

Through A Strangers' Eyes: From Stranger to Familiar
A Phenomenological Journey Exploring High School Students' Understanding of Culture
Through Participation in the Human Geography Class

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Curriculum & Instruction

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services

October, 2018

Steffani Parker Dyer

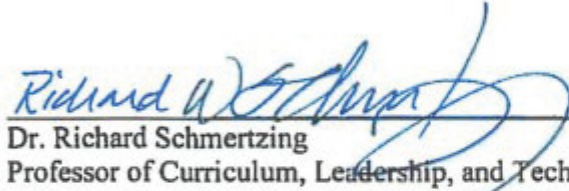
Ed. S., Valdosta State University, 2015
M. Ed., University of Oklahoma, 1987
B. A., University of Georgia, 1984

© Copyright 2018 Steffani Parker Dyer

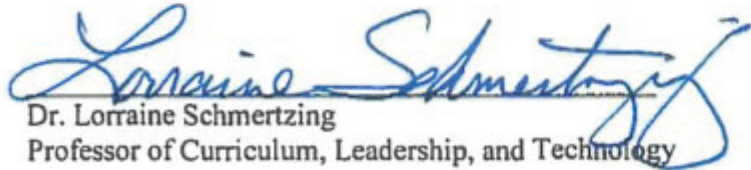
All Rights Reserved

This dissertation, "Through A Strangers' Eyes: From Stranger to Familiar
A Phenomenological Journey Exploring High School Students' Understanding of Culture
Through Participation in the Human Geography Class," by Steffani Parker Dyer, is
approved by:

**Dissertation
Committee
Chair**


Dr. Richard Schmertzing
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology

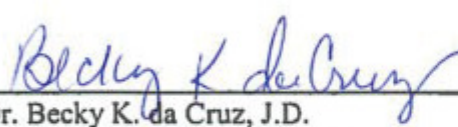
**Dissertation
Research Member**


Dr. Lorraine Schmertzing
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology

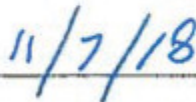
**Committee
Member**


Dr. Sean Lennon
Associate Professor of Middle Grades, Secondary Reading
and Deaf Education

**Associate Provost
for Graduate
Studies and Research**


Dr. Becky K. da Cruz, J.D.
Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date


11/7/18

FAIR USE

This dissertation is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, revised in 1976). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of the material for financial gain without the author's expressed written permission is not allowed.

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this dissertation for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by a library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature _____

I refuse permission for this dissertation to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature Stephani Parker Dyer

ABSTRACT

A sound understanding of culture is an important concept for students to acquire in a globalized world. Despite researchers' interest in how individuals understand culture, little research has focused on high school students' understanding of culture. In fact, most research exploring high school students' understanding of culture has examined the concept using quantitative methods to determine their level of understanding of other cultures. To that end, no study that I have found thus far, has examined the process of the shifting conceptualization that high school students experience from participating in a human geography course. Thus, this study sought to shed light on emic narrative voices of the 10 high school students' journey with shifting conceptualization of culture from participating in a human geography course.

The purpose of this study was to explore students' understanding of culture from taking the human geography class. More specifically, the particular interest of this study was to examine the processes and outcomes of shifting conceptualization of culture that 10 high school students experienced from participating in a human geography class. Using a post-intentional phenomenological framework, I followed and applied Vagle's (2014) five-component process to examine the phenomenon. Qualitative data were collected through expressive writings, focus group interviews, and semi-structured interviews in an attempt to capture students' voices of their experiences in the human geography class that led to their shifts in their conceptualization of culture. The data were then analyzed using the whole-part-whole process (Vagle, 2014), and examined for

tentative manifestations of the phenomenon. Participants verbatim focus group and individual narratives are offered in the findings chapter.

Data analysis revealed four distinct themes or tentative manifestations that were ubiquitous among all of the participants: *shifts in conceptualization of culture that lead to deeper, more complex thought than previously experienced, changes in thinking patterns related to culture, shifts in conceptual thinking that led to changes in behavior that resulted in a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others, and shifts in conceptualization of culture that resulted in that transfer of knowledge and real-life application of culture.* These tentative manifestations are discussed in greater detail in the tentative manifestation chapter.

The findings in the study indicated that students developed a greater understanding of culture that became more complex and broader than they initially thought while also experiencing a shift in their thinking patterns related to culture after participating in a human geography class. Further, shifts in their conceptualization of culture led to changes in their behavior that leading to a greater level of tolerance acceptance and open-mindedness about culture, and transfer of knowledge to real-life application of information that would ultimately benefit them in the future. Finally, a discussion of implications and limitations of the study and future research are offered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Significance of the Study	6
Purpose of the Study	12
Research Questions	13
Conceptual Framework	14
Personal Interest	15
Professional Interest	17
Personal Position in the Study	19
Theoretical Framework	20
Summary	21
Chapter II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	23
Trends in Immigration	23
Understanding the Concept of Culture	25
The Research	28
Quantitative Research	28
College Level	28
High School and Middle School Level	30
Qualitative Research	34
Mixed-Method Research	37
College Level	37
Middle School Level	41

Summary	42
Chapter III: METHODS	44
Phenomenology.....	44
Post-Intentional Phenomenology	49
Design of the Study.....	55
Research Componen 1: Identify the Phenomenon.....	56
Contexts	57
Participant Selection	59
Participant Selection Procedure	60
Summary	63
Research Component 2: Devise a Clear, Yet Flexible Plan to Gather Data	64
Select Data Sources.....	64
Align Data Sources with Research Questions	69
Summary	69
Research Component 3: Make a Post-Reflexion Plan	70
Create A Post-Reflexion Journal	71
Write an Initial Post-Reflexive Statement	73
Post-Reflex as You Gather and Analyze Data	76
Summary	77
Research Component 4: Read and Write Your Way Through the Data in a Systematic, Responsive Manner	78
Whole-Parts-Whole.....	79
Step 1: Holistic Reading of the Entire Text	79

Step 2: First Line-by-Line Reading.....	80
Step 3: Follow-Up Questions.....	82
Step 4: Second Line-by-Line Reading.....	82
Step 5: Third Line-by-Line Reading.....	84
Step 6: Subsequent Readings	86
Summary	87
Research Component 5: Craft a Text that Captures Tentative Manifestations of the Phenomenon in its Multiple, Partial, and Varied Contexts.....	88
Re-State the Multiple and Varied Contexts.	88
Brainstorm Potential Forms.	89
Summary	90
Summary.....	90
Credibility	91
Summary	95
Chapter IV: INTERACTIVE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS	96
Interactive Focus Group 1: NG.....	98
Topic 1: Reasons For Taking the Class	100
Topic 2: What is Culture.....	101
Topic 3: Vivid Experience	105
Topic 4: Culture as All-Encompassing Concept.....	110
Topic 5: New Look at Culture	112
Interactive Focus Group 1: EC	115
Topic 1: Reasons for Taking the Class	117

Topic 2: What is Culture.....	118
Topic 3: Pre-Class Awareness of Culture.....	120
Topic 4: Aha Moments	123
Topic 5: New Understandings	125
Topic 6: Vivid Memories.....	131
Summary of The First Focus Group Interviews	133
Individual Vignettes.....	133
Osceola.....	134
Athens	142
Kelly and Matthew.....	151
Georgia.....	162
Tess	170
Jefferson.....	178
Just Jim.....	190
Evangeline Harcourt	199
Shirley Shire.....	207
Summary	216
Interactive Focus Group 2: NG.....	217
Topic 1: Look at the World in New Ways	217
Topic 2: The Why of Where	220
Topic 3: Deeper Levels of Analysis.....	223
Topic 4: New, In-depth Understanding	226
Topic 5: Lightbulb Moments	228

Interactive Focus Group 2: EC	232
Topic 1: Look at the World in New Ways.....	232
Topic 2: The Why of Where	234
Topic 3: Deeper Levels of Analysis.....	237
Topic 4: New, In-depth Understanding	238
Topic 5: Lightbulb Moments	240
Summary of Final Focus Group Interviews.....	242
CHAPTER V: TENTATIVE MANIFESTATIONS	243
Tentative Manifestation 1: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture to Deeper, More Complex Thought.....	243
Osceola.....	246
Athens	248
Kelly.....	250
Matthew	252
Georgia.....	253
Tess	255
Jefferson.....	257
Just Jim.....	258
Evangeline Harcourt	259
Shirley Shire.....	262
Summary of Tentative Manifestation 1	263
Tentative Manifestation 2: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture that Led to Changes in Thought Patterns	265

Osceola.....	265
Athens	266
Kelly.....	267
Matthew	268
Georgia.....	270
Tess	271
Jefferson.....	272
Just Jim.....	273
Evangeline Harcourt	275
Shirley Shire.....	276
Summary Tentative Manifestation 2.....	279
Tentative Manifestation 3: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture Led to Changes in Behavior Resulting in Greater Tolerance and Acceptance.....	280
Osceola.....	281
Athens	282
Kelly.....	283
Matthew	285
Georgia.....	286
Tess	287
Jefferson.....	288
Just Jim.....	290
Evangeline Harcourt	290
Shirley Shire.....	291

Summary Tentative Manifestation 3.....	292
Tentative Manifestation 4: Shifts In Conceptualization of Culture that Led to Transfer of Knowledge and Real-Life Application of the Concept of Culture.....	293
Osceola.....	294
Athens	295
Kelly.....	297
Matthew	298
Georgia.....	300
Tess	301
Jefferson.....	303
Just Jim.....	305
Evangeline Harcourt	307
Shirley Shire.....	308
Summary of Tentative Manifestation 4	310
Summary of All Tentative Manifestations.....	310
Conclusion	311
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION	313
Interpretation of the Findings Aligned to Research Questions.....	315
Research Question 1 Findings Answered by TM 1: Shifts Conceptualization of Culture that lead to Deeper, More Complex Thought.....	315
Summary	319
Research Question 2 Findings Answered by TM 2: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture that Led to Changes in Thought Patterns.....	320

Summary	326
Research Question 3 Findings Answered by TM 3: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture that Let to Changes in Behavior Resulting in Greater Tolerance and Acceptance	327
Summary	330
Research Question 3 Findings Answered by TM 4: Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture that Led to Transfer of Knowledge and RE.....	331
Summary	336
Limitations of the Study.....	337
Summary.....	339
Findings Related to The Literature.....	340
Summary.....	341
Implications.....	342
Summary.....	343
Future Research	344
Summary.....	345
Conclusion	345
EPILOGUE.....	347
REFERENCES	350
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL.....	356
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER.....	359
APPENDIX C: INTEREST SURVEY	362

APPENDIX D: WRITING PROMPTS FOR LIVED EXPERIENCE

DESCRIPTONS (LED).....364

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE 366

LIST of FIGURES

Figure 1. Intentionality and Tentative Manifestations.....	51
Figure 2. Whole-Part-Whole Data Analysis Map.....	81
Figure 3. Sample of First Line-By-Line Procedure.....	83
Figure 4. Third Line-By-Line Reading Focus Group 2: Potential Tentative Manifestation.....	85

LIST of TABLES

Table 1. Participant Data.....	63
Table 2. Date of Focus Groups and Individual Interviews with Participants.....	68
Table 3. Research Questions and Data Source Alignment.....	70

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I waited to write this to the very end. I am not really sure why, other than maybe I had to complete the journey in order know who to thank. The list has grown over the years as I have sometimes; ran through, trudge through, and even crawled through the process and I would have been remiss if I had not waited to pen this portion of my dissertation. I have been able to accomplish something that I have dreamed about my whole life, which most of you know is a long time, and for that I am truly grateful.

First, I would like to thank a wise sage who asked me at the beginning of this journey what I was really trying to understand from doing this research. Dr. Richard Schmertzing, my chair, you were right on with your analysis that I was seeking to understand those multi-faceted levels of understanding culture that students experience from taking my class. I didn't know it at the time that was where I was headed or if I would discover any significant findings, but somehow you read that in the way I talked about my subject and my students. You set my feet on the right path and it proved to be the golden path to the land of great discovery. I thank you for your help in getting here. To my researcher, Dr. Lorraine Schmertzing, I cannot believe I am going to say this, but thank you for all of the chewing out moments especially when it came to APA. You are a master wizard of APA and editing and I surely could not have made it without you. I appreciate all of your suggestions, urgings, and bright colored pen markings that made me pay attention and do right, even if it took a little while to get there. Thank you for all of your help with this process. To Dr. Sean Lennon, thank you for agreeing to join this party. I am not sure if you would have agreed had you known that the dissertation would be so long, but I appreciate having another social studies person in the house. I look forward to discussing social studies education in the future. To my entire committee, you rock!

To Justin, I owe you a debt of gratitude I cannot repay. I so appreciate all your help with this document and life. You pulled my fat out of the fryer so many times when I couldn't figure out how to format or find information. You prodded me when I started to get weary and you listened for countless hours to me on the phone and in person about this process. You never got weary of listening and helping and if you did, you were gracious enough not to throw it in my face or stop giving. We have had wonderful times together from San Diego to Chattanooga to Newnan and beyond. You are my travel buddy and I am so lucky and honored to have you in my life. I love you, always, always!

To Diane, wow girl we did it! I remember you asking me to go on the Specialist journey with you and I thought, well ok. Then when we accomplished that, I dragged you along on this journey, although you didn't know that you really wanted to do it anyway. If I had not had you along on this rip-roaring ride, I wouldn't have made it. You pushed me, I pushed you. From all of the countless hours talking and walking, and talking some more, we forced each other to climb up that mountain and claim the victory prize. Thank you for being my friend and helping me along the way. I love you, girl!

To my students, past and present, thank you for making me feel like a rock star every day when I walk into the classroom. I have always considered you to be like my own children and you lavished me with your love and support. Thank you for allowing me to teach you and making my job the best one on the planet!

To anyone I have missed in this acknowledgement, I thank you!!!!!! I am greatly appreciative of your contribution, no matter how big or small. I did not intend on leaving anyone out, it is just that my brain is fried at this point. I hope I get it back!

DEDICATION

I wholeheartedly dedicate this dissertation and the accomplishment it represents, to my parents, especially my dad. My dad was the kindest, smartest, most loving father a girl could ask for. He showed me what it means to have a male role model and what to look for in a man. He gave everything to his family and generously left me enough money to complete this doctorate, so I didn't have to take out student loans. I know that he is as proud as any father could be that I have accomplished this degree and that I was his daughter. To my mother, thank you for always making me laugh. I now know where my sense of humor came from. You supported everything I attempted to do and did, even though you worried about me all the time. I also know that you are proud of my accomplishments and would want me to be happy and thrive. I miss you both so much and think about you every day, whether it's when I am looking at a photograph or reading a book, something always comes to mind. I hope you know that you gave me roots grounded in your love and wings to soar high. Soar on, I will!!!

To my daughter, Kelsey and my son Charles, aka Gretzky, I dedicate this doctorate to you as well. Even though we are scattered far and wide, you are always in my heart. I wish we had more time together, but we are busy with life. I know that you are proud of me for finishing this degree. I love you both with all my heart and can't wait to hug your neck. Mom- out!

OVERVIEW

In the proposed phenomenological study, I plan to explore the shifting conceptualization of culture as experienced by high school students from participating in a human geography course. Further I plan to examine understanding of culture using the lens of Robert Hanvey's (1975) global awareness theoretical framework and Kniep's (1986) conceptual themes for the social studies framework as guides to indicate the value of the importance of people's knowledge of cultural understandings. Specifically, I will use Hanvey's idea of cultural awareness, and Kniep's theme of culture will be used to explain what I mean by cultural understanding, why it is important, and how it will be used as the focus of my study. I sought to know how students develop understandings of culture, come to know about other cultures, and how their life and class experiences with participating in the human geography class affected their understanding of culture. Human Geography is a course that is that focuses on multiple facets of culture by which I mean, there seven objectives which teachers follow as a guide in their instruction. Those objectives are: Geography: Its Nature and Perspectives; Population and Migration; Cultural Patterns and Processes; Political Organization of Space; Agriculture, Food Production, and Rural Land Use; Industrialization and Economic Development; Cities and Urban Land Use. These as well as the relationship to course content are described in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this manuscript. In Chapter 1, I explain the context of the study; discuss the theoretical framework that guided the study and the importance of the framework to education and instruction, and students' understanding of the course content; my own anecdotal experiences with culture; and the purpose and proposed relevance of the study. Chapter 2 contains select literature and research studies that

provide relevant information on the topic and define the importance of my study and address the importance of cultural understanding with high school students. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of how I addressed the methods I used to answer the research questions and applied Vagle's (2014) post-intentional phenomenological approach to this study. Chapter 3's content also shows the research practices and data analysis procedures I used to gather information, which I used to examine and understand the phenomenon of the changing conceptualization of culture as experienced by high school students who participated in a human geography course. Chapter 4's content shows the interactive focus groups data and individual interviews. The individual interviews are structured as vignettes as outlined by Seidman (2013). In Chapter 5, I explain the tentative manifestations gleaned from data analysis of the focus groups and individual interviews of the participants. Finally, Chapter 6 content provides my interpretation of the findings aligned to the research questions; limitations of the study; findings related to the literature; implications of the study, and suggestions for future research. This dissertation was structured following Maxwell's (2013) outline for developing dissertations taken from *Qualitative Research and Design: An Interactive Approach*.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

“As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own.”

