

CHAPTER 3: OTHERING RESEARCH, RESEARCHING THE OTHER

Trying to find the other by defining otherness or by explaining the other through laws and generation is, as Zen says, like beating the moon with a pole or scratching an itching foot from the outside of a shoe. (Minh-ha 1989, p. 75)

Though I tried I could not really write my story. Each time I tried to write, everything splintered into little bits, I could not figure out a line or theme for myself . . . I had no clear picture of what unified it all, what our history might mean. We were all in it together, that's all I knew. And there was no way out. (Alexander 1991, p. 28)

Introduction

Recall that the purpose of this research is twofold. On the one hand, I am interested in exploring the life experiences of transnational female Indian graduate students in U.S. On the other hand, I am interested in examining how methodology is informed by de/colonizing theories. Of special interest are the calls for specific departures that can be made from de/colonizing perspectives.

The specific research questions that I ask are:

1. What relations and practices are enabled by the material and discursive conditions of transnationalism, and how, in turn, do the two female Indian graduate students construct/maintain/dismiss subject positions within those relations and practices?
2. What expectations do the two female Indian graduate students retain from their Indian upbringing? What expectations do they discard or modify? How do two female Indian graduate students conceptualize their modification of expectations?

3. How do two female Indian graduate students conceptualize their academic experiences (e.g. classroom experiences, relationships with advisors, expectations for performance, their role as graduate assistants, relationships with other students, interactions with people of diverse backgrounds, etc.)?
4. As a transnational researcher studying other transnationals, how do I incorporate decolonizing methodologies into my research? What deliberate moves can I make to decolonize my work? What are the limits of possibility for decolonizing methodologies given my colonized education and upbringing?

I first ground my thinking in de/colonizing methodologies and discuss how these methodologies played a role in this research. Embedded in these discussions are various de/colonizing approaches incorporated in data collection, issues of voice, research sites, and subjectivities. This research is a case study informed by both interpretive and de/colonizing epistemologies. There is no separate section discussing subjectivities; instead, the reader will find subjectivities expressed and integrated in every part of this chapter and throughout this dissertation without being confined to a separate section, thus heeding the criticisms and cautions put forth by feminist researchers like Wanda Pillow (2003) to avoid a narcissistic “romance of the speaking subject” (Lather 2001, p. 206).

Since this research is informed by de/colonizing epistemologies, I integrated de/colonizing methodologies throughout the research in response to the fourth question. Where possible, I discuss specific departures from colonizing assumptions and ways that those departures inform the study. Note that the departures do not comprise an exhaustive list, but rather represent only those that could be attended to and identified.

Finally, it is not my claim that the methodological approaches, departures, findings, and analysis employed in this study are novel in their presentations. Operating from multiple theoretical, methodological, and substantive frameworks, this study at times emphasizes previously stated arguments and at other times demonstrates how certain departures played a role in constructing findings. I suspect that another researcher could have come to these findings from another approach, but by discussing the limits and possibilities of methods employed in this study, I show the tensions and contradictions influencing the data collection, analysis, and re-presentation of this study.

Research Framework: De/colonizing Epistemologies and Methodologies

Patti Lather (1992) describes methodology as the theory of knowledge and the interpretive frame informing choices of methods and procedures used in a study. Michael Crotty (1998) states that methodology is a strategy, a blueprint linking methods to outcomes. Like Lather, Crotty emphasizes the need for epistemological and theoretical grounding in research methodology. Using these arguments, I situate this study in the current moment of qualitative research, knowing all too well that this moment is never fixed, discrete, or foundational to this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offer a comprehensive tracing of the moments in qualitative research. They identify a traditional period in the early 1900s, followed by a modernist phase ending in the 1970s which included works of feminism, phenomenology, critical theory, and ethnomethodology and which attempted to honor the voices of the unvoiced. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identify a third moment, called “blurred genres” (p. 15), in which qualitative researchers used multiple paradigms, epistemologies, and strategies to conduct their research. This moment ended in the mid-1980s. The fourth moment in qualitative research marks the crisis of

representation and continues to influence current research as reflexive writing is privileged and validity, reliability, and objectivity are critically interrogated. The fifth moment is the “postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 17) informed by the arguments presented in the crisis of representation.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the sixth and seventh moments are currently upon qualitative researchers, although I argue and elaborate shortly about the simultaneous existence of all of the moments. The sixth moment, known as the “postexperimental moment,” represents the “triple crisis” of representation, legitimation, and praxis. The seventh moment is the moment of the future informed by the triple crisis, which asks questions such as, “Is it possible to effect change in the world if society is only and always a text?” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 17).

I do not doubt that some progression in qualitative research has been linear. However, in the current moment of qualitative research, genres, epistemologies, paradigms, and crises are not discretely located in their respective moments. Instead, these moments often exist and inform each other simultaneously. Therefore, de/colonizing methodologies can exist in multiple moments, questioning and troubling the limits and possibilities of each and all of the moments. For example, this research is grounded in transnational feminist methodologies while acknowledging the crisis of voice, representation, and legitimation and interrogating/abandoning an authorial positioning of the researcher, thereby de/colonizing multiple moments of qualitative research.

I now turn to decolonizing methodologies as used in this research. Linda Smith’s (1999) groundbreaking text *Decolonizing Methodologies* provides a poignant description and criticism of the imperial nature of research. Smith states:

Research “through imperial eyes” describes an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only idea which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings. It is an approach to indigenous peoples which still conveys a sense of innate superiority and an overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of indigenous peoples – spiritually, intellectually, socially, and economically. It is research which from indigenous perspectives “steals” knowledge from others and then uses it to benefit the people who “stole” it. Some indigenous and many minority group researchers would call this approach simply racist. It is research which is imbued with an “attitude” and a “spirit” which assumes a certain ownership of the entire world, and which has established systems and forms of governance which embed that attitude in institutional practices. These practices determine what counts as legitimate research and who counts as legitimate researchers. (Smith 1999, p. 56)

Smith’s criticism, although from an indigenous Maori perspective, can be extended to other de/colonizing contexts in which certain kinds of knowledge production are privileged over others. This is not to say that all research is imperialist and racist in its intention or practice. However, research informed by Western imperialistic discourses conducted on/with non-Western participants and packaged and represented in the Western academic world carries within it some inherent impossibilities of capturing the voices of the subaltern (Spivak 1993). The argument is not that the subaltern cannot be heard, but that there exist gaps and untransferabilities due to the “untranslatability of the ‘third world’ experiences into ‘first world’ imperialist discourse” (Chow 1993, p. 38). It is within such impossibilities, contradictions, and tensions that this research is situated.

Based on the works of multiple de/colonizing scholars (Rich 1978; Alexander 1991; Shohat 1993; Spivak 1993; Sunder Rajan 1993; Gandhi 1998; Shohat 1998; Smith 1999/2002; Dave, Dhingra et al. 2000; Narayan and Harding 2000; Mohanty 2004; Mutua and Swadener 2004), de/colonizing research interrogates the imperialistic foundations that privilege Euro-American constructions of knowledge and silence knowledge constructed by the marginalized. When theoretical and methodological discourses are informed by oppositional standpoints, then de/colonizing work becomes problematic. De/colonizing methodologies need to further interrogate the assumptions that are considered foundational in research, such as voice (Spivak 1993; Caputo 1997; Lather 2000), data (St. Pierre 1997; Roulston, Baker et al. 2001), field (Visweswaran 1994; Britzman 1995; Butler 1995), analysis (Kondo 1990; Lather 1993; Richardson and St. Pierre 2004), and representation (Minh-ha 1989; Chaudhury 2000; Kaomea 2004). I situate transnational feminism as the primary theoretical perspective informing the de/colonizing aspect of this dissertation both epistemologically and methodologically.

I read transnational feminism as “feminism from a global-minded and multi-leveled perspective, where the goal of feminism is no longer simply to empower women or to analyze gender ideology. By itself, the empowerment of women does not change the entrenched structures of domination, especially when we consider that women themselves are a diverse group, no more essentially wise or moral than any other group” (Stone-Mediatore 2003, p. 130). In other words, echoing Mohanty’s (2004) concerns, I align with the ideas that support a multi-pronged approach to understanding and developing diverse forms of resistances against inequalities driven by globalized social and economic structures and migration of people. While conducting research using transnational feminist frameworks to study transnational female Indian graduate students, Chow’s reminder is especially helpful:

The task that faces Third World feminists is not simply that of animating the oppressed woman of their cultures, but of making the automatized and animated condition of their own voices the conscious point of departure in their interventions. This does not simply mean they are, as they must be, speaking across cultures and boundaries; it means that they speak of the awareness of “cross-cultural” speech as a limit, and that their own use of the victimhood of women and the Third World cultures is both symptomatic of and inevitably complicitous with the First World. (Chow 1992, p. 111)

Simply put, informed by Western discourses, it is easy for me to become automatized and to essentialize oppression, liberation, and agency through/with/against my de/colonizing epistemologies and methodologies. As a transnational scholar in training in the U.S., I am painfully aware of my complicated positioning in conducting research on other female Indian graduate students. I realize that despite my best intentions to de/colonize my work, I cannot remain neutralized in what I produce because it is always already colonized through my British/Indian/Canadian/U.S. upbringing, training, and presentation of my work in the colonizer’s language to Western academia.

Put another way, I write in English to capture the experience of people whose language of communication is a hybridized form of Hindi and English already in its colonized package. I write to translate the cultural productions of experiences of “Others,” unwittingly taking on the role of a “Third World” broker in a format acceptable in Western academic gatekeeping. These complicated situations and actions continue to create im/possibilities in which I exist, function, interrogate, and abandon thoughts, beliefs, and epistemologies.

I recall Smith’s (1999, pp. 1-3) warning that “scientific research is implicated in the worst excess of colonialism . . . Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity

that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions, and questions about researcher's subjectivities, posturing, and interpretation arise." Certainly I am not an innocent actor, nor can I speak for anyone else, or presume that the ethnographic 'Other' is oppressed based on Western liberatory discourses that fail to respond to non-Western cultural perspectives. This is not to say that there is no suffering or that social systems do not create and maintain various forms of inequality and oppression. Rather, the argument is that resistance to such systematic inequalities must be simultaneously grounded in and interrogated by multiple de/colonizing discourses that attempt to cut across multiple borders and issues, in order to break apart oppressive regimes and nullify their effects.

Since this research is informed by transnational feminist methodologies, experimentation with multiple forms of data collection, analysis, and representational strategies informs the methodological approach. Additionally, attempts to blur the boundaries between the researcher and the researched fit in well with transnational feminist methodologies, as with other feminist and de/colonizing methodologies. However, even with the best of intentions to blur boundaries between the researcher and the researched, it is impossible for me to abandon all authority as a researcher. The awareness of the gaze and control I continue to possess as a researcher justifies further the privileging of the participants' critical agencies.

Transnational feminist methodologies acknowledge that this research is never complete. I do not have complete access to the participants' lives, making this research only a frozen frame of collective moments. As a transnational feminist, I was data hungry and could not turn off my researcher self during any interaction with the participants. Using conversations as a form of inquiry, all interactions became data to me. Sensing such hunger, Neerada, one of the participants, cautioned me that, "You would never finish your dissertation, because the subjects

are still speaking.” Thus, conceding that the data are never real, true, complete, or holistic despite my attempts to “capture ‘em all,” this research is a negotiation of my effort to abandon authority and privilege participants’ critical agencies and voices, all the while recognizing the inevitable failure.

