy 2000, Fuller et al. 2006, Pandit 2009, Duffy 2012, Castleden et al. 2013, Simm and Marvell 2015). Students who are exposed to new cultures find varying differences between the representations developed through popular culture and what they experience firsthand (Duffy 2012, Castleden et al. 2013). Levy (2000) reflects on the opportunity study abroad programs give to nuancing

otherness, and Duffy (2012) describes a university travel writing course in Southeast Asia in which students' expressed *critical* reactions to these cultures through journal writing. Similarly, Castledeen et al. (2013, 1) explores the utility of using interactive field schools in Canada for the "transformation of worldviews," as undergraduates meet and learn from indigenous groups. Parkhill (2018) argues these efforts are increasingly allowing students to put the theoretical into their lived experience.

A final challenge to "othering" comes by introducing Said's Orientalism theory into the classroom (Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Nozaki 2009, Somdahl-Sands 2015, Smiley 2017). This presents students with a framework for developing and contextualizing identities of people and places. As Nozaki (2009, 142) warns, without an understanding of Orientalism, students typically remain "stereotypical and simplistic" in their representations of the "Other." Similarly, Ashutosh and Winders (2009) argue for incorporating Orientalism into undergraduate geography coursework. By familiarizing students with the historical and contemporary issues of Orientalism, geographers can give reason for the enduring stereotypical representations students have become accustomed to, and have used to build their imagined geographies (Nozaki 2009).

**Conclusion**

Morgan (2001) argues that the blurring of lines between formal education and popular culture requires geographers to reevaluate how to approach popular culture, and more importantly, how to create discussion about imagined geographies in the classroom. This debate over popular culture's influence on and power over imagined geographies is still apparent in contemporary education. Therefore Hall (2011) calls for more research on how

students use popular culture to develop knowledge of the world around them. Additionally, Said's (1978, 46) Orientalism plays a tremendous role in understanding the implications of such use:

> In short, from its earliest modern history to the present, Orientalism as a form of thought for dealing with the foreign has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinctions as "East" and "West"…Because this tendency is right at the center of Orientalist theory, practice, and values found in the West, the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth.

More specifically, additional research is needed on how popular culture and media influence students in undergraduate geographic education. Students entering higher education are traditionally expected to think more critically – and complexly – about issues. While younger students may lack the framework to consider the intricacy of cultural diversity around the world (Picton 2008), undergraduates nonetheless represent a student population with the potential to think more critically and complexly. Indeed, as McInerney (2010, 26) argues, as 21st Century learners undergraduates are interested in "issues of social justice, connecting with others in the real and virtual space, embracing cross-cultural competencies and sensitivities to other cultures, and being global in outlook as citizens of the world." Additionally, most universities require some form of international/cultural coursework for their undergraduates, many whom fulfill this requirement through geography courses. However, unlike the continuous flow of other subjects through middle school and high school (e.g. math, English, physical sciences), geography is typically left with only one year during this span. The educational gap in geography means more students entering higher education are failing to even meet proficient standards in geographic literacy (NAEP 2011).

This raises several questions: If undergraduates are required to think more complexly about culture and geography in broad terms, but lack a previous foundation of formal knowledge, do they rely more on popular culture to build and employ "knowledge" of other people and places? And if so, how can geographic educators in higher education help guide students to this realization? Wellens et al. (2010, 159) give some guidance here:

> As we move further into the twenty-first century, it is becoming increasingly clear that many of the world's major problems are strongly geographical in nature. The misuse of the earth's resources, environmental degradation, climate change, global inequality and intercultural relations are all central parts of geography's territory. While retaining its academic rigour and scholarship, geographical education has, we would argue, a duty to teach both about and for the kinds of changes that can help to create a world which is more equal and more sustainable. A more explicit focus on social transformation would enrich our students' education and also help to raise the discipline's status and profile. It would help to release us from the present paradoxical situation where our discipline appears in many countries to be faltering at the very moment when its knowledge, insights and skills have never been more needed.

In which ways can geography educators empower undergraduates to undergo such social transformations? As Conover and Miller (2014, 93) argue, geographers should use methods that help students build skills for critical media literacy, understanding the influence of media in representation, and furthermore, "embrace [those] possibilities and keep developing [them] towards more exciting and effective pedagogies." My research proposes to further analyze these issues and questions with both undergraduates and geography instructors, utilizing three different higher education settings, and employing multiple qualitative methods, which I discuss next. As I argue throughout this dissertation, one powerful pedagogy includes students' visualizing the source(s) of their knowledge and

effectively addressing issues of power and representation within popular culture in conjunction with other avenues of information.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

## Introduction

As explained through my literature review, this research emerges at the confluence of several topics in cultural geography and postcolonial studies, including representation of cultures, popular culture, and geographic literacy in higher education. I am concerned with how undergraduates utilize popular culture (and other sources) to build and sustain knowledge of distant places, as well as ways in which educators can further nuance imagined geographies and reduce the process of "othering." Additionally, this research provides an empirical analysis for a basis to develop creative pedagogy to empower undergraduates to challenge cultural/colonial stereotypes reinforced through popular culture and other sources. Finally, this research provides instructors and universities reason to (re)consider and (re)shape curriculum and school policies in order to reduce the hegemony from within.

Using photographs and focus groups, I employed a modified Photovoice approach, known as participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE), to create and analyze data with undergraduates at three universities. Photovoice is a community-based participatory analytical approach, which allows participants to use photography to visualize and describe their answers to a set of questions, while focusing on goals such as community

empowerment and progress (Wang and Burris 1994, Delgado 2015). PDPE encourages participants to take or obtain photographs, but has less of a focus on empowerment or progress (Harper 2002, Kurtz and Wood 2014). In this study, PDPE allowed for insight into how participants (undergraduates) build, sustain, and modify their imagined geographies, specifically of India. Within the PDPE approach, focus groups are used to give participants an opportunity to collectively view each other's photos and discuss strengths, weaknesses, and proposed changes within their individual and collective informal (and formal) learning environments. Moreover, it provides opportunities to encourage a depth of understanding of why a photograph may answer questions concerning individual and collective imagined geographies. I also interviewed geography instructors to compare and contrast information and understandings of undergraduate participants, especially in terms of how undergraduates' project and work with imagined geographies within coursework and classrooms. Overall, this research design is based in postcolonial theories, with data synthesized through inductive and deductive discourse analysis, and interpreted through the lens of Said's Orientalism.

**Research Questions**

As described in the Chapter 1, the following questions formed the core of this research:

1. What modes and networks of popular culture, as well as other realms, assist undergraduates in their imagining of India?
2. How do undergraduates reinforce or challenge stereotypical representations of India?

3. In which ways may PDPE inform our understandings of student imagined geographies, and further develop critical (geographic) pedagogy of distant places, as well as to participatory approaches in pedagogy?

**Study Area**

I visited three university campuses in the mid and south central areas of the United States (Figure 3.1). Within this region, I included three types of universities: 1) a land-grant university (LG) (and predominately white institution, or PWI), represented by Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK), 2) a private/religious institutions (PR), with the Lutheran liberal arts school of Concordia University Nebraska (Seward, NE), and 3) a historically black college/university (HBCU), represented by Langston University (Langston, OK). By

*Figure 3.1 University sites.*

including three types of universities, I examine similarities and differences among university students from several vantage points, including patterns that emerge between and within schools with different locations and varying demographics (see, for example, Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Lee et al. 2009). At least one limitation of this study is that I used only one site within each university type, giving a particularly small sample size and representation of each specific university and type. However, I offer the findings of this research as case studies by which to emulate and interrogate further in the future.

While I conducted interviews with instructors at these sites, I also interviewed instructors from all over the United States. I held to the parameters that those whom I interviewed had to be at a land-grant university, a minority-serving university, or a private-religious university. In many cases, I needed to conduct these additional interviews via phone or Skype/FaceTime for convenience and timeliness. The opportunities and limitations of these interviews will be discussed further below.

**India as a Distant Place and Focus**

Researchers who examine students' knowledge about a distant location or culture typically focus on a specific region or nation. For example, scholars examine student's perceptions of areas and cultures such as New Zealand/Great Britain (Holloway and Valentine 2002), Sikhs (Algeo 2007), Brazil (Picton 2008), Asia (Nozaki 2009, Hong and Halvorsen 2010, Duffy 2012), Sri Lanka (Tierney 2010), Turkey (Tallon 2011), indigenous peoples (Castledeen et al. 2013), Japan (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Taylor 2011, Taylor 2014), and Iran (Carter 2015). Few, however, examine undergraduate knowledge of imagined geographies (but see, Algeo 2007, Castledeen et al. 2013, Carter 2015). Moreover, India has previously been unstudied as

a distant location in examining how students, and specifically undergraduates, construct their imagined geographies.

Recently, Indian cultural diaspora has put Indian culture within the grasp of many Westerners. For example, the rising popularity of films in or about India (e.g. *Slumdog Millionaire, The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, Million Dollar Arm*, and Pixar's animated short *Sanjay's Super Team*), or the role of Indian actors and actresses in recent entertainment television programming (e.g. the character Dr. Raj Koothrappali, played by Kunal Nayyar, on *The Big Bang Theory*, or the character Tom Haverford, played by Aziz Ansari, on *Parks and Recreation*). Much of this newfound cultural crossover is predicated on growing globalization and contact between people and places, but also to the larger physical presence of migrating Indians into the United States over the past three decades (Raghuram et al. 2008). Second, as described earlier in the literature review, India falls within Said's classic Orientalism model of western culture versus eastern culture. In this way, this research is an extension of previous research, and affords using Said's theory of Orientalism as a critical lens to explore students' imagined geographies (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Nozaki 2009).

Finally, while previous studies use a variety of ways to gauge students' knowledge of distant places, including essays, mental maps, interviews, focus groups, and participant observations, this project incorporated photography. This method provided undergraduates with an opportunity to critically visualize their individual and collective sources of knowledge about India. Having students visualize this process was important in two distinct ways: 1) most of the ways in which we "learn" about distant places is visual or through imagery (e.g. film, television, magazines, etc.) (Said 1978, Lutz and Collins 1993, Algeo 2007, Lee et al.

2009), and 2) photographs gave students something to speak about during focus groups (Longhurst 2010, Winlow et al. 2013, Kurtz and Wood 2014).

## Theoretical Background, Benefits and Drawbacks of Methods Used

### Photovoice

With continued emphasis on reducing barriers among participants and researchers, as well as empowering participants, qualitative methods have emerged to provide participants more "voice." For example, Photovoice, a community-based participatory research method, embraces much of this ideal within qualitative research, including the concepts of critical inquiry, empowerment, and participatory action research (Delgado 2015). Moreover, variations of this method, namely participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE), are especially effective with young people, particularly in educational settings (Harper 2002, Kaplan et al. 2010, Kurtz and Wood 2014). Before I discuss this modified approach, I provide background on Photovoice.

Originally, Photovoice was created by those studying and researching community health issues (although the method has now crossed over into multiple disciplines). Pioneers of Photovoice, Wang and Burris (1994) use the method to assess rural health care of Chinese women. As Wang and Burris highlight, the method has three overarching goals: 1) Photovoice provides an opportunity for people to record (visually and textually) and reflect upon various strengths and concerns found within a community; 2) Photovoice promotes a bridge between participants to discuss and critically think about their community via the photos taken by the group; 3) Photovoice spurs greater dialogue within the community, and also affords an opportunity to reach policymakers or stakeholders. For the purposes of this

study, I define community as both a group of learners, as well as the potential "grassroots" opportunities these learners have to diffuse into larger networks and communities (see "ripple effect" below). Thus, a primary aim in using Photovoice is to perform, with participants, some type of social justice or positive experience.

As Delgado (2015) has recently defined Photovoice, the method involves taking photographs (more recently, through digital technology), to capture an image that is later used as a "vehicle" for not only creating discussion, but more importantly, local knowledge. Participants from the same community engage in a project with a researcher (although in Photovoice a researcher is much more like a partner or co-researcher) to address a particular topic or issue within that community (for example, as described above, community health care, or, as another example, the effects of violence in a community). Participants are asked to take photographs that address "research" questions, and in addition are encouraged to write brief summaries of why they chose to take a particular photograph. Participants are then allowed to select a few of their photos and descriptions to share with a small group (e.g. focus group, discussed below), in which each person has an opportunity to speak about the issue, again using the photographs to facilitate the discussion. The group then engages in a broader conversation about the issue to consider ways to address them as a community (in this case how undergraduates use various sources to imagine distant places as a community of learners). Photovoice projects typically (although not always, such as the case with PDPE) end with a public exhibition of the photographs for the community at large (including policymakers) to see and spur further discussion and dialogue.

Like other qualitative methods, Photovoice attempts to deal with some of the "messy" realities of the complex human experience. By using visual methods as a means to

show and create knowledge that is "grounded" within participants' experiences and realities, researchers and participants alike avoid some of the power issues created between researcher and the researched that affect more traditional methods (e.g. interviews) of interpreting data within institutions such as universities (Delgado 2015). In doing so, Photovoice emphasizes the notion of 'voice,' albeit "through the eyes" of an individual, where that person's "view counts" (Delgado 2015).

Participant-Driven Photo-Elicitation (PDPE)

Although Photovoice has been proven to be beneficial both for researchers and participants, more recently modified Photovoice approaches have been developed. These newer approaches highlight certain aspects of Photovoice (while leaving out other traditional components), typically to better facilitate communication in certain environments (e.g. classrooms), or to contend with various limitations in the field. One of these modified approaches is known as PDPE. While still known for its ability to give participants the ability to take and speak about photographs, PDPE "does not focus on community empowerment and improvement" (Kurtz and Wood 2014).

While PDPE is different in its aims than a more traditional form of Photovoice, it retains many of the same methodological steps. First, participants are not only trained how to take photographs, but are also oriented on the nature of the research (e.g. research questions). Second, participants take (or obtain) photographs they feel pertain to the research topic. Finally, participants use these images to buttress conversations about the research topic, either in an interview or focus group. Accordingly, these photographs and

this process still enable participants to discuss what they feel is most important or representative from their perspective and/or experience (Delgado 2015).

As a means to conduct research, geographers have begun to use PDPE as an alternative to a full Photovoice approach. For examples, Liesch (2011) utilized PDPE to explore community perspectives of a local national historic park, while Wells (2011) implemented the method to understand social networks created by young refugees/asylum-seekers in London. More instructively for this research, some geographers have begun to use PDPE as a critical pedagogical tool. Perhaps in the best example to date, Kurtz and Wood (2014) show how to use PDPE as an instructive assignment in an upper-level food geography course for undergraduates. By completing the assignment, students gained critical thinking skills to enmesh course material with personal experience. Moreover, Kurtz and Wood (2014, 548) contend that PDPE is not simply a way to collect data, but more importantly, it empowers students to reflect on their own ways of thinking:

> We suggest that to use PDPE exclusively as a research tool is to limit the potential of the technique. The enhanced role of the participate in PDPE interviews can spur reflexive evaluations by students, offering them insights into their own experience by allowing them to make novel connections and conclusions during the picture-taking and interview processes. This potential makes PDPE useful not only as a means to enhance inductive research skills, but also as a means for students to describe, evaluate, and critique the factors that contribute to the formation and interpretation of the experiences.

For this study, the PDPE project gave participants the opportunity to enact change at individual and collective scales. First, each individual considered the ways in which they construct their imagined geographies of India, focusing on those knowledges and respective sources they rely on to think about this distant place. Second, as a group, students worked

together to sort through their photographs and determine what types of information was being used to construct their imagined geography, and the strengths and weaknesses of these sources. Finally, the process allowed me to gauge their ability to enact such change within their informal learning environments through a pre- and post-focus group activity. The focus group began with participants watching a film scene representing India, and then together constructing a list of information based on what they connected to India. This helped to gauge how authoritative the students viewed the film. After the focus group, we returned to the list to see where the points fell within their discussion of their individual and collective photographs.

Focus Groups and Semi-Structured Interviews

As the remaining two methods – focus groups and semi-structured interviews – are alike in many respects, I provide background information for them together, highlighting distinct differences between them where appropriate (especially in terms of their benefits and drawbacks). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups have similar goals: both seek to engage people in conversation to better understand their experiences and knowledge of their world. However, one fundamental difference between the two is that they generate very different data. Semi-structured interviews generally take place in a one-to-one environment, where the researcher asks a number of open-ended questions to one participant. Focus groups use a small assembly of people to discuss a number of topics or questions posed by a researcher/moderator.

While semi-structured interviews and focus groups have similar objectives, due to their different approaches they create different strengths and weaknesses. Interviews allow

for "depth and detailed understanding" of an individual's experience and knowledge, giving researchers an "interpretive methodology" for "probing meanings and emotions" (McDowell 2010, 158). The one-on-one nature of interviews foster intimate environments where the participant is viewed as an "expert" in their experiences. Thus, interviews provide an environment to study sensitive topics (Bennett 2002). Accordingly, participants are assured confidentiality and the opportunity for follow up discussion.

Focus groups, on the other hand, may generate more data from varied perspectives in less time (Bosco and Herman 2010). Moreover, focus groups offer a forum for participants to give their genuine thoughts and feelings, providing opportunities to establish new and deeper understandings of a given issue or topic (Breen 2006). Focus groups can, however, be more difficult to arrange and coordinate for multiple participants to show up simultaneously, can be "dominated" by certain individuals, and typically are highly "context-specific," meaning they are more difficult to use in generalizations across time and space (Breen 2006, 467). Finally, due to the nature of having a group discussion, ensuring confidentiality is typically more difficult, and participants are encouraged to speak only about things they would not mind others potentially sharing (Longhurst 2010).

**Data Collection**

Before I explain how I collected data using a PDPE approach (including focus groups) and through interviews, I provide an overview of my participants and how I recruited them. Also, prior to recruiting participants, I received approval from Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research with human subjects.

Participants and Recruitment

Undergraduate participants ranged in age from 18-27 (see Table 3.1 for other selected demographics among all participants; Table 3.2 for selected demographics by institution). At each university, two groups of students were solicited to participate in the study. The first group was in their first year of study (freshmen level status), and the second group include undergraduates in their final year (senior status). Thus, the study included students at both ends of the undergraduate spectrum. In doing so, as shown by O'Meara et al. (2012), who recruited students in the same way, I was able to consider patterns of similar and different perceptions of each group. I originally expected to recruit 6-8 participants within each of these groups (12-16 at each campus), but in actuality I had 10, 11, and 12 participants respectively, totaling 33 participants across all three universities.[1] Most of my participants were traditional-aged university students (i.e. no gap between secondary and higher education), with one non-traditional student. Participants represented a relatively diverse set of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

I made contact with gatekeepers (i.e. instructors) at each university to assist in recruiting participants and securing meeting locations. Gatekeepers distributed (via email) electronic fliers to potential participants. The flier contained basic information about the project, including prospective dates, eligibility, contact information and incentives (Appendix I). I incentivized participation by providing food at each meeting (both the initial meeting and the subsequent focus groups), awarding each participant a $20 VISA cash card, and entering each participant into a raffle for one of two mini-tablets upon completing the

Table 3.1. Selected demographics of undergraduate participants.

| *Institution* | |
|---|---|
| PWI/Land Grant | 10 |
| HBCU | 12 |
| Private/Religious | 11 |
| | |
| *Gender* | |
| Female | 22 |
| Male | 11 |
| | |
| *Academic Standing* | |
| First Year | 15 |
| Final Year | 18 |
| | |
| *Socio-economic Standing* | |
| Low Income | 7 |
| Middle Class | 19 |
| Upper Middle Class | 7 |
| | |
| *Ethnicity* | |
| Asian | 1 |
| Black | 10 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 3 |
| White | 16 |
| Multiethnic | 3 |

project. At my final site, I increased the incentive to $40 in order to increase participation. In some cases, instructors offered extra credit in return for participating in the study. Gatekeepers emailed those students in their courses, as well as asked other instructors (regardless of department/discipline) to forward the flier it to their students. The project was considered first-come, first-serve (via email contact with me), although I only reached my "maximum" in one case (i.e. 8 participants in a group). After a participant had confirmed

Table 3.2. Selected demographics of undergraduate participants, by institution.

| **PWI/Land Grant** | | **HBCU** | | **Private/Religious** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | *Gender* | | *Gender* | |
| Female | 4 | Female | 11 | Female | 6 |
| Male | 6 | Male | 1 | Male | 5 |
| | | | | | |
| *Academic Standing* | | *Academic Standing* | | *Academic Standing* | |
| First Year | 5 | First Year | 4 | First Year | 6 |
| Final Year | 5 | Final Year | 8 | Final Year | 5 |
| | | | | | |
| *Socio-economic Standing* | | *Socio-economic Standing* | | *Socio-economic Standing* | |
| Low Income | 2 | Low Income | 3 | Low Income | 2 |
| Middle Class | 4 | Middle Class | 9 | Middle Class | 6 |
| Upper Middle Class | 4 | Upper Middle Class | 0 | Upper Middle Class | 3 |
| | | | | | |
| *Ethnicity* | | *Ethnicity* | | *Ethnicity* | |
| Asian | 1 | Asian | 0 | Asian | 0 |
| Black | 0 | Black | 10 | Black | 0 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 2 | Hispanic/Latino | 0 | Hispanic/Latino | 1 |
| White | 6 | White | 1 | White | 9 |
| Multiethnic | 1 | Multiethnic | 1 | Multiethnic | 1 |

their interest in participating, I added them to an email list and kept them posted on meeting dates and times when I planned to visit their campus. Additionally, I used a snowball method by asking remaining participants if they had any friends or acquaintances they thought might be interested in joining the project. To incentivize this snowballing effect, I offered an extra “raffle ticket” for every additional participant they recruited and successfully completed the study.

In addition to PDPE, I conducted semi-structured interviews with instructors, focusing on how undergraduates’ project imagined geographies within coursework and classrooms. At first, I recruited instructors at the same sites as my PDPE projects by sending out emails with information about my research and a consent form. To expand my

interviewee pool, I conducted an online Google search for geography departments and instructors at similar university-types (e.g. land grant, etc.) in the United States, creating a list of prospective interviewees based on the courses they taught (namely lower-level introductory human or world regional courses). After my initial wave of 30 interview requests via email, I was able to acquire 23 commitments. I sent a second wave of 10 interview requests to other instructors, and was able to secure seven more interviews. In total, I interviewed 30 instructors, including eight face-to-face interviews across the three university sites, with an additional 22 interviews conducted via phone or Skype/Facetime from sixteen universities. I sent emails to each instructor with a consent form to complete before the agreed upon meeting time.

**Employing PDPE**

Orientation Details

The first meeting, which included both student groups, took place on campus during the evening (in order to avoid classes held during the day).[2] Meetings lasted about 60 minutes, where I explained the "nuts and bolts" (described below) of the PDPE project, including the expectations and rights of participants and protocols of myself as the researcher, overall aims of the project, and student questions or concerns (Appendix II). Participants also completed written consent forms and background surveys. Orientation meetings were held on September 9, 2016 (PWI/land grant), September 20, 2016 (religious/private), and October 24, 2016 (HBCU).

Initially, I gave an overview and purpose of the project/research (e.g. to gain more understanding about how undergraduates imagine distant places). After this introduction,

every participant completed what I called a "knowledge inventory." I asked participants to spend a couple minutes writing down a list of 3-5 things they knew about India. No other parameters were set, and hence participants could be as specific or as abstract as they wanted. The purpose of this inventory was twofold. First, it gave each participant something to work with as they completed their respective projects by matching the knowledge they listed to photographs that represented that knowledge or the source of that knowledge. Second, it acted as an accountability factor, ensuring that what participants were including in their project was "existing" knowledge rather than "new" knowledge – a present imagined geography, rather than a modified imagined geography. I also took pictures of each participant's list in case they misplaced it; I could then simply email them their respective list.

Additionally, for demonstrative purposes, I conducted a hypothetical project with participants by asking each group "What do you know about the Vietnam War?" After we came up with a collective "knowledge inventory" of the Vietnam War, I asked participants to offer prospective images we could include in a project that would represent these pieces of knowledge. I encouraged them to think about *how* they learned or what was *still* informing/supporting that knowledge. I reiterated that there was no such thing as right or wrong images to include, but rather that the descriptions they wrote about each picture would help to indicate how it connected back to an item on the "knowledge inventory."

After the demonstration, and when students were comfortable with the concept of PDPE, I directed them to send their completed projects about India to me via email using a Word file (although some used other programs such as PowerPoint). I also described the timeline and deadlines associated with the project. Participants understood that they would earn a VISA cash card for completing the project, and additionally be entered into a raffle

for a mini-tablet. Each meeting was recorded audibly in case of: 1) potential changes or modifications in my presentation of the information for future meetings, and 2) to assist in my process of reflexivity (see below). That being the case, I did not experience any major issues or find a need to alter my orientation meeting approach for the three sites.

At the end of the first meeting, participants were asked to complete the written consent form (Appendix III) to acknowledge their rights and expectations within the project. After signing the consent form, each participant also completed a short survey in order to collect details about each students' coursework (in particular coursework dealing with international cultures), travel history, and popular culture consumption, along with basic demographic information (age, gender, socioeconomic experience) (Appendix IV). These surveys assisted in building a working understanding of the backgrounds of each of the participants, and, as Woldoff et al. (2011) explain, how past experiences and environments are employed by participants during focus group interactions.

Between the Orientation and Focus Group Meetings

I kept in contact with each site's participants via email to make reminders about impending deadlines to turn in their data (i.e. digital photographs and typed descriptions) prior to our focus group meeting. By having participants send their projects electronically to me, I could print them for their respective focus groups, but also have a digital copy to preview before the focus group and for future analysis. Emails also included reminders about our face-to-face meetings (i.e. date, time, location). Additionally, these "checking in" emails allowed me to answer any questions participants had.

Focus Group Meetings and Locations

I conducted two focus group meetings on each respective campus, one focus group with first-year students and one with final-year students. Each set of focus groups were scheduled to occur one after the other, with about 90 minutes budgeted for each respective session. As mentioned above, I communicated to participants through email as to the times and locations of these meetings. In each meeting we met during a weekday evening, and focus groups ranged in length from about 40 minutes (only four participants) to just over an hour. I provided snacks and water for participants. Table 3.3 summarizes each focus group meeting.

To assist in identifying undergraduates, I developed the following unique identifier for each participant: Gender-Year-University Type-Speaker Identification Number. For example, a female undergraduate in their final year at the private religious university, who was the third female to speak would be abbreviated F4-PR-03. Table 3.4 describes the abbreviations used. Additionally, when using images submitted by students, I include the caption written by students in their respective PDPE projects.

Table 3.3. Focus group details.

| *Institution* | Academic Year | Size (Females/Males) | Length of Meeting |
|---|---|---|---|
| HBCU* | First | 4 (2/2) | 38:14 |
| HBCU | Final | 8 (7/1) | 56:42 |
| Land Grant/PWI** | First | 5 (2/3) | 48:58 |
| Land Grant/PWI | Final | 5 (2/3) | 1:04:49 |
| Private/Religious | First | 6 (5/1) | 52:26 |
| Private/Religious | Final | 5 (2/3) | 51:25 |

*Historically Black College/University, **Predominately White Institution

Table 3.4. Abbreviations used for undergraduate participants.

| *Gender* | *Abbr.* | *Year* | *Abbr.* | *Institution Type* | *Abbr.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | M | First Year | 1 | Land Grant | LG |
| Female | F | Final Year | 4 | Private/Religious | PR |
| | | | | Historically Black | HB |

Facilitating Focus Group Discussions

To be attentive to group dynamics and listen thoughtfully to participants, I visually and audibly recorded each focus group for purposes of reflexivity, analysis and interpretation. I also made some brief notes to myself during the focus group, especially during the third phase, while observing student interaction and for later consideration while analyzing the data. After an overview and ice-breaking exercise, the focus group had three phases: 1) selecting photographs, 2) contextualizing, and 3) codifying.

Each focus group began with an introduction, reminding participants of the purpose of the study, reviewing any ethical or logistical issues, and giving the "ground rules" for the discussion. Participants were also given opportunity to add to these rules, as well as ask any questions about the format or to address any other concerns. I also reminded participants of their rights and expectations (and mine) from the consent form they signed at the orientation meeting.

Every discussion began with an opening exercise/activity to "break the ice." This centered on viewing a brief dinner scene from a film (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*), and having participants write down what they believed to be information about India (both preexisting and new "knowledge"). Then as a group, we created a list of representations

about India through this film scene. The exercise allowed all participants, regardless of personal experiences, a chance to add to the conversation, as well as get them comfortable in building dialogue. Although participants contested some of these representations initially, I asked them to hold on to those thoughts (i.e. write them down) for the end of the focus group session when we returned to this collective list about the film scene.

I moderated each focus group with a set of predetermined questions and discussion topics (Appendix V). These points revolved around general knowledge about India, and were situated individually and collectively with participants' pictures and descriptions associated with India. The majority of the focus group discussion revolved around the respective photographs taken by the participants, and therefore most of the subsequent or follow-up questions emerged from photos/text/knowledge created during each individual focus group meeting.

After distributing participants' projects, each selected 3-5 photographs that best represented their individual knowledge of India, refreshing themselves on the picture and description. Next, each participant had an opportunity to share their respective photographs, describing why they took the photo, or selected that image, and what it represented in terms of what they knew about India. I asked participants to consider the following questions as they shared their stories about each picture:

1. What do you see in this photograph?
2. What is being represented in this photograph?
3. How does this relate to your knowledge of India?

Other participants were encouraged to respond to these photographs, sharing (dis)similar photographs or experiences. In many of the focus groups, as one participant would share a

picture, another would make a connection in some way, and then another participant would follow that, creating a waterfall-like experience of sharing respective pictures and projects. Occasionally the discussion would stall, and as the facilitator/moderator I would need to "restart" the conversation by asking if anyone else had something they wanted to share. This process continued until all participants felt they had contributed.

Then, working together, participants sorted the photographs into stacks based upon what they determined to be similar characteristics. I gave few instructions here, except that they needed to be able to identify each of their stacks with some sort of label, indicating how they sorted the pictures and why. I reiterated that I was not looking for any particular way of sorting, or how many (or few) stacks they should end up with – in essence, that there was no "correct" method to this step. After participants created their stacks, I asked the following questions:

1. Why did you decide on these stacks?
2. What do these stacks represent about India?
3. What strengths are present within these stacks as "sources" of knowledge?
4. What weaknesses are present within these stacks as "sources" of knowledge?

I concluded each focus group by returning to the list we created at the beginning of the meeting in relation to the *Indiana Jones* scene. The point of returning to the list was to reflect on the initial process of "learning" about India through popular culture, and how their knowledge and ideas about creating knowledge had changed given their discussion in the focus group. Additionally, I gave some concluding remarks to summarize the discussion, and gave participants an opportunity to both analyze the extent of the conversation and

offer any final thoughts. I ended by thanking the participants, distributing the cash card incentives, and conveying their important contribution to my research.

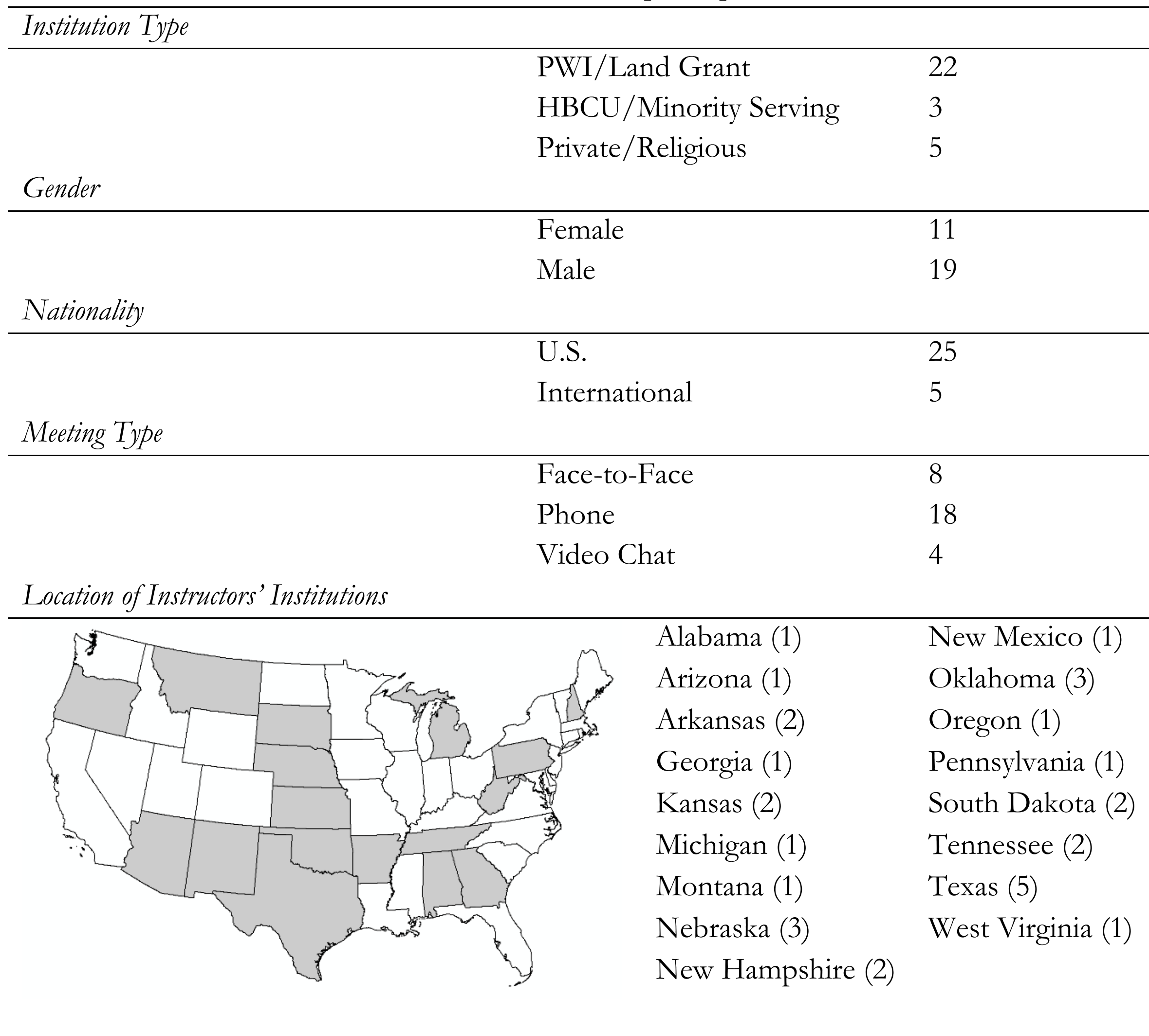
**Semi-Structured Interviews**

<u>"Meeting" Details</u>

The original intent for my interviews was to meet face-to-face with instructors at each of my prospective campus locations. This occurred on the three campuses I described above, where I completed six face-to-face interviews. However, when I began to experience difficulty securing other viable sites to work with students, as previously discussed, I expanded the scope and size of my interviewee pool. On one hand, this allowed me to contact instructors from all around the country in an attempt to gather perspectives from a variety of experiences. On the other hand, many of these interviews had to be conducted remotely, either via phone or video chat (e.g. Skype, FaceTime). I discuss the implications of these different types of "meetings" below.