-Margaret Mead- (1928, para.1)

Background of the Study

America continues to be a diverse land of immigrants. The image of America's cultural landscape as a mosaic is still as relevant today as it was 200 years ago. The Pew Research Center (2017a) statistics show there are 46.6 million immigrants residing in the United States, comprising 13.4% of the overall population. This is a dramatic increase in the immigrant population numbers since 1960, when the number of immigrants totaled 9.7 million. The majority of immigrants continue to come from Latin American, however, there has been a marked increase in immigrants from South and East Asia coming to the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017b). With an increase in numbers of immigrants comes an increase in cultural diversity and the need to know and understand different cultures. Kirkwood (2001) claimed students graduating from high school need to be prepared to live in a world that includes a new way of thinking about contact with others of diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Further, educating the U.S. citizenry about different cultures remains a pressing issue to ensure that all individuals are prepared to live in a globalized world with knowledge of other cultures. Levintova, Johnson, Scheberle, and Vonck (2011) claimed that people are not born with an innate awareness of other cultures but that this knowledge must be taught and learned

through education. In their mixed method study, the researchers found that 1,242 Midwestern college students indicated, through survey data, that engagement in a course in global cultures helped them gain a better understanding of other cultures and their cultural norms. Further, instructors' observations of students during the program lent credence to students' self-reported data on their cultural awareness. With the same goal as Levintova et al. but with different methods, I explored high school students' shifting conceptualization of culture through their participation in the human geography course and whether their experiences contributed to a better understanding of cultures.

Growing concern over increased cultural diversity in the United States and decreased understanding of a global perspective among United States citizenry, led Robert Hanvey (1975), an often-cited author and educator on global awareness, to develop a manifesto outlining a way for individuals to develop a global perspective. Hanvey believed education was key to helping people understand their role in the global world, yet no clear definition of what constituted a global perspective existed at that point in time. Hanvey developed a five-dimensional plan for educators to help individuals attain a global perspective. Hanvey's five dimensions consisted of:

1. Perspective Consciousness
2. "State of Planet" Awareness
3. Cross-Cultural Awareness
4. Knowledge of Global Dynamics
5. Awareness of Human Choices. (p. 262)

Hanvey did not specify an age or grade-level of students that should be targeted as part of the educational system, rather he suggested the broadest possible application of

his educational principles to all citizens. Later, William Kniep (1986), a noted educator, echoed the sentiments of Hanvey (1975) by advocating for a curriculum that promoted global education from elementary through high school to help individuals develop a greater understanding of global awareness and the importance of global education. Kniep discussed five conceptual themes that he suggested should be infused throughout the social studies curriculum from elementary school through high school. Kniep's five conceptual themes consisted of: (1) interdependence, (2) change, (3) culture, (4) scarcity, and (5) conflict (p. 538). Further, Kniep suggested a specific plan to infuse the five conceptual themes throughout the social studies beginning in grade one and ending in grade 12. Later, Merryfield and Kasai (2004) indicated a distinct need to help students understand the connectedness of people and cultures across the world as well as endow students with the necessary skills and understanding that could empower them as 21st century participants in a globalized world. Using Hanvey's (1975) and Kniep's (1986) ideas about culture and considering the call to action of these writers and other researchers such as Kirkwood (2001), Merryfield and Kasai (2004), and Levintova et al. (2011), I explored the phenomenon of changing conceptualization of culture that high school students experience as a result of participating in the human geography course. Engagement in the human geography curriculum provides students with ample opportunities to explore and develop their knowledge of and understanding of culture. In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss the human geography course, its inception and positioning at the high school level, and the importance of the course objectives to help students understanding the principles and applicability of human geography concepts to their lives.

At the high school level, students have few opportunities to engage in a comprehensive study of world cultures. Students can engage in intensive study of other cultures in the foreign language classroom, however, there is a focus on a single language and culture. Unless there is a set aside course for the study of culture, this prescribed curriculum is parceled among other subjects, largely within the social studies curriculum. This is where the human geography course as a separate course in high school social studies curriculum can help provide a broader picture of human cultures.

Human geography is a one semester, college-level, elective class offered to 9-12 grade students in the high school. While there is a good deal of latitude in how the course is taught, the human geography curriculum is governed by seven objectives that teachers are expected to follow when teaching the course. Human geography is a survey course where students are exposed to a wide variety of disciplines including; population geography, urban geography, social geography, economic geography, behavioral geography, cultural geography, and political geography, which all have deeper roots in other major disciplines. Human geography is largely considered to be the study of how humans have altered the cultural landscape. The curriculum consists of the study of culture and the impact of culture on both human interactions and physical constructions as seen on the landscape. Further, because human geography is an elective class, recruitment for participation in the course is done predominately through students' word-of-mouth discussions, as well as, counselor and teacher discussions with students and parents in various forums. In my high school this led to full enrollment in human geography classes every block it was offered in the last 11 years. What follows is a discussion of how the subject was developed and inserted in the high school curriculum

and how the course that I teach is helpful for student understanding of culture and increasing their global awareness.

According to Bednarz (2016), the human geography course became a reality due to efforts of one educator, James Marran, a former high school teacher in Illinois. Marran, a past president of the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE), advocated for nearly a decade for the inclusion of a human geography course at the high school level. Marran extensively promoted the course to increase the role of human geography in the high school curriculum. Advanced Placement (AP) Human Geography became a fully accredited AP course offered to high school students, nationwide, in the 2000-2001 school year.

To underscore the importance of human geography education in the high school curriculum, Klein, Pawson, Solem, and Waverly (2014) contended that human geography education could lead to greater global and cultural awareness for students. A central tenet of the human geography curriculum surrounds the need to help students become aware of other cultures and gain a greater global perspective. Murphy and Hare (2016) suggested the framework of the AP Human Geography curriculum should be structured using a cross-curricular approach that not only emphasizes the major themes of geography but also fosters the *geographic way of thinking*, a phrase that is used ubiquitously in human geography circles. The geographic way of thinking denotes the concept that all phenomenon should be viewed through a spatial lens. The authors proposed this approach to teaching human geography would help students in the present by bolstering concepts that they learn in their classes and in the future by fostering a greater understanding of the real world and how they fit in it. As noted above, the human

geography class provides a way for students to engage in learning about culture and applying that learning to real-life situations. In the next section, I discuss the significance of the study for developing students' and outline the purpose of the study.

Significance of the Study

The research on developing understanding of culture produced varied and mixed results despite suggestions and findings of numerous authors that cite the necessity for students to know and understand the concept of culture (Baltes et al., 2015; Beneker et al., 2013; Demovsky, 1999; Levintova et al., 2011; Mulvaney, 2014; Rawls & Hammon, 2016). Further, the multifaceted definition and fluidity of the concept of culture poses an additional problem for understanding how to help students acquire knowledge about culture. Demovsky (1999), Levintova (2011), and Mulvaney (2014) examined cultural awareness or the understanding of other cultures. Baltes, Hernandez, and Collins (2015) examined multicultural awareness, or awareness of the multitude of cultures. Beneker, Tani, Uphues, and van der Vaart (2013) looked at cultural awareness and open-mindedness describing cultural awareness as world-mindedness, or knowledge of global events, other cultures, and how geography plays a role in that awareness. Further, Rawls and Hammons' (2016) examined cultural awareness and global understanding or how aware students are of other cultures and how versed they are in their knowledge of global and cultural perspectives.

My search across three databases, multiple scholarly organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council of Geographic Education, AERA, and assistance from research librarians produced eight quantitative studies, four qualitative studies, and six mixed-method studies examining cross-cultural awareness,

only two of which were situated in the high school and were both quantitative studies. Notably, I found no qualitative studies that examined high school students' experiences and perceptions of their understanding of culture through participation with a targeted curriculum such as human geography. The significance of my study is its unique perspective in describing the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students, an approach I have not found in the current literature so far. What follows is a sampling of research that demonstrates the need for understanding of culture and finally a suggestion for the inclusion of students' voices and perceptions as part of the research process. These studies were selected to emphasize research that has been done at the high school level and foreshadow the use of similar methodology in my study. A full literature review of the research I found so far is provided in Chapter 2.

Demovsky (1999), conducted an action research project as part of a Master's Thesis in which she examined sixth grade students' acceptance of diverse cultures through engagement in a prescribed program. Demovsky used pretest/posttest surveys to assess students' initial and post-program understanding of diverse cultures. The researcher found that students who engaged in a cultural awareness curriculum cited having a better understanding of diverse cultures. Further, student journal responses and interviews provided additional evidence of students' perceptions of their developing understanding of culture. Demovsky found that sixth grade students who had engaged in a curriculum that promoted cultural awareness, indicated through survey results and interview transcripts, they had a better understanding of other cultures. Although done with fifth grade students, this study provides a framework for examining students'

understanding of culture using interview and journal responses that I can apply to my study with high school students.

An additional action research project by Mulvaney (2014), examined the effects of a targeted, short-term research project using an instructional unit on culture to assess fifth grade students' awareness of other cultures. The researcher conducted a mixed method study with 30 students by employing pre-and post-program surveys, student journals, and short student interviews in order to understand the efficacy of engagement in the unit on culture and the impact it had on their awareness of other cultures.

Mulvaney found that students' pre-and post-survey mean scores increased for all the questions, which she interpreted to mean that engagement in a short-term cultural project benefited students by improving their understanding of other cultures and enhanced their cultural awareness. Further, reported codes and themes from the five students' interviews Mulvaney conducted also indicated students reported a greater understanding of other cultures after the class project on culture. This study also has a similar format to the Demovsky's (1999) study in that the researcher used qualitative interviews to capture students' voices about their learning. This study also shows data collection methods that I can apply to my study with high school students.

In addition, several studies exist that target high school and college level students' cultural awareness (Baltes et al., 2015; Beneker et al., 2013; Levintova et al., 2011; Rawls & Hammons, 2016). These studies either involved the use of mixed or quantitative method approach to examine students' scores on cultural awareness measures. These measures were taken through survey instruments. Where studies exist that examine understanding of culture on the high school level or college level, the focus

rarely includes in-depth students' perspectives of their experiences learning about cross-cultural awareness through engagement with a specific curriculum. Some of the findings from the literature on high schools and college students understanding of culture, albeit other cultures are presented next.

Levintova, Johnson, Scheberle, and Vonck (2011) examined college students' understanding of other cultures and awareness of their own culture. Students engaged in a global summit about culture and then were given a survey to assess their understanding of other cultures post summit. The researchers found that students did report a greater understanding of other cultures and concluded that students need to be taught about other cultures through specific programs that promote learning about culture. This study is useful for my study as it demonstrates the use of a specific program designed to help students understand culture, albeit other cultures.

Baltes, Hernandez, and Collins (2015) conducted a quantitative study examining the use of a cultural awareness program on increasing students' cultural awareness. The researchers administered a pre-survey to 54, ethnically and racially, diverse high school students in Michigan to assess the students multicultural understanding and awareness of culture. Following a 4-month period of engagement in a cultural awareness consortium program, students were reassessed using the multicultural awareness survey to determine the programs impact. Repeated measures *t* tests were then used to analyze the survey results. Researchers noted that although the sample size was small, *t* test results indicated a statistically significant change in students reported understanding of culture and cultural awareness after participating in the program. This study is applicable to my study in that the researchers used a specific program to examine students understanding and awareness

of culture. I plan to use the human geography program to examine high school students' awareness of culture.

An international study by Beneker, Tani, Uphues, and van der Vaart (2013) was employed to examine cultural awareness and open-mindedness in high school students in Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Students in all three countries, responded to survey questions assessing their knowledge of world-mindedness, or knowledge of global events, other cultures, and geographical awareness, or the role of geography in connecting those concepts. The researchers collected 799 surveys from students in 10 different high schools across the three countries. Means were calculated from the Likert-scaled survey questions and showed students from the three countries reported positive attitudes toward questions that indicated world-mindedness and cultural awareness. The researchers gave additional suggested means to help improve students' geographical awareness.

Finally, Rawls and Hammons' (2016) quantitative study examined the effectiveness of delivery format on students' global understanding and awareness of other cultures. The researchers used survey results from 1,210 students in traditional and on-line college settings to assess each group's ability to understand their level of engagement in learning about global understanding and cultural awareness. Rawls and Hammons cited significant mean differences in the differences in the way students gained global understanding and cultural awareness, however, more importantly, the researchers claimed that gaps still exist in the research of global understanding and cultural awareness. Further, the researchers claimed that while studies exist that examined "faculty perceptions as to the learning taking place or the effectiveness of specific

pedagogical techniques,” there appears to be a “gap in the attention given to the students’ perspective” (p. 90) of global understanding and cultural awareness. This finding of the gap in the attention given to students’ perspectives about their learning is illustrative and was used to inform the current study concerning providing a platform for students’ voices to be heard about in the process of learning about culture. Therefore, I set out to devise a study that provides such a platform for students’ voices about their understanding of culture to be heard and noted.

In conclusion, previous research on students’ understanding of culture focused on students in middle school and college and involved predominately mixed method or quantitative research designs to examine their development of understanding of other cultures. The research that exists on studies conducted on the high school level, did not examine the phenomenon of shifting conceptualization of culture through a single, stand-alone course that specifically targets students’ understanding of culture nor did it engage in examining students’ perspectives of their understanding of culture. There is a paucity of research, notably qualitative research, that examines understanding of culture at the high school level and certainly no studies I found that directly examine the shifting conceptualization of understanding culture as a result of engagement with focused curriculum that emphasizes culture in a high school classroom. A fresh look at students’ understanding of culture is warranted and timely. In order to provide that fresh look, I designed a study that examines the shifting nature of conceptualization of culture that occurs from engagement in a human geography class. The next section delineates the purpose of the study and the approach I used to conduct the research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore changes in 10 high school students understanding of culture. Specifically, I sought to understand the phenomenon of the changing conceptualization of culture as experienced by a few high school students who participated in the human geography course. The study came about by following a path of my own anecdotal evidence of students' experiences with culture that I witnessed over the 11 years that I taught the course, and the gaps that I found in the literature concerning the phenomenon. As I poured through the literature, I found a paucity of research with high school students about their understanding of culture, to be interesting as many researchers suggested this understanding was critical for high school students' future success (Kirkwood, 2001; Levintova et al., 2011; Merryfield & Kasai, 2004). This led to the realization of the need to examine how high school students learn about culture and to understand what role a human geography course could play in that understanding.

To examine this, I employed a *Vaglerian* (Vagle, 2014) post-intentional phenomenological approach to explore the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture as experienced by high school students who participated in the human geography course. Vagle (2014) suggested that researchers articulate and state "the large, overarching concern empirically, theoretically, personally, and practically" (p. 122). I will address in each chapter the large, overarching empirical concern from a theoretical perspective, and provide my own personal and practical conceptual framework for conducting the study.

Summary

The previously presented findings in the literature point to the gap in the literature concerning high school students shifting conceptualization of culture. This is significant considering the calls from several researchers of the importance of understanding culture (Baltes et al., 2015; Beneker et al., 2013; Demovsky, 1999; Levintova et al., 2011; Mulvaney, 2014; Rawls & Hammon, 2016). The purpose of the study was to explore the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students as a result of engagement in a human geography class. Hopefully, my research will demonstrate one method to help high school students develop understanding of culture through a broad curriculum centered in human geography coursework. My research can also inform other educators on best practices, as identified by students, that help them acquire understanding of culture and its many facets. Of greatest importance, the research can inform on the ability to provide for real, positive, social change that can occur as a result of students becoming aware of other cultures and gaining knowledge and skills that help them function and thrive in a world of diverse people. Given the significance of the study as a unique perspective on the nature of students understanding of culture and the lack of literature on the topic, I set out to devise a study that explored this phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students. In the next section, I pose the research questions that I will use to guide the study.

Research Questions

The phenomenon that positions the research questions centers around high school students' experiences with and perceptions of understanding culture as a result of their

participation in a human geography class. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do 10 high school students shift from an initial conceptualization of culture to a broader, deeper understanding of culture and the many variances encapsulated in the concept of culture?

Research Question 2: What are the lived experiences of 10 high school students who took the human geography class that contributed to their understanding of culture?

Research Question 3: What are the long-term benefits that students experienced or anticipate experiencing from taking the human geography class?

These overarching research questions guided the way I approached not only my understanding of the phenomenon, but also how I approached the data. What follows is my conceptual framework, personal interest in the research, professional interest in the study, personal position in the study, and theoretical framework that guided the research.

In the next sections, I define the overarching concerns, empirically and theoretically, to demonstrate the problem as it currently exists in the literature then follow up with my position in the study and my personal, professional, and practical interests for the research in the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

Recognition of one's conceptual framework provides a much-needed foundation for any researcher to understand a phenomenon or any complex problem. Furthermore, it is important the reader be aware of the writer's conceptual framework in order to understand the conclusions she presents.