Feminist theories promote work that is for and about women. From a transnational feminist perspective, I was unable grasp how I can work “for” women without the assumption of a certain power which gives me the ability to work “for” them. This notion of working “for” someone situated the participants without the kind of agency that I awarded to myself as the researcher. This position assumed that the women in this study were not capable of working “for” themselves, and that therefore the researcher was needed to take on such liberatory role to facilitate working together and for the participants.

Hence, transnational feminism disrupts the liberatory goals of feminist research while underscoring the problem of voices that can never be heard in their entirety, the situational and contextual nature of experiences, and the reflexivity that is embedded in multiple power relations. Examining power relations raises issues of transparency and the role of a native researcher to make things clear to gatekeepers who might be unfamiliar with the culture of those studied. The task of bringing transparency to understanding creates a risk of the researcher becoming the “Third World broker,” a co-opted and essentialized “Third World” position that places the responsibility of “border crossings” only on the colonized.

The tensions created by transnational feminism’s advocacy of social change and interrogation of liberatory discourses put this research in a messy space. On the one hand, liberatory discourses are seductive, especially when the material conditions of many women’s lives are affected by social systems of oppression. On the other hand, Smith’s (1999) criticism of

such liberatory epistemologies situates certain notions of liberation as part of imperialistic discourses. She states that, “research is probably one of the dirtiest words” as it is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1). Furthermore, Smith (1999) cautions:

Many researchers, academics and project workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects serving a greater good “for mankind,” or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community. But belief in the ideal that benefiting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training. It becomes so taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities. (p. 2)

Informed by Smith’s criticism, as a transnational feminist researcher I question my liberatory urges, reminding myself that just because participants have allowed me into their lives this does not give me the right to tell them they are oppressed or to offer consciousness-raising to liberate them from their oppression. It is at this juncture that I search for alternate purposes¹ for research and continue to inform myself through multiple decolonizing discourses.

Inspired by transnational feminism, I present stories of women that demonstrate their empowerment, acts of resistance, and accommodations that exist in the participants’ lives prior to the research and would continue even after the research. I ask questions informed by Stone-Mediatore’s (2003) work about the relations of dominations in the participants’ lives, realizing that social struggles cannot be separated discretely into categories of race, class, gender, and nationalities but are intertwined with each other. The question then becomes one of cultural

¹ Some alternate purposes include developing dialogues about the effects of local, communal, and global social systems on the lives of transnational women. Through these dialogues, people could be inspired differently to become (or not become) agents of change, develop coalitions, and challenge the status quo of higher education.

understanding and the “politics of location” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), in which normalized and naturalized discourses work to maintain social structures of inequality. The work of transnational feminism can be to initiate discussions about the specific ways historical and cultural contexts connect multiple oppressive practices such as patriarchy, colonialism, and neo-colonialism in local and global spaces.

However, I want to clarify that transnational feminist epistemologies are not used in this research with the intention of creating a binary opposition between Western liberatory discourses and de/colonizing transnational discourses, thereby constructing countercultures with their own forms of hegemony and alienation. Instead, with the utmost honesty I agree with Gloria Anzaldúa when she imagines a day of affirmation for her people:²

On that day I say, “Yes all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame. It is our innate identity you find wanting. We are ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance. We can no longer camouflage our needs, can no longer let defenses and fences sprout around us. We can no longer withdraw. To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, these vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let’s try it our way, the *mestiza* way, the Chicana way, the woman way.” (Anzaldua 1987/1999, p.110)

De/colonizing research must not perpetuate another set of binaries to justify the critiques it launches. Therefore, I have no intention of becoming or re-presenting the voice on the alternate side of Western imperialism, thus scoring some form of moral or rhetorical victory by rendering

² By “her people,” I refer to Anzaldúa’s description of people with Chicana, Mexican, Indian, and Anglo heritages creating a *mestiza*.

participants or groups of people as oppressed and pointing the blaming finger towards Western discourses. Therefore, in the spirit of de/colonizing methodologies, I, too, accept my “white parts, male parts, queer parts, pathological parts, and vulnerable parts” and welcome the borderless, multi-pronged, globalized coalitions amongst people who are “comrades in the struggle” (hooks 2000) for democratic existence and for erasing social structures of inequalities. It is in this spirit of transnational feminism that I ground the methodological framework for this research.

Theoretical Influence on Methodology

From transnational feminist perspectives, abandoning questions that analyze, interpret, or re-present women as defined by their object status creates a space for examining the production of gendered subject positions like, victims of male violence, colonialism, familial systems, economic developments, and universal dependents (Mohanty, 2004, p. 23). Therefore, methodologically, I worked with an autoethnographical gaze that continuously interrogated the objectified subject positions through which I authored the participants. I collaborated with other transnational feminist scholars, qualitative scholars, and the participants to continuously challenge and re-construct my understandings. Consequently, I re-presented findings in their own tension-filled spaces where suffering and resistance occurred simultaneously, describing such tensions with one eye on the material consequences of such lived experiences and another on the discursive gaze of decolonizing feminist discourses that attend to the impossibilities of such construction.

As a result of being in a “messy” theoretical and methodological space, this research incorporates some conventional forms of qualitative research and some departures that are specific to the epistemological framing of the research. Some of the departures were informed by theoretical and methodological work in projects prior to the dissertation. Other de/colonizing

departures were constructed within the context of the research. Therefore, as this chapter continues, I urge the reader to keep in mind that de/colonizing epistemologies are weaved through the research design, data collection, analysis, and representation, while specific points of departure are noted. In the next section, I discuss de/colonizing departures that I intended to make prior to conducting the research.

Will to Know

Generally speaking, as I enter into the contractual research space with the participants, I enter into a relationship that involves multiple forms of negotiation and desire. On the part of the researcher there is an obvious “will to know,” and on the part of the participant there are performances and negotiations through which she expresses herself. Specifically,

Some of what occurs in an interview is verbal. Some is non-verbal. Some occurs only within the mind of each participant (interviewer or interviewee), but it may affect the entire interview. Sometimes the participants are jointly constructing meaning, but at other times one of them may be resisting joint constructions. (Scheurich 1997, p. 67)

Therefore, the process of research interviewing and by extension gathering data in research is rife with ambiguity and contradictions. With this realization I question the “presumptive agency” with which I would otherwise enter the research space. I use the term “presumptive” here to describe some of my colonial assumptions which might lead me to expect the participants to answer my questions in a way that is helpful towards my research questions. I might further assume that if they do not, then with appropriate techniques of questioning and probing I would be able to “extract” the data I need from my participants, positioning my research agenda at the center of our conversations. My agency is presumptive because although I

am aware of the fluid nature of the co-construction of meaning in the interview process and the participant's right to exercise her agency, I may not identify my desire to know and understand the participant's experiences in a way that informs my research as a colonizing gesture. Figure 1 is a representation of this presumptive agency through which I might author myself.

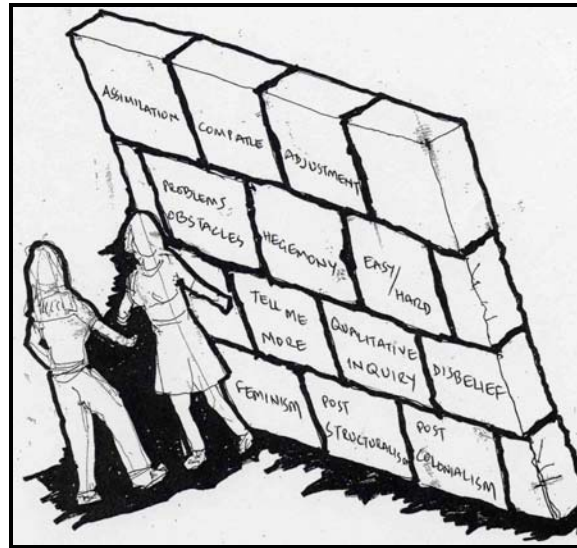


Figure 1: Wall of presumptive agency

The figuration in the wall of presumptive agency is inspired by the movement of a male singer, Usher F. Ludacris, in a hip hop video. In this video, Ludacris positions himself in front of a woman whose back is against the wall. Ludacris leans towards the female as she leans back and he says, "When I move you move and that's like that." When the woman stands up straight, Ludacris leans on to her again and repeats the same words as the woman leans back on the wall. This figuration produces the impossibility of research where, as a researcher, I feel that given the appropriate methodologies I would be able to extract helpful information by "cornering" my participants through the strong posturing of a "will to know." The wall at the back of the participant in Figure 1 is constructed through the contesting epistemologies that inform my methodology.

However, questioning this will to know leads me to realize, as Scheurich noted above, that participants can exercise their own agency and resist joint constructions of meaning. I am reminded of hooks' criticism of a centralized researcher agency:

I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew.

I am still author, authority (hooks 1990, p. 151).

The wall of presumptive agency demonstrates the building blocks of the epistemology and methodology that inform the strategies I incorporated partially in this study. Armed with open-ended questions and shared understanding, I might have the privilege of interrogating – asking for further explanation of answers. Since the wall of presumptive agency is constructed mostly through my researcher epistemologies it rests on unstable foundations, especially if the interviewee chooses to exercise her agency, rendering the wall invisible and moving to unanticipated and unimagined spaces. Figure 2 depicts one of the possibilities through which a participant can exercise her agency and disintegrate the wall of presumptive agency through which I might structure my inquiry.



Figure 2: Disintegration of the wall of presumptive agency

The participant in Figure 2 moves according to her own agency, forcing me to attend to the illusory nature of my agency and the strategies of my inquiry. For the participant, the wall behind her does not exist in the same way it does for me. In light of this realization, I questioned the presumptive agency with which I designed this study.

Consequently, this research emerges from the cracked space of the wall, within which I question the commensurability of methodology and de/colonizing theories. One of the departures I then take is the abandonment of some of my “will to know” within the research context. Accordingly, I identified the data collection methods that would allow me to maintain as non-intrusive a posture as I can, given that I am still in the driver’s seat in conducting this study. These data-gathering strategies include conversational interviews, participant observations, and photo- and object-elicitations, which I describe in more detail later in this chapter. These data-gathering strategies do not eliminate my curiosity or my desire to shed light on my research questions. Rather, they change the approach I take in posturing to inform my research questions, keeping in mind that this new posturing might assist me in remaining vigilant and respectful of

collective agencies of the participants³ as co-creators of experiences and meanings during the research process.

Silence and Voice

I argue that giving voice to the unvoiced⁴ leaves her/him open to being served up as an exotic dish to be consumed or to being viewed as one would view a performing animal in the zoo. By deciding to give voice, the researcher decides to expose communal secrets. So what communal secrets can one choose to disclose? What can be told with participants' silences? While feminism advocates giving voice to those who have historically been silenced, Visweswaran (1994) questions how one is given voice, while Adrienne Rich promotes silence as a site of analysis and resistance:

Silence can be a plan rigorously executed

The blueprint to a life

It is a presence

It has a history a form

Do not confuse it

With any kind of absence. (Rich 1978, p. 17)

Visweswaran (1994) uses silence to look at a participant's refusal to be her subject and she "makes her subject's refusal itself a subject, asking what new forms of subject constitution are forced upon her by now inscribing her silence in speech" (p. 60). In exploring the cultural constructs around speech and silence, I anticipated that the participants would negotiate their speech and silence. This movement from speech to silence is a fluid movement and through

³ I include myself when I speak of participants in the research process.