In all, I conducted thirty interviews with instructors between June 2016 and March 2017 (see Table 3.5). My interviews were dominated by those instructors at land grant universities. Land grant universities, as opposed to private/religious or HBCUs, were more likely to have entire geography departments from which I could contact prospective interviewees. To mitigate this imbalance, for example, I expanded instructors from *just*

Table 3.5. Breakdown of interviews with instructor participants.



| *Institution Type* | | |
|---|---|---|
| | PWI/Land Grant | 22 |
| | HBCU/Minority Serving | 3 |
| | Private/Religious | 5 |
| *Gender* | | |
| | Female | 11 |
| | Male | 19 |
| *Nationality* | | |
| | U.S. | 25 |
| | International | 5 |
| *Meeting Type* | | |
| | Face-to-Face | 8 |
| | Phone | 18 |
| | Video Chat | 4 |
| *Location of Instructors' Institutions* | | |
| | Alabama (1) | New Mexico (1) |
| | Arizona (1) | Oklahoma (3) |
| | Arkansas (2) | Oregon (1) |
| | Georgia (1) | Pennsylvania (1) |
| | Kansas (2) | South Dakota (2) |
| | Michigan (1) | Tennessee (2) |
| | Montana (1) | Texas (5) |
| | Nebraska (3) | West Virginia (1) |
| | New Hampshire (2) | |

HBCUs, to a broader definition of minority-serving institutions (e.g. Hispanic-Serving Institutions, or HSIs). A disproportion in gender is also represented, with nearly twice as many male participants (19) as female (11). While I attempted to interview a balanced number of males and females, the discipline of geography remains a gendered field, leaving limited opportunities. However, according to a report released by the American Association of Geographers (2016), faculty members in university/college geography departments are currently 63% male and 37% female, indicating that my participants were approximately

representative of present gender ratios (see more about instructors below in "Instructor Background). Interviews were as short as 25 minutes, and as long as 1 hour and 23 minutes, with the average length about 45 minutes. In total, I had over 21 hours of recorded conversations.

Of the thirty interviews, eight were face-to-face, and almost all of these occurred in offices on respective campuses. This seemed to be the most comfortable and convenient locations for participants, with limited distractions and typically quiet environments to have our conversation. Two interviews were conducted in public spaces – both in coffee shops. These presented slightly more difficult environments due to background noise and visual distractions. That being said, in all of the face-to-face interviews it was relaxed atmosphere, and for the most part observable for me to read body language or recognize voice tone or inflection to understand the direction our conversation needed to move (e.g. shifting to the next topic, asking a probing question). These more intimate interviews also tended to be a bit lengthier in duration, as it was easier to build rapport and share experiences.

Interviews that were conducted remotely, either by phone or video chat, presented some opportunities, as well as some limitations. In most cases, instructors indicated they wanted to interview while they were in their office, although in some cases they preferred to be interviewed while they were at another location so as not to be disturbed (e.g. home). I attempted to be as flexible as possible in terms of times and days to schedule interviews, especially if instructors needed to change times due to other, more pressing demands. This amenable approach built rapport with instructors in a way that translated into them following through with their initial commitment to participate in the study, rather than rescind their interest.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of conducting these interviews was facilitating the flow of the conversation. While in face-to-face interviews I was able to "read" my participants body language, the only aspect I could depend on in the remote interviews was vocal tone and inflection. Earlier interviews tended to have some awkward pauses or "crossed lines" when both the participant and myself were talking simultaneously. To be sure, as I conducted more interviews over the phone, I became more comfortable at knowing when to lead – and importantly, when to listen – in these conversations. Another issue, although less common, was some type of technical connection problem in phone and video interviews. Despite these obstacles, most of my interviews went extremely well, resulting in open, reflective, and informative conversations with instructors about their experiences and perceptions.

Facilitating Interview Discussions

Once each participant signed a consent form (Appendix VI), I audibly recorded respective interviews to transcribe them for purposes of analysis, interpretation, and additional reflexivity. Interviews were semi-structured in nature and followed the same interview guide (Appendix VII). The interview guide centered on four general questions:

1. How would you define the phrase "imagined geography?"
2. How have you witnessed and experienced students' imagined geographies in class?
3. In what ways have you tried to nuance imagined geographies?
4. Are students' imagined geographies influenced by globalization? How so?

Participants were able to expand upon their answers, but I also prepared (or crafted on the fly) some follow-up/probing questions. I ended each interview by giving some space for participants to have a "last word," or an opportunity to say anything else about the topic of imagined geographies.

### Instructor Background

In addition to instructor demographics described earlier, below I provide a broader overview of the diverse backgrounds of those who participated. The diversity is exemplified not only in locations of or in positions held within departments and universities, but also in a variety of specialty areas within geography and years of experience in the classroom. Additionally, this diversity allowed for the emergence of varying understandings and practices concerning undergraduates' construction and use of imagined geographies.

#### *Locations and Positions*

As described earlier, participating instructors represented three university types – Land Grant, Minority Serving, and Private/Religious – located within 17 different U.S. states (see Table 3.3). In terms of job titles, a good mix of early career and tenured instructors participated. Figure 3.2 provides a breakdown of these positions. In addition to these official titles, some participants also performed other notable duties, such as undergraduate or graduate coordinators, department chairs/heads, honorary chairs, college deans, and vice provosts. Moreover, some participants indicated they served as leaders within some AAG specialty groups, as well as various international consortiums.

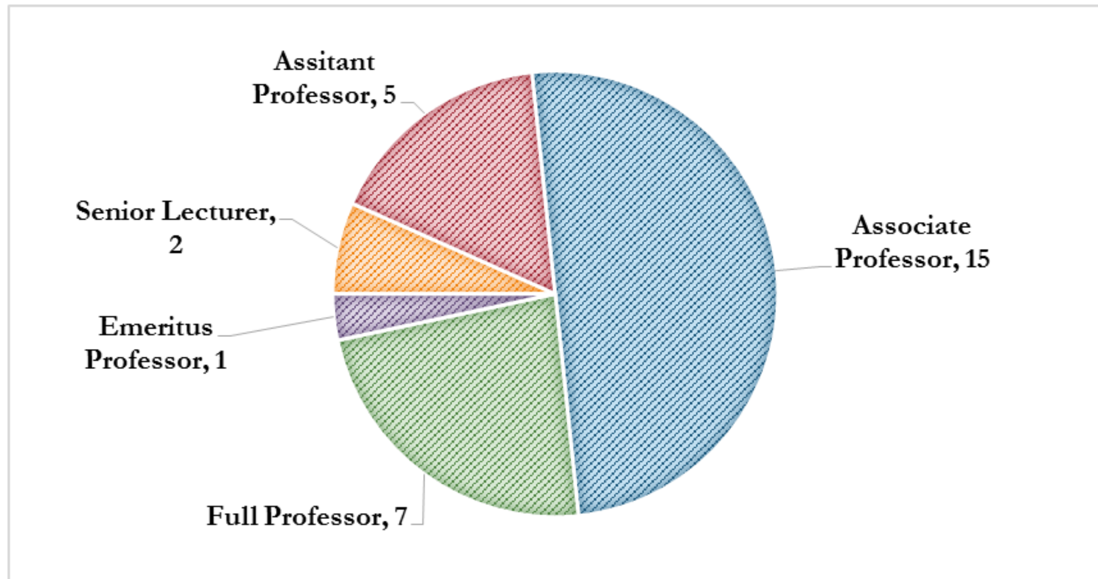



*Figure 3.2 Participants job titles/positions within respective departments.*

To assist in identifying some of these characteristics of participants I quote, I developed the following unique identifier for each instructor: Gender-Job Title-University Type-Years of Experience. For example, a female associate professor at a Land Grant university, who had 13 years of experience, would be expressed as: F-ASCP-LG-13. Table 3.6 describes the abbreviations used.

Table 3.6. Abbreviations used for instructor participants.

| *Gender* | *Abbr.* | *Job Title* | *Abbr.* | *Institution Type* | *Abbr.* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | M | Senior Lecturer | SL | Land Grant | LG |
| Female | F | Assistant Professor | ASTP | Private/Religious | PR |
| | | Associate Professor | ASCP | Minority Serving Institution | MSI |
| | | Full Professor | FP | | |
| | | Emeritus Professor | EP | | |

*Specialties/Interests*

Geographers are an eclectic collection of scholars that explore a wide variety of topics. Solem et al. (2008) identify twenty subfields within geography, with many other specialties within those twenty. The American Association of Geographers (AAG) houses more than 60 specialty or affinity groups "who share interests in regions or topics." These geographic specialties range between the two branches of the discipline – physical geography and human geography – as well as fields that merge the two into human-environment interaction.

Participants represented, to some extent, many of these subfields. Additionally, most participants described themselves as being focused in multiple fields, especially where subfield and specialty lines blurred, as well as the spatial extent to their interests. For example, one participant explained: "I consider myself a migration scholar, first and foremost, and a population geographer, and also a cultural geographer and a Europe specialist" (F-ASCP-LG-7). Broadly speaking, the most common identifications (more than 5 participants) were cultural geography, historical geography, and political geography. To a lesser degree, other specialties represented (3-5 participants) included population geography, urban geography, economic geography, geography education, and environmental geography. Finally, fewer instructors represented medical geography, religious geography, social geography, tourism geography, and rural geography.

Participants overrepresented the branch of human geography. These are outcomes of a direct, purposeful sampling approach taken during the methodology. In order to ensure that I included educators who had taught courses dealing with people, place, cultural difference, such as world regional geography or introduction to human/cultural geography, I

only contacted those who had listed such experience on their online profiles or CVs provided by respective departments and universities. Consequently (and expectedly), many of those who participated in an interview taught these courses because they already had interest and training in subfields of human geography. Therefore, none of the instructors specialized in physical geography or describe themselves as remote sensing or GIS specialists.

*Teaching Experience*

Teaching experience varied widely depending on both the previous characteristics: the position instructors held, and their geographic specialties. In general, almost all of the instructors at one point taught an introductory, undergraduate course. Not surprisingly, these were most likely to be an introduction to human (or cultural) geography (20 instructors), world regional geography (18 instructors), or a combination of the two. Beyond these first-year courses, instructors taught the breadth of human (and some physical and techniques) geography subfields: urban geography, economic geography, rural geography, political geography, population and migration, globalization, gender in geography, physical geography, environmental science, environmental disasters, meteorology, geography of resources, and geographic information systems (GIS). Others indicated they taught regional specialties, including U.S. and Canada, Latin America, Europe, Russia, South Asia, Central Asia, and Africa. A few mentioned teaching a special regional course on the state or region their university was located within (e.g. Geography of New England, Geography of Kansas). Some instructors taught within departments granting masters or PhDs, and therefore taught some graduate-level courses like history and philosophy of geography, qualitative methods,

quantitative methods, field methods, among a number of special topics or seminars. Finally, many of the instructors had led fieldtrips, both within the United States and to countries abroad, such as Cuba, Norway, United Arab Emirates, and Italy.

In terms of the number of years taught, the participating instructors represented all stages of relative experience (Figure 3.3). The average number of years of teaching experience was about 15, with a total of over 460 combined years of experience. (I should note, this does not include any years teaching as a graduate student, as some participants made note of this experience, while others did not. I assume that most (if not all) instructors had some degree of experience in front of a classroom, lab, or otherwise, while as a graduate student.)

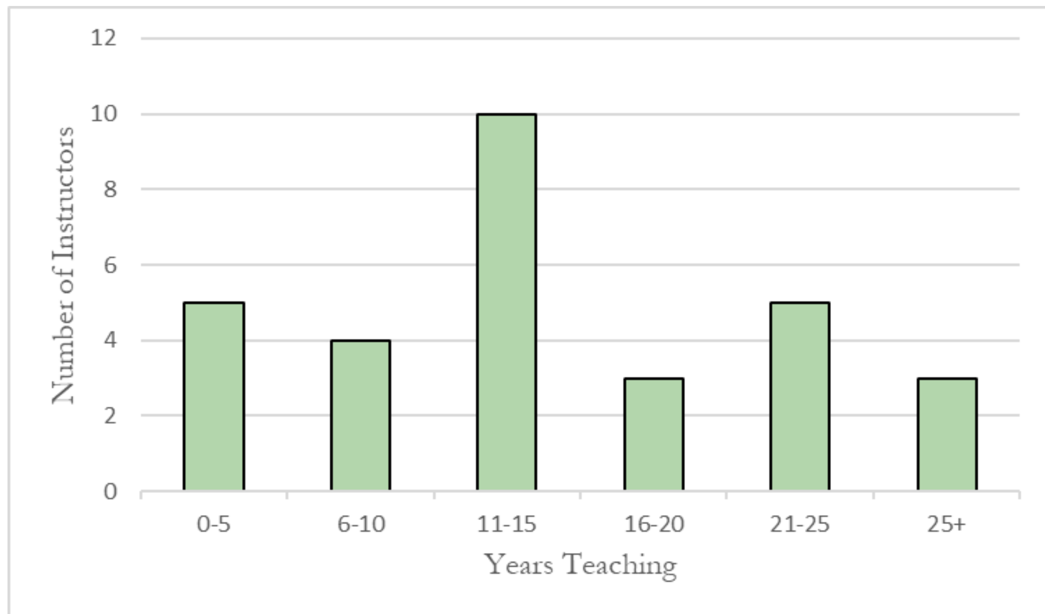



*Figure 3.3. Instructor years of experience.*

Some knew how many sections or students they had taught over the years. For example, one instructor mentioned, “I’ve taught over…60 individual sections of World Geography” (M-SL-MSI-13), while another amazingly reported, “And I’ve taught over five

thousand – six thousand students" (M-ASCP-LG-20). Between the number of years of experience, the number of students taught, and the array of courses taught (both inside and outside the classroom), the instructors interviewed represented a diverse set of geographers with extensive experience and aptitude to speak on the topics that follow.

## Preparing and Analyzing the Data

### Transcribing

As noted previously, each interview and focus group session was recorded with audio equipment, with focus groups additionally being recorded with video equipment. I also made handwritten notes to indicate the interviewees and focus group's mood and willingness to speak, as well as the general environment/location of the discussion (Patton 2002). I transcribed all six focus groups, as well as thirteen interviews, while I enlisted a professional transcriber for the remaining seventeen interviews. Any silent or verbal pauses, or nonverbal sounds (such as laughter, which was common in many interviews). Within each of my transcripts, and prior to my analysis, I identified various speakers and gave each a pseudonym label to ensure confidentiality (Hennink et al. 2011).

### Coding, Categories, and Themes

After transcribing the focus group discussions, I developed a series of codes to survey common themes. I used both deductive and inductive codes in my analysis. Deductive codes are those created by me from the standpoint of topics discussed in both the discussion guide and from the literature (Hennink et al. 2011). Here, I specifically looked for themes about the representations and uses of popular culture as source of knowledge for

India. On the other hand, inductive codes are those that "identify issues raised by participants themselves" (Hennink et al. 2011, 220). These codes emerged from the conversations between participants as they discussed their various photographs, sharing both similar and dissimilar photographs/experiences, as well as during the final phase of the focus group meeting as participants worked together to sort the photographs into stacks. These stacks represented how participants decided which photographs represent sources and types of knowledge about India.

I coded each focus group transcript by hand in three cycles (Saldaña 2013). The first through, I used deductive coding to consider the ways undergraduates connected to various aspects of popular culture. The second time I used inductive coding, considering other ways students communicated their imagined geographies outside of popular culture. Finally, I coded a third time to consider ways these deductive and inductive codes were related to create broader categories for further analysis. During each coding session, I attempted to use students' words as much as possible within each code to preserve their individual and collective voice.

I began to relate various codes together into categories. Originally, due to my interests in variations between students at different points in their educational experience, categories came together to represent these differences. For example, one category I labeled "First Year vs. Final Year: Relationships" incorporated a number of related codes such as personal relationship, work relationship, and indirect relationship. Of course, categories also emerged from the data itself. For example, another category I labeled "HBCU Students and Indian Hair," included codes such as Indian hair, hair care, ethnic conflation, skin complexion, and personal relationships. Note, the last code here was also found under the

category "First Year vs. Final Year: Relationships," showing that at times coded data overlapped categories.

From these codes and categories, I was able to reveal broader themes and relationships within the data. It is through these various themes that I focus much of my attention in this dissertation. In Chapter 4, I explore the theme identified as the ways undergraduates construct imagined geographies of, and discourses on, India. Additionally, in Chapter 5, I elaborate on a theme concerned with the uniqueness of undergraduates at different points in their academic experience, as well as at different universities. Lastly, in Chapter 7, I produce a discussion on categories that involve the utility of PDPE as a pedagogical tool.

Due to the high volume of data I accumulated through interviews with instructors, I used the qualitative software package NVivo to assist my coding. After formatting each interview transcript to be identical, I imported the documents into NVivo. I divided up the coding process into four initial categories that represented each of the four questions I asked each instructor. Within each category, I coded instructors' answers into common topics, and then later coded these into broader categories. From these categories, I follow one strong theme in Chapter 6 centered on instructors' pedagogical approaches to nuancing undergraduates' imagined geographies.

**Reflexivity and Positionality**

The concept of reflexivity within geographic thought and research has been underway now for over twenty years, especially through the work of feminist geographers such as Gillian Rose (Rose 1993; Rose 1997). As she writes, reflexivity is "a strategy for situating

knowledges: that is, as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge" (Rose 1997, 306). Reflexivity is thus an opportunity for researchers to take a step back to consider the ways their own positionalities, subjectivities, and identities can bias or affect the research (and relationship) process (Cupples 2002; Besio 2003; Hodge and Lester 2006; Aitken 2010; Sheehan 2011). As Emerson et al. (2011, 248) describe:

> Reflexivity, when applied to the understanding of members' worlds, helps us see those worlds as shaped…as meaning systems negotiated and constructed in and through relationships. Hence, when self-consciously applied to ourselves as researchers, the reflexive lens helps us see and appreciate how our own renderings of others' worlds are not, and can never be, descriptions from outside those worlds. Rather, they are informed by, and constructed in and through, relationships with those under study…we understand our own enterprise in much the same terms that we understand those we study.

Accordingly, reflexivity is never an easy task, full of "anxieties and ambivalences" (Rose 1997, 306). However difficult, these interactions and relationships, or as Aitken (2010) describes, "critical encounters," provide the prospect of addressing "processes of unfairness and injustice" (61). This is especially true when researchers develop their transcripts and notes into published manuscripts, as reflexivity should be an "obligation" of the researcher to their participants, their audience, and ultimately to themselves (DeLyser 2010). As MacKian (2010, 360) argues, reflexivity is part of what "move[s] analysis into interpretation" – transcripts into manuscripts – and thus is essential to the research process.

Before I conducted this research, I anticipated a number of issues that might influence my interactions with instructors and undergraduates. While I was prepared to mitigate those positionality concerns, very few issues arose during my research. However, as someone not brought up in a diverse cultural background, I did experience situations where

I felt out of place with participants' experiences. The greatest tension I felt was during my focus groups at the HBCU, as all of my participants were black, and in many instances, had different experiences than I did. While I describe this in more detail in Chapter 5 as it relates to these students' unique imagined geographies of India, to mitigate this I tried to draw on similarities to ease some of this anxiety, such as general undergraduate experience, athletics, current news, and humor. To a lesser degree, undergraduate participants at times saw me as a "teacher" figure, and would ask questions of me in more of a classroom fashion (I describe some of these instances later). As my role in the focus groups was as a facilitator rather than teacher, I tried to steer conversations back to the topic at that moment, although I did open space at the end of the focus group for other questions. That being said, the fact that participants became comfortable enough in that space to ask questions of a virtual stranger leads me to argue for the value of the PDPE project to engage students in conversations about their perceptions of place and people.

**Conclusion**

The processes associated with student imagined geographies that emerged from this project will allow educators to address and develop non-monolithic changes to course content and structure—specifically building upon PDPE, to create opportunities for active teaching and learning. Moreover, this research provides insight for higher education in curriculum development as well as diversity policies for undergraduates to engage with postcolonial 'Other' identities.

As offered by Paulo Freire, the ways in which teaching happens serves various political agendas. Although Freire (1970, 1973) argued (rightly) for native populations to

educate with anti-colonial pedagogy, education must also become "new" for students within colonial powers. Students in nations such as the United States must be freed from colonial perspectives, and this project examines a way that possibly aids in those efforts, with long-term benefits to pedagogical and policy changes within higher education to address hegemonic (neo)colonial identities of Self and Other. Accordingly, the following four chapters examine, respectively, 1) how undergraduates construct and present their imagined geographies of India, 2) the differences between undergraduates' imagined geographies of India based on university level or previous experiences, 3) current techniques used by geography instructors to nuance undergraduates' imagined geographies, and 4) the utility of PDPE as a pedagogical tool for exploring undergraduates' imagined geographies.

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[1] One student attended the orientation meeting and also submitted a project, but did not attend the focus group meeting, therefore their information and data was not included in the study or analysis.
[2] While the first meeting with students included both first and final year students, I later conducted separate focus group meetings: one with first year students and another with final year students.

# CHAPTER IV

## HOW UNDERGRADUATES CONSTRUCT AND PRESENT GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATIONS OF INDIA

> Orientalism is a form of paranoia, knowledge of another kind…I think of imaginative geographies and of *the dramatic boundaries it draws* (Said 1978, 72-73, emphasis added).

### Introduction

Much of Edward Said's work surrounding Orientalism, although rooted in literary criticism, is as concerned about geography. As Said writes above, the pangs of Orientalism include "dramatic boundaries." A key aspect of communicating ideas about difference between places and peoples is to do so geographically. Indeed, as Said (1978, 216) concludes:

> Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics of the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography. Thus on the one hand the geographical Orient nourished its inhabitants, guaranteed their characteristics, and defined their specificity; on the other hand, the geographical Orient solicited the West's attention, even as – by one of those paradoxes revealed so frequently by organized knowledge – East was East and West was West.

Without geography, no Orientalism exits, as it relies on physical and social distance upon which to enact its "paranoia." Derek Gregory (1994) argues our geographical imaginations play with these boundaries, as we consider the relationships between "our" places and "other" places. The difference between "our" places and "other" places may include many influences beyond simple physical distance, such as ethnicity, gender, education, socio-economic status, religion, political values and so on. Certainly, the way by which we gain such distinctions are numerous, although as many geographers have noted, the increasing role of media consumption, through various platforms such as popular film, news media, television and social media, particularly by younger generations, is substantial (for example, Morgan 2001, Picton 2008, Carter 2015).

While the majority of Said's argument revolves around the Middle East, he recognizes that Arabs are not the only groups receiving attention, as the representations of numerous other places and peoples in the East have "wide repercussions" (1978, 285). These other Orient cultures include places like Japan, China, and importantly for my purposes here, India. As I have shown earlier, previous scholars address these various "repercussions" in India (Inden 1990, Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993, Rocher 1993, King 1999, Dirks 2001). However, the representations of India by contemporary American undergraduates, as will be discussed in this chapter, confirm that the effects of "paranoia" and "dramatic boundaries" are still actively at work. Here I will extend the limited conversation about what types of discourses undergraduates bring with them to the geography classroom about a particular place.

This chapter describes and analyzes two major components. First, I categorize the three major sources students relied on to construct their imagined geographies of India. This

included their use of varied popular culture mediums, direct relationships or indirect contact with people, and finally their experiences in formal education. Second, I explore the various ways undergraduates described their knowledge of India. I begin this analysis by examining the language students use to create difference between themselves and "Others." Then, in turn, I provide three examples of common discourses of difference students employed during focus groups, namely food, animals, and history. In the end, I argue that while these two components can strengthen the relationship between "paranoia" and "dramatic boundaries" – or fear and imagined geographies – they also open opportunities for geography educators to help students push past these imaginative borders.

**Constructing an Imagined India: Sources Undergraduates Use to Build Imagined Geographies**

As shown earlier, previous work in geography has identified a number of sources by which students construct imagined geographies. From popular film, television, and news media, to personal relationships, formal education, and travel, studies show how K-12 students build and modify their understandings of places they have never been. Yet, a dearth of scholarship remains concerning what images of distant places undergraduates bring with them to the classroom (Dittmer 2006, Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Carter 2015), and particularly what sources they employ. While I will discuss the former issue later, I open by addressing the sources undergraduates revealed in the construction of their imagined geographies of India.

In the following section, I present three broad sources undergraduates commonly indicated as ways they gained knowledge about India. First, I unpack popular culture as a source of undergraduates' imagined geographies, mostly through film and television, but also

some other notable popular mediums. Second, I address the influence of personal relationships, particularly of undergraduates' who have had direct contact with people from – or connected to – India. Finally, I examine the role of formal education in undergraduates' imaginings of India.

Popular Culture

As described earlier, the ways in which students today construct their imagined geographies of place are progressively outside of formal education (Morgan 2001), and as shown through numerous examples (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Heron-Hruby and Alvermann 2009, Hong and Halvorsen 2010, Hall 2011), students tend to use these informal understandings within more formal learning environments. Although my research did not occur under the auspice of a typical course, students treated the PDPE project as a typical course assignment. Therefore, it was common for students to share that their knowledge about India was coupled with popular culture.

Additionally, nearly all the instructors I interviewed described the strong role of popular culture in the construction of imagined geographies: television shows, movies, news, social media, songs, music, print media, online journalism, memes, and so on. As one instructor summarized, "Certainly media, images, and popular cultural movies, television programs, and books. In the United States, those are probably the main sources, especially television and movies" (F-ASCP-MSI-12).

While students did not always represent their reliance on popular culture through their actual images, when pressed to describe where they remembered seeing or learning

about these aspects of India, they would invariably relate it back to popular culture. For example, the below reflects a common exchange during the focus groups:

> M4-PR-04: So, this is my first picture. Um, the reason I picked this is to mostly represent the slums, um, which is this part here. When I think of India, just like from movies I've seen and through history, like my classes in history, that is basically what you are told and what you see in movies and books are the slums…
>
> Facilitator: Can I stop you really quick before we go on?
>
> M4-PR-04: Yup.
>
> Facilitator: Um, two things. One, you had said that you had learned it from various movies or coursework. Can you think of anything specific? Like maybe specific films or, um, classes that make you think that.
>
> M4-PR-04: So specific, I can't think of the title, but the movie I was thinking of was the one where the guy travels from the United States to India to find a baseball player.
>
> Facilitator: *Million Dollar Arm*?
>
> M4-PR-04: *Million Dollar Arm*. And in a sense it is kind of misrepresenting from the picture, because the guy that he picks is kind of in the higher status of India, but you can still see how India is looking, from what they see as they are traveling there…

As stated above, the image the student was showing was not from the film that he later mentions, even though the image he saw in his head was planted (or reinforced) by this popular film. When encouraged, therefore, students would think critically about the somewhat overlooked (but specific) aspects of popular culture that inform their respective perceptions of place and people. In most cases, however, students were aware that images concerning popular culture mediums influenced their imagined geographies of India.

*Film*

To be sure, the influence of popular culture was most evident through the role films played in constructing students' imagined geographies of India. While some of the films students showed or mentioned included more recent releases like *Million Dollar Arm* (2014), *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), *The Love Guru* (2008), *Cheetah Girls: One World* (2008), *27 Dresses* (2008), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), *Alexander* (2004), and *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), they also indicated older films such as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Gandhi* (1982) as having an influence on the way they thought about India.

When students shared, either visually or vocally, that they were influenced by a particular film (or several films), it was common for the majority (if not all) students to show confirmation in some way. Most would simply nod in agreement, while others would jump into the conversation explaining their own connection or experience with the film. Occasionally, two or more students would have the same film pegged as a source of knowledge about India included in their respective projects. This was apparent with very popular films, especially those that were released during the students' lifetimes, such as the Academy Award-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The discussion of popular films also led to students to go beyond what they included in their projects, describing other films that contributed to their image of India. For example, in a focus group with first-year students, a student (M1-PR-02) observed, "The more we talk – I don't have pictures – but the more we talk, I keep thinking of pictures." As other students agreed, the same student continued, "Like, *Paul Blart* with the call centers. Like he's on the phone…Yeah, there's like just a bunch of stuff flooding into my mind now." *Paul*

*Blart: Mall Cop* is a 2009 film, wherein the main character, a white male mall security officer, has a conversation over the phone with a fellow mall employee, who is of Indian descent. The student here mistakenly thinks the conversation is with a call center in India, a common stereotype of South Asians working in the technology sector (Wang et al. 2013).

Students' reliance on popular films as a source of their knowledge of India was not surprising. As geography scholars argue, such films allow students to transport themselves to other places (near or far) and times (present or past), and do so in a manner that grasps their attention with story and cinematography (Algeo 2007). Increasingly, undergraduates' lives are becoming, as Algeo (2007) notes, "media-rich." One instructor explained, noting this reliance, and also the generational differences of instructors and undergraduates, "I think my generation underestimates the power of media and the influence of media…[students are] picking up all these visuals about places, and those are kind of a soup of images" (M-FP-PR-11). However, the soup of images this instructor alludes to is often confined to particular ingredients, if you will, that relies predominantly on Western portrayals of the other places and peoples.

For example, given the influential role of popular film, the topic of Bollywood was rarely discussed by undergraduates. While Bollywood films (or Bollywood more generally) did come up in five of the six groups, these conversations did not last long and mostly in passing (although of note, all mentions of Bollywood were initiated by students). In fact, in almost every instance where a student mentioned Bollywood, it was more to buttress descriptions of other talking points, such as dancing, than to challenge, for example, Western stereotypes represented in film. One student did notice this gap later in the discussion, stating she was surprised she had not put Bollywood in her project, "because I know that

Bollywood is like a huge deal" (F1-LG-01). Bollywood films are becoming more and more available to Western audiences, but with undergraduates, it appears they are attracted to – and trust – the depictions given by Western films (e.g. Hollywood) of India. Tharoor (2011, 414) notes Western films cultural power to depict India (she specifically focuses on *Indian Jones and the Temple of Doom*), and suggests that "indifference, even sloppiness" is at the core of such representations – "Who knows the difference…and who cares?" I will address this notion of cultural indifference, particularly with students' experience with the same *Indiana Jones* film, later in this chapter when I turn my attention toward how students project their imagined geographies through cultural discourse. Next, though, I consider another highly visual popular culture source students relied on to describe India: television.

*Television*

To a lesser degree, television programs also influenced the ways in which students described thinking about India. This included popular television shows such as *The Big Bang Theory* – or in one case an actual photograph of someone's television – and many of the students recalled the influence of educational programming from National Geographic or PBS (I will discuss these educational documentaries more within the theme of formal education). Television programming was not portrayed visibly in many students' projects, but like films, it was not far from their minds as an explanatory device in the focus groups. For example, as one final-year student described the children's show *Avatar*, others quickly affirmed or jumped in to validate:

> M4-LG-02: So, this is a really random one, but going back to the religion thing, did anyone watch *Avatar* growing up?
>
> F4-LG-05: Oh yeah! My favorite.

> M4-LG-02: So, I mean, although it's not like directly Hinduism, um, it's, you know, reflects a lot of those same beliefs: circle of life, reincarnation, and stuff like that. So, I mean, although, like I said, it's not the exact same religion, or – well, they made one up for the show, or whatever – like you get a sense of their belief system through like media, or through mediums.

While this student claims to have learned about an aspect of Indian culture (Hinduism) through this cartoon television program, many of the markers he refers to, such as reincarnation, are some of the most stereotyped aspects of Hinduism. Although Lee et al. (2009) have argued college students with heavy television viewing habits tend to hold onto ethnic stereotypes, it also appears that college students can still rely on earlier television exposure to extend the use of such stereotypes. Stereotypes are often deeply rooted in students' entire lived experiences, rather than "new" information (Taylor 2015). Moreover, stereotypes concretize over time as students view images or hear discourses that reaffirm abstract markers of ethnic, racial, or cultural identity. Lodged deeply into students' minds, stereotypes are typically difficult to dismantle (Lee et al. 2009).

While on the initial background survey students reported to have engaged with a variety of news services on a somewhat regular basis, televised news programs were noticeably absent from students' images and discussions. This was somewhat surprising, given that many scholars and instructors argue that students construct their imagined geographies of places through the news (Aspass 1998, Hay and Israel 2001, White 2004, Hong and Injeong 2017). Increasingly young people's consumption of news happens visually (Chan-Olmsted et al. 2013, Antunovic et al. 2016), and although one instructor surmised "everything [undergraduates] get is on a screen" (M-FP-LG-22), most news is online video

material rather than televised. Even news websites are moving away from the written word to imagery, as another instructor noted this transition's effect on her students:

> Well I think even things like CNN and the news sites, even the BBC…their online news is increasingly video…I think the video presentation of the news has a much more visceral and emotional impact than reading news. And so it impacts [students'] view of the world in a very different way. (F-ASCP-LG-24)

Thus, while undergraduates do utilize news media, in this project they appeared to fail to recognize its influence constructing, reinforcing, or modifying their imagined geographies. This is due to news media's ability to appear neutral and objective, but are not; instead they conceal values and positions – something Alderman and Popke (2002), and Conover and Miller (2014), argue that undergraduates tend not to engage.

*Other Popular Culture Mediums*

While visual media outlets like film and television dominated our conversations over popular culture influence, to a lesser degree, students indicated other important realms of popular culture. Examples included knowledge about religion through popular literature (Figure 4.1a*)* and music (Figure 4.1b), and knowledge about "Indian hair traditions" through YouTube, a social media platform (Figure 4.1c). Perhaps one of the more unexpected references by students was that of "color runs." Color runs have recently become quite popular, both across the United States, as well as in other Western countries, where entertainment companies (such as The Color Run, Color Me Rad, etc.) organize a "fun run" (typically an untimed 5K walk/run) in a number of large cities (and other smaller locales

*Figure 4.1a Popular Literature. "Buddhism and Hinduism." (M4-LG-02)*

*Figure 4.1b Music. "I chose a picture of my Nirvana T-Shirt to represent my knowledge of Hinduism. I learned about the basics of Hinduism when I was in elementary school. However, as I began to listen to Nirvana's music more, I did more research on Hinduism and why the state of Nirvana is so important in the religion." (F1-LG-01)*

*Figure 4.1c Social Media. "I like to watch YouTube a lot trying to find ways to grow my hair fast. Most of the results are videos of Indian hair traditions that make their hair grow so long and healthy." (F4-HB-03)*

*Figure 4.1 Popular culture mediums used by students in their projects. Captions written by students.*

put on by local groups and organizations), and thousands of participants pay a fee to attend the event. As participants make their way around the course, a number of color stations, where volunteers throw bright-colored powdered paint as participants go by. Some students used images from textbooks, while others used images from their own participation in these events. Students referred to these color runs because it imitates a Hindu religious festival known as *Holi* ("festival of color"). Current debates discuss whether color runs are culturally appreciative or culturally appropriating of the *Holi* festival. For example, some argue that the for-profit companies operating these runs give the appearance of non-profit organizations. While encouraging volunteers in respective cities to "work" the race, and in return earning a donation (typically a small percentage of each paid runner's entry fee) toward their cause(s), the bulk of the proceeds go directly to the company (Olaussen 2014). Understanding the distinction is vital for students to tease apart concepts such as the contested nature of culture in a globalized world. In fact, only one student expressed facets of the festival:

> F4-LG-03: Um, I have a picture of the *Holi* festival. The *Holi*? [Looking for pronunciation verification.]
>
> Facilitator: The *Holi*, yeah.
>
> F4-LG-03: So really colorful. My freshmen year I made a friend…and he had just moved here that semester and it was really interesting, and he kind of explained to me, you know, his name and how it was from a Hindu god. Um, just got to know him pretty well and he just told me about all these amazing festivals and the strong Hindu culture. And, I don't know, I just always picture the colorfulness of India when I think of it. Like I've always wanted to go and be a part of this. It's just a lot of people getting together, you know, for a religious purpose. Basically like a community purpose, so.
>
> M4-LG-04: I also have a picture of the same festival.
>
> F4-LG-03: Yeah.

> M4-LG-01: Me too. It's the cover of the cultural book.
>
> M4-LG-02: We had one. [Group laughs.] Like the group that I'm a part of on campus, we had like our own little version of it, um, yeah.

