2023

It's in the Design: Student Perceptions of Intercultural Interactions in Online Communication Classrooms

Darius Lana
University of Central Florida

IT'S IN THE DESIGN: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION CLASSROOMS

by

DARIUS LANA
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2011
M.A. University of Florida, 2015

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Nicholson School of Communication & Media
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2023

Major Professors: Deanna Sellnow and Jennifer Sandoval

ABSTRACT

This study identifies how intercultural interaction takes place in online communication courses within higher education. Radically politicized efforts to remove discussion around identity and difference from education and increased enrollment in online courses has raised a concern regarding the degree to which diversity, equity, and inclusion goals are being met in college classrooms generally and online sections specifically. This study identified how current pedagogical content, structure, and delivery of online communication courses may impact intercultural interaction and interaction. Findings indicate a need to address the design of online communication courses to better meet the desired intercultural interaction of the students that enroll in them. This research expands how Critical Race Theory can be used to understand how the design of online communication courses may contribute to bias. This study identifies opportunities for Critical Communication Pedagogy as a means to improve intercultural interaction around issues of identity and difference by enhancing social presence and a positive communication climate and community in online courses.

Keywords: intercultural interaction, online education, difference, identity, critical race theory, critical communication pedagogy

To Constance, Towana, and Jessica. The greatest teachers of my life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was only able to take shape because Black women risked harm to write and publish their perspectives on race, identity, and difference. It is because of their works, that I've been able to complete my own. Specifically, I'd like to acknowledge: Isabel Wilkerson, bell hooks, Ijeoma Oluo, Beverly Tatum, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Patricia Hill Collins, and Brenda Allen.

I would also like to acknowledge my cohort. There are no instructions for being the inaugural cohort of a new program during a global pandemic. During a time of isolation and uncertainty, you all gave me the community needed to persist through this program.

I would like to thank my Dissertation Committee: Dr. Stephen A. Spates and Dr. Michael G. Strawser. Their expertise, feedback, and willingness to collaborate truly added to the study.

A special thanks to my sister-in-law, Caitlyn, for her assistance in sourcing the racial and gender identity of all the authors cited in this study.

To my family and friends, thank you for listening to my dissertation topic endlessly and for the encouragement and support in the pursuit of my passions.

Lastly, I cannot overstate my appreciation for the guidance and grace of my co-chairs. Dr. Jennifer Sandoval and Dr. Deanna Sellnow. The patience, unwavering support, and encouragement to really explore this idea gave me the confidence needed to push through. Both have shown me that there's merit to my work and that my perspectives are valid. Dr. J. and Dr. D., this study doesn't happen without both of your expertise. I will be forever grateful for your mentorship, friendship, leadership, and kindness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

In June of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of people risked contracting the deadly virus to participate in protests about the enduring inequitable treatment of Black people in the United States (Silverstein, 2021). The highly publicized violent murders of three Black Americans, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, each served as catalysts for what would be worldwide demonstrations contesting the racial injustice and police brutality against Black citizens. Repeated exposure to the reality of the Black American lived experience during a country-wide lockdown due to a global pandemic forced many to acknowledge that the racism, hate, and bigotry that plagued the United States since its inception was still prominent and pervasive.

In February of 2020, 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was gunned down and murdered by three White men who claimed that Arbery appeared suspicious when he was looking at a house under construction in the neighborhood (Fausset, 2022). Two months passed with little action taken by local law enforcement and no consequences for the murderers. A video taken by one of his murderers surfaced showing the modern-day lynching of Arbery. It was not until this video went viral that investigators decided to revisit the case, even though they initially stated that "there was no need to arrest them" (Adams, 20021). A month after Ahmaud Arbery's death, Breonna Taylor, a Black medical worker was murdered by Louisville police when they raided her home. The 26-year-old was shot and killed after police aimed and fired their guns blindly into her apartment while carrying out a 'no-knock' warrant (Oppel, Taylor & Bogel-Burroughs, 2021). It was eventually determined that the police had failed to perform the raid correctly as the suspect for their case was already in custody and they had left Taylor wounded and without

medical attention after the shooting. Similar to Arbery's murder, progress in the case was slow and lacked accountability or consequence for the wrongful death of Taylor (Wood, 2020).

The brutal killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin was ultimately the tipping point that sparked global outrage after the live video streaming his horrendous murder went viral. The video showed Chauvin, a White police officer, unlawfully kneeling on the neck of Floyd, a Black man, while he was handcuffed, for at least 8 minutes and 15 seconds, killing him while in police custody (Hill et al., 2022). Even with a live-streamed video of Floyd's murder available for the world to see, it still took four days to charge Chauvin (Deliso, 2021). The murderers of these modern-day lynchings (Brown, 2020) were eventually charged. However, it is the virality of the video of the Floyd and Arbery killings on social media platforms during a time where many were confined to their homes and devices, that helped spark a nation-wide response against the injustice of Black Americans. While the filming and distribution of murders should never be necessary for justice to be served, the viral videos consumed on platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok and Facebook, did have an impact on how society perceives racism and police brutality in the U.S., and contributed to the actions that followed these deaths (Solano & Robson, 2020). The unique circumstance of a national lockdown led—at least in part—to increased social media exposure of the racial injustice experienced by Black Americans and strengthened the empathy of non-Black persons.

Frustrated by the inability to hold police accountable and a blatant disregard for Black lives, protests erupted immediately following the video of Chauvin killing Floyd. Unforeseen however, were the scale and diversity of the protests that took place. Clearly, these protests were different. During the height of the pandemic, more than 8,700 demonstrations across 74 countries

protesting the treatment of Black lives took place according to a report by Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2020).

A highly contagious virus with no vaccine meant that many who were not protesting the inequitable treatment of Black life in person were probably still following its developments on media outlets. While these protests were taking place, the pandemic continued to spread. School buildings were closed to curtail spreading of the virus and nearly all students moved to online learning. Similarly, most corporations sent employees home to work remotely, and sports were heavily reduced or placed on hold altogether leaving little to distract Americans from reality. Suddenly, Americans' routines shifted in a way that forced them to acknowledge the injustices happening right in front of them and, for some, to encourage participation. Void of soccer practices, happy hours, and church gatherings, time was filled with significant increases in news and social media consumption (Adgate, 2020). In some ways, the pandemic lockdown seemed to make the need for change regarding racial inequities and racial injustice glaringly transparent.

Continuous news coverage on social media platforms of these racial injustices coupled with first-hand accounts by those experiencing them strengthened the credibility of the Black American plight and cultivated new interaction amongst those of different racial groups. As many people remained physically isolated in their homes due to COVID-19 restrictions, they sought social connection to their families, friends, and communities through Web 2.0 technological affordances (Pezzullo, 2022, p. 158). For example, the social media platform, Tik Tok, which saw 180% growth in school-aged Generation Z[1] users (Ceci, 2022) and an overall

[1] Post-millennial generation, commonly referred to as Generation Z are persons born from 1997 to 2012, age 11 to 26 in the year 2023 (Fry & Parker, 2020).

increase of 75% to 53.5 million weekly average users during the summer of 2020 (Koetsier, 2020), quickly became the center for young activist to discuss racial injustice (Allyn, 2020). The hashtag #blacklivesmatter trended on Tik Tok generating more than 4.9 billion views. Non-White users and their allies emphasized educating others on being vulnerable about their identity and the marginalization of it, protesting inequitable treatment, and building a community of support (Janfaza, 2020). The platform gained much of its summer 2020 traction by mirroring the social and political positions of Generation Z (Allyn, 2020) which has consistently made-up 60% of the total user base (Muliadi, 2020). More racially and ethnically diverse than all previous generations in the United States with 48% identifying as non-White[2] (Fry & Parker, 2020), Generation Z has displayed a strong civic engagement with a deep connection to the issue of racial injustice. This increased interaction and understanding of the fight toward racial equity fostered empathy and led some White Americans to take action, which resulted in the most diverse racial justice protests since the Civil Rights Movement (Silverstein, 2021). Just two years after this mass mobilization, however, White American support for Black lives has seemingly faded back to pre-2020 racial injustice protest levels (Williams, 2021).

Though not considerable, there has been some progress to address systemic racism in the United States. Attempts to reform federal, state, and local police policies by governments (Ray, 2022), hiring of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specialists to facilitate conversations about race by some companies (Pandey, 2021), and the removal of confederate statues by some states (Vigdor & Victor, 2021) seemingly stemmed from summer 2020 protests of racial injustice and

[2] Generation Zs in 2018: 52% White, 25% Hispanic, 14% Black, 6% Asian, and 4% Some Other Race (Fry & Parker, 2020).

police brutality. However, retrenchment has derailed sustained progress toward racial equity in the United States. Concerted efforts by conservative media outlets and Republican lawmakers aimed to suppress the opportunity for increased understanding of the racial disparities levied on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOCs)[3] and, more broadly, any people and groups that identify in any way other than cisgender. Under the facade of "race neutrality," Republicans in office have banned more than 1,600 books about race and identity (Gunn, 2022), created dire consequences for educators that appear to address race or identity in the classroom (Izaguirre, 2022; Pendharkar, 2021), and punished corporations for supporting the equitable rights of these groups (Thompson, 2022). All of this at a time when the largest and most racially and ethnically diverse population, GenZers, are school-aged.

Attacks on inclusive education that attempts to both acknowledge and honor the lived experiences of those not White, straight, and male is not new. The periods after Reconstruction, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, *Roe v. Wade,* and *Obergefell v. Hodges* all serve as timestamps in American history where the suppression of empathy through legislation removed opportunities to sustain progress. There is an overwhelming need to avoid the retrenchment that comes after mobilization and reform. White women, BIPOCs, and LGBTQIA+ people in the United States are currently seeing their constitutional rights severely reduced and even removed altogether. Jim Crow laws, exclusionary zoning, and voter literacy tests, are scary reminders that the precedent for the restraining of certain 'inalienable rights' has already been set.

[3] While the term "BIPOC" is used throughout the study, the author acknowledges and agrees that there's no consensus on its use. Language is complex and there's no accepted universal term agreed upon when it comes to discussions on race.

The U.S. education system has been singled out due, in part, to the recognition of its ability to break this mobilization, reform, and retrenchment cycle through facilitated classroom discussions designed to improve understanding of one another (Oluo, 2020). Often referred to as intercultural interaction, this type of communication can come from (a) the educational content and (b) interaction among peer groups and instructors of different identities, culture backgrounds, and races; intercultural interaction creates the opportunity for critical thinking to foster the empathy needed to break hegemonic power structures (hooks, 1994). Similarly, Bell (1992) said "education leads to enlightenment. Enlightenment opens the way to empathy. Empathy foreshadows reform" (p.150). This view is supported within the communication discipline leveraging a critical communication pedagogical approach to instruction. Critical Communication Pedagogy (CCP) asks instructors to situate often marginalized perspectives (White women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+) in relation to the cultural and socioeconomic power structures. CCP calls for a learning environment that allows for the facilitation of a discussion that seeks to identify the ways sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, and many other forms of oppression are addressed in the classroom (Fassett & Warren, 2010). These learning environments become even more paramount as students today are on the receiving-end of the backlash of policies that suppress the facilitation of these discussions.

The limitations by state governments on race and identity conversation in schools has largely focused on brick-and-mortar, primary and secondary schools and classrooms (Izzaguire, 2022). Introductions to these topics are likely to occur in these settings due to the repeated interaction amongst diverse racial groups. Additional efforts by Republican-led state legislatures to falsely position Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a means by which to indoctrinate students and

label every White person a racist (Kendi, 2022), is actively leading to university educators being similarly restricted (Gaudiano, 2022; Golden, 2023). CRT, a graduate-level study and legal framework, is used to understand how systems of racial oppression were first established and are upheld still today and does not focus on biases an individual could harbor about a racial group (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). The Republican lawmakers' manufactured claims of Critical Race Theory's impact in schools will leave K-12 and higher education heavily reliant on the learners to interact and discuss race and identity on their own without curriculum, content, diverse authors of texts, and other classroom dynamics to consider.

Educators in non-brick-and-mortar school settings could be more challenged, as far less empirical research has been published about how online pedagogies serve students of different races, genders, religions, or cultural backgrounds (e.g., Hannon & D'Netto, 2007; Shlossberg & Cunningham, 2016). The need for increased understanding will continue to build as the emergency online learning implemented during COVID-19 has shifted to sustained asynchronous and synchronous online education formats post-pandemic (Lederman, 2021).

Synchronous learning requires learner(s) and instructor(s) to interact or engage on the education topic at the same time, while asynchronous learning environments do not (Sun & Chen, 2016; Moore & Kearsley, 2011). Asynchronous learning is considered flexible for both learner and instructor, as engagement is facilitated through discussion boards, assignments, e-mail communication, and other forms of mediated communication (Hrastinsk, 2008). In a 2018 study, the researchers discovered evidence of race and gender bias in asynchronous or online, self-paced learning courses, noting partiality to White males by instructors and student groups (Baker, Dee, Evans & John, 2018). Additional research is warranted to bolster conclusions from

that study though to learn how intercultural interaction manifests in online learning environments and the role communication has in these pursuits.

This study explores how intercultural interaction takes place within online learning environments by leveraging both the critical communication pedagogical approach and a critical race theoretical perspective. Moreover, with consideration to increase online course offerings (Sellnow & Kaufmann, 2017), the racial inequality that exists in on-ground education today (Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 2017), and the call for a dialogic approach to instruction between the teacher and the student (Allen, 2011; hooks, 1994), a failure to identify how different cultures interact in online education courses could present more obstacles to achieving understanding of one another. The goal of this study is to provide baseline research on which to build better interaction in the online classroom. Intercultural interaction in online education research is growing and conclusions drawn may further develop effective practice of engagement in online higher education courses.

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an explanation of the problem, rationale, and purpose for this study. Chapter two establishes the study in relevant research and poses research questions. Chapter three details the methods utilized to conduct the analysis and chapter four describes the findings. Finally, chapter five provides conclusions and implications, as well as offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

Underlying this study is the knowledge of the power of communication to constructively address and evolve preconceived notions (prejudices, stereotypes, biases) regarding race and identity in education (Allen, 2010; Orbe, 2016; Fassett & Warren, 2010). Specifically, this dissertation study presents a theoretically grounded, exploratory thematic analysis of interaction as a form of communication by examining the presence of intercultural interaction in online courses within higher education. The study evaluates how student-to-student, student-to-instructor, and instructor-to-student interaction manifest in synchronous and asynchronous online learning environments. This chapter provides a summary of the current research on the interaction in higher education. A review of the critical communication pedagogical approach leveraged in this study is paired with an explanation of critical race theory as the theoretical grounding. Finally, intercultural communication research questions are presented.

The U.S. Education System

Literature in this section reviews the shortcomings of the United States education system to integrate Non-White and White students in the classroom. It provides some historical context to the U.S. education system's emphasis on desegregation and how it created today's educational system that presents racial inequality in curriculum, instruction, and peer-to-peer intercultural relationships. It highlights the developments in understanding the positive impact of racial diversity in classrooms, reviews the growth of the online educational market, and asks what research developments have been made in online education beyond student outcomes. Finally,

literature in this section discusses interaction among peers and with instructors in higher education.

Situating Diversity in the American Education System

On May 17, 1954, Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous decision by the Supreme Court that determined separating children in the public school system on the basis of their race was unconstitutional by law (Warren, E. & Supreme Court of The United States, 1953). This overruled the previous 1896 Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson,* which institutionalized racial segregation in nearly all aspects of public and private life. Hotels, theaters, restaurants, swimming pools, and schools were all made to establish and enforce the separation of Black and White American citizens (Golub, 2005). Until *Brown v. The Board of Education*, opportunities for children of different cultural and racial backgrounds to interact were limited, avoided, and even punishable by law. Although the *Brown* ruling was intended for good, the outcome of the court decision did little to reduce, let alone eliminate, the racial inequality, bias, bigotry, and discrimination experienced by Black Americans. Known as "White Flight," White parents removed their children from public school to avoid contributing resources and conforming to desegregation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Private academies were built as a means to avoid the integration of White and Black children, well-qualified Black teachers were fired without cause and often not considered for open positions, and White teachers often neglected Black students in their classrooms (Gladwell, 2017; Donnor, 2017). The education system emphasized desegregation and not integration (Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004). In fact, Donner (2017) recounts the success to which Bolivar County, Mississippi was able to delay the integration of the public schools for nearly a decade after the court decision. Course curriculum,

content, and instructors, all continued to serve White children and marginalize Black and children of color positioning them as subordinate to Whites. Black children and children of color were forced to learn history solely from White colonial viewpoints.