⁴ In this context, I am referring to the unvoiced as those from the South Asian ethnicities, ethnographic exotic Others.

Visweswaran's work, I identified the binary between voice and silence as a restrictive tool for this study. One deliberate de/colonizing departure I make is to challenge the binary between voice and silence and to accept that like the participants, I am in constant motion between voice and silence, so the moments in which I choose to speak and those in which I remain silent become moments of critical agency.

Similarly, participants exercised their critical agency in this study by employing voice and deliberate silences strategically to accommodate and resist multiple social structures and their discursive effects. Through plotting such voices and silences I wish to create a continuum between voice and silence, in order to illuminate the functioning of power relations within a space and the construction of subjectivities through these acts of accommodation and resistance. Building on Minh-ha's argument regarding the speaking subject, hooks' criticism of the centrality of the researcher's position, and Spivak's assertion that the subaltern has no voice, I reconceptualize speech and silence. If every act of commission is contingent upon countless omissions, then voice functions through silence. This means I can and should analyze silence within the context of who is speaking, what is being said, and (especially my concern here) what is *not* being said, as well as who is listening within each oration.

What is so de/colonizing about plotting silence? The silences discussed are not always imposed silences, but may be purposeful and chosen. These silences emerge from a space of marginality, of not belonging, and of knowing the limits and possibilities of certain subject positions. Those with a voice have been associated with power and representation, thus creating a dualism of power and oppression between the voiced and the unvoiced. Disrupting this binary would mean asking the one with a voice to unlearn his/her privilege, listen, and interrogate silence in a way that has not been done before. What is the compulsion to speak? What are the

consequences for feminism of privileging speech and rendering silence invisible, passive, and without agency? Questions that are of interest to this study involve exploring how silence functions in the participant's life; what does it do for the participant? How does silence expand or restrict possibilities?

Nevertheless, silence as a de/colonizing tool is not free from its own contradictions. How can de/colonizing work represent the voices of those who do not speak and who still combat previous silences in research and history? Linda Smith expresses concern about the effects of de/colonizing frameworks:

In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. (Smith 1999/2002, p. 3)

Smith recommends naming all the spaces of marginalization and resistance to “address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice” (p. 4). I argue that a continuum of silence and voice makes visible all spaces of marginalization while addressing issues of unbalanced power relations, discursive effects, and participants' negotiations.

Research Design

This research is a case study of the socio-cultural negotiations of two female Indian graduate students pursuing higher education in the U.S. during their first year of stay in the U.S. In this section I situate the use of case study in this research and move to discuss other elements of design, including participant selection, gaining access, and data collection methods.

Case Study

Multiple definitions of case studies inform this research; for example, “Case studies are reports of alternative paradigm inquiries” (Lincoln and Guba 2002, p. 213), yet the case study “does not implicate any particular approach” (Wolcott 1992, p. 36). Yin defines case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 1994, p. 13). While Wolcott defines case study as an end-product of research, Merriam asserts that a “qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam 1988, p. 21). In her later work, Merriam adds to her understanding of case studies by stating that, “I have concluded that the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (Merriam 1998, p. 27). Though Merriam advocates for a boundary or identification of the scope of a study, she acknowledges that there is freedom in what might be conceptualized as a case. A case may involve studying a person, program, policy, or any other phenomenon that is intrinsically bounded by the interest of the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

It is difficult to understand how a case study can be “holistic” because the experiences of the participants can never be captured in their entirety or placed in neat categories, regardless of the amount of time spent in the “field.” The researcher is only capable of capturing a freeze frame of a participant’s life: a pattern of negotiations, understandings, and experiences during the course of the study but not necessarily one that remains stable over time and space. Such depictions allow us to ask questions perhaps not previously asked, and then work toward specific understandings to create “different kinds of knowledge and produce that knowledge differently”

(St. Pierre 1997). The participants' lives are fluid and continuously evolving, so "holistic" may be a permanently deferred concept.

Merriam (1998) notes that a case study provides a vivid and lifelike experience within a contextual situation; knowledge of the case under study is developed by the reader's interpretations and insights. Extending this argument, one can assert that knowledge of the case study is developed not only by the reader but also by the participants, the researcher, and the gatekeepers, all of whom negotiate and produce a collaboratively dis/agreed upon production which then gets taken up by the readers through their own negotiations with/through/against their multiple subjectivities. Furthermore, Merriam (1998, p. 13) states that case studies can be responsible for discovering "new relationships, concepts, and understandings" inductively rather than deductively.

Certainly an inductive approach to case study can develop an understanding of relationships and concepts. However, how can one really assert what is new, known, or unknown? For example, what I write might not be something new to the participants who might have known and perceived these relationships in their lived experiences for a while. What is new to the Western academic world may not be new to the South Asian academic world. Not being able to exhaust all possible sources of information, it would be difficult to claim novelty. Rather, with the researcher's clarification of the purpose of research (i.e., to understand, emancipate, deconstruct, etc.⁵) the reader can determine whether the research has accomplished its purpose and what s/he got out of the research. This research, while idiosyncratic, can be transferable on various grounds including practices in higher education, hegemonic effects of colonization, and patriarchal effects on higher education. There might agreeable head nods through which readers take up various aspects of familiarity when reading. There might also be disagreeable

⁵ I am using Lather's (1991, p. 7) continuum to demonstrate various goals of postpositivist inquiry.

headshakes, which could be equally informative, showing the gaps in subjectivities and creating fertile grounds for dialogues across epistemologies. Hence, not all research can promise a demonstrable new relationship.

Adding to two other researchers' understanding of case studies, Bromley (1986) states that the purpose of a case study is "not to find the 'correct' or 'true' interpretation of the facts, but rather to eliminate erroneous conclusions so that one is left with the best possible, the most compelling, interpretation" (p. 38). Hamel and colleagues (Hamel, Dufour et al. 1993) posit that the case study "has proven to be in complete harmony with the three words that characterize any qualitative method: describing, understanding and explaining" (p. 5).

Bromley's (1986) perspective of case-study research being "true and erroneous" implies that there are some benchmarks that one needs to measure up to when conducting case-study research. But what are such benchmarks and how are they assured or established? Who decides what is erroneous – journal editors, dissertation committee members? What if there are disagreements between different academic gatekeepers about how research on a specific case study is approached? Would that be an erroneous case study, thereby implying that researchers should aspire to universal agreement? What if dis/agreements vary culturally and my justification can be legitimized in one publishing space and not in another? Would that mean that my interpretations are erroneous? Or should it be the goal of research to get head nods from everyone? Is this possible, realistic, or even desirable? It is unlikely that any research would have such universal appeal that all parties would agree that the best possible, most compelling interpretation was made, because people are differently moved by stories and depictions.

Therefore, the goals in presenting this research are to demonstrate how interpretations were made and how limits and possibilities were constructed to cut across several foundational

assumptions and binary-driven concepts. The reader then lends credence to it as it fits her/his perspectives, which cannot be exhaustively predicted or anticipated. This is not to say that I do not have a current or future readership in mind. The re-presentational negotiations would be contingent on the space in which the research is published and the explicit and implicit expectations of that space. Despite the researcher's best attempts, the standards for best possible interpretation would vary in these spaces.

Hamel et al.'s statement about the harmonious nature of case study and use of terms like description, understanding, and explanation do not address the contingency of meanings residing on varied cultural understandings. To *describe*, a researcher negotiates multiple subject positions, collaborates with the participants, and consults with people such as journal editors or dissertation committee members to develop a finalized description. The term *understanding* must always be considered in relation to multiple subject positions and contexts. Thus, although the researcher's "*explanation*" might align with her/his understanding and description, it could leave gaps in such alignment with the readers. With competing discourses and subject positions, instead of a harmonious symphony, I am more likely to produce a cacophony of dissonant voices, a *rashomon* – a complicated narrative from multiple differing perspectives.

Furthermore, Hamel et al.'s assertion assumes that language is holistic, fixed, and foundational, allowing description, understanding, and explanation to be established and perhaps universalized. But language is not (Bové 1990), and meanings are permanently deferred and fleeting. The best I can do is to convey the messiness and (mis)alignments, state the limits and possibilities of the research, acknowledge what I get out of this research, and communicate the claims, questions, concerns, and directions I want to emerge from the research. Research then

becomes the interaction between process and product, both of which can be claimed as findings amidst contradictions and ambiguities.

Therefore, this research was designed with the broader implications of case study as both a method and an end product. I find value in both Wolcott and Merriam's arguments and see my decision to study the phenomenon of transnational feminism in the two women's lives as both a method of inquiry and an end product. This research was conducted over a 5-6 month time period with extensive visits to the participants' homes (2-3 times per week), informal conversations, photo- and object-elicited conversations, and participant observations during social and cultural events and in the participants' interactions and conversations with other people.

Selection of Participants

Hickory Towers apartment complex is the housing of choice for many recently-arrived Indian graduate students in Arborville, a small southern university town. Hickory Towers contains 30 two-bedroom townhomes, usually all of which are shared by 3-4 Indian students. Based on participant observations and various unplanned informal conversations with residents at Hickory Towers, I provide the following description of the living community and residents of Hickory Towers.

While Hickory Towers remains open to any tenant, most of the Hickory Towers townhomes are occupied by Indian graduate students who are pursuing either a Master's degree or Ph.D. at the University of Arborville. Some older residents of Hickory Towers are pursuing a second graduate degree at the university. The Indian residents of Hickory Towers formed a university-recognized student organization, the Indian Students Association (ISA), which organizes social, cultural, and religious activities for the residents at Hickory Towers and for the

larger Indian student community at the University of Arborville. Since election of executive members for the ISA means visibility in the Indian student community, residents of Hickory Towers vote for one of their own to executive positions in the ISA.

The members of ISA serve as initial contacts for new Indian students arriving at the university. New students usually contact the members of the ISA for information about housing and they are placed in partially occupied or soon-to-be-vacant Hickory Towers townhomes. In the ten years since the organization was founded, the cyclical process of electing members from Hickory Towers into ISA leadership positions and having those student leaders place new students in Hickory Towers has created a thriving Indian student community at Hickory Towers, which is more commonly known as *Haragao* (name of a generic Indian village) amongst the Indian students.

Most Indian students at Hickory Towers arrive in the U.S. after completing a Bachelor's and/or Master's degree in India. They belong to upper- or middle-class families of various castes in India. In some ways, residents in the Hickory Towers community try to simulate Indian college life while strategically adhering to or rejecting particular traditional and cultural values. For example, fearing the loss of culture, Indian residents at Hickory Towers participate in daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly celebrations of religious, social, and cultural festivals. Often the Indian residents at Hickory Towers create culturally familiar social environments where they cook and eat together, take day trips to nearby attractions and malls, or watch Indian movies together. Women are expected to learn to cook if they do not already know how to, and men also learn to cook if they do not have a girlfriend or female friend who cooks for them. Rejecting traditional norms surrounding arranged marriages, many residents in Hickory Towers engage in

dating relationships with each other, especially when they do not have to be accountable to parental inquiries about their whereabouts.