The last student to speak in this exchange describes a "version" of this being done by a group he is a part of on campus. To note, the group of which he was speaking of was a Christian campus ministry. The difference in source between the original student's knowledge of *Holi* from a connection with someone from India, and the last student's knowledge through an "event" is an important one. While the first student spoke of the *Holi* as a "religious purpose…a community purpose," the last student spoke possessively of his experience, "our own little version," as if to say they were the same community events with the same purposes – particularly as one religious group (Christianity) was utilizing another's (Hinduism). Despite these differing experiences, both students gave similar levels of confidence to their knowledge of *Holi*. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, engaging students' various experiences are integral to fully examining imagined geographies. The knowledge obtained through personal relationships, however, was certainly an important theme through most of the focus group discussions, and one that I know turn my attention.

<u>Relationships</u>

In many cases, students shared personal experiences of direct relationships, either with those from India or Indian heritage (e.g. friends, co-workers, employers), or with people who had been to India for various purposes. While the latter of these relationships was limited (in terms of what students shared), the former resulted in some poignant discussions between students as they assessed the knowledge emerging from those

experiences. As one instructor noted, the learning process by which "our family and our community shape our culture and our values…the same thing happens with our sense of place, with our geographies" (F-ASCP-PR-12). In many of these cases, the contact between students came due to the growing internationalization of U.S. college campuses (Pandit and Alderman 2004). I emphasize these various personal connections to India as they seem to carry more weight with students in terms of the legitimacy of the information they gain, particularly in comparison to information presented/gained through popular culture.

*International Students*

For example, one student included a picture of a group of international friends (e.g. India, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia) (Figure 4.2). She explained that during a game of table tennis with these friends, she noticed the Indian students strategizing, but speaking English, thus letting everyone else know their game plan. She inquired about this, "Why don't you just speak your own language to each other?" The Indian students explained that while they were both from India, they spoke different native languages. She recounted,

> The only language that they all share is English…even back in India, if they were to travel outside of their hometown, they would have to speak English to, say the market people or, um, I don't know, professors or teachers from different areas. So he said that it wouldn't have been any different in India. They would have spoken English there, and they speak English to each other here. (F4-LG-05).

In this, the student expressed she learned that India is a diverse country, and that English acts as a lingua franca. Moreover, this knowledge was shared with the rest of the students in the group and received as valid as it came from a personal experience with individuals from India.

*Figure 4.2 "India is a country with a very diverse set of languages. Indians, outside of their hometowns, speak English to one another. I learned this when I decided to play badminton and ping pong with some fellow students..."*

Learning about Indian culture via personal relationships with international students was a common topic, especially with students in their final-year (see Chapter 6 for how instructors' encourage such relationships). The same student who spoke above about her friends in the ping-pong game also described working in a science lab with another student from India. From this coworker, the American student was able to learn more about various practices and traditions in Hinduism. Additionally, the international student felt comfortable confiding to the American student that she felt it was difficult to celebrate these things at university because "there's not a big community of Indians."[3]

In that same discussion, another student described eating at a campus restaurant often, where he met two Indian students:

> So I got to get to know them, and I noticed that they wore the *bindi*, as I learned that it was called, and after several times I was comfortable with them enough to ask them, "Sorry, I'm not cultured. I'm an uncultured swine. What is that?" And they explained it to me, and ever since then, it kind of added a personal touch, because yeah, I knew Hinduism was a thing, but it was more of just an abstract, "Oh, it's just another religion." But once I met those two girls, oh, it's like a real thing – it's a real religion (M4-LG-01).

The value added to information learned about a place noted here as the student regards these encounters as a "personal touch." Moreover, he was able to go beyond the abstraction of what he previously thought about *bindis* specifically (although he did not share what this was), but also Hinduism more broadly, into a more tangible understanding. To be sure, the benefits of cross-cultural interactions on ever-internationalizing university campuses in the United States is widely argued for by geographers within undergraduate curriculum and programs (Pandit and Alderman 2004, Klein and Solem 2008, Kagoda 2009, Ray and Solem 2009). As Pandit (2009, 653) summarizes this push:

> Thoughtful internationalization is consistent with the goals of a liberal education: to give students the ability to ask the right questions and learn to listen, analyze, and communicate. It challenges them to confront their own prejudices and empowers them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change.

As I will show, opportunities afforded by the PDPE project do just that. It provides a platform where students can actively reflect on their cultural learning experiences, and simultaneously encourages other students to realize the benefits of cross-cultural interactions. While the university environment provides one common example, students discussed other sources for learning from relationships.

*Work*

As I highlighted above, some of these relationships were work-related on university campuses. In others though, students revealed that they built similar relationships apart from the university community. Students indicated that they learned through these encounters by asking questions about various facets of Indian culture or tradition. For example, a final-year student shared a picture she had taken of a small bronze bowl with a turtle inside of it (Figure 4.3). She explained that the dish was where she worked – a daycare –placed in the front reception area. When she first started working there, she did not know what the purpose of the turtle dish was, especially as it always had water in it. She described her experience with her boss, an Indian woman, trying to understand what it all meant:

> My boss, she told me that they're very superstitious and that the turtle represents – when you fill it with water, it brings good luck for her business…She has a lot of different things…She went around the building with something to bless it. It smells like mint or something (F4-HB-08).

*Figure 4.3 "The Indian turtle represents good luck for your business you own, you must keep it filled with water."*

This particular student encounters, quite regularly, a variety of situations at her work that are not familiar. As Indian populations continue to permeate the U.S. cultural landscape, opportunities to work for and with those of South Asian heritage will increase the chances of cross-cultural learning. Marsick and Watkins (2015) argue that learning in the workplace, as described above, sometimes goes unnoticed by the would-be learner. They refer to this type of learning as "incidental learning," or those that take place in routine, banal experiences. As I will argue in Chapter 7, PDPE affords opportunities for students – and instructors – to tease apart and examine the often-overlooked sources of our knowledge.

*Indirect Personal Contact*

Indirect personal contact also appeared as a way students built knowledge of India. This was most evident when students described occasions when they visually confirmed their imagination. In these cases, students said something like this first-year student, who was describing how they knew how Indians dressed: "Yeah. Like I seen it, like I went to a church before and they were dressed like that. There was this one church and it had a lot of Indians in it, and they all dressed like that and came to church like that, so. Yeah, that's how I know" (F1-HB-02). Of note, the student had an image of Indian women wearing *saris*, and made a connection with previously seeing similarly dressed women at a church. She did not detail any more of this experience, so it is unclear if she interacted with these women, particularly if she was able to confirm they were indeed ethnically Indian (or Christian, for that matter).

Other times, students described traveling to large metro areas, like New York City, exposed to a variety of new cultures, including those from South Asia. During one first-year

focus group, as students were discussing *bindis* (again), a student remembered the first time ever seeing someone with a *bindi*:

> F1-PR-05: Um, I was in New York – my aunt actually lives out there – and I saw a couple Indian people, and they must have walked past. And I don't – when I think of New York, I don't think of Indian people, but um, I remember asking my mom specifically when I was six what that meant, and all that she could pretty much tell me was that they were from India. I still haven't figured that out. I'm going to have to go Google that, but I don't know.
>
> […]
>
> F1-PR-04: Back to the New York thing, I had a band trip this year to New York and I had like this stereotypical like – people are just angry and they're walking down the street and there are horns honking and everyone is angry. Um, but we went to like, we went to like Chinatown and all these little tiny villages within New York, and we did hit just like a little suburb of like Indian culture, and, I mean, it was kind of stereotypical, but I didn't really expect it to be right there in New York, like they had, it was like fresh fish and like things were on ice like just there in the street. And it was just pretty cool because I'd never seen that.
>
> F1-PR-05: Did they have their bugs on a stick and stuff?
>
> F1-PR-04: Yeah. There was an old man and he sat – there was fish on one side, and he had like made this like wooden cart, and they were like stuck in there. It was kinda weird but it was kinda cool.

Several points emerged in this exchange. The first student (F1-PR-05) remembers at quite an early age the first time seeing a *bindi*, and more so, remembers that her mother did not know much about it at all, except that they were from India. This suggests that students form perceptions about the Other while they are very young, but also that they can hold on to these memories and ideas for incredibly long periods of time, using them to buttress other

information they may pick up. A decade or so later, this same student still does not understand what the *bindi* is or what it symbolizes, declaring that she needs to look it up online. Rather than seek out information directly, such as through a personal relationship, this student simply states, "I'm going to have to Google that." In a technological age, it is becoming more common for undergraduates to rely on the internet, rather than direct experiences, to supply answers, particularly in educational environments (Creighton et al. 2013).

A short while later, a second student (F1-PR-04) remembers their own experience with seeing Indian culture in New York City, something that surprises both of them in an American city. Both fail to realize the status of New York City as a global city, representing people and cultures from all over the world. Quite the opposite, they expect to see and hear the New York City of their imagined geography, built from similarly constructed stereotypes: "people are just angry and they're walking down the street and there are horns honking and everyone is angry."

The first student then asks if she sees the same thing as she did as a child, "bugs on a stick and stuff?" The second student affirms seeing this, adding, "it was kinda weird, but it was kinda cool." The other students did not challenge these views, even though it is not clear if the student saw bugs on a stick in the Indian neighborhood, or if it was in another ethnic enclave, especially as the second student continually refers to only the fish she remembers seeing. This is a common element of Orientalism, where the lines between Eastern cultures blur to the point of indistinctness.

Despite these direct and indirect personal relationships, their knowledge was limited. Students found it difficult to elaborate on basic information they shared, even when there

was a direct connection to that information, such as those instances shown above. Additionally, those students who had brief encounters or indirect relationships, understandably, struggled to contextualize or build conversations, as those situations do not provide enough for detailed knowledge building. However, students did appear to be generally interested in learning more once they found themselves in those situations of not knowing, suggesting that students do wish to deconstruct some of their misperceptions or fill in gaps once they are given opportunities to recognize them.

Formal Education

Finally, in addition to popular culture and personal relationships, students shared they formed their imaginings of India through formal education. Some recalled early memories from elementary school, such as learning about the modern Seven Wonders of the World, and accordingly that the *Taj Mahal* was located in India. Some indicated that exposure to ideas more recently as undergraduates, in particular within courses dealing with issues such as globalization or cultural diversity (Figure 4.4).

Instructors also emphasized that one's formal education about place was not restricted to merely to geography classes: "of course through their studies throughout schools, whether its history, biology – they're picking up pieces of information about places" (M-FP-PR-11). While academic study in geography centers on important spatial principles such as place, space, and distribution of physical and cultural phenomena, other disciplines can contribute to knowledge of distant places and in some cases may be the only access students have to learn about other places in a formal setting. I would suggest three general reasons for this. First, general requirements at the university-level are on a downward trend,

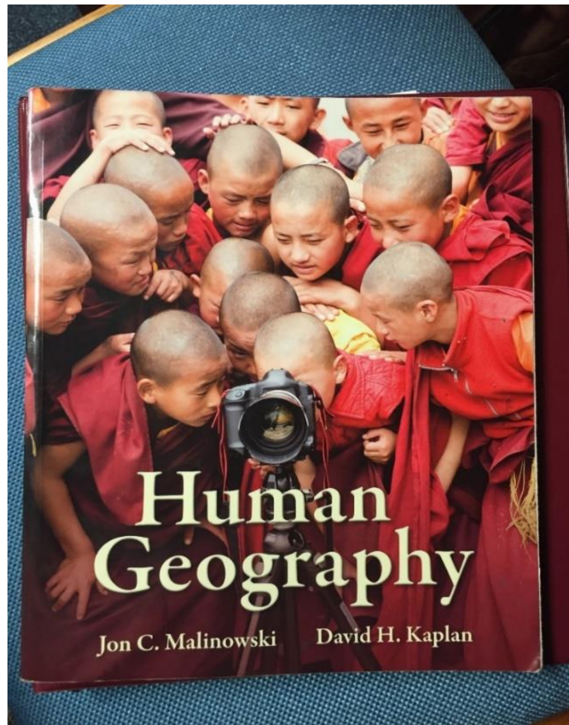


*Figure 4.4 "This is my textbook for Intro to Human Geography. I learned in this textbook the population distributions of Indian citizens. India has a population boom right now with the population climbing."*

leading students to have fewer opportunities to take introductory geography coursework (Warner and Koeppel 2009). Second, and similarly, historically some degreed-programs, such as engineering, limit or have fewer electives open for their students (Itani and Srour 2016). Finally, and more broadly, the removal of geography as a stand-alone subject from K-12 education in the United States is often identified as part of the long-term disconnection between students and geographic learning (Segall and Helfenbein 2008).

*Previous Educational Experiences*

The most common reference to formal learning came via students' experiences in secondary education. In particular, students referenced social studies courses (a number of students described their history classes) as their platforms for learning about India. For

example, several groups discussed how they learned about Mahatma Gandhi (typically by watching the film *Gandhi* during class). Social studies was not the only venue where students learned about India in school though. As mentioned before, one student referred to reading the popular novel *Siddhartha* in his high school English class (Figure 4.1a). Another example, as one first-year student shared:

> F1-PR-03: Piggybacking off the *henna* idea, I know that they use it, like this picture, for like weddings and stuff.
>
> F1-PR-04: But it is like very, I don't know if you've ever seen it in person, but it is amazing.
>
> F1-PR-03: It is really nice.
>
> F1-PR-04: How the little, tiniest gap on their skin there is still so much pen and marker. It's just unreal.
>
> F1-PR-03: My high school used to have *henna* actually. So, it was like awesome for like our art club, yeah.
>
> F1-PR-04: Yeah? That's cool.

Students shared a variety of formal educational experiences through which they learned about India, especially given that different subjects lend themselves better to relaying information about particular aspects of Indian culture, history, or even geography. As this example shows, a student reflected upon their understanding of *henna* as it pertained to an artistic tradition they learned about through an art club in high school.

Although students shared how their perceptions of India were influenced by education experiences less than other sources like popular culture, the importance of sharing their formal education was notable for several reasons. First, in terms of secondary education, it is the most recent education experience for first-year students, who were more likely to discuss what they learned in high school than their final-year counterparts. Final-

year students were more likely to reference undergraduate courses they had taken.[4] Additionally, although we were not in a formal educational setting, students may have perceived it as so (i.e. project as assignment, myself as instructor, etc.). Bearing that in mind, students may have attempted to present aspects of their learning as also deriving from their high school or university educations. In other words, students used formal education as a means to legitimize what they knew about India. This is not to say that other sources (e.g. popular culture) were not similarly used to legitimize knowledge, as I have shown, but rather that students may identify these in order to satisfy instructors, who may expect some aspect of formal learning to influence students' knowledge.

In a few instances, students commented directly about past teachers who helped them learn about India, including an image of a Human Geography instructor, for example. In another situation, a student shared that she had a teacher in high school who was originally from India (even though the teacher taught math, who she described as a "human calculator"), and explained how she and other students actually learned quite a bit about Indian culture from their teacher, such as hair (see Chapter 6). This suggests that despite describing several themes here in terms of sources students relied upon for building their imagined geographies of India, themes often overlapped. In this case, for example, an overlap between a student's experiences in formal education, with her personal relationship with someone from India, is evident. Therefore, teasing apart the foundation of students' perceptions of places can be difficult and time consuming. Yet, throughout this experience, students also showed eagerness to "get to the bottom" of why they imagined India in such ways. This exemplifies what McInerney (2010, 24) says the 21st century student expects, "connectivity with their life and their learning experiences." Together, geography classrooms

and educators create a tremendous platform from which to conduct such introspective contemplation of our perceptions of the world.

*Documentaries*

This overlapping also appeared when students referenced watching documentaries. Documentaries often are limited in the ways they can present information, much like popular film or television (Chapman 2009). Additionally, popular multimedia outlets, such as National Geographic, make documentaries branded as educational materials. Students shared that they learned about India through, for example, documentaries describing India's role within the globalized economy (e.g. call centers), pollution, population issues, poverty, and religion. In interviews, instructors noted documentaries can be particularly helpful as it "tends to say things much better than I can" – especially with overlaid imagery (F-ASCP-LG-7). Documentaries can also release students from misconceptions they may have. For example, one instructor described using a documentary about Iran in which veiled women are shown going into a beauty shop to get manicures and pedicures and "they are wearing sexy clothes under their coverings" (although this is off camera), and this "always shocks my students. I think they thought they wore nothing under there. [laughs]" (M-ASCP-LG-16). However, as I will discuss, documentaries can reinforce misconceptions about a place as well, often times focusing on problems rather than banal, day-to-day facets or broader social phenomenon that are seen as positive (or neutral).

Not all students indicated that they watched these documentaries within a classroom setting; however, students did appear to give more validity to the information presented in these films as opposed to popular movies. When asked about how to nuance their imagined

geography of India, one student offered, "If it was like a documentary, you would probably trust it more than a movie," (F1-HB-03) while another followed up with, "You can look at documentaries about India. Research more" (F1-HB-01). While both students separate the "educational merit" found within documentaries versus popular films, they did not indicate where they might "research more" beyond these documentaries, or where they would even begin such a process, suggesting that undergraduates may not know how to conduct research. However, documentary films certainly come with their own biases and agendas. As Chapman (2009, 8) notes about this paradox:

> Many people seem to feel instinctively that documentary brings us nearer to the truth, for two reasons: first, because one of documentary's features has been the absence of fictionalized elements; second, because of the commonplace illusion that events as depicted in a documentary have not been controlled by the filmmaker…[therefore] the genre of documentary is based on 'fraud' – that is, a claim on the real that has implications because of the moral issues involved.

Some students found a trend in what they viewed within these "learning experiences":

> F4-PR-02: Documentaries, I feel like documentaries are more about showing negative, or not negative, but like, I don't know how to explain it.
>
> M4-PR-05: I would say they highlight some of the negative things that are happening, and then that's why we kind of focus on, or you remember just the negative things rather than potentially any positive things.

Although most students agreed that documentaries were better at relating information about a place than a popular film, it appears they continue to think about negative themes covered in documentaries – themes that quite often are still skewed and abstract (Chapman 2008). Essentially these two students recognize, while not in name, that a particular negative cultural discourse is present within film and documentaries (especially those made by

Westerners). This discourse has the power to build knowledge of India, as "power produces knowledge…that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (Foucault 1977, 27-28). In this case, and from their perspective, the imagined geographies students build about India are overwhelming negative, constructed from a particular power-knowledge situated in the West attempting to "know" the East. The first part of this chapter identified three important sources of these discourses, as revealed by undergraduates, namely popular culture, relationships, and formal education. While I have shown how these sources present both positive and negative avenues to constructing perceptions of the Other, they also often overlap with one another, creating unique challenges in examining and deconstructing imagined geographies. The second part of this chapter focuses on the specific examples of knowledge and discourses undergraduates use to discuss their imagined India.

**Presenting an Imagined India: Undergraduates Knowledge and Discourses of an Imagined Geographies**

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; *it produces reality*; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. *The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him* [sic] *belong to this production*. (Foucault 1977, 194, emphasis added)

Like previous scholars who explored students' geographical imaginaries of distant places (Picton 2008, Nozaki 2009, Hong and Halvorsen 2010, Tierney 2010, Taylor 2011 and 2013), I was interested in the ways in which students reflected that knowledge as a larger discourse about India, Asia, the East, and Orient. As Foucault suggests, knowledge and power are entwined. Indeed, this power "produces reality." As I will show, students'

knowledge is wrapped up in powerful discourses about India that appear to students as being "real." Applying this principle to a particular "reality," Said (1978, 46) argues:

> In short, from its earliest modern history to the present, Orientalism as a form of thought for dealing with the foreign has typically shown the altogether regrettable tendency of any knowledge based on such hard-and-fast distinctions as 'East' and 'West': to channel thought into a West and East compartment…the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth.

More recently, as Nozaki (2009) notes, Orientalist discourses "lurk in cross-cultural studies and understandings" among American students as they contemplate Asian cultures. Or, as argued by Jazeel (2012, 10), students' geographical imaginations of places, such as India, "are embedded [with] stubborn power geometries, developmental inequalities and privileges." My aim here is to highlight and unpack some of these contemporary, "stubborn" conversations in order to promote pedagogical experiences that empower students and instructors in addressing issues surrounding inequality and privilege.

In this section, I present a number of vignettes of students' descriptions of India. To realize the discourses students rely on, I explore topics they discussed at length, particularly as those they relate to broader themes found in Orientalism and Postcolonialism. Prior to the vignettes, I address the importance of words themselves, particular the manner by which students employ binary language, such as "us" and "them." I then present three distinct topics students discussed, including 1) food, 2) animals, and 3) history. Where appropriate, I include commentary from my interviews with instructors.

“Us and Them”: Words and Imagined Geographies

Unlike the mediums of popular culture, which are largely visual, students rely on words to describe what they understand about the world around them. Words become the way they represent their imagined geographies in classroom discussions, activities, or assignments. However students often do not realize the power of words, especially words that are seemingly harmless and ordinary (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Carter 2015). As one instructor shared, pushing students to understand the relationships and meanings words communicate is challenging:

> I think students have a tendency to talk in terms of us and them. And so they often write in terms of "here in the United States" or "we Americans"…and that is one of those things I address very early on, that it is not just “here in the United States.” Even the United States itself is diverse, so it's not like everyone in the United States is the same. So it's definitely the language that they use. I talk a lot about discourse and we just had a discussion…where I discuss the difference between undocumented migrants and illegals, and so most students buy into that, but there was one student who just kept saying, “But it is just language!” And I said, “Yeah, but it is the power relations that are in this language and the meanings that are attached to these words, so even though for you it might just be language, whether an immigrant is labeled as an undocumented migrant or an illegal migrant, to that person, that makes a big difference.” (F-ASCP-LG-7)

Stuart Hall (2013) argues that the use of language heightens the process of Othering. He describes four ways why differences in language matter when it comes to making sense of the world around us. First, differences are relational, meaning we understand what things are because of what they are not (as Hall gives example, we know black because it is the opposite of white). Therefore, we use difference to create crude binaries, although scholars have argued that these binaries are never impartial, but rather favor one over the other. For

example, geographers apply the black/white example to issues of race (see Kobayashi and Peake 1994, Carter 2009, Mahtani 2014). Second, difference allows individuals to construct meaning through dialogue with the Other, where meaning is established through a "give-and-take between different speakers." Third, difference allows cultures to organize and give meaning to classification systems (what belongs vs. what does not belong). Finally, and importantly for Said's development of Orientalism, the difference created by an 'Other' is used to define one's 'self': "the construction of identity…involves the construction of "others" (Said 1977, 332). As described above, the instructor shows how students use dichotomies such as us/them to create identity with language, and create distance from a perceived "Other" (in this case, immigrants).

According to Hall, a "fascination" exists with difference and the Other. At its most extreme, Hall (2013, 225) calls these language cues of difference "binary oppositions":

> Thus, while we do not seem able to do without them, binary oppositions are also open to the charge of being reductionist and over-simplified – swallowing up all distinctions in their rather rigid two-part structure…there are very few neutral binary oppositions. One pole of the binary is usually the dominant one, the one which includes the other within its field of operations. There is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition. We should really write, **white**/black, **men**/women, **masculine**/feminine, **upper class**/lower class, **British**/alien.

As example, Hall draws on Said's claim that a foundational point in the development and endurance of Orientalism is the language used to mark identity, even in its rudimentary terms of "us" and "them." Further still, this derives from Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony (Dittmer 2010, 30-33), whereby "certain cultural forms predominate over others" (Said 1978, 7).

From the perspective of instructors, it appeared that many undergraduates did not have a critical lens toward language. Indeed, as some instructors encountered this situation repeatedly in the classroom, they became more proactive in their approach to discussing cultural diversity. For example, one instructor described one of language and discourse's detrimental consequences, particularly with undergraduates:

> One thing that I have to do every semester…is that I have to have this little talk with my students about the words "us" and "them," "we" and "they." And I just essentially outlaw saying "we," unless you are talking about the 120 people in this class, you cannot say, "we." Because if you say, "we," you mean Americans, you are excluding the 10 international students that we have…what does that mean, "we?" And I think that in itself is one of the problems in the imagined geographies that come across in media discourse, and just the basic framing that guides students' thinking before they ever even walk in the door of that class. It's very like adversarial and confrontational, and it really inhibits the ability to understand places around the world…just that little piece of discipline, to say that if someone raises their hand and they say, "Well, why can't they just do blah, blah, blah?" I'm like, "Who's they? Like, do you mean people from Afghanistan? Then say people from Afghanistan." Don't create these imagined categories that really just inhibit your ability to actually think about anything. (F-ASCP-LG-10)

As Said (1977, 327) encourages us, contemporary reflection on such historical and modern discourses point us toward "the great value of skeptical critical consciousness." Although the development of critical consciousness comes through critical geographic study, facilitated by critical geography instructors, as I show next with my interactions with students, it remains an uphill battle despite decades of impassioned work by scholars and educators.

In my review of students' comments during focus group, they often did not hesitate to use collective first-person pronouns to demark identity they included themselves in, and third-person pronouns to describe what they considered to be unique or different about

India(ns). For example, note how often difference is marked via a pronoun in this single excerpt (emphasis added):

> Yeah, this [picture] is just, um, my friend. He is one of my best friends. He is a student here…he's actually from Bangladesh….I know that's not India, but what I know from him, *they* are extremely similar culture and makeup… and the way that the people are…he describes it as dirty in a lot of ways, and that is interesting to hear from him because his family, a huge family, 14 brothers and sisters, and he grew up in extreme poverty. *They* just recently got electricity like in the last eight years. So *they* have like metal tin roofs, kind of like the stereotypical thing you might think of in India and that part of the world. But he tells me like that is what – how it is…but he tells me about his problems with coming here, and his main concern when he got here was learning personal space, cause he said where he is from, you could – you would be right in someone's face cause there are so many people around, and that's how you talk to someone. But when he came here, he realized people were like, "Whoa, back up dude! You're too close." [Group laughs.] So he had to learn new personal space – in America *we* have greater boundaries…and *they* practice agriculture at home, and made a lot of their own food, and used the old ways. (F4-LG-03)

I highlight three of these instances: First, the student describes her friend as being from Bangladesh, and although this is "not India…they are extremely similar culture and makeup." In reality, Bangladesh and India are quite different culturally, such as in language or dominate religious beliefs. Indeed, the motivation of a modern nation-state of Bangladesh is to separate itself as a Muslim homeland, first in partitioning itself from India (1947), and later from Pakistan (1971). As Said (1978, 252) contends:

> The non-European known to [Westerners] is…an atom in a vast collectivity designated in ordinary or cultivated discourse as an undifferentiated type called Oriental, African, yellow, brown, or Muslim. To such abstractions Orientalism had contributed its power of generalization, converting instances

> of civilization into its values, ideas, and positions…transformed into common cultural currency.

Algeo (2007) warns of such "conflation of South Asian identities under an umbrella," particularly groups that have struggled – sometimes through violent conflict – to preserve a unique cultural identity. Not surprisingly, when I later asked students if they thought they would have unique ideas (e.g. projects) about the United States, they all agreed they would, despite all of them sharing a national identity. Yet this was clearly a stretch when students considered another culture. As the same student realizes: "I think it is easier for you to generalize another culture or another country, not being from there, especially…being from America. So really, I think it's like putting stereotypes on a person that you don't know, you just base them off looks" (F4-LG-03).

Second, the student identifies a number of symbols – "the stereotypical" – that further marks difference. Noting that the (very large) family had just recently gained access to electricity, but still had a home with a tin roof, bolsters Said's earlier position of Western cultural supremacy over Eastern "backwardness." It is a "system of containment," argues Jazeel (2012, 10), "one that safely assimilates the West's 'Others' in ways that effectively reinscribe the superiority of the West over those Others." The same student reacted to another student's image of the Ganges River moments later: "Yeah they do everything in that river – most people wash *their* clothes, bathe, *they* cremate bodies and put *them* in there. *It's really wild*" (F4-LG-03, emphasis added). The student overlooks pertinent socio-political issues within their statement, such as access to fresh water, issues of infrastructure, and sacred spaces. Rather than engaging with complex issues, these reinforce notions of superiority and difference.

Finally, in her comparison of personal space, she uses the pronoun "we" as a blanket statement of U.S. behaviors. Nozaki (2009, 147) attributes this behavior to the process of essentialism: "Whatever category is used to define people…[it] inevitably stresses the similarities and disregards the differences within the category…it defines and defends the 'essence' of the people and their culture…rather than promoting a full understanding of their complex identities as socio-historical constructs." Moreover, the student uses the phrase "greater boundaries," to distinguish the difference between "we" and "they." While "greater" certainly in this phrase could mean larger or bigger, it could be confused with other synonyms – better, superior. As Hall (2013, 228) concludes:

> Difference is ambivalent. It can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed object – and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the 'Other'…always bear in mind this ambivalent character of 'difference,' its divided legacy.

This affirms, to an extent, that which instructors highlighted within their own experiences. Although students use language that is familiar, outwardly simplistic, or innocent in nature, the inherent "power" which resides in words such as "us/we" and "them/they" is often ignored or unknown. Turning to examples of discourses students used to communicate knowledge of India, note how often they employ these binaries.

*Indiana Jones and "Outrageous Foods"*

To bookend my conversations with focus groups, we viewed and discussed a scene from Steven Spielberg's film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). This exercise was to

"break the ice" of the conversation, as well as to consider the ways in which students analyzed a popular (Western) film set in India. The scene itself portrayed a dinner scene between the main characters (Americans and Brits) and their Indian hosts, made up predominately of royalty and government officials. While viewing the film, I encouraged students to write down anything that came to mind that represented India. At the end of the scene, students compiled a list of descriptions they felt best covered their individual notes. Although students described a number of the physical and behavioral attributes shown throughout the scene, the most common discussion point revolved around the food presented.

For example, here are some responses from students after viewing the scene: "Well I assume those are like traditional dishes that would be served" (M1-LG-02), "Their portrayal of food as strange and disgusting" (M4-LG-04), "The outrageous foods" (F1-PR-05), "The food. It's just very different" (F4-HB-02). This also led to associating what the characters were eating and *how* the Indian characters were eating: "They are kind of sloppy eaters" (M1-LG-05), "Um, like table manners. They sat on the floor" (M4-PR-01), "Yeah, it kind of made them look like they were barbaric" (F1-LG-01), "I said that it almost portrayed them as savages" (M4-LG-01). Additionally, the last two comments appear to offer some criticism of how Indians' characterization in the film, although this type of critical comment was rare at the outset of watching the scene.

Based on what they viewed during the scene, students made relatively large generalizations about India, such as diet or mannerisms. One of the "humorous" subplots within the scene is the lead actress, whose character is mortified by the items being served, attempting to vomit and later fainting. In *every* focus group, students empathized with the

(white) woman, cringing and vocalizing their distaste (either with uneasy laughter or, more commonly, sounds such as "ew"). The scene does not give any Indian characters a voice other than that to reinforce the behaviors presented at large. India and Indians are rarely "allowed to speak to us" through Western popular culture (Jazeel 2012). This is why students used phrases such as "savage" or "barbaric" when describing Indians, as this was the single story being presented. Indiana Jones himself is never seen partaking of the meal, rather he manages the conversation between himself and his Indian hosts. Said (1978, 196) notes of such male "pilgrims" from the West into the Orient: "every scene in the Pilgrimage reveals him as winning out over the obstacles confronting him, a foreigner, in a strange place…able to do this because he had sufficient knowledge of an alien society for this purpose." Students take their cue – and build "sufficient knowledge" from these Western pilgrims (as well as larger cultural norms), when to recoil or when to disapprove. Moreover, as they created discussion around the film, they did so in a manner that largely suggested binary oppositions.

It was apparent that students struggled at the outset to process the representations presented during the film into a meaningful or critical dialogue. Most students were vocally (and visually) disturbed by the scene – not so much because of their apprehension to accept the scene as truth, but more because of their aversion to what was represented as "true" Indian culture, practices and behaviors that did not align with their own cultural norms (Algeo 2007). Still today, popular culture is certainly difficult to untwine, particularly as they attach themselves to individual geographical imaginaries (Conover and Miller 2014, Somdahl-Sands 2015).

While students in focus groups tended to view the scene in similar ways, each student contextualized and situated their interpretation via previous knowledge concerning

India. In Chapter 7, I will show how students began the process of detangling individual and collective imagined geographies through the PDPE project, including their post-focus group conversations on this particular scene. Next, I provide another example of how students exoticisize and distanced India, this time through discussing aspects of their respective PDPE projects. As I will show, students used language to separate themselves from India/Indians by describing how two particular animals (cows and elephants) are treated differently in India, within the contexts of, for example, agriculture and religion. Students juxtapose their ideas of India with dominant Western perspectives of the same animals.

*Domestic or Wild?: Discussions on Cows and Elephants*

The following conversation took place between final-year students while they were sorting their individual images into collective stacks:

> M4-LG-04: I just had this [picture] because of the elephants in India.
>
> F4-LG-03: Maybe that could go in agriculture.
>
> M4-LG-04: Yeah it could go in there.
>
> F4-LG-03: Cause don't they use them for that?
>
> M4-LG-04: Yeah.
>
> F4-LG-03: I mean to help farm.
>
> F4-LG-05: They're so cute.
>
> M4-LG-02: That'd be awesome to like ride on one to school.
>
> F4-LG-05: And like pick up all the kids in the area.
>
> [Group laughs.]

In a number of instances, such as this, students presented images – and consequently language – about animals in a way that added to the distancing of cultural norms they associated with and imagined about India. In another way, students described the function of animals in seemingly opposite ways from their own experience or expectation (e.g. elephants are shown to be domestic, cows to be wild). For example, assuming one might ride an elephant to school, which is simultaneously odd (because it is not a modern form of transportation) yet interesting (because it is exotic), points to what Hall (2013) calls "having-it-both-ways." As he explains:

> People who are in any way significantly different from the majority – 'them' rather than 'us' – are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation…through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling because different/compelling because strange and exotic. And they are often required to be *both things at the same time*! (Hall 2013, 219, emphasis in original)

The example above touches on nearly every one of these binaries. For example, while students imagine it is "civilized" to farm, it is "primitive" to use elephants for agriculture.[5] This was not an isolated image of India, as in a separate focus group a student claimed, "[Elephants] are also like really big in developing the country in the early times, because they'd use these elephants to help plow land" (F1-LG-03). Beyond the use of elephants domestically as farm implements or transportation, one group even longed for elephants as pets, adding to the misguided perception that elephants are widely domesticated or exist in the day-to-day lives of many Indians.

In addition to most groups discussing the domestic nature of elephants, students connected elephants to religion: "This [picture] is another statue. I'm not really sure who that

guy is, but elephants, like elephants are a big thing, because they like put paint on them for like ceremonies or celebrations" (F1-LG-03). The student was referring to the Hindu deity Ganesha, which has the head of an elephant. In another group, three separate students also had images of elephants that were all specifically connected to religion. This is not particularly surprising given that Ganesha is globally one of the best-known Hindu deities. Due to the spatial diffusion of Indian culture and people, as well as Ganesha's adoption within other faith system such as Buddhism and Jainism, this created both visibility and conflation to Westerners (Nagar 1992, 175). Students appeared to be quite familiar with this image as a representation of what they imagined about India. Yet, students were quick to point out the boundaries:

> I had two other [pictures] that I didn't show, but its *Indiana Jones*, which I put like as very verdant and rural areas and exotic. So that goes along with all of the like sweeping shots when they are marching through and they are on elephants and that's obviously not in America." (M1-PR-02)

As pointed out earlier, one of the key aspects of Othering is using language that helps to drive difference as a wedge between groups. Moreover, the student emphasizes that America is *not* "verdant and rural and exotic," or "on elephants," as those are not simply different, but inferior.