Other systems were also not integrated. For instance, housing areas continued to separate White and Black families and government agencies continued to centralize Black living areas, which directly impacted the resources available to support learning (Kozol, 2005). Chapman (2007) explains that families, peer groups, and federal, state, city, and county governments can influence learning, arguing that the perception of self is often reflected in educational experiences. White supremacy and racial power structures outside the classroom had a compounding impact in the classroom. Although flawed in its construction, the decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education* would serve as a focal point for the expansion of the rights of Black Americans during the 1950s. This movement toward desegregation of students, as a result of *Brown* and similar court cases that would follow, produced a new level of interaction, which presented an opportunity to shift the thinking of White students toward their Black classmates.

Today, the value of nurturing interaction among students from different cultural backgrounds in the classroom is acknowledged as beneficial in the fact that, among other things, it plays a significant role in achieving learning outcomes. For example, one study that looked at diversity in college classrooms found that interaction of different cultural groups has a direct impact on increasing educational possibilities and enhancing educational outcomes of students (Maruyama, Moreno, Gudeman, & Marin, 1999). Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004) determined that experience with diversity in the classroom better prepares students for success in a multicultural democracy. Smith and Schonfeld (2000) speak to the need for that success and

understanding of a multicultural democracy, stating that “diversity remains an important imperative for the United States, its cities, and its communities, and it is one in which higher education has an important role. Our campuses are laboratories for diversity issues that continue to evolve over time” (p. 17).

In 2003, the role of diversity on a college campus was challenged by a White law school applicant who claimed that she was denied admission on the basis of her race, the Supreme Court disagreed and ruled that it is in the interest of universities to promote diversity (Parker, 2006). The aforementioned studies acknowledge that in order to “transform oppressive structures, institutions, and relationships,” intentional attention to interaction in the classroom across race, gender, and ethnicity is absolutely necessary (Collier, 2005 p. 254). But how do these efforts to diversify education through interaction manifest in online education settings? As learners' preferences and needs change, colleges and universities must offer more mediated learning environment options (Strawser & Kaufmann, 2020). Such shifts must then lead to examinations regarding carryover of in-person classroom educational diversity efforts and achievements.

Online Education Market Growth

Learner outcomes in online education are actively being researched and attempts to replicate positive, in-class educational outcomes in an online format continue to be identified. Convenience and circumstance have contributed to the increasing popularity of fully online courses as a preferred mode of instruction in higher education (Sellnow & Kaufmann, 2017). With the advancement of the Internet and other technologies, efforts have been made to make instruction in primary, secondary, and higher education more accessible to young students and adult learners. Prior to the start of COVID-19, more than six million college students were taking

at least one class online over the course of their education, a representation of almost one in every three students (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

In the two years since, the highly infectious disease has accelerated college learners' exposure to online courses. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) showed a 93 percent increase in online higher education enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020, with a 367 percent increase in undergraduate learners selecting exclusively to enroll online for college during that same timespan (Lederman, 2021). The pandemic forced many institutions to move to emergency online learning in the Spring of 2020 and continue that format through the following Fall semester.

An October 2021 report published by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), a nonprofit organization that regulates the quality, cost, and access to distance education offerings, provided more insight into the impact of COVID-19 to online education. The report showed that 85 percent of their total 2,200 member institutions moved exclusively online as a result of COVID-19, and 60 percent plan to continue to offer all or partial online learning post-pandemic (National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, 2021).

Replicating Student Outcomes Online

Institutions are seemingly responding to the consistent demand by learners for more flexibility in their college journey. Despite some learners voicing dissatisfaction from unpreparedness of the emergency move to online instructions due to the pandemic, educators, technology firms, and administrators have worked together to consistently provide a positive student experience long term (Lederman, 2021). In the last decade, research conducted responds to the criticisms of

online education by emphasizing solutions that increase retention rates, mitigate attrition rates, and identify tools for positive learner outcomes and course satisfaction.

Students have responded to these changes with increased enrollments in online courses (Friedman, 2018). More recent arguments are being made about the enhanced student engagement that some online instruction allows for that in-person does not offer. When compared to traditional classroom experiences, online educational studies have noted "no significant differences" in learning outcomes and state that online education allows the learner "freedom to participate in the learning process" (Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014, p.35).

Technology firms that produce software for online instruction, have developed features and functions meant to encourage learners normally hesitant to participate in an in-person course to contribute and engage with the instructor online (Peters, 2021). Chat-functionality, poll questions, break-out rooms, hand-raising, and student screen-sharing are contributing to increased engagement in the classroom (Villasenor, 2022). A 2021 report by consulting firm, McKinsey and Company, supports the long-term viability and possibly enhanced interaction of online learning, specifically by emphasizing an engaged teaching approach (Child, Frank, Lef, & Sarakatsannis, 2021). Adaptive learning, range of learning formats, captivating experiences, and skills application have been identified as key indicators of quality online instruction and learner engagement. Technology, access, student engagement with the course material, and meeting course objectives are continuingly being researched and developed as the need for online courses increase (Kaufmann, Sellnow, & Frisby, 2016; Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014; Limperos, Buckner, Kaufmann, & Frisby, 2015; Sun & Chen 2016).

Interaction in Higher Education

Measured by both its frequency of contact and quality, interaction has been defined by social constructionists as the shaper of the human reality (Allen, 2005). Using this school of thought for interaction as a framework, it is understood how much of an impact interaction has on the classroom and the contribution it has to positive learner outcomes and student satisfaction (Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014). Interaction has been determined to be important to education regardless of the use of technology (Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014), but has been identified as the "heart of the online learning experience" (Woods & Baker, 2004, p. 2). Furthermore, technology allows for the enhancement of the interaction between content or instruction with the student (Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014). Attention to technology in online education proves timely as the number of classes being offered online has increased significantly over time.

As technology and understanding of online student achievement advances, distance education opportunities have been increasing steadily. Measures beyond evaluating online student outcomes have become more widely available and encouraged. Sub-meanings of interaction were developed to help ensure students achieve positive educational outcomes while using technology as the primary tool for interacting. The sub-meanings of interaction related to content and instruction online are captured in an article by Moore (1989) where he calls for three-types of interaction: learner-learner (communication between students in a course), learner-instructor (communication between student and instructor in a course), learner-content (process of understanding course information). These sub-meanings of interactions have been accepted and expanded as the measures for online student satisfaction. Woods and Baker (2004), highlight

additional sub-meanings of interaction, identifying learner-interface, learner-environment, learner-context, teacher-teacher, teacher-content, and content-content as related interactions to be considered.

Online Communication

Early evaluation of the relationship between teacher and student in online learning has focused on pedagogy, as the scholars of the time looked to add credibility to the use of computer-assisted instruction to positively impact learner outcomes (Sellnow & Kaufmann, 2017). With increased interest and offerings of online education, more research is needed to understand the interaction between teacher and student relationship in online learning. Key contributors to the field of instructional communication, Sellnow and Kaufmann (2017) share this view of needing to understand if and how instructional communication takes place in online environments and posit that quality of communication, rigor, and collaboration are measures to consider along with a need for further research in – interpersonal and relational dynamics, classroom climate, social presence, and course design and delivery.

Kuo, Walker, Schroder, and Belland (2014), have contributed to the evaluation of relationships taking place in online environments, identifying both quality of the education and interaction as contributing to the student satisfaction. The researchers tested a regression model for student satisfaction involving the characteristics of the students and class level predictors. More specifically, three-types of interaction, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning were tested. The study found that the relationship between the learner and the content indicated the strongest relationship to immediacy and student satisfaction. This research deemphasizes rigor and grade outcome and explores new relationships within online learning. While it does not

address the intercultural interaction component to learning in mediated environments, it does identify some key interaction points to be considered if instructional communication is to be considered effective.

Sellnow and Sellnow (2018) emphasize the importance of effective communication as part of instruction in all learning contexts and argue that messages will fall short of resonating with the receiver if they do not provide instruction on why and how to act on the information. This view introduces a strategic framework to instructional communication with effectiveness in online learning means to have goals, a shared understanding between the instructor and student, and should seek to positively impact the world. Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2007) share this position when they claim that strategic communication is "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (p. 3). This strategic instructional communicative perspective has some critical pedagogical considerations as contributors in the field sought to have a mutual understanding of each other, transform knowledge, and live fully in the world (Freire, 1970; Giroux 2020; hooks, 1994). Within strategic communication scholarship Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2007) argue that the discipline allows for the emergence of more critical perspectives, with scholars finding a relevant discipline to include work, as calls have been made to advance scholarship in instructional communication (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2018).

Communication in Education

To fully understand the history of instructional communication, it is critical to distinguish it from communication education. Communication education is the teaching of the applied and theoretical aspects of the communication discipline. These include classes such as public speaking, strategic communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, and organizational communication, among others. Instructional communication is broader in that it encompasses the role of communication in instruction, which may occur in traditional classrooms as well as other communication contexts (Sellnow & Sellnow, 2018). Thus, instructional communication, which was established as a subfield in the discipline in 1970, focuses on such variables as immediacy, student satisfaction, motivations, engagement, teacher satisfaction, credibility, self-efficacy, student-student and teacher-student interaction, and intercultural interaction, among others (Farris, Houser, & Hosek, 2017).

According to Farris, Houser, and Hosek (2017), this area began as an official interest group division of the International Communication Association led by Lieb-Brillhart and Kibler. Instructional communication does present some similarity and overlap to education, psychology, and other communication fields as these fields evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning categories (Mottet & Beebe, 2005). Instructional communication posits that understanding the communication between teacher and students is paramount to learning.

The communication process contributing to building of the relationship between student and teacher is relational and largely influenced by interaction. Mottet and Beebe (2005) also contribute to the idea that instructional communication research is not restricted to in-person or face-to-face environments nor is it reserved only for traditional primary, secondary, higher

education classroom settings, but indicates that instructional communication can happen in non-traditional settings.

Critical Communication Pedagogy

Critical Communication Pedagogy and the role it plays in fostering intercultural interactions among students and instructors in brick-and-mortar classroom settings may be paramount in understanding how it develops in online education. Research is actively being published about effective instructional communication practices in online learning environments (e.g., Kaufmann, Sellnow, & Frisby, 2016; Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014; Limperos, Buckner, Kaufmann, & Frisby, 2015; Sun & Chen, 2016) and studies do exist regarding the link between instructional communication pedagogy and diversity, although these are situated primarily in traditional in-person classroom settings (e.g., Byrd, 2019; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez 2004; Maruyama, Moreno, Gudeman, & Marin, 1999).

Largely missing from the research, however, is how intercultural interaction materializes in online higher education courses. Shlossberg and Cunningham (2016) connects the need for diversity in the classroom to the online modality. The researchers suggest that the lack of a critical communication pedagogical view is what has contributed to a gap within the research in online education beyond outcomes. Shlossberg and Cunningham (2016) state that to avoid the continuation of online education research reflecting a Eurocentric or implicit bias view, a critical communication pedagogical approach must be taken. They state that "critical communication pedagogy asks us to recognize that social presence and community cannot be organized or structured in an equitable or socially-just way when power, difference, and inequality are not

recognized and acknowledged between and among students and teachers" (p.230). Thus, a better understanding of how intercultural interaction manifests in online learning environments is needed for a targeted approach to equitable online education.

There is precedent outside of the communication discipline to support the need for further exploration of this topic. Allport (1954) proposed intergroup interaction as a means by which to measure the reduction of racial prejudice and conflict between Black and White Americans in the 1940s. More specifically, he posited that prejudice was reduced when groups interacted in ways that adhered to these four elements: equal status, common goals, cooperation, and the support of an authoritative figure. Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004) shared Allport's view as a starting point but argued that curricular and co-curricular experiences with diverse peers were necessary to achieve diversity within education contexts to take place and called for intentional engagement, advocating for the creation of an integrated learning environment that goes further than placing students of different ethnicities in the same classroom.

CCP Ties to Critical Pedagogy

Critical Communication pedagogy takes many of its foundations from critical pedagogy. While critical communication pedagogy discusses how to facilitate classroom discussion of the dismantling of oppressive structures, identification of power dynamics, and asks to consider identity and difference, critical pedagogy advocates for a repositioning of education altogether. Although there is no singular definition of critical pedagogy, prominent critical pedagogy scholar Shor (1992) positions critical pedagogy as an attempt to avoid shallow learning and to understand and seek to develop a deeper meaning of the social contexts, ideologies, and root causes of organizations, experiences, policy, and discourse. Freire (1970) emphasizes a dialogic

approach to education to help evoke critical consciousness of the learner. Similar to Allen's "less sage on the stage" positioning, Freire advocates for education to be an exchange between the instructor and student where both are learning from each other, and the student is not an empty vessel waiting to be filled by the instructor – a concept he identified as "banking." Freire sees this as the only way for education to be positioned with mutual understanding that both instructor and students are incomplete beings, conscious of their incompleteness and with a desire to become more human through understanding and championing difference, as any other position places the instructor as an instrument of oppression.

Fassett and Warren (2010) share this view and build on it, stating that instructors owe it to the students to acknowledge them in "their full complexity and respect them as human subjects who have agency, cultural values, and beliefs that guide them" (p.290). It is hooks (1994) that argued education should take a transgressive approach, where educators support the becoming of others and achieve the state of being seen fully in society. hooks discusses how to help individuals find their voice and suggest how educators can be prepared to address differences in the classroom. hooks (1994) introduces teaching strategies to help instructors consider multicultural classrooms by understanding "cultural codes" that operate within them. It is this approach of learning how to facilitate a diverse classroom in which critical intercultural communication and critical communication pedagogy are both referenced and utilized. Sandoval and Nainby (2017) argue that critical intercultural communication research is pedagogical as both communicative and cultural contexts are present to engage and be engaged in by students and instructors.

Giroux (2020) argues similarly that the instructor and student should together seek to actively transform knowledge not just consume it. Giroux posits that critical pedagogy allows for the questioning of power dynamics within schools, leveraging history to reclaim power and identity of marginalized groups, and the creation of interdisciplinary knowledge. Unlike the critical thinking limitations in past and current classroom constructions within the United States (Kozol, 2005; Tatum 2017), Giroux places an importance on students as critical thinkers that identify their social responsibilities and considerations to better contribute to an equitable multicultural society. This emphasis and the perspective of aforementioned critical scholars connect the many ways that identity, critical pedagogy, critical communication pedagogy, and critical intercultural communication are intertwined and work together.

Identity

Within intercultural communication contexts researchers review aspects of social and cultural identity (Allen, 2003, p.xi). Examining identity requires multidisciplinary study of how humans interact with themselves as well as others. Jackson and Garner (1998) posit that identity is relational and negotiated with other people. Mendoza, Halunani, and Drzewiecka (2002) add that those with the most positionality and privilege often set the terms of the negotiation. Scholarship in this space concentrates on dynamics such as power structures, those with agency, and considerations to race and ethnicity to better understand how differently identity manifests in communicative practices.

It is these critical perspectives that spotlight the conflict over identities, what they mean, and help to define what students and educators should consider with engaging intercultural dialogue. Hall connects how agency and identity are central to pedagogy and discusses the many

ways that racial and ethnic identities are positioned (1997). He discusses the intricacies of identity, emphasizing the need for the critical dimension of positioning, arguing that identity is always moving. Hall calls for many of the same considerations of critical intercultural communication – what is the impact of gender, class, race, and community. Communication scholarship has increased in this area, evaluating how intercultural communication intersects with identity, culture, and difference (Allen; 2010; Chávez 2012; Patton, 2004).

Critical Intercultural Communication

Grown out of the larger intercultural communication discipline, Critical Intercultural Communication (CIC) asks us to push far beyond the understanding of different cultures and appreciation of diversity to consider instead how these cultures are impacted by dominant group power dynamics including socio-economic relations, historical and structural contexts, race and ethnicity, identity, and colonialism amongst others. Critical Intercultural Communication helps to connect cultural, rhetorical, feminist studies, critical communication pedagogy, media studies, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, performance studies, race and ethnic studies, and several others (Halualani & Nakayama, 2012). CIC asks the researcher to consider how both power and context constraints placed on the marginalized by the dominant group contribute to the pervasive inequality in society and challenges the critical intercultural communication scholar to identify these structures to better dismantle them.

Critical Intercultural Communication is still growing as communication scholars explore additional contexts and perspectives to better equip themselves with the tools necessary to have better intercultural interactions. Critical intercultural communication research considers the

shifting dynamics of knowledge creation across identity and community (Sandoval & Nainby, 2017).