While most residents of Hickory Towers enjoyed class and religious privileges in India, those privileges are erased with their status as international graduate students in the U.S. In Hickory Towers, caste privileges are also erased because privileges in Hickory Towers are grounded in how much one knows about surviving in the U.S. and navigating through the spaces of higher education. Privileges are also derived from ownership of a vehicle and a personal computer. Most students either had a personal computer due to their class privileges or they had access to one at the university. However, owning a vehicle clearly marked a student who had been in the U.S. and Hickory Towers for at a year or more. In general, male students who had been in the U.S. for a year or more were most likely to purchase vehicles. Female students, on the other hand, obtained rides from the male residents of Hickory Towers, with the exception of a few who chose to purchase their own vehicle. Owning a vehicle was a sign of privilege, not only because it marked a class privilege, but also because it conferred the privilege of mobility, ease of life and navigation around town, and access to places and information not readily accessible to those who did not have their own vehicles.

The male members of the Hickory Towers community were the primary decision-makers about events and membership roles in the community. The female members aligned with the male members to enjoy the power and privileges of mobility, access, and visibility in the community. Newcomers were expected to respond with some sort of reciprocation when afforded the privilege of mobility and access to information. Sometimes this reciprocation involved cooking for the most socially visible group in the Hickory Towers. At other times reciprocation included hosting a party, hosting a religious ceremony, hosting a movie-watching

gathering, or just spending time with the most socially visible group in Hickory Towers. This socially visible group consisted of mostly male members along with two or three female members. They held the executive positions in the ISA and controlled the funds that paid for events for the Indian students at Hickory Towers and in the University of Arborville community. Newcomers were expected to align with this core group if they wished to receive the recognition and privileges that came with group membership.

However, membership came with a price. Membership in Hickory Towers implied active participation in all social, cultural, and religious events. The Hickory Towers community situated itself within and outside of Indian cultural traditions. On the one hand, the community tried to enact cultural traditions in the daily lives of the residents; on the other hand, certain members of the community also deviated from expected cultural norms. To enact tradition, certain conservative norms about gender roles were evident when the women were expected to cook or to learn how to cook after they arrived at Hickory Towers. During religious festivals, women took on traditional gender role of decorating shrines and gathering auspicious offerings, just as they would be expected to do in India. Revisiting familiar Indian cultural norms in the larger cultural space of the U.S. allowed many members to cope with a sense of cultural loss affecting their lives in the U.S. However, while Neerada and Yamini both wanted to return to a traditional cultural space, they did not want to do it within the terms prescribed by the Hickory Towers community. Instead, both of them authored their own nostalgic return to cultural traditions based on their imaginations and memories of India.

To integrate themselves into this community, newcomers were expected not only to enact traditional gender roles, but also to offer open access to their living spaces and lives. While no one frowned upon someone's choice to date in the Hickory Towers community, when a woman

called off a relationship she was often criticized, scandalized, and otherwise evaluated on traditional values, while her male partner's reputation remained relatively unscathed. For example, when Neerada's relationship with Ashit ended, established members of the Hickory Towers community questioned Neerada's relationship and her role in it, reminding her that it was not "proper" for Indian girls to break up with their boyfriends. At times, then, membership involved gossiping about other residents in the community and fixing women's roles rigidly, while allowing men to be more flexible in how they authored themselves from varied and negotiated cultural perspectives.

Not all residents of Hickory Towers valued or agreed with the expectations established by those who played central roles in the community. However, those who disagreed with group roles and expectations ran the risk of being marginalized by other members; losing their privileges of mobility, access, and visibility; and becoming the targets of criticism about their choices and character. This was evident in Neerada's and Yamini's cases, as both women were criticized due to their lack of interest in belonging in the Hickory Towers community after two months of being in the U.S.

Many Hickory Towers residents found the initial cultural and social familiarity comforting as they transitioned into their new status as international students in the U.S. However, some residents experienced a progressive upbringing in India in which they were not interrogated about their actions and decisions with anything like the critical gaze that the leaders of Hickory Towers turned on their peers, ostensibly in order to return to a nostalgic space of Indian tradition. If students valued their membership roles, then they accepted the critical "nostalgic" gaze of the community even if they had a progressive upbringing. Conversely, if students didn't value their membership roles in Hickory Towers, regardless of their upbringing

they rejected such memberships. Consequently, many students moved to on-campus graduate student accommodations after staying in Hickory Towers for their first year. Those who remained in Hickory Towers after their first year chose to do so because they valued their membership in the community, and many of these students eventually assumed leadership roles in the Hickory Towers community and in the ISA.

After visiting the Hickory Towers apartment complex a few times prior to the study, I began to make some friends. I was invited to several cultural and religious celebrations. One of the participants in my pilot study agreed to act as a key informant and told me that some new female graduate students had arrived from India. Neerada, one of the participants I met during a cultural festival, agreed to be involved in this study. Yamini, the second participant for this study, was referred to me by another contact from the community.

My sampling method for this dissertation lies at the intersection of three types of purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) describes purposeful sampling as “selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth” (p. 230). Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn “a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Based on Patton’s further typification of purposeful sampling, this study lies at the intersection of criterion, theory-based, and homogeneous sampling.

Criterion Sampling

Since the two participants meet some pre-determined criteria, criterion sampling is one form of sampling that affected the selection of the participants. For this study, the participants needed to be female, Indian graduate students who had been in the U.S. for no longer than 1.0 years. Another criterion informing selection was that at least one participant needed to be in the social sciences rather than the hard sciences, which is a common path for Indian academics. The

final criterion for selection included participants sharing a common language other than English with the researcher. Following is a chart of how the participants for this study met the pre-determined criteria.

Criteria	Neerada	Yamini
Female Indian graduate student	✓	✓
Duration no longer than 1.5 years in U.S.	Been in U.S. for ~ 3 months	Been in U.S. for ~ 6 months
At least one participant outside of hard science discipline, preferably in social sciences	Business Marketing	Veterinary Science
Share at least one native Indian language	Share Hindi in common	Share Hindi in common

Table 1: Matching pre-determined criteria with participants

Theory-Based Sampling

Patton (2002) observed that theory-based sampling is a “more conceptually oriented version of criterion-sampling . . . The researcher samples incidents, slices of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs” (p. 238). In this study, I was particularly interested in exploring the theoretical boundaries of transnationalism and what it means in the context of the lives and material conditions of those who are in-between nations, states, cultures, and spaces. These participants have multiple shifting subject positions, histories, and politics of location that shape them and influence the way they negotiate their experiences. Therefore, through this case study I am able to document incidents, a part of the participants’ lives in a specific time period (i.e., early stages of transnationalism) as they begin to negotiate the limits and possibilities of their transnational status. I explore the role of transnational movement in producing gendered experiences through the participants’ negotiations, retention, and dismissal of multiple subject positions.

Homogeneous Sampling

Patton (2002) states that the purpose of homogeneous sampling is to describe a subgroup in depth (p. 234). So while there could be many different kinds of production of gendered transnational experiences, I was most interested in looking at those produced during the early stages of negotiation with a transnational status. For this reason, the participants' short duration in the U.S. worked well for this study, as it allowed an examination of similarities and differences in the production of experiences for recently arrived female Indian graduate students.

Research Site(s)

This study is situated in both tangible and intangible research sites. I present a continuum below to demonstrate the various research sites for this study. Figure 3 shows that research sites are intersected by two continuums. The deliberate and unintentional sites continuum represents both the planned and serendipitous nature of qualitative research. Unintentional sites of research could be a movie theater, conversation with colleagues, listening to music--all unplanned sites that nevertheless influence the study. The second continuum refers to the fluidity of access to such research sites. If the sites are tangible and finite, then access is limited by time and space considerations. However, when the sites are intangible--for example, sharing a similar memory with the participants--then access to the site is infinite and unrestricted by time and space issues.

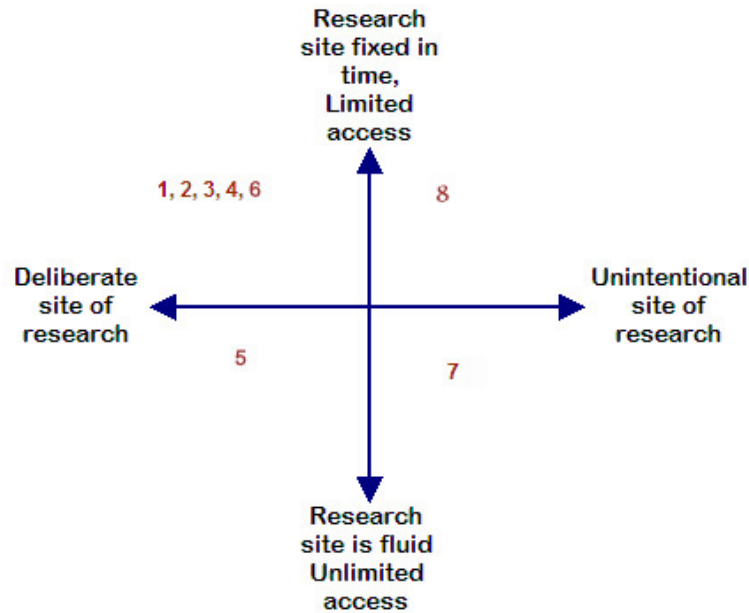


Figure 3: Research Site Continuums

Using the illustration in Figure 3, I plotted the sites from which I have collected data. Most of the sites of research and data collection have been in the top left quadrant, while some unanticipated sites are located in the bottom right-hand quadrant. The following are the sites of research that I have been able to identify:

1. Homes of the participants
2. Classes the participant attends
3. Cultural festivities across campus
4. Social and cultural festivities attended by participants at their apartment complex
5. My home and office
6. Home of other transnational Indian students
7. Memory sites evoked by notions of being a woman, being a minority in the U.S, and growing up in India as I conducted reflexive inquiry and interrogation

8. Unintentional sites of research such as writing group meetings, meetings with advisor, committee members, peer debriefing, unplanned and unanticipated social gatherings, etc.

This list is not exhaustive and there are indeed sites that I cannot consciously identify although I know they inform this study. Sites in the upper-right quadrant could include serendipitous conversations with peers, advisor, etc.

Gaining Access

My means of gaining access to the research sites varied based on the different sites. I had easy access to Hickory Towers due to my prior involvement with the people in Hickory Towers and similarities in cultural background. The Indian graduate students always commended me for being fluent in my native language and being informed about Indian politics, entertainment, and current issues, despite being away from India for over sixteen years. These forms of alignment provided me with easy and unlimited access to Hickory Towers and its cultural and religious festivals.

Visiting the participants in their classes required special permission from their instructors. Most instructors were willing to have me in their classes as a visitor, so I selected classes that fit with my schedule. Some instructors either did not respond to my requests or denied access.

The rest of the research sites (7, 8) were the sites that were not limited by time or access; therefore I had unlimited access to those sites.

Insider-Outsider Positioning: Departing to Fluid Emic and Etic Positions

It would be arrogant of me to assume that because I enjoyed some insider status and easy access to the Hickory Towers community, that I somehow “know” or have more “innate” knowledge of the transnational conditions affecting the participants’ lives. Therefore, remaining

cautious of the “romance of the speaking subject” and how that re-presents the participants’ voices through fluid emic and etic perspectives became an important concern. The binary of the insider/outsider positioning has long been challenged with arguments that what is being studied does not stand outside of the researcher. Kondo (1990), Behar (1993), Abu-Lughod (1992), and Visweswaran (1994) all have argued for a complex and fluid understanding of the researcher/researched positioning whereby the self is transformed by the research process. These authors have also discussed ethical issues and implications of being native researchers who developed strong kinship relations with the participants.