Less often, students included images of cows in their respective projects, or discussed them during the focus groups. For example, this first-year student presented her picture somewhat reticently: "This looks kind of strange, but I have a picture of a cow because I've heard that cows are sacred in India and there are laws against killing them" (F1-HB-03). The student assumes the image is "strange," but furthermore, strangeness toward laws that protect cows from slaughter. Particularly from a Western perspective, cows supply

a traditionally dietary supply of protein, and the diffusion of Western diet to other locations has created a global nutrition transition (Caballero and Popkin 2002). This transition increases the demand on items such as convenient, processed foods, and meat, notably beef. While India has experienced a nutrition transition (Shetty 2002), it has remained (mostly) outside of this push for consuming beef due to religious ("sacred") and ethical beliefs about cows (Amarasinghe et al. 2007). Therefore, students view the practice of protecting cattle for religious purposes as counterintuitive to their experience and expectations in the United States.

Similarly, in another focus group, a student noted the contrast in a slightly different manner: "I had a picture of cows just wandering, cause they are sacred in India, and they just go wherever they want and stuff like that" (M4-PR-04). This student, like the previous, uses the phrase "sacred," but in a way that legitimizes difference. Rather than cows being penned or fenced in – a common practice in commercialized agriculture that dominates American beef production – cows in India "just go wherever they want." Although students were lacking clear understanding about farming and religious practices concerning elephants or cows in India, they discussed such topics with confidence in their knowledge, emphasizing the difference between Western ways and "their" ways.

This is a hallmark of Orientalism, whereby students can produce knowledge by using pictures and words attached to specific exoticizing discourses (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Somdahl-Sands 2015). The knowledge students produced about India from their previous experiences did not simply confirm Orientalist discourses, but simultaneously "enacts and so reproduces the structure" of what other students may believe about a place like India (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, 72). The production of knowledge becomes a vicious

cycle and recycling of stereotypes and myths through language and discourse. Students rarely question one another over the validity of their claims, particularly about distant places or people (Hall 2011). While this provided an example of how students imagined India set in the present day, more often students created discourse that set India in historical terms, and found it difficult to describe India as a modern nation-state. As I argue, this type of discourse exemplifies Said's concept of latent Orientalism.

*India as Past in Present: An Example of Latent Orientalism*

Students struggled to find ways to speak about India as a contemporary nation-state, but rather tended toward a discourse of a nation-state set in the past. In fact, the lone Indian figure ever mentioned by students was an historical one, Mahatma Gandhi. This only occurred in half of the focus groups (only with first-year students); two of those three references based on watching the popular 1982 film *Gandhi*. Even when students used personal relationships to couch their knowledge of India, it was often set in past tense (e.g. traditional). For example, as one student described her South Asian friend's family farm, "they used the old ways" (F4-LG-03).

Additionally, students were quick to claim that most of what they formally learned about India was in a world history class, and that they never learned about "present day" India. Even those students who mentioned taking more advanced coursework, on topics such as eastern religions, suggested their knowledge was rooted in historical development and practices of religions such as Hinduism. Moreover, what they could recall was rather ambiguous: "In history classes…pictures in history books and stuff like that. I can't remember specific topics or anything like that" (M4-PR-04). As another first-year student

discussed, learning about a distant place such as India, beyond "broad subjects," is difficult in Western education:

> I think like today's India…we don't know what they're doing today. Like their politics or Gandhi, or something that's happening now that isn't such a broad subject as religion and population and culture…Like in history, it'll go through like the ancient history of India, but it will like stop…today, India is like doing great, they have great IT and stuff like that, but nothing else. Like taking US history, we go up to like 2011 and stuff today. We just stop at a general idea of India. (F1-LG-03)

This student seems to even conflate present day India with the person Gandhi, in a way that appears Gandhi is still alive (I explore more on conflation in Chapter 7). Moreover, the student claims that they, "stop at a general idea of India," but I would question, what is "a general idea" of India? Is it their history? Ancient or modern? Both? Their geography? Physical or human? Hopefully both? As is the case with stereotypes, we tend to be exposed to very little information, and the information we are given is often abstract and exaggerates differences.

Said (1978) describes this particular phenomenon as latent Orientalism. Latent Orientalism is "almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity," whereby although knowledge may change over time about the Orient, "*the unanimity, stability, and durability* of latent Orientalism" remain virtually unchanged (206, emphasis added). In essence, the Orient (including India), exists as a constant expression of its values (or truths), with few if any modifications. As Dittmer (2010, 26) adds to this concept within an age of globalization, "the West [is] defined by its progress and universality and the East [is] defined by its exotic traditional folk culture, which is linked to the past as well as particular to a

specific region." Through globalization, today's students are exposed to more aspects of Indian culture, and yet, it is still considered traditional or old.

Despite students relying mostly on their (limited) knowledge of an historical India to represent a modern one, at times they were critical of such representations. As one focus group concluded after discussing the *Indiana Jones* scene:

> M1-PR-02: Movies are very static, so [*Indiana Jones* is] always going to be about India in the 1930s. So I think by realizing that, and that the entire country has shifted, and how that's not necessarily a reflection on India nowadays.
>
> F1-PR-01: I mean, it's a little stereotypical. Yeah, a lot of that culture is still relevant in India today, but there are people who are just like us and dress just like us. They're buying the same kind of clothes.
>
> F1-PR-04: Yeah. They have the same kind of jobs.

When given the opportunity, students were able to conceptualize some of the incongruences between how India is represented as set in the past through various sources, and how that influences their perception of India presently. Furthermore, students considered their contemporary Indian counterparts to be quite similar to themselves in the clothes they wear or the jobs they have. However, as Dittmer (2010, 26) argues, the modern "steamroller" of Orientalism, in the guise of "modern Western commodities and entertainment," makes this similarity a consequence of cultural imperialism.

In this example and others, students discussed their knowledge of India through discourses that resonate with common Orientalist themes. At times, students did offer brief instances of stepping outside those discourses to more critical and nuanced perceptions of an imagined place, particularly as our focus groups progressed into the latter stages of discussion (see Chapter 7). However, as I have shown in this section, the overwhelming

majority of the early conversations in focus groups took place in students' "comfort zone." This phrase, as used by one instructor (F-ASCP-LG-10) I interviewed, became a common part of my conversations with other instructors as well, especially as they described their attempts to confront students' imagined geographies in the classroom. These comfort zones are represented by students employing stereotypes and dichotomous language as defense mechanisms against those seen as the Other, particularly when invoking emotions such as anxiety over not knowing or fully understanding the Other.

**The "Comfort Zone:" Anxiety and Imagined Geographies**

For many students who engage in conversations over their imagined geographies, they remain in their "comfort zone." This is a place that helps students fit information into categories such as "us" and "them," and is bounded by a healthy level of unease concerning those differences. Instructors explained that they often experience not only a dearth of knowledge about various places among their undergraduates, but also face stereotypical comments, whereby students participate in a discourse that generates and perpetuates negative, simple, and often inaccurate depictions of places. Typically, imagined geographies are bounded not by personal experiences with that place or group of people, but rather through the "social production of space…[and] the social production of fear" (Koskela 2010, 389). Indeed, scholars such as Koskela (and earlier Said), argue that fear is often associated (and necessary) with the construction of imagined geographies. However, students in my focus groups expressed not so much fear as what I would categorize as anxiety.

While certainly an element of “not knowing” exists, instructors highlighted that even when undergraduates lack knowledge about a place, group of people, or geographic concept, they still put forth the façade that they know “something.” For example, one instructor described a recent experience when giving an exam to an introductory human geography class:

> I had a question about ethnic neighborhoods and ethnic islands and ghettos…students are quick to identify ghetto as a bad place…All I was looking for on the question was it's an ethnic neighborhood, that is impoverished, and typically has a specific ethnic group…But the students say things like "it's a bad place, it's a shady place, it's a sketchy place, it's rundown, it's a slum, it's just awful.” (M-ASCP-LG-22)

Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005) argue that even when American students claim to not have much or any knowledge about another place, they are able to “produce knowledge” out of their various experiences and relationships. While students rely on problematic information they glean from media, they also tend to associate characteristics of other places with a relatively high level of anxiety. Note that in the previous statement, the instructor used language expressing this very sentiment: bad, shady, sketchy, slum, awful. Another instructor used the Middle East as an example as she described the process:

> Places outside of the United States…insert themselves into [undergraduates] thoughts when they become seen as dangerous… like the Middle East and terrorism…then they have sort of this idea that all across the Middle East, it’s just full of ISIS or whatever…they have a particular blanket vision for what is there…so that their thinking about these other places only in truth when it's something that is dangerous or perceived as problematic, rather than sort of kind of having some sort of holistic understanding or thought about these other places around the world. (F-ASCP-LG-16)

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Said indicates that one of the major aspects to Orientalism is fear and anxiety ("paranoia"). Koskela (2010, 390) argues that "fear *needs* the Other," even if those fears are unfounded, "as in the collective Western imagination of dangerous alien nationalities." While fear or anxiety is an individual emotion, they are always linked to collective imaginations through social relationships:

> Whilst fear from an individual perspective is pure emotion, it rests on…other aspects that shape its outlook. One is the social relations that interpret how spaces are socially produced…this production is tied to how 'we' intersect with 'Others', rather than being embodied in individuals' emotions. 'We' accordingly adopt 'telling', as a strategy, in an attempt to spread the message about fearful 'Others'. As a result, fear accentuates in the process of 'othering' because 'Others' are always blamed when 'we' are frightened. (Abu-Orf 2012, 160).

Undergraduates in my study did not express a strong emotion of fear as they discussed India. However, there were certainly markers of anxiety based on perceived difference. For example, as described previously, students had both visible and visceral reactions to watching the scene from *Indiana Jones*. Representation of difference, such as through popular films, "engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fear and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way" (Hall 2013, 216). Many educators typically have brief encounters with undergraduates, and may anticipate they have insufficient time to uncover why students feel such fear or anxiety. I would argue that these types of conversations must happen if our students are to attain critical geographic perspectives.

As Koskela (2010, 404) concludes, "Maybe, the way out of fear is not to be more careful but to avoid Othering…and to promote mutual respect, sustainable solidarity – the culture of fear turned into a culture of tolerance." Or, as one undergraduate put it

concerning India, "I think without true knowledge…and more wholesome education, I guess, on India and the people of India that could lead to intolerance, just because we're ignorant" (F4-LG-05). As I will show later in Chapter 7, pedagogical techniques such as PDPE give instructors opportunities to get at those "deeper levels" (Hall 2013).

**Conclusion**

Beginning the process of exploring the boundaries of imagined geographies is a necessary task for a "critical global citizen" (Martin 2011), and unearthing the various sources that create those boundaries is vital first step. This project confirmed some of the previous literature concerning students' reliance on a variety of popular culture mediums as sources of knowledge about a distant place (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Picton 2008, Carter 2015). For example, as noted by L. Hall (2011) in Chapter 2, U.S. students often use popular culture in a variety of ways to connect to academic learning or discussions.

However, I also identified students' knowledge that comes from personal relationships with international students or immigrants from India. This suggests that compared with younger students, undergraduates have more opportunities to engage in relationships and conversations with Indians in their learning environments (e.g. college campuses). It was also evident that when students shared knowledge that stemmed from these relationships with the focus group, the group accepted this knowledge as being valid (e.g. ping pong and language) – even if that knowledge was still problematic (e.g. the story concerning the student from Bangladesh). And although students at times did learn about India through more formal educational means, the general lack of discussion on previous

formal education suggests students derived very little of their perception of India through these environments.

I also addressed the ways in which participants claimed to know India, particularly as it related to larger discourses of "the East" as presented in Said's Orientalism. I argue that as undergraduates described and discussed various facets of their knowledge of India, including food, animals, and history, they largely did so in ways similar to common patterns of othering. In all of these examples, students frequently used language to create binary oppositions between "us" and "them" (Nozaki 2009, Hall 2013), "dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close…and what is far away" (Said 1978, 55).

As indicated from instructors, this dramatization can take the form of fear, or as in my case, anxiety within undergraduates. While fear or anxiety is an individual emotion, larger social and spatial forces construct and drive fear, particularly when concerned with the "Other" (Koskela 2010, Abu-Orf 2012). Said (1978, 263) contends that Orientalism as a discourse on the Eastern "Other" was largely built on fear and anxiety in the West, as "the apocalypse to be feared was not the destruction of Western civilization but rather the destruction of the barriers that kept East and West from each other." As I argue, geography educators should be concerned with helping students confront their personal barriers of fear or anxiety towards others.

Undergraduates' imagined geographies of India represented rather "dramatic boundaries." However, when given the opportunity, undergraduates are also eager to discuss these boundaries. Why do they exist? What do they mean? How can we think past them? Importantly, Said (1994, 336) gives some of the antidote to circumventing our imagined geographies, and pushing past the notion of "us" and "them":

> It is more rewarding — and more difficult — to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about "us." But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how "our" culture or country is number one. For the intellectual there is quite enough of value to do without that.

Before examining a prospective tool educators can use with undergraduates to address imagined geographies, I first turn to some of the major difference between undergraduates at different sites, and at different points within their education (first-year vs. final-year). While many commonalities exist across undergraduates' discussions concerning India, as I have presented in this chapter, unique imagined geographies within different sites provide particular challenges – and opportunities – for geography educators.

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[3] Although this international student confided that she felt that she did not have the capability to celebrate Indian traditions due to the low Indian presence, this particular campus has a substantial Indian student population, as well as Indian Student Association, the largest of any international student association on campus. Perhaps this student did not feel comfortable because even though a large Indian community is present, in comparison to what she may have experienced at home it feels nonexistent.

[4] Some first-year students, in fact, did mention some of the courses they were currently taking. For example, two students were taking the same course, "Global Issues," in which they had viewed a film on globalization and India, and in another case a student described an "Intro to Human Geography" course in which they learned about population in India. Similarly, some final-year students did describe experiences in high school. However, both of these were exceptional situations.

[5] Asian elephants, while sometimes were/are captured from the wild and trained to carry heavy objects such as lumbered trees, more often were/are used for battles or ceremonies. Remarkably, the number of tractors on farms in India increased from 200,000 in 1961 to 4,800,000 in 2000.

# CHAPTER V

## HOW UNDERGRADUATES' EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND EXPERIENCE CREATES UNIQUE IMAGINED GEOGRAPHIES

> I have attempted to raise a whole set of questions that are relevant in discussing the problems of human experience: How does one *represent* other cultures? (Said 1978, 325, emphasis in original)

**Introduction**

As described in statement above, Said implies that humans gain knowledge about the world through a variety of personal experiences – and this is a "problem." Thus far, I have introduced a number of ways that students experience this transfer of knowledge, including popular culture mediums (film, television, news media, etc.), personal relationships, and formal education. In these instances, however, many contain problematic representations of other cultures, typically using binary oppositions or stereotypes. Consequently, students use these experiences to think about and represent other people or places. Exploring these varying human experiences is vital for understanding how perceptions of Others are constructed and perpetuated. From the vantage point of geography instructors, contextualizing students' imaginings of the world is paramount, as students enter with a

variety and amount of knowledges and images of places and peoples (Morgan 2001). Student experiences can be similar across age, sex, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status, particularly within societies that largely consume similar sources of popular culture (Picton 2008, Taylor 2011). Yet, imagined geographies can also vary based on students' demographic or locational differences (Inokuchi and Nozaki 2005, Lee et al. 2009). While the previous chapter explored largely the common sources and discourses undergraduates use concerning how they imagine India, this chapter shifts focus to some of the distinct differences between participants groups. I categorize these differences in two ways: first in terms of their experience level at their respective universities (e.g. first-year students versus final-year students), and second through the types of institutions included in this study (e.g. public land grant, historically black, private/religious). I consider the implications of each of these types of difference, in terms of how undergraduates think uniquely about a distant place, as well as how these differences extend ongoing conversations by geographers' (Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Conover and Miller 2014, Somdahl-Sands 2015) concerning the need for flexible – and critical – pedagogy for teaching about place.

**Differences between First-year and Final-year Students**

A primary objective of this project was to explore similarities and differences among university students from a variety of vantage points. One of the most obvious points of comparison are differences between students in their first-year compared to those in their final-year. As previous studies argue, acknowledging the educational and experiential backgrounds of participants is important to contextualize different behaviors and perceptions, particularly when examining students' use of stereotyping (Inokuchi and Nozaki

2005, Lee et al. 2009). In this section, I explain three areas in which noticeable patterns emerged between first and final-year undergraduates. First, I examine what students reported in terms of their academic coursework, including some of the existing gaps within coursework when it comes to addressing imagined geographies. Second, I discuss travel experience, particularly international travel, and the prospective advantages for undergraduates' experiences outside of the classroom. Third, I return to a topic covered earlier concerning relationships, but reframe the discussion based on differences between first and final-year students, where the former use more informal relationships and the latter more direct relationships. I show that not only did final-year students tend to have (obviously) more experience in all three categories, but significantly, a lack in any may increase the likelihood of undergraduates relying on sources such as popular culture to inform their imagined geographies of place.

First-year vs. Final-year Experience: Coursework

While every participant completed a survey to supply demographic information, I also inquired about students' previous coursework or experience (such as travel) in order to contextualize their perceptions and descriptions of India. These questions also allowed me to compare the two cohorts. For example, I asked students to list any courses they had taken related in any way to the study of culture or diversity. Of the fifteen first-year participants, the average number of courses reported was less than one (0.9), with five students not writing in any courses on the survey.[6] The average number of courses reported for the eighteen final-year participants was two, with only three students not writing in any courses.

Not surprisingly, students in their final-year of study reported having taken more courses that they would classify as such.[7]

Two findings are of note, given the recent push in higher education for more coursework in diversity (Mayhew and Grunwald 2006, Singleton and Fleming 2009), and particularly by geographers (Whalley et al. 2011). First, three final-year students reported not having a course they would consider to be about culture or diversity. Second, the average number of courses for final-year students was not higher than two. In both cases, some of this is based on the subjective understanding of how students classified courses they had previously taken. Additionally, students' major area of study certainly influence which courses, including the number of elective courses, they took (or did not take).

Despite recent trends suggesting an "assault" on the liberal arts curriculum (Lafer 2017), many universities still pride themselves in exposing students to liberal arts educational experiences, and often require coursework in areas such as cultural diversity. The land-grant university expects most undergraduates to complete at least one course with a diversity designation *and* at least one international dimension designation. Similarly, the private religious university requires students in *all* programs and majors to complete two courses with "Global/Multicultural" distinctions. While the HBCU does not designate any of its general education courses to be specifically about diversity or cultural, many of the final-year students at the HBCU listed some of these courses as such.

As described in the previous chapter, students in general did not indicate that their formal education had significant contribution to how they learned about India. This was true about coursework in post-secondary education, and in fact, both first and final-year students rarely discussed specific courses they had taken at the college-level. However, recall that

first-year students were more likely to discuss their experience in high school than final-year students were. Yet, both first-year and final-year students were mostly silent about the influence of recent coursework in terms of how they imagined India. This identifies two issues. First, first-year students may lean on memories or learning from earlier experiences (e.g. high school), at least in terms of how they imagine distant places. Put another way, students may reinforce what they think they already know about a place, particularly if new or complex information is not introduced through, for example, general education coursework. As shown earlier, undergraduates represent knowledge often through stereotypes formed through informal learning. Additionally, Somdahl-Sands (2015, 26) contends that stereotypes, especially of the Orient, are more difficult to deconstruct in contemporary times:

> I must not only show my students how movies, the evening news, and their textbooks are constructing the places we are learning about, but how those very constructions shape their own geographical imaginations…however, it is difficult for students to recognize in their own experience with knowledge production in the media when they are so fully immersed in the material and the social reproductions as expressed in mainstream media outlets.

Instructors I interviewed recognized this pattern as well. Most agreed that not only do stereotypes and imagined geographies go hand-in-hand, but that without concerted efforts by students and instructors, we confirm our imagined geographies even with so-called "new" information:

> I think that media is still using [stereotypes] – I think it's easy, I think it's cheaper, I think there's not always nuance in the way that even a major movie is put out… much of it is not very problematic. Much of it is not very progressive because it was easy…it's much easier to reinforce people's existing preconceptions than it is to challenge them. (F-ASCP-LG-24)

Second, final-year students tended to recognize this gap. Some suggested courses that involve their individual and collective imaginings of people and places should challenge their assumptions and stereotypes. Some geographers have attempted various avenues of challenging undergraduates imagined geographies (Algeo 2007, Ashutosh and Winders 2009, Conover and Miller 2014). For example, using various mediums (film, novels, travelogues, etc.) that historically constructed how Eastern Europe was imagined (particularly its connection to vampires), Dittmer (2006, 59) encourages undergraduates to "understand the relationship between popular culture and the perpetuation of patterns in the collective geographical imagination." Yet this is difficult work for geographers. For example, one instructor noted concern over the overwhelming number of sources (both real and fake) in an age of information and technology:

> To really dissect the world is much more complicated than it has been in the past…it makes it even more challenging from an instructor's perspective, kind of helping students think through and postulate their own imaginations of what places are. (M-FP-LG-16)

Unfortunately, many instructors did not offer any distinguishing capabilities between first and final-year students, particularly in lower-level courses populated by both groups (e.g. Introduction to Human/Cultural Geography, World Regional Geography). Despite the uphill battle faced by instructors, the process of unpacking stereotypes and imagined geographies remains a vital aspect of any study of culture or diversity. Moreover, it equips undergraduates with opportunities to, as Conover and Miller (2014, 93) argue, "gain a more self-aware and reflexive account" of how various experiences construct their imagined geographies.

First-year vs. Final-year Experience: Travel

Another set of questions I asked participants in the survey centered on their experiences traveling internationally (e.g. study abroad, vacationing, etc.), such as when they had traveled and to which countries. About half of the participants (8/15 first-year students, and 8/18 final-year students) reported previously traveling outside of the country. This relatively high percentage confirms the reports from various faculty members who remarked in interviews that a growing number of their students had experience(s) abroad. As one instructor (F-ASTP-LG-12) noted, "over the years, every single first class of my world regional lecture I ask people to raise their hand if they had traveled outside of the country, and I am at almost 100% now." However, as this instructor went on to point out, even though the experience of traveling is on the rise, students do not always know how to contextualize these experiences. Yet, as I will show, final-year students did tend to be more critical of their travel experiences than their first-year counterparts.

Furthermore, only two students from the HBCU had experience traveling overseas (one first-year and one final-year), confirming recent studies concerning HBCU students (Brux and Fry 2010, Evenson 2015, Kasravi 2018). Evenson (2015) claims that the existing gap of HBCU students participating in, for example, study abroad opportunities as compared to students at predominately white institutions (PWI), is a myriad of issues, typically mixed with insufficient funds. Beyond a lack of financial means, Kasravi (2018) identifies lack of family support or cultural capital, institutional and academic obstacles, and broader systematic fear and racism as barriers to students of color participating in study abroad opportunities. Put into context with what students reported on their respective socio-economic background, HBCU students were more likely to describe themselves as coming

from low-income or middle-class, whereas students from the land grant or private religious universities described themselves as middle-class to upper middle-class. Another instructor I interviewed, who teaches in an impoverished state, contends:

> It would be wonderful if we could take all of these students and send them on study abroad programs, because that fundamentally breaks down [imagine geographies]…but we can't do that, especially because we're one of the poorest states in the country, and people with very limited means and core educational preparation. (F-ASCP-LG-10)

Despite the hope above for international travel, students seldom spoke about their experiences abroad, although of note, none of the participants had been to India, and furthermore, only three students claimed to have lived for any significant time in another country. That said, when students did use their experiences in other countries, first-year students tended to so superficially. For example, one student related their travels to El Salvador to what they expected to see in India: "the overpopulation…the economy isn't that great…so many people and shantytowns, and practically no towns have plumbing, and they live in garbage" (F1-LG-03). Indeed, some instructors warned of such issues, suggesting, "a lot of people feel like they've been to Europe if they did a summer trip to England or if they've been abroad" (M-ASCP-LG-13). This implies that while students have greater opportunities to travel internationally, first-year students in particular lack a framework to avoid conflating places and cultures. Moreover, within those participants who reported they had traveled abroad, the majority indicated these trips were typically between 1-2 weeks in length, which does not provide much time for observing and interacting with unfamiliar places. While the benefits of international travel are numerous (Pandit 2009), and delaying those opportunities for first-year students is not ideal, properly preparing for and reflecting on these experiences are vital for successful cross-cultural experiences (Schroeder et al 2009).

While not all students' travels were specifically associated with study abroad opportunities (for example, mission trips or vacations), final-year students who shared their various international travel experiences consistently did so with a more critical lens:

> I also know…like I've traveled the world, and one thing I've learned is that Americans tend to think we are the best at everything and that everyone looks to America, which to some extent is true, but there is a lot of good in the world, and we just think that we're like the top of it all (M4-PR-05).

Anderson et al. (2006) contend that study abroad programs can increase students' awareness of cultures outside and within the United States. Indeed, a recent, yet significant push from geographers calls for greater incorporation of study abroad opportunities for undergraduates (Pandit 2009, Mullens et al. 2012, Mullens and Cuper 2015). In her presidential address, former AAG President Kavita Pandit (2009, 649-650, emphasis added) argues:

> Few of us need to be convinced about the value of studying abroad. The positive outcomes include becoming more proficient in a foreign language, becoming more comfortable living and working in a different culture, gaining a significant cross-cultural understanding, and improving interpersonal and communication skills. At a broader level, *study abroad expands the imagination of students*.

In my conversations with students, they too realized the necessity and benefits of travel, particularly if one is to overcome the influence of popular culture on the imagination. "[Get] over there and [see] it. Don't judge it on the things we see in movies or things like that. Get over there and travel" (M4-PR-04). However, simply traveling in the spirit of adventure or vacation, as shown earlier, may not fully unpack international experiences. Formal learning *while* traveling can be extremely beneficial for undergraduates (Mullens and Cuper 2015). Instructors, particularly those in geography, are well positioned to create meaningful learning opportunities while visiting other countries, especially if trips are short-term and learning

opportunities are condensed. Indeed, a number of instructors I interviewed do just that. Linking these study abroad experiences with critical pedagogy in the classroom appears to be paramount in overcoming stereotypes and imagined geographies.

First-year vs. Final-year Experience: Relationships

In addition to general academic and travel experience, relationships also appeared less in first-year students as ways students defined how they learned about India. As described in the previous chapter, students in general relied on a myriad of connections to people who "taught" them about India, including those from South Asia, such as other undergraduate students (e.g. international students), co-workers, teachers, or employers, or even those who had been to India as, for example, missionaries. However, final-year students tended to use direct relationships more often to buttress their knowledge about India. As one final-year student recognized, "I think that we can still learn a lot …because we all have personal relationships with either people from the country" (F4-LG-05). Some first-year students did note that they learned from friends, but these relationships tended to be indirect or conflated with knowledge about other places in Asia (see, for example, the instance of "Dubai, India" in Chapter 7).

Final-year students were aware of the potential to build their perceptions of a place like India through multiple avenues, including direct relationships. While first-year students also offered building relationships as a means to nuance their imagined geographies, only final-year students suggested that these relationships could similarly cloud their imagined geographies if not understood in context of those relationships. For example, when I asked one final-year group what they felt was a strength in terms of their understanding of India, a

participant promptly replied, "Contact with people or seeing people from India" (F4-HB-02). However, when I asked them what weaknesses they perceived, several students noted that although they labeled Indians as being "wise," "it was kind of just an assumption we all just made because of the people we have met, or like through movies, we just all assume that they are wise, even though they come from different like backgrounds" (F4-HB-04). First-year students may require more encouragement toward critically analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of existing or potential relationships as they (de)construct imagined geographies. Therefore, as I will show further in Chapter 7, the PDPE project and focus group provided first and final-year students a safe environment to produce such reflexivity.

### Implications of Differences between First-year and Final-year Students

In the first part of this chapter, I have explored three ways in which first-year and final-year students differed in terms of their various experiences, particularly as it directly or indirectly influenced their imagined geographies. While extending a certain degree of latitude toward first-year students – recognizing their obvious shortage of years to have such experiences – understanding these differences allows instructors better opportunities to begin the process of critically examining students' imagined geographies. Moreover, I identified that when students (first or final-year) have a shortage of diverse experiences from which to draw upon, they predominately construct their imagined geographies through popular culture representations of place and people. While this continues longstanding conversations on imagined geographies initiated by Edward Said, Stewart Hall, and others, these findings in particular suggest two overarching implications for geography instructors in higher education.

First, this presents unique ways students imagine the world as they exist in various stages of their academic experience. By in large, final-year students described more critical connections to travel and relationships than first-year. This would suggest that the university experience "works" to some degree in that final-year students used more critical and complex thinking when asked similar questions or discussing similar topics. However, it was not clear whether or not *all* of the experiences final-year students indicated occurred *during* their higher education career, or if they presently viewed these experiences as being more valuable to their imagined geographies. This suggests that students at any level may (and probably do) hold onto experiences that influence their imagined geographies, and these are worthy of self-reflection. Indeed, self-reflection is a key step in Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984). Kolb (1984) identifies four major stages within his learning theory, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Moreover, these four work in a cyclical process whereby students may enter the learning process at any point and complete the cycle. As Healey and Jenkins (2000, 194) note of the second stage, "Without reflection on experience, students are in danger of continuing to make the same mistakes," or in this case, continue to uncritically use their experiences to construct imagined geographies.

Second, and consequently, geography educators must foster an environment students can feel empowered and safe to conduct such self-reflection. While Healey and Jenkins (2000) were some of the first to call for Kolb's experiential learning theory within higher education geography classrooms, many have continued to push this forward.[8] More specifically, geographers are considering ways students can process previous experiences as they relate to material associated with courses (Chappell 2006, McGuinness 2009,

Summerby-Murray 2010, Patterson and Slinger-Friedman 2012). For example, McGuinness (2009) explores using reflective diaries with undergraduates to teach about feminist geography. As he argues, "this required students to think through issues in completely new ways, citing a wider range of evidence and incorporating their own life experiences in the work produced" (McGuinness 2009, 347). Overall, these geographers contend that without this opportunity, students cannot complete the learning process, especially as the reflective observation stage directly influences students' capacity to experiment with new ways of understanding the world.

While this geographical and pedagogical research is helpful, much of the remaining literature on this topic focuses narrowly on students who participate in upper division or fieldwork courses (see, for example, Keeling 2008, Simm and Marvell 2015, Mullins 2016), rather than the many students who take lower division geography courses. Training upper division geography students how to collect data in the field, and how to reflect on that process, is essential to ensure proper research methods. However, geography educators encounter many more students in lower division, introductory courses, where the training of reflection as a learning process could – and should – happen. Therefore, it behooves geographers to create space within *all* their courses for students and instructors to work through the learning process *together*, focusing on experiences with other courses, travel, and relationships. Moreover, in relation to deconstructing imagined geographies, reflecting on previous experiences seems to be the only way to: 1) allow instructors a clearer picture of *what* students think and believe about the world around them, and 2) allow students a critical examination of *why* they think and believe this.

## Variability Among Undergraduates at Different Universities

Similar to my findings above, I was also able to find distinguishing patterns among universities. In some cases, these patterns show distinct relationships that bind some sites together, while at others there were noticeable differences in the ways that undergraduates imagined India or Indians. Here, I offer three findings. First, I examine the role of missionaries and missionary work as sources of knowledge, and its consequences, chiefly for undergraduates at the private religious university. Second, I analyze the ways in which undergraduates ascribe cultural attributes, particularly in the way that students at the land grant and private religious universities are dominated by negative ascriptions, while HBCU students used more ascriptions that are positive. Finally, I examine the unique discussion of hair and complexion among HBCU students as it related to their understanding of India. Additionally, I show how these conversations urge geography instructors to be conscious and open to exploring their students' experiences and perceptions.

### Learning About India through Missionaries

In half of my groups (both groups at the private religious university, and one at the land-grant university), at least one student described how they learned about India through someone who themselves had been there doing mission work. In fact, one student had borrowed pictures from a missionary who had stayed with her family for a while, and had been to India. For the most part, students used these relationships to confirm a relatively negative stereotype about India, such as widespread poverty and unsanitary conditions. For example,

> I had a pair of friends who were married and they were stationed in India for a while, and they said that the things that

> we see in like *Slum Dog Millionaire*, that is almost exactly it…but they said that like in the [overpopulated] areas, it looks just like that. It's very [overpopulated] and it's very, um, very sad. They just said that it was very sad. (F4-LG-05)

Several ideas may help to explain the reliance on missionaries as viable sources of information about India, or more generally, the Other. First, Christianity is the dominant religious group in the United States, and therefore it is presumed that some of my participants were self-identified Christians, particularly at the private Christian university, although I did not ask this in my surveys. Second, Christianity is a universalizing religion, meaning current members are actively seeking new converts. Typically, Christians broach conversion efforts through missionary work – such as traveling to places in developing countries or the Global South to perform some type of humanitarian aid and evangelical work. Third, Western Christians have long viewed India as a "mission field" (Frykenberg 2013). However, Christian missionaries in India go "hand in hand" with (British) colonialism, which created standards of religious (Christian) and cultural (Western) superiority, (Shullai 2017). Still more contemporarily, Westerners (and particularly Americans) view India among a number of desperate regions in need of "saving," both religiously and culturally. For example:

> I think another thing that reminds me are those adopt children commercials. Where they say, "Ten cents a day goes to provide for a child's life." And they show you those graphic photos of kids, like I said, sitting in dirty water and drinking dirty water and all of the negative aspects of it and what you can do to help. (M4-PR-04)

The student notes thinking about television commercials encouraging monetarily supporting those in poverty – and prospectively ministry, as this comment was during the conversation about missionaries – in places like India.

While some suggest that missionaries are "among the weakest agents of 'cultural imperialism'" within places like India (Porter 2004, 322-323), that is not to say missionaries do not have substantial influence in constructing imagined geographies for those "back home." Through their exploration of correspondence from missionaries during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Brunn and Leppman (2003) argue that Americans have long learned about distant places and peoples through missionaries, particularly in terms of negative stereotypes. Vallgårda (2016, 876) shows similar findings with Christian missionaries to India:

> The literature that missionaries directed at juvenile readers was particularly clear in its moral, religious and political message… missionaries helped propagate notions of racial distinctions and promote particular structures of feeling that undergirded a hierarchical relationship between Europeans and Indians. In particular, they sought to cultivate…an image of themselves as benefactors and of Indian children and women as victims in need of rescue and salvation. Their tracts were full of stories of impoverished, maltreated and unhappy children, whose own families abused them until they were miraculously saved by the intercession of a (Western) missionary representing superior morality, a more advanced civilization, and a direct connection to the true God.

Thus, Vallgårda asserts that as people learn about place from missionaries, it often creates a superiority/inferiority binary lens in terms of understanding differences among and within religion, culture, and society. Brunn and Leppman (2003, 189) suggest that, while mediums have changed (e.g. the rise in television, films, and the internet), considering the contemporary influence of missionaries that transmit knowledge about places is vital to understanding "how Americans learn about other cultures and places." Presumably, undergraduates who attend religious institutions have greater opportunities to come into

contact or develop relationships with missionaries, and therefore may be at greater risk to creating binary lenses toward places such as India.

Additionally, while a very small percentage of American college undergraduates participate in study abroad opportunities, it is estimated that as many as 50% of undergraduates at Christian universities and colleges have traveled internationally to conduct mission work (Priest and Priest 2007). These experiences too can have profound influence on the ways students view the world, and students recognize this. For example, one student suggested that although travel is expensive, shorter trips could be obtained through missionary experiences (F1-PR-05).

Though these sentiments are earnest, they also may be in the minority. As La George (2015) and others (see Priest et al. 2006, Farrell 2007) have argued, while surely there are benefits to short-term mission trips, many students impetus can be quite selfish. Students are commonly taken abroad despite these personal motivations (for example, a chance to travel, or filling a void in life), as well as "negligible culture and language skills…some trips result in little more than souvenir braided hair, photos of participants with dark-skinned children, and stories of strange food and unfortunate toilets" (La George 2015, 944-945). Accordingly, instructors at such universities/colleges need to be aware of these "dangers and difficulties" (La George 2015) of short-term mission trips, particularly what students may (or may not) bring to classrooms concerning their views and experiences of the "mission field."