While critical intercultural communication asks us to recognize these power and context constraints and dismantle inequity, it is critical communication pedagogy that situates these large goals, and provides accountability to the theorizing, concepts, actions, and commitments (Halulani, 2017). Similar to traditional classroom environments, cultural difference in online learning settings is having an impact in learning and the relationship amongst peers and between teacher and student (Hannon & D'Netto, 2007). This further emphasizes the need to evaluate intercultural communication within online education contexts. Fasset and Warren (2010) see the application of critical communication pedagogy to technology and text as advancing the theory and practice, bringing to the forefront the ways that both are positioned in the classroom and asking how has the curriculum, content, and other educational resources served as a tool for shaping who the students have become and how the mediated interactions with peers and instructor, within education contexts, contribute to them becoming (Fassett & Warren, 2010).

The application of a pedagogical approach to critical intercultural communication helps to provide a critical frame to intercultural relations. Without it, communication scholars may fall woefully short of situating disparity and inequity. The foundations of the communication discipline are largely applied and skills based, leaving the intercultural relations unjust, unequal, and with little unchanged. Halualani (2017) posits that without the relationship of critical intercultural communication to critical communication pedagogy the learnings are insufficient and are likely to maintain a prevailing structure of racialized, gendered, classed and colonial narratives with no critical perspectives or positionality. Critical Communication Pedagogy asks

instructors to position critical intercultural perspectives in relation to the cultural and socioeconomic power structure in a way that facilitates the discussion of how sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, and many other forms of oppression are reproduced in the classroom (Fassett & Warren, 2010). Allen (2011) emphasizes the need for critical communication pedagogy in the organizational approach of the classroom and calls for a new teaching perspective with more facilitation, and less "sage on the stage" (p.111). She argues that communication scholars are uniquely positioned to incorporate "difference" in their instruction, helping students understand varying social identities and how they speak with each other. Allen states that such an approach, "can provide pivotal insight and understanding to prepare students to interact effectively and humanely in contemporary organizational contexts" (p.103).

Critical Race Theory

Originally established in legal scholarship, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework used to understand how systems of racial oppression were first established and are upheld today in application of the law. The theory emphasizes an approach that interrogates the system of racial injustice over the individual engaging in racial bias as "oppressions are neither neatly divorceable from one another nor amenable to strict categorization" (Bell, 1992, p.145). CRT scholars seek to dismantle the racial power structures that allow for continued inequality (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT emerged in the 1980s and extended Critical Legal Studies (CLS), as CLS became hampered by conservative ideology and the willingness to be political in what seemingly was an apolitical environment. Critical Race Theory differentiates itself from critical legal studies by decentering socioeconomic class and focuses on how a structure of racial hierarchy determines who legislation is designed to benefit. Critical Race

Theory critiques the scholarship of CLS, frustrated with the apolitical stance and inability to remove the racism hidden by socioeconomic class (Gillborn, 2006). CRT took the legal aspects of CLS and paired the embodied experiences from the civil rights movement to contribute to the critical race theoretical scholarship (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). It sees the many structures and systems in the United States as perpetuating racial inequity throughout all aspects of social life, and posits that racism is not simply an individual act, but instead "endemic in the U.S. Society, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychology" (Tate, 1997, p.234). In an interview, one of the originators of the theory Kimberlé Crenshaw summarizes the position of CRT stating, "Critical race theory is based on the premise that race is socially constructed, yet it is real through social constructions" (Omokha, 2021). These social constructions manifest and evolve to create conditions for the oppression of people of color. This social positioning is shared by scholars in other contexts that call for a critical perspective.

CRT scholarship is unified by two common interests regardless of the object, argument, and emphasis. The first is understanding how White supremacy and the oppression of people of color have coexisted and endured despite the supposed ideals within the United States legal system that claim that all citizens have "equal protection" and the "rule of law" prevails over all others. Second is to not only understand the relationship between racial power and law in the United States, but to change it (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Scholarship in this field opposes "neutral" or "objective" positioning and posits that the 14th amendment and *Brown v. The Board of Education* came short of removing government-sanctioned racial discrimination. There are six key components to critical race theory that Matsuda, Iii, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) outline for its framing. First, racism is pervasive and wide sweeping throughout all

aspects of U.S. society. Racism is embedded in everyday life in the United States and is culturally, legally, and psychologically deeply ingrained. Second, CRT scholars are skeptical of claims of neutrality, color-blindness, and supposed objectivity within the legal system. Third, scholarship in this field identifies historical contexts as essential to understanding how people's lives are shaped. Scholarship in CRT posits that all human interaction is framed within a set of historical and current-day realities that are of high importance and inescapably relevant. Fourth, both experiential knowledge and analysis of BIPOCs in society and law are needed as false assumptions are made by the dominant White group in part due to low interaction. Fifth, critical race theory posits that CRT scholarship is multi-disciplinary and applicable to a broad range of disciplines. Finally, critical race theory sees ending racial oppression as part of the broader goal to eliminate all forms of oppression.

Critical Race Theory and Education

Since its inception, Critical Race Theory has expanded to other academic disciplines such as ethnic studies, sociology, education and more as a means of identifying how racial disparity could seemingly exist in a system that is said to be positioned as an equalizer of opportunity (Tate, 1997). In fact, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become a foundation for education scholars and researchers to evaluate representation, pedagogy, educational opportunity, and school climate (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that the intersection of social and school inequity creates the need for CRT to be used as a framework or analytical tool to identify the contributors to disparity within the education system. Ladson-Billings and Tate posit that CRT positions marginalized peoples with the agency to be heard, and that the classroom provides a means to

communicate the experience and the realities of being oppressed. Although Ladson-Billings and Tate identify the importance of the dialogue, they do not identify how to navigate and facilitate these classroom conversations for the instructor or recommend how the students should contribute and discuss these experiences.

Critical Race Theory posits that the impact of Eurocentrism and colonial positioning within the educational system should be considered, but also determined it to be a direct influencer of the outcome of both educational successes and failures of BIPOCs (Chapman, 2007). Within higher education, critical race scholars have pulled from the six tenets of critical race theory, to better identify how race impacts admissions decisions and policies, the pervasiveness of colorblindness on campus and overall racial climate (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). CRT, within education and additional disciplines, aims to address several false assumptions associated with race, and aims to use the classroom to facilitate the learnings of the lived experiences of oppressed groups within the United States.

Study Overview

This research study seeks to understand how intercultural communication is taking place in online learning environments, in both synchronous and asynchronous settings and to what extent the interaction is taking place. Additionally, there remains the opportunity to determine how a critical communication pedagogical approach might improve the intercultural communication amongst peers and between the student and teacher. Thus, the guiding research question for the study is as follows:

RQ1: What does intercultural interaction look like in online learning communication courses at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States?

Additionally, this research seeks to understand how the interactions of learners engaged in online education may differ depending on two types of online learning, synchronous or asynchronous. Thus, two delineating questions are posed:

RQ1a: What does intercultural interaction look like in online learning *synchronous* communication courses at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States?

RQ1b: What does intercultural interaction look like in online learning *asynchronous* communication courses at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States?

CHAPTER THREE - METHODS

To gain insight into how intercultural interaction occurs within online learning communication courses, a qualitative methodological approach was applied. Qualitative interviews provided the foundation for in-depth understanding needed to inform this study and properly investigate the experiences of learners' intercultural interactions. It also afforded increased understanding of their interaction more broadly with peers and instructors within asynchronous and synchronous online learning contexts. Tracy (2010) conceptualizes eight criteria of quality to signal effective practices in qualitative research. She argues that good qualitative inquiry should explore a worthy topic, be rich in rigor, be conducted with sincerity and self-reflexivity, be credible with high levels of explanation and transparency, be resonant and transferable, add a significant contribution to the area being researched, maintain ethics, and be meaningfully coherent using methods and procedures that fit stated goals.

To conduct the qualitative interviews, I leveraged the semi-structured interview approach. The semi-structured respondent interview using a responsive interviewing stance to gather data, according to Tracy (2020), allows for increased flexibility and an improved natural flow to the discussion. She argues that such an approach, "encourages interviewers to listen, reflect, adapt to ever-changing circumstances, and cede control of the discussion to the interviewee" (p. 158). Considering that the research asks the learner to situate their cultural identity within the online classroom environment and to share interactions of peers and instructors, it was important that I share my own cultural identity as a Black American, cisgender man that has discussed my identity in online courses, personally experienced harmful language related to my identity in online courses, and both taken and taught online communication courses within one large,

diverse, public university in the southeastern United States. This approach was with an understanding that interviews are not a means of only extracting information, but instead an active-embodied process where meaning is mutually created and we come to know ourselves and each other (Tracy, 2020). By being self-reflexive throughout the interview process, I was able to engage in a discussion with the participants being studied instead of observing their remarks from a distant abstract positioning. This led to rich and engaging insights by the participants.

Participants

Several requirements were established to be eligible to participate in this study. Participants had to (a) be currently enrolled in a communication course or courses in the one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States, (b) have completed an online course in either the Fall 2021, Spring 2022, or Summer 2002 semester, (c) not have taken a course with the interviewer, and (d) be at least 18 years old. Twenty-one total participants fit the aforementioned criteria and participated in this study. The age range of participants was 18 to 35 (M = 22.4; SD=4.558; n=21), consisting of 17 (80.95%) that identified as a woman, 4 (19.05%) that identified as a man. Participants self-identified as the following ethnic groups: 2 Asian (9.52%), 3 Black (14.29%), 10 Hispanic, Latino/a/x or Spanish origin (47.62%), 1 Middle Eastern or North African (4.76%), and 5 White (23.81%).

A pre-survey to explain the study, collect demographic information, initial insight on online courses, and determine interest in participating in the full study was also utilized. While only 21 of the possible 97 were available to participate in the full study, it's worth noting the full population demographics and insights briefly. The information contributed from the pre-survey provided an initial view of the knowledge and familiarity of asynchronous and synchronous

online courses. The full population age range span 18 to 48 (M = 22.05; SD=4.884; n=92), consisting of 74 (78.72%) that identified as a woman, 15 (15.96%) that identified as a man, 1 (1.06%) that identified as non-binary, and 4 (4.26%) that preferred not to answer. 94 survey respondents self-identified into many ethnic groups, with some identifying as two or more ethnicities. For this reason, percentages are offered instead of a count: Asian (7.55%), Black (16.04%), Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (33.96%), Middle Eastern or North African (0.94%), White (38.68%), and Some other race, ethnicity, or origin (2.83%).

Of the 97 survey respondents that completed questions regarding the number of asynchronous courses taken at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States, 61 or 67.03% had completed either '3-5' or '5 or more' asynchronous courses. Of the 97 survey respondents that completed questions regarding the number of synchronous courses taken at the one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States, 60 or 65.93% had completed either '0-1' or '1-3' synchronous courses. Results from survey respondents show more familiarity with asynchronous courses and less familiarity with synchronous online courses at the one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States.

The 21 participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure privacy and anonymity. The pseudonyms are used throughout the results.

Procedures

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited in a combination of ways. Participants spanned many communication majors, but a recruiting emphasis was placed on students near completion of their undergraduate studies. Specifically, the recruitment targeted students currently enrolled in upper division courses within the Fall

2022 semester at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States. These students, typically classified as upper-level or 'seniors' would likely have more varied experience with courses of multiple modalities, have both pre-COVID and emergency online learning perspectives, and may offer more insights than students just starting college. Emails with the IRB approved purpose of the study and a hyperlink to the pre-survey were sent to several faculty within the one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States that were the instructors of record for upper-division undergraduate courses during the Fall 2022 semester. Some instructors offered students that completed the survey extra-credit toward their grades within the course. There were no requirements or incentives offered for agreeing to participate in the interview.

Students were asked to complete a pre-survey to determine eligibility and interests for the study and to collect demographic information. All 97 pre-survey participants were provided an explanation of the study that details the study's purpose, the process, and the confidential nature of the information. The pre-survey asked the survey respondents if they met the aforementioned criteria and if they were interested and available for an interview. Those that did not meet the criteria were thanked for their interest and sent to the end of the survey. Interested and available students (n=21) provided a contact email in the survey, and were issued an IRB approved email with a link to schedule an audio-only recorded Zoom interview at the time of their choosing via the scheduling app Calendly.

Data Collection

All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted via the web-mediated audio-visual tool Zoom at the location of the interviewees choosing. All camera capabilities on the Zoom

were turned-off and remained off throughout the duration of the interview to allow participants reserve internet bandwidth while utilizing the Zoom platform. Interviews ranged from 18 to 43 minutes (M=27:19:14; n=21), were recorded for transcription and coding purposes, and saved onto a password-protected computer. The transcription service SpeechNotes was used for the initial transcription of the interviews. Once transcribed, transcriptions totaled 216 pages. Audio files were transcribed for coding and thematic analysis purpose and saved onto a password-protected computer.

Participants were asked to share their experience related to intercultural interaction and interaction more broadly in asynchronous and synchronous online courses. Additionally, participants were asked to share interactions with peers and of their instructors in asynchronous and synchronous online courses. Participants also shared experiences related to their cultural identity. I began with an initial eight-question interview protocol (see Appendix A) that guided the discussion and prompted participants to discuss their experiences of intercultural interaction in online courses. The nature of the flexible interview protocol led to asking several follow-up questions depending on the flow of the conversation with each participant. For example, one question asked respondents: ‘To what extent did cultural identity play a role in your interactions with your peers?' In some cases, I followed this with a question like “ how did your perception of their cultural identity play a role in your interaction with them? “.

Analysis

With interviews completed, data collected, and transcribed, I began the process of coding for emergent themes and subthemes as they address each research question. As I reviewed the transcriptions, I engaged in the manual process of primary-cycle coding, which Tracy (2020)

describes as the process of examining the data and capturing the essence through the assignment of words or phrases. This unrestricted and open coding approach allowed for the natural maturation of major themes from the data to arise and led to categories of the information to be formed.

To do this, I placed all the transcripts into one document, careful to label and separate each interview with section-breaks and began reading through them in their entirety. While doing so, I utilized the comment feature in the document app to assign points of interest, repeated terms or phrases, words or phrases that aligned to the research questions. This descriptive level of coding emphasized a focus on what was stated and clearly present in the interviews. I reviewed my in-interview notes and compared them to the comments for alignment and consistency. This helped to develop a codebook with an initial list of 24 codes complete with definitions, categories, and quoted examples for the transcripts. Referred to as a "legend" for the data, codebooks help to organize findings from pages of transcripts into a visual analysis tool that serves to assist in the explanation of the study to external reviewers, advisors, supervisory committee members, and instructors (Tracy, 2020).

With the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks in mind, I organized the comments and corresponding quotes by each participant and code into a data spreadsheet to narrow the preliminary themes and confirm the identified subthemes. Tracy (2020) describes this process as secondary-cycle coding, in which "the researcher critically examines the codes already identified in primary cycles and begins to organize, synthesize, and categorize them into interpretive concepts" (p. 225). This view of the data was useful in identifying overlapping preliminary themes and opportunities to combine and refine into clearly defined themes

presented in the results. This process, referred to as hierarchical or axial coding, calls for the grouping of codes under a collective "umbrella" category that share similar concepts. Identified themes used language and phrases made by participants to authentically represent their lived experiences.

The 21 participants for this study displayed a wide range of cultural identities (see Appendix C) and varied greatly in lived experiences. These diverse viewpoints showed varying levels of alignment with some themes over others, but theoretical saturation, where the data and analysis no longer produce new or emergent findings, was reached for this study (Tracy, 2020). There are varying suggestions on what constitutes saturation, Tracy (2020) posits that twelve interviews are likely to be sufficient for saturation. I chose this position when considering saturation but continued in an effort to ensure qualitative quality. While participants were varied in how they identified, their position on intercultural interaction in asynchronous and synchronous online courses were largely reflective of each other.

CHAPTER FOUR - RESULTS

The final themes determined from the interview and transcription analysis are identified in this chapter. These are organized in terms of how the participants discussed reasons for choosing online courses, the interaction of peers and instructors within the online courses and relationships developed, whether these relationships considered cultural identity of themselves or others, who's responsible for intercultural interaction facilitation, and what they expect of their online educational college experience. Each theme considers various aspects of the research questions posed and helps to provide a more complete understanding of what intercultural interaction looks like in online learning communication courses in a communication program at a large, diverse, southeastern university. Pseudonyms are used throughout these results. The quotes provided are the words of the participants and have not been altered. Additionally, the ethnic/racial identity of the participants will be noted as it is a core component of the analysis conducted in this study.