Maxwell (2013) and Ravitch and Riggan (2017), posited that a conceptual framework provides a plan and guide for one's work. Ravitch and Riggan called the conceptual framework the "overarching argument for your work, both in terms of why it's worth doing and how it should be done" (p. 8) and, "a guide and ballast" (p. 193). Further, Maxwell claimed that the conceptual framework is a "conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why--a tentative *theory* of the phenomena that you are investigating" (p. 39). All three authors, along with Vagle (2014) suggested that experiential knowledge is an important part of the process that can often be overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant. I believe experiential knowledge is at the root of why we are curious about a phenomenon, enough so that we want to know more about why it is the way it is. In light of Vagle, Maxwell, and Ravitch and Riggan's calls for scholars to express their personal and professional interest in the topic, as well as, my own ardor to express my position in the study, I offer the following three sections as a background on my belief of the importance of addressing students' understanding of culture in high school.

Personal Interest

In my experience, I circulated through microcultures throughout my life. The first microculture I experienced was within the context of my upbringing. As I am a first generation German American, I grew up developing memories that were grounded in more than one culture. My father was in the Air Force and met my mother in Germany. When he returned to the United States, he sponsored my mother to come over from Germany, and they married. Shortly thereafter, he sponsored my grandmother, my mother's mother, to come to the United States where she joined them. My brother was

born in 1961, and I came the next year in 1962. For all I knew, it was the norm to have grandparents live with you. Further, I thought it was the norm to grow up in a bilingual and bi-cultural household. I remember pride in my cultural heritage. It meant knowing I had roots in more than one place and feeling grounded to more than one way of looking at the world and doing things. I found roots and wings can be very powerful things; the roots of the (cultural) past gave me grounding while the wings pushed me out of the nest to go forward and find out about other cultures and people. Three years ago, I went on an ancestral tour to Europe. I remember thinking that I found my ancient psyche there on my ancestors' lands and knowing I needed to know more about culture, more about people, and more about how one understands his/her own heritage and cultural identity while living in a place of cultural homogeneity.

Later, I encountered another micro-culture when I married a military man right out of college. I did not realize at the time that it would be a whole separate world, one to which I had never been exposed nor could understand. I learned some different life lessons that profoundly impacted me and my understanding of others and set me on a different path to awareness. Travels from the country of Panama to all over the United States brought experiences with and knowledge of other cultures, as well as, love for people that remains with me to this day. A world set apart and different for many, but for me, a world I can call up at a moment's notice and sing a song from a time that should be elusive at this point in my life, but maybe never to elude my conscious thoughts. Being exposed to different cultures made a huge impact on my understanding of others. My exposure to other cultures and experiences I had in my life, had a profound influence on

me and granted me an understanding of the importance of others, others' cultures, and one's perceptions of the world.

I believe exposure to micro-cultures makes a difference in one's approach to life. Certainly, they made a difference in my life. I often wonder whether my experiences are unique. I believe that my experiences, coupled with my education, helped me develop an appreciation of other cultures and a desire to examine how people come to understand culture. I firmly believe that people must know and understand other cultures and the world around them to be successful in a rapidly changing, globalized world.

Professional Interest

I taught human geography for 11 years and was the first and only one to teach the subject in my high school. I started with one class full of eager learners and built the program to as many as five full classes of students. Human geography is the largest AP program in my high school with the most AP test-takers every year. As an elective class, human geography relies on students selecting to take the class and committing to engaging in college-level material. I can still remember thinking that the subject found me, not I found it. The study of culture and human interaction on the cultural landscape was and is exhilarating to me. Even at year 10 of teaching, a lovely student told me she had never met anyone as enthusiastic teacher who is in love with the subject matter as much as I was with human geography. The human geography curriculum objectives allow for students to learn about many cultures and see how they fit into a global framework. I cannot wait to walk into the classroom and talk about topics related to human geography. Of all the topics in human geography, the study and teaching of culture has always intrigued me the most. However, over the years I also found the

students' lack of understanding about other cultures has become problematic. I noticed a trend that current students tend to be more insular and lack understanding of other cultures than previous generations and this intrigued and baffled me and even annoyed me at times.

Numerous studies (Merryfield, 1998, 2008, 2011, 2012; Merryfield & Kasai, 2004; Reidel & Draper, 2013) cited the urgent need to ensure that students are prepared to understand other cultures and live in a globally-connected world. Yet, in my experience, it has appeared to be a source of confusion and misunderstanding for many students. The previous cited authors agreed that it is important that students gain knowledge of other cultures to help ensure their success in the future, yet there does not seem to be common consensus on how to ensure that students are gaining awareness of other cultures. Further, there are very few places in the high school curriculum that allow for a deeper study of global cultures and understanding of culture. This is where instruction in culture through the human geography curriculum can help fill the gap in students' knowledge of culture. To get a sense of the contributions of the course made for 10 high schools students, I explored the shifting conceptualization of culture that they experienced as a result of taking the human geography class. The information could help inform educator preparation programs about the importance of high school students' understanding of culture to ensure that they are preparing teachers to teach, not only to, but also about diverse cultures. The next section outlines my personal position in the study as a teacher of the human geography class.

Personal Position in the Study

I became a teacher at a later age and stage of my life. I lived what seemed like a lifetime of experiences before ever stepping foot in the classroom. Many of those experiences were described above in the personal interest portion of this document, while others are tucked away in my mind to be recalled later when needed, which is explained in greater detail in the subjectivity portion of this chapter. I firmly believe that my experiences led me to where I am with the ability to teach what I teach. I also believe that experiential knowledge influences the way I teach and the perceptions of my ability to teach human geography. I found that experiences with the topic help teachers speak with authority on their subjects. This certainly has been the case for me in teaching human geography. I explain this here to show my central positioning in this study and foreshadow the use of self-reflexion and as expressive writing techniques in the post-reflexion journal as suggested by Vagle (2014). The post-reflexion journal is explained in the methods section of this document. Post-reflexion writing will be used as a way to capture my thoughts about the process of collecting and working through the data. These techniques are described in greater detail in Chapter 3. The use of post-reflexion journaling provided a way for me to not only write down things that surprised me but also things that baffled me. In addition, it served as a way to attempt to keep my subjectivity in check. It is necessary to understand the theoretical framework that served as the underpinning from which the study evolved. What follows is the theoretical framework that guided the research questions and importance of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Cross-cultural awareness, as a subset of the global awareness curriculum, is the study of how individuals come to know and understand other cultures. Hanvey (1975), a pioneer in the field of global awareness, remarked in his foundational article that cross-cultural awareness, one of four other dimensions of knowledge, was essential to an individuals' ability to prepare to understand a world that was becoming increasingly interconnected. Hanvey stated the component of cross-cultural awareness includes an awareness of the "diversity of ideas and practices" that exist across the globe and is important so that students could have a clear understanding of the importance of cultural diversity" (p. 11).

Later, Kniep (1986) discussed the need to infuse the study of cultures throughout the social studies curriculum to help students understand the concept of culture. For Kniep, the concept of culture included:

The idea that people create social environments and systems comprised of unique beliefs, values, traditions, language, customs, technology, and institutions as a way of meeting basic human needs and are shaped by their own physical environments and contacts with other cultures. (p. 538)

This fluid definition provided a basis for Kniep to develop programs for infusion of culture and global education in the curriculum from elementary through high school.

Finally, where to place a course with a curriculum that helps high school students gain an understanding of culture should be considered. Traditionally, high school students are exposed to culture in the foreign language classroom and then it is a single culture. Also, the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)

classes leave little room in the curriculum for study of the “soft sciences.” This can be short-sighted at best as researchers (Lopez-Murphy, 2013; Merryfield, 2012; Reidel & Draper, 2013) have aptly cited the need for cross-cultural awareness among students to prepare them to be successful in a highly globalized world. Human geography was first offered to high school students in 2001 as a social studies elective. The human geography curriculum outline provides ample opportunities for students to engage in learning of other cultures at the global scale that they would often not receive through other subjects’ curriculums. The discussion of cross-cultural awareness by Hanvey (1975) and Kniep (1986) and the importance of understanding other cultures among students, has provided a foundation from which to explore the subject through the human geography curriculum. I see human geography as the ideal medium to help students gain a greater understanding of other cultures. To this end, I explored high school students understanding of their own culture and other cultures and how this was affected by taking the human geography class.

Summary

This study provides an exploration of high school students’ experiences and perceptions with understanding of culture as a result of participation in the human geography class in order to gain a better understanding of what the process of becoming culturally aware looks like for high school students. The purpose of the study was to the examine the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students’ after a human geography class. The phenomenon of the shifting conceptualizations of culture that high school students experience from participating in a human geography course was examined using Vagle’s (2014) qualitative, post-intentional

phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis layered with Krueger and Casey's (2015) focus group protocol to explore the research questions. Further, I used Seidman's (2013) interview data analysis method to produce vignettes from individual interviews of the participants. The research questions focused on students' experiences and perceptions with understanding culture as a result of participation in the human geography class. It is my hope that the findings of the study will fill the gaps in the literature discussed in greater detail in the next section, lend credence to students' voices as powerful examples of how the learning process occurs, and lead to further dialogue on the importance of high school students' understanding of culture.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Culture is something that Western societies have not clearly understood, so that the challenges they have to face in an increasingly multicultural world are particularly difficult to manage. Understanding culture is certainly not only a Western problem, but a universal problem as well. –Montovani- (2000, para. 1)

In this chapter, I discuss the trends in immigration to underscore the importance of America as a diverse land of immigrants from many nations. Next, I provide an explanation of the term *culture* and how it will be examined and used in this study. Finally, I present the research on students' understanding of culture and the methods used in previous research studies to gain information about those understandings. The research is presented beginning with quantitative, followed by qualitative and then mixed methods. Further, the studies are broken down into college level, middle, and high school levels. What follows are the trends in immigration followed by an explanation of the concept of culture.

Trends in Immigration

America is the quintessential land of immigrants. Although other places have welcomed other cultures, The Pew Research Center (2017a) offered vital and timely statistics that demonstrate the continued desire of immigrants to choose America as a destination. According to the Pew Research Center (2017a) the United Nations estimated that in 2015, 46.6 million foreign born immigrants resided within the United States, making America the single largest immigrant destination, four-fold larger than Germany, the second largest destination for immigrants. Latinos, overall, continue to be the largest

immigrant group with Mexican immigrants comprising the largest migration stream to the United States (Pew Research Center, 2017b). In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, the Mexico-United States migration stream passageway is the largest in the world. However, South and East Asia comprised the second largest foreign-born population accounting for 26.9% of the United States population in 2015. This trend toward increased migration flows from Latin America and Asia to the United States appear to continue, at least for the time being (Pew Research Center, 2017c) .

Another trend that is occurring in the United States is the growing population of individuals known as Millennials. According to the Pew Research Center (2017c), in 2016, Millennials, the age group comprised of individuals aged 18-35, was the largest generation residing in the United States with 79.8 million members. Further, this number is projected to increase well into 2036, with the additional increase in Millennial immigrants. The same report continued by suggesting that immigrants, ages 25-64, are the workforce group that is experiencing increasing growth in the United States job market. The Pew Research Center suggested that as a result of retirement of the Baby Boomers and U.S. born parents having fewer children, estimates indicate that immigrants and children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents will comprise most of the workforce by 2035. Given the current political atmosphere in the US, where the desire is to deport immigrants, the idea of a diverse citizenry is under attack and could have profound implications for how students understands and develop a knowledge of those who are different from themselves. It is imperative to explore how individuals gain an understanding of culture and how educators can help students understand culture through participation in the human geography class. In the next section of the literature review, I

will provide a discussion of the term *culture* and a definition of culture as used in my human geography class. I will then discuss the pioneers in the field, Hanvey (1975) and Kniep (1986), who pushed for a greater understanding of other cultures. Following this initial background material, I discuss the relevant literature about culture and understanding of culture and the importance of the development of an understanding of the concepts in students. Finally, I show how instruction in the human geography curriculum can provide a means to help students understand cultures and provide awareness of other cultures.

Understanding the Concept of Culture

The term, *culture*, has been defined in a multitude of ways across a variety of disciplines. Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, and Lindsley (2006) in their book, *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, pointed to the illusive nature of the word culture that has historical roots in Latin, French, German, and later, English. Further, the term culture and its definition has been nuanced across the disciplines from, anthropology to psychology to communicative arts. This is mentioned here to provide an understanding of the definition as it will be applied in this study. Because hundreds of definitions exist for culture, it is appropriate to provide the specific definition that will be used in this study, as outlined in the text used for the human geography curriculum that students, who will be participants, will follow. A search of the glossary of the textbook showed anthropologist Ralph Linton (1925) definition of culture as, “the sum of the knowledge, attitudes, and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a society” (p. 475). However, it is noted in the glossary that while this definition is Ralph Linton’s (1925) interpretation of culture; hundreds of other definitions

exist. A search in the main body of the text book yielded a more nuanced definition of culture that incorporates the idea the

Culture refers not only to music, literature, and arts of a society, but also to all other features of its way of life: prevailing modes of dress; routine living habits; food preferences; the architecture of houses and public buildings; the layout of fields and farms; and systems of education, government and law.

Culture all-encompassing term that identifies not only the whole tangible lifestyle of peoples, but also their prevailing values and beliefs. (Deblj, Murphy, & Fouberg, 2007, p. 26)

This definition of was used to provide a basis for exploration of the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture that students experiences from taking the human geography class. This definition encapsulates the concept of culture as a broader topic than merely modes of dress and food preferences. It hits at the essence of the nature of the concept of culture and the human geography course. I continue the discussion of culture as noted by several other researchers and authors and end the discussion with why understanding culture is important.

Brown (1963) in his discussion of cultural awareness, pointed to the importance of understanding how we are the same and how we are different. He claimed that “to understand other people, then, we must have some idea of what culture is and how it functions and some knowledge of the variety of ways in which different human groups have gone about solving universal problems” (p. 5). Although Brown’s ideas are in relation to the concept of culture, they have been incorporated here to show the importance that culture plays in individuals’ understanding of culture.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of cultural awareness, or understanding of other cultures different than one's own, was a term that Robert Hanvey (1975) included as one of his five dimensions to help educate individuals to increase their understanding of global issues. For Hanvey (1975) it was imperative that individuals have an understanding of the great amount of diversity of ideas and practices that exist between cultures and knowledge of other's cultural *vantage points*. He believed that this was possibly the most difficult of his dimensions for individuals to grasp and develop. Hanvey (1975) believed, although this development was difficult to obtain due to the level of understanding that is required of individuals, it was imperative for individuals to obtain understanding of other cultures, no matter the level at which it is grasped. Later, Kniep (1986), suggested the study of other cultures should be included throughout the social studies curriculum from first grade through high school to help ensure that students were being exposed to and provided with meaningful information regarding other cultures. Kniep (1986) suggested it was imperative to educate young people on the need to understand other cultures in a world that was rapidly becoming highly globalized. Moule (2008) echoed Hanvey's (1975) and Kniep's (1986) mindset noting that we live in a global society where it is imperative to remove oneself from the American mindset and think on a global scale. Moule (2008) suggested that acknowledging the diversity of students could lead to an understanding of the "richness" of culture that students bring to the classroom (p. 468). Therefore, an understanding of the concept of culture and knowledge of the importance of understanding culture for individuals, as outlined in the previous paragraphs, lays the foundation for the next discussion on the relevant studies found in the literature.

The Research

This section of the literature review focuses on the previous quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research found to provide data concerning the importance and development of understanding of culture in students. It is structured by the three research methods noted above to provide a systematic look at what has been gleaned from the work thus far. Further, the research will be presented in order of highest to lowest school level of students being assessed to provide clarity on the paucity of studies at the high school level. Assessments measuring cultural awareness or understanding exist but are used primarily in the health sciences field or with educators gaining cultural competency when working with their minority students. While no definitive assessment was found to specifically measure cultural understanding or awareness in students, elements of other existing measures touch upon the concept of understanding related to culture awareness and its development in students. What follows is the relevant literature surrounding these assessments.

Quantitative Research

College Level

Clarke (2004) conducted a study with 701 college students in a Northeastern liberal arts college using survey data to understand students' global awareness and level of personal involvement in appreciation of other cultures. Clarke (2004) used a Likert-scaled survey questionnaire to illicit information on a variety of dimensions. Inferential and descriptive statistics showed that students' self-reports indicated they lacked a global awareness and understanding of foreign cultures. Clarke (2004) concluded college

educational programs should include strategies that help students develop an awareness of a global perspective and knowledge of other cultures.

A quasi-experimental study by Myers-Lipton (1996) examined the effect of a 2-year service learning project on college students' attitudes and international understandings. Myers-Lipton (1996) employed a nonequivalent control group design with 150 college students from a large Western state university. Using pretest and posttest data from the International Understanding Scale, developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the researcher tested service learning and non-service learning groups' understanding across three dimensions: global concern, cultural respect, and cultural interest (p. 666). Myers-Lipton's (1996) regression results demonstrated that over "the 2-year experiment the service learning group showed larger increase in global concern than the two control groups." Further, the results indicated "a 1.009 standard deviation change occurred between the service-learning group and the non-service-learning group from pretest to posttest" (p. 656). The researcher suggested the standard deviation increases on the domain could inform reformers of education on the need for service-learning projects to increase students global and cultural knowledge.