<u>Using Positive versus Negative Cultural Ascriptions across Universities</u>

Notably, as collective groups, both the LG and PR students tended to utilize more negative stereotypes, as opposed to HBCU students, who tended not only to use fewer

negative stereotypes, but rather emphasize positive characteristics. For example, several LG and PR students remarked that films like *Slum Dog Millionaire* and *Million Dollar Arm* represented "poverty" in India. As one student offered, "[O]ne of my other pictures was a picture of the movie *Slum Dollar Millionaire*, and that it…showed the urban side of India, and uh, I think I put on here poverty/slummy" (M1-PR-02). Additionally, LG and PR students associated other negative characteristics with what they had seen or heard through popular mediums, such as crowding, pollution, and arranged marriages. For example:

> This is more of the…kind of dirty side, but this always sticks in my mind, something about India, I can't – it's like one of the things that first pops up – but I saw this [news] article about the Ganges River a couple years ago…where there are just bodies in there with animals feeding on them, and like human waste everywhere. And that just always stuck in my head as like disturbing, but kind of sad at the same time. (M4-LG-04)

Particularly "disturbing" in this description is the student's assertion of animals eating human carcasses in the Ganges River. The very next student responded, "I also [imagine] that…they do everything in that river – most people wash their clothes, bathe, they cremate bodies and put them in there. It's really wild" (F4-LG-03). Yet, the Ganges "religious and social importance reaches far beyond the Gangetic plain," bringing fertile soil and thus life to those within its influence (Mallett 2017, 2). Indeed, Hindus view the Ganges as sacred, and despite the rising pollution from industry and waste, continue to use the river to cleanse themselves from bad *karma*, make physical offerings to the goddess *Ganga*, and believers' cremated remains are returned to the life-giving waters (Alley 2002, Mallet 2017). Students, however, attribute these as negative because of the way in which Western lenses frame India – that these characteristics do not align with normative practices (such as bathing in a polluted river), they are judged as "disturbing."

This difference between these universities is most apparent in the ways that students labeled their stacks of images toward the end of each focus group (see Table 7.2). For example, all four LG and PR focus groups used the similar labels of "population" (in reference to overpopulation), "overpopulation," or "crowdedness" (all negative in students' implications), while "poverty" was used as a descriptor by three of those groups. HBCU focus groups neither used these labels, nor *used these words* during our conversations. In fact, when they did use similar popular culture references, such as *Slum Dog Millionaire*, the HBCU's representation was *far* different from their LG or PR counterparts:

> My first picture is *Slum Dog Millionaire*…basically this tells like – it tells a little boy's story of how he is from the poor and living in India, and he goes on the show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, the Indian version, and he ends up winning the money, and everybody, you know, celebrates and there's a big festival. (F4-HB-07)

Here, the emphasis is not on the main character's poverty, but rather on the fact that the character overcame his situation, and the community celebrating together in his victory. Another HBCU student later reflected on why she too included an image of the film:

> The only reason I put *Slum Dog Millionaire* is just because I feel like people from India are really wise…for this guy to be an orphan and to win a million dollars, it was kind of crazy. And plus, back in high school, our [Indian] teachers, they could just answer any question off the top of their head. Like, especially math, right off the top of their head. Human calculator, no lie. (F4-HB-04)

Again, her emphasis centers on how "people from India are really wise," a positive stereotype, rather than their associated impoverishment. Moreover, this student makes a personal connection to her former teachers, who reinforced this much more positive representation.

Scholars have noted students of differing ethnic or racial backgrounds can have opposing views when it comes to ascribing or acknowledging stereotypes, particularly when addressing popular culture representations (Rockler 2001, Parks et al. 2006). Parks et al. (2006) argue that while minority students may recognize negative stereotypes of their own ethnic/racial identity within popular culture, they tend to spin these representations to positive images. For example, when students discussed the film *Rush Hour 2* (2001), minority students (Asian and black) ignored the stereotypes of their respective races, and rather focused on the positive use of minority actors in such prominent roles, and fostering qualities such as racial equality, friendship, and empowerment (Parks et al. 2006).[9] Conversely, in the same study, white students were much more likely not to "go beyond" these negative stereotypical representations, suggesting that these students were "comfortably aligned with the dominant racial ideology that promotes white invisibility and minority [negative] stereotypes" (Parks et al. 2006, 169). As exemplified in my focus groups, white students utilized "comfortable" negative stereotypes couched within popular culture representations of India, and while minority students did tend to use more positive stereotypes (e.g. "really wise"), it is notable they did so of a *different* ethnic/racial/non-white group.

More recently, Zhang (2015) determined that students from various ethnic or racial backgrounds can hold positive stereotypes of the (Asian) Other. Exploring U.S. undergraduates' perceptions of China, Zhang (2015) argues students might create positive stereotypes of an Other based on geopolitical or economic threats to the United States, for example, by recognizing the work ethic of Chinese people, and the booming economic development in China more broadly. Despite a similar trajectory to China as a growing

economic power (and thus geopolitical power) within U.S. and global markets (Winters and Yusuf 2007), students in my focus groups were largely silent on India's economic prowess or geopolitical significance, and this may have contributed to why most white students did not utilize positive stereotypes of India or Indians.[10] Indeed, as referenced earlier, Lutz and Collins (1993, 220) argue, "the average white middle-class [student] may find little in his or her everyday social experience to contradict" negative stereotypes.

Minority students at the HBCU may have ascribed more positive stereotypes of India and Indians, because they were largely not around white students. Therefore, they did not experience "the burden of acting white," in which black students must negotiate dominate white and black cultural and social perspectives, particularly within formal educational environments (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Webb and Linn (2016, 134) show that black students at HBCUs are (still) familiar with this accusation, particularly as it relates to how one speaks (e.g. Standard English), but few extend the accusation to other white norms, such as "academic performance or preference in dress and music." In this case, my participants did not use the negative stereotypes often employed by mostly-white focus groups, particularly how they spoke about "Other" groups. They may have not felt the constraint of agreeing with negative perspectives about other non-white groups because they wanted to avoid such negative social viewpoints, or because they did not have the immediate pressure of being in proximity to white students. Indeed, minority students who participated in focus groups at both the LG and PR often echoed white students' negative stereotypes of India. Additionally, the (mostly) positive image HBCU students describe may be due, in part, to their similar position as an Other within Western (and white) culture (Hall 2013).

Nevertheless, even positive representation of the Other can also lead to a fetishization of difference. As I will discuss in the next section concerning black women and their desire for straight hair, this creates unique experiences between HBCU students and their imaginings of India and Indians. Additionally, it creates unique challenges/opportunities for geography instructors who work with and through HBCU students' imagined geographies of India.

Western Ideals of Beauty: HBCU Students and Indian Women's Hair

The two focus groups at the HBCU described hair and skin complexion of Indians – in particular black female students. However, neither students at the LG, nor the students at the PR, had images about hair or skin tone, or made comments about either topic. Moreover, HBCU students approached these notions of physical characteristics in multiple ways. These included students sharing their admiration for Indians' traditionally long, straight, black hair, their own attempts to acquire this hair type (both representationally and literally), and finally, instances in which black students were confused as Indians due to hair and skin color. I analyze the implications of each of these, exploring the potential reasons why black students picked up this conversation and other groups did not, and how these created different imagined geographies of India.

The background of black women and their hair is rooted within America history, dating back to times of African enslavement. As early as the mid-1800s, blacks straightened their hair (or shaved it off in the case of men) in order to rid oneself of the outward markers of African ancestry (e.g. "nappy" hair), thus creating "good" hair (Byrd and Tharps 2014). This trend continued into the twentieth century, as black communities wrestled with the

outward physical markers of social class, education, and wealth, especially light skin and straight hair (Byrd and Tharps 2014). Because hair acts an outward marker of identity, Johnson and Bankhead (2014, 90) argue black women must make difficult decisions based on social norms of whiteness, particularly as popular media "send direct and indirect messages about what it means to…have beautiful hair…as well as who has the power to define these beauty standards." Although many black women have been empowered globally to wear their "natural hair" (among other styles), there are "continued attacks against black hair…while America continue[s] to grapple with its tangled black hair history" (Byrd and Tharps 2014, 201-202). Moreover, black women now live in an age when the commodification of, and access to, "good" hair (e.g. extensions, practices) from places like India are becoming more routine (Compaoré 2011). This constant bombardment – both by advertising and society – concerning what constitutes appropriate hairstyles was evident with students in my HBCU groups, who were examples of this consumption and practice.

Typically, students first addressed the topic of Indian hair by claiming their attraction to it. For example:

> Indian people have very, very long, beautiful and healthy hair. There was way more pictures of longer hair, but I just picked this one because she's sitting down and combing it to show you the length and how long it is (F1-HB-02).

As I will show in the examples that follow, black female students appeared at times to be envious of Indian women's ability to naturally grow long, straight hair – especially given the difficulties students faced while longing for this "beautiful" look. Consequently, much of our conversation shifted toward students describing their attempts to mimic Indian hair. Some students shared that they extensively researched the topic. They used numerous online websites, including tutorials on YouTube, to learn techniques to emulate:

> Yeah, just to add to the long hair…we do go to YouTube to figure out how to grow our hair out longer, and so some things that I just notice that Indian women do is that they put pure aloe from the aloe vera leaf in their hair to make sure that it grows, and then they massage their scalps and stuff like that. And that's how they actually grow out their hair. And then they might do treatments like henna to dye their hair naturally without all the chemicals. (F4-HB-04)

As Jacobs (2016, 65-66) suggests, "the Indian individual [is] relegated to the position of 'exotic other,' valued only for their 'mystic' practices and luscious locks." While watching videos on YouTube, students participate in the exoticization of Indian women, viewing "mystic practices" of using aloe vera or henna on their hair – practices not common in the West. More particularly, black women find these practices strange given the great number of haircare products available to relax or straighten their hair (Jacobs 2016), hence why the students mentions that these women avoid chemicals in their hair. Ironically, although students recognize that most Indian women have "naturally" straight hair, they still are fascinated with the haircare process Indian women use, giving the impression this will encourage their own "natural" hair to become, or remain, straight.

Some students were able to attain the straight, long hair look, although they were unclear about how they accomplished this (e.g. professional haircare products, naturally, etc.). One student took a picture of her own hair to depict her knowledge about India: "This other picture is about their hair again. This is a picture of my own hair, just cause it's long and they have long jet-black hair" (F4-HB-06). Thus, she feels that by using an image of herself, she represents what she knows about Indian women. However, does this make her feel as though she is closer to knowing or understanding Indian women's experience (or expectations) socially, culturally, religiously, and so on? Do other non-Indians confuse her

for being Indian based simply on what she looks like? I return to these questions soon, but first examine those students who had more trouble in their efforts to create such a look.

Students who had difficulties in achieving the hair they saw online or in person indicated they would often resort to purchasing hair extensions. Two students, sisters, shared a previous experience with a teacher from India who described how easy – and inexpensive – getting hair extensions from India is:

> F4-HB-03: And then my last picture is basically a picture of women with really long hair. And again, that's because back in high school, my trigonometry teacher, she had really long hair, and my Catholic teacher, she was also Indian, she told the girls that if they got a B or better in that class, they should go to India and buy them hair extensions because nobody needs hair extensions in India.
>
> F4-HB-04: Yeah they were really cheap.
>
> F4-HB-03: Yeah, it was just like a dollar a pack. And basically like, when I go on YouTube, because this is a YouTube clip, and you try to grow your hair out fast, it's always like Indian traditions of how they grow their hair. So yeah, that's like the top three things I know about India.
>
> Facilitator: Was your teacher from India?
>
> F4-HB-03: Yeah, both of them.
>
> Facilitator: And she had really long hair?
>
> F4-HB-03: Yeah, the second one, she had really long hair, but then we had this event where they donate hair to cancer patients, and she cut off all of her hair, and I couldn't believe it. Because her hair was really, really long.

Consider the last student is virtually horrified at the thought of someone with such long hair cutting it off – even for a good cause. Students' shock shows the level of social and cultural importance placed on hair, particularly as many of the students (and black women in general)

claim they struggle to achieve "good hair" (Banks 2000). However, regardless of how students achieved "good hair," either naturally, professionally, or cosmetically, some expressed unintended consequences related to this look, namely that they are mistaken as Indian or descendent from Indian ethnicity.

In both focus groups, students described being confused with those of Indian ancestry because they had changed their hair to straight and long, or their general complexion, or both. As this first-year student summarized "When I see people with good hair, I always hear people say, 'Are you Indian, or are you part-Indian?'" (F1-HB-02). She went on to say her mother and sister are often asked these questions, or are "told that they have Indian in them because they have good hair." A final-year student shared a similar story:

> Then there's a picture of us, cause people always say we're Indian, or, "Are you guys from India?" Cause they look at our hair and our skin complexion and say, "Oh, you guys look like you are from India." And we're like, "No. We're from America." (F4-HB-07)

This last student is almost surprised when asked such a question and rebuts, "We're from America," somewhat dismissively. Yet in some ways, by other people viewing them as such, it confirms that they have indeed attained the look that they initially desired. As I noted earlier, most Indian women have naturally straight hair, while most black women do not, and yet Indian women do not feel the same types of social and cultural pressures concerning their hair as do black women, particularly black women living in postcolonial societies (Banks 2000, Compaoré 2011). This conflation of ethnic and racial identity, as well as the desire to emulate a different hairstyle, provides examples for much larger, historical, and often overlooked issues centered on Eurocentric ideals of beauty and consequently what

constitutes "good hair." Moreover, these ideals set up, at least for black students, particular (and positive) ways of imagining places like India, where "good hair" is readily seen and available.

Despite American black women desiring "good" or "straightened" hair, claiming convenience, Banks (2000) asserts many do not consider other forces at work behind their decisions. As she argues, "few women explicitly considered how their material understanding might be related to immaterial or external ideas…how social and cultural forces shape their beliefs about hair" (153). These forces center on historical standards of beauty set by white European society (Banks 2000, Watson 2010). As Watson (2010, 81, emphasis added) adds, "hair/styling practices [of black women] are inextricably tied to discourses of femininity, womanhood, beauty, power, domesticity and modernity, and *fundamentally implicated in the (re)production of colonialism and Eurocentric hegemony*." Similarly, students in my study noted their interest in straight, black hair (particularly as it related to their knowledge of India) - both in terms of buying hair extensions, as well as learning methods for transforming their own hair. Although I did not directly ask these students (due to my own lack of knowledge and experience surrounding the topic as a white man), none of them offered any reasons as to why they had such interest either.

The distribution of hair extensions from India to outside markets, notably former slave-holding or colonized countries such as the United States or South Africa, is big business (Berry 2008, Compaoré 2011, Jacobs 2016). Talking about Indian hair, therefore, was inevitable with black students, and as one student started our conversation quite matter-of-factly, "Next, of course, is long hair" (F1-HB-02). Compaoré (2011, 157) contends that black women in the United States, as well as Indian women who give their hair as an

offering, are intrinsically tied by "power relations that are shaped by the local and global structures that regulate their actions." This creates a unique relationship between black women and Indian women, particularly as the former idolizes the latter based on standards created by an outside group (whites/Europeans). Moreover, black students connected their imagined geographies of India with their own personal practice to a physical identity marker of Indian women. I did not witness anything similar within any other group, suggesting that minority students, due to the normalization of whiteness in Western society, construct part of their imagined geographies based on *also* being an Other. HBCU students, based on their attraction to the long, straight hair Indian women possess, developed a relatively positive imagination of India, and may indicate why HBCU students tended to use more positive cultural ascriptions I described in the previous section. Whether they knowingly or unknowingly do this is less certain, and could use further research.

## Implications of Variability between Undergraduates at Different Universities

As the timeless geographic expression echoes, "Location, location, location." Location mattered in terms of the different imagined geographies of students who attended separate universities. More specifically, students who attended the same university tended to have similar experiences that helped to construct their respective imagined geographies. In the second half of this chapter, I analyzed three examples of this spatial phenomenon. Understanding that students' social or cultural experiences are potentially similar, and yet unique to their university, instructors must consider how to draw out these relationships in the process of deconstructing imagined geographies.

One way instructors can bridge this discussion is to consider the pedagogical strategy of place-based education. Place-based education is an approach that uses all aspects of the local natural and built environment, including cultural and historical information, as the context for learning (Gruenewald 2003). Although geographers in higher education have benefitted greatly from this practice in their classrooms (see, for example, the 2012 special issue of *Southeastern Geographer* 52(4)), hesitancy and resistance still provide formidable challenges. In his introduction to the special issue on discussing memory and heritage as place-based education, geographer Chris Post (2012, 352) argues:

> Still, some professors may be reluctant to radically change their courses or invent new units of study within introductory classes. Sometimes the concern is a matter of regional identity. For example, when I taught a freshman-level United States Cultural Geography course at the University of Georgia for two years, I (a native Midwesterner who grew up in a town settled by antislavery New Englanders) found it challenging—but certainly not impossible —to get native Southern students to approach landscapes such as former plantations and Confederate memorials with a critical and open mind. As some implied on their course evaluations, what right did I have to teach them about their own heritage? I have every right as professor, of course, but how so critically and fairly?

One reply to Post's question may be making space for students to share their own experience with their setting, and consequently instructors must hear *and* listen to their students. Working with students to engage their understanding of place through personal experiences, whether locally as Post and others suggest, or globally as I have shown in exploring imagined geographies, helps to challenge "the isolation of schools and classrooms from their social and ecological contexts" (Israel 2012, 79). Additionally, this moves students further toward completing Kolb's experiential learning cycle, as previously discussed. While traditional place-based education focuses on engaging students with their local community as

the starting point for learning, students can also consider their experiences in that environment as a starting point to understanding the ways they imagine the rest of the world.

Ultimately, instructors must draw upon the uniqueness of their student populations. From my interactions with instructors, it was apparent that many of them had a good understanding of their student population. They knew their strengths, weaknesses, and general experiences coming into higher education and their classrooms. Moreover, instructors recognized how these often work together to form imagined geographies. As one instructor implied, it's "how ideas and values are formed," and then she elaborated:

> My students are mostly from the Southeast, they're from the Bible Belt, so they pick up lots of interpretations of the world based on a Christian worldview, right, and particularly a Protestant worldview. So I think just like our family and our communities shape our culture and our values, I think the same thing happens with our sense of place, with our geographies, with our worldview. (F-ASCP-PR-12)

Sometimes, though, instructors noted the diverse experiences students bring to the classroom. In one case, an instructor in Oklahoma noted how typically half of his students had traveled abroad, while "half have not been out of the country, and many have not been out of Oklahoma and Texas…to them, Tokyo and New York City are equally exotic" (M-FP-LG-22). In some cases, as I have shown, mostly homogenous student bodies tend to draw on similar experiences to construct their imagined geographies (e.g. HBCU students and hair). However, at larger institutions, such as public land grant universities, student populations may be more diverse. In these environments, it may be helpful to use homogeneous focus groups to deconstruct students' imagined geographies. While the debate continues among qualitative scholars as to whether focus groups should be homogenous or heterogeneous, most geographers argue groups should be as similar as possible in their

makeup (Breen 2006, Hopkins 2007, Longhurst 2010). More specifically, when working with diverse populations, Rodriguez et al. (2011) suggest using culturally responsive focus groups (CRFP). They argue that the success and effectiveness of focus groups involving culturally homogeneous participants "are more likely to represent authentic and rich information, because participants are communicating in natural ways in an environment that affirms their experience" (Rodriguez et al. 2011, 409). This may be extremely beneficial in terms of facilitating undergraduates as they analyze and deconstruct their individual and collective imagined geographies, based within similar cultural contexts or experiences. To be sure though, as I will show, even within relatively homogenous groups, students can present unique perspectives or experiences that elicit new ways of thinking (see *Synergistic Discussions* in Chapter 7).

**Conclusion**

Two of the primary objectives of my research included understanding patterns (of similarity and difference) *among* and *between* my participants and university sites, and I have highlighted some of those patterns here. In most cases, first-year and final-year students had different types of experiences, including coursework, travel, and relationships, which led to different conversations with different consequences. Final-year students reported they had more university coursework in classes dealing with cultural studies or diversity, but these numbers were still quite low, despite the three universities each having expressed expectations for students to take such courses within their general education regiment. Certainly, more research could be undertaken to consider opportunities and limitations afforded to students who enroll in varying amounts of diversity courses. Although first and final-year students

reported about the same amount of international travel, HBCU students appeared to lack the same level of travel. As students recognize, and geographers agree, international travel is a dynamic, necessary learning experience, providing students with "a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of a particular location" (Pandit 2009, 650). Finally, first-year students, in comparison to final-year students, tended not to use personal relationships as a means to discuss what they knew about India. It appears that undergraduates' opportunities to build such cross-cultural relationships, prospectively through geography coursework, can help alleviate cultural ignorance (Pandit and Alderman 2004). While some undergraduates benefitted from constructing their imagined geographies through coursework, international travel, and relationships, other undergraduates tended to rely more heavily on stereotypical notions about India, especially through popular culture sources.

Additionally, I built the case for three noticeable differences between institutions. First, some students at the private religious university relied on information given to them from missionaries, or considered mission trips as a viable way to know such places as India. While firsthand accounts can be beneficial to learning about a place, missionaries have a long history of significant influence over Americans perceptions of distant places, and contextualizing these experiences is paramount. Second, students at the land grant and private religious universities were more likely to use negative cultural ascriptions when describing India(ns), compared to their HBCU counterparts, even when utilizing the same popular culture reference. I argue that black students may not have experienced the "burden of acting white" (Fordham and Ogbu 1986), and therefore consciously or subconsciously identify with a fellow non-white Other, while those minority students who participated in mostly-white focus groups tended to repeat negative stereotypes. This implies minority

students, depending on environments, may sidestep the ways they think about a place in order to avoid intergroup disagreement. Finally, students from the HBCU were the only ones to discuss physical features of Indians, namely their hair and skin complexion. Female students' fascination with Indian's straight hair alludes to historical markers of (white/colonial) beauty, as well as the commodification and exoticization of the Other, but also fundamentally creates different connections within black students' imagined geographies compared to white students.

While the previous chapter focused on some of the overarching similarities found in the ways undergraduates create and present their imagined geographies of India, here I have acknowledged that significant differences exist, between not only first and final-year students at the same institutions, but also students at different types of institutions. As has been shown throughout both chapters, understanding and engaging undergraduates' experiences and perceptions create opportunities for greater levels of discussion, particularly in a world where students face more exposure to cultural diversity, as well as more recognition to issues of social injustice and inequality (McInerney 2010). Importantly, geography instructors need to create safe, critical, and flexible environments where students, on both individual and collective scales, can examine their unique imagine geographies.

Indeed, the struggle of contending with students' imagined geographies within formal education is a constant – and usually uphill – battle. "We can change our geographical imaginations, *but we can't turn it off*" (F-ASTP-LG-12). Perhaps, then, the best we can do as educators is to provide students these opportunities to transform and nuance the ways in which they contemplate place, both near and far. In an attempt to do that, I offer the next

two chapters as an analysis of current and prospective pedagogical techniques for critical thinking about imagined geographies.

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[6] First-year students were in their first semester of their university experience. It is possible that these students may have thought classes they were currently taking did not count, and were leaving this question blank because they had not completed an entire semester of any coursework.
[7] Although students responded with their intended majors on the initial survey, some universities/colleges have different general education requirements based on academic major. Therefore, some students may have more/less flexibility in their ability to take cultural studies or diversity courses.
[8] Notably, experiential learning theory was widely used (and cited) by geographers in the UK before 2000. More geographers in North America began to implement it within their own pedagogical approaches after the publication of this article.
[9] *Rush Hour 2* is an action-comedy film with two lead characters of minority backgrounds, one black and one Asian. Both characters are detectives who are plunged together to find an international crime lord.
[10] Somewhat to my surprise, students never discussed the topic of nuclear weapons/power, despite India being one of only a handful of countries with viable warheads at their disposal. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, India had the sixth most nuclear weapons in 2014, with 80-100 missiles. Seemingly, students do not perceive India as a threat, as they may view other nuclear powers like China or Russia.

# CHAPTER VI

## REFOCUSING AND RETOOLING: AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT GEOGRAPHY EDUCATORS' ATTEMPTS TO NUANCE IMAINGED GEOGRAPHIES

> But Orientalism is a field with considerable geographical ambition…we must learn to accept enormous, indiscriminate size plus an almost infinite capacity for subdivision as one of the chief characteristics of Orientalism. (Said 1978, 50).

### Introduction

Early in Said's description of Orientalism, he suggests a certain level of dissonance between the abstractness and specificity of learning about distant places. He calls this "geographical ambition," in the sense we must understand entire regions of the world as monolithic, and yet simultaneously try to tease apart the nuance of local cultures. As he implies, this task is virtually impossible. As many geographers have argued since, the regional approach has significant limitations (Thrift 1983, Pudup 1988, Macleod and Jones 2007); at the same time instructors do not wish to "descend into an endless deconstruction of the metageography of place" (Dittmer 2010, 50). Geographers increasingly teach the world in more tangible ways, focusing on opportunities to provide various political, economic, material, and discursive

reasons such imagined regions are constructed (Laliberté et al. 2015, Korson and Kusek 2016).

One key part of each instructor's interview was for them to share their successes (and failures) as educators teaching about place. More specifically, I asked each how they had tried to make students' imagined geographies more nuanced. While a few found the question initially difficult to answer (putting them on the spot to recall their own experiences), virtually every participant was able to describe a variety of teaching techniques they used to encourage their students to think more complexly about place.[11] Most of the conversations centered on introductory-level courses; however, some instructors ventured into methods they had used in upper-level undergraduate – and even graduate-level – courses. For my purposes here, I focus almost exclusively on the former, while using the latter only where appropriate to show differences in pedagogical application.

In this chapter, I give an overview of current techniques being used to help nuance imagined geographies from my interviews with geography instructors. While not an exhaustive account of all the approaches used by those interviewed, the following sections attempt to summarize the broad ways by which instructors work with students inside and outside the classroom. This section divides teaching methods into those two categories, analyzing those techniques used inside the classroom (readings, group discussion, visual aids) and outside the classroom (fieldwork, trips abroad). In addition, many instructors argued that the reason behind these multiple ways of teaching and learning led to a triangulation of sorts, whereby students became more familiar with the complexity of place through multiple pedagogical perspectives. Although I describe these methods initially, I follow with a critical evaluation of these respective methods and their strengths and weaknesses. In light of this

evaluation, I contextualize the need for new pedagogical opportunities, such as a PDPE approach.

## Inside the Classroom

The majority of instructors discussed pedagogy that centered on actual instruction in a formal classroom environment.[12] Below, I separate their methods through three themes: reading, group discussion, and visual aids.

### Reading

One of the most common sources used by instructors to get students to think about the nuances of place was through the exercise of reading. As one instructor emphasized, much of undergraduate education is understanding "the importance of reading and engaging with written text and using that as a basis for thinking through ideas" (M-ASTP-LG-4). Indeed, the types of "reading" varied greatly among instructors.

Some instructors used academic textbooks, but they tended to begrudge their use. For example, one instructor shared, "Unfortunately, our legislature requires us to have a textbook. For our lower level classes…our hands are now tied" (F-ASCP-LG-24). Although this instructor was disappointed, she receives some latitude when teaching honor's sections, and can introduce a wide variety of readings, resulting in a more diverse picture of places and people. Consequently, in this particular case, students who have the opportunity to enroll in honor's sections have better opportunities to broaden their imagined geographies, while those relegated to the larger introductory section do not. As another instructor lamented

concerning textbooks, "the textbooks that are there, even the better ones, there's a lot of pretty encyclopedic and boring information" (M-ASCP-LG-13).

However, several instructors were resolute with textbooks' endurance and importance as tools in the contemporary classroom. Not surprisingly, this attitude was somewhat entrenched in the fact that these instructors were themselves authors of textbooks. Despite the above comment of "encyclopedic and boring" above, one instructor argued that much thought goes into the structure and organization:

> So what we try to do is move through five themes [of geography] kind of in repeating fashion…and I think that provides a powerful comparative template that I repeatedly use as we go from region to region as well. For me, having kind of a teachable and predictable template that one applies to different regions is, I think, an effective way to teach people, and I think that is one of the reasons why our textbook has done so well frankly too. It's a good template to teach from as well. So I think providing that common lens of topics in looking at regional geography is a real powerful tool and gets people thinking, "Ok, well look at levels of urbanization through Latin America as compared to sub-Saharan Africa," and so forth, to get them thinking in that way. So I think that's another thing that I've really learned a lot simply by working through that textbook over the years. (M-FP-LG-34)

Indeed, another instructor described putting together a separate reader that is published in tandem with a widely used World Regional textbook, where he chose articles specifically aimed at illuminating parts of places or cultures that go against stereotypical representations (M-ASCP-LG-20). While this creates approachable texts that gives students a starting point to learn – and ask questions – about the world around them, it is also apparent that textbooks are losing appeal due to everything from prohibitive cost to the "wider trend in academic publishing to avoid controversy…with the aim of maximizing sales" (Warf 2018,

56). Consequently, the role of online reading material and open source texts are becoming increasingly preferred. Van der Schee et al. (2015, 15) recently note, the computer and the internet are as revolutionary to education and learning as the development of the printing press. While reading remains a key element in the classroom, instructors will need to increasingly think of other means to incorporate digital reading and learning.

Many more instructors described their use of outside reading materials to help supplement, or in some instances supplant, what students obtained from textbooks. Some use journal articles or case studies to encourage students to think beyond their conceptions. Still others implement the use of other types of nonfiction writing, such as travelogues by Bill Bryson, or books like *The Geography of Bliss* (2008) and *Neither East nor West: One Woman's Journey through the Islamic Republic of Iran* (2001) to help nuance ideas about places. As one instructor summarized, "I want them to read more in-depth about places through books" (M-FP-PR-11). Notably, most instructors who described some type of reading as important to learning more about place also shared they themselves had fond memories of reading about the world as a young person, particularly before the advent of the Information Age. For example, one instructor reflected:

> That's why I keep sort of harking back to the good old days… trying to think of other things I read as a kid that really sparked my interest. It's a much deeper kind of exposure and I think it builds a foundation for both interest in pursuing that further, you know, well I read about this place, maybe I really want to go there some day – wouldn't that be something! (M-FP-LG-23)

While I later describe some technological methods instructors have employed, many shied away from this, such as the instructor above, who also stated, "I don't know a lot about social media, I'm not a social media guru, I'm not involved…I don't tweet or anything like

that, I just don't have time and I don't have much interest honestly" (M-FP-LG-23). This suggests that some instructors – particularly those who grew up in an era before the internet – fail to fully engage students through mediums they connect best with on a daily basis.

Another outside-reading material used by instructors was fictional writing. Some instructors required students to select novels written about (and often from) various regions of the world to gain a better image through the eyes of characters "living" there. Some found success using these mediums in deconstructing stereotypes and imagined geographies of students because the material was more entertaining. As one instructor commented on the success of such material, "I think it is very successful…lots of comments in papers like, 'I never really thought about it like that before, but now I understand'" (F-ASCP-LG-10). In one case, an instructor had created an entire upper-level geography course based on reading a series of novels:

> At first I began with nonfiction, and now most of my books, or all of my books are fiction. And my socio-cultural class that I'm teaching right now is based on this idea of *The Black Atlantic*, from [Paul] Gilroy. So I have them read books about slavery, and a novel, Isabelle Allende's *Island Beneath the Sea*, and it's about slavery in Haiti and later on they move to New Orleans…then I have them read *Americanah*…and right now they are reading *Sweetness in the Belly*, which is about a white woman who becomes a Muslim, who spends time in Ethiopia, and then goes back to Britain…but the *Americanah* book is sort of interesting. So the protagonist grows up in Nigeria, and she goes to school in the United States and she stays a while and then she goes back. …the essays [students] wrote, almost all of them, they didn't talk about the Nigerian part, they talked about her experience in the United States. I was telling them, it's like narcissistic nationalism, right. It only counts when she's here, the other part is irrelevant. I mean, I can kind of see why, because that is the part that is familiar to them, but still, it's just I was taken aback. (M-ASCP-LG-16)

While connecting students with literature written from the perspective of the Other is helpful, the instructor still struggled to have students absorb the meanings of those stories beyond their own comfort zones and spaces (e.g. the parts of the story that occur in the U.S.). Students need to consider broader social, cultural, and political reasons that prohibit them from engaging the Other in nuanced ways. For example, Dittmer (2010) suggests combining fictional literature with other materials, such as primary sources, popular film, and maps, to create opportunities for students to understand the connection between their geographical imaginations and their consumption of popular culture. As geography educators, we should also seek ways to explicitly go beyond understanding these patterns and help students explore their personal constructions of the Other and ways to complicate/problematize those constructions.

Finally, and not surprisingly, many described the usefulness of reading (and making) maps. While maps help to convey significant amounts of information at varying scales, instructors quickly pointed out that their main goals are to give students the skills to critically read maps. This includes looking at how the map is projected, what is included in the legend, how classes of data are divided up, and so on. As one instructor explained, "I emphasis how maps are over-generalized. Every map you'll ever see is a generalization…all we have to do is change scales and we'll see different patterns…the world is more complex than this map is portraying" (M-ASCP-LG-22). This appears to be a crucial link for instructors to convey with their students, as the same issues and limitations constrict the ways we imagine places in specific ways. In other words, since maps are simplifications of our world, they simplify cultures and peoples that live in those places on the map. Monmonier (1996, 186) argues:

> White lies are an essential element of cartographic language, an abstraction with enormous benefits for analysis and

> communication… [however] cartographic abstraction has costs as well as benefits. If not harnessed by knowledge and honest intent, the power of maps can get out of control.

Therefore, geography educators need to pursue two simultaneous objectives: first, to equip students with "critical spatial thinking" as they make and/or read maps (Kim and Bednarz 2013), and second, to develop discussions whereby students understand the role maps play in constructing the world they imagine.

Despite the rise of visual media, technology, and consequently, accessibility to instantaneous, succinct information, reading remains a fundamental aspect of learning within formal higher education environments (Ramsden 2003, Light et al. 2009). As students increase their reading, their perceptions of place and people become more nuanced (Perry 1990, Hinde et al. 2007), particularly when they engage in multiple types of writing such as print news, textbooks, nonfiction and fictional literature. Reading also increases spatial awareness, particularly when learning to interpret various types of maps (National Research Council and Geographical Sciences Committee 2005). Although reading may seem a moot point to reiterate within educational/instructional circles, increasing evidence suggests undergraduates are not only reading less, but "deep reading" is becoming increasingly absent among undergraduates (Salter and Brook 2007, Gilbert and Fister 2011). It would behoove geography instructors to encourage their students to engage with the written word through various mediums (including digital), and this should not come at the loss of other learning styles.

Group Discussion

Another technique instructors employed were large and small group discussions, through which students could discuss their imagined geographies. A number of instructors described using a word association game prior to discussing countries or world regions. These instructors see this activity as a productive litmus test for students' knowledge of a place – and how much reliance they put on stereotypes. One instructor gave the following example, "If I say, 'Colombia,' and they say, 'drugs,' you know, that's the first thing that comes into their head, is Pablo Escobar or something, and that might be the only thing they know about Colombia" (M-ASCP-LG-14).[13] The instructor acknowledged this eventually leads to an important question – and teaching moment: "They realize that, 'Yeah, why do we say that about this place?!'" However, one significant drawback to this call-and-response technique is the often limited number of students who engage in the discussion, particularly in larger classes. Indeed, the same instructors who used this style lamented that only a small percentage of the class offered ideas. Additionally, instructors are often limited in time to allow everyone to speak, so the "we" used in the question above assumes all students are thinking about places in the same ways. For those instructors who want students to critically examine their respective imagined geographies, this method may not provide the most ideal.