Choosing Online Courses

When considering intercultural interaction in asynchronous and synchronous online courses, it is helpful to first understand why a student chose to take an online course to begin with. Three themes developed as students discussed their reasoning for selecting computer-mediated learning formats. Nearly all participants discussed their reasoning for choosing online courses. Of the 21 total participants, 17 noted the convenience of online courses fitting with their schedule, and 11 participants suggested it had to do with the comfort and familiarity they gained from participating in emergency online learning courses during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Fifteen participants described a ‘traditional’ in-person course experience as a luxury that was out of reach for them financially due to needing to earn income while attending college.

Any Time, Place, or Pace

When asked why they chose online courses, nearly all participants first referenced the ability of online courses to better fit within their schedule. Participants were not shy about describing the inconvenience of in-person courses either. Arya, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, noted the traffic getting to campus as a reason when stating, “I take online courses because I don't have the time to go to campus four times a week and take on traffic." Another participant, Tucker, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, also stated difficulty navigating campus as a reason he preferred to take online courses:

> I think it gives me a little bit of an anxiety break, because I was the type of person who would worry about, you know… Oh gosh, I have to get to class on time. You know, I need to find parking, I need to make sure…I'm not like sweating buckets because I'm walking across campus for my parking spot.

He further explained that not worrying about navigating campus has helped him maintain his personal mental health, relationships with friends, and work obligations. Kaitryn, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin and as a non-traditional student, discussed the benefit of not having to manage the campus traffic and parking:

> I feel that these online classes are the best opportunity for someone to get the experience of college and further their education without having to be, you know, stuck in traffic, rushing to get to school, rushing to find parking, and all the stuff that comes with going face-to-face.

In addition to saving time, the ability to schedule the online course work at a convenient time so that students could manage other responsibilities, like work, were also reasons for many participants. Penny explained:

> I do like asynchronous method because it really helps me schedule out my days. I also work and so I do feel like it would be the best method to kind of keep track and then be able to catch up with the deadlines – to work at my own pace.

Jada, who identifies as Black, shared Penny's position stating, "I just like being able to work at my own pace and not be expected to be in a certain place at a certain time because I suck at that type of stuff." Matt, who identifies as White also referenced the pace in which he could complete his work, "I like doing things on my own pace…not being that stressed about times." Not being stressed about schedules and maintaining some level of life comfort served as major contributors as to why participants chose to complete their coursework online. Most notably, the ability to work was a key contributor, as many of the participants stated that they worked full-time while attending the university.

Zane, who identifies as White, speaks to being a working student and describes in detail why he prefers online courses over in-person, comparing the difference to his brother with a similar job but who attends courses in-person:

> I enjoy taking online classes more than I enjoy taking in-person classes, primarily because I am also a working student. So having the ability to have online classes has been really nice for me because it allows me to reserve time for work and not have to worry about also planning around going to class or planning around waking up early to be at class and things like that. I have a brother who has the same job as me and he has to go to

> his classes. And when he tells me about his week, it's much more busy, and a lot more like constantly doing something.

Jude, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, related the comfort of knowing she can work, and can complete course assignments in her online courses at a later time, "I think it's more comfortable. If I'm at work, I can do things at my own time."

Comfort in knowing that coursework wouldn't interfere with the ability to earn an income wasn't the only benefit communicated by the participants. Several participants also noted significant comfort in when they could complete the work. Ayden, who identifies as White describes this:

> I'll do a week's worth of work in like an hour…it's a nice little weight off your shoulders, like okay, I don't really have to think about this for the next week…that's kind of how I like to see it.

Matt, who identifies as White described it similarly:

> For me, it's easier to do courses online for the majority of time because I have the flexibility of being able to work on the course, whenever, wherever I want. If I've got something going on during the week, I can kind of adjust my schedule to better fit what I've got going on.

"I had different expectations"

Some participants described their preference for online courses as situational, due the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency learning put in place due to the highly contagious virus placed many of the participants in front of a computer-mediated online course for the first time. Jackie, who identifies as Black described her change in view of online courses:

> I'm like, I cannot do this online, I have to be in the classroom. I have to have a book. I have to look at the teacher's mouth while she's talking. I have to feed off of other people. But then once the pandemic hit, it just changed my thinking. I had to take online courses because nothing else was available and I took a liking to it. Now I don't mind either asynchronous or synchronous.

Atlas, who identifies as Black, speaks to having less familiarity with online courses and different expectations for her college experience:

> I went into college with a different expectation of the modality of my courses. I wasn't ever expecting to take online courses. I took one online course before COVID and that was self-paced. I only took it because other classes were not available.

She continues to say that she prefers online at this point:

> I feel like I do prefer online classes at this point primarily. Because even though there are due dates for the assignments, I'm better able to allocate my time versus in my in-person class. Yeah, I would say at this point, my preference is online classes.

Another participant, Julie, who identifies as White, stated that due to COVID, she'll be taking her first in-person course in the upcoming semester, "I don't have as much experience doing in-person classes. COVID happened and so I just kept them all online because I could."

"I can't afford the traditional experience"

When asked why participants chose to complete their course work online, some were very clear that this was the only way to attend college. Ayden spoke to both the time and cost of in-person stating, "I like the traditional college, you know, go into the classroom more, but some people don't have that luxury."

Velma, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, stated similarly, “I understand why some people can't. Some people are taking online classes because that's all they have time for; they may have a job.” Later in the interview Ayden attributes affordability to why students may opt for the online course modality, “I think as a society, as technology progresses, there's going be, no matter what you do, more people who gravitate towards the online format. It’s cheaper. It's more convenient.” Affordability of the traditional experience was present throughout many interviews, with participants understanding what they identified as the ‘traditional experience’ but needing to make different choices due to affordability and paying bills. Here’s Jada again:

> Being a full-time student and a full-time employee is hard enough as it is. But being expected to do adult things while in school is kind of like you have to take the good with the bad. So, I'd rather have a place to live and eat and deal with the disadvantages of my online classes.

Interaction in Online Courses

The types, frequency, and quality of interactions students have with peers and instructors in both asynchronous and synchronous online courses are often varied and not always determined by the student. To understand intercultural interaction in online courses, interaction more broadly in online courses is first considered. As the 21 participants discussed the interaction in online courses several major themes arose; 16 participants communicated not having a real sense of peers and instructors and 12 noted the limitations of providing contexts to peers for misunderstanding in discussion. There were also 18 interviewees who discussed the lack of relationships developed with peers and instructors in online courses and 11 explained

themselves as accepting of limited interaction as inevitable in online courses. Finally, 7 of the 21 interviewees mentioned the difficulty they experienced in trying to communicate with peers in online courses.

“They're there, but I don't really know anybody”

When participants were asked about their online interactions with their peers in online courses, many described the majority of their interactions were through assignments such as required discussion posts or peer reviews. Emily, who identifies as White, describes these assignments, “we will have discussion boards that are posted, and we're supposed to post our response. But then in addition, you're also supposed to leave a comment or leave a response to another person's post.” When asked about discussion posts Julie described these course interactions by assignment as, “it’s as close to interactions as you will get for the most part with these classes.”

Many participants spoke to the limitation of the interaction in discussion posts within online courses. Velma compares interaction of online course discussion posts to that of in-person classes:

> I do find it harder to get to know someone for online classes because it doesn't feel authentic as it is. That digital connection. Whereas when it's something personal in person, you do get that human connection. Right off the bat, you get to learn their face faster, their name, whereas digital, you may only be talking to them via text, which is what often is the case for me.

Zane describes how online interactions with peers are forced at times, “when it comes to things like group assignments and discussions, the only downside to those is that they can occasionally

feel forced." When asked what other interaction points they've experienced in online courses some participants stated group projects and email were experienced to a lesser degree. Many stated that external messaging mobile apps such as Group Me and Discord were started by a student peer and utilized throughout the semester. In discussion with Arya, she stated, "most of my courses have made a GroupMe on the side." When asked what interaction happened within the external messaging apps, many participants described communication as being centered around the coursework.

Participants were also asked about the frequency of the interaction with peers, to which many stated that they "didn't really interact" (Tamyia). Matt spoke of the minimal interaction, "I rarely interact with my peers. The only amount is in the discussions and even then, I don't look at them, I just look at what they're saying." Lahna noted having "difficulty finding a good time to meet." When asked what they make of the minimal interaction, Matt described the situation:

> I feel like it's expected. Like, you can't expect to talk to your peers with an online course, but it's nice when you can. I would like to talk to more peers for my online classes but it's just hard because there's that online barrier and it makes it a little more awkward to talk to them or reach out.

Many of the participants described their interactions with peers of their online courses as neutral, or not memorable when asked. Penny described the neutral assigning in this way:

> I would consider it to be neutral. We're all just there to answer questions, remind people of deadlines. But other than that, nobody is really causing harm or really going above and beyond that to build friendships outside of that.

Matt stated that his interaction with his peers “have been discussion post based. So there hasn't been much positive or negative energy within those.”

Participants shared similar sentiments of their peer interactions to their interactions with instructors of online courses. Participants describe interaction with online instructors as minimal and happening largely through course announcements and email within the Canvas learning management system, webcourses. Tucker states:

> When I do have interactions with professors in online courses, it's mainly email based or through the webcourses messenger. I have had a Zoom meeting maybe once or twice with the professor, but I would say the majority of it is strictly messaging or email.

Tamyia described interactions with instructors as typically need-based, “I personally don't really reach out a whole lot unless it's something that I really need.” Penny shares this position, “I usually try not to ask questions if I could find it in the syllabus.” Similar to peer interaction, when asked how they would rate the interactions with instructors, participants rated them as a split between neutral, meaning not memorable to positive, friendly and helpful. Matt describes his rating in detail:

> I feel like generally they're either positive or neutral. I don't think I've had a negative interaction with an instructor online, just being in an online course makes it much more neutral in general because there's no confrontation there, you're not going to see them in person."

Atlas noted a lack of depth to the interaction of the instructor when speaking to her rating, “very neutral, I ask for something, and then I get the answer and then I kind of move on. So, I'd say they're pretty much just neutral for the most part.” Participants that found the interactions with

online instructors as positive were challenged to describe why they assigned a rating of positive. Matt explained his positive positioning on future state interactions with online instructors, “it’s been mostly positive or neutral, I just never interacted with them because I didn't really need to, once I did that, it would be positive, they would actually help.”

“She took it to a different context”

The absence of cues to help with understanding or to assign the desired meaning was shared by participants for both peers and instructors. Ayden describes a disagreement from a discussion post in her online course with a peer:

> When you're just typing words on a screen, maybe things can come off, not as how you intended to say them. I'm thinking of one instance in particular where some discussion posts topics can be kind of sensitive topic matters. I said something and then this girl responded, and she was offended. She was accusing me of saying things that I didn't. Not only did I not say what she said I said, but she took it to a different context. She was coming for my throat.

In discussing online instructors of asynchronous and synchronous courses, a similar outcome was assigned by the participants. Jada summarized the absence of connection with instructors of online courses this way:

> I'm kind of in a class with the robot because I don't really know you outside of you grading my work and you don't know me either. So, it's like, are you using snarky language? Are you just like this, is that just how I speak? You don't build that personal connection with your professor to where they know.

When asked to compare an in-person experience and how it might be different, Atlas remembers back to when she had in-person courses stating, “when I was taking face-to-face classes and then maybe after class, I would walk up to the teacher, say something or have a conversation.” Being able to ask instructor questions in real-time was shared by other participants. Julie explained, “I think the only struggle of online classes is not being able to, in the moment, ask a question.” Tucker notes a similar position to Atlas and Julie in the trade-off of an in-person instructor compared to that of an online instructor:

> I think the amount of feedback that professors can give for assignments varies, because if you're in person, for example, you can just go up after class and be like, hey, you know, you did great, or I can say hey, can you help me on this?

Velma provides a prospective into the inability to use body language and other cues without having in-person interaction:

> I do think everyone is just like in school to get the class done and move on to the next class. I think it is more difficult to build meaningful relationships in an online course. It's not saying that it's impossible but it's a little more difficult if you're not actually seeing that person and they're not able to see your body language, how you are, and your humor.

“Those connections never really lasted”

With the stated focus of online communication courses as assignment-oriented, all participants acknowledged not having made a friendship, relationship, or other connection after the completion of the online course. This applied to both asynchronous and synchronous online courses and for both peers and instructors. This finding spoke to earlier themes of not knowing

peers and seemingly served as a tradeoff to the convenience of taking online courses. Tamyia, who identifies as Middle Eastern, explained:

> Unless we were paired for a group project and I had to interact with people, usually those connections never really lasted. We just kind of collaborated for the project or whatever was going on during time and then we just kind of dispersed into our own worlds.

When asked if the participant has been able to make a connection from an online course that extended past the duration of the course with their peers, Penny described the situation:

> I think there's always an expiration date, quote, friendships unquote, including classes because we're all just students trying to make it through the semester. So I was like after that, even if somebody does reach out to you outside of class, without that in-person interaction, without reinforced interaction, how am I supposed to know this person would be a good friend outside of the academic setting?

Matt further explains the reasoning of interacting in online courses:

> I think when you're in a classroom with people, you're kind of forced…that idea where you are in an area where you have to communicate or you feel the need that you should and so that kind of helps with that interaction and building those friendships that might last outside of the class.

Ayden describes the absence of interaction after completing the online course in an exchange, indicating that once a mutual benefit or exchange is completed in an online course the purpose for connecting is complete. She compares this to an in-person:

> Once the semester is over and I don't have anything to offer them, the semester is over. But for my in-person classes I did meet once that semester was over, I did message for

advice, questions about classes, and writing. Because we had built a relationship in person over the semester she knew me, I know her. But for online, it's hard. It's kind of like, what's the guy called in Wizard of Oz? Who's behind the curtain?

Participants viewed the confined spaces of in-person courses, sitting near someone and small gestures, such as borrowing a pen, as reasons for connection being made compared to online courses. Participants were asked, where relationships and friendships are being formed if they were not developing relationships and connections in their asynchronous and synchronous online courses. Participants explained that their job, organizations on campus, church groups, and roommates served that purposed. Arya states, “I don't have many friends out of my classes, I make friends randomly.” Emily speaks to friendships being made within her church organization, “I am part of a campus organization ministry called Young Life. That's probably where I met the bulk of my friends and made my best friends.”

“I go into it knowing there’s not going to be much interaction”

Participants were asked if they’re OK with the level of interaction in online courses and if connections were expected or desired in online courses. When comparing in-person interaction to online interaction with instructors and peers, participants seemed to be accepting of the difference in interaction that could produce meaningful connection. Julie describes it, “I think I kind of go into it knowing that there's not going to be much interaction.” Arya, describes the purpose of an online course as the opposite of interaction, “it's the minimum contact possible and I do think that at the end, the goal of online, is to waste less time.” Velma, who identifies as a non-traditional student offers insight into why interaction in online courses is not top of mind for her:

> I mean, me personally, where I'm at in life, it's not that I'm with the mentality of, “no new friends,” but at the same time, I've got my established group of friends that I've had for over 20 years. I've got my family here, so my goal isn't to build relationships with everyone in my class. My goal is to learn as much as I can, get a good grade and implement what I'm learning into my career that I'm in and in my daily life.

Articulated differently, Zane states why he’s okay with not having connection in his online courses:

> I pursued this degree in communications because I am a very social person… luckily my job gives me that social outlet to interact with people. I'm constantly meeting new guests and new employees that come into our store, so that allows me to use that social side that I have. When it comes to school, I still have been able to meet people, but in terms of what I'm here to do at the university, it's primarily to learn and to improve my overall knowledge. So, while I do wish that it was a little bit more social, the fact that I'm able to have a social job has kind of filled that gap.

When asked if participants would welcome more interaction or if they could foresee the possibility of creating connections in online courses some thought it was possible. Jude explains:

> I think people can make friends from there, of course. There's a way for you to speak to other students if you need help, if you have a doubt or something. There are ways for you to speak to other students, and I definitely think that's an opportunity for you to make friendship.

Emily thought positively of the opportunity to create friendships in online courses stating:

> I think personally, I would increase it just because I would prefer to have a group of people to kind of lean on, in those assignments or in those courses to make it not seem like I'm so alone in my room with my laptop.