Being situated similarly in the U.S. as a non-resident female Indian student minority, and sharing similar languages, I had some insider status that provided me with access to information I would not have had without these similarities. However, I was an outsider because the participants and their subject positions were developed through various unshared discourses, histories, contradictions, and tensions. It is then both a burden and a privilege to speak from colonized and racialized subject positions while being aware of the crisis of representation, and the contradictions of conducting de/colonizing work in Western academia.

My insider status allowed for shared understandings about friendships and kinship relations with the participants and other members of the transnational Indian student community. Kinship relationships with the participants involved being an elder sister, not in its allegorical form, but in terms of being responsible for the well-being of the participants, providing them with concrete advice, providing an unconditional support system, and maintaining a familial relationship outside the scope of the research. An inability to perform on these levels would have affected the rapport and trust established with the participants.

My outsider status of being in the U.S. longer than the participants, having an already-established support system within the U.S., and having a family in the U.S. to whom I can turn instantly distanced me from the participants. Moreover, leaving India during my early teens I never experienced being in higher education in India. Therefore, I had no similar points of reference for growing up and studying in India despite my diligent efforts to stay connected to the culture through frequent visits to India, reading Indian newspapers and literary texts, listening to various forms of Hindi and Bengali music, and watching Hindi and Bengali movies regularly. Balancing between my insider and outsider assumptions, I engaged the participants in various member-check conversations so that I could modify and verify the rigor of knowledge gained from emic and etic perspectives.

With the insider/outsider position emerged the contesting loyalties of being a native researcher in Western academia. Where should one's loyalties lie and how does one balance these loyalties? What understandings would a researcher want to promote and what myths would s/he like to dispel? Since there were times when the participants sought advice from me, wanted my support, shared intimate details of their lives, and even lived with me⁶, I had access to information beyond the scope of the research. The responsibilities of being an elder sister⁷ preceded the role of the researcher always. What this meant was that Neerada and Yamini were not means to an end for this study. There were ends in themselves. Although we started out as strangers and met through the context of the study, my relationship with them as an elder sister and a friend became far more important than my relationship with them as a researcher. With

⁶ Neerada lived with me for three weeks after she broke up with Ashit as she needed a support system, someone to talk to, and avoid feeling lonely in Hickory Towers.

⁷ My understanding of being an elder sister meant that I felt the need to be supportive, accessible, and resourceful; to care unconditionally; and to be prepared to dole out advice when it was sought. Chaudhury (2000) experienced similar inside-outsider relationship with her participants where she was expected to take on the role of an elder-sister and dole out advice during some stressful events in the participants' life.

shared cultural understanding, the participants valued the kinship relations more highly than the research relations. Consequently, if either of them had dropped out of the study, the elder sister relationship would have prevailed because it was not contingent on maintaining a researcher/researched relationship. Needless to say, at the end of data collection the kinship relations with both Neerada and Yamini remained and deepened.

I was also conscious of not becoming an essentialized “Third World” informant. Heeding Chow’s (1993) warning, I questioned what needed to be done to address the imperialistic ways of knowing that plague the insider/outsider transnational de/colonizing researcher when speaking of, to, and at an audience. Keeping in mind that I occupy the subject position of a privileged Third World informant in the U.S., my insider/outsider culture crossing within Western academia

[is] made possible by socialized capital, or from the point of view of the indigenous people intellectual or professional elite in actual Third World countries. Among the latter, the desire to “cross” culture means accession, left or right, feminist or masculinist, into the elite culture of the metropolis. This is done by the commodification of the particular “Third World culture” to which they belong. Here entry into consumerism and entry into “Feminism” (the proper named movement) have many things in common. (Naomi Schor, cited in Chow, 1993, p. 69)

The danger in playing such an insider/outsider informant role is the commodification of “native” knowledge produced in Western academia. The commodification of knowledge might not attend to critiques presented in de/colonizing epistemologies, especially when imagining a primary readership of White academics. Therefore, for this research I have primarily imagined a South Asian readership before any other readership. Such posturing calls for different kind of

accountability when a female South Asian transnational scholar in the U.S. studying other female transnational scholars places her accountability first to the people about/with whom she writes. However, since this work is produced in Western academia, and since many South Asian transnationals work in Western academia in the U.S., the insider/outsider negotiations are already influenced by the “elite culture of the metropolis.”

Consent Form and Ethics

Through my kinship relations and insider status, I developed a trusting relationship with the participants. This trust affected the way participants negotiated their consent and membership in the study. While both participants completed the consent form at the outset of the study, their understanding and negotiations of those conditions varied during the study and we continually revisited intent, desires, and ways of participation. For example, Yamini⁸, one of the participants, remained busy during the year with her program, which required her to be out of town frequently. Therefore, I was not able to “hang out” with her as much as I was with Neerada, the other participant, and so our conversations were more structured by time and Yamini’s limited availability.

Furthermore, knowing that I am interested in photo-elicited conversations, both Yamini and Neerada found the exercise to be fruitful and provided me with more information than I requested. Neerada was more interested than Yamini in discussing her experiences through her photography, and so the research space, dialogue, and Neerada’s participation were modified by her intent to participate more through photo-elicited conversations than through conversational interviews.

⁸ Participant descriptions are provided in the findings chapter and the selection of participants is elaborated earlier in this chapter.

Neither participant had ever taken part in a research project. Therefore, they placed a tremendous amount of trust in me that I would cause no harm to them. This trust and understanding extended beyond providing pseudonyms and fictionalizing identifiable contexts and details. As our relationship grew more into friendship, and later into kinship relations of being an elder sister, lines needed to be drawn around what information I had access to as an elder sister versus as a researcher. Since, as a researcher, I found myself to be always “on” whenever I interacted with Yamini and Neerada, I continued to question how such information affected the way I understood Yamini’s and Neerada’s production of experiences as recently arrived female Indian graduate students in the U.S. The lines between being a friend, elder sister, sometimes a mentor, sometimes a support system, and always a researcher were blurry and any discrete occupation of one subject position without being affected by the others was an impossibility.

Ethically, I faced a dilemma about how to represent such findings when they were shared with me based on the relationship that developed as a result of my insider status and access. Consulting with the participants resulted in remarks like, “I trust you. You can use whatever you think would help your research.” Granting me such privilege became more of a burden than a relief. Continuing to battle the ethical dilemma, I considered the following questions: Do they understand what it means to give me such access and permission? Should the researcher play the role of a protector and tell them the implications of sharing such information? Am I assuming that the participants are too naïve and incapable of understanding the qualitative research process? Is this an arrogant posturing of presumptive agency that I have as a researcher? I asked the participants what they would feel comfortable sharing assuming their mothers or

grandmothers might be reading. This question was designed to identify some boundaries that I did not have before.

As the participants started looking at the data and identified spots that would be appropriate and inappropriate for their families to read, I was reassured about which data could ethically be included in this study. Furthermore, as the participants became more involved in the research process they authored their roles differently. They also understood and negotiated their participation differently. Yamini wanted to see all the interpretive work and data poems I created, whereas Neerada wanted me to share with her my writing, discussions about the study, and how she as a “case” fit into the general purpose of the research. Neerada wanted to help me sort through the data and wanted to meet more frequently than I outlined in the consent form, whereas Yamini kept to a more structured meeting schedule. However, toward the end of the study, Yamini interacted with me in multiple group situations and began to invest more time and interest in the study, becoming an integral part of authoring interpretations.

Through these interactions it became clear that consenting to the research does not fix the manner in which one participates in research. Rather, the consent form and consenting are contingent on varied negotiations of multiple subject positions, life events, and shifting understanding of research. Moreover, through transformatory experiences, the ethics of representation included tension-filled negotiations, which took into account the combined subject positions of a well-wisher, a friend, and even an elder sister. An insider/outsider position complicates the ethics of consent and representation because they are both shifting concepts. Certainly there are no specific ethics or guidelines, but attempting to present the implications and clarify understandings of participation in the research may shed light on the ethical decisions a researcher must make in these situations.

Data Collection Procedures

For a detailed breakdown of specific data collection processes and the volume of data generated through those processes, see Appendix C. After transcription and expansion of field notes, I was able to generate about 350 pages of raw data from the following data collection methods.

Adda/Time-Pass

Typically, Indian students allocate certain times for "hanging out" and conversing across multiple related and unrelated topics. These times are called "adda" in Bengali and "time-pass" in English as used by Indian students. I visited both Neerada's (eight conversations) and Yamini's (five conversations) homes and engaged them in conversations without any pre-arranged, focused interview questions. In the beginning, I would start the session with simple questions such as "How was your day?" or let the participant begin the conversation. Because of the saliency of their experiences, any information they shared with me pointed to issues that stood out for them in various spaces such as formal academia, informal academia, general U.S. culture, or their Indian communities. Towards the end of the conversation, I would go back and clarify thoughts or ideas, or ask some focused questions based on previous conversations. These informal conversations were conducted most often in English, but sometimes they were in a combination of Hindi and English. The choice of language always came from the participants.

Photo-Elicited Conversations

Given the complexity of human behavior, photo elicitation can take understanding to a place that may not be possible within the limits of using text. Advocating this alternate understanding, Harper (2002) writes:

Photo elicitation may overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties. If the interview has been successful, then understanding has increased through the interview process. (p. 20)

Consequently, Harper advocates any form of photo elicitation to cross cultural boundaries and urges researchers to seek a new “framing of taken-for-granted experiences . . . to deconstruct their own phenomenological assumptions” (p. 21).

Similarly, Allen et al. (Allen and Labbo 2001; Allen, Fabregas et al. 2002) and Ziller (1990) conducted cross-cultural research studies through photo-elicitation, in which participants photographed their lives and objects around them to explore their cultural understandings. Integrating photo-elicitation interviews with reflections, stories, and participants’ journals, Allen et al. looked at teachers’ assumptions about culture and learning occurring within the contexts of leisure.

Ziller’s (1990) use of reflective photo-elicitation research with domestic and international students to capture their impressions of American culture displayed distinctly different responses between the two groups. Using inexpensive cameras, the domestic students took pictures of their families and neighborhoods; the international students were more interested in photographing American businesses they perceived to be iconic to the world, such as McDonald’s restaurants, Coca-Cola vending machines, etc. Through his photo-elicited interviews and thematic analysis, Ziller was able to create an understanding between domestic and international students about cultural perspectives and assumptions.

In this study, I provided the participants with disposable cameras and asked them to take pictures of anything that they thought reflected their experiences of being a female Indian

graduate student in the U.S. The participants were excited about taking pictures and soon discarded my cheap disposable cameras and used their digital cameras to create their own personalized digital albums. Both participants enjoyed taking pictures, and Neerada particularly enjoyed expressing herself through photography. While there was a pre-determined timeline, Neerada and Yamini became excited to share their pictures with me. I had anticipated two photo-elicited conversations, but with the participants' enthusiasm, there were five photo-elicited conversations with Yamini and seven photo-elicited conversations with Neerada.

Both Yamini and Neerada called me to talk about their pictures and I recorded these conversations. They put the pictures on a slideshow mode in their computers and the conversation floated from being in the U.S., to cultural assumptions, to arranged marriages, to discovering extraordinary ideas--thoughts without any pre-designed forced or focused questions. Neerada and Yamini initiated the conversations while I chimed in with probes and clarifications. The following is an example of a photo-elicited conversation with Yamini.