Instructors also had students conduct brief conversations in small groups about a place or concept. They found engaging students in such a way about their ideas was "much more valuable than me doing it" through a lecture (F-ASCP-LG-24). Some instructors described using online discussion boards to stimulate class dialogue, especially in situations where class size becomes an impediment to thoughtful conversation. In these cases, instructors "tend to interact far more with students…I get them to dissect, to flesh out, to

be critical and ask questions" (F-SL-LG-4). Contrary from the limitations of large group discussions above, these smaller group discussions appear more productive for students to deconstruct both individual and collective ideas. Moreover, technology assists instructors with many students, as Scheyvens et al. (2008, 57) contend:

> The online forum is especially useful for incorporating discussion into classes with large enrolments. Students can be divided into smaller online groups…When everyone is required to participate, shy students have as much opportunity to contribute as extrovert ones… encouraging students to (1) think about what they learned…(2) articulate what they learned in writing and apply it in a discussion forum, and (3) learn from, respond to, and discuss geography with other students.

Small group discussions, both face-to-face and virtually, create opportunities for students that are often times overlooked or eliminated within large classes. In order to empower students to think critically, instructors should incorporate these types of active learning styles as often as possible.

Offering students active learning opportunities is integral to the learning process. Light et al. (2009) argue that while historically instructors in higher education have relied on lecture-style teaching, when time is afforded for students to engage material in small-groups, they often consider the strengths and weaknesses of explanations generated within these in-depth discussion. This extends more specifically to the geography classroom, where students have opportunities to critically analyze their view(s) of the world (Kagoda 2009, Somdahl-Sands 2015). Moreover, as I will show later with the PDPE project, combining other learning techniques such as visual aids with small group discussions can be productive endeavors – for both students and instructors alike – toward social transformation (Wellens et al. 2010).

Visual Aids

Not surprisingly, based upon the dominance of visual learning in geography (Rose 2008), using visual aids in the classroom was commonplace for geography instructors. As described in earlier chapters, visual aids (e.g. images, television, film) help students "get the picture" of what reality might be like in various locations around the globe. As Hall (2009, 453) contends, "studying human geography at university without photographic images would be unthinkable." Notably here, instructors described how their use of visual aids was to create counter-narratives to long-standing stereotypes or typical imagined geographies of place.

Most instructors described using visual aids through simple photographs, normally added to lecture slides. In some cases, instructors use images as talking points, where one might ask the class, "What is going on in this image?" Additionally, images are used to juxtapose notes and descriptions given by instructors: "I do try to incorporate a lot of imagery, and not just my verbal explanation, but imagery that would dispel stereotypes and reinforce or provide nuances for the truth – whatever the truth is" (M-ASCP-LG-20). As another instructor offered, when speaking about Southwest Asia, the mental picture of deserts and people living in tents and riding on camels often comes up with students. After describing that the Bedouin lifestyle is much less apparent today with the advent of the oil industry, "we show them pictures like that, but also explain who is actually doing all of the oilfield work, the expatriate labor that is brought in from South and Southeast Asia as well" (M-SL-MSI-13). Such images lend themselves to make students' mental pictures of places and people more complex.

Another use of imagery was through television programming, especially popular television shows. Typically, the example chosen countered widely held beliefs about concepts or places. For example, one instructor shared their use of *The Daily Show* to nuance perceptions about health care access, particularly in the United States. However, in another case, an instructor described how she used an episode from *This is Us* to consider the ways that stereotypes of rural society continue to be perpetuated in contemporary entertainment. These types of exercises are what Hall (2013) calls going "through the eye of representation." Reflecting this idea, the instructor explained,

> This is a show that is really good at all kinds of identity difference from addiction to gender to race to obesity…and they deal with it in really sophisticated ways…except for when they enter a rural space, and they use the most horrible stereotypes of what rural people might be, and what rural spaces are, and what rural people eat…and [students] were able to really quickly pull out the representation that draw on stereotypes. (F-ASTP-LG-12)

Instructors use this critical media lens also with films, both popular and documentary. Most instructors shared that they used either entire films or clips. In some instances, instructors assigned movies for students to view outside of classroom, and then either have them write a paper or discuss the film as a group (Algeo 2007). Instructors also tended to prefer watching popular movies that were created by native directors and artists. Moreover, as one instructor suggested, film lends itself to more critical analysis for contemporary students, saying, "spending two hours watching a movie is doable, and often times there will be movies on my list that people are like, 'Oh, I always wanted to see that'...they're pretty invested in seeing it, and then breaking it down and thinking about it more critically" (F-ASCP-LG-10). In terms of documentaries, instructors note that these can

be particularly helpful as it "tends to say things much better than I can," especially with overlaid imagery (F-ASCP-LG-7). While documentaries can help students let go of misconceptions they may have, unfortunately, as I described in Chapter 4, documentaries are still limited in their scope and can reinforce cultural discourse that ascribe negative stereotypes to places and people (Chapman 2008). In order to help improve students' ability to contextualize, combining visual techniques with others teaching techniques, like small group discussions or further reading, is paramount.

Images, in their various mediums, can be powerful tools for learning. But as Rose (2008, 159) encourages geographers, "[images] are not self-evident objects. They are always put to work in particular ways. The important thing is to recognize that, and to think carefully about how and why you want to make them work." Among the instructor participants, this call has been taken to heart; many utilizing images to broaden perspectives of students, as well as building critical media skills to interpret visual information about other places and people (Conover and Miller 2014). As the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964, 47) offers, "When the image is new, the world is new." In the next chapter, I present the case for – and benefits of – students themselves supplying their own images to geography classroom discussions, and seeing those images and the world anew. Next, however, I consider the ways instructors breakdown imagined geographies outside the formal classroom.

**Outside the Classroom**

As one participant paraphrased the author Rudyard Kipling, "The first thing to know about a place is to smell it." For some educators, this means students need to literally go and

experience place firsthand, outside the classroom, beyond the mind's eye, as Meining (1979) refers to as "The Beholding Eye." Indeed, Meinig (1979) reminds us, seeing the world around us is a combination of both *what* we see and *how* we interpret these landscapes through our previous experiences. By leaving the formal environment of a classroom, students may gain a greater understanding and appreciation for their day-to-day experiences with the world, acknowledging that they construct (and imagine) places through multiple senses. Instructors expressed this in two ways: fieldtrips and fieldwork. From my conversations, it appeared that both of these options were more realistic in upper-level undergraduate courses (or graduate courses), where smaller class size allowed such opportunities to be logistically feasible. Any yet, this also indicates that many lower-level courses are prospectively missing critical opportunities in nuancing imagined geographies, and may need to find ways to incorporate these into their curriculum.

Fieldtrips

Beyond making the most of in-class opportunities, many instructors adamantly lobbied for the utility of fieldtrips, in particular, those that were substantial in time and distance. These were described in a number of ways: as extensions of existing courses, as field courses during extended breaks (e.g. Spring Break, May-term, etc.), or as educational experiences taking up entire semesters or academic years. Many talked about the need for study abroad, and some even pushed for this to be a mandatory component within any undergraduate program – geography or otherwise. As one instructor who regularly uses fieldtrips as a teaching method exclaimed, "it just tears down [stereotypes] – and that's why travel is such an important thing" (M-FP-PR-11). Despite this sentiment, and as I described

in Chapter 5, travel does not necessarily equate to deconstructing imagined geographies, particularly if instructors do not prepare or engage students before, during, or after such experiences (Mullens and Cuper 2015). Moreover, even though Pandit (2009) claims that geography programs can "serve as a model for the rest of the university" in terms of developing study abroad programs within the curriculum, some research suggests that geography is losing ground to other disciplines who offer their own opportunities for international learning (Luo and Jamieson-Drake 2015). As I will show below, geographers have unique approaches to fieldtrips, but geographers must also redouble their efforts to resist the "arm-chair geographer" label by developing and leading more "critical" fieldtrips to engage their students.

Some described their own experiences leading trips both within the United States and overseas. For example, one instructor often takes her students to Cuba, while another had led students to Romania, India, and West Africa. The instructor who travels to Cuba noted that although Cuba is relatively close to the United States physically, the social distance can be off-putting for students (and their families). Much of her time is spent reassuring prospective travelers that such trips were safe, as she explained, "their whole perception of danger comes from it being this cultural imagination of the enemy – it's an enemy place" (F-ASCP-MSI-12). However, instructors noted that once students commit to the experience of traveling, they can overturn previously held ideas about place. As one instructor described:

> I've taken a lot of students over on international trips and that's probably one of the best eye-opening – I mean, you can tell them this stuff [in class]…but I think the best thing for them is to travel themselves…then you can be more critical about

> your own self, I think, and your own culture. (M-ASCP-LG-14)

Therefore, an added benefit of travel can be students' self-evaluation of home. Although many instructors described their passion for and development of travel opportunities, some instructors were not sure what types of changes, if any, occurred among students. In fact, very few described how or if they follow-up with students afterwards. Mullens and Cuper (2015, 510) argue instructors should take advantage of this experience by using debriefing assessments (e.g. group discussions, individual interviews), "[encouraging] students to consider the knowledge and skills they have gained as well as on how their attitudes may have shifted over the course of the program." For example, instructors could implement a PDPE project (described in Chapter 7) to better assess students' individual takeaways from their travels, especially as photography is often a mainstay of travel.

The push for service learning or public good in tandem with study abroad is often offered as another positive way to push students' perceptions of place (Taylor 2009). However, similar to what I described in Chapter 5 with short-term mission trips, these too have the potential for turning into voyeuristic tourism rather than volunteer tourism. As Sin (2009, 497) describes from interviews with undergraduates who participated in volunteer tourism:

> It is important to realize upfront that many [students] are typically more interested in fulfilling objectives relating to the "self". This puts away the altruistic perception of volunteer tourism and allows one to critically assess the nature of volunteer tourism much like any other form of tourism—whether considered as mass or alternative tourism. Indeed…volunteer tourism could indeed be reinforcing negative stereotypes of aid-recipients as inferior or less-able through the process of "othering" by volunteer tourists.

Geographers walk a fine line, then, as they attempt to introduce students to various parts of the globe in ways that do not in its very action reproduce stereotypes and imagined geographies. This is particularly the case, as most instructors described only leading or developing short-term trips, where the ability to develop critical perspectives are limited. Also, very few instructors described using a critical perspective while on these short trips, suggesting more concerted efforts are necessary during the various stages of a trip (e.g. before, during, and after).

Despite the limits of these shorter trips, some instructors considered these important steps toward encouraging students to continue traveling, learning, and deconstructing their imagined geographies. The instructor who takes brief trips to Cuba with students viewed these opportunities as "gateways" rather than immersions:

> These short little trips, basically they are ideal for students who have never traveled before or whose parents are really worried, um, and they're very cautious, and many of them have never left the state before, and really, for me, it's a gateway, this is just their first step into seeing that they can travel and that, you know, they can make it around in a foreign country. And so, hopefully then they will go on and travel to a lot of different places, you know, and become interested in knowing other cultures…I mean beyond them just learning more about Cuba, they learn that they can travel, and that they can be a part of a bigger world. (F-ASCP-MSI-12)

While geographers can use short-term trips to get students interested in traveling, it appears from my interviews they have little influence at their respective institutions over longer, more influential study abroad opportunities and programs (e.g. not consulted, do not oversee, do not develop). But as Schroeder et al. (2009) argue, geographers are well-suited to either lead or assist universities in developing study abroad experiences, particularly from a

critical spatial perspective, so as to dissuade negative effects. Certainly the growth and breadth of study abroad programs on college and university campuses do not only reside in geography departments. To Mullens et al. (2012, 224-225), this creates rather important questions for geographers:

> Given geography's longstanding role, what does this upsurge in interest in and commitment to internationalization and the concurrent growth in international field study mean for us? Does it feel like enrichment or, possibly, encroachment? Do we take the lead in this effort, graciously offering our veteran expertise (if indeed our departments can provide it), or do we let other departments and/or campus programs take a more central role in the current internationalizing climate? Such questions reveal both the hopeful and the vexing situations facing many US Geography departments today…in effect, geographers are being presented with an opportunity, arguably even a responsibility, to influence the internationalization agenda through research and educational publications outside their own discipline. But the larger question remains as to whether such a role is something we want to assume.

As Mullens et al. (2012) go on to rightly argue, given geographers' unique contributions to understanding our world, we *should* be at the forefront of these efforts to develop critical experiences for students. However, from my interviews, it seems we have work to do as a discipline to reach these lofty but crucial goals, particularly if we wish to continue equipping our students with the skills to deconstruct their imagined geographies.

Fieldwork

While fieldtrips are sometimes seen as ideal, they are not always affordable or conducive for all students. Therefore, instructors also described other ways to get students out of the classroom to think critically about local and global imagined geographies. Some

instructors assigned projects (individually or in groups) that required students to go out into a local community to gather data. For example, an instructor teaching Geography of Mexico and Latin America had his students search local grocery stores to find products from Mexico and Central America. In addition to simply creating lists of products, students "analyze what types of products and tie it in with some of the existing or theoretical ideas we talk about in class," such as globalization or World Systems Theory (M-ASCP-LG-20). As another instructor put it (who conducted a similar project, but with a large, introductory-level class), students create a "map [of] their own personal globalization" (M-FP-LG-34). As the instructor continued, some of his students' tend to claim: "China is where all my stuff is made," making these types of experiences essential for students to better understand how they perceive place, particularly as it connects to their own consumption habits.

The use of fieldwork in undergraduate geography programs and courses has a long tradition, and with contemporary resurgences (McEwen 1996, Fuller et al. 2006, Wilson et al. 2017, Parkhill 2018). As Wilson et al. (2017) have recently noted, a trend toward fewer options for undergraduates in geography courses to participate in fieldwork is a discouraging aspect. This is especially true for human geography courses, where students could further nuance their perceptions of places and cultures through direct engagement. Parkhill (2018, 33, emphasis in original) argues of human geography fieldwork:

> The *potential* value of [fieldwork] is clear; they can offer the opportunity to explore abstract concepts in the real world, foster indirect learning benefits, facilitate deep learning, and engage students in a variety of skills and knowledge development. However…none of the benefits are guaranteed…which require careful consideration and ongoing critical reflection.

Arguably, this ongoing critical reflection must not solely fall on the instructor, but also students who participate. As will be seen in the next chapter, PDPE has the potential to engage both instructors and students in fruitful discussions concerning fieldwork experiences.

Surveys appeared to be a popular – yet challenging – opportunity for undergraduates to experience fieldwork and imagined geographies. One instructor described having her first-year students create their own survey and to interview 10-15 people on campus about their perceptions (i.e. imagined geographies) of world regions. Another had her students complete an assignment by speaking to an international student and getting to know them – where they are from, what they miss about home, their favorite food, and the like. As she claims of the interaction, "students have had a very positive experience coming out of that…[they] have made a lot of friends" (F-SL-LG-4). As Pandit and Alderman (2004, 133) show, interviewing international students "expose[s] students to other cultures and ways of thinking, and it [makes] them reexamine their own society and cultural frames of reference." The same instructor also has her students participate in international student organization events on their campus. More than act as passive attendants, the instructor noted that she tries to work directly with the university's International Student Organization: "I've tried to get my students to actually volunteer or help the international kids put up these events, which then gives them a deeper level of interaction with these different communities and cultures on campus" (F-SL-LG-4). Geographers have argued that undergraduate geography courses seem an appropriate conduit for such engagement outside the classroom (Pandit and Alderman 2004, Klein and Solem 2008, Pandit 2009). As Pandit and Alderman (2004, 134) reason:

> It is imperative that geographers continue to promote intercultural understanding and tolerance in their classrooms. Sadly, recent events have caused some United States officials and citizens to become more suspicious of the presence of international students. We take issue with this sentiment and believe that this diverse population is needed within the nation's colleges and universities now more than ever. Without the benefit of direct, first-hand interaction with international students, the development of intercultural awareness among non-international students will be left in the hands of teachers and the mass media. Given the selectivity of media representations and the limited international experience of some instructors, international populations are indispensable resources for expanding the world-views of our students.

Although their worry was borne in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11, their words still ring true today in the midst of rising nationalism and division in the United States and abroad. Perhaps more now than ever students need opportunities to see and interact with the world and people around them.

Whether engaging in conversations with other Americans about the world, or with international students about their homelands, these opportunities outside the classroom give students the power and agency to think critically about place. Panelli and Welch (2005, 275) contend that undergraduates are better able to learn about a place while simultaneous conducting field research there, such as administering surveys or conducting informal/semi-structured interviews with locals. Once again, instructors and students must process fieldwork into meaningful reflection together, especially as a learning experience. On that note, the ultimate benefit for undergraduates engaged in geography fieldwork is "the sense of self-esteem as a result of a student becoming a producer rather than simply a consumer of knowledge can engender a sense of lifelong learning and becoming a self-sustainable learner" (Walkington et al. 2011, 327). Prospectively, experiences students gather through fieldwork

and fieldtrips, in concert with opportunities afforded within formal learning environments, create individuals who strive to think more complexly about place. This certainly takes a tremendous level of effort and investment by individual and communities of geography educators, but a worthwhile endeavor.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored and analyzed various methods instructors use in attempts to nuance undergraduates' imagined geographies. First, instructors utilize their classrooms as venues for pushing students' perceptions of place and cultures by incorporating different learning styles, such as assigning various reading materials (e.g. textbooks, nonfiction, fiction), engaging students in group discussions (both large and small scale, as well as face-to-face and virtual), and employing the help of visual aids (e.g. photos, film, documentaries). Second, instructors also find ways to encourage students to explore the world around them, either through fieldtrips or fieldwork. While all of these methods provide numerous and unique benefits to instructors, each also has its own set of limitations.

To mitigate some of these drawbacks, many instructors argued they use multiple ways of teaching and learning to create a triangulation of sorts, whereby students became more familiar with the complexity of place through multiple perspectives and learning experiences. As I noted earlier, Picton (2008) argues that students must be given diverse opportunities to see and think about the world. Regardless of which methods instructors use, many alluded to the necessity of blending these methods in a way that bring together multiple vantage points. Although typically limited by time and class size, the essential task of the instructor becomes, "how can I get as many perspectives on this as possible" (F-

ASTP-LG-12), so that, as another instructor offered, students "have different pictures within the region" (F-ASCP-MSI-5). Furthermore, how do we, as geography instructors, get students to the point where they think differently about place as a whole, rather than simply through viewing it in our imagination?

Beyond the use of online discussion boards, one significant omission by many instructors was their incorporation of technology (e.g. social media platforms, GIS mapping) as a means to engage students in a conversation about imagined geographies. Additionally, instructors did not discuss anything concerning either students' previous experiences, at least in terms of structured assignments, projects, or discussions. This seems particularly important given my findings of the influence of different experiences and the creation of imagined geographies in Chapter 5. From my conversations it appeared this does happen to some degree informally during times such as class discussions, however, this potentially does not engage all students in their own personal experiences, and consequently, their own imagined geographies. The next chapter explores the various opportunities that a PDPE project gives to instructors as a means to better understand students' individual and collective geographical imaginaries of people, places, and cultures.

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[11] In reflecting on these conversations, it seems appropriate to encourage instructors to write down their successes – and failures – in the classroom. These specific reflexive moments can be used to work upon in the future.

[12] This was not surprising, as most of the conversations tended toward instructors' experiences in large, introductory courses for undergraduates.

[13] Pablo Escobar, known as the King of Cocaine, was a drug lord in Colombia during the late 1970s through the early 1990s when he was killed by joint operations between the US and Colombian military. At the time of my interviews, renewed interest in Escobar had surfaced due to several new popular culture depictions, particularly in a Netflix miniseries *Narcos*.

# CHAPTER VII

## PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATIONS: PDPE AS A PEDGAGICAL TOOL IN UNDERGRADUATE GEOGRAPHY CLASSROOMS

> Yet there is no use in pretending that all we know about time and space, or rather history and geography, is *more than anything else imaginative.* (Said 1978, 55, emphasis added).

### Introduction

Although the epitaph was coined by Edward Said four decades ago, Somdahl-Sands (2015) argues, and my research confirms, imagined geographies and maps of our world are still greatly distorted, especially through popular culture. Thus, from both current scholarship and what I have shown in the previous chapters, a primary issue that geography educators struggle with is the notion of imaginative geographies. Although many students are aware of the presence of stereotypes and want to deconstruct them (McInereny 2010), conscious efforts by geography educators to develop critical geographic literacy to assist in this process is crucial (Conover and Miller 2014). The previous chapter explained some of these efforts by educators currently "in the trenches." However, as the next generation of geography educators engage with students over these struggles, it is imperative that we continue the

work of empowering and entrusting students with the necessarily knowledge and skills to become "global in outlook as citizens of the world…[by] customizing their education to their needs and personal pathways" (McInereny 2010, 26). Consequently, geography educators must also push forward new or modified pedagogical techniques to better hone our capacity to empower our students as critically thinking, global citizens. This chapter will provide one such push.

As explained earlier, previous work in this field has identified a number of sources by which students construct these imagined geographies. From popular film, television, and news media, to personal relationships, formal education, and travel, studies show that students at a variety of ages build and modify their understandings of places they have never been. In an effort to continue encouraging students to deconstruct their imagined geographies through creative pedagogical techniques, I suggest a modified Photovoice approach, known as participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE), to provide students an opportunity to help explain why and how they think about a place or issue (Kurtz and Wood 2014). In order to critically assess their imaginings, students are afforded time to speak with their peers about their respective images and why these images have meaning to them. This dialogue, as facilitated by an instructor, provides space for students to dig deeper into their perceptions. As one student suggested after their experience with PDPE:

> I think it was a really interesting opportunity to just kind of reflect on our perceptions of other places...I think it's important for people to have a chance to talk about their perceptions and maybe misperceptions of a place in order to be better understanding and accepting of people (F4-LG-03).

While I encountered various (mis)perceptions with students through the PDPE project, I also found encouraging results suggesting students' desire to better understand and accept people that are different than themselves.

In this chapter, I examine outcomes and the utility of the PDPE project as a means to explore undergraduates' imagined geographies. Prior to describing the PDPE project and its possibilities, I lay out several experienced and potential limitations for instructors. After a detailed analysis of how students put together their respective projects, I divide the PDPE project into three discussions concerning its promise within geography classrooms. First, I argue PDPE creates a synergistic environment, through which instructors and students alike fuel conversations. Second, I show how PDPE helps to uncover specific biases or stereotypes individuals or groups make, producing spaces for teachable moments. Third, I illustrate that by students arranging and coding their collective images, meaningful and reflective conversations can occur concerning imagined geographies, including the opportunity for students to be responsible for their learning about the world (Somdahl-Sands 2015).

**Limitations of PDPE**

Prior to assessing the opportunities afforded by the PDPE process, I present several limitations. Understanding limitations does not necessarily detract from the data students and I created together, but rather points to the areas for further research associated with experiential learning environments. I either experienced these limitations firsthand with my focus groups, or I anticipate that they may be problematic for use by instructors in undergraduate geography classrooms, in the context of how I implemented the project.

One of the obvious limitations to this type of engagement with students, at least logistically, is the need for small-group discussion. In most situations, introductory courses in geography, such as world regional or human geography have large numbers of students. In my own experience teaching these courses, the number of students ranges from 45 to well over 100 per class. Although addressing educational strategies in this arena is not new (see, for example, Gibbs and Jenkins 1992), geographers still grapple with the various limitations (and opportunities) of active and engaging learning techniques in these large sections (Brown 1994, Fournier 2002, Leydon and Turner 2013). A project involving PDPE, as I describe here, may be more beneficial within smaller, more discipline-specific classes (Kurtz and Wood 2014). This is especially true as these courses tend to be more discussion-driven and applied in nature. While optimally this may work better within smaller groups, future research on implementing a modified PDPE approach in large introductory courses merits consideration as an active learning style. One solution, for example, could be the wider use of recitation sections (small discussion groups which typically meet once a week for 50 minutes), whereby PDPE can add to the instructor's pedagogies for nuancing imagined geographies (see, for examples, Brown 1994, and Klein 2003). Klein (2003, 156) reports,

> Even with a medium-sized class, one cannot interact with each student every day. Over the duration of a course, however, active learning provides opportunities to observe students engage the material, to help those who need individual attention, and to discuss areas of confusion with students who are too shy to ask questions in a large class.

Moreover, as McInereny (2010) argues, students expect instructors to incorporate unique approaches to learning in groups or teams, rather than simply taught content or skills en masse.

A second limitation in this study was the reliance of students on search platforms such as Google Image to find and use images that matched their ideas about India. On a number of occasions, students had the *exact* same photograph in their respective projects, even though projects were created and submitted separately:

> M4-PR-05: Yeah, I had a picture of like poverty.
>
> F4-PR-03: I have the same exact picture.
>
> [Group laughs.]
>
> M4-PR-05: …
>
> Facilitator: Ok. And [F4-PR-03], you had the same exact picture?
>
> F4-PR-03: I had, yeah, I had the same exact picture.

Students typically acted surprised by this coincidence. Hillis et al. (2013) have come to call this the "Google Affect" (21):

> Google implicitly invites each of us to reimagine ourselves as searchers, as contemporary explorers and voyagers, latter-day Vasco da Gamas, Captain Cooks, and Neil Armstrongs navigating the proprietary intersection of the digital realm and bodies-as-information…each interactive online search can be seen [by users] to produce a unique path, different from the others not pursued, along which the search branches and forks through Google's seemingly ordered universe of data.

As Pan et al. (2007) argue, students tend to trust Google's ability to "rank" or place relevance with a particular search query. As with the example above, both students prospectively entered the terms "India" and "poverty" into their respective searches, and both most likely selected one of the first – if not the first – image that Google selected as being relevant. While students may include similar (or the same images), this overlap lends itself to address the influence of search engines in determining how we imagine, view, or

perceive places, people, or ideas. Indeed, more research is needed concerning how educators can help students build critical media literacy skills in an age of "just Google it." Geographers too are interested and concerned over the broad effects information technology have on students' geographic imaginations. For example, Pow (2016,) argues that while institutions must be willing to assume the cost of information technology, we must also have eager geographers able to create new and technologically-based activities for students to build critical thinking skills. Despite these limitations, PDPE offers many more benefits to educators and students. It what follows next, I show PDPE's effectiveness to explore individual and collective imagined geographies.

**Creating PDPE Projects**

As previously highlighted, 33 undergraduates (20 females and 13 males) participated in the PDPE project and focus groups. The six focus groups ranged in size from 4 to 8 students (see Table 3.2). Students met with me on their respective campuses, and in relatively quiet and undisturbed locations. As described earlier, students were guided through a series of group activities based on their individual PDPE projects.

In general, I placed few parameters on how participants created their projects. This loose structure resulted in a number of electronic formats submitted to me prior to our focus group meetings, although most projects were created in Microsoft Word. Participants were expected to include two components, with the potential of a third component based on their respective projects. First, participants were expected to include no more than ten images. Second, participants needed to briefly describe these images – essentially how and why each was included to represent their knowledge of India. Finally, if participants included

images they obtained from an online source, I asked them to include a reference to the webpage where they retrieved it. Below, I summarize these three aspects as they were displayed in the PDPE projects my participants created.

The Visuals: Photographs, Pictures, Images

The number of images submitted by students varied widely (Table 7.1). While I did set a limit to ten images for each respective project, many students turned in far fewer to help explain the knowledge inventories they had written down at the orientation meeting. From the 33 projects submitted, a total of 184 images were included - an average of 5.6 images per project. Also, only about 25% (43/184) of the images were personal images provided by the students themselves, indicating a heavy reliance on online sources. I permitted students to use online images in order to complete their projects, given their (probable) lack of access in their immediate surroundings.

Table 7.1. Images submitted via PDPE projects, by institution.

| *Institution* | Academic Year | Personal Photographs | Obtained Images (online) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HBCU | First | 0 | 13 | 13 |
| HBCU | Final | 8 | 55 | 63 |
| Land Grant/PWI | First | 19 | 13 | 32 |
| Land Grant/PWI | Final | 8 | 17 | 25 |
| Private/Religious | First | 8 | 20 | 28 |
| Private/Religious | Final | 0 | 23 | 23 |
| | Total | 43 | 141 | 184 |

In addition to the number of images, and despite some repetition of images among students, the types of images also varied tremendously. Yet at the same time, most of the images were overwhelmingly of people – individuals and groups. In fact, the majority were human or cultural images, with very few strictly physical images, such as mountains or rivers.

Second, many images concerned similar aspects and concepts. For example, it was common to see pictures of the Taj Mahal in multiple projects from one group. However, many images stood alone, or were different from the rest of the images and from other campuses. For example, two focus groups had a number of images of Indian women's hair (as discussed in Chapter 5), something not present in any projects from the other two campuses. Some students submitted images that were quite difficult to interpret, usually because of the poor quality or low grade. This may be because students were unable to locate the exact image they were searching for, searching in haste, or focused on convenience to complete the project. Finally, very few students included images of personal acquaintances or friends. Fewer still obtained permission to use these likenesses for the project, and therefore, students blurred or masked faces as needed.

The Text: Descriptions, Captions, Citations

My directions concerning descriptions were concise, producing a wide range of writing detail. For the most part, students indicated why they had selected the image, or how it connected to their idea(s) about India. Some students wrote quite extensively concerning their reasoning for including images (personal or obtained). In some cases though, these lengthy descriptions became much more academic in nature, by which students discussed historical or cultural aspects of the images. As I discuss later, the PDPE experience was likely treated as an assignment, and therefore students anticipated that I wanted "academic writing" rather than personal or informal reflection. On the other end of the spectrum, a few students wrote very little, simply labeling the image as what they had originally listed in their knowledge inventory of India or including the website reference from which they

obtained the image. Citations in general were typically included with each image, although in a couple instances, students compiled all of their references to a final list at the end of their project. Based on these various ways students used text in their projects, instructors must consider the costs and benefits associated with the amount of instruction they give their students. If instructors wish for students to engage their images in a particularly way, such as reflexively, students may need more explanation or skill development beforehand.

**Synergistic Discussions**

In all six focus groups, every student presented their pictures with relative confidence and eagerness. None of them shied away from sharing their photographs or seemed embarrassed. As students shared their photographs and descriptions, other students were eager to either comment or question each other. In particular, many students were able to make connections between their own photographs and others', as well as others' experiences, creating a somewhat fluid movement from one project to another. Indeed, only one student (a first-year) could be described as being reserved in their interaction with the group beyond their own required sharing.

The synergy between group members was most evident when students shared similar experiences with sources from popular culture, such as movies or television programs. As Algeo (2007) recommends, creating learning activities that are both engaging with and critical of students' media-rich lives is evermore necessary. The issue here is how to provide students opportunities to tease apart performance and perception:

> Because movies, through their portrayal of peoples and places, are one of the ways that students come to know the world, classroom analysis of popular film encourages students to apply critical thinking to everyday experiences, to uncover

> ideologies embedded in their taken-for-granted world, and to be sensitive to the construction of meaning in popular culture (Algeo 2007, 133).

And, as Conover and Miller (2014, 85, emphasis in original) have more recently contended:

> As educators and geographers, we need to prepare students with the conceptual tools needed to better navigate our daily experiences that are awash with increasing amounts of problematic information, advertising, and entertainment. In short, we think that critical theories of the media can help us better understand how we not only live in the world, but also *with* it, thus engendering a more aware, thoughtful, empathetic, and active sense of being and becoming with the world.

PDPE offered such an opportunity, albeit not directly in a classroom setting. In nearly every focus group, either through my direct questioning, or more organically through the students' conversations, we eventually narrowed to the point of popular culture's function (e.g. storytelling, entertainment, advertising), and more importantly, its shortcomings (e.g. use of stereotypes, generalizations). These shortcomings typically related directly to the various stereotypes students' described through popular culture's representation of India (e.g. "poverty," "pollution," "slums"). As one student proffered toward the end of one focus group, the images they see in, for example, popular films greatly informed their informal learning, and more revealing, reinforced their formal learning. The student reflected:

> I think when we get taught about it, ask for a fuller picture. Like ask what good does a country have? What's the positives? All too often, all we hear are the negatives really, I mean, that's what we're taught and what we see in movies. You know, what's going right in a country? That comes with life experience too, to even ask that question…What good does this country have? What's positive? I think if we start asking those questions will have a fuller understanding about whatever a country has to offer (M4-PR-01).

Lee et al. (2009) argue for educational experiences such as this, as they highlight, if "stereotypes have an impact on viewer interpretations of reality…it is necessary to…offer tools for encouraging [students] to be more active and critical in their media consumption" (108). The PDPE project allowed both in this particular case as well as more generally in all focus groups, for individual students and the group as a whole to critically engaged with how (especially) *past* experiences with media influenced their perception and imaginations of another place.

As shown earlier, sharing these experiences in small forums also allows other students in the group to gain detailed knowledge about India. For example, in Chapter 4, I described a student learning about language diversity in India during a game of ping pong, and then sharing this with the group. In another example, a student offered another opportunity for a group to develop a more nuanced imagined geography of India:

> F4-HB-08: Well, I work at a daycare, and there are a lot of Indian kids who go there, so the parents cut the little girls' hair off before they turn one, because it cleanses them and starting a new life when they are born.
>
> F4-HB-06: Really?
>
> F4-HB-08: Yeah, they shave their head completely.

Although this exchange was brief, students who were interested in this Hindu tradition, known as *mundan*, could easily ask or obtain information about it. More importantly, this opportunity allows students to make connections with other abstractions of Hinduism, such as reincarnation (think back to the reference of the children's television program *Avatar* in Chapter 4). In this example, a student could better understand the relationship between cutting a child's hair and its connection to freeing one from a previous life's undesirable

traits, as well as being potentially the only time a girl has her hair cut during her entire life (Nesbitt 2017).

By bringing their work back to a group phase, it provides further analysis and discussion of the consequences of this knowledge and experience that construct various imagined geographies. Perhaps this is the most appealing advantage to using focus groups in concert with the PDPE – its "synergistic" capabilities (Hopkins 2007, Cameron 2010, Kurtz and Wood 2014). As Cameron (2010, 154, emphasis added) clarifies, "the interactive aspect of focus groups…provides an opportunity for people to explore different points of view and to *formulate* and *reconsider* their own ideas and understandings." Breen (2006, 473), who also used focus groups with undergraduates, considers this aspect of focus groups also as a potential "rewarding learning experience" for participants, as I have shown with my participants as well. Therefore, focus groups are additionally useful for empowering participants, while also bringing about social change (Skop 2006, Hopkins 2007, Cameron 2010). Finally, focus groups allow researchers an opportunity to experience their own changed perspectives, especially in terms of how theories are worked out on the "ground level" through "collaborative, participatory, and critical research in human geography" (Bosco and Herman 2010, 206). As I have highlighted in the previous two chapters, focus groups enabled this type of "collaborative, participatory, and critical research," but perhaps more importantly, it produced an environment by which students felt comfortable and willing to address the strengths *and* weaknesses of imagining a place.

**Overlapping Imagined Geographies: Three Types of Conflation used by Undergraduates**

One of the consistent weaknesses that appeared in all focus groups was the issue of conflation. In many cases, students confused their knowledge about India with other places or groups of people. This occurred not only within their experience with popular culture, where media can "colonize" our perceptions of distant places (Dittmer 2010), but somewhat surprisingly, also in some of their personal relationships. Students often use conflation to bridge gaps in either their knowledge or experience. As Taylor (2015, 112) has recently argued:

> Young people sometimes conflate places that are comparatively near to each other but distant from the young person…such conflation maybe unconscious (for example, when students attribute the characteristics of one country to another) or conscious confusions (for example, when students express their uncertainty about whether a certain characteristic is true of one or another country).