“It’s a lot harder to communicate”

Participants were asked if they saw any long-term outcomes to the current level of interaction in both asynchronous and synchronous online courses. While participants accepted the minimal to no interaction in online courses, many held the perspective that there are potential long-term consequences to its absence. Jada speaks to growing mistrust of peers due to an unknowing of who they are and states, “they might be their name and their face that's coming up on that discussion, but you don't know who typed it or who's the author behind it.” Another participant Jackie discusses how her peers have chosen to forego the assignments that do involve interaction:

> People just say well I'm not going to do this because it doesn't really matter. As long as I take my quizzes, I can still pass the class, but it affects the people that do participate that would like all of their points. You're waiting for feedback but you're not going to get it.

Jada suggests that the consequences due to minimal or no interaction in online courses are already being realized today. Both loss of communication skills with her peers as well as the willingness to collaborate were positions she discussed. Jada’s observation on collaboration in online courses when some group work is assigned: “they don't have a collaborative thought, or they can't think collaboratively or work collaboratively on the spot.” Her view on communicating without the ability to preplan a response:

> It's becoming a new norm when having to speak to people face-to-face. It's a lot harder to communicate because you don't readily think of responses. You always have time to sit and plan and replan and edit your response to everything like the email…It's becoming a lot harder.

Intercultural Interaction in Online Courses

The findings of how students interacted with peers and instructors in online courses more broadly helped prepare participants to answer similar questions regarding interactions in relation to their cultural identity and the cultural identity of their peers and instructors. Similar questions of intercultural interaction in online courses were asked, but the topic focused on the diversity, understanding, and identity of one another. Keeping the themes that arose from interaction in online courses in mind, this section presents findings of how online courses impact intercultural interaction of peers and instructors and directly addresses the research questions posed in this study. Major themes that emerged from the data are as follows: 14 of the 21 participants experienced an absence of intercultural interaction, 6 participants of those who identify with a marginalized community discussed the anonymity of their identity in online courses, and 11 participants discussed where their intercultural interactions are taking place if not in the online classroom.

"I think everyone is just too focused on getting the answers"

When discussing interaction in online courses, nearly all participants stated that unless prompted in an assignment to introduce your cultural identity to the course for points, intercultural interaction rarely happened. Participants were intrigued by the question, when asked why, several noted the perceived purpose of online courses. Aubrey, who identifies as having

Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, explained, “interestingly, I don't think so. I think it's because it's very assignment focused. I don't think race or ethnicity came up too many times for me or ever actually.” This position was shared by Tucker, “I feel like it's very assignment oriented. If the assignment were to ask about it, I feel like it would, but without any instruction or guidance it probably wouldn't occur on its own.” Penny stated that “not even in discussion posts” does cultural identity enter the online course. She goes on to say, “I think everyone's just too focused on getting the answers.” Some participants noted that when cultural identity is brought up in their online course, it’s often in the abstract, assignment-oriented, and not related to them personally. Tamyia describes:

> I would say I guess not with my peers specifically because the conversation has never come up but in general in class. What I'm learning about in class, it's definitely something that I've thought of, that crosses my mind, especially when we're looking at research and demographics and finding statistics on the target audience.

Camilla agreed, stating that when her cultural background did come up, it was “something where we have to identify and introduce ourselves.” Tamyia goes on to say that the intercultural interaction “almost never concerned my personal identity.”

Participants were also asked about possible intercultural interactions with instructors. Several participants noted the rarity in which intercultural interaction took place with instructors in online courses and in what context these interactions took place. Similar to intercultural interaction with peers, many participants reported that they haven’t discussed their cultural identity with instructors. Lahna states, “truthfully, I never thought about it.” Penny echoes Lahna's statements explaining that, “honestly, no, it's never really come up.” Participants say that

when cultural identity does appear in online courses it's often prompted by the instructor in an introduction. Here is how Penny described it:

> I haven't really had a lot of early interactions with my professors, but I know that in the introduction on the first day of the semester, a professor will write a little blurb about themselves. Sometimes they would mention cultural identity, but it wouldn't really come up.

When asked what the instructors in online courses are forthcoming about, Arya explained, "a lot of them are open about their sexuality. If they are a she, a he, about their pronouns."

"You really can't silence my voice, you have to read it"

Understanding that intercultural interaction with others was rare for both peers and instructors in online courses. Participants were asked if their cultural identity became top-of-mind with how they approached interaction in online courses. Several participants explained that their cultural identity did influence how they interact in online courses and with whom they interacted with. Three participants, all who identify as Black women (Jackie, Jada, and Atlas), provided insight into the different ways their cultural identity influences their interactions in online courses. Jackie explains that, in online courses, she seeks out other Black people to ask questions regarding an assignment. She provides an analogy for her approach:

> If I go into a store, if I go to buy a car, I'll look for a minority salesperson. In classes, I'll kind of want that feedback from them. Just so we can kind of be involved in like, have our voices kind of can't hurt.

Atlas, spoke to the benefit of the anonymity in online courses and how they impact her intercultural interactions:

> I feel like I can speak or say what I'm going to say without having to second-guess myself. I don't need to read the room in a sense, because typically, in a face-to-face interaction, when I go into a space, I will read the room because there's a sense of energy of what I should say. Well, I can't say how I'm going to be perceived with online interactions. Even though people can see my profile picture and I can see theirs, it feels like less of a barrier to be worried about how I'm going to be perceived just because I feel like no one's really focused on that in an online class.

The perceived absence of biases and stereotypes were shared by Jada when asked about anonymity in the interactions of online courses. She states that "a very big positive is that once you're interacting with someone, you don't really have those biases, whether conscious or unconscious, you don't carry those same biases because honestly, you don't know me." She goes on to state that the assignments in online courses have provided her with more voice. She explains, "I'm also often silenced, so you really can't silence my voice, you kind of have to read it. And either agree or disagree, that's your prerogative. But you have to hear it."

Several participants described making decisions on instructors based on how the instructor relates to the participant's cultural identity. Participants indicated that they review course instructor rating first and then reflect on instructor names and other characteristics to decide on what online course to select. Kaely, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, explains that "if there's the option to take someone with similar cultural backgrounds as me, I would definitely pick them. Just because that gives me something I could talk about with a professor and connect with them." Another participant, Jude who also identifies

as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin agrees with Kaely and explains why she chose a professor that related to her cultural background:

> I did choose her class because her name seemed like she was Latina or Spanish. So, I was like I'm going to choose her class because you know, maybe if I need to communicate, that would be beneficial for me.

Jackie holds a similar viewpoint as Kaely, and explains within her program that she plans to seek out, school leaders and instructors that mirror her cultural background:

> I would try to see about getting an African American or just a person of color teacher and then I will also, when it's time for advisement, go look at my advisors I will try to see who looks like me. So, for the school when I look at the list, I will go in and see if there was a Black advisor and go and see that person.

Intercultural Interaction *Outside* the Classroom

After discovering that interaction and intercultural interaction among peers and instructors is perceived as minimal in online courses, participants were asked where they are having intercultural interactions. Many participants stated that friend groups outside of class via a job, roommate, or previous friendships provided interaction and connections with those from diverse backgrounds. Matt describes where he has interaction outside of the classroom with others of diverse backgrounds:

> Everywhere. No matter if it's school or even in my own household. I have three other roommates and they all have very different backgrounds from me. First of all, they're all young women. So, I'm the only male of the house, that alone makes them different. One’s

> Argentinean, one's Chinese, one's Mexican. So just even in my household. Especially work, I work at Target. So, I see many different people every single day that I work.

Zane, who identifies as White, also referred to the diversity of his roommates to explain where intercultural interaction is taking place for him:

> I moved into the apartment, without any knowledge of the roommates …but my interactions with my roommates have been nothing short of spectacular. They are all wonderful and super, super nice. And what's really interesting about them is they all come from different cultural backgrounds. Being able to interact with them has taught me a lot about not only their cultures but also allowed me to see my own culture in a different way. As I'm continuing to further my education on communication and different cultures, my interactions with them have allowed me to get a better understanding of that content. When reading the content, I'm able to identify things that I know in my real life as well.

Velma, who identifies as a non-traditional student, stated that her community was quite diverse and that there's no absence of intercultural interaction. She stated, "I have a lot of friends, from Bosnians, Serbians, Albanians, Black and Hispanic. I love all cultures and have always had a very diverse group of friends." Some participants stated that they needed more intercultural interaction and were forthcoming about keeping to cultural groups that mirrored their own. Arya stated, "I don't have many friends that are a different nationality, that is, not Hispanic in general." Arya continued that it's "something I've done to myself, because I'm so comfortable, speaking Spanish." Emily explains that she should be more intentional in her effort to make friends with

those from different backgrounds. She explains, “I wish I was more intentional about that, but I certainly have friends who are not of the same cultural, racial background as me.”

A Need for Intercultural Interaction in Online Courses

Participants were asked questions related to the level of need for intercultural interaction specifically in online courses. Findings produced two major themes. Of the 21 participants, 14 noted a need for discussions of intercultural interaction in the classroom and 8 discussed the possible benefits and consequences of not having the opportunity for intercultural interaction in an online course.

“I can learn from people who don't look like me”

While participants noted having intercultural interaction outside of their online courses, many stated a need for having increased intercultural interaction opportunities within the online classroom. For some participants, it was a need to better understand who is in the online classroom, Jada explains, “I don't even know what these people look like." Kaitryn, now a senior, remarks, "I would like more, to be more connected, or just actually know there's people and not robots." The term “robots” was used more than once to describe how participants saw interactions with their peers.

Participants discussed at length the need to understand others' cultural backgrounds and a willingness to forgo some perceived conveniences of online courses. Arya explains how it’s an opportunity to learn:

> I do think it's important because it opens your mind. When you start to learn about other people that are not your cultural background, it's really interesting. I think there's a lot to learn about other cultures and everything in general. How people talk, how people act, it's

> very different. Even if we want to put it here in the US. It's very different knowing somebody from Florida and knowing somebody from Texas. We're still American, but it's very different.

Atlas explains that increased intercultural interaction is an opportunity to understand another's lived experience. She states, "when these opportunities are given, it's nice to see other people that aren't necessarily the same race or identify the same way as me – how they feel about how they're perceived and how they exist." Tamyria agreed, and explains her willingness to exchange an understanding of one another, "I also feel like I can learn from people who don't look like me and I hope that other people can learn from me. So, I've always been able to handle it very well."

Some participants posited that intercultural interaction was necessary for their personal growth as individuals. Many participants described learning from others as a first step, but that intercultural interaction could present the opportunity for developing an individual's own ideologies, separate from their upbringing. When asked if intercultural interaction is necessary in the online classroom Velma explains:

> I think it should exist. I think if it's someone who has been, either sheltered or has gone to a school where it's maybe predominately White people and they haven't had to have interactions with other people that aren't like them, I think it's important to see how other people communicate and what people find interesting. So you can learn about other cultures. I think it's important throughout your college experience to have interaction with people that are different from you. It's good to know and learn from other people and not be close-minded.

Camilla, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, explained she welcomes the opportunity to discuss different cultural backgrounds, saying she might “walk on eggshells around some people because they tend to be very closed-minded” regarding her identity. Tucker, shared a similar position to Velma attributing growth as the reason to have intercultural interaction and discussion regarding identity in online courses:

> I think that is a very beneficial thing that should happen. Because in most cases, people go to college, and they start a whole, fresh viewpoint for themselves. Because up until now they've been raised by Mom and Dad, most of the time since day one.

When asked if participants felt the need to exchange the perceived convenience of both asynchronous and synchronous online courses for increased intercultural interaction, several discussed being willing to. Matt, who identifies as White, adds further depth on the importance:

> I definitely feel like there's a better option or a better way to go about it in order to get those interactions compared to now. I would be willing to sacrifice convenience for those interactions because I feel like they're very important. Not even just for the educational process but for us as humans in general. We need that diversity in our lives. Otherwise, it just wouldn't be as interesting. It would just be you, on your computer, talking to all these people and you wouldn't know anything about them. They would just be another profile or something like that. So, if you have the chance, even if it is less convenient, to change that, so you know more about them, more about their backgrounds…then yeah, I would definitely do that.

Jackie also discussed a willingness to exchange perceived convenience of online courses for an opportunity to have more discussion surrounding cultural identity. She specifically shared a desire for White peers to improve understanding of her cultural identity:

> I would say yes. I feel that as a culture as being African American. I feel like there is this perception of us, this view that we're not on a high standard when it comes down to our white counterparts, or not educated. I wouldn't mind giving up some of my time to introduce myself and my culture to other people who might be ignorant of the fact that yes, Black people are successful as well. Not all Black people live in the ghetto or in the projects. There are a lot of wealthy Black people. I feel like the misconception is that all Black people have struggled that as a culture we have struggled. I feel like we're really misunderstood, and I feel that they feel that they don't understand what our culture had to go through or what we came from, just to be sitting where we're sitting at this moment.

“Ignorant of things you don't know”

In addition to opportunities and benefits to intercultural interaction and discussion of cultural diversity, participants discussed potential consequences of not having intercultural interaction. Similar to the impacts of the minimal communication in interaction, several participants noted the inability to communicate with those different from your cultural group. Tucker explains it this way:

> I feel like that just kind of allows them to instill the values and beliefs that they were raised with. Doesn't give them quite the opportunity to be an adult and experiment, and adopt their own sort of lifestyle, and viewpoints, their own values by having these

different minorities, and experiencing these different minorities. And actually having discussions with people and interacting with others.

Others like Kaitryn, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, stated that the "consequences are not learning about it. Ignorant of things, you don't know." Atlas echoed Tucker and Kaitryn's statements regarding missed opportunities for understanding and being in society without understanding of others. She states, "the only consequence maybe would be the fact that we would stay how we are now and that's where people don't understand each other and they're not willing to." Ayden offers additional perspective, explaining that some may not be aware of what they don't understand:

> Are you really missing out, if you don't know, you're missing out? Being able to see your peers, interact with them in person, it's easier to walk up and say, hey, I liked what you said about this. Can you go into more detail? Whereas online. It's kind of hard to make those interpersonal interactions.

While many described intercultural interaction as necessary in online courses, some participants stated that many peers will see intercultural interaction as not the purpose of taking an online course. Penny, who identifies as Asian, explains, "I feel like it doesn't really matter because we're kind of just here for one thing. People are behind the screens. As long as you do your work, then that's really all that matters to me." In discussion with Julie, she believes that online courses are too commonplace now and doesn't think that she or her peers would interrupt the convenience stating, "I don't think so. A lot of people do online and I think it's become such a common thing for people to do." Matt felt like it was a "nice to have" aspect of the online course and tended not interact because of the low likelihood of meeting in person:

> It's just a nice thing to know about them. Because I feel like especially online, I'm not going to actually interact with them in person. Most likely, at least in my case, I never have. So, I feel like personally no.

Cait, who identifies as a non-traditional, Asian student explains that she finds no benefit in having intercultural interaction in online courses and states, “I don't see why we need that. I personally don't think that's necessarily.” She goes on to say “I think I have a nice amount now” when speaking about the amount of intercultural interaction in her online courses. Tim, who identifies as having Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, explained that intercultural interaction in online courses were important, but stated that he’d be hesitant to share, “since you don't know who that person is, on the other side of the screen, I would rather not.”

Although Jude felt that intercultural interaction in online courses would be beneficial, she shared Penny’s position of having difficulty balancing other responsibilities that she can more easily manage with how her online courses are currently constructed. She also touches on earlier themes of affordability and working full-time. Jude explains:

> It depends on the way because, honestly, I'm super down and I feel like I need to get to know more people. I was super social, but then when COVID hit I just changed because I was outgoing, and I made friends and I talked to people that I hadn’t even met before. Then with COVID I got kind of shy, and I stopped going out and things. I will definitely be down to meet people, it just depends because I work every single day. I'm full time. I work full-time and I go to school full-time, you know, it's hard.

Opportunity for Intercultural Interaction to Develop

Participants were also asked how intercultural interaction could look in their online courses – who's responsible for the intercultural interaction and how asynchronous and synchronous online learning could present opportunities for increased intercultural interaction. Findings from these questions produced three major themes. First, 5 participants found the need for intercultural interaction in online courses to be largely situational. Second, 10 participants discussed how instructors mostly determine the intercultural interaction in online courses and can do a better job of centering these conversations. Finally, 8 participants discussed synchronous online courses presenting the greatest opportunity for improvement of intercultural interaction in online courses.