Time: Early November, 2004

Yamini: This is New York. I went there the first holiday right after I got into U.S.

Kakali: With whom?

Yamini: With no one. By myself. I booked my ticket and I decided to go to all the places they showed in the movie *Kal ho na ho*, where Shah Rukh Khan went and I wanted to go there and I just went.

Kakali: How did you know where to go, what to do, where to stay and all that?

Yamini: Oh that's easy. The Lonely Planet Guide. That book is my bible. I was able to use that book to figure out all the cool places and I hit them all. My parents were really worried. And I stayed at a youth hostel. The people in the apartment complex thought . . . well God knows what they thought of me and I really do not care. I wanted to go to New York and I went. I knew you would like this trip because I went alone. I am an independent person and traveling alone is ok with me. New York is like Mumbai so I really felt much more at home than I do here in Arborville. I feel more alienated here.

Experience-Box Conversations

Apart from informal conversations, the participants stored artifacts in a box that highlighted their experiences while in graduate school in the U.S. The rationale for this form of elicitation was same as the rationale for photo-elicitation conversations – to elicit information that might not come out in informal conversations. Understandably, there are many events and circumstances through/against which the participants negotiate their experiences. Creative reflective practice became a better way to elicit some of that information than relying only on verbal responses.

I provided the participants with boxes in which both Neerada and Yamini stored objects that represented some aspect of their experiences as a female Indian international student in the U.S. Though both participated in this activity, neither of them enjoyed the activity as it seemed

more unfamiliar to them than taking pictures. Yet these boxes were able to elicit ideas about cultural distances and assumptions which were integrated into the findings. There was one object-elicited conversation per participant, in which the participant initiated the conversation without any prompts or questions. The following is an excerpt from an object-elicited conversation with Neerada.



Neerada: I collected this baby leaf for the experience box. I was sitting by the Creamery, having coffee. I go there whenever I feel lonely and then there were all these leaves on the ground and on the table where I sat. Orange, red, brown, so many big leaves. Then there was this one small dead baby leaf. I felt so sad for that small dead baby leaf. It looked so isolated. Or maybe that I am really stressed out.

Participant Observations

Having an insider/outsider status with the participants, I was part of twelve informal, social, cultural, and religious gatherings where I conducted participant observation. I was mostly informed by the works of Spradley (1980) and Dewalt & Dewalt (2002) when conducting participant observation that promoted an immersion in the socio-cultural contexts in order to

observe the participants, their interactions and activities. Events at which participant observations occurred were never initiated or organized by me. Instead, these were participant- or community-initiated activities to which I was invited either by the participant or by another member of the Indian graduate student community. My membership role towards the beginning of the study was peripheral at first (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002, p. 21), changing later to a more integrated role at the request of the participants. For example, when attending a cultural festival called *Garba*, I was expected to join the participants in their dances instead of staying on the side of the room recording notes in my digital voice recorder.

I bought a slim, small digital voice recorder and a digital camera that I carried with me at all times. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, I turned the recorder on either to record my own notes or to record conversations of the participants with other people. However, during these conversations I was also expected to participate in the events, as people would otherwise feel uncomfortable seeing me take notes or speak into my recorder. I took pictures of events, spaces, and interactions to trigger multiple forms of sensory memory.

I expanded the recordings into fieldnotes immediately after each event, integrating jotted notes, verbal recordings, and pictures. In the beginning, knowing that I would not be able to capture all the details while observing, I focused on big patterns of events. Later, as I expanded my fieldnotes, I recorded questions and hunches, and discussed them with the participants and a peer debriefer. My peer debriefer was a member of the Indian graduate student community with training in qualitative methods. After adding the feedback of the participants and peer debriefer to my notes, I continued to write to develop ideas. I recorded 150 pages of participant observation fieldnotes involving Yamini and Neerada.

Written Data: Notes, Journals, and Critical Personal Narratives

Richardson and St. Pierre (Richardson and St. Pierre Forthcoming), in their current and earlier work (Richardson 2000), identify writing as a mode of inquiry informing methodological practices. Richardson delineates writing practices in four categories of notes, whereas St. Pierre explores the contingent construction of knowledge based on our understanding of method and writing. Minh-ha (1989) explores the multiple ways of writing from transnational feminist perspectives. Minh-ha looks at issues of race, class, gender, abilities, and the roles of each in creating a space for knowledge constructed through writing:

Neither black/red/yellow nor woman but poet or writer. For many of us, the question of priorities remains a crucial issue. Being merely “a writer” without doubt ensures one a status of far greater weight than being “a woman of color who writes” ever does...She will sooner or later find herself driven into situations where she is made to feel she must choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Woman writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties? (Minh-ha 1989, p. 6)

I struggled with contested loyalties during this study and anticipated being in this unreconciled space permanently. I participated in a writing group to continue to develop and interrogate ideas and obtain feedback. I continued to imagine multiple audiences as I explored ideas around being a transnational researcher working with other transnational female Indian graduate students. Inspired by Richardson, apart from journaling and writing critical personal narratives, I took notes on various aspects of the study that served as data as well. These included:

1. Data collection notes, which included information about organization, logistics, post-conversational and observational thoughts, and notes from participants' responses after sharing transcripts and findings with them.
2. Notes on emotions, which included feelings, doubts, anxieties, indulgences, assumptions, and expectations that I might have about myself, the participants, and the iterative research process.
3. Instinct notes, which included my hunches, assertions, gaps in my understanding and limits and possibilities of the hunches and assertions.
4. Decision notes, which included some of the ways I made decisions about cognitive selection of data, ways to work with participants, ethical issues, re-presentational issues, and other emergent issues during the research.

While expanding, transcribing, and reading fieldnotes, I kept parallel written accounts of thoughts, understandings, hunches, questions, etc., asking questions like, what is going on here. What are two or three things I know for sure? Where are the silences? etc. and continuing to record my responses relentlessly. Sometimes, until I wrote and explored my ideas, I did not know how to articulate my thinking and its contribution to the research as data.

I looked at my own colonization and how such colonization influenced this study. A colleague agreed to conduct some bracketing interviews which were recorded and transcribed. I conducted several intense free-writing exercises around the interviews and the research to explore and interrogate my subjectivities, in order to remain vigilant with the autoethnographic gaze.

Tacit Data

While I have listed all the tangible forms of data I collected for this research, I cannot ignore the role of those data that are unseen, unheard, undescribed, and unrealized, yet continue to shape and influence the research. I found that there are research spaces in which words were not always adequate to describe emotions, sensual information, dreams, and various forms of (conscious and unconscious) psychological negotiations (St. Pierre 1997) during data collection and analysis. The forms of data produced within these spaces cannot be captured even by the most sophisticated technological resources or the most “accurate and systematic transcription procedures” (Mishler cited in Scheurich, 1995, p. 243). I refer to these forms as *tacit data*, a category that includes information and experiences that constitute alternate ways of knowing which cannot be textually articulated, but which nevertheless inform the study.

For example, while conducting a peer debriefing session, I realized that even with detailed fieldnotes of dialogue, body language, and the site description, the peer debriefer interpreted an interaction with the participant negatively. Certainly not every piece of information can be captured in field notes, but this interpretation alerted me that I knew more than I could articulate, and that my knowledge exceeded the information that could be captured in text. It could have been a shared understanding, a way of being, something that I could not and did not attend to consciously. I remembered feeling the kindness in the participant’s eyes, a feeling of comfort and belonging during our conversations, all of which were expressed only partially in their intensity and effects in my fieldnotes. Some of this information never made it to the representation plate as it did not play any directly relevant role in answering research

questions. This unspoken, unthought, unrealized ontological awareness continued to play a role as I interpreted more tangible forms of data.

Data Transformation and Representation

“Suppose you and I are walking on the road,” said Swamiji, the holyman whose storytelling I was researching in 1985. “You have gone to University. I haven’t studied anything. We’re walking. Some child has shit on the road. We both step in it. That’s shit! I say. I scrape my foot; it’s gone. But educated people have doubts about everything. You say, ‘What’s this?’ and rub your foot against the other.” . . . “Then you reach down to feel what it could be.” A grin was breaking over his face. “Something sticky! You lift some up and sniff it. Then you say, ‘Oh this is *shit!*’ The hand that had vigorously rubbed his nose was flung out in a gesture of disgust. . . . “See how many places it touched in the meantime,” Swamiji continued. “Educated people always doubt everything. They lie awake at night thinking, ‘What was that? Why did it happen? What is the meaning and cause of it?’ Uneducated people pass judgment and walk on. They get a good night’s sleep.” (Narayan 1997, p. 33)

Transforming qualitative data usually involves some form of organization, management, description, analysis, and interpretation of data, with accompanying documentation of the process the researcher used to transform that data into evidence that provides answers to her/his research questions (Wolcott 1994; Lincoln 2002). However, this process is riddled with iterative procedures often without clear entry or exit points. I was aware that the voices of the participants would never be captured in their entirety. Nevertheless, I wanted to remain close to the data despite the tension between voice and transparency.

While I could never completely divorce myself or the decisions I made about data collection, management, analysis, and interpretation from theoretical influences, I wanted the data to be the driving factor, with theoretical arguments supporting the data, thereby avoiding the creation of a preconceived theoretical foundation and locking the data within those foundational borders. Folk understanding can and should become a legitimate site of authoring transnational perspectives, and I continued to embody that belief throughout the research in order to privilege ways of knowing that may or may not have been legitimized or voiced.

In this section I describe the processes and the journeys I took towards data management, analysis, and representation.

Data Management

I organized my data using both electronic devices and paper printouts. Using the software NVivo as a data management tool, I transcribed my tapes, expanded my fieldnotes, and wrote researcher journals. I kept a dated process log every time I opened NVivo, in order to remember my previous actions. In NVivo, I sorted out all photo-elicited interviews, object-elicited interviews, conversational interviews, and participant observations and assigned separate analytical spaces for each of the data collection methods. While writing about the data, I connected to the appropriate data file for quick retrieval. Using writing as a form of inquiry and analysis, I was able to return to previous assumptions, evolving subject positions, and discourses with which I identified as I developed analytical ideas.

The freedom I experienced when using this software resulted from the fact that anything could be used as data as long as the software could create a file for it. Therefore, I connected my entire bibliography and theoretical notes to the dissertation file in NVivo, so that I could browse through electronic references whenever I deemed appropriate. However, NVivo, like other forms

of data management software, is not value neutral, and is informed by certain theoretical frameworks that were different from the ones informing this study. I continued to stay vigilant of the incommensurability of those perspectives with my work so that I would not be falsely seduced by the features of the software. The advantage of the software lay in its ability to conduct sophisticated search and retrieval, which reduced the hours of time I might otherwise have spent looking for a strip of paper data in a detailed filing system.

Moreover, the writing and modeling tools in NVivo allowed me to interrogate continuously, develop, and connect multiple pieces of data in one space as I continued to ask, “What is going on here?” Interrogating my data allowed me to question my subjectivities to maintain an autoethnographic gaze. For example, if I was sure that racialized experiences were playing a big part in the data, I could search for certain key terms and locate the contexts in which they appeared. If the context displayed my written notes, hunches, and questions rather than the spoken data of the participant, I would begin to question the implications of the evidence and the claims warranted from such evidence. Being able to save such searches and write around them allowed me to document reliably my process and thereby offered me the ability to retrace my footsteps when needed.

Maintaining a paper-based binder of all the data was also a useful process as I printed and sorted out conversations, photo- and object-elicitations, participant observations, and written data. I used this binder to tactically connect to the data, move away from the office and reflect on the data somewhere else, and develop alternate ideas. Hence, a combination of NVivo and paper-based organization of my data allowed me to remain messy and organized simultaneously.

Reading through the data, I could not separate one-word or phrased codes into their discrete boxes without acknowledging that they were all intertwined in complex ways. The

participants negotiated their experiences in messy spaces, in contradictory ways. I wanted to capture some aspect of the messiness it would resonate with transnational feminism, which advocates developing an understanding that starts from a site of multiplicity. If the world exists in multiplicity, if people process information in multiple interconnected ways, then sorting, managing, analyzing, and re-presenting the messiness would be commensurable with ways of knowing that remain closer to the participants. Through this process, I continued to question the theoretical influences in my reading of the data to break apart my established ways of knowing in order to discover some alternate forms of knowing.

One such alternate way of knowing came from an Indian Vedic ⁹ mantra, *Om tat sat*, whose literal translation is: *Om* the vital force is the key element *tat* in all existence *sat* which is culturally understood as that which exists beyond all categorizations. *Om tat sat* is used sometimes in meditation, sometimes as a philosophy, and sometimes as a way to understand the world as it transcends any fixed forms of categorization. Invoking the same philosophy, the participants' racialized experiences were not always separable from their gendered or cultural experiences. These codes existed in ways that were inseparable, creating vital experiences for the participants.

For example, the code "racialized experiences" functioned differently in different spaces, held different meanings, and was negotiated differently by the participants across time and space. Each of those negotiations interacted intricately with other aspects of the participants' experiences, legitimizing that which exists, exists in all its riddles. Thus to understand such intertwined aspect of negotiations and productions of experience, I needed additional ways of knowing to better capture the multiplicity of interactions between time, space, events, negotiations, and contradictions, with room for permanently deferring meaning.

⁹ Vedas are ancient sacred Indian texts.

I listened to the conversation tapes closely to obtain a sense of more than the textual representation of data, a reminder of how some of those tacit data sources shaped understanding. Then, just as Neerada or Yamini would finish discussing an idea and proceed to talk about something else, I would begin to write about the idea. As I wrote, I began to connect to multiple points in the data either from memory, by searching through the data sources, or by re-reading portions of the data. I developed these ideas based on connections to similar and contradictory ideas, changes in their lives including turning points and epiphanies, and intense reactions to events, people, and circumstances. This process, represented in a single electronic document, became a space for developing ideas while remaining intimately connected to the data.

My initial analytic focus was loosely structured to explore how the participants negotiated their experiences, and to examine the contexts in which those experiences were produced. I was hoping that this focus would provide a starting point that would help me stay close to the data and open up possibilities through writing. I went through the entire data set and began writing every time a different topic came up in the conversations. As I continued with this process I came up with several written pieces linking to multiple pieces within the data. The pieces did not exist independently. However. Instead, they were connected to each other, almost creating a network feeding into and out of one another, mostly because I was influenced by the philosophy of that which exists, exists in all its inseparable complexities.

I returned to the data again and looked for silences and misses, and asked, What else is going on? Wherever there was silence, I made that a point of inquiry and began writing around that idea as well. In re-reading, I assigned “new values to texts ignored or discarded” (Visweswaran 1994, p. 17) in my previous reading. During this entire process I conducted several member checks with the participants, and worked with a local peer debriefer from the

community. Their ideas and suggestions were then added to the stories as points of clarification, providing depth and continuing to build on the complexity through which the participants authored themselves.

I began to look at the written pieces again for patterns and silences. For each of the pieces, I created a demographic chart that outlined who the actors were, where the significance was attached, which outcomes were valued over others, what cultural practices were described by the participant, and where the event occurred. I also created a search based on the various attributes within the demographic charts. This search produced a pattern of events in certain spaces. For example, for Neerada, feelings of cultural alienation were strongest in her formal academic space. Anytime Neerada discussed cultural alienation she returned to experiences in formal academia. Thus, I began to look at the spaces and the experiences produced in those spaces.

Soon I was able to produce a list of events in spaces like formal academia, informal academia, living contexts, alternate communities of support, and memories of India. By now I had written around every idea and connected similar and dissimilar ideas to discuss tensions resulting from the oppressive effects of certain hegemonic discourses. The following is an example of such writing:

Neerada resisted her professor when he was making fun of the students by making a prolonged eye contact which is a clear sign of disrespect and disruption. She still walked away from being tempted to say that she felt awkward or offended that he was laughing at people's papers. Her resistance (*connect to another portion of data*) was an indication of her becoming. She has seen that people argue with their professors here and that it is ok to criticize some professors (*connect to another portion of data*). The most strategic

thing for Neerada to do at that time was to resist in silence (*connect to another portion of the data*) with her body language.

Such interconnected data, listed in spaces where the participants had to function, led me to further analysis and representation of the data as described in the next section.

Data Analysis and Representation Strategies

Analysis began when I designed my research questions and continued as I moved through the research process. Troubled by the loss of the subaltern voices, I invited both Neerada and Yamini to write descriptive vignettes.

These descriptive vignettes were composed using the participants' words throughout the research study. Both participants were intimately involved in composing their vignettes, selecting portions from their speeches and adding ideas and words for clarification and elaboration to the excerpts and phrases chosen for the vignette. They cleaned up certain speech elements (e.g., um, like, you know) to make the text flow better. Informed by my need to create a descriptive self-portrait using our conversations, Neerada and Yamini became excited, and immediately participated in authoring themselves.

We discussed what the descriptive vignette should tell people about the participants. We went back and forth in several rounds of conversation, both in person and via e-mail, until we came to a satisfactory conclusion. For example, for Neerada, we decided that the vignette should capture:

- Neerada's love for her pets
- Her love for the outdoors and her friends
- Her struggles when she chose to study veterinary science

- Some of the ways women are expected to behave in India
- How Neerada pursued her own desires, sometimes in contradiction to her parents' and cultural expectations
- How she was taught not to be authored solely by her class and caste status
- Some of her battles in trying to come to the U.S.
- Some of the loneliness that she faced in the U.S. amidst unfamiliar environments

We looked at the data and started to pick out lines, phrases, and excerpts that matched our criteria. While constructing this vignette, Neerada added more information or altered or abbreviated some expressions to communicate carefully what she perceived were the most appropriate words and phrases to represent her to the anticipated readers of our work.

Once the participants had selected important parts of their lives that they were comfortable sharing, I helped them search through the data and continued to dialogue with them to see why they were including certain parts and what those parts meant for them. We went through three to four drafts per participant before both of us were happy with the alignment of what we produced. My role as a facilitator was to assist the participants with all the information they required in crafting the descriptive vignettes and to do whatever I could to minimize their workload without dismissing their enthusiasm and interest. While they pointed to data pieces and talked through their ideas, I would type, cut and paste excerpts and pictures, and probe for clarification and elaboration.

Once the vignettes were completed, I invited the peer debriefer to read them and she identified points that I had not considered. For example, for Yamini, the peer debriefer suggested that I look at her enhanced sense of Indian-ness in the U.S. and provide some examples because that is a salient aspect of Yamini's negotiations. Once I added the information and checked with

Yamini, the portrait became richer, with thick descriptions of the participants' lives authored mostly through their voices.

After sorting out the data through topics, events, stories, and spaces, I was still burdened by the responsibility of analysis that went beyond sorting, categorizing, and managing. To sharpen my analytical questions, I considered the following questions: What is going on in these spaces? What are the contradictions and tensions? Where are the silences? What are the negotiations and reworking of subject positions in these spaces? I created a chart¹⁰ that offered visual clarity and some answers to these questions (see Appendix D). Furthermore, a revisit to the research questions became a helpful focusing strategy.

Recognizing that there was a performative element in the participants' acts, I looked at ethnodrama as a potential analytical and re-presentational strategy. However, nothing mentioned in ethnodrama connected participants' stories to each other, showing that they existed in relations of accommodation, resistance, contradiction, tension, or support for each other, until I came across a figuration of front and back stage in the writings of Erving Goffman (1997). This figuration of front and back stage became most useful for me in conceptualizing and interpreting the data. Goffman's theoretical framework is not used when implementing the front and back stage idea in this study. Phrases like "in front of the curtains" and "behind the curtains" could serve similar purposes, but seemed clunky to me, so I moved instead towards Goffman's elegant figuration of front and back stages.

¹⁰ The chart in Appendix D served as a form of data reduction. By using writing as a form of inquiry I was able to generate ideas that I organized visually in these charts, providing me with a visually accessible representation of ideas developed during data analysis. I approached the ideas in the charts as continuously shifting, always suspect, and filled with tensions. Therefore, I referred more to my writing than to the charts when I was interpreting the data, but the charts were helpful in presenting an overview of developing ideas.

I followed the literature in performance ethnography to ground the re-presentational strategies. Denzin (2003, p. 14) notes that the “move to performance has been accompanied by a shift in the meaning of ethnography and ethnographic writing.” Denzin privileges performance ethnography because he feels that the “writer-as-performer is self-consciously present, morally, and politically self-aware.” Visweswaran (1994) extends the argument by asserting that there is something allegorical yet tangible about dramaturgical performative acts. Performance ethnographies have the potential of creating a politics of possibilities (Soyini 1998) that can interrogate existing social structures and practices.

Butler, on the other hand (1993, p. 141) states that “there are no original performances, [that] every performance establishes itself performatively as an original, a personal and locally situated production.” Denzin further elaborates on how the writer and the performance come together in performance ethnography:

Focusing on epiphanies and liminal moments of experience, the writer imposes a narrative framework on the text. This framework shapes how the writer’s experience will be represented, using the devices of experience of plot, setting, characters (protagonists and antagonists), characterization, temporality and dialogues; the emphasis on showing not telling. (Denzin 2003, p. 46)

I choose performance ethnography as a re-presentational strategy to highlight the messiness that results from intersections of the researcher and the researched in one space with fleeting subjectivities and assertions.

Saldana (2003) identifies the move to ethnodrama as a relatively new trend in qualitative research. He suggests:

A key question to discern the most appropriate mode of representation and presentation for qualitative research is, will the participant's story be credibly, vividly, and persuasively told for an audience through a traditional written report, video documentary, photographic portfolio, Website, poetry, dance, music, visual art installation, or ethnodrama? If it's the latter, then a qualitative researcher playwrites with data. (Saldana, 2003, p. 219)

I grappled with the question Saldana posed and concluded that a traditional written report could not do justice to the performative acts of the participants, especially when their shuttling between multiple spaces produces the performative actions and re-actions.

I recognized that by juxtaposing the performative spaces against each other, I could "show" instead of tell the reader about the discursive effects of those spaces. I continued to follow Saldana's primer to inform the plotting, character development, deliverance of monologues, and scenography. When creating a plot for performance, Saldana recommends:

Dramatic structures include the number of acts, scenes, and vignettes ("units" to most theatre practitioners); whether the time line of events is chronological or randomly episodic; and whether monologue, dialogue, and/or lyric are the most appropriate narrative forms for its characters. The story line is the sequential arrangement of units within the plot. (Saldana, 2003, p. 220)

Therefore, I identified a storyline that mainly involved episodic encounters in multiple spaces and the participants' subsequent actions and re-actions. These episodic encounters corresponded to the plot of being racialized, gendered, classed, belonging in certain groups, and resisting and accommodating to different socio-cultural expectations.

These episodic encounters were at times chronologically developed and at other times were randomly put together depending on the episode. For example, Yamini was uncomfortable networking at the beginning of her program. Towards the end she was able to develop some networking skills. This representation was chronological. On the other hand, Neerada experienced multiple oppressive incidents in the context of formal academia which I represented in episodic instead of chronological terms.

To develop characters in ethnodrama, Saldana suggests making attempts to present a three-dimensional nature of the participant. He recommends that:

Portrayal of a participant in ethnodrama [should be]: (a) from interviews: what the participant reveals about his or her perceptions or constructed meanings; (b) from field notes, journal entries, or other written artifacts: what the researcher observes, infers, and interprets from the participant in action; (c) from observations or interviews with other participants connected to the primary case study: perspectives about the primary participant or phenomena; and (d) from research literature: what other scholars offer about the phenomena under investigation. (Saldana, 2003, p. 223)

Following Saldana's suggestions, I incorporated information about the participants from photo- and object-elicitation conversations, conversational interviews, researcher-written data, and fieldnotes. This incorporation added to a multidimensionality of data which went well beyond the textual re-presentation of data.

Saldana also recommends using monologues as an effective way to dramatize the data. He explains:

Monologues are extended passages of text spoken by one character that are (a) addressed to another character listening on stage, (b) addressed directly to the audience, or (c)

reveal inner thoughts spoken aloud—a soliloquy—for the audience (see Prendergast, 2001). A playwright in ethnodrama is not just a storyteller, he or she is a story-reteller. You don't compose what your participants tell you in interviews, but you can creatively and strategically edit the transcripts, assuming you wish to maintain rather than “restory” their narratives. Interviews with one participant generate transcript data suitable for transformation into one-person reflections. (Saldana, 2003, p. 224)

This suggestion became especially helpful for me as I was able to incorporate and manipulate multiple excerpts for dramatic effect as monologues to develop both Yamini's and Neerada's characters. Because I had abundant conversational data, I had access to various forms of reflective data and strategically incorporated them in the plays.

Next I looked at Saldana's recommendations for scenography to add multidimensionality to re-presentation. He suggests:

“[B]ecause ethnography analyzes participants in action, there are things to show on stage: descriptive replication with subtextual inferences of the way participants facially react, walk, gesture, pose, dress, vocally inflect, and interact with others. These nonverbal cues reveal much about characters—and real people. Scenography establishes time and place of a play, evokes mood, and serves the required action of characters. This article cannot discuss in depth the potential of costumes (participant clothing), hand properties (artifacts), or scenery, lighting, and sound (the fieldwork environment) to enhance the ethnographic performance. But from my own experience, I offer the classic design adage for guidance: “Less is more.” (Saldana, p. 2003, p. 227)

I used my fieldnotes to construct the scenography and remembered that “less is more” in terms of performance and re-enactments. Included in the scenography were descriptions of chairs

in formal academic offices to establish the subtext of power relations between the participant and the professor. I also included gestures, body language, and other non-verbal aspects (i.e., rolling eyes for Yamini) when developing a scene. All scenes were marked with time and relations to another scene that served either as a front or back stage for the current scene.

Armed with a compatibility with performance ethnography I began to examine the front and back stage figuration closely. These front and back stages could become the spaces where the participants experience certain events, topics, and epiphanies. Sometimes these spaces were physical (i.e., a classroom) and sometimes they were imagined (i.e., memories of India) or temporal. Realizing that the front and back stages each have separate audiences (see Figure 4) and that each audience is privy to different kinds of performances, I began to develop the idea of front and back stage further, concluding that front and back stages are relational terms and are

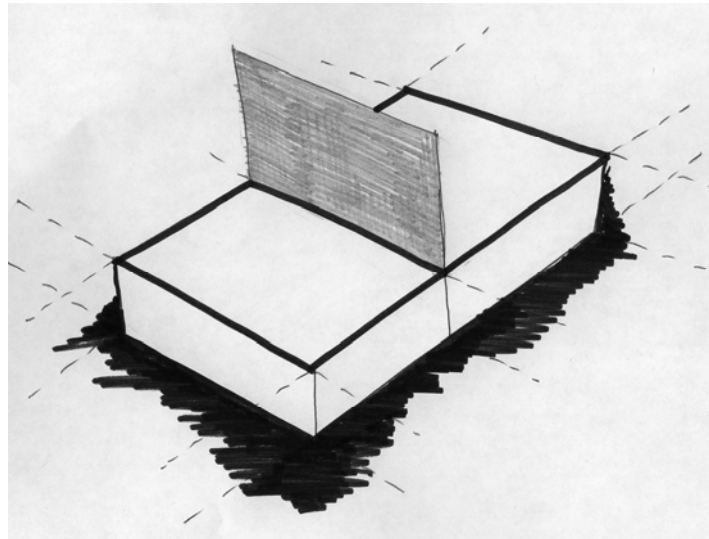


Figure 4: Front and back stage

not fixed in their performative spaces. This means that what is back stage for one audience could be front stage for another audience who is observing performances at the back stage.

The general argument is that there is always a performative aspect to our acts and actions and depending on who the audience is, these acts and actions vary. Front and back stage are

useful constructs in relation to each other, but they do not hold on to their absoluteness for too long. One can move within multiple back and front stages depending on one's acts of accommodation, resistance, and reworking of multiple subject positions and spaces. These front and back stages can become a labyrinthine structure through which the participants navigate in their everyday lives (see Figure 5).

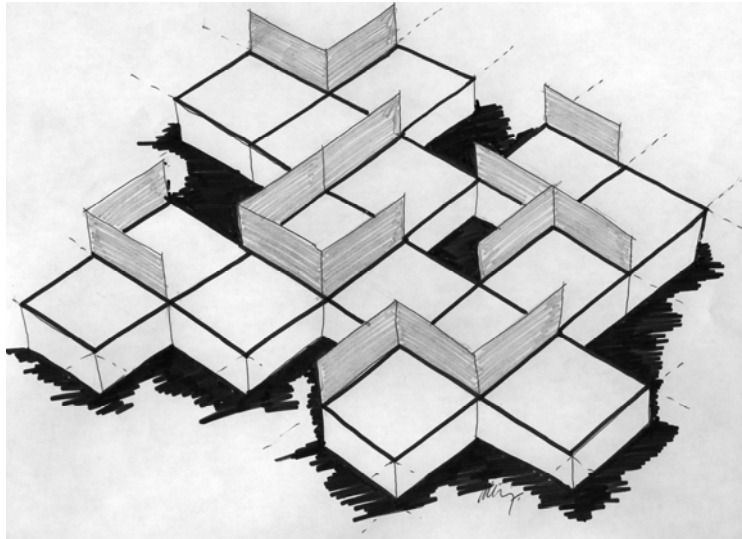


Figure 5: Labyrinth of front and back stages

The performative self is full of contradictions, inconsistencies, tensions, voices, and silences. The front and back stage allegories show multiple forms of shifts, border crossings, and negotiations between spaces – shifting spaces of lived experiences. Therefore, for this study, the front stage became where the participant chose to perform in one way and the back stage became a space in relation to the front stage where the tensions, contradictions, elaborations, and giving voice to silences were addressed. The labyrinthine depiction of front and back stages allows for participants' existence and movement in multiple spaces, and reveals how acts of border crossing are informed by competing and contradictory discourses.

Since at any given time any stage could be a front or back stage performance for a specific audience, every stage has a front and back stage component to it. The stages for this

research denote the regions or spaces in which participants' lived experiences are produced.

Using a visual representation to demonstrate the front and back stage performances separately for each performance allowed me to show specific negotiations and relations. Incorporating the fieldnotes and pictures into the stage as settings and as the backdrop enabled me to create a multidimensional representation of the data.

To select appropriate performances that would be the “nuggets” of the representation, I chose those performances based on either the intensity with which the participant described events and/or events that the participants repeated over multiple times and spaces. Once the spaces were identified, attending to the research questions for both participants provided further understanding of negotiations, relations, tensions, and contradictions. Consequently, the performative acts in each of the spaces soon began to appear in relation to other spaces. Thus, if the participants identified the relationships directly, then I placed the performative act(s) as front and back stage plays, demonstrating the different ways participants negotiated an experience in those spaces. If a relationship was researcher-identified, then I clarified such relationships through further member checks and peer debriefing before situating the plays in front and back stage relations to one another.

After the front and back stage plays were constructed, the need to crystallize the main arguments became the driving force for designing the plays. The plays were named from those arguments. During the entire time, there were periodic member checks and peer debriefing for enhanced focusing and sharpening of ideas. The plays presented are those with which the participants were most comfortable, narratives they agreed with and for which they understood my intentions. This is not to imply that the participants did not disagree with my interpretations.

Instead, we talked through the disagreements while I continued to emphasize that they had the final say over what got produced about their lived experiences.

Once I interpreted the participants' disagreements to their satisfaction and made the necessary changes, I would put forth that representation as findings. The staged interpretation was always a co-construction that honored the participants' interpretations. The subsequent discussion space served as a site for my subjectivities and interpretations as depicted in Chapters 4 and 5. For example, Neerada disagreed about an experience that I interpreted as gendered and racialized. However, since this was the first time Neerada was experiencing racialization, she did not perceive the incident to be racializing or gendering her as an Other. I mention this discrepancy in the discussion so that the reader can situate her/himself within the overlapping subject position. Finally when all the plays were constructed, I created visual diagrams demonstrating the relationships between each act of the plays for clarity and organization. This construction process was iterative as I continued to think through the plays and returned to my initial data analysis questions about silences, tensions, and contradictions.

Another iterative strategy that enhanced the sharpness of the plays included consideration of the following questions: Where do the plays get the participants and where do they get me? Why is there a need to occupy such subject positions and what are the possibilities and pitfalls generated through these occupations? The final draft of the plays was produced through extensive writing around these questions to identify nuggets.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is grounded in various de/colonizing approaches informing research design, data collection, analysis, and re-presentation. By attempting to abandon a will to know; identifying a continuum between silence and voice; highlighting the need for multiple forms of

border-crossings by breaking the oppressor/oppressed binaries; and incorporating various methods of data collection, analysis, and representation, this study captures multiple ways of producing knowledge. While the voices of the participants were always already mitigated through several mitigating filters, I tried to honor these voices as much as possible. The participants' interests and continued participation became integral parts of this study, ensuring collaborative construction of knowledge and authoring even though I continued to monitor and facilitate the direction of the study.

Such a collaborative research process, along with de/colonizing departures, member checks, peer debriefing, and shuttling between interrogative and reflective posturing added to the rigor and trustworthiness of this research. Since this study began with the intent to implement de/colonizing epistemologies, the approaches taken were consistently informed by theoretical and methodological frameworks of such epistemologies, allowing varied forms of data analysis and re-presentation.

My transnational subjectivities remained under and outside an autoethnographic gaze through writing, member checks, peer debriefing, constructing critical personal narratives, and a relentless desire to blur boundaries and binaries anywhere I saw them. In the next two chapters, Neerada's and Yamini's negotiations are presented in multiple spaces.