While Taylor indicates students conflate places unconsciously or consciously, I offer three different types of conflation I encountered in the PDPE projects and focus group discussions. First, students exhibited indirect conflation, whereby students mistakenly used images from popular culture as being of/from India. Second, students used direct conflation, whereby students confused knowledge about India they received through personal relationships. Third, students used a mixed conflation, whereby both indirect and direct conflation were employed to describe India. I also consider the different kinds of teachable moments that exist within each type.

Indirect Conflation: *Aladdin*

A number of students shared images of the Disney film *Aladdin* (1992). Even though *Aladdin* is presumably in Southwest Asia rather than South Asia, various scenes in the film, such as the sultan's palace and the marketplace, made them think of India. One final-year student also tried to make a connection between her image of the Taj Mahal and the film: "Yeah, I have the Taj Mahal too. And besides the reasons she said, I remembered it too because the palace in the movie *Aladdin* actually looked similar to that as well, so, again, I don't know the significance behind it. It's a nice monument" (F4-HB-04). I should note that no other student offered any connections between the similarities between the two, namely the common Islamic architecture. It appeared that none of the students knew about India's history of the Islamic Mughal Empire, despite it being a part of national educational standards in Common Core (Common Core 2018). To be fair, though, all my participates were from a handful of states that have not adopted these new standards. To note, while students were quick to point out *Aladdin*, no students ever made a connection to the Disney film *The Jungle Book* (1967)*,* which is set in India. While this film is much older than *Aladdin*, many recent versions of *The Jungle Book*, including three by Disney (1994, 1998, and 2016), were released since *Aladdin*. Although students may have been familiar with *The Jungle Book* (I did not ask), perhaps they did not place the film as being India, but rather another subtropical location with exotic animals (e.g. Amazon, Central Africa), further conflating places.

Regardless, the absence of this story seems to confirm that students conflate places, especially when the cultural landscape appears homogenized due to students' physical and social distance to faraway places. Accordingly, students lack the ability to differentiate

between locations that are "Other." Shaheen (2003) argues that the role of film, such as *Aladdin*, in particular creates an image of exotic places as monolithic and abstract, making it virtually impossible to distinguish between people who live there and their respective cultures. Despite this lingering issue, instructors have much to work with in these types of teachable moments. Instructors can lead students to brief history lessons in the diffusion of Islamic architecture, but also into broader conversations on spatial diffusion of culture, giving examples within their own proximal cultural landscapes. Additionally, as PDPE acts as a litmus test for student knowledge, instructors can structure their upcoming lectures or discussions to explore these points of conflation. Similar to Dittmer's (2010) approach with Eastern Europe, instructors can highlight the influence of popular culture on the construction of imagined geographies, although now with the added benefit of understanding where students may have existing gaps in their knowledge. This encourages students to build critical media skills for analyzing popular culture's representation of place (Conover and Miller 2014), as well as empower them to question the issue of conflation in our imagined geographies (Somdahl-Sands 2015). Yet, as I move to the next example, sometimes the basis of these conflations lie within very direct personal relationships that become more difficult to deconstruct.

Direct Conflation: "Dubai, India"

While confusion may be more obvious when relying on stereotypes based within popular culture or discourses, students unknowingly shared instances when misperceptions happened within direct personal relationships. For example, one first-year student recounted everything a former high school classmate wore, his academic abilities and his extracurricular

activities, and said "he is from Dubai" (F1-PR-04), thinking the city was in India (Figure 7.1). She went on to use this place name five times. None of the five other students in the group inquired to the discrepancy between our conversation about India and that this high school classmate was from a place not in India – "Dubai." In fact, later in the same conversation, another student described their experience with a student from South Asia, albeit one from Pakistan:

> M1-PR-02: Um, I don't have a picture of it, but going back to how she had that Indian friend, there was a Pakistani guy back at my school…He was only there for like a semester, but he was always pissed off at the world, and just always was just saying how much he hated India – how he just hated the nation. He wouldn't really explain why but he just hated, hated, hated. And I know there is like a lot of tension between the two countries.
>
> F1-PR-04: That's interesting because he wanted to go back to Dubai like all the time. He would just be like, "I can't wait. I can't wait."…But that's interesting that he hated it and he liked it.
>
> M1-PR-02: Well, he was Pakistani.
>
> F1-PR-04: True.
>
> M1-PR-02: Yeah, and Pakistan and India do not like each other.
>
> F1-PR-04: Yeah. And he said in Dubai like its just, he said everyone is super friendly, and um, I mean, that's coming from him, so I'm not exactly sure where he lives…

*Figure 7.1 "A boy who went to my school and was from Dubai, India. He told me all about his culture and lifestyle there in Dubai."*

Not only in this exchange does the second student not realize that Dubai is not in India (nor does the first student), but she also conflates three places as being one: Dubai, India, and Pakistan. Notice the first student reiterates the fact that not only are India and Pakistan two different places, but also that they have geopolitical disagreements. The second student attempts to cover her faux pas by adding, "I'm not exactly sure where he lives," – nor did it seem that anyone else in the group knew.

As is anticipated in this type of direct conflation, the gap in knowledge came from a particular student's experience; yet when no other students directly challenge erroneous knowledge, instructors still have an opportunity to make this a teachable moment. For

example, instructors can tie an array of topics together, including transnational migration, development, and human rights issues, to address the connection and confusion students have between India and Dubai (or United Arab Emirates). Immigration from India to Middle Eastern countries, in particular to the United Arab Emirates, is a reality.[14] This phenomenon has been widely studied by geographers beyond simple migration routes. For example, Vora (2013) recently explored various issues for Indians' trying to gain citizenship in Dubai. Marrying personal stories, such as the one presented above, with larger global geographic trends is a move toward greater educational authenticity.

McInerney (2010, 28) suggests that for students and instructors of geography, "the classroom should be as 'real' as possible, always looking for links with the world outside the classroom – the walls of the classroom to be as porous as possible." PDPE creates "porous" classroom walls to direct conversations that help students create fluid, permeable boundaries of their imagined geographies. This can be particularly helpful when students present mixed conflation in their knowledge of places, people and cultures, as I turn to such an example next.

Mixed Conflation: Which "Indians"?

Perhaps the most striking example of conflation was over the one word I gave students to think about: India. The confusion came with Westerners' use of the term in a much closer context, as one final-year student's entire PDPE project described what he knew about Native Americans – or "Indians." It is particularly difficult to tease apart this misunderstanding as the student uses both indirect and direct forms of conflation when presenting his imagined geography of India. Much like the instance described with the

student using the term "Dubai," none of the other students in this focus group calls the student out on the discrepancy. In fact, a much different reaction occurs:

> M4-HB-05: Ok. Um, what I have is spiritual healing. And um, I got this idea from my dad. He like made a joke towards my grandma saying, "Just go find yourself an Indian person, because you won't have to pay for your medicine." And then, um, you know, most of my childhood is Disney channel, so I have *Peter Pan*, and plus, they always tell you to sit Indian style. So, I'm pretty sure that's what they do. Um, then *Pocahontas*, with her long hair. So the women have long hair. You know, long hair, don't care. And then I have *Jungle to Jungle*, I thought that they would, in India, go outside and hunt for their animals, because in that movie you showed us they were eating like snakes and gorillas and stuff. So they got to get it from somewhere. So he's got the bow and arrow.
>
> [Group laughs.]

The laughter is an interesting response by the participants, as it suggests both a sense of comicalness, as well as a sense of uneasiness. It was obvious that this particular project did not fit the scope of what students were asked to do, yet none of the remaining students take time to note this, rather they uncomfortably "laugh it off." This is particularly puzzling as this student was one of the last to share their project, meaning the group had already seen a variety of images and descriptions of India, none of which matched those this student displayed. In fact, from my perspective (and previewing the project before the meeting, which included an image of the NFL team Washington Redskins logo and a painting of the French and Indian War), the student seemed a little hesitant to talk about his project, anticipating some type of ridicule from peers – ridicule that never materialized. After the collective chuckle and a brief awkward silence, the conversation simply moved on as a different student shifted to another topic.

This situation gives opportunity to consider a couple of theories surrounding humor and human behavior. First, the relief theory, as presented by Sigmund Freud in the early 20th century, suggests that laughter is a sign of unconscious nervous energy being released, as someone shares or experiences moments that are coupled with inhibition. The laughter acts as "a thing which had been permitted at the stage of play but [could be] dammed up by rational criticism" (Freud, 1960, 169). A second theory, incongruity theory, may be more helpful here. As geographers Purcell et al. (2010, 375, emphasis added) summarize in the use of humor to understand the Other:

> Incongruity theory relies on human efforts to create abstract concepts and expected patterns in daily life. Occurrences contradictory to preconceived notions, replete with newness, contrast, inconsistency and surprise, form the basis of amusement and humor...These events entail a sudden shift in psychological state of being, encompassing elements of surprise, all the while maintaining a level of pleasantness at the new situation. *It is this distinction of pleasure separating this form of incongruity from negative results such as confusion and emotional distress*.

This latter theory helps to explain why students were so easy to let the conflation pass without passing judgement over the student's error. Instructors, though, can effectively use opportunities involving "humorous" situations in undergraduate geography classrooms to constructively and critically examine the world (Alderman and Popke 2002, Hammett and Mather 2011, Jansson 2016). Jansson (2016) points out that while different opportunities arise if humor is stoked by instructors or by students, he also reminds us that while humor can make people feel good, that does not always mean it is appropriate or can help in the learning process. Instructors must be conscious of this if they are to use humor or laughter to engage students in situations such as the one above. In this particular situation, keeping a light mood in order to deflect some of the embarrassment felt by the student would be ideal.

Additionally, to create a teachable moment, it is necessary to engage students in a spatial, historical, and political conversation about why the term "Indian" is conflated between two separate locations and peoples on the Earth's surface.

To note, this was not the only case of a student including an image of Native Americans in their project. For instance, one student's project highlighted Native American pueblos as a common building practice of several tribes, including the Hopi and Acoma. Unlike the student whose entire project was about Native Americans, in this student's example an even stranger situation emerged with the image of the pueblos juxtaposed against other images *of* India. Therefore, this student could not separate lands, cultures, and identities separated by thousands of miles. However, as students were able to select which images they wanted to share, and those they did not, this student refrained from using this particular image from our discussion. While I can only speculate, the student may have become aware of their conflation between Indians in the North American context and Indians in the South Asian context as we discussed other students' projects. Here too though is another practical aspect of using PDPE. As instructors can preview each students' work prior to engaging the group in conversation, they have the opportunity to create discussion questions that can directly (or indirectly to save students from embarrassment) engage conversations about conflation. And yet, instructors also must be ready to think about how to steer students' reflections as more emergent issues arise when students work together to arrange and code their images.

## Arranging and Coding Photographs

After students had the opportunity to share and discuss their respective PDPE projects, I gave them the task of arranging their collective images into similarly themed stacks. Importantly, I gave few directions in how to accomplish this, allowing students to work unhindered in how they attempted to categorize the images. I only supplied students a brief set of guidelines for working together to organize their photographs into stacks. I stressed the subjectivity of this task (i.e. no right or wrong way), although they needed to be able to tell me what each stack represented. I did not participate in this process, but did take note of how the students negotiated this task together, as well as how they ended up sorting their photographs. In what follows, I describe these negotiations, as well as our subsequent discussion of their respective stacks, and the various suggestions given by students for reconstructing, revising, and reimagining distant places such as India.

### Negotiating Photographs into Stacks

Overall, students worked well together in devising a plan to sort photographs. Additionally, they were mostly successful at resolving differences, such as what stacks represented or deciding which photographs should go in which stacks. The groups typically created few stacks (Table 7.2). In fact, the number of stacks ranged between 5 and 10 across all focus groups. They also represented large, abstract ideas or stereotypes. In most cases, the stacks were associated with the negative ascriptions mentioned earlier, such as “poverty” or “overpopulation.” Students appeared hesitant to create small stacks, especially ones that may only have a single image (although this did happen in two groups). It may seem that the relatively abstract and few concepts students created would hinder our ability to deconstruct

imagined geographies. However, these situations create unique opportunities for teaching and learning, such as helping students define what a stereotype is, or exploring why it is difficult to think complexly about places outside our own experiences.

Table 7.2. Labels (codes) used by focus groups for stacks of images.

| *Institution* | *Academic Year* | *Number of Stacks* | *Labels Used* |
|---|---|---|---|
| HBCU | First | 5 | Landscapes, culture, hair, ancestors/history, food |
| HBCU | Final | 10 | Food, buildings, dancing, tradition, clothing, hair, *henna*, wise, day-to-day activities, festivals |
| Land Grant/PWI | First | 6 | Cultural, geographic, population, religious, entertainment, pollution |
| Land Grant/PWI | Final | 5 | Agriculture, poverty, crowdedness, religion/color/culture, diversity |
| Private/Religious | First | 7 | Globalization, population, tradition, food, clothing, wedding, poverty |
| Private/Religious | Final | 7 | Religion, clothing, overpopulation, poverty/slums, food, globalization, heat |

Some students appeared to be reluctant when placing their photograph in a particular stack, especially if it represented more than just one idea. This presented a slight limitation within the process, as I asked students to create exclusive categories. Instructors may encourage students to "think outside the box," however, students may need to develop a better sense of creating more fluid categories. In some instances students in focus groups thought outside of the box (e.g. fluid categories rather than exclusive), although even in these cases, most students were uncomfortable and easily persuaded. For example, this exchange happened upon my asking about a photograph (Figure 7.2) that was straddling two stacks labeled "religion" and "clothing," respectively:

M4-PR-04: This represents religion, um, this one is in the middle of both just because the dot represented, the red dot represented Hindu, so we put that one in there, but we also put it in the middle because of that.

Facilitator: What's [the other stack]?

F4-PR-02: This is clothing.

Facilitator: Ok. And what's the middle one?

M4-PR-04: It could go in both.

M4-PR-05: Why don't we just put it in clothing?

F4-PR-02: Ok, let's just go with what [M4-PR-05] says.

M4-PR-04: There you go. Now we only have seven [stacks].

*Figure 7.2 "This picture always reminds me of how the majority of India is Hindu. The red dot on the forehead is the symbol that I am drawn too and always makes me think of the Hindu faith that most of the residents of India believe in."*
https://legacy.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=17156&rog3=IN

The photograph in question belonged to M4-PR-05, who had previously argued that it represented both of these aspects, but now quickly stopped the discussion about its "fluid" nature and compromised by putting it into the "clothing" stack. If this type of situation were

to appear in a more formal education setting, instructors could highlight students' propensity to develop impasses between their categories, which does not reflect the actual malleability or dynamics of cultural attributes. Dowler (2002, 71) encourages geography instructors to not simply challenge undergraduates in their stereotypes of other cultures, but equipping students to learn how to consider other information that does not fit within exclusive categories. While these conversations are "fraught with emotion and human prejudice…[geography instructors] have no choice to embrace the uncomfortable classroom" (Dowler 2002, 71).

In other situations, to come to agreement, students combined large groups of pictures under very abstract labels such as "culture" to be a catchall for things that did not match. This appeared to happen when students, in fact, did not know what the picture represented. At this point, an instructor could step in to inform students about the images or encourage them to break their categories up. However, these abstract labels may be more conducive for instructors to show the consequences of imagined geographies. After students participate in a PDPE project, instructors in a traditional classroom environment may dive further into the misinterpretations students have with images of other places. As Wee et al. (2013, 172) argue:

> Geography instructors need to be aware of the nuanced ways by which students make sense of content because knowledge is ultimately grounded in students' foundational ideas. Students learn better when they are able to relate new information to existing foundational ideas uniquely derived from human experiences.

Thus, instructors must present new information *after s*tudents have time to consider their own experiences, particularly as they tie to their respective and collective imagined geographies.

Ironically, each student was responsible for submitting images that represented what he or she knew about India. As seen in the earlier case, students were quick to describe what commonly became known as "the red dot" (i.e. *bindi*), but very few actually knew its significance or use. This made it difficult for them to categorize the image, as some groups would define it as religious, some as an aspect of weddings, and still others simply as culture. This knowing/unknowing phenomenon created the need and space for broad, generalized labels. Even the labels themselves became sources of unidentified relationships, as one group used a "religion/color/culture" tag. To students, connections existed between these three, but teasing them apart was challenging. Here is how the group explained the label:

> M4-LG-04: Well I think that that one for sure started out as color and then we, as a group, thought well we could throw in religion.
>
> F4-LG-03: Cause the *holi* festival was really colorful, so it just kind of tied into it all.
>
> Facilitator: Ok.
>
> F4-LG-05: I think that really the, um, importance of colors in Indian culture are stemmed from religion too.
>
> M4-LG-02: And I think –
>
> F4-LG-03: And how they like represent different meanings.
>
> M4-LG-02: Yeah, like the artwork of their gods can definitely be very colorful.

This process of selecting images for individual projects, and creating stacks from the pool of collective images, gave each group an opportunity to reflect on and be critical of their imagined geographies of a particular place (Somdahl-Sands 2015). More broadly, the pedagogical opportunities afforded by the PDPE project reach the "cornerstone of geography education," that is, "sense of place [as] a construct that is simultaneously abstract

and real" (Wee et al., 2013, 172). Encouraging this type of experiential, empowering, and existential learning should be at the forefront of critical geography education at the university level:

> The use of visual methodology in geography education supports a student-centered pedagogical approach by valuing the foundational ideas that are brought to learning environments in universities on an everyday basis. Images, in particular, can highlight a person's sense of place, that is, their interpretations of the world and the interactions that occur within it. As geography educators, it is critical that we recognize students' differing sense of place and leverage these ideas in ways that provide meaningful opportunities to support learning in our classes (Wee et al. 2013, 173).

Although students worked relatively well together, the level of critical thinking was lacking in this portion of the project. One reason for this absence may be due to the unstructured and undirected nature of allowing students to sort their images on their own. As I described earlier with instructions for writing, instructors must consider the opportunities and limitations between either a strict or flexible coding process. If instructors opt for the former, students can apply more critical analysis to the ways they negotiate stacks (this relates to the issue of exclusive categories described above). Fortunately, if instructors choose the latter, the PDPE process provides an opportunity to discuss the consequences of uncritical analysis of individual and collective images. Regardless of instructors' preference, this step in the PDPE project allows students and instructors to recognize patterns and stereotypes used by the group, as well as gauge student curiosity and to create goals for future learning during a time of reflection.

Reflecting on Individual and Collective Imagined Geographies

Upon asking students about their collective stacks, they quickly realized that their "knowledge" and imaginings of India were limited and abstract. Some reflections were blunt, as one final-year student lamented, "I feel kind of bad" (M4-PR-04). Kobayashi (1999) identifies this as the phenomenon of white guilt. While her reflection is predominately on her students' reaction to race and racism, it lends itself more broadly to recognizing the consequences of marking difference, particularly as students realize their everyday consumptions that perpetuate such imagined geographies (Kobayashi 1999). Kobayashi finds students respond best using break-out discussion sessions, similar to what the PDPE process provides.

More importantly, students recognized that even though they created projects independent of one another, they had similar images, ideas, and stereotypes of what India was, drawing on similar sources for knowledge as discussed earlier (e.g. popular culture, formal education). This was even apparent among groups that addressed unique topics, such as HBCU students and images of Indian hair. Therefore, students displayed a level of comfort once they realized many of their perceptions were shared among group members, making them more willing to dig deeper and go beyond what they originally provided in their PDPE projects. This is contrasting to what some instructors described to me within their introductory courses, whereby many students avoid speaking about their ideas, experiences, or questions in front of larger peer groups, likely in fear that they see their own perspective as unique or irrelevant. Realizing that broader (Western) discourses influence the process of learning about place (Said 1978, Gregory 1994), students related other, similar revealing experiences.

For example, one student, a first-year undergraduate, was born in Honduras and immigrated to the United States when he was 11 years old. He related the following story to the group as we discussed the implications of relying on popular culture, and in particular films, as a way to imagine another place:

> I think that, actually, from the movies and stuff, that sometimes they like want to show like the better picture, or what is most important… For example, like in my experience, I remember whenever I first – in Honduras, when I would watch movies from the USA, like I always saw New York City and the taxis and all this and that, you know, and I remember when I was going to come first here to Oklahoma, I was like, that was what I was expecting. Like it would be like New York and everything. [Group laughs.] And so I got here and I was like, this is a whole different thing, cause like whenever you think of the USA, you know, from that perspective over there, it'll kind of be like New York, because the movies you would watch, it was all kind of like that. When I came here, it was like, yeah, this totally doesn't look like New York. (M1-LG-04)

This student's perspective is particularly noteworthy, as the other students' are exposed to the consequences of assuming that a place is as it is in film or television program. The very next student responded, "I think all of this shows that most of what we know about countries, and in this case India, but I think you can put a lot of different countries into that space, but a lot of what we know is stereotypical" (F1-LG-01). While the entire group laughed about his supposing that Oklahoma would be similar to New York City, students were able to make the link between their own presumptions concerning India.

To achieve similar levels of discussion, several instructors I interviewed shared how they use work by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie. In her writing and speaking, Adichie warns of the various dangers of a "single story," or the issues that stem from only being presented one image of what a place or group of people are like. As she contends:

> Americans think African writers will write about the exotic, about wildlife, poverty, maybe Aids. They come to Africa and African books with certain expectations. I was told by a professor at Johns Hopkins University that he didn't believe my first book because it was too familiar to him. In other words, I was writing about middle-class Africans who had cars and who weren't starving to death, and therefore to him it wasn't authentically African. (Moss 2007)

The advantage of using PDPE is that students must *first* focus on their own "single stories" about place and people, even if those stories tend to overlap with other students' experiences, and then deconstruct those single stories in focus groups with the instructor.

Consequently and organically, conversations between students ended by discussing the opportunities afforded by the PDPE project – and the subsequent group discussions – to work through these imagined geographies. One student realized from their own travels abroad that the American "perspective" is certainly subjective, especially when comparing oneself to others:

> I also know…like I've traveled the world, and one thing I've learned is that Americans tend to think we are the best at everything and that everyone looks to America, which to some extent is true, but there is a lot of good in the world, and we just think that we're like the top of it all. And I think that sometimes – like if we did [a PDPE project] for America, we would say look how great it is, we wouldn't tend to focus on the negatives. (M4-PR-05)

In this focus group, students assumed that in a PDPE project of India and the U.S., their descriptions of India would be more negative, while description of the U.S. would be more positive. This points towards what Hall (2013) calls "visibility" (stemming from Foucault's idea of power-knowledge), by which students found it difficult to draw on positive representations of India from their experiences, but assumed it would be rather easy to build

a positive narrative concerning the U.S. This provides an opportunity for instructors to dig into conversations with students concerning cultural discourse, as well as how our personal/community identities (e.g. national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc.) are formed and juxtaposed to other identities through various geopolitical and popular culture narratives (Dittmer 2010).

Even so, most acknowledged the benefits of working through their individual and collective imaginings of India. Kurtz and Wood (2014, 553) argue PDPE creates vital opportunities "for students to reflect on their own and peers' social assumptions…thereby derive richer understanding of the ways in which [stereotypes] are reinforced and occasionally transgressed." The process appeared cathartic for groups, building a safe space to apply constructive criticism to various depictions of India. As a final-year student reflected:

> I was going to say that, in bouncing off of both you guys, um, it's like we don't have true knowledge of India, of like what India is all about, and…ultimately I think, for example, if I was very ignorant about Hinduism, that could lead me to be, it could lead me to discriminate against, um, Hinduism, against Hindus, I guess Indians. I think without true knowledge…and more wholesome education, I guess, on India and the people of India that could lead to intolerance, just because we're ignorant. (F4-LG-05)

McInerney (2010) argues that geography educators need to create such environments that foster active learning, empathy, and understanding. However, the "wholesome education" mentioned by this student did not merely reference formal education, but rather, when I asked students how they might nuance their imagined geographies of India (or any other place) they were quick to point out a number of strategies.

Students Perspectives on Expanding Imagined Geographies and Stereotypes

Toward the end of each focus group meeting, I took an opportunity to ask students how they might strengthen their understanding of a place, especially in light of the experience sharing and organizing the images from their PDPE projects. Within the context of the PDPE, students offered three common recommendations to achieve the benchmark, "[to] create a geographic imagination based on empathy, critical thinking, and a nuanced understanding" (Somdahl-Sands 2015, 31). First, students recognized that within formal education settings, asking questions is a best practice:

> I think when we get taught about it, ask for a fuller picture. Like ask what good does a country have? What's the positives? All too often, all we hear are the negatives really, I mean, that's what we're taught and what we see in movies. You know, what's going right in a country…I think if we start asking those questions will have a fuller understanding about whatever a country has to offer. What are all of it's positives and negatives? (M4-PR-01)

In his recent assessment of the changing educational landscape of geography, McInerney (2010) has identified a number of expectations for instructors, including responding to student interests, instilling curiosity, and encouraging self-direction. Additionally, in order to provide what McInerney (2010, 28) calls "authenticity of learning," geographers need to "tailor learning experiences to the needs of students, provide…structure and support for project-based student inquiry…and involve students in deciding what, when and how they learn." PDPE represents at least one such example. As described earlier, students often avoid dialogue in larger, traditional lecture style learning environments. Instructors may implement PDPE as a means to assess student knowledge in a formal environment, yet providing students the ability to direct conversations around what they feel is important or

necessary for their growth toward an "attainable global perspective" (Klein et al. 2014, 24). In my experience, this was most visible in the ways students became increasingly comfortable to ask questions or critique their existing knowledge about India. Sometimes questions were directed at other student's experiences or perspectives, and other times at me (as a teacher-figure). Indeed, in some situations students even began questioning the nature of their own thoughts about places, as one final-year student confessed toward the end one focus group: "I don't know if it's comforting or disheartening to see validity in the stereotypes in this all, because we have all different pictures, and yet they all fit into four different categories, relatively the same" (M4-LG-01). PDPE, therefore, provided a safe environment where the instructor experiences greater willingness for students to ask questions and engage in the discussion.

Second, many students considered making personal connections with people from India. For example, "Don't assume so quickly just by an image, until you…speak to someone of that culture" (F4-HB-06). As described in Chapter 4, personal relationships tended to be helpful in deconstructing stereotypes of that imagined place, and in addition, allowed students to speak more confidently about what they knew. When students shared knowledge with the group that they received from an Indian, it was received as expert testimony. Geographers have suggested creating opportunities within coursework to build relationships between U.S. and international students (Pandit and Alderman 2004). However, in this case, students seemed to enjoy more organic relationships. Regardless, geography instructors must encourage their students to create cross-cultural relationships within the context of their university community. As Pandit (2009, 651) later argues, "we have tended to overlook the wealth of global knowledge and connections [international]

students bring to our campuses." In this study, students eventually recognized this as well. For example, after participating in the PDPE project and focus group, a final-year student argued:

> I think [PDPE] was a really interesting, um, opportunity to just kind of reflect on our perceptions of other places, and India obviously specifically, especially from a student, you know, being a student at a university…having so many international students. I think it's important for people to have a chance to talk about their perceptions and maybe misperceptions of a place in order to be better understanding and accepting of people. (F4-LG-03)

Therefore, PDPE may offer students a starting point for considering the value of such relationships, particularly if it is tied to multicultural or international experiences on campus (see Chapter 6, "Outside the Classroom"). Students could complete a PDPE project about their experience, with either a broad focus on what they learned about a particular group's culture, or a specific focus about the relationships that develop out of participating in the event.

Finally, students suggested that travel might be the best way to broaden their thoughts and knowledge about a place. As one final-year undergraduate quipped, "buy a passport" (M4-HB-05). As I have shown previously, the invaluable experience of travel in many ways may supersede what instructors can do in the classroom, although the combination of formal learning and travel can be a potent remedy to students' perceptions of place (Mullens et al. 2012, Mullens and Cuper 2015). While my use of PDPE did not incorporate a travel element, combining the two could create a unique situation for students to address their imagined geographies head on. For example, students could use the PDPE project to assess those experiences in their travels (domestic or abroad) that either confirm

or challenge their existing perceptions of that place. Particularly appealing is if instructors can complete this within the context of a service-learning project, as called for recently by geographers (Grabbatin and Fickey 2012, Jurmu 2015).

This does not represent an exhaustive list of suggestions that students offered, or could offer, prospectively. Yet ending the PDPE experience with a dedicated effort to consider potential remedies of learning about other places was helpful for both students and myself. For students, it provided opportunities to discuss the strengths and weakness of various mediums as sources of information about a place. It proved that, rather than assuming what the best courses of actions are for critical spatial learning, PDPE provided an opportunity to work with students in creating a plan for more holistic learning. And while the PDPE did make students "responsible for their own geographical imagination in a conscious manner" (Somdahl-Sands 2015, 31), it takes students a step further by wrestling with their perceptions and planning active learning strategies.

**Conclusion**

Using a PDPE approach, undergraduates were able to think about their individual and collective imagined geographies of India. The focus group discussions, and more specifically the sharing and sorting of images, gave students an opportunity to recognize the strengths and weaknesses within their imagined geographies. In the end, undergraduates could propose strategies for constructing more nuanced geographies, either through formal learning environments (e.g. ask more questions), or through more personal experiences (e.g. travel).

Understanding the processes associated with student imagined geographies that emerged from this research provides opportunity for educators to address and develop non-monolithic changes to course content and structure—specifically building upon PDPE, to create opportunities for active teaching and learning. As described in this chapter, the utility, opportunities, and limitations of PDPE, in particular its synergistic qualities, extends a recent movement within geography in higher education. As Conway-Gómez et al. (2011, 420, emphasis added) call for:

> Ultimately, synergistic activities need supportive structure but also the freedom to grow in fruitful directions. Synergy seems to thrive in a dynamic space of uncertainty where things can and sometimes do go wrong. We believe that the key to tapping geography's potential for *synergy with creative instructional approaches* is recognition that failed attempts to generate synergy are part of the process. Extra effort might not produce new frontiers in education or research but the possibilities of doing so exist and, therefore, we argue are worth the investment.

Pedagogically speaking, the PDPE project and the subsequent discussions with students provided a number of opportunities for instructors, otherwise known as "teachable moments." As I have shown in this chapter, instances when students overlook the fluidity of culture, for example, allow for discussions on the misinterpretations or misrepresentations of images that students hold – physically in their projects, but also mentally within their imaginations. These are ripe for further development in the geography classroom, for instance, when students conflate cultural identities across transnational boundaries (e.g. Dubai, or Native Americans). Moreover, it allows instructors and students to work together towards "conscientization…a process of learning that leads to change…in more even knowledge exchanges and theory building" (Pain 2009, 481). As a creative instructional

approach, PDPE proved an accessible tool with plentiful openings for instructors to dive deeper, become more nuanced, and deconstruct the boundaries of imagined geographies with their students.

Linking processes of knowledge creation, control, and circulation of imagined identities of the "Other" works, as Stuart Hall (2013) explains, "through the eye of representation." One of the ways students in particular can rethink these lines and representations is through photographs or images of the Other. The classroom creates a space in which students can be equipped with the capacity of what Zandy (2008, 94) calls "respectful not knowing…a recognition of the experientially unknowable, and yet a willingness to make an imaginative leap into another's world." This practice requires understanding the difference between looking and seeing, or shifting from quickly processing imagery to engaging imagery in a direct and thoughtful manner.

Additionally, creative approaches in geographic instruction, such as PDPE, distinguish between memorization of facts and focus on the practice of learning (Schoffham 2013). As a pedagogical tool, PDPE places control within students' hands – control to create personally reflective projects, control to drive synergistic conversations, and control to determine how to move forward in removing imagined boundaries. Warf (2015, 47) identifies this philosophical work as cosmopolitanism – a perspective that "views all human beings as being equally worthy of respect, regardless of their place of birth…celebrates the commonalities that underlie human life, offering an 'imagined community' that extends everywhere." Ultimately, this type of empowering and participatory work with undergraduates provides a foundation to develop openings to question and rework

historical/contemporary identity binaries (e.g. Self/Other), where ambiguity, complexity, and hybridity emerge.

[14] According to a recent Pew Research study (2017), "about 3.5 million Indians live in the UAE, the top destination country for Indian migrants…over the past two decades, millions of Indians have migrated there to find employment as laborers."

# CHAPTER VIII

# CONCLUSION

> In thinking about the predicament of positionality…I have become aware of many writers who insist that it is both impossible and illegitimate to speak for or even about others; but as a teacher of geography I believe I have a responsibility to enlarge the horizons of the classroom…the consequences of not doing so, of locking ourselves in our own worlds, seem to me far more troubling. I put the problem in pedagogic terms because I have always done research in order to teach. (Derek Gregory 1994, 5)

## Introduction

As Gregory indicates above, somewhere between our skills as academics and teachers we must guide students through the complexity and diversity of our world. This is particularly the case in a world growing in connectivity and visibility. Our responsibility in the classroom should directly inspire students toward individual and collective social transformations (Wellens et al. 2010). For geography instructors, the ability to address and explore such global links through various lenses – colonization, capitalism, identity, and so on – is ever necessary in the classroom. But the classroom cannot simply be geographers disseminating

"knowledge" to students. How we engage our students in these conversations is paramount, including what they imagine places to be like, and the types of information they rely on to build imaginative geographies. Dodging these conversations runs the risk of avoiding Pandit and Alderman's (2004, 134) appeal: "It is imperative that geographers continue to promote intercultural understanding and tolerance in their classrooms."

In this concluding chapter, and in light of the findings I present in earlier chapters, I summarize Chapters 4 through 7, respectively considering the major contributions and significance of my analysis in each. Additionally, I consider future possibilities using PDPE as a pedagogical tool, as well as broader research streams emanating from undergraduates' individual and collective imagined geographies.

## Contributions and Significance

In Chapter 4, "How Undergraduates Construct and Present Geographical Imaginations of India," my research confirms most of the same sources reported (mostly in K-12 research) that undergraduate participants used to help construct their imagined geographies of India. Namely, I show how a majority of the images and experiences stemmed from undergraduates exposure to a variety of popular culture mediums, such as film, television, and social media. Although students did occasionally use previous formal education to indicate learning about India, the relative lack of use may suggest students indeed lacked a foundational geographic knowledge about India. However, as I show to be unique about undergraduates apart from younger students, they *also* relied on personal relationships, mostly with those from (or descendants of) South Asia, to help contextualize their imagined geographies of India. In many cases this was directly related to their proximity to

international students on or around respective campuses, or contact with Indian people/communities that has taken place as a result of the Indian diaspora (Raghuram et al. 2008).

In the second part of Chapter 4, I provide three examples of how undergraduates weave these sources together to create a specific discourse about India, and how this overall discourse extends long-standing Orientalist stereotypes that projected India as a distant and exotic Other. I argue that this is most identifiable in the ways students create mental boundaries by using dichotomous language such as "us" and "them," what Stuart Hall (2013) calls "binary oppositions," or what I relate to one instructor's label as a "comfort zone" for students. These comfort zones allow students to feel safe behind historical Western walls of cultural and moral superiority as they view, discuss, or learn about the Other. Therefore, despite using more varied sources than reported in younger students, most undergraduates still struggled to create nuanced perceptions of India.

In Chapter 5, "How Undergraduates' Educational Level and Experience Creates Unique Imagined Geographies," I trace how undergraduates diverged in their perceptions of India based on their use of particular sources or experiences. First, explaining how first-year and final-year students prioritized various sources and experiences, I show that first-year students tended to use popular culture references more often, and frequently uncritically. Final-year students, on the other hand, while still drawing on popular culture texts to stage discussion, were able to apply more critical understandings of how these texts influence their perceptions of India. Moreover, although both groups tended to report similar amounts of coursework in culture and diversity, final-year students were more likely to recognize gaps in their formal education. I argue that geography educators must encourage self-reflection

(Kolb 1984), particularly in their lower-division courses with first-year students, so that students may consider how their individual experiences influence what they think about certain places – and critically, why.