"It's largely situational"

When participants discussed increasing intercultural interaction in online courses, many were mixed about the ways in which it should be presented in the course. Some participants discussed intercultural interaction being an approach to the way class is constructed. Course assignments and various course elements contributed to producing opportunities for students to interact and learn from others of different cultural backgrounds than themselves. Atlas explains that cultural identity and intercultural interaction could be done "a little bit better because, 'how do you identify?' can be woven into pretty much everything." Many stated that intercultural interaction and discussion of cultural identity should be based on the topic of the course. Velma states, "if it's a topic of discussion like my intercultural class that I took, that would have been appropriate." Tim offers a similar view when approaching intercultural interaction and topics of cultural identity:

> If it's able to be done in the course naturally, then by all means it's OK. However, if it doesn't make sense for it to be mentioned in a course, I would rather focus more on the information at hand. Sometimes it is just sharing information while some courses are trying to get a wider picture.

When asked if participants would seek out opportunities in their current online courses to engage in intercultural interaction and discuss cultural identities, Tim continued, "not unprompted. If there is a place for me to try and talk about it, or if there's a discussion occurring, I could facilitate by mentioning that information, then I will bring it up." Similarly, Penny explained that she would see it as appropriate "only if somebody brings it up."

"I can actually pay attention and learn about the person"

When asked about the ways in which intercultural interaction could make appearances, participants offered perspectives that applied to both asynchronous and synchronous online courses. Many of the perspectives provided by the participants were applicable to both interaction and intercultural interaction in online courses. Several participants shared suggestions within the current online course structure that would help facilitate intercultural interaction. Lahna shared that more "group projects" would help and Kaely reflected on a course that created smaller discussion groups to help create opportunities for intercultural interaction. She explained, "in smaller discussion groups, I can actually pay attention and learn about the person that I'm discussing with." Tucker explained a similar position, "in order to improve those things I would probably say having more group assignments, but group-oriented…for example, in one of my classes, this semester I have three separate group discussions but at least we're all working together." Zane described a previous online course this way:

> They have tried to utilize more of a social method of submitting assignments. So, for example, in one of my classes that I took last year we had several group projects that we had to go over. We had to meet with other kids in the class in order to complete the assignment. That's something that classes have tried to do, create an assignment that we all have to work together on.

Some participants suggest video to better facilitate interaction. Tamiya reflects on a past asynchronous course "I remember for one class we were assigned partners online to do this project that was a presentation that we had to use a video camera." However, some participants stated that it would be counter to the purpose of online courses. Kaitryn explains, "I guess like a set time for Zoom, but that just defeats the purpose of a self-paced online course, right?"

Some participants communicated uncertainty in knowing how to improve intercultural interaction in online courses. In discussion with Kaitryn, she wanted to improve it, but stated "I don't know how." When reflecting, Jackie stated that improved intercultural interaction with peers was more likely to happen in synchronous online learning environments:

> I don't know that they'll get it in the asynchronous setting. Maybe a little bit more in the synchronous because you meet every week, and you get to talk to those people. But I think the people that take the asynchronous, they take it for a reason. They just want to kind of get it done and get it out the way. They don't need that community.

"The professors need to make more of an initiative to get the people together"

While some participants offered suggestions on how the program could improve interaction in online courses, many held the position that the responsibility was primarily on the instructor to determine both interaction and intercultural interaction. Velma stated, for example,

“I think if the instructor makes it required or they put you in like a small group for an assignment. That helps the interaction.” Emily provided insight into the role the instructor can take, “in online courses, it's important to set an expectation from the beginning that this is a very interactive class in that everyone needs to be involved.” When speaking about discussion of cultural identity, Ayden described the role of the instructor this way:

> It just depends on the class because if the professor is asking you in an assignment to answer some question, how does this relate to your own life? You can read people's posts and see what they say and see kind of where they're coming from another point of view, other than yourself. But if the professor isn't asking anything about you, and they just want you to do this assignment, then all you see is the work. You don't see the person behind the work, if that makes sense.

Some participants explained that it can be a shared responsibility that begins with the instructor but that students have a role to play as well. Emily, for instance, said:

> Professors have a responsibility for providing those opportunities and whether that's a group project or like a breakout group and talk about talk with your peers about what we've just been discussing in the lecture, but then I think it also the responsibility of the students, and you have to make the choice to approach the group that you've been working with in a project…I think it's goes both ways but certainly it can start with the professor.

Some participants did communicate that some instructors have made efforts to build more interaction in the course. Velma reflected on a synchronous online course that she had taken earlier in the year:

> I've had more interaction this semester, but because the professor actually required us to be in groups and this is the first class that I take where he requires us to have interactions and it's in every assignment... You get a different group, so you get to interact with different people in the class in a small group setting.

When discussing intercultural interaction, Jude discussed how the instructor made efforts to facilitate safe space dialogue:

> The professor that I had, he was very interactive. He wanted everybody to feel comfortable and that's what made it easy for everybody to feel comfortable amongst each other and be able to speak. Because it can be a little weird to speak over the computer and with the camera and all that stuff, but he made it so comfortable for you just to be yourself and be able to express whatever and it was just respected. Everybody respected each other's point of view, everybody's questions. It was just that kind of environment that made it so nice. I enjoyed the class because I knew that it was a safe space.

Many participants were complimentary of some of their online course instructors, Arya noted that "communication teachers are very open. In general, they understand they how to communicate compared to engineering." Tucker spoke to the diversity within the communication department at one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States explaining that "one thing for at least this college and the classes I've been in, I've seen people from many different backgrounds."

Some participants offered opportunities for improvement of instructors and the communication college within one large, diverse, public university in the southeastern United States to improve opportunities for intercultural interaction and facilitate safe space dialogue

regarding cultural identity of themselves and others. Jackie states, “The professors need to make a little bit more of an initiative to get the people together, if that's important to them, because it's left to do it on our own.” Ayden suggested that instructors could educate on culture more in the classroom:

> I would say that they could be better at making opportunities for our peers to understand because at the beginning of every semester, there's introductions, but it's never anything that deep, you know? I think if there was some sort of exercise where it was more than just, what's your major and what city are you from, if you tell us something interesting about yourself, maybe we could have a better understanding of our peers. Before the actual nitty-gritty of coursework really began.

Participants provided insight into how the school could improve to recruit diversity. As Tucker explained:

> More public outreach events or more promotion or advertising or really showing that the people that attend this university or in this subset of schooling, are from such XYZ diverse backgrounds versus how it was before or compared to other places. I think that would be a really good thing because it could just show that people who come from these minorities…those that identify as these minorities, they could feel safe or represented at this school or in this college.

This study investigated the ways that interaction and intercultural interaction manifested in online synchronous and asynchronous online courses amongst peers and with course instructors. Themes from this study were determined from the interviews conducted and transcribed, and by a transcription analysis. Each theme considered the various aspects of the

research questions posed and helped provide a more complete understanding of what intercultural interaction looks like in online learning communication courses in a communication program at a large, diverse, southeastern university. Additionally, this study analyzed how participants viewed current efforts of their instructors in online courses and dialogue regarding their cultural identity and the cultural identity of others. Finally, this study examined the level of social presence and community in online communication courses they took.

CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The goal of this study was to provide a theoretically-driven qualitative analysis of how intercultural interaction takes place within online learning environments leveraging both the critical communication pedagogical approach and a critical race theoretical perspective. More specifically, this study explored the extent to which dialogue of cultural identity among students and instructors is currently taking place, analyzed how students viewed instructors' efforts to situate discussions of cultural identity in the online classroom, and identified opportunities for improved interaction to better achieve these outcomes in the online classroom. This final chapter begins by presenting the conclusions and implications drawn from the study's findings. Limitations are then acknowledged and suggestions for future research offered.

Conclusions

This was a study about the facilitation of and dialogue on race, identity, and difference as they may occur in online communication courses within higher education. Doing so was an opportunity to better understand the level of concern communication scholars and educators should have regarding the potential muting and shrinking of safe spaces for dialogue about identity and difference. As discussed in Chapter 1, the increased political radicalization in the United States by Republican officials brought new limitations to the U.S. school system's ability to facilitate discussion of race and identity in the classroom (Izzaguire, 2022). Determined to suppress, deny, and erase the lived experiences of marginalized students, the Republican-led legislature has imposed obstacles to restrict opportunities for students and instructors to have equitable discussions on identity and difference. Importantly, Allen (2011) posits that

communication scholars are uniquely positioned to incorporate "difference" in their pedagogy; however, legislative mandates are serving as barriers for doing so. Moreover, although a good deal of instructional communication research exists confirming why and suggesting how to discuss cultural identity in historically traditional in-person instruction (Halualani 2017; Allen, 2011; Fassett & Warren, 2010), much less is known about if and how it is being done in online communication courses.

This study focused directly on an answer to the question: does the current construction of online communication courses situate diversity in an equitable way by incorporating the lived experiences of marginalized communities into its design? The need for insight on this question becomes more paramount when considering that Generation Z, the most racially and ethnically diverse generation (Fry & Parker, 2020), are enrolling in online courses exponentially more often compared to other generational groups within higher education nationwide (Schwartz, 2020). The study considered the increasing number of students taking asynchronous and synchronous online courses, and evaluated if critique, education, and understanding of one another is taking place as Shlossberg and Cunnigham (2016) argues is needed to avoid reflecting the implicit bias that is enduring within U.S. education system today. Otherwise, students in online communication courses are merely consuming knowledge, not sharing understanding with peers and instructors (Freire, 1970; Giroux 2020; hooks, 1994; Sandoval & Nainby, 2017).

Findings from the current study reveal that online communication courses have not prioritized the co-creation or exchange of knowledge and instead students discussed having little to no interaction with peers or instructors. With regard to the study's research question, intercultural interaction is nearly absent in both asynchronous and synchronous online courses.

Students seem to be participating in a “banking” approach to teaching and learning, a concept Freire (1970) identified as a student as an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge by the instructor. Results show that students' expectations are not to interact, foster community, or create meaningful connections with peers or instructors in online courses. Many students commented about their online experiences with peers as Penny did when she said, “we're all just there to answer questions, remind people of deadlines…but other than that, nobody is really causing harm or really going above and beyond that to build friendships.” Similarly, when speaking about the nature of interactions with their instructor, students commented as Atlas did when she stated, “I ask for something, and then I get the answer and then I kind of move on.”

These themes were indicative of the depth (or lack thereof) of interaction taking place in online courses. Students did not describe an environment that facilitates intercultural interaction so that power, difference, and inequality in the online classroom is recognized and acknowledged as advocated for by Shlossberg and Cunningham (2016). Collins (2012) argues that it is necessary to build communities that allow for the critical dialogue so that the intellectual and political work needed in our society can advance. Students in the present study recalled only utilizing email and discussion posts for most interactions with instructors and peers. They also clarified that, unless the course topic and instructor directions required it, dialogue of race, identity, and difference never took place in their online courses.

More encouraging to note, however, is that students overwhelmingly agreed that more intercultural interaction should be happening, and that they would like to see these discussions incorporated into online communication courses both actively and passively. Although students conveyed communication challenges with peers (e.g., statements from discussions being taken

out of context) and a mistrust of both peers and instructors from not knowing their in-person identity, they reported choosing to take online courses anyway because of the flexibility they afford to do required work and complete assignments, familiarity with online courses from taking them in high school, and affordability of the online option saving money on parking, fees, and fuel. These reasons confirm existing research regarding reasons students enroll in online courses (Serhan, 2010; Strawser & Kaufmann, 2020) and extend that work to identify motivation to do so at the expense of peer and instructor discussions about cultural identity and diverse lived experiences.

Students presented mixed perspectives regarding whether intercultural interaction and discussion of cultural identity should be situational or "woven into pretty much everything" as Atlas stated. However, nearly all students conveyed a desire to learn from others of different cultural backgrounds and communicated concern of being ignorant in society by not having the opportunity to engage in dialogue about race, identity, and difference.

Findings from the students provided suggestions on how to facilitate intercultural interaction and incorporate "difference" in online communication synchronous and asynchronous courses. Students suggested that intercultural interaction is more likely to improve in synchronous online courses. They provided the following examples of ways to incorporate help foster meaningful relationships and promote discussion of cultural identity:

1. small group assignments
2. meaningful introductions by peers and instructors
3. optional video opportunities amongst peers and more video use by instructors

These suggestions and others provided from the findings in the study are consistent with some of the existing instructional communication scholarship today (e.g., Kaufmann, Sellnow, & Frisby, 2016; Kuo, Walker, Schroder, & Belland, 2014; Limperos, Buckner, Kaufmann, & Frisby, 2015; Sun & Chen 2016). Findings reveal that the identified effective practices aren't taking place as recommended and should be reevaluated.

The study revealed that students' of online communication courses perceived there to be both positives and negatives in regard to the current low levels of intercultural interaction and limited identifiers of peers in online courses. The study revealed that students, particularly those from marginalized communities, leveraged anonymity afforded in online courses to protect themselves from possible harm by students that could express bias to them based on how they identify. Students explained that they could more easily express their views without having to endure the same amount of racial biases when compared to in-person courses.

Finally, students also explained that instructors of online communication courses have the primary responsibility of facilitating intercultural interaction and stated that although there have been some positives with incorporating "difference" there is opportunity to improve.

The initial intergroup interaction scholarship of Gordon Allport (1954), and the extension of it by Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004), in many ways served as the foundation for this study of intercultural interaction in online communication courses within higher education. Allport's position was that prejudice could be reduced when different cultural identities interact with equal status, common goals, cooperation, and the support of an authoritative figure. Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez contribution to Allport's findings suggest that facilitated curricular and co-curricular experiences with peers of different cultural backgrounds and the creation of an integrated

learning environment were necessary to achieve diversity within education contexts. These studies and others (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Nagda, Yeakley, Gurin, Sorensen, 2012; Rodríguez, Nagda, Sorensen, & Gurin, 2018) justify the need for intercultural interaction and critical dialogue in higher education classrooms. These studies, however, emphasize proximity through direct contact, in-person interaction and activity participation for the successful implementation of interaction amongst different cultural groups and presents an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which intercultural interaction and dialogue on difference is taking place in online educational learning environments. With consideration of the different educational modalities offered and increasing in popularity (Sellnow & Kaufmann, 2017), it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the facilitation of interaction among groups of differing cultural identities.

This study was able to uncover more about the way in which computer-mediated asynchronous and synchronous educational online learning environments are facilitating (and not facilitating) intercultural interaction and impacting the opportunity to have discussion among peers and instructors regarding cultural identity. It applied what we know about interaction among cultural groups from existing research and asked, is this happening in online courses? Results revealed that, although co-curricular and curricular discussions about culture and diversity are taking place, the perceived mistrust of peers and instructors and the general unknowing of others in the online classroom may exacerbate the implicit bias that is enduring within the U.S. education system today. Findings reinforce Shlossberg and Cunnigham's (2016) argument for critical communication pedagogical approach to online instruction and further explains the need for CCP to address its function in online classroom instruction.

Finally, this study also supports the argument for the need of Critical Race Theory to be utilized as a measure for which communication scholars and educators determine how systems of racial oppression are being upheld in online communication course design. It extends CRT, as it identifies approaches to interrogate systems of racial oppression in asynchronous and synchronous online communication courses where interaction and opportunities to facilitate communication on the identity and difference are severely limited. The study's findings of improved interrogative approaches of critical race theory and ways to improve intercultural interaction help to extend to Critical Communication Pedagogy by presenting a path to achieving social presence and community in online courses.

Implications

The findings in this study presented several implications for online communication course instructors to consider in the construction of online courses in higher education. These implications are described as communication strategies and recommendations.

First, if communication educators are to seriously consider the dialogic approach to online instruction as suggested by the discipline, interrogation of their current online course construction is necessary. Findings showed little interaction and opportunity for discussions taking place in courses where communication is meant to be central to, or at least a core aspect of, the course objectives. Including perspectives of marginalized communities is a valuable contribution to co-creation and exchange of knowledge between the student and their instructor but is unlikely to be realized without leveraging critical communication pedagogy as an approach to course design. This addresses cultural and socioeconomic power structures in a way in which the need for the purpose of the course being taught to actively discuss identity and difference

becomes secondary (although these courses are paramount too). It may offer more protection to the instructor against political radicalization, a move many educators may find more necessary to avoid modifying their teaching or canceling courses altogether for fear of losing their tenure, jobs, and thus livelihood (Golden, 2023). Costanza-Chock (2020) states it differently:

> If we take seriously the idea that current power structures are not only unjust but also steadily leading humanity down an unsustainable path that ends in planetary ecological collapse and species death, then we can't be satisfied with purely pragmatic design.

Findings present an opportunity to have intercultural interaction "woven" into the course.