Similar to what Meyers-Lipton (1996) did 20 years earlier, Rawls and Hammons' (2016) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effectiveness of delivery format on students' global understanding and awareness of other cultures. The researchers used six questions from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) with 1,210 students in traditional and on-line programs from a private university in the Midwest to assess their ability to understand students' engagement in global understanding and cultural awareness. Rawls and Hammons (2016) found three of the six questions showed

statistically significant different means for on-site students on questions about global understanding and cultural awareness when compared to online students, however, more importantly, the researchers claimed that gaps still exist in the research of global understanding and cultural awareness. Further, Rawls and Hammon (2016) claimed that while studies exist that examined “faculty perceptions as to the learning taking place or the effectiveness of specific pedagogical techniques,” there appears to be a “gap in the attention given to the students’ perspective” (p. 90) of global understanding and cultural awareness.

High School and Middle School Level

On the high school level, several quantitative studies were found that addressed some form of global and cultural awareness. Two of the studies were internationally based and one was based upon results with United States high school students.

Baltes, Hernandez, and Collins (2015) used quantitative methods to study how engagement in a cultural awareness program affected students’ cultural awareness. Baltes et al. (2015) administered a presurvey to 54 diverse high school students in Michigan assessing their multicultural understanding and awareness. Following a 4-month period of engagement in a Cultural Awareness Consortium (CAC), students were reassessed using the multicultural awareness survey to determine the program’s impact. Baltes et al. (2015) used descriptive statistics to generate frequencies for the fixed response survey questions and repeated measures *t*-tests to answer the research questions. Baltes et al. (2015) noted that although the sample size was small, *t*-test results indicated a statistically significant change in students reported understanding and increase in multicultural awareness as a result of participating in the program, $t(53) = -2.74, p < .01$.

Baltes et al. (2015) suggested that a benefit of engagement in CAC might be an “improvement in attitudes and an encouragement of positive cross-cultural interactions that can be carried into the workforce of students when they graduate” (p. 18).

An international study conducted by Beneker, Tani, Uphues, and van der Vaart (2013) in Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands, used a 43 statement Likert-scaled survey questionnaire to assess world mindedness, knowledge of geography, and personal characteristics of 799 high school students from 22 different schools across the three countries. Beneker et al. (2013) calculated means scores for each of the Likert-scaled survey questions and created box plot diagrams for each of the dimensions. Of the two dimensions, mean scores for world mindedness were consistently high for all three countries. Four of the statements that scored high on the world mindedness dimensions were related to culture and cultural awareness. Beneker et al. (2013) suggested that the promotion and awareness of different cultures could be instituted in the geography classroom to promote a greater understanding of other cultures’ perspectives.

Zhang, Hsu, and Wang (2010) researched global literacy of high school students in large metropolitan areas of the United States and China. Zhang et al. (2010) used a “global literacy” Likert-scaled instrument to assess 2,157 high school students in New York City and 2,220 high school students in Nanjing, China regarding their global literacy. Zhang et al. (2010) conducted an independent *t*-test and ANOVA to find statistical significance on the Likert-scaled questions and then Pearson’s correlation coefficient to examine associations of test items. Zhang et al. (2010) found that Chinese students had a greater ability to understand cross-cultural perspectives ($t(4,218) = 14.53$, $p = 0.000$), and a greater willingness to become a citizen of the world ($t(4,229) = 23.104$,

$p=0.000$) than the students in the United States. Zhang et al. (2010) concluded that, while this difference between U.S. and Chinese students may have been an anomaly, it is important for U.S. teachers to find ways to increase students' awareness of other cultures and global issues, and cited with an awareness of other cultures, "students could learn the values, strengths, and weaknesses of people, especially regarding countries that are increasing their power in the global society" (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 95).

At the middle school level, an action research project done by Demovsky (1999), explored the implications of global classrooms and students' awareness and acceptance of other cultures. Demovsky (1999) worked with teachers and students in a large Midwestern city to study the effectiveness of a subject-specific, targeted program in global awareness on students' awareness and acceptance of other cultures. Demovsky (1999) used a Likert-scaled survey to assess teachers' opinions of students' global awareness, and students' pretest and posttest scores on a human geography exam to assess their level of global awareness and acceptance of other cultures. Demovsky (1999) computed percentage scores on the Likert-scaled survey and the pretest and posttest scores and concluded that students needed to be provided specific instruction to "strengthen their geography skills, to understand world issues and the implications of current events, and to appreciate cultural differences" (p. 61).

Although situated in Australia, Densen, Ovenden, Wright, Paradies, and Priest (2017) conducted a quantitative study examining the process of developing and validating an instrument to measure intercultural understandings among primary and secondary school teachers and students. Citing a need to improve students' cultural awareness and knowledge of other cultures and the subsequent lack of instrumentation

that sufficiently addresses the concept for use in the primary and secondary school level, Densen et al. (2017) sought to develop an instrument to address students' cultural awareness (p. 234). Teachers and students from 12 schools in Australia were given surveys in three waves over a 2 school-year period. Focus on the student surveys is provided here. A total of 8,960 students responded to the 28-item survey over the 2-year period. Densen et al. (2017) conducted exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to find goodness-of-fit indices for the 28 survey items. Densen et al. (2017) reported of the 28 items on the survey:

11 were included in two constructs of: intergroup skills and openness to cultural diversity. The other 17 did not load onto either of the two factors or loaded onto both factors and were excluded. Reported factor loadings ranged from .47 to .81, with the correlation between the two constructs being .73. (p. 239)

Densen et al. (2017) suggested that while the items on the survey were positively associated with one another, caution in interpreting results should be taken due to the sample size and the combination of primary and secondary school into one sample reducing validity. Overall, this studies' content provides a recent example of an attempt to develop an instrument to measure cultural awareness and supports the need for more work in the area.

In summary, the quantitative research presented here indicated that college students reported a lack of understanding of foreign cultures and often benefitted from programs that promoted global understanding and cultural awareness. Further on the high school and middle school level, the research showed that students also benefitted from programs intended to increase their understanding of other cultures. The

researchers predominately used, and based their reported results on, Likert-scaled survey instruments to provided information on students' understanding of culture. Next, I present the qualitative research found in the literature to date.

Qualitative Research

It was far more difficult to find qualitative research studies that addressed cultural understanding in high school students. None were found that solely focused on the experiences of high school students learning about culture in the social studies classroom. Two research studies were found from other countries where cultural awareness was the subject of the study and research was found from different multiple disciplines but none from the high school social studies curriculum. What follows is the qualitative research gleaned from the literature.

Choi and Choi (2012) employed a unique qualitative, interpretive research design that used insider-outsider perspectives to examine cross-cultural learning and global perspective development of eight female undergraduates and one graduate student from a Korean woman's university, following a course in cross-cultural learning (p. 81). Choi and Choi (2012) used a 42-item survey, semi-structured interviews, observation of the participants, and participants' reflective journals and artifacts to study the effects of experiential learning on students' cross-cultural understanding. The insider researcher, a professor of global economics, served as the observer of the participants throughout the study. The outsider researcher served as an active participant in the study, observing, interacting, and traveling with the other participants throughout the study.

Choi and Choi (2012) found cross-cultural learning experiences helped these university students understand other perspectives and gain a greater understanding of

world mindedness. Further, all participants reported that the “cross-cultural learning experience was a powerful learning opportunity that produced unforgettable memories” (p. 93). Choi and Choi (2010) suggested that similar learning experiences may help increase understanding of the profound impact that cross-cultural experiences have on students understanding of other cultures.

Grady (1986) conducted an exploratory study in which he examined how global understanding through the reading of critical text influences students understanding of other cultures in a foreign language classroom. Grady (1986) sought to understand how high school world history students and university undergraduate and graduate Russian foreign language students used text to think critically about other cultures. Grady (1986) used open-ended questions with 58 high school and 35 university students to gauge students understanding of Russian culture. The data was collated and coded for commonalities in response and reviewed for themes. Grady (1986) posited that critical reading from texts that present more than one outlook on other cultures was imperative for high school students’ development of knowledge of other cultures. Further, “the goal of attaining a global perspective” cannot be solely left to the foreign language department but must be a concerted effort practiced across the curriculum (p. 63).

Lee, Williams, Shaw, and Jie (2014) employed qualitative research methods to study first-year college students’ development of intercultural awareness. Lee et al. (2014) used the reflective writing of 115 students enrolled in a first-year experience (FYE) program through the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota to understand the impact of intercultural learning programs on students’ learning outcomes. The reflective writing involved open-ended prompts

provided by the professors in the programs and given at the end of the first and second semesters. Three research team members and professors in the program participated in individual reading of students' responses to identify initial understandings reflected in the students' writings. In the second phase, the three-member research team conducted open coding and memoing of specific themes. Finally, in phase three, the research team members arrived at agreement on and collated the emergent codes. Research reflected the students needed to engage in personal, first hand interactions with people different from themselves and have authentic practice with those first-hand interactions (p. 551) to help them develop intercultural learning.

Finally, a study by Reich (2012), explored college students' understanding and development of intercultural competency following participation in a global studies course and subsequent visit to the United Nations (U. N.). Over the course of a 2-year period from 2009 – 2011, approximately 378 students from Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, engaged in a course on global awareness and a visit to the U. N. and were then given a survey assessing their understanding of globalization and other cultures. Reich (2012) found students' self-reported having gained a greater "understanding of globalization and diverse cultures and global issues" (p. 472). Reich (2012) suggested that education programs that focused on global awareness and "aspects of diverse cultures and societies" could help students develop understanding of an "increasingly interconnected and complex world" (p. 464).

In summary, the qualitative literature was sparser concerning research on students' understanding of culture. Three of the four studies I found were conducted with college students and one was done with high school and college foreign language

students. The college level studies employed interviews, reflective writing, and observations by college professors to gauge students' understanding of culture. These studies indicated that students reported that engagement in personal interaction with other cultures helped them gain a greater understanding of other cultures. Also, Reich (2012), found that students who were exposed to courses that promote understanding of other cultures were more likely to report a greater level of cultural awareness. Finally, Grady (1986) suggested that critical reading of texts that showed different outlooks on culture helped high school students develop knowledge of other cultures, something that should not be left solely up to foreign language departments. What follows is a discussion of the mixed-methods research and the results found in each study.

Mixed-Method Research

The search for mixed-method research examining cultural understanding or awareness in students yielded far more research studies that addressed the topic than just straight quantitative or qualitative research. Further, four of the studies were done at the college level in a variety of subjects, and one was a Master's level action research project done with elementary and middle school students. The following research studies outline the use of a mixed-method design.

College Level

Ducate and Steckenbiller (2017) employed a mixed-method research design to examine the development of cultural understanding of other cultures through the use of websites known as What I know Is (Wiki)s with students in beginning college German courses. The pilot study involved 192 beginning level German language participants from 11 different classes from a large university in the Southeast. At the beginning of the

semester, participants were given a pretest to assess their prior knowledge of culture and related topics. During the semester, the participants engaged in readings of authentic cultural texts and documents, discussion with professors and classmates, and essays on topics related to German culture. Student engagement with authentic readings and documents and posting of responses about their reading, was done through the Wiki platform to allow for open access and the ability to edit documents. Following the instruction period, participants were given a posttest to gauge their progress in cultural understanding and required to write an essay outlining five concepts they learned and believed were important for traveling to another country.

Ducate and Steckenbiller (2017) conducted statistical analysis on pretest/posttest data and found participants did increase their “knowledge of cultural products, practices, and perspectives, with the most significant progress in the questions regarding practices” as indicated by the *p* values (p. 212). Further, Ducate and Steckenbiller (2017) noted that students’ essays provided rich, in-depth information regarding their perceived understanding of the German culture. Finally, Ducate and Steckenbiller (2017) validated previous discussions on difficulties of research designed to learn about culture and development of cultural awareness in students through closed-ended testing methods, suggesting that the essays in this study allowed for richer dialogue on the subject of the development of cultural understanding in students.

Jin and Bennur (2012) conducted a mixed-method study to examine college students’ improvement in global understanding following engagement in specific coursework covered in three courses. Approximately, 35 to 52 students from a comprehensive Midwestern university participated in a pre-and post-module instruction

Likert-scaled survey assessing their understanding of the information. Students provided written responses to questions about specific modules' content and the effectiveness of the information provided in the modules. Jin and Bennur (2012) derived statistical data and calculated frequency data for responses. Jin and Bennur (2012) discovered that the number of correct answers increased by 11% following completion of the modules and students' subject assessment of the modules also indicated favorable results on their increase in global understanding and awareness. Although this study was done with students who were studying the textile industry in India, it still provides an example of the importance of improving college students' understanding of culture.

Kurpis and Hunter (2017) conducted a mixed-method study exploring college students' development of cultural intelligence through a targeted learning activity that incorporated interviews of people from other cultures and their consumer behaviors. Using the Cultural Intelligence model (CQ) as a guide, the researchers developed a cross-cultural experiential activity in which 35 American students, in a marketing class, interviewed 34 international students from an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Interviews were conducted in groups of 2 to 3 students from each category and lasted the duration of the 75-minute class period. Following the interviews, students were required to write a post reflection paper regarding their interview and engage in a survey of their experience with the cross-cultural interview. The paper provided qualitative feedback and the survey results provided quantitative feedback for the researchers. Kurpis and Hunter (2017) reported the "reliabilities for all of the four CQ subscales reached acceptable levels in excess of Cronbach's α .7 for both domestic and international students and three of the four subscales were significant with one, the behavioral subscale

being positively correlated to all of the other three scales” (p. 37). Further, Kurpis and Hunter (2017) found four major themes in the reflection papers that indicated students increased understanding of other cultures and broadened their perspectives among the students. Kurpis and Hunter (2017) cited the use of the experiential approach to cross-cultural learning helps the learner engage in the curriculum at “deeper levels” and can lead to a better understanding of other cultures (p. 43).

Levintova, Johnson, Scheberle, and Vonck (2011) conducted a mixed method study; the researchers found that 1,242 Midwestern college students indicated, through survey data, that engagement in a course in global cultures helped them gain a better understanding of other cultures and their cultural norms. Further, instructors’ observations of students during the program lent credence to data students reported on their cultural awareness.

In a unique mixed method study exploring cultural awareness through a study abroad experience on agricultural sustainability in Costa Rica, Unruh-Synder, Lamm, Brendemuhl, Irani, Roberts, Rodriguez, & Navarro, (2011) recruited 33 students from three different universities and assessed their cultural awareness following participation in the study abroad program in Costa Rica. The researchers used a self-developed, Likert-type scaled pretest/posttest instrument to generate quantitative data and open-ended questions to generate qualitative data on students’ experiences. The pretest prior to the study abroad and posttest following the conclusion of the study abroad were used to gauge students’ various understandings of cultural awareness. Unruh-Synder et al. (2011) analyzed the survey results using descriptive statistics and plotted frequency distributions for each of the questions then identified, categorized, and coded emergent

themes from the open-ended questions. Qualitative data was further triangulated with journal entries of the participants, and member checks of information was provided by the participants. Unruh-Snyder (2011) overwhelmingly found that students' cultural awareness not only increased across the board, but students also indicated that they felt that they were more globally aware and had an interest in engaging in international agricultural pursuits.

Middle School Level

Finally, action research by Mulvaney (2014) as part of her Master's Thesis, examined the effects of a targeted, short-term research projects using a cultural unit to assess fifth grade students' awareness of other cultures. The researcher used a mixed-method design, employing pre-and post-program surveys, student journals, and short student interviews to understand the efficacy of engagement in a cultural unit on students' awareness of other cultures. Mulvaney (2014) found that students' pre-and post-survey mean scores increased for all questions indicating that engagement in a short-term cultural project benefited students' understanding of other cultures and improved their cultural awareness. Reported codes and themes from the five students' interviews also indicated students reported a greater understanding of other cultures.

The mixed-methods study results were predominately conducted with college students using survey data and written reflection to assess understanding of culture. The researchers in these studies suggested that experiential learning and exposure to culture in courses led to students reporting increases in their understanding of culture and global awareness (Ducate & Steckenbiller, 2017; Jin & Bennur, 2012; Kurpis and Hunter, 2017; Levintova, Johnson, Scheberle, and Vonck, 2011 Mulvaney, 2014; and Unruh-Snyder,

Lamm, Brendemuhl, Irani, Roberts, Rodriguez, & Navarro, 2011). Mulvaney's (2014) research at the middle school level indicated that students who were exposed to units on culture in fifth grade, benefited from increased understanding of culture and improved cultural awareness. Further, students reported that they had a greater understanding of other cultures.

Overall, in terms of what was found in the literature, it was evident that research has been conducted examining cultural understanding or awareness and the importance of student's acquisition of such (Baltes et al., 2015; Beneker et al., 2013; Choi & Choi, 2012; Clarke, 2004; Ducate & Steckenbiller, 2017; Jin & Bennur, 2012), to name a few. It is surprising, however that there is a dearth of research in the literature that address understanding of other cultures in younger audiences. Further, the paucity of qualitative research about students' experiences and perceptions of their understanding of other cultures proved baffling as well given the response by some researchers that students' voices should be included in the research (Rawls & Hammons, 2016).

Summary

The literature points to several methods the researchers found effective in helping students gain a better understanding of culture. Programs that focused on culture and global awareness proved to be especially effective in helping college, middle, and high school students gain a greater understanding of culture. Choi and Choi (2012) found that students who were provided with cross-cultural learning experiences helped gained a better understanding of culture to high school students. Grady (1986) demonstrated reading critical texts influenced the students' understanding of culture. Finally, Unruh et

al. (2011) found studies abroad helped enhance students' cultural awareness and global mindedness.

In this study, I and my colleague employed the use of the human geography course curriculum to deliver instruction on culture. The course also provided opportunities for students to engage in critical reading designed to help students gain a greater understanding of culture. As studies abroad are beyond the scope of the classroom, I, as well as my colleague, used technology and specific websites to simulate study abroad experiences for the students. These methods were used by both teachers to provide instruction in the human geography.

In the following section, I discuss in great detail the methods and design of the study that I used to study the phenomenon of high school students' understanding of culture through participation in the human geography curriculum. I followed Vagle's (2014) post-intentional research methodology overlaid with Krueger and Casey's (2015) focus group interview protocol.

Chapter III

METHODS

*“There is never nothing going on!
Take out the trash Dan.
The trash is anything that is keeping you from the only thing
that matters, this moment, here, now.
When you are truly in the here and now, you will be amazed at
what you can do and how well you can do it!”*
-Socrates from the movie *The Peaceful Warrior*, (Salva & Bernhardt. 2006)-

This chapter sets forth the methods and design of this qualitative study. This study was conducted using a post-intentional phenomenological approach, as denoted by Vagle (2014), to examine the shifting conceptualization of culture that high school students experience from participation in the human geography class. The method was chosen for this study to allow for a rich, deep, subjective understanding of the data that was gathered throughout the process. A basic description of phenomenology is provided here followed by an in-depth discussion of Vagle’s (2014) post-intentional phenomenological approach. I also outlined Vagle’s five component research design and provide an explanation for the rationale for using this method for participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. These rationales coincide with explanations of my use and application of the methods as well as examples from the data that demonstrate exactly how the process occurred.

Phenomenology

According to Sokolowski (2000) the term *phenomenology* is a compound word of the Greek words *phainomenon* and *logos*. “It signifies the activity of giving an account, giving a *logos*, of various phenomena, of the various ways in which things can appear”

(p. 13). Therefore, according to Vagle (2014), at the most basic level, phenomenology is the study of *phenomena*. For Sokolowski (2002), these phenomena could manifest themselves in a variety of ways and these manifestations “are real and belong to the being” (p. 15). Vagle (2014) suggested that behind the philosophical framework of phenomenology lies the study of how individuals are *being*, and *becoming*, and *moving through* the “lifeworld in intersubjective relationships with others and with intentional relationships with other things” (p. 22). Further, it was the work of the phenomenologist to study how a phenomenon *manifests* and *appears* in the lifeworld (Vagle, 2014, p. 22). With this information in mind, what follows is a brief, basic history of phenomenology, followed by a detailed account of the post-intentional philosophical methodology that will be used in this study.

Husserl (1931, [2014]), considered the father of phenomenology, advocated examining the *lebenswelt* (life-world), the subjective reality that individuals create through experiences in the life-world. Husserl’s (1931, [2014]) application of phenomenological practices to philosophy and mathematics laid the foundation for expanding the practice to other disciplines. Husserl firmly believed that an individual’s life-world experiences were unique experiences of *something* that needed to be examined with an understanding of the timely and worldly nature of the experience. Husserl’s (1931, [2014]) foundational work with the concept of phenomenology provides the qualitative researcher with an avenue to examine individuals’ life-world experiences through a historically grounded methodology.

Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom’s (2008) *reflective lifeworld* approach to phenomenology, centered on the responsibility on the part of the researcher to remain

open to the process and resist a set, sequence of steps when examining the phenomenon. Essential to the process for Dahlberg et al. (2008), was the commitment to openness throughout the process from participant selection to data analysis and presentation. To remain true to the spirit of openness throughout the process, led to the development of what Dahlberg et al. (2008) called *bridling* whereby the reins are loosened or “slackened” to allow for an understanding of the phenomenon and its meanings (p. 16). According to the Dahlberg et al. (2008), this was a marked difference from the previous method of *bracketing*, the setting aside of data, as bridling was much more reflexive in nature than bracketing, a passive act.

Later, van Manen (2014), advocated a hermeneutic approach that remained true to Husserlian phenomenology of life-world yet supported a need to know and understand the consistently changing nature of one’s life-world and the demonstrative ways in which individuals move in their life-world. Here, the description of moving through one’s life-world, refers to the way an individual understands, breaks down, and gives meaning to life experiences as they move through engagement with a phenomenon. A phenomenological approach to my study provided the basic framework in which to capture individuals’ lived experiences and how those experiences continue to shift and change with their exposure to the life-world. For van Manen (2014), lived experience are the “starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (p. 36). Further, van Manen (2014) offered:

The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful:

a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (p. 36)

This description of lived experiences indicated a post-reflective quality to lived experiences that is at once powerful and transformative to the person who lived through the experience, something not found in a regular, everyday experience. The act of moving from pre-reflective to post-reflective thought is a hallmark of lived experiences. Further, van Manen (2014) described phenomenology as:

The way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively. Pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence. Whether we are eating a meal, going for a walk, driving a car, gardening, daydreaming, texting a message, hugging a loved one, presenting a lecture, have a conversation with a friend, watching a movie or interpreting the movie, writing a paper about reflection; these are all pre-reflective experiences, from a phenomenological point of view. (p. 28)

This grounded description provides the basis for what van Manen (2014) suggested as phenomenology is a *meaning-giving* method of inquiry. This method of inquiry allows the researcher to gain an awareness of the *phenomenality of human experience* that cannot be gained through strict scientific procedures, hence the need to delve deeply into the human experiences with the phenomenon.

For the researcher to understand participants' life experiences with a phenomenon, Vagle (2014) advocated engaging in intentionality as interconnectedness or "looking at the way in which humans are connected meaningfully with the world" (p.

111). For Vagle (2014), intentionality meant “the inseparable connectedness between subject (humans) and objects (all other things including ideas) in the world” (p. 27). Here, Vagle is discussing intentionality as connections and the multiple and varied manifestations of those connections. Further, Vagle (2014) explained intentionality as that of *essencing*, what Husserl referred to as “turning to things themselves” rather than trying to determine the subjective meaning of an event. Vagle (2014) suggested that essencing “was not about finalizing anything but capturing what makes” a phenomenon, “what it is for human beings in their intentional relations with one another and the world” (p. 28). For the phenomenological researcher this capture of essencing requires a commitment to permitting the phenomenon to move through the “things themselves” and attempting to capture the manifestations of the participants’ experiences as they are experienced in the lived world, with the understanding that these experiences are temporal, a moment in time of the phenomenon. For me this would require letting students to move back and forth in their thoughts so that they encounter the lived experience of the phenomenon of their shifting conceptualization of culture from taking a human geography class so they would connect to the post-reflective nature of their experiences in the class.

To grasp high school students’ understanding of culture, and their life experiences in the human geography class as revealed in their narrative dialogue was critical for me to get at their intentional relations with the world and their pre-reflective experience. I used van Manen’s (2014) description of pre-reflective experience and meaning giving and Vagle’s (2014) intentionality as interconnectedness to guide my understanding of the phenomenon and the questions that I asked the participants. Through descriptive

writings, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, I peeled back the layers of the narrative to understand pre-reflexive thought, meaning giving, and intentionality as I believed that this would give me some insight into the nature of their life experiences. To accomplish this, I asked them to do reflective writing, Lived Experience Descriptions (LED's) before the start of each focus group. I recorded and later transcribed, using the transcription service, GoTranscript, the data of both the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. I systematically worked through the data, starting with the focus group interviews. Following this segment of the research, I engaged in data analysis of the individual interviews, also described in greater detail later.

My study followed a phenomenological approach to gain information on students' experiences with understanding culture through engagement with the human geography curriculum. This *meaning-giving* method of inquiry could allow students an opportunity to express what Vagle (2014) described as a place "where meanings come into being through engagement in the life-world" (p. 115). Vagle (2014) advocated a more dialogical approach to phenomenology as compared to Husserl (1931, [1970]), where participants communicate their understandings of life experiences through engagement in the world. The approach allows a method where individuals can actively express their engagement with the phenomenon. Further a post-intentional phenomenological approach to explore the current research phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Post-Intentional Phenomenology

Vagle's (2014) post-intentional phenomenological approach was used to

explore the phenomenon of cultural awareness through engagement with the human geography curriculum. The post-intentional approach allows, as Vagle (2014) put it, one to take a view that, “seeing knowledge as partial, situated, endlessly deferred, and circulating through relations would be a most helpful way to reconceive phenomenological research today” (p. 111). Previous approaches to phenomenology such as Husserl’s (1931, [1970]) transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger’s (1962) hermeneutic phenomenology focused on the fixed, architectural form of lived experiences. Vagle (2014) advocated a more flexible and varied approach that was situational in nature. Vagle (2014) noted this outlook would allow a “loosening up” and provide a more “nuanced reading of lived experiences” while still adhering to major philosophical underpinnings of previous theory (p. 111). Further, Vagle (2014) built on the post phenomenological approach by providing what he considers to be the “most important phenomenological contribution to Western philosophy, that of intentionality” (p. 112). While the other approaches sought to grasp the meaning or substance of a phenomenon, the post-intentional approach seeks to discover the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon, in all of its multiple and varied forms. Vagle (2014) cited that intentionality, “signifies interconnectedness, moves away from subjective knowing, and allows for consideration of the circulation of meanings” (p. 113). To understand Vagle’s (2014) intentionality, I have included the following diagram as figure 1. Vagle (2014) noted “the points of overlap in grey are multiple and temporary and if set in motion, the malleable lines would move and shift as would the points of overlap.” If we craft a post-intentional text, “we are elucidating these grey areas, the tentative manifestations, not trying to center the meaning” (Vagle, 2014, p. 32).

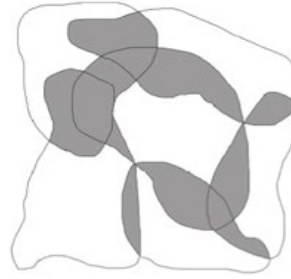


Figure 1. Intentionality and Tentative Manifestations (p. 32)

In my study, the setting in motion, as depicted above, of the phenomenon meant, allowing the participants' words about their experiences to manifest in all of its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. I allowed their voices to move back and forth between thoughts and experiences to allow their narrative to vary with their thoughts depending upon the context of where they were in the experience of the phenomenon. Also, it meant, I had to realize that their thoughts are temporal, a snapshot of their experience for that given moment. It required that I allow them to move through their thoughts and experiences without interrupting or assuming where they were going with their discussion.

Further, Vagle (2014) suggested that a post-intentional approach to intentionality could:

In this same way, a post-intentional phenomenology can do what old phenomenology could not—it can join the conversation about multiplicity, difference, and partiality. And I think this is important, for once we make this move it becomes more possible for post-intentional phenomenology itself to be a dialogic philosophy. One of the key ideas for me is that when old phenomenology stands alone it can only accomplish so much, and it seems stuck in-resistance-to Cartesian thinking while all sorts of other philosophies, post-structuralist ones,

have moved well past this concern. For me, post-structural conceptions of the way knowing and understanding are fleeting, momentary, tentative, and dangerous opens up phenomenology more—it draws out phenomenology not only as a philosophy of lived experience, but also as a philosophy capable of being used toward political ends. (p.113)

In my study, I applied the concept of “joining the conversation about multiplicity, difference, and partiality,” (Vagle, 2014, p.,113) by allowing the dialogue between the participants to move back and forth through the phenomenon when they were speaking. This allowed the participants to share their “fleeting, momentary, tentative thoughts” about their experiences, which was especially important for the interactive focus group interviews (Vagle, 2014). Since teenagers tend to thrive in environments where they can talk in groups, it was important to allow the conversation to move back and forth among the participants to take advantage of the give and take nature of their dialogue.

Vagle (2014) likened the post-phenomenological approach to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of “lines of flight” (p. 117). Vagle (2014), expanded his thoughts on lines of flight when he wrote:

As such, the concept, lines of flight, does not assume that anything, idea, belief, goal, phenomenon, person, animal, object, etc. can be thought of as stable, singular, and final. Instead, all things are connected and interconnected in all sorts of unstable, changing, partial, fleeting ways. This is important to post-intentional phenomenology as a political philosophy as the connective nature of social, ethical, and political relations does not lend itself to simplicities and essences. It does lend itself to complexities and tentative understandings. (p. 117)

Vagle (2014) noted these tentative understandings were important for understanding the nature of lines of flight in post-intentional phenomenology as they served to demonstrate that work is essentially “generative, creative, and complicated, with “innovative ways to conceptualize things as fluid, shape-shifting assemblages continually on the move in interacting with the world, rather than perceiving them as stable essences” (p. 118). Here, Vagle (2014) noted that lines of flight in post-intentional phenomenological research could “take-off” down routes that the researcher had not expected and that it is up to the researcher to follow those paths regardless of where the paths lead with finality being the discovery of “what the phenomenon might become” (p. 118).

The concept of lines of flight was important in my study as it gave me grounding, as the researcher, to let the dialogue “move and interact with the world” (Vagle, 2015, p. 119) and each other as they were talking about culture and their experiences with culture. Further, I allowed the discussion among the participants to follow the path choosing, regardless of where it led. This was also important with focus group interviews as they tended to be back and forth dialogue among the members of the focus group, as they frequently played off of one another’s responses.

Finally, Vagle (2014) asserted a post-intentional phenomenological approach to research can lead to an understanding of what the phenomenon might become as one chases the lines of flight that “aim to escape the tight boundaries of any theoretical framework or method” (p.118).

Here, I liken the notion of lines using an equine analogy to explain the role of the researcher in a post-intentional phenomenological study. While chasing the “lines of

flight,” a researcher must maintain a firm grip on the reigns of the phenomenon while allowing it to take one down the path of its intention, wherever that might lead. In my study, I approached this process by holding on loosely enough to the reigns of the topic of discussion and flow of thoughts while still providing enough structure to help the participants remain on the path of the phenomenon’s intention.

Additionally, I used van Manen’s (2014) description of pre-reflective experience and meaning giving and Vagle’s (2014) intentionality as interconnectedness to guide my understanding of the phenomenon, which in this case was students’ shifting conceptualization of culture from taking a human geography class. To do this, I asked the participants to write a response to several prompts and provide a verbal response to several statements, one of which was: Describe and detail two things you learned in the human geography class about culture that you will never forget and that helped you become a lifelong geographer? I believed that this would give me some insight into their thoughts about what they learned about culture that would carry forward with them in the future. Students’ responses to the prompt and verbal statements indicated they each learned several important ideas about culture and thought that they would continue to use the tools learned in the class in the future. An example of a response to the prompt is provided here to give insight into the process and data.

Tess commented on the things she learned in the class about culture and how that had an impact on her being a lifelong geographer.

I learned that India has hundreds of religions and a plethora of languages. This spiked my appreciation for the entirety of the Indian culture and led me to want to travel there to see for myself. Also, the mother tongues and the language tree are

fascinating to me. The idea that all languages can be derived from only a few sources and languages in different countries (i.e. romance languages like French, Spanish, and Portuguese) have the same origins despite their differences. It made me want to teach myself Esperanto. I still like learn languages to this day.

The following paragraphs address the design of the study and explain in greater detail the tenets of the post-intentional phenomenological approach to research that this study will employ. Specifically, Vagle's (2014) five component process will be discussed and the definitive methods for enacting each of the components will be provided alongside explanations of my application of each. Finally, rationale for the use of the method outlined in each component will be provided to demonstrate goodness of fit for the current study.

Design of the Study

Vagle (2014) suggested the use of a five-component process for conducting post-intentional phenomenological research, which is what was used to provide a procedural framework to guide the study (p. 121). Specifically, the five components include:

1. Identify the phenomenon in all of its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.
2. Devise a clear, yet flexible process for gathering appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation.
3. Make a post-reflexion plan.
4. Read and write your way through the data in a systematic, responsive manner.
5. Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. (p. 121)

What follows is a thorough break down of each component of Vagle's (2014) post-intentional phenomenology process and how I implemented each of the components in my study.

Research Component 1: Identify the Phenomenon

Component number one consists of an examination of the phenomenon from a variety of contexts, both partially and in multiple forms. Here, Vagle (2014) suggested that the researcher complete the six-step process to identify the phenomenon in the order listed. The steps are:

1. State the research problem.
2. Complete a partial review of the literature.
3. Make a philosophical claim relative to the research problem.
4. Articulate the phenomenon and the accompanying research questions.
5. Situate the phenomenon in the multiple, partial, and varied contexts in which it tends to manifest.
6. Select the research participants. (p. 121-128)

This creates a plan to set-up the initial phases of the study prior to an investigation. Vagle (2014) urged the researcher to be careful and flexible when situating the phenomenon in the literature as this can be a reiterative process, where the thought and discovery of the phenomenon may need to be looked at over and over again and possibly re-situated at different points in the research. I actually experienced this when I when I revisited the databases early in the process to see if any additional sources were available to situate the phenomenon in high school. At that point, none were found that could prove helpful.

Vagle's (2014) first four items in components one; statement of the research problem, review of the literature, philosophical claim, and research questions were addressed previously in chapters 1 and 2 of this document. The additional two elements; contexts and participant selection will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

Contexts

Vagle (2014) suggested the element of context is where the phenomenologist will "situate the phenomenon in the multiple and varied contexts in which you believe it resides, keeping in mind that this decision will guide your data gathering and analysis plan and serve as merely a starting point" (p. 127). Vagle's statement was used to inform my decision on the context and setting for my study. The study was conducted in two suburban high schools in Southwest Georgia. The resident researcher's school consisted of 1,790 students, 75% White, 13% Black, 7% Hispanic, 3% two or more races, and 2% Asian. Gender is split evenly with 50% female and 50% male. My colleague's high school consisted of 2,882 students, 62% White, 22% Black, 9% Hispanic, 4% two or more races, and 3% Asian. The gender was also split evenly with 50% female and 50% male. Specifically, the research was centered around the AP human geography curriculum as its focus, and students who had engaged meaningfully in the curriculum as noted by their performance in class and/or the AP exam.

AP Human Geography is an elective course and both high schools have a policy of open enrollment for participation. Students were encouraged to take the class but were also told of its rigorous nature. In both schools, the typical breakdown of students is half underclassmen, grades 9 and 10 and half upper classmen, in grades 11 and 12. This is not the norm for all AP classes offered at the high schools as AP Human Geography is the

only AP class offered to Freshmen. Both high schools were on block schedule, so classes met daily for approximately 90 minutes. The same textbook was used in both high schools and both teachers followed the course objectives outlined by the College Board, the governing body over AP courses and course curriculums.

The course is organized around seven major themes: geography, it's nature and perspective, population and migration, cultural patterns and processes, political organization of space, agriculture and rural land use, industrialization and economic development, and cities and urban land use. My colleague at the other high school was a veteran teacher who started the AP Human Geography program at his school under my guidance. Further, I developed the program, using the course objectives and guidelines provided by College Board, and was the first to teach the course in my county. My colleague was a frequent attendee, as am I, of the annual AP reading which are meetings for teachers to score AP exams held annually in the month of June.

Student participants, in the research, engaged in reflective writing, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, which were conducted in each of the high schools' classrooms. Reflective writing pieces, focus group interviews, and individual interview protocols are discussed in greater detail in the procedures section of this document. The rationale for conducting the research with human geography classes is it "situated the phenomenon in the contexts in which I believe it resides" (Vagle, 2014, p. 127). Further, the decision to conduct focus groups in the high school classroom allowed for ease of participation for students and provided a convenient, familiar place to conduct the research.

Participant Selection

Vagle (2014) encouraged purposeful selection of participants when using post-intentional research design. This was seen by Vagle (2014) as a deliberate action to find participants who represented the population under study and underscored the importance for participants to represent the *multiple and varied* contexts in which the phenomenon occurred. Maxwell (2013) referred to similar components when he pointed out that *sampling* and *selection* had different meanings to quantitative and qualitative researchers. Maxwell (2013) believed the term selection was more appropriate for qualitative research as “in this strategy, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 97). Maxwell (2013) claimed purposeful selection could allow the researcher to find participants who could provide information that could address five different goals of qualitative research, two of which were relevant to my study that of *typicality of individuals* and *ability to answer one’s research questions*. For Vagle (2014), purposeful selection meant, selecting “participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation, whom will be able to provide a thorough and rich description of the phenomenon” (p. 128).

In addition to Maxwell’s (2013) and Vagle’s (2014) suggestions concerning participant selection, Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested methods for selection of potential participants for focus groups. The authors noted that participants in focus groups should be carefully recruited and of similar types of people, they further suggested they be invited and interested in participating. Villiard (2003) suggested that

“participants in the focus group interview are brought together because they possess certain characteristics related to the subject under study” (p. 2).

Human geography students represent participants who could provide descriptions of their lived experiences with learning about culture from participating with the human geography curriculum. Given the information cited above for this study, a purposeful selection of 10 participants in total, six from the resident school, and four from my colleague’s high school who had taken the human geography course were recruited. The number of participants allowed for a large enough sample to explore the phenomenon more in-depth, yet small enough to conform to Krueger and Casey’s (2015) guidelines for focus group interviews. Additionally, the sample provided what Maxwell (2013) noted as a purposeful selection of students. For this study, the purposeful selection included students who had been in a human geography class who also experienced engagement with the curriculum and could speak about their lived experiences with understanding culture.

Participant Selection Procedure

The research population was comprised of 10 students ranging in age from 14-18 in grades 9 through 12 from the two high schools in the county. Six participants came from the resident researcher’s high school, and four from my colleagues. All participants were former students who had taken the human geography course in the last 4 years. After receiving *Institutional Review Board* (IRB) approval to conduct the study (see Appendix A for IRB Exemption letter), I generated a database repository at the resident high school of students who fit the target population of those who had taken the class in the last 4 years and who the teacher indicated participated and did well and scored above

a 90 in the class. My colleague generated the same database at the other high school. I recruited from my resident high school and my colleague recruited from the other high school. Following the development of the database repository, I and my colleague worked together to recruit students through distributing recruitment flyers (See Appendix B) and asking students to engage in a preliminary survey (See Appendix C) on Google Surveys to gauge their interest and availability to participate in the study. I used email and direct distribution of flyers to former human geography students in the resident school and provided a link to the participation survey in Google Docs. My colleague performed this task in the other participating high school.

Initially, 20 people, 14 from my school and 6 from my colleague's school, answered the survey and responded to the flyer. Further discussion with the potential participants, through email and face to face contact, reduced the number of potential participants to 12. Some potential participants found that they could not make the time commitment needed to participate while others had transportation issues. The 12 student participants were given all the information they need, to include purpose of the study, their role in the study, how the data from the study would be reported, how their confidentiality would be maintained, and any permission forms that need to be gathered. See appendix B for the recruitment flyer and the accompanying information. The rationale for working with 10-12 students comes from Krueger and Casey's (2015) suggestion that focus groups ideally have 5 to 6 people per group. This allowed for each participants' voice to adequately be heard while cutting down on confusion. I cycled through the initial interest surveys and responses from potential participants and the final number of students who were committed to seeing the research through was 10. This

would ensure enough participants to provide an adequate sample size for focus group interviews and reflective writing pieces and satisfied what Vagle (2014) suggested as the reiterative process of conducting post-intentional phenomenological research. The attrition rate was considered at this point, and I considered that if I lost two participants that I would still have a viable study. As it turned out, all 10 of the initial participants completed the initial focus group interview and individual interviews, while one participant from my colleague's school did not attend the final focus group due to a prior commitment, but whose data was still included in the study.

The following chart provides an initial description of the participants and relevant information about their pseudonym, gender, grade level, school, and length of time since taking the human geography class. The participants chose their pseudonyms. Several chose pseudonyms related to the universities or college towns they wanted to attend. Osceola choose his name based upon a college mascot. Tess was short for Contessa. Jefferson chose his pseudonym because he thought it sounded stately. Evangeline chose her name as that was her character's name from the play that she starred in. Shirley Shire chose her name as it is one of her fantasy characters from her writing. The other participants choose their names at random. The school names were chosen as they are the first two letters of each the schools' name, NorthGlen and EastGlen (psuedonyms).

Table 1: *Participant Data*

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade	School	Time Since Taking the Class
Osceola	Male	12	NG	6 Months
Tess	Female	11	NG	3 Years
Kelly	Female	10	NG	6 Months
Matthew	Male	9	NG	6 Months
Athens	Female	9	NG	3 Months
Georgia	Female	9	NG	3 Months
Evangeline	Female	12	EC	4 Years
Jefferson	Male	11	EC	3 Years
Jim	Male	10	EC	1 Year
Shirley	Female	10	EC	1 Year

Summary

Research component 1 involved identifying the phenomenon. This involved following a five-step process. The first four steps; stating of the research problem; reviewing of the literature; articulating philosophical underpinnings of the work; and constructing of the research questions were addressed in the previous chapters. The final two steps of Vagle's (2014) component 1, establishing contexts and selecting participant were addressed in this section. I grounded the study in the place which the phenomenon was situated, the human geography class, and I conducted a purposeful sampling of

human geography students from two high schools who fit the criteria. Completion of these steps in research component 1, prepared me to complete research component 2, devise a clear, yet flexible plan to gather data. The following section outlines research component 2.

Research Component 2: Devise a Clear, Yet Flexible Plan to Gather Data

Vagle's (2014) component number two involved the procedure for creation of data that was concise and flexible enough to allow for change when appropriate. Vagle (2014) cited the need for the researcher in post-intentional phenomenology to "think broadly and creatively about what data is appropriate" (p. 129). Vagle (2014) noted one should choose data sources and provide an explanation of how data will be collected for each data source. Vagle (2014) posited that researchers need to remain flexible and *open* to modifications that may be needed while gathering data, to ensure that she is being flexible enough to let the data lead where it will. To accomplish data collection in a post-intentional phenomenological study, Vagle (2014) outlined a two-fold procedure involving selecting data sources and aligning data sources to the research questions. Both are explained and correlated to what I did in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Select Data Sources

Vagle (2014) stated data sources need to be *aligned* with research questions. Further, Vagle (2014) suggested one should make a clear case for the importance of the data to the unfolding of the phenomenon "in all its multiple, partial, and varied contexts" as identified and used in the study (p. 130).

For the current post-intentional study, data came from three primary sources: reflective writing pieces or Lived Experience Descriptions (LED's) as a warm-up activity

prior to the focus group interviews, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, with my own post-reflexive writing journal entries serving as a secondary form of data (See Appendix D for writing prompts). Participants engaged in reflective writing pieces concerning a cultural encounter/happening that they experienced as a result of engagement with the human geography curriculum. The LED's served as a warm-up activity to the focus group interviews. As qualitative research is emergent in nature, topics for further prompts led to other questions and roads of inquiry assessing students' understanding of culture. A sample response to the warm-up writing that demonstrates this process and the outcome is provided below for clarity.

I asked the participants to explain what the term culture means to them. Kelly answered:

I think a lot of people have shared a lot of the same beliefs of what comes to mind when people say culture. To me, it's the what people believe, the way they practice those beliefs, the language they speak, the way they dress, the way they practice their religion, and how they came together as a group of people. When you expand on the fundamentals you see it's how you perceive the world.

Kelly's response to the question spurred a new round of answers from all of the participants as they thought of something else they wanted to say about the question. This kind of back and forth dialogue, where participants played off one another and added to others' responses, was a common occurrence in the focus groups. So, as a warm-up, it served to get the conversation going in the group.

Focus groups interviews were conducted in the high school teachers' respective classrooms. Focus group interviews are appropriate for use in this study as they allowed

for ease of student participation but also, they appeal to the social nature of teenagers and their desire to talk about subjects with their peers, which was demonstrated by their interactions during the focus groups, willingness to banter back and forth, laugh with one another, and interject their thoughts when needed.

Further, an interactive focus group approach was used to allow for a flexible dialogical process to unfold during the focus group sessions. According to Davis and Ellis (2008), as outlined in the *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, interactive focus groups provide a method for conversation where participants are considered as co-participants in the research. Interactive focus groups typically consist of individuals who have an “existing bona fide relationship” with one another allowing for multiple perspectives to emerge (p. 443). Davis and Ellis (2008) claimed interactive focus groups allow researchers “to analyze, reflect, and share in vivo, using the group discourse itself as a method of inquiry as well as data to analyzed” (Davis and Ellis, 2018, p. 443).

This was very evident with both groups but notably when Jefferson responded in the first focus group, saying, “Is this like a Socratic Seminar where anyone can respond to each other?”

For me, this demonstrated the appeal of the focus group to allow teenagers to interact socially and talk among their peers. Further, it showed Jefferson’s desire to want to interject when he had something relevant to say to another persons’ response. It was almost as if he thought of something else to add to the discussion after thoughtfully listening to what his peers were saying. It generated a flurry of responses between the

participants where they commented on one another's responses. This is what made it more than a question and answer session but a dialogue.

Also, by focusing on the group dynamics and listening intently to what the participants were saying about the question, I was able to use what Davis and Ellis (2008) referred to as using the group discourse as a method of inquiry, to reflect upon where the question was going and probe deeper.

Focus groups began with a reflective writing moment to serve as a warm up activity and provide potential sources of current and future questions. The focus group interviews were structured using Krueger and Casey's (2015) protocol for conducting focus group interviews and Davis and Ellis's (2008) interactive approach to conduct the interviews that allowed for participants to be actively involved in the process. Focus group participants were given a name tag on which they wrote their chosen pseudonym, a composition notebook in which to write their responses for the prompts, and asked to answer all of the questions, time permitting (See Appendix E for focus group questions). A schedule of the interview time frames is provided below. The focus group interviews were conducted in the respective teacher's classroom, around a table, and lasted approximately 1 hour in length. Once the students were settled and had given permission to be interviewed and recorded, the interviews began. The interviews were recorded and transcribed either by me or an outside transcription service known as GoTranscript. Further, I took written notes during the interviews and kept a post-reflexive researcher

Table 2: *Date of Focus Groups and Individual Interviews with Participants*

Date of First Focus Group Interviews	Date of First Individual Interviews	Date of Final Focus Group Interviews	Date of Final Individual Interviews
April 18: Focus Group 1 at NG	April 23-April 27: Individual Interviews at NG	May 10: Final Focus Group at NG	May 14-May 18: Final Individual Interviews NG
April 20: Focus Group 2 at EC	April 30-May 3: Individual Interviews at EC	May 11: Final Focus Group at EC	May 21- May23: Final Individual Interviews at EC

journal of my thoughts, stories, and observations. It was maintained throughout the research and served as an additional source of data and is described in greater detail in component 3 of this chapter. Post-reflexions, taken directly from the journal are provided for each question I asked and at the conclusion of the focus group interview. A sample of my post-reflexive thoughts, as a demonstration of a data source, is included below in response to the first question from focus group 1 at EC, my colleague's high school.

Sample of Post-Reflexion: Question 1

Like the participants at NG, the participants at EC expressed that they decided to take the course for a variety of reasons. However, all agreed that it was the advanced scholastics that they were in search of. This was interesting to me as it spoke to their desire to take one challenging class from the start of their high school career. That was a common thread among these participants that showed a level of sophistication that I don't always see among my students. Having said this, I also got the impression that they knew that they could learn quite a bit about culture from taking the class and that knowledge would benefit them in the long run.

Following the first round of focus group interviews, I conducted the first individual interviews with all of the participants where I delved deeper into their stories and experiences with engagement with the human geography curriculum. The individual

interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The following week, I conducted another set of wrap-up interviews with the participants. Then I conducted the final focus group interviews at both schools. All of the interviews and focus groups were conducted over an 8-week span of time on each of the respective teachers; classrooms. The second round of individual interviews were conducted to provide clarity to previously answered questions and to delve deeper into participants' thoughts. The focus groups and individual interviews are explained in greater detail in later sections of Chapter 3.

Align Data Sources with Research Questions

Vagle claimed that data sources need to be “aligned” with research questions (p. 130) and suggested a table outlining this procedure might be included to help some readers. The following table shows my alignment of the research questions to the data sources to provide clarity on this process.

Summary

In summary, following Vagle's (2014) research component 2, I selected data sources and aligned my research questions to those data sources. To accomplish this, I gathered expressive writing samples, LED's, from participants prior to interviewing in focus groups, conducted focus group interviews and individual interviews, and post-reflected on the questions I asked and following each focus group and individual interview interaction. Further, I provided a table that shows the alignment of the research questions to each of the data sources I collected. What follows in the next section is an explanation of research component 3 and how I applied the components of Vagle's research component 3 to my study.

Table 3: *Research Questions and Data Source Alignment*

Primary Research Question	Data Sources
RQ1: How do high school students move from an initial, surface level understanding of culture to a multi-layered, deeper understanding of other cultures and its many variances?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts from audio-recorded focus group interviews and individual interviews with participants in person • Participants' written and spoken lived experience descriptions • Researcher's handwritten post-reflexion journal
RQ2: What are the lived experiences of high school students who took the human geography class that contributed to their understanding of culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts from audio-recorded focus group interviews and individual interviews with participants in person • Participant's written and spoken lived experience descriptions • Researcher's handwritten post-reflexion journal
RQ3: What are the long-term benefits that students experience or anticipate experiencing from taking the human geography class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts from audio-recorded focus group interviews and individual interviews with participants in person • Participants' written and spoken lived experience descriptions • Researcher's handwritten post-reflexion journal

Research Component 3: Make a Post-Reflexion Plan

Incorporating Vagle's (2014) component three led me to develop a post-reflexion plan to allow me to record thoughts, feelings, and/or questions, that puzzled me. Vagle (2014) posited this type of *bridling* of information could help a researcher challenge her assumptions about a phenomenon and understand the way participants frame information

based on their life-world. Bridling of information, analogous to *memoing* (Maxwell, 2013) and *bracketing* (Per Vagle, 2014, Giorgi, 2009), could help the researcher challenge assumptions and initial thoughts during the research process to help remain true to the participants' life experiences.

To accomplish this, Vagle (2014) suggested the use of three methods; create a post-reflexion journal, write an initial post-reflexion statement, and post-reflex as you gather and analyze data. These methods, with examples, are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Create A Post-Reflexion Journal

Vagle (2014) discussed the need for post-intentional researchers to keep a post-reflexive journal in which they begin with an introductory post-reflexive statement that embodies the researcher's thoughts, subjective beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that one has about the research in question. Vagle (2014) urged the researcher to write often as soon as one begins to "craft their research proposal" and use it as a "space to wonder, question, think, contradict yourself, agree with yourself, vent, scream, laugh, and celebrate" (p. 132).

For my post-reflexion journal, I used a variety of methods to capture reflexive moments throughout the research process. I kept a handwritten journal, as I like to physically write during the process. However, knowing that this may not always be convenient, I also recorded notes on my phone using *Evernote* when appropriate to ensure that I remained true to Vagle's (2014) urging to write early and often. Further, I also used *QuickVoice* on my phone to make voice recordings of thoughts and emotions as they developed for ease of data gathering when I was not near a computer nor had the

ability to write the reflexion down. This allowed for later dissemination and analysis.

The post-reflexions are denoted by italics throughout the manuscript indicating my voice and thoughts. A sample of a post-reflexive writing prior to and following the first focus group at EC is provided below:

Sample of Personal Post-Reflexion: Focus Group 1 at EC

Pre-Reflexive Thoughts:

I was much more nervous going into this focus group than I was going into the focus group at my school. These were students that I had not met nor taught before and I was not sure what the group dynamics would look like. I also wondered if I would find the same findings and thoughts that NG participants had provided just days before. There is always the danger that I was leading the NG participants and that they were just telling me what I wanted to hear since they know me and how I teach. Yet, if I really wanted to know if there was something to this phenomenon of cultural understanding with students who had taken the human geography class, then I had to venture out and talk to a different group of students who had not been in my class. If I was hearing the same thing from these students that I heard from my own and others throughout the years, then I might be onto something big!

Post-Reflexive Thoughts:

My fears and concerns were unfounded. This truly makes my research so much more relevant, at least to me. I see now that while my teaching style may have an impact on my students, it is truly the curriculum that influences students' lives in profound ways. I heard these students saying the same things my students expressed over the years and recently in the focus group interviews. I am excited to delve deeper with all these participants and see where it leads!

These statements reflect how I was thinking and feeling at the time I went to the other high school to conduct the first focus group. This example of personal post-reflexive entry was placed in the post-reflexion journal as a place to put all of my thoughts and concerns down and try and take hold of those worries. The writing here helped me relive the focus group experience and remain true to the participants' voices. In addition, the post-reflexion journal served as a repository for my thoughts during the

focus group and individual interviews as a place to record where the I saw potential themes emerging in the data.

Write an Initial Post-Reflexive Statement

According to Vagle (2014), the researcher should write an initial post-reflexive statement that “describes your role as a researcher, your assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives, and your background—especially as these relate to the phenomenon” (p. 133). Vagle (2014) believed that the initial statement should “describe your role as a researcher, your assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives, and your background—especially as these relate to the phenomenon” (p. 133). Vagle (2014), Maxwell (2014), and Peshkin (1998) all referred to the notion of unpacking oneself in qualitative research. Post-reflexive statements are similar to *subjectivity statements* used in other qualitative research, also they are similar in that these statements should be revisited throughout the study process.

Vagle (2014) suggested the researcher should not only “focus on personal beliefs and perspectives” but also what “frames your seeing, connections/disconnections, assumptions of normality, bottom lines, and what shocks you” (p. 133). Further, Vagle (2014) urged the researcher to continually challenge one’s assumptions and bias about the phenomenon to “take hold” of those assumptions rather than letting the assumptions “take hold of you!” (p. 133). In retrospect, I see how this happened when I took hold of the assumption that I was not going to get enough data for this study, as witnessed by a card that still hangs on my bathroom mirror. I worried that I would not be able to collect enough data to move forward.

Qualitative research involves a level of researcher intimacy with the topic that requires one to examine assumptions and beliefs about research topics. Maxwell (2013) cited the need for researchers to examine why they are doing the study and what goals can be achieved by conducting the research. Maxwell claimed (2013), one should examine personal, practical, and intellectual goals when deciding upon a research topic. According to Maxwell (2013), personal goals are ones that motivate us to do research, practical goals are “focused on accomplish something,” and intellectual goals are focused on “understanding something” (p. 28). Further, qualitative research involves *process theory* approach to research, what Maxwell (2013) described as a method to “see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these; explanation is based on analysis of how some situations and events influence others” (p. 29). These statements point to a level of connectedness between the researcher and the research that is indicative of qualitative research. I think it is imperative to examine the personal, practical, and intellectual goals, as well as, beliefs and assumptions that I brought to the study to understand their effect on the post-reflexion process. What follows serves as my initial post-reflexive thoughts.

I selected this topic as a study using Maxwell’s (2013) personal, practical, and intellectual goals as a framework. Personally, I have taught human geography for 10 years and have grown to love the subject above all other subjects I have taught. I am intimately tied to the subject as it allows me to teach a curriculum to which I connect on a deeper level. I have a depth of background in understanding of my own culture and other cultures through extensive traveling. Further, Maxwell (2013) cited the importance of personal values and identity as a part of the process of selecting a research topic. I found

the subject provided me a forum to express my personal values and reveal part of my identity. Teaching human geography allows me to help students connect with all things cultural so it was a natural progression to select a topic from the subject to research for my dissertation.

As for practical goals, those that focus on accomplishing something I believed, the research on students' cultural awareness through engagement in the human geography curriculum could meet the need of informing as to the process of students' understanding of other cultures. Further, it could provide a forum for students to express their thoughts and have their voices heard and possibly provide information on ways to help students understand other cultures. Finally, the research could practically inform about the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students and the benefit students gain from taking the class. Now that the research is completed, I am convinced that what I found and the way it is presented here can meet these goals, if a reader is open.

Intellectually, the research helped provide insight on high school students' understanding of culture and the role the human geography curriculum plays in that understanding. The research provided valuable information about understanding of culture in high school students that previous research has not adequately addressed. Few studies on the topic have been conducted on the high school level, certainly none using the human geography curriculum, that I have found yet.

As a teacher of human geography for the last 11 years, and given my background mentioned above, I have cultivated certain assumptions about the nature of students understanding of culture. Working with students in a variety of grades in the high school

environment, has afforded me a unique glimpse of the learning process. These factors led to the development of assumptions and biases, of which I am aware, and I attempted to keep in check. One method I employed was to often revisit the initial post-reflexion statements, my understandings of my history, and the phenomenon to make more accurate interpretations of the participants' experiences, rather than simply interpret through my own biased lenses. I constantly asked myself if I was trying to hear things that I wanted to hear or if I was hearing what the participants were really saying. This is a risky thought as it would be easy to think that I have heard this before and this could be a form of confirmation bias, but I think this is something that researchers deal with when they are so intimately connected to their topic. Subjectivity and bias are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Next, I discuss Vagle's (2014) third component of *post-reflex as you gather and analyze data*.

Post-Reflex as You Gather and Analyze Data

Here, Vagle (2014) described the need for researchers to devise a plan for writing in their journals. He suggested writing in the journal after every data gathering session and date each entry for later analysis and placement in the text. Finally, Vagle (2014) urged researchers to view their journal entries as viable data sources for "crafting" their texts. Throughout the research process, I wrote after each data gathering session, inserting the post-reflexions at the end of every focus group question and focus group and at the end of individual interviews. Further, as I got into the process of working with the participants, I wrote through experiences I encountered to provide what Vagle (2014) suggested as a method of data gathering inquiry. An additional post-reflexion from the

end of the first focus group with NG is provided below to demonstrate my personal reflection on the event.

Sample of Personal Post-Reflexion: Focus Group 1 NG

I found that I was still nervous about conducting this focus group. I questioned why but I realized I was maybe scared that I might not be able to get them to talk. I was not leading them on to what I wanted to hear but helping them formulate their thoughts, they are teenagers often limited in their ability to express themselves on certain levels. So, I heard my students clearly say that this class and the subject matter lead them down paths they didn't anticipate. They spoke of deeper understandings, ones that went from initial moments to more nuanced understandings that became apparent only later. Also, they spoke of thoughts that emerged that progressed from pre-reflective thought to post-reflective thought about culture. Many of them had "Aha" moments where they realized something new and they said it changed them, often profoundly, in ways they will remember. Although this was from an initial focus group. Other ideas surfaced that will be address in the individual interviews and final focus groups, but I am confident that I will find the data leading me in new and interesting directions.

Summary

In summary, Vagle's (2014) research component 3 was possibly my favorite part of the research process. I really like post-reflecting about experiences with students in my classes and other human geography classes as it brings validation to the subject as an important part of the curriculum. This component of Vagle's (2014) post-intentional phenomenology design is crucial for not only allowing the researcher to get their thoughts down about the process but also to help the researcher attempt to keep their subjectivity in check. What follows is research component four and my explanation of how I applied it to the research.

*Research Component 4: Read and Write Your Way Through the Data in a Systematic,
Responsive Manner*

According to Vagle (2014), component four involves the process of reading and writing your way through the data in a systematic, responsive manner (p. 134). Vagle (2014) considered this to be the *heart of data analysis*. It is here that Vagle (2014) and other contemporary phenomenologists promote the whole-parts-whole approach to analysis of the phenomenon. Vagle (2014) suggested the method as a way to “actively look for ways that knowledge ‘takes off’” (p. 135). This procedure involves allowing the phenomenon to *take off* in ways not expected and using the whole-parts-whole analysis and journaling to challenge the assumptions we have as researchers about what we think is going on with the phenomenon.

Further, Vagle (2014) urged the researcher to consider that regardless of the phenomenological approach taken, the researcher should focus on four basic commitments when analyzing the data:

1. Whole-parts-whole process
2. A focus on intentionality and not subjective experience
3. A balance among verbatim excerpts, paraphrasing, and your descriptions/interpretations
4. An understanding that you are crafting a text. (p. 98)

Each of the four commitments will be explained and my connection to them through the demonstration in upcoming sections.

Whole-Parts-Whole

What follows, on page 79, is a concept map outlining the whole-part-whole process I used to analyze the data. The whole-parts-whole concept map and process of data analysis and the steps involved in the process are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs. Relevant examples of the steps involved in the whole-part-whole process will also be provided to show clarity in how the process was conducted.

In this dissertation, the focus group data was presented in a dialogical format following students' responses to my questions. Further, the first focus group and the last focus group are presented separately for each of the two schools. The individual interviews are presented as vignettes, per Seidman (2013) to capture the participants' unique story. Further, the individual interviews were combined to form a single vignette for each of the participants.

Step 1: Holistic Reading of the Entire Text

Vagle (2014) cited the first reading of the text should be done in its entirety so that the researcher can become "reacquainted with the data." Vagle (2014) suggested that the researcher not take notes but become "attuned" to the complete data collection process before separating the data into parts. Here, I conducted a holistic reading of the reflective writing pieces, then re-listened to the interactive focus groups and read the transcripts of all focus group interviews, then re-read my post-reflexive statements from start to finish. The same procedure was employed with the individual interviews. This procedure aligns with Vagle's (2014) suggestion to read the entire text to become "attuned with the whole data collection event" (p. 98). This process was done after all of the data was collected.

Step 2: First Line-by-Line Reading

Following the initial holistic reading of the participants' focus group transcription, I engaged in what Vagle (2014) described as a first line-by-line reading. I read through the entire text and marked chunks of information with parentheses and made notes along the margins of questions I had while reading and chunking. I returned to my post-reflexion journal throughout the first line-by-line reading session to achieve what Vagle (2014) suggested and bridled my thoughts while I was reading the text. This procedure served as the first-line-by-line reading of the text. For the focus group and individual interviews this involved writing in the margins of the text and marking passages that appeared be of interest concerning the questions I posed to the participants. These were considered initial, perhaps tentative themes. A sample of my initial notes in the margins and highlighting significant passages, is provided for clarity of the process and found on the next page.

Post-Reflexion: After First Line-by-Line Reading

After conducting the first line-by-line reading of the entire text and making notes in the margins and marking passages of interest, I am beginning to see a number of categories emerging from the data. I made a list of the categories with the intent upon seeing where those categories might align with my research questions. If I find that linkage, then it will provide the context for discovering and writing the tentative manifestations that align with the research questions. At this point, I have discovered the following categories that I will delve deeper into during the second and third line-by-line reading.

- 1. Pre-Class Reflective to Post-Class Reflective Thought- understand more about culture and take a post-class reflective look at culture and the world, thinking about culture and then see culture on the landscape now and can identify it.*
- 2. Deeper Levels of Understanding of Culture- see culture on deeper levels now, now understand the why of cultures more, have a much more multi-layered understanding of culture.*

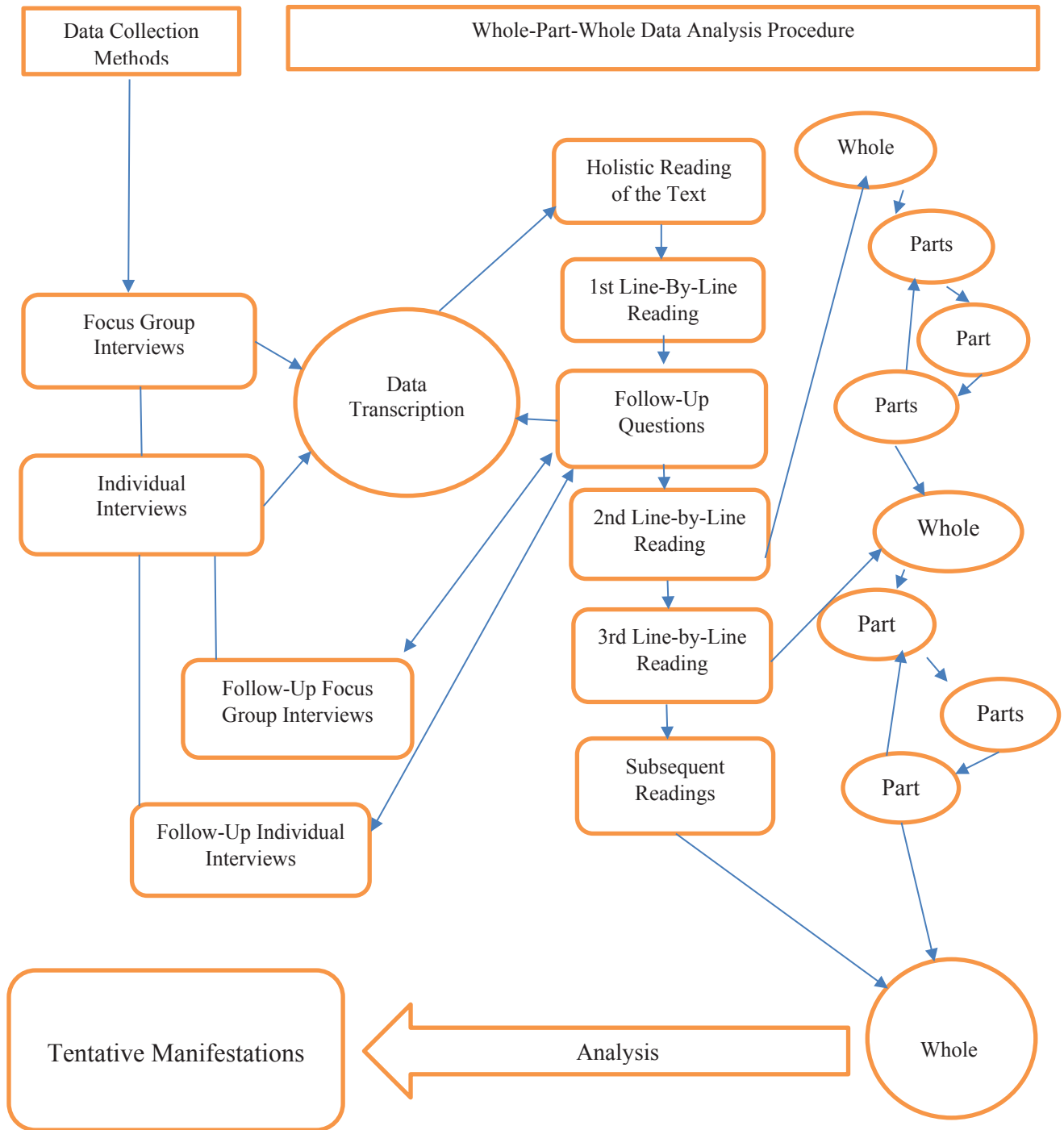


Figure 2. Whole-Part-Whole Data Analysis Map

3. Increased Understanding and Tolerance for Other Cultures- greater acceptance of those different from myself, greater knowledge of other cultures, greater willingness to try and understand other cultures.

Step 3: Follow-Up Questions

Once I completed the first line-by-line reading of the reflective writing text of the focus group transcriptions, and individual interview transcripts then I reviewed my notes and annotations of the reading, I conducted what Vagle (2014) termed the follow-up questions development phase. Here, I developed follow-up questions for the participants to clarify meanings related to their previous responses to questions that I had posed to the participants earlier in the process. In the initial question, I asked the participants what they thought was their current level of understanding of culture. Most said that it was small at best. The two who said that they thought they had a good understanding of culture before they took the class, were Jefferson and Jim. They said they believed their bi-cultural background gave them a little better understanding of culture. I then used a statement from the College Board (2017, December 11) objective's page, to understand what their thoughts were about the statement. I asked the participants to respond to the statement, "This course is designed to help you look at the world in new way!" This procedure helped me clarify how the participants if and how they thought their understanding of culture changed after taking the class.

Step 4: Second Line-by-Line Reading

After the second focus group where I received the participants' responses, I performed the second line-by-line reading of the entire text, noting the meanings gleaned from what I deemed were significant passages that spoke to the phenomenon.

to really be accepting to that and same thing with my mom, just like one of her stepmoms is um, like, she's from the Philippines and so we've had to learn to kinda adapt to that.

Moderator: I know what you're saying. I can-can remember um, being at the AP reading and one girl who-who's I believe they're from-- She's from South America, came up to me and very just like bluntly looked me in the face and said, "You should never go out in public with your roots like that." And, I looked at her like, "Are you kidding me?" But, in her culture it was very normal to be so bold and just speak your mind.

But, for me I just, I was taken aback and she's lucky my Yankee didn't start you know jumping out on her. But, you know just that, it-it's just when you start looking at other cultures, you start realizing there's you know, like the dynamics and they don't see it as rude or you know or forward, they just realize that they're just expressing the way they communicate and their cultures.

post
reflexion
↓
=

Kelly: Not at all. Um, this is, Kelly, we had um, one of my principals at my old school was a good friend of mine and we were even talking about punishments when he had a kid-- got heated in class one day, the kid was from I believe China and got up and slapped the kid for getting a math answer incorrectly. And, so, to the kid it was, "What you just did," and so the teacher just had to remind me that you can't really punish, can't counteract to the point, of course he got on him but, in his culture it was normal.

takes
a new
look at
culture

It's like telling somebody, maybe try a different route and get smacked for it. It's like what did you do wrong? The kid to this day has no idea why that was wrong, or why we all freaked out. But, it was just interesting to see.

Mathew: Just like, I'm teaching him not to be stupid.

Kelly: Yeah.

dialects
language
tree

Mathew: This is Matthew by the way. The most mind-blowing thing I learned in Miss. Dyer's class was um, whenever she showed us the language tree and that everything might actually just be different dialect. Because, I was like, totally blown by the fact that we could all be-- I don't know, somehow intertwined. And, I knew that, but it's like, another thing that we all shared.

Moderator: So, I, I'm catching from you, which would've been my next route of talking, but, I-I'll insert here and then come back to it. What you're saying to me is, you-happ-before you may have known it, but on a surface level, and later when you reflect on it-you reflect on it in a deeper level and you gained the greater understanding. Is that what I'm hearing you say Matthew?

Matthew: Definitely.

Pre-reflective to

Post reflective
deeper level

Tentative
manifestation?

Figure 3. Sample of the First Line-By-Line Procedure

I lifted text and passages and copied and pasted each individual participants' responses (*parts*) into a new crafted document (*whole*). This new document contained what Vagle (2014) described as "all of the potential parts that the researcher thinks might contribute to the phenomenological text" (p. 99).

Sample of Post-Reflexion: After Second Line-by-Line Reading Across the Data

After completing the second line-by-line reading and reflecting upon the initial categories I was seeing in the data, I lifted specific passages from the text that spoke to those categories and began to see the tentative manifestations for those categories emerging and perhaps some new categories emerging that warrant a further look. The emergence of the categories is typified by commonalities in response from the participants. In order to ensure that I am not missing meaningful moments from the data, I believe that I will need to go back and cycle through the transcripts to ensure that I am not missing manifestations that were not readily apparent to me at that point in time.

Step 5: Third Line-by-Line Reading

At this stage of the data analysis process, I conducted a third line-by-line reading of the newly created document to ascertain what Vagle (2014) cited as "your analytic thoughts about each part" (p. 99). I continued this process with the focus group interviews and each of the participants' individual interviews (*part*) parceling out each of the individual participants' voices from the processes. A new document (*whole*), articulating my analytic thoughts was crafted for each participant from each data gathering session which finalized this stage of the data analysis. My analytic thoughts are included as post-reflexions. The figure on the next page represents the whole-parts-whole process after the third line-by-line reading. The final stages of the *whole-part-whole* process, *subsequent reading*, is explained in greater detail in the next section.

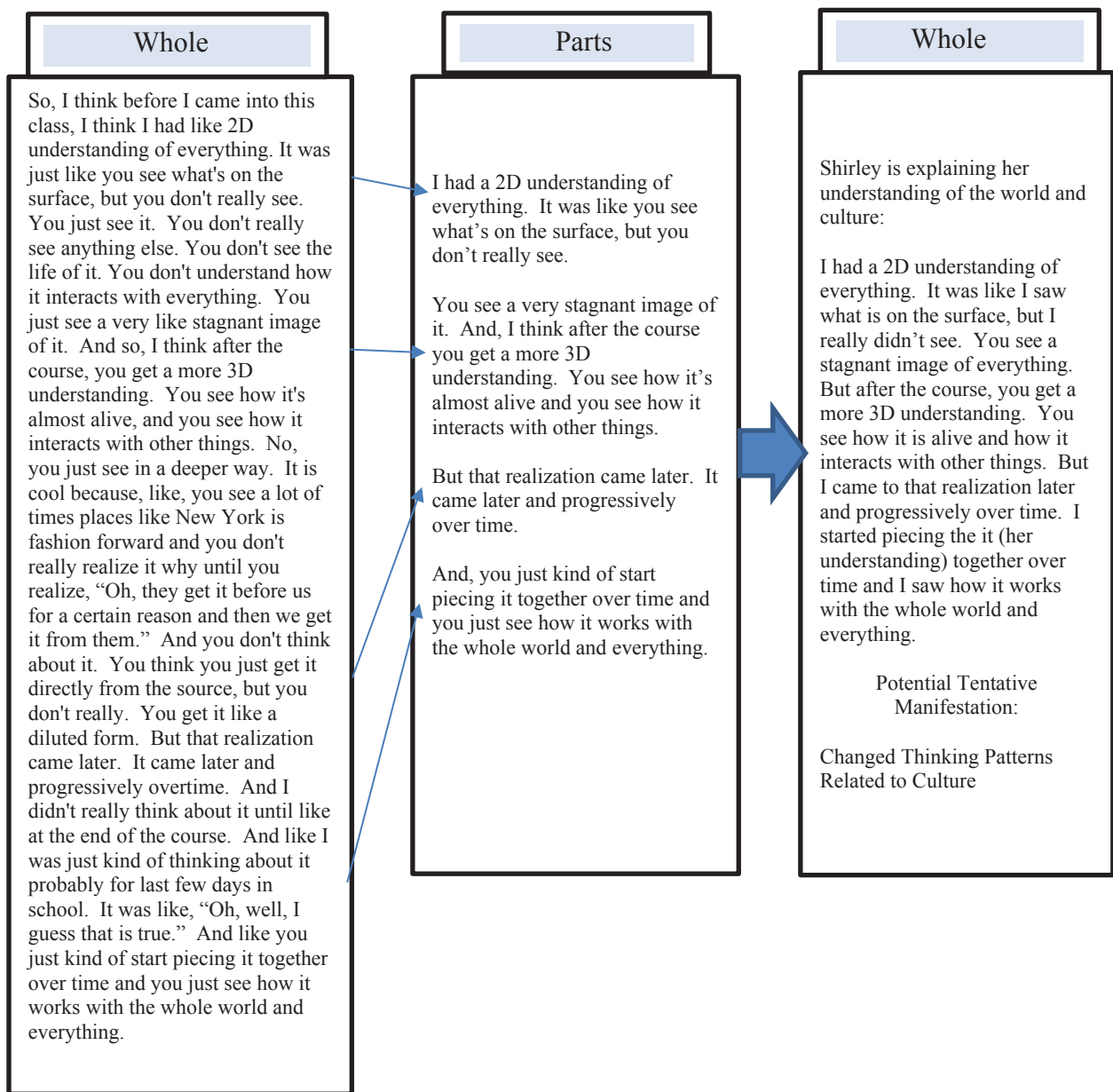


Figure 4: *Third Line-By-Line Reading Focus Group 2-Potential Tentative Manifestation*

Sample of Post-Reflexion: After the Third Line-By-Line Reading

After conducting the third reading of the selected text from which I crafted a new whole document, I see that I have at least four and possibly five tentative manifestations that speak to the phenomenon and research questions. The tentative manifestations include; deepening, more complex concepts of culture, changes in thinking patterns related to culture, culture, analyzing cultural information on deeper levels, shifts in conceptualization of culture that lead to a change in behavior, resulting in a greater level of tolerance and acceptance, and shifts in conceptualization of culture resulting in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the knowledge. As mentioned earlier, the first two manifestations may be collapsed as I move through the final stage of the whole-part-whole process, that of subsequent readings, where I pin down the passages that speak to each of the manifestations and decipher the exact words of the participants that frame the manifestations. The process has been cyclical in nature as Vagle (2014) cited, but it has helped me remain true to the participants' voices.

Step 6: Subsequent Readings

The final stages of data analysis involved reading across each participants' text with the purpose of finding what Vagle (2014) termed *tentative manifestations*, van Manen (2014) termed *themes*, and what Dahlberg et al. (2008) called *patterns of meaning*. As I analyzed the data through subsequent readings, I looked for places where data began to show me the tentative manifestations or themes. As these tentative manifestations emerged, I gave them preliminary titles. I remained flexible enough to allow new manifestations to emerge during the analytic process and delete old manifestations that were no longer significant. This process, described earlier, is what Vagle (2014) suggested as *chasing lines of flight* in post-intentional phenomenological research. Here, Vagle (2014) described the process as:

Lines of Flight resist the tying down of lived experience and knowledge. It assumes that knowledge takes "off" in ways that we may not be able to anticipate. So, it is important to carefully and persistently look at our whole-part-whole

analysis and our own post-reflexive journaling and ask ourselves' questions such as: What doesn't seem to fit? If I follow this "mis-fit" notion, idea, insight, perspective, what might I learn about the phenomenon that is not yet think-able.

(p. 134)

I followed the lines of flight in my data analysis per Vagle's (2014) urging and remained true to the post-phenomenological research process of writing one's way through the explosions of data and chased the lines of flight wherever they led. I conducted the first line-by-line reading where I marked and highlighted passages of interest. I then performed a second line-by-line reading where I lifted passages of interest and created a new whole document from the parts (Vagle, 2014, p. 110). I then did a third line-by-line reading across the text gleaning out the relevant data that described the phenomenon and spoke to the most prominent tentative manifestations. This was crafted as a new whole document. Then I went back and read across all of the participants. This procedure was used with the focus group interview data, individual interview data, and the final document was crafted with both sets of data to create the tentative manifestations in Chapter 5.

Summary

I used Vagle's (2014) whole-part-whole process to read my way through the data. The process involved the holistic reading of the entire text which I did in a systematic manner starting with the first focus group, and the individual interviews. Then I performed the first line-by-line reading of the text, marking passages of particular interest. I then developed follow up questions crafted from the first focus group interview, individual interviews, my notes, and the annotated readings to create questions

for the final focus group that I hoped would expand upon what I beginning to see in the early stages of data analysis. I then conducted the second and third line-by-line reading each time lifting text and passages (parts) and copying and pasting to create a new document (whole). Finally, I conducted the subsequent reading portion of the component, where I read across each participants' text to ensure I was remaining true to capturing their voices throughout the process. The next section provides information on the final component of the post-intentional phenomenological process.

Research Component 5: Craft a Text that Captures Tentative Manifestations of the Phenomenon in its Multiple, Partial, and Varied Contexts

Finally, component five involved what Vagle (2014) instructed to, “craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts” (Vagle, 2014, p. 136). Here is where Vagle (2014) reported that the post-intentional phenomenologists are essentially taking lived experiences and transforming the information into written form to capture the *essence* of the phenomenon. This is where the crafting of the tentative manifestations occurs. To do this, Vagle (2014) suggested two steps to help the researcher start the process: “(1) re-state the multiple and varied contexts and (2) brainstorm potential forms” (p. 136).

Re-State the Multiple and Varied Contexts.

According to Vagle (2014), the first step should be brief and help the phenomenologist think *contextually* while writing phenomenologically. For Vagle (2014), “this is the culminating moment in which we craft” (p. 136). Here is where the post-intentional research begins to work with the essence of the phenomenon and the way in which the phenomenon was manifested.

I did this just before I began the next step where I crafted the tentative manifestations that are found in Chapter 5. Here, I followed Vagle's (2014) advice and briefly thought through the process of what multiple and varied contexts means for the research and me. I came to the realization that multiple and varied contexts means I should keep in mind that the participants' voices are a snapshot in time and almost guaranteed to change depending upon the context.

Brainstorm Potential Forms.

The second step requires the post-intentional phenomenologist to consider the varied forms and ways that the written "expression" can be manifested. Vagle (2014) posited that authors of post-intentional phenomenology should feel free to "play" with the design and form that works best for them if one remains true to the tentative manifestations. I believe his quote "write around and through the grey areas—whatever they might come to be—and amplify the explosive lines of flight" (p. 137), aptly sums up the nature of post-intentional phenomenological practice in action. As explained with figure 1, I see the setting in motion of the phenomenon meant allowing the participants words about their experiences manifest in all of its all of the contexts Vagle (2014) spoke about. For me, the process looked like allowing their voices to move back and forth between thoughts and experiences to allow their narrative to vary with their thoughts depending upon the context of where they were in the experience of the phenomenon or in their memory of the phenomenon.

As I crafted the document that reflected the research process and the data found concerning the phenomenon, I used the whole-part-whole protocol, my post-reflexion journal notes, reflective writing pieces from participants, and focus group interview and

individual interview data to develop a text of my findings. These findings are found in Chapter 5, tentative manifestations, of this dissertation. What follows is a summary of component five and the overall five component process, then my thoughts regarding credibility, subjectivity, and validity issues and my attempts to mitigate the negative impact of issues that could arise related to subjectivity and researcher bias.

Summary

The last component involved crafting a text that captures the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. In order to accomplish this, Vagle (2014) suggested a two-step process of restating the multiple and varied contexts and brainstorming potential forms of the phenomenon. For me this meant realizing the multiple and varied contexts of the participants' voices were a snapshot in time and almost guaranteed to change depending upon the context. Further, brainstorming the potential forms of the phenomenon meant I needed to revisit the text from the focus groups and individual interviews to allow their narrative to vary with their thoughts depending upon the context of where they were in the experience of the phenomenon or in their memory of the phenomenon.

Summary

In summary, the study was conducted using Vagles' (2014) post-intentional phenomenology framework to examine the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture that high school students experience from participating in the human geography class. I followed the five-component research process to discover the tentative manifestations that present in from the students' voices in the focus groups, individual interviews, and reflective writing pieces. The five-component process

provided a blueprint for collecting and examining the data. Finally, in component five, Vagle (2014) set forth the manner in which the tentative manifestations are crafted from the transcribed text. What follows is a discussion of credibility in the form of researcher bias and reactivity, and subjectivity, more specifically subjective “I’s and the attempts I took to mitigate the issues that all can produce.

Credibility

Validity or credibility issues are a concern for all research studies. According to Maxwell (2013), “the concept of validity has been controversial” when examining qualitative research. So much so that “many qualitative scholars abandoned the concept entirely” (p. 122). In this section, I will address two potential sources of validity issues according to Maxwell, that of researcher bias and reactivity.

Maxwell (2013) discussed researcher bias as “the selection of data that fits the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that “stand out” to the researcher” (p. 124). Maxwell (2013) was not suggesting that *eliminating* a researcher’s theories, goals, beliefs, or values was a goal that should be strived for, but instead “qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding how a *particular* researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study. In my study, this became a very real issue and perhaps my biggest struggle throughout the study. I am intimately involved with this subject and the students that I teach so I knew going into this study, I would have to attempt to keep this in check, often not as successfully as