Second, I identify how undergraduates at respective universities can rely on different sources to learn about India. For example, students at the private religious university often shared images of or experiences with missionaries who had been to India. The knowledge shared in these cases was often tied to negative stereotypes, such as poverty, and suggests that missionaries continue to have a strong influence over American's perceptions of distant places and people, despite students having more direct access to information and people from those places (Brunn and Leppman 2003, Vallgårda 2016). I also show how HBCU students were less likely to use negatively ascribed stereotypes than students at the land-grant or private religious universities. Using the concept of "the burden of acting white" (Fordham and Ogbu 1986, Webb and Linn 2016), I argue that minority students in these particular environments may not feel the pressure to agree with dominate, white perspectives of the Other. However, HBCU students were not immune from exoticizing Indians, as I show in my discussion surrounding their interests with Indian hair.

In Chapter 6, "Refocusing and Retooling: An Overview of Current Geography Educators' Attempts to Nuance Imagined Geographies," I describe how U.S. geography instructors approach issues of imagined geographies in their classrooms. I distinguish between two primary methods utilized by instructors, those applied inside the classroom (e.g. readings, visual aids, group discussions), and those they use outside classrooms (e.g. fieldtrips and fieldwork). I identify the strengths of these techniques, particularly as instructors use them in concert with one another to create nuanced perspectives of places

and people. However, I also evaluate the various omissions in my conversations that limit instructors' effectiveness in deconstructing imagined geographies of students, particularly in larger, lower-level courses. One exclusions included the incorporation of technology, particularly those that students readily engage with (e.g. social media). Another exclusion was instructors not actively or formally incorporating students' experiences as they relate to the formation of imagined geographies. Bearing in mind the influence these experiences have on imagined geographies (described in Chapter 5), I argue that pedagogical tools need to be in place to focus attention on both individual and collective imaged geographies of students.

Finally, in Chapter 7, "Pushing the Boundaries of Geographical Imaginations: PDPE as a Pedagogical Tool in Undergraduates Geography Classrooms," I provide a step-by-step demonstration and analysis of applying the PDPE project in assessing undergraduates' imagined geographies. I show the multiplicity of ways PDPE can assist students in interrogating their individual and collective perceptions of place, as well as how instructors are afforded numerous opportunities for teachable moments. Despite undergraduates initial discourses centered on stereotypes, they ultimately expressed interest in challenging the ways they constructed imagined geographies of India as they worked through the PDPE process. My findings suggest that, while some educators have an "ambitious task" deconstructing imagined geographies with younger students (Picton 2008, 247), given the right (safe) conditions, undergraduates will question their own imagined geographies and representations of India. These conditions included the comforts of speaking within a smaller group setting (as opposed to a large lecture classroom), and also students' realization that their peers often times had similar ideas and experiences constructing imagined geographies of India.

This produced enlivened and synergistic conversations among students that enabled critical self-evaluation to happen more fluidly. For example, while I described in Chapter 5 that particular student groups relied on missionaries to learn about India, as students worked through the PDPE process, they began to understand that much more existed within India than what was commonly reported to them from missionaries. Reflecting on these notions, one final-year student argued for contextualizing conversations and relationships with those who have been to other places, and specifically missionaries:

> And I think that some of us mentioned that we heard this from other people, and you have to get into context what that person was doing over there, because I know the couple of people that I mentioned were specifically over there doing mission stuff, so obviously they are not going to go over to the wealthy part of India, they are going to go to the part that needs the help. And so when you hear these stories, I think we generalize to think that that's all of India, but you have to keep in context why that person was there, what were they doing, what was their purpose. And that will tell you what that means at face value. (F4-PR-02)

Instructors need to use tools like PDPE in their classrooms so students have the opportunity to problematize the "face value" of information they gather about cultures. As Whalley et al. (2011, 390) urge us, geographers' curriculum should "live," "by this we mean ensuring that what we do and how we do it relates to student experience…and geography's broader social and economic importance by designing curricula that relate to…geography's social importance." I argue that students' various experiences played a pivotal role in the development of their respective imagined geographies. Therefore, this requires instructors to employ unique approaches to effectively deconstruct imagined geographies. The PDPE approach also responds to calls from other geographers for the creation of pedagogical

practices that are "tailored" to students' backgrounds and experiences – to give students multiple opportunities to describe and discuss their perceptions of place (Taylor 2014).

### Future Possibilities with PDPE and Research in Undergraduates' Imagined Geographies

The PDPE approach enabled me to explore, and more importantly for students to communicate and learn about, imagined geographies of a distant place. As each student was responsible for putting together their own PDPE project complete with images and short descriptions, it enabled them to have something to speak about during our small group discussions. This contrasts with typical classroom lecture/discussion settings where students may feel unsure or hesitant to share their own viewpoints or experiences. This project gave them *time* to think about their imagined geographies of a place and to consider the sources of information they rely on to construct such imagined places. In particular, it gave undergraduates the opportunity to critically examine the role popular culture mediums play to construct imagined geographies (Dittmer 2006, Conover and Miller 2014). As students reflect on their experiences and knowledge through the PDPE project, it moves them toward social transformations. But it can be transformative for educators too, openly listening to their students' experiences and perspectives, and considering their own constructions of place.

More generally, the impact of fieldwork on learning geography knowledge/skills/practices is also notable, something often encouraged by instructors I interviewed. Instructors can utilize PDPE as a field exercise to explore, for example, the cultural landscape, going beyond typical classroom activities (Fuller et al. 2006), engaging

with multiple places and sources based on individual differences, in order to reflect on their respective knowledge and experience (Boyle et al. 2007). Instructors may also modify their approach, as I did, allowing students to use images they find online to explore areas they might not have direct access to.

Although my particular research focused on how undergraduates construct, modify, and challenge geographic knowledge about a particular place, it may be applied to any geographic location (such as a city, country, or region) or concept (such as terrorism, global poverty, or urbanization). Asking students to think about their existing knowledge or perception of a place, group of people, or process can provide a valuable opportunity to further develop critical thinking skills. This approach assists instructors in unpacking stereotypes or misconceptions revealed through the PDPE project. One first-year student summarized the particular usefulness of PDPE:

> I think all of this shows that most of what we know about countries, and in this case India, but I think you can put a lot of different countries into that space, but a lot of what we know is stereotypical. Like we kind of have this perception, but it's not – when you look at all this, it's kind of like all the same thing, and I'm sure there is so much more that we don't know. And I think that you could, you could put like China, or Mexico – well, I've been to Mexico – but you could put a lot of different countries in there and it could be maybe think of… But, you know, I think for any country we have this perception of it that we get, and maybe it's from movies like that, or maybe just things that we've been told. But when we think about countries that are different, everything we have is kind of a more stereotypical generalization, um, and that's not necessarily a good thing (F1-LG-01).

Although Kurtz and Wood (2014) show how a PDPE project can be used within an upper-level, food geography classroom, I have demonstrated the flexibility with PDPE to address a

variety of topics or issues with both first and final-year students. Therefore, this pedagogical tool can be implemented across the geographical curriculum spectrum, from introductory to subfield courses.

Several areas of future research are also spurred on by my research here. One is to consider how to implement PDPE into larger classrooms of students. As I discussed in Chapter Seven, one possible avenue is to develop recitation sections to encourage small discussion groups, and studies could indicate the opportunities and limitations of this tool in those settings. Additionally, the opportunities and limitation for using PDPE as a reflexive tool in the field (e.g. fieldtrips or fieldwork) could be explored. I am also interested in the differences between students who use images retrieved from the internet and those students who take personal photographs. More specifically, research should address the emotion or attachment shown toward those images, and if this in turn makes their imagined geographies more resistant to challenges.

More broadly, researchers need to further explore how students at different university-types or experiences construct their imagined geographies. For example, based on my initial findings, a larger study might better understand whether various minority groups continue to place more positive attributes on a perceived Other than their white peers. Similarly, a specific study with black students and their imagined geographies of India could (prospectively) connect and expand current literature of black hair in an age of globalized commodification of Indian hair.

**Conclusion**

Toward the end of Chapter 2, I laid out several questions regarding the current educational gap that exists in the U.S. for geographic learning that takes places before students enter higher education: Do undergraduate students continue to utilize information presented in popular culture as a way to informally learn about other people and places, and if so, how might geography instructors in higher education have better opportunities to help students realize this process? I have addressed these two concerns here. First, I show how undergraduates overwhelmingly use informal learning through popular culture to construct and confirm their imagined geographies of a particular place and people – India. Second, and more importantly, I give a detailed account of using PDPE, a unique tool for geography instructors to employ in their classrooms to engage students in a process of understanding how they create and perpetuate imagined geographies.

Although I emphasize the need for students to deconstruct their imagined geographies, it is equally important that we help students *reconstruct* imagined geographies as well. At the very least, we must provide them the skills and tools by which to create a more nuanced understanding of the world around them. This reconstruction includes, among other things, encouraging students to build relationships with "others" and engage in specific types of opportunities to travel.

Reconstructing our perceptions and imaginations of places and people is not an easy task, nor has it ever been. But as I paraphrase Hugo of St. Victor (quoted in Said 1978, 259): The person who finds their homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; to whom every soil is as their native one is already strong; but they are perfect to whom the entire world is unique. Said (1978, 259) interprets this as deconstruction *and* reconstruction:

> The more one is able to leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.

Accordingly, I argue, that we must use our skills as geographers, as well as our positions as educators, to equip students with the capabilities and confidence of living in a world where the "dramatic boundaries" of imagined geographies are blurred with increased access to *diverse* information and stories. With recent attempts to restore these imaginative – and real – walls between us, encouraging our students to be empathetic, respective, and curious can only lead to a "truer vision" of the world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

RECRUITMENT FLYER FOR UNDERGRADUATES

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

1. Do you like taking pictures?

2. Do you want to think more about how we

IMAGINE distant places to be like?

3. Want to earn $20 and get some *FREE* food?

4. Are you in your FIRST-YEAR or in your FINAL- YEAR of study?

If you answered yes to these four questions, and you are interested in participating in an upcoming study, please contact Thomas Craig for more information. The study is limited to the first 8 students in either their first or final years of study who express interest. Must be 18 years old to participate.
Contact info: Thomas.craig@okstate.edu

## APPENDIX II

## ORIENTATION MEETING

(Turn on video and tape recorder.)

1. Welcome

[Introduce yourself and background, and then ask participants to go around the room and share their name, age, and major, before reviewing the following order of items to be presented/discussed.]

2. Purpose of Meeting and Project

The purpose of this meeting is to introduce you to the project that each of you has shown interest in. To overview, I will give a brief explanation of our goals together in this research project, and then I will give an outline of the topics we will cover in this meeting. To begin though, I want to encourage you to ask questions at any point during this meeting for clarifications you need or concerns you may have. There will be a time at the end too for any questions.

So why are we here? Well it helps to know what I am interested in, and how that relates to you. As both a geographer and an educator, I realize that we learn about other places and people, especially those that are far away from us, in a variety of ways. Particularly though, I am curious about the ways that undergraduates think about and visualize distant places. So to examine this relationship, we are going to use a unique method called Photovoice, which simply allows you to answer questions in part by using photography. Each of you will be able to take your own photographs, and then later, we will reconvene to discuss your photographs together in focus groups.

We will talk more about Photovoice and what it is and how it originated. We then will shift into the specific details or our project together, including expectations, ethical issues, and focus group information. I will then cover how to earn the incentive for participating in this project. Before officially being admitted to participate, we will need to go through a consent process, in which you will need to agree and sign a form. After you have done so, I will conclude by having each of you fill out a brief survey, and ask for any remaining questions.

3. Knowledge Inventory

Many of you may be wondering what "distant place" we may be talking about during this project. Well to alleviate some of that mystery, the country we will be considering here is that of India. Now, some of you may be racking your brains right now to think about what you know about India. And in fact, it would be good for us to take a few minutes here to consider what you know about that place. So, to keep ourselves accountable to things we know at this moment, I would like you to use the paper and pens provided to write down 3-5 things you know about India. These items can be as broad or specific as you like.

[Give participants time to complete their lists. Ask them to put their names at the top of the page. Avoid giving students any ideas about what to write. After participants complete their lists, take a photograph of each one in order to keep a record and in case participants lose their lists.]

This list will provide two important services. First, it will give you something to work with as you begin this project, by matching the knowledge you write down to photographs that represent that knowledge – or what you believe is the source of that particular knowledge. Second, it will act as an accountability factor for me, to ensure that you are taking pictures and representing knowledge that you have at this very moment, rather than what you may "learn" in the days leading up to our focus group meetings.

4. What is Photovoice?

In the mid-1990s, Photovoice started in the medical field as a means to examine women's health issues in rural China. Since then though, many other disciplines have learned to use Photovoice. Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method used to better engage with various populations to research issues connected to those groups and communities. Participants in Photovoice projects use cameras in order to visually document their answers to a series of research questions. Additionally, participants include titles, small captions, or full paragraph descriptions to indicate how the photograph helps to answer the question(s). After each participant has had some time to take their photographs, they meet collectively to view and discuss each person's respective work and viewpoints. These group discussions spur the participants to develop ways in which to improve their community, and potentially even pass along ideas to various stake holders.

Photovoice has been used with undergraduates in a number of ways, including campus health issues, such as the development of a smoking ban, but most of them tend to be used as a way to engage with students in classrooms. Again, it has been successfully used in various disciplines and departments, such as physical science and psychology. For our aim here, we will use Photovoice to better understand how all of you learn and think about a particular distant place.

5. Photovoice Expectations

Each of you will be expected to take your own photographs, either with phone cameras or other digital cameras. You will have approximately two weeks to complete this task. You will be asked to submit no more than ten photographs to represent the sources of the knowledge you just wrote down on your respective lists.

After uploading your photographs to a word processing document, you will also need to include a brief description about why or how this photograph answered this question for you. All the photographs and descriptions should be in one electronic file.

You will be expected to send your document to me at least three days before our next meeting (e.g. focus groups). The best way will be to email me this file, although other arrangements can be made (such as a USB flash drive).

6. <u>Photovoice Example</u>

Next, I know that you may be still wondering, "Well, what do I take pictures of?" So, by way of example, I want us to go through a quick simulation using a totally different topic. If I would say, "What do you know about the Vietnam War," each of you could come up with a list of things you know about that event.

So what are some things we might write down?

[Make a list, either on paper or on a whiteboard if available.]

Now, how might you represent these pieces of knowledge in terms of taking a photograph? Essentially, you will want to take a picture of *how* you learned that knowledge. If you cannot remember when or where or why you learned that, think about it in this way, what is *still* informing that knowledge that makes it true to you?

Remember, there is no right or wrong answer necessarily here, and what one person might take a picture of for a piece of knowledge may be a totally different picture for another person. In fact, this is the point of writing up a brief description with each photograph, to give your reasoning why the photograph represents your knowledge.

[Continue with this through several examples until participants feel comfortable with the process.]

Are there any further questions regarding the Photovoice process?

7. <u>Ethical and Safety Issues and Photography</u>

With how popular it is to take photographs today, especially with it being so convenient and constant, we might not think of some of the ethical or safety issues with taking photographs, especially photographs of other people. So here are a couple of things I would like you to think about when you are taking you photographs.

First, make sure that you only take photographs in places that you feel safe and comfortable.

Second, if you take a photograph (or screenshot) of something online, please make sure to reference where the image is coming from (e.g. a website).

Third, if you want to take a picture of people, you may do so ONLY IF it is a large group and it is difficult to distinguish who is in the photograph. If you want to take more up close or personal photographs, you MUST receive permission from that individual or individuals.

The best way to do this is to get something in writing from them that says it is ok to take and use their photograph. If any faces are recognizable in the photos, they will be masked in any reports or publications of the results of this research, unless you have acquired photo release permission. Also, if you are taking a picture of another non-human object, for example a building, but people are in the photograph, you do not need to ask their permission.

8. Focus Group Information

After this meeting, you will be given several weeks to complete your photography. I will keep in contact with you via email to make sure that you are aware of impending deadlines and our focus groups meetings.

You will need to send your photographs and descriptions to me via email as an attached document BEFORE our focus group meeting. This will give me time to print off each participant's photographs and descriptions to bring along to the meeting.

We will meet in two different focus groups: one will be held for first year students, and the other for final year students. I will provide food at these focus groups. [Work with students here to determine a best possible time and date for everyone.] The time and date of these focus groups will be relayed to you via email. The focus group will give each of you an opportunity to share some of your photographs. Additionally, you will be able to work as a group to think more critically about these photographs as they represent a distant place. These meetings will be audibly and visually recorded.

9. Incentives

As a means to thank you for participating in this project, you will earn a $20 VISA prepaid cash card. In order to qualify, you must complete each part of the project, including attending this meeting, agreeing to the consent form, filling out a survey, completing your photographs and descriptions, sending those photographs and descriptions to me electronically, and participating in the focus group. At the end of the focus group meeting, I will hand out your cash cards.

In addition, every participant that completes the project will be entered into a raffle to win one of two mini tablets. I will randomly draw two winners from participants from all six sites after I have completed my visits, and notify winners via email and/or phone. The tablets will be shipped to an address provided by the winners.

10. Consent Process

[Please refer to the consent form. Read through and ask for any questions/concerns before participants sign the form.]

11. Surveys

Now that you have completed the consent process, you can complete the first part of the project – filling out the survey. These surveys will give me some general background on your demographics – for example your age, year in school, and major – as well as some other general questions about your travel experience, relevant coursework, and media consumption.

[Hand out surveys and pens and give time for participants to complete them.]

12. Conclusion/Questions

I really appreciate your time by listening during this meeting. The goal of this meeting was to introduce you to this project, specifically for you to become familiar with Photovoice, as well as the various components of this project.

This concludes our meeting. Thank you for having interest in the project. At this time, if you have additional questions or concerns, please feel free to share them.

13. Materials and supplies for orientation meeting:

- Talking Points Guide
- 1 audio recorder (extra batteries)
- 1 video recorder (with plug)
- Notebook for note-taking
- Contact cards with email address & phone number
- Consent form copies (2 copies per participant)
- Survey copies
- Paper for knowledge inventory
- Pens
- Snacks

APPENDIX III

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

**Project Title: Constructing our Imagined Geographies of India**

**Investigator/Facilitator**

Thomas R. Craig, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Geography at Oklahoma State University.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore how we think and learn about a distant place, specifically India.

**What to Expect**

After attending an introductory meeting about the purpose and outline of the Photovoice project, you will be asked to complete a brief survey about yourself (questions concerning background and demographics). You then will be asked to take photographs according to your knowledge about India. You will also supply a short written description/caption for each photograph giving your reason behind taking each photograph. Photographs and captions will be compiled in electronic format and sent to the investigator (e.g. email). Finally, you will participate in a focus group to discuss your and others photographs.

1) **Face-to-face orientation/informational meeting (1 hour).** This will involve completing a survey and discussing 1) which pictures are acceptable/ethical, 2) electronic photo submission process, 3) the follow-up focus group session process and 4) the timeline for overall participation. This meeting will be visually and audibly recorded.

2) **Taking photographs and electronic submission.** You will have approximately two (2) weeks to complete this task. You will be asked to submit no more than ten (10) photographs to respond to the following questions:

   **What do you know about the country of India?**

   You and the project facilitator will decide the best way for photo submission (i.e. email or digital storage device, such as USB flash drive, if necessary). If any faces are recognizable in the photos, they will be masked in any reports or publications of the results of this research, unless you have acquired photo release permission.

3) **Face-to-face focus group (2 hours).** Focus groups will be used to discuss the meanings or stories behind photos that you take. This meeting will be visually and audibly recorded.

**Risks**

There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Benefits**

The results of this study will lead to a better understanding of how people learn about distant places. This will help educators in higher education in serving students by understanding what is valued, the learning processes, and how to improve institutionalized schooling based on social and cultural influence.

**Compensation**

Upon participating in and completing all three of these phases, you will be given a $20 VISA cash card. Food will be provided at both face-to-face meetings.

**Your Rights**

Participation in the current research activity is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate and may stop or withdraw from the activity at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. If you do withdraw, I will remove all statements made in transcripts or any notes.

**Confidentiality**

The signed copy of this form will be collected and stored separately from all study information. Your responses to both the survey and your photos and descriptions are confidential. During the study a code number will be used to connect all of your photos and study materials together. No names or other identifying information will be attached to your materials and only aggregate data will be reported. Once all data are collected, the codes with any identifying information will be shredded. The data will be securely stored electronically with no names in a locked file cabinet in one researcher's office. Only the researcher will have access to the information.

The OSU IRB has the authority to inspect records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

**Contacts**

Please feel free to contact the investigator/facilitator at Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK 74078) if you have questions or concerns about this research project. Investigator/Facilitator: Thomas Craig, Department of Geography, 405-744-7245, thomas.craig@okstate.edu

For information on participants' rights, contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

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I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

________________________________________

**Printed Name of Participant**

________________________________________ ____________________

**Signature of Participant** **Date**

APPENDIX IV

STUDENT SURVEY

<table>
<tr><td>Name<br>(First and Last)</td><td colspan="6"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Hometown<br>(City, State)</td><td colspan="6"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Age</td><td></td><td>Gender</td><td colspan="4">Female Male Transgender Rather not respond</td></tr>
<tr><td>Academic Status<br>(circle one)</td><td colspan="2">FIRST YEAR FINAL YEAR</td><td>Academic Major</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Ethnic Identification<br>(please check a box)</td><td></td><td colspan="2">American Indian</td><td></td><td colspan="2">White/Non-Hispanic</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Asian/Pacific Islander</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Other:</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Black/African American</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Multiethnic:</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Hispanic/Latino</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Rather not respond</td></tr>
<tr><td>Which of the following best describes what you feel like your family's economic situation is?</td><td colspan="6">Little to no income Low income Middle Class Upper middle class Wealthy class</td></tr>
<tr><td>Please list any courses you have taken that you believe relate in any way to the study of culture or diversity.</td><td colspan="6"></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Have you traveled outside of the United States? If so, please answer the associated questions.<br><br>YES<br><br>NO</td><td>If so, when did you travel?</td><td colspan="5"></td></tr>
<tr><td>If so, where did you travel to?</td><td colspan="5"></td></tr>
<tr><td>If so, how long were you gone?</td><td colspan="5"></td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Have you lived outside of the United States? If so, please answer the associated questions.<br><br>YES<br><br>NO</td><td>If so, when did you live abroad?</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>If so, where did you live abroad?</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>If so, how long did you live abroad?</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>On average, how many hours do you spend watching television or movies per week? (circle one)</td><td colspan="3">Over 20 hours per week<br>10 and 20 hours per week<br>Less than 10 hours per week<br>I do not watch TV/Movies</td></tr>
<tr><td>How often do you read/watch news from a major media outlet on television or online (e.g. CNN, FOX News, MSNBC, ABC, BBC, NPR, Yahoo!)? (circle one)</td><td colspan="3">Everyday<br>Every other day<br>Once a week<br>Never</td></tr>
<tr><td>Which news outlet or outlets do you rely upon most? (circle as many as necessary)</td><td colspan="3">CNN<br>ABC<br>MSNBC<br>BBC<br>FOX News<br>NPR<br>Yahoo!<br>Other (Please list):</td></tr>
</table>

APPENDIX V

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

## Introduction

1. *Welcome*

[Introductions and circulate sign-in sheet.]

[Go over "Consent Process" (below)]

## Consent Process

Thank you for participating in this focus group. I am interested in hearing from all of you about some of the photographs you have taken, to discuss some broader questions and ideas about how we imagine distant places to be like. First, I wanted review some basic guidelines for this focus group and your rights as a participant within it.

- The purpose of this study is to have an opportunity to share your photographs and viewpoints about the knowledge we have about India, with an emphasis on your experiences in thinking about this distant place. More specifically, we will discuss the ways that we identify and imagine India both individually and collectively.

- Anything you say during this focus group will be kept confidential. Your name will not be attached to any transcript. The content though of this focus group will be made public in the form of a dissertation defense and possible presentations at various conferences. Additionally, this content may be published within various manuscripts in the future.

- I will be recording our conversation, both audibly and visually. This will assist me in retaining your ideas and opinions during our discussion. Again, no names will be attached to my transcriptions of the audio and visual tapes.

- You may choose not to respond to any question, and you may stop participation in the focus group at any time.

- It is important to keep information shared during this focus group confidential, and so I ask that each participant respect all other participants' information.

- If you have questions or concerns after you have completed this focus group, you can contact me via email or phone, which I will provide to each of you after this meeting. You may also contact the IRB office at Oklahoma State University if you have any further concerns or questions.

- These rights were explained to you now, as well as in the previous consent form you signed at the first meeting. If you still agree to these guidelines and would like to participate in this focus group, please indicate by saying yes.

1. *Explanation of the Focus Group Process*
   Has participated in a focus group before? So that everyone is on the same page, I will review the purpose of this focus group and how it will work.

   *About focus groups*
   - I learn from you.
   - I am not trying to achieve consensus about any particular topic, but rather I'm gathering information from different perspectives and experiences.
   - The reason I am conducting a focus group is to gather in-depth information from a variety of people in a relatively short amount of time. This allows me to understand a variety of thoughts about and reactions to topics we discuss.

   *Logistics*
   - The focus group will last up to two hours.
   - Please feel free to move around if needed.
   - Please use notepads to write down ideas, questions, etc. while others are speaking.
   - Write your name on the name tents and place in front of you.
   - If you need to use the bathroom, you can find it ____________ (provide location).

2. *Ground Rules*
   I'd know like for the group to come up with some ground rules for everyone as we participate in this discussion. [After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.]
   - Everyone should participate.
   - Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential.
   - Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations.
   - Turn off/silence cell phones if possible.
   - Be respectful of others opinions and thoughts.

3. Ask if there are any questions or concerns before getting started, and address those questions.

4. **Turn on Tape Recorder AND Video Recorder**

5. *Introductions*

I would like to have everyone introduce themselves by just giving your name, as well as your academic major.

[Note: The discussion should now begin, making sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and don't move too quickly.  Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.]

**"Ice Breaker"**

[Begin by showing a brief clip from the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (the "exotic" dinner scene, about five minutes long).]

We are going to watch a brief clip from a film that takes place in India. While watching the clip, jot down notes to yourself about India. After the clip, we'll discuss your notes, and as a group, create a list of points about how India is represented.

Question 1: What, from the film, did you already know? Did anything connect with pre-existing knowledge you have?

Question 2: What did y

[Save this list for later in the discussion.]

**Main Discussion Areas and Questions**

<u>Part 1: Selecting Photographs</u>
[*Purpose*: The process of selecting photographs has participants choose photographs they think reflect their knowledge and imaginings of India. They choose the photographs they want to be included as Photovoice evidence and photographs they feel are representative of their learning experiences.]

Our discussion today will be broken down into three parts. The first part of this will be to select some of the photographs you took for this project. So I first need to give each of you your respective photographs, which I have printed out onto single sheets of paper with your descriptions.

[Hand out the photographs.]

I would like each of you to sort through your photographs and select at least three, but no more than five, of what you think are your best photographs and descriptions. What I mean by "best" here is which photographs you think represents what each of you knows best or most about India. I'll give you some time to go through these individually, allowing you to refresh your memory not only by reviewing the photographs you took, but also opportunity to read through the descriptions you wrote out. When it seems as though everyone is done, then we can proceed into the second part.

Part 2: Contextualizing

[*Purpose*: Participants contextualize the photographs by telling stories about what the photographs mean to them in terms of what the know about India. They tell their stories through dialogue with group members and through the captions they provided for each photograph. It is during the dialogue and guided discussion that participants can voice their individual and group experiences.]

The second part of our time here is going to be a time to share your respective photographs. In essence, this is a time for you to tell the story behind the photograph. As you share your photograph and your stories, think about these questions:

1. What do you see in this photograph?

2. What is being represented in this photograph?

3. How does this relate to your knowledge of India?

[Ask for a volunteer to begin, making sure that everyone has an opportunity to share their photographs and stories. If there are no volunteers, then begin on your left and move in a clockwise motion around to each of the participants. After each participant is done, follow up by asking the rest of the group these questions.]

1. Does anyone else relate to these photographs?

2. Does anyone have any similar or dissimilar photographs?

Part 3: Codifying

[*Purpose*: This is a process of identifying and sorting data as a group into categories of topics, issues, or themes. When codifying an issue of concern, for example stereotyping other cultures, it is important that the concern targeted for action is one that can realistically be achieved. The group will need to determine realistic outcomes and desires for learning about distant places.]

In this final part, I would like you as a group to sort the images we have discussed just now. As you sort the images into stacks, you should work together to create a list that describes each of the stacks, including why you think they go together. How you group them is totally up to all of you, as there is no "correct" or "particular" way to sorting them. You can have as many stacks as you like, as well as many or few photographs within each stack.

[Take notes on how participants work on this task collectively and individually. Once the photographs have been sorted by the group, go through the following questions:]

Now I would like to ask some questions about these stacks you have made, and anyone can answer:

1. Why did you decide on these stacks?

2. What do these stacks represent about India?

3. What strengths are present within these stacks as "sources" of knowledge?

4. What weaknesses are present within these stacks as "sources" of knowledge?

**Conclusion**

We now will return to the original list of points made after we viewed the scene from *Indiana Jones*.

[Go over the list.]

1. How might this list change given our experience here?

2. How can we use this experience to better our understanding not only of India, but the cultures of other distant places?

I really appreciate everyone's participation in this discussion. The goal of this focus group was to further explore some of our personal and collective experiences as we learn about distant places like India. My hope is that by going through this exercise you have had an opportunity to think more complexly about the ways you construct imagined geographies of distant places through various sources.

This concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your experiences and opinions with me. Please leave all the materials, including name tents, notepads, and pens, so that I may collect them. Again, if you have additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me using my email address or by phone (hand out contact cards). As a sign of appreciation, please accept these $20 Visa cash cards for participating in this study.

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***Materials and supplies for focus groups:***

- Sign-in sheet
- Name tents
- Pads & Pencils for each participant
- Each participant's photographs and descriptions
- Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator
- 1 audio recorder (extra batteries)
- 1 video recorder (and plug)
- Notebook for note-taking
- Contact cards with email address & phone number

APPENDIX VI

INSTRUCTOR CONSENT

**Project Title: Witnessing and Complicating Undergraduates' Imagined Geographies of Distant Places**

**Investigator**
Thomas R. Craig, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Geography at Oklahoma State University.

**Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to explore how geography (and related fields) instructors witness – and attempt to nuance – undergraduates' constructed and imagined geographies of distant places. This is part of a larger study with undergraduates to have a better understanding of how they construct and modify their individual and collective imagined geographies, and how geographers may be able to create active and engaging ways to have students think more complexly about distant places.

**What to Expect**
You will participate in a semi-structured interview for about one hour. The topics covered during this interview will examine your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom, with particular emphasis in the ways you have witnessed students' imagined geographies of distant places. Additionally, we will discuss the sources of these imagined geographies. Finally, you will be asked about the ways you have attempted to nuance these geographies. This interview will be audibly recorded.

**Risks**
There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Benefits**
The results of this study will lead to a better understanding of how undergraduates' project imagined geographies within coursework, as well as opportunities to discuss potential ways to encourage students to think more complexly about distant peoples, places, and cultures. This will help educators in higher education in serving students by understanding what is valued, the learning processes, and how to improve institutionalized schooling based on socio-cultural influence.

**Your Rights**
Participation in the current research activity is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate and may stop or withdraw from the activity at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. If you do withdraw, the audio recording and any notes will be destroyed and not included in this study.

**Confidentiality**

The signed copy of this form will be collected and stored separately from all study information. No names or other identifying information will be attached to your materials and only aggregate data will be reported. The data will be securely stored electronically with no names in a locked file cabinet in one researcher's office. Only the researchers will have access to the information.

The OSU IRB has the authority to inspect records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures.

**Contacts**

Please feel free to contact the investigator/facilitator at Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK 74078) if you have questions or concerns about this research project.
Investigator: Thomas Craig, Department of Geography, 405-744-7245, thomas.craig@okstate.edu
For information on participants' rights, contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

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I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

________________________________________

**Printed Name of Participant**

________________________________________ ____________________

**Signature of Participant** **Date**

APPENDIX VII

INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Introduction**

1. *Welcome*

[Introduction]

Thank you for participating in this interview. I am interested in hearing about your experiences with undergraduates and their imagined geographies of distant places, as well as your attempts to challenge those imagined peoples and places. However, I would like to go over some basic information about this interview and your rights as a participant within it.

[Go over Consent Process via consent form]

2. *Explanation of the Interview Process*

   *About interviews*
   - I learn from you.
   - I am not trying to achieve consensus about any particular topic, but rather I'm gathering information from different perspectives and experiences.

   *Logistics*
   - The interview will last up to one hour.
   - If you need to stop the interview at any time, please feel free to do so.

3. Do you have any further questions or concerns before getting started?

4. **Turn on Tape Recorder**

5. Introductions

[For the recorder, please have the participant say their name and job description/title.]

[The interview should now begin, making sure to give a participant time to think before answering the questions and don't move too quickly. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.]

**Discussion Questions**

1. Please provide your academic and professional background?

   *Probes*
   - What would you consider to be your specialty areas in your discipline?
   - What are your research interests?
   - What is your teaching experience? What types of courses have you taught?

2. How would you define the term "imagined geography"?

   *Probes*
   - In what ways are imagined geographies constructed?
   - What do you think are the greatest contributors to students' imagined geographies?
   - Does a relationship exist between imagined geographies and cultural stereotypes? If so, in what ways?

3. How have you witnessed and experience student imagined geographies in class?

   *Probes*
   - Do you see these imagined geographies projected during discussions? Papers/projects? Exams? Do you notice them using them more in one way or another?
   - How have you experienced students imagined geographies of places both near (within the U.S.) and far?

4. In what ways have you tried to nuance imagined geographies?

   *Probes*
   - Do you provide any extra materials (e.g. films, books, articles) to assist in this process? If yes, how so?

- Do you assign any projects or homework assignments to nuance students' imagined geographies? If so, can you explain?

5. Are students' imagined geographies influenced by globalization? How so?

   *Probes*

   - Does globalization help breakdown imagined geographies in any ways?
   - Does globalization reinforce imagined geographies in any ways?
   - How might students living in a globalized world (technologically advanced) have better opportunities today to think more complexly about cultures other than their own?

6. Is there anything else you would like to say about this topic?

**Conclusion**

I appreciate your time by participating in this interview. The goal of this interview was to explore some of your experiences as an educator in terms of witnessing students' imagined geographies. My hope is that by conducting these interviews, in tandem with completing focus groups with current undergraduates, that we can have a better understanding of how students construct and modify their knowledge of distant places.

This concludes our interview. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and opinions with me. Again, if you have additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me using my email address or by phone (hand out contact cards). If you would like to see a copy of the transcript from this interview, please let me know.

**Materials and supplies for interviews**

- Interview Discussion Guide
- 1 audio recorder (extra batteries)
- Notebook for note-taking
- Contact cards with email address & phone number

VITA

Thomas Robert Craig

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: CHALLENGING U.S. UNDERGRADUATES CONSTRUCTIONS OF INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES TO (RE)IMAGINE THE OTHER

Major Field: Geography

Biographical:

Education:

Bachelor of Science in Education, Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska (2006); Master of Arts in Geography, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio (2008).

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Geography at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2018.

Experience:

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University (August 2013 – May 2018).
Research Assistant, Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University (August 2014 – July 2015).
Social Studies Teacher, Sierra Lutheran High School, Carson City, Nevada (August 2008 – June 2013).
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Geography and Planning, The University of Akron (June 2007 – June 2008).
Graduate Assistant, Department of Geography and Planning, The University of Akron (January 2007 – May 2008).

Professional Memberships:

American Association of Geographers (AAG)
National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE)
Gamma Theta Upsilon (GTU)