Second, communication educators should consider how attributes of the learning management system (LMS) used to help facilitate the instruction of online communication courses, can be utilized to better address mistrust of peers and instructors by students and foster relationships. Students expressed the need for a confirmation of who they're engaging in dialogue with. One suggestion to consider are more robust student and faculty profiles within the LMS to help students quickly determine the credibility of a peer. This view is supported by Spates, Kaufmann, Lin, Lachlan, and Spence (2020) who posit that the "identity heuristic then becomes a cognitive shortcut because knowing more about who is posting information impacts the perception of source credibility" (p.156).

Third, this study has shown that implicit bias present in the U.S. education system is at best equal to that of in-person courses and at worst increased by the absence of meaningful exchange, further muting the opportunity of intercultural interaction to take place. For successful implementation, communication instructors should consider how marginalized perspectives are incorporated into online communication courses within higher education. Current

communication scholarship would suggest that non-White perspectives are underrepresented, as editorial positions, citation rates, and publications all favor White, male scholars and their perspectives (Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs & McIlwain, 2018). Previous findings suggest that students find it necessary to learn from those with cultural identities different from their own. Students, particularly those of minoritized backgrounds, find it necessary to learn from instructors that represent their identities and communities and will seek out instructors that look like them. Communication educators of online courses should review textbooks, articles, resources, videos, and other material utilized in their curriculum and ensure that those from marginalized communities and diverse cultural identities are represented.

Finally, communication scholars should be transparent about the racial/ethnic and gender identities of sources cited in their research to help evaluate the representation of cultural and marginalized perspectives in the work. For example, this study, which centers identity and difference, attempted to identify all authors cited (see Appendix D). This study cited 153 total authors consisting of 74 (48.37%) women, 78 (50.98%) men, and one (0.65%) non-binary person. To the extent possible cited authors identities were researched, sourced, and identified as the following racial/ethnic groups: 24 Asian (15.69%), 31 Black (20.26%), 20 Hispanic, Latino/a/x or Spanish origin (13.07%), one Middle Eastern or North African (0.65%), one Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.65%), and 76 White (49.67%). While there's not currently a benchmark for representation expected in communication scholarship, we know editorships, citation practices, and publishing histories have favored white men (Chakravartty, et al, 2018). Additionally, Chakravartty and Jackson (2020) have identified a severe lack of, and indeed a "disavowal" of race in the curriculum of communication graduate programs (tasked with training

future educators in the discipline). There is a need for accountability in communication programs to not only increase representation in the faculty ranks, but also in the works and perspectives assigned in the classroom.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, results from one study at a single institution may not be as generalizable as larger samples across institutions. It would be valuable to conduct similar studies at other colleges and universities to identify consistencies and differences across regions and demographics. It is worth noting that, although the participant population was diverse in ethnicity and identity, representation was not exhaustive. Second, the data presented in this study consists solely of a qualitative analysis of interview data. Future studies may consider how alternative methodologies help contribute to the crystallization of these findings. Utilizing the quantitative approach, a climate survey could be constructed and distributed to increase understanding of intercultural interaction of online courses. Using rhetorical criticism, review of various communication course materials could identify the diversity represented. Third, the current study only examined the perspectives of students. Future work could examine the perspectives of instructors. Finally, future studies could go beyond self-report data of perceptions using course observation to explore authentic affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning outcome achievement regarding understanding of and respect for diverse cultural identities and lived experiences.

Future Directions

Conclusions yielded from this dissertation study give rise to several suggestions for future research. Replication of the study with an increased number of universities will help determine the study's generalizability. Education level may also be applied to better understand how suggested recommendations for situating "difference" in online instruction as a pedagogical practice applies to K-12 education grades. The study could expand to identify and compare perception of intercultural interaction in other learning modalities such as hybrid and flex models. Studies should be replicated in other disciplines to determine generalizability outside of online communication courses. How might students in an online engineering course display greater empathy and reduced biases for peers and instructors who identify differently than themselves if provided the opportunity to do so? Future findings from expanding this study could help to improve existing educational curriculum quality standard checkers like Quality Matters. Sustained increases in remote work post near global lockdown (Robinson, 2022) present opportunities to explore intercultural interaction outside of academia. Continued exploration of intercultural interaction in computer-mediated spaces might help to reveal the impact of social media platforms on identity and difference. Considering the contribution of social media on the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, future direction might seek to understand how users of social media interact with difference in both viewed media and subscribers of diverse cultural backgrounds. While this study leverages critical communication pedagogy and critical race theory as theoretical groundings, how might other theories apply in the identifying opportunities to address and remove barriers to incorporating difference in the online classroom. Future direction might consider how Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, Social Presence Theory, and

Social Information Processing Theory contribute to this analysis. Finally, this study should leverage quantitative inquiry in the future as insights may help contribute to an understanding of systemic barriers to overcoming inequality in online courses within higher education.

Summary

In the summer of 2020, we saw the power of empathy's ability to break hegemonic Whites supremacist power structures by centering the lived experiences of those that have been marginalized in this country. If only temporarily, the Black American 400+ year plight was seen, heard, acknowledged, with some progress made. It took a global pandemic with deadly consequences to prevent those with privilege and power from ignoring racial injustice and systems of oppression levied on those who are not White. The empathy built from fear of death was not sustainable, nor am I advocating for its enduring existence for Black lives to matter. However, the intercultural interaction through computer-mediated platforms and increased interpersonal engagement helped internalization to take place and serves as an example to what's possible on matters of identity and difference. As communication scholars and educators of online courses we have the capacity to be self-reflexive, interrogate who's been able to make these decisions, and determine if they are inclusive and centering those historically left out of consideration. It is incumbent on the discipline to engage in this praxis and design spaces accordingly.

APPENDIX A: IRB DOCUMENT 1

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

September 12, 2022

Dear Darius Lana:

On 9/12/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Intercultural Interaction in Online Courses
Investigator:	Darius Lana
IRB ID:	STUDY00004585
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly form - Intercultural Interaction(1).pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval; • Study 4585 IRB Lana - Intercultural Interaction Email Response V2.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Study 4585 IRB Lana - Intercultural Interaction Flyer Copy V3.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Study 4585 IRB Lana - Intercultural Interaction Speaking Script V2.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Study 4585 IRB Lana - Interview Protocol - Intercultural Interaction V2.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions; • Study 4585 IRB Lana - Survey - Intercultural Interaction V3.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • Study 4585 IRB Lana HRP-254-Form - Intercultural Interaction V4.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Study 4585 IRB Lana HRP-255-Form Request for Exemption - Intercultural Interaction V4.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the

human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Kristin Badillo
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: IRB DOCUMENT 2

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

CLOSURE

March 13, 2023

Dear Darius Lana:

On 3/13/2023, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Continuing Review
Title:	Intercultural Interaction in Online Courses
Investigator:	Darius Lana
IRB ID:	CR00002188
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None

The IRB acknowledges your request for closure of the protocol effective as of 3/13/2023. As part of this action:

- The protocol is permanently closed to enrollment.
- All subjects have completed all protocol-related interventions.
- Collection of private identifiable information is completed.
- Analysis of private identifiable information is completed.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Yariela Thompson
UCF IRB

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARTICIPANTS

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted via an eight-question interview protocol:

1. Can you please describe yourself to me? I am specifically interested in how you culturally identify? (Offer example, Black American cisgender man with Nigerian roots from my birth father)
2. Can you please describe the type of online course you recently completed or are in current? (e.g., topic, level, number of credits, general education course, course in your major)
3. How often would you say you interacted with other students in the course?
    a. Were these interactions part of the course expectations/requirements or did they emerge organically among the students? Explain.
    b. Where or how did these interactions take place? (In-course - ex. Discussion posts, or out-of-course - ex. Group Me app)
    c. Did you find these interactions generally - positive (helpful, friendly), negative (harmful, distracting), or neutral (not memorable)? Explain.
4. To what extent did cultural identity play a role in your interactions with your peers?
    a. How did your perception of self (cultural identity) play a role in the interaction?
    b. How did your perception of their cultural identity play a role in your interaction with them?
    c. How did their perception of self (cultural identity) seem to influence the interaction? Explain.
    d. How did their perception of your cultural identity seem to influence the interaction? Explain.

5. How often did you interact with the instructor in the course?
    a. How often did the instructor reach out to you?
    b. How often did you reach out to the instructor?
    c. Where or how did these interactions take place? (In-course - ex. E-mail, or out-of-course - ex. Virtual Office Hours)
    d. Did you find these interactions generally - positive (helpful, friendly), negative (harmful, distracting), or neutral (not memorable)? Explain.
6. To what extent did cultural identity play a role in your interactions with your peers?
    a. How did your perception of self (cultural identity) play a role in the interaction?
    b. How did your perception of their cultural identity play a role in your interaction with them?
    c. How did their perception of self (cultural identity) seem to influence the interaction? Explain.
    d. How did their perception of your cultural identity seem to influence the interaction? Explain.
7. To what extent did your cultural identity play a role in your interactions with your instructor?
    a. How did your perception of self (cultural identity) play a role in the interaction?
    b. How did your perception of the instructor's cultural identity play a role in your interaction with them?
    c. How did their perception of self (cultural identity) seem to influence the interaction? Explain.

d. How did their perception of your cultural identity seem to influence the interaction? Explain.

8. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX D: PSEUDONYM, ETHNICITY, AND IDENTITY OF PARTICIPANTS IN THIS STUDY

Table 1. Pseudonym, ethnicity, and identity of participants in this study

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year in School	Ethnicity
Tamyia	21	Woman	Senior	Middle Eastern or North African *(Eg: Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc)*
Aubrey	24	Woman	Senior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Lahna	24	Woman	Senior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Kaely	20	Woman	Junior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Camilla	23	Woman	Junior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Penny	21	Woman	Junior	Asian *(Eg: Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc)*
Arya	22	Woman	Senior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Jada	20	Woman	Senior	Black *(Eg: African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc)*
Ayden	20	Woman	Junior	White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*
Tucker	21	Man	Junior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin* *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Jackie	35	Woman	Junior	Black *(Eg: African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc)*
Atlas	21	Woman	Junior	Black *(Eg: African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc)*
Julie	18	Woman	Freshman	White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Year in School	Ethnicity
Matt	19	Man	Sophomore	White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*
Kaitryn	21	Woman	Senior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Velma	35	Woman	Junior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Tim	21	Man	Senior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*
Emily	20	Woman	Junior	White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*
Zane	20	Man	Junior	White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*
Cait	N/A	Woman	Junior	Asian *(Eg: Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc)*
Jude	22	Woman	Junior	Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin *(Eg: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc)*

*Also identified as White *(Eg: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)*

APPENDIX E: GROUPED QUOTES FROM THEMES PRESENTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

Table 2. Quotes from themes presented by participants in study, pseudonyms used.

N=21	Theme	Quote
17	Online courses fit with students schedules. It was convenient.	*"I feel that these online classes are the best opportunity for someone to get the experience of college and...further their education without having to be, stuck in traffic rushing to get to school, to find parking, and in all of the stuff that comes with going face-to-face" - Kaitryn*
11	Familiarity and comfort with Online courses due to Emergency learning during COVID-19	*"I don't have as much experience doing in-person classes…Covid happened and so I just kept them all online because I could." - Julie*
15	Described a 'traditional' in-person course experience as a luxury that was out of reach for them financially	*"Being a full-time student and a full-time employee is hard enough as it is. But being expected to do adult things while in school it's kind of like you have to take the good with the bad. So I'd rather have a place to live and eat and deal with the disadvantages of my online classes." - Jada*
16	Participants communicated not having a real sense of peers and instructors	*"I do find it harder to get to know someone for online classes because it doesn't feel authentic... Whereas when it's something in-person, you do get that human connection...you get to learn their face faster, their name, whereas digital, you may only be talking to them via text." - Velma*
12	Noted the limitations of providing contexts to peers for misunderstanding in discussion	*"When you're just typing words on a screen, maybe things can come off, not as how you intended to say them. I'm thinking of one instance in particular where...She was accusing me of saying things that I didn't. Not only did I not say what she said, I said, but she took it to a different context. She was coming for my throat." - Ayden*
18	Interviewees discussed the lack of relationships developed with peers and instructors in online courses	*"Unless we were paired for a group project and I had to interact with people, usually those connections never really lasted. We just kind of collaborated just for kind of the project or whatever was going on during time and then we just kind of dispersed into our own worlds" - Tamyia*
11	Explained themselves as accepting of limited interaction as inevitable in online courses	*"it's the minimum contact possible and I do think that at the end, the goal of online, is to waste less time." - Arya*

07	Interviewees mentioned the difficulty they experienced in trying to communicate with peers in online courses	*It's becoming a new norm when having to speak to people face-to-face. It's a lot harder to communicate because you don't readily think of responses. You always have time to sit and plan and replan and edit your response to everything like the email…It's becoming a lot harder." - Jada*
14	Participants experienced an absence of intercultural interaction	*"I feel like it's very assignment oriented. If the assignment were to ask about it, I feel like it would, but without any instruction or guidance it probably wouldn't occur on its own." - Tucker*
06	Participants that identify with a marginalized community discussed the anonymity of their identity in online courses	*"Typically, in a face-to-face interaction, when I go into a space, I will read the room because there's a sense of energy of what I should say. Well, I can't say how I'm going to be perceived with online interactions. Even though people can see my profile picture and I can see theirs, it feels like less of a barrier..." - Atlas*
11	Participants discussed where their intercultural interactions are taking place if not for in the online classroom	*"I have a lot of friends, from Bosnians, Serbians, Albanians, Black and Hispanic. I love all cultures and have always had a very diverse group of friends." - Velma*
14	Noted a need for discussions of intercultural interaction in the classroom	*"I think that is a very beneficial thing that should happen. Because in most cases, people go to college, and they start a whole, fresh viewpoint for themselves..." - Tucker*
08	Discussed the possible benefits and consequences of not having the opportunity for intercultural interaction in an online course	*""The only consequence maybe would be the fact that we would stay how we are now and that's where people don't understand each other and they're not willing to." - Ayden*
05	Participants found the need for intercultural interaction in online courses to be largely situational	*"If it's able to be done in the course naturally, then by all means it's okay. However, if it doesn't make sense for it to be mentioned in a course, I would rather focus more on the information at hand." - Tim*
10	Participants discussed how instructors mostly determine the intercultural interaction in online courses and can do a better job of centering these conversations	*"If the professor is asking you in an assignment to answer some question, how does this relate to your own life? You can read people's posts and see what they say and see kind of where they're coming from another point of view, other than yourself. But if the professor isn't asking anything about you...then all you see is the work. You don't see the person behind the work."* *- Ayden*

08	Participants discussed synchronous online courses presenting the greatest opportunity for improvement of intercultural interaction in online courses	*"I don't know that they'll get it in the asynchronous setting. Maybe a little bit more in the synchronous because you meet every week, and you get to talk to those people. But I think...asynchronous, they just want to kind of get it done and get it out the way." - Jackie*

APPENDIX F: ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY OF AUTHORS CITED IN THIS STUDY

Table 3. Ethnicity of authors cited in this study

Ethnicity	Ethnicity Count	Ethnicity Percentage	1st Author Count	1st Author Percentage
Asian	24	20.26%	10	11.63%
Black	31	15.69%	22	25.58%
Hispanic, Latino/a/x or Spanish origin	20	13.07%	9	10.47%
Middle Eastern or North African	1	0.65%	1	1.16%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.65%	1	1.16%
White	76	49.67%	43	50.00%
Total	***153***		***86***	

Table 4. Identity of authors cited in this study

Gender	Count	Percentage
Men	78	50.98%
Women	74	48.37%
Non-Binary	1	0.65%
Total	***153***	

LIST OF REFERENCES

Adams, C. (2021, November 25). *"They almost got away with it": How a leaked video led to convictions in the Ahmaud Arbery case*. NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/-almost-got-away-leaked-video-led-convictions-ahmaud-arbery-case-rcna6690

Adgate, B. (2020, August 21). *Nielsen: How the pandemic changed at home media consumption*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/bradadgate/2020/08/21/nielsen-how-the-pandemic-changed-at-home-media-consumption/?sh=6f6e1d375a28

Allen, B. J. (2010). *Difference matters: Communicating social identity* (2nd ed.). Waveland Pr Inc.

Allport, G. W. (1954). T*he nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.

Allyn, B. (2020, June 7). *TikTok pivots from dance moves to a racial justice movement*. NPR.org. https://www.npr.org/2020/06/07/871065917/tiktok-pivots-from-dance-moves-to-a-racial-justice-movement

Anderson, M. White. (2021, September 15). *'These are the facts': Black educators silenced from teaching America's racist past*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/14/black-us-teachers-critical-race-theory-silenced

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2020, September). *Demonstrations & political violence in America: New data for summer 2020*. https://acleddata.com/2020/08/31/us-crisis-monitor-releases-full-data-for-summer-2020/

Baker, R., Dee, T., Evans, B., & John, J. (2018, March 6). *Bias in online classes: Evidence from a field experiment*. Center for Education Policy Analysis. https://cepa.stanford.edu/content/bias-online-classes-evidence-field-experiment

Barge, J. K., & Craig, R. T. (2009). Practical theory in applied communication scholarship. In L. R. Frey & K. Cissna (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Applied Communication Research* (pp. 55–78). Routledge.

Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism* (Reprint). Basic Books.

Bhattacherjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: Principles, methods, and practices* (2nd ed.). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Brown, D. L. (2020, June 4). *As black people continue to die at the hands of police and vigilantes, the nation faces its long history of racial violence.* National Geographic. https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2020/06/it-was-a-modern-day-lynching-violent-deaths-reflect-a-brutal-american-legacy

Ceci, L. (2022, January 28). *TikTok usage during COVID-19 in the United States 2020*. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1207831/tiktok-usage-among-young-adults-during-covid-19-usa/

Chakravartty, P., & Jackson, S. J. (2020). The disavowal of race in communication theory. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, *17*(2), 210–219. https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2020.1771743

Chakravartty, P., Kuo, R., Grubbs, V., & McIlwain, C. (2018). #CommunicationSoWhite. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(2), 254–266. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy003

Chapman, T. K. (2007). Interrogating classroom relationships and events: Using portraiture and Critical Race Theory in education research. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(3), 156–162. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x07301437

Chávez, K. R. (2012). Doing intersectionality; power, privilege, and identities in political activist communities. In N. Bardhan & M. P. Orbe (Eds.), *Identity Research and Communication: Intercultural Reflections and Future Directions* (pp. 21–32). Lexington Books.

Child, F., Frank, M., Lef, M., & Sarakatsannis, J. (2021, November 11). *Setting a new bar for online higher education*. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/setting-a-new-bar-for-online-higher-education

Collins, P. H. (2012). *On intellectual activism* (2nd ed.). Temple University Press.

Costanza-Chock, S. (2020, March 3). *Directions for future work: From #TechWontBuildIt to #DesignJustice ·*. Design Justice. https://designjustice.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/ev26fjji/release/1

Crenshaw, K. (2022, April 7). *45. Was this the last Black History Month?* [Video]. Apple Podcasts. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/45-was-this-the-last-black-history-month/id1441348908?i=1000556571260

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

Deliso, M. (2021, April 21). *Timeline: The impact of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis and beyond*. ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/US/timeline-impact-george-floyds-death-minneapolis/story?id=70999322

Farris, K. L., Houser, M. L., & Hosek, A. M. (2017). Historical roots and trajectories of instructional communication. In M. L. Houser & A. Hosek (Eds.), *Handbook of Instructional Communication: Rhetorical and Relational Perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 1–18). Routledge.

Fassett, D. L., & Warren, J. T. (2010). Critical communication pedagogy reframing the field. In D. L. Fassett & J. T. Warren (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Communication and Instruction (Sage Handbooks)* (1st ed., pp. 283–291). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Fausset, R. (2022, February 7). *Ahmaud Arbery shooting: What to know about the trial and more*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html?

Fisher, D. R. (2022, March 9). *The diversity of the recent Black Lives Matter protests is a good sign for racial equity*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2020/07/08/the-diversity-of-the-recent-black-lives-matter-protests-is-a-good-sign-for-racial-equity/

Fry, R., & Parker, K. (2020, August 14). *Early benchmarks show 'post-millennials' on track to be most diverse, best-educated generation yet*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/

Gaudiano, N. (2022, March 14). *Colleges are fighting conservative bills in states like Florida and Texas that they say throw "red meat" to Trump supporters and muzzle educators*.

Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/colleges-fighting-conservative-woke-act-bills-critical-race-theory-gender-2022-3?international=true&r=US&IR=T

Gillborn*, D. (2005). Education policy as an act of white supremacy: whiteness, critical race theory and education reform. *Journal of Education Policy*, *20*(4), 485–505. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500132346

Gillborn, D. (2006). Critical race theory and education: Racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *27*(1), 11–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500510229

Giroux, H. A. (2020). *On critical pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Golden, D. (2023, January 3). *After DeSantis' anti-CRT Law, Florida professors cancel courses, modify teaching*. ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/desantis-critical-race-theory-florida-college-professors

Golub, M. (2005). Plessy as "passing": Judicial responses to ambiguously raced bodies in Plessy v. Ferguson. *Law <Html_ent Glyph="@amp;" Ascii="&Amp;"/> Society Review*, *39*(3), 563–600. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2005.00234.x

Gunn, M. (2022, April 12). *Recent surge in banned books targets titles with focus on race, sexuality*. Newsweek. https://www.newsweek.com/2022/04/29/recent-surge-banned-books-targets-titles-focus-race-sexuality-1696575.html

Gurin, P., Nagda, B. R. A., & Lopez, G. E. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues*, *60*(1), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-4537.2004.00097.x

Hall, S. (1993). Cultural identity and diaspora. In P. Williams & L. Chisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 227–237). London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hall, S. (1997). Old and new identities, old and new ethnicities. In A. D. King (Ed.), *Culture, Globalization, and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (pp. 41–68). University of Minnesota Press.

Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *1*(1), 3–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180701285244

Halualani, R. (2017). Demarcating the "critical" in critical intercultural communication studies. In A. Atay & S. Toyosaki (Eds.), *Critical Intercultural Communication Pedagogy* (pp. 3–10). Adfo Books.

Halualani, R. T., & Nakayama, T. K. (2012). Critical intercultural communication studies: At a crossroads. In R. T. Halualani & T. K. Nakayama (Eds.), *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (1st ed., pp. 1–16). Wiley-Blackwell.

Hill, E., Tiefenthäler, A., Triebert, C., Jordan, D., Willis, H., & Stein, R. (2022, January 24). *How George Floyd was killed in police custody*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Huang, Y. M., Wang, C. S., & Liu, Y. C. (2015). A study of synchronous vs. asynchronous collaborative design in students' learning motivation. *International Journal of*

Information and Education Technology, *5*(5), 354–357. https://doi.org/10.7763/ijiet.2015.v5.529

Izzaguire, A. (2022, March 31). *LGBTQ groups sue Florida over so-called "Don't Say Gay" law*. AP NEWS. https://apnews.com/article/education-florida-tallahassee-ron-desantis-gender-identity-261dca455c4027d5fc5ce10fd1d7f012

Janfaza, R. (2020, June 5). *TikTok serves as hub for #blacklivesmatter activism*. CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/04/politics/tik-tok-black-lives-matter/index.html

Johnson, E. P. (2001). "Quare" studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *21*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119

Kaufmann, R., Sellnow, D. D., & Frisby, B. N. (2015). The development and validation of the online learning climate scale (OLCS). *Communication Education*, *65*(3), 307–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1101778

Kendi, I. X. (2022, February 14). *Opponents of critical race theory are arguing with themselves*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/07/opponents-critical-race-theory-are-arguing-themselves/619391/

Koetsier, J. (2020, September 15). *Massive TikTok growth: Up 75% this year, now 33X more users than nearest direct competitor*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2020/09/14/massive-tiktok-growth-up-75-this-year-now-33x-more-users-than-nearest-competitor/?sh=190d071c4fe4

Kuo, Y. C., Walker, A. E., Schroder, K. E., & Belland, B. R. (2014). Interaction, internet self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning as predictors of student satisfaction in online

education courses. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *20*, 35–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2013.10.001

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(1), 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (2016). Toward a critical race theory of education. In *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song* (1st Edition, pp. 11–30). Taylor & Francis Group.

Lederman, D. (2021, September 16). *New data offer sense of how COVID expanded online learning*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/16/new-data-offer-sense-how-covid-expanded-online-learning

Ledesma, M. C., & Calderón, D. (2015). Critical race theory in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825

Limperos, A. M., Buckner, M. M., Kaufmann, R., & Frisby, B. N. (2015). Online teaching and technological affordances: An experimental investigation into the impact of modality and clarity on perceived and actual learning. *Computers &Amp; Education*, *83*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.12.015

Maruyama, G., Moreno, J., Gudeman, R. H., & Marin, P. (1999, November 30). *Does diversity make a difference? Three research studies on diversity in college classrooms*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED444409

Matsuda, M. J., Iii, C. L. R., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, K. W. (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the First Amendment (New Perspectives on Law, Culture, & Society)* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Moore, M. G. (1989). Editorial: Three types of interaction. *American Journal of Distance Education*, *3*(2), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/08923648909526659

Moore, M. G., & Kearsley, G. (2011). *Distance education: A systems view of online learning (What's New in Education)* (3rd ed.). Cengage Learning.

Mottet, T. P., & Beebe, S. A. (2005). Foundations of instructional communication. In V. P. Richmond, J. C. Mccroskey, & T. Mottet (Eds.), *Handbook of Instructional Communication* (1st ed., pp. 3–32). Taylor & Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315664064

Muliadi, B. (2020, July 7). *What the rise of TikTok says about Generation Z*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/07/07/what-the-rise-of-tiktok-says-about-generation-z/?sh=693b5c1a6549

Nagda, B. R. A., Yeakley, A., Gurin, P., & Sorensen, N. (2012). Intergroup dialogue: A critical-dialogic model for conflict engagement. *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict*, 210–228. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199747672.013.0013

National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements. (2021, October). *NC-SARA annual data report: Technical report for Fall 2020 exclusively distance education enrollment & 2020 out-of-state learning placements*. https://nc-sara.org/annual-data-reports?utm_source=AdaptiveMailer&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=All%20Acti

ve%20SF%20Contacts&org=2562&lvl=100&ite=216&lea=24106&ctr=0&par=1&trk=a171R00000Wmpq9QAB

Oluo, I. (2020). *Mediocre: The dangerous legacy of white male America*. Seal Press.

Omokha, R. (2021, July 29). *How critical race theory mastermind Kimberlé Crenshaw is weathering the culture wars*. Vanity Fair. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/07/how-critical-race-theory-mastermind-kimberle-crenshaw-is-weathering-the-culture-wars

Oppel, R. A., Jr, Taylor, D. B., & Bogel-Burroughs, N. (2021, April 26). *What to know about Breonna Taylor's death*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html

Orbe, M. P. (2016). "Diversity matters" in communication education. *Communication Education*, *65*(1), 118–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1096948

Pandey, E. (2021, May 20). *The chief diversity officer hiring frenzy*. Axios. https://www.axios.com/chief-diversity-officer-hiring-frenzy-289877ce-ce65-4169-b414-79982e856281.html

Patton, T. O. (2004). Reflections of a Black woman professor: Racism and sexism in academia. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *15*(3), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170490483629

Pendharkar, E. (2021, September 22). *He taught about white privilege and got fired. Now he's fighting to get his job back*. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/he-taught-about-white-privilege-and-got-fired-now-hes-fighting-to-get-his-job-back/2021/09

Peters, M. (2021, August 6). *7 Zoom features for online learning success*. Technology Solutions That Drive Education. https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2021/03/7-hidden-zoom-features-can-improve-online-learning

Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *49*(1), 65–85. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65

Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Meta-analytic tests of three mediators. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *38*(6), 922–934. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.504

Pezzullo, P. C. (2022). *On bats, breathing, and bella vita verde: Reflections on environmental communication during a global pandemic.* In C. S. Beck (Ed.). Communication in the 2020s: Viewing our world through the eyes of communication scholars (pp. 155-164). Routledge.

Ray, R. (2022, March 9). *One year after George Floyd's murder, what is the status of police reform in the United States?* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2021/05/25/one-year-after-george-floyds-murder-what-is-the-status-of-police-reform-in-the-united-states/

Robinson, B., PhD. (2022, February 1). *Remote work is here to stay and will increase into 2023, experts say*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2022/02/01/remote-work-is-here-to-stay-and-will-increase-into-2023-experts-say/?sh=2e6689d920a6

Rodríguez, J., Nagda, B. R. A., Sorensen, N., & Gurin, P. (2018). Engaging race and racism for socially just intergroup relations: The impact of intergroup dialogue on college campuses

in the United States. *Multicultural Education Review*, *10*(3), 224–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615x.2018.1497874

Sandoval, J., & Nainby, K. (2017). Making a place: A framework for educators working with critical intercultural communication and critical communication pedagogy. In A. Atay & S. Toyosaki (Eds.), *Critical Intercultural Communication Pedagogy* (pp. 11–26). Lexington Books.

Schwartz, N. (2020, April 3). *Gen Z takeover: Could online colleges gain traction with young students?* Higher Ed Dive. https://www.highereddive.com/news/gen-z-takeover-could-online-colleges-gain-traction-with-young-students/575484/

Sellnow, D., & Kaufmann, R. (2017). Handbook of instructional communication. In A. M. Hosek & M. L. Houser (Eds.), *Instructional Communication and the Online Learning Environment: Then, Now, and Next* (2nd ed., pp. 195–206). Routledge.

Sellnow, D., & Sellnow, T. (2018). Introduction to this special issue on communication and instruction beyond the traditional classroom. *Communication Education*, *67*(4), 409–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2018.1503695

Serhan, D. (2010). Online learning: Through their eyes. International Journal of Instructional Media, 37, 19-24.

Silverstein, J. (2021, June 5). *The global impact of George Floyd: How Black Lives Matter protests shaped movements around the world*. CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-floyd-black-lives-matter-impact/

Spates, S. A., Kaufmann, R., Lin, X., Lachlan, K. A., & Spence, P. R. (2020). I don’t care about who you are, but what you are doing for me? Examining perceptions of helpful

comments and identity in user-generated content. *Southern Communication Journal*, *85*(3), 155–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794x.2020.1770319

Solano, E., & Robson, A. (2020, August 4). *'Imagine if Martin Luther King Jr. had Facebook.' Watch TIME's documentary on the role of social media in racial justice protests*. Time. https://time.com/5875479/viral-videos-racism-impact-protests/

Strawser, M. G., & Kaufmann, R. (2020). Intergenerational learning styles, instructional design strategy, and learning efficacy. *Form, Function, and Style in Instructional Design*, 40–51. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9833-6.ch003

Sun, A., & Chen, X. (2016). Online education and its effective practice: A research review. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research*, *15*, 157–190. https://doi.org/10.28945/3502

Tate, W. F. (1997). Chapter 4: Critical race theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, *22*(1), 195–247. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x022001195

Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race* (Rev. ed.). Basic Books.

Thompson, D. (2022, May 2). *Disney vs. DeSantis is the future of politics*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/newsletters/archive/2022/05/ron-desantis-disney-florida-republicans/629722/

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Urdan, T. C. (2016). *Statistics in plain English* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Vigdor, N., & Victor, D. (2021, February 24). *Over 160 confederate symbols were removed in 2020, group says*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/23/us/confederate-monuments-george-floyd-protests.html

Villasenor, J. (2022, March 9). *Online college classes can be better than in-person ones. The implications for higher ed are profound.* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2022/02/10/online-college-classes-can-be-better-than-in-person-ones-the-implications-for-higher-ed-are-profound/

Wabuke, H. (2020, August 10). *"Caste" argues its most violent manifestation is in treatment of Black Americans*. NPR. https://choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2020/08/10/900274938/caste-argues-its-most-violent-manifestation-is-in-treatment-of-black-americans

Weber, P. (2016, August 3). *Will Smith: "Racism is not getting worse, it's getting filmed."* The Week. https://theweek.com/speedreads/640675/smith-racism-not-getting-worse-getting-filmed

Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. Random House.

Williams, J. P. (2021, May 25). *A year after George Floyd's killing, white allyship fades*. US News & World Report. https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2021-05-25/a-year-after-george-floyds-killing-white-support-for-black-lives-matter-fades

Wood, J. (2020, July 26). *Breonna Taylor killing: Call for justice intensifies after months of frustration*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/26/breonna-taylor-killing-justice-louisville-kentucky

Woods, R. H., & Baker, J. D. (2004). Interaction and immediacy in online learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v5i2.186

Yosso *, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(4), 659–691. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.4.m6867014157m707l

Zapata-Cuervo, N., Montes-Guerra, M. I., Shin, H. H., Jeong, M., & Cho, M. H. (2021). Students' psychological perceptions toward online learning engagement and outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comparative analysis of students in three different countries. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2021.1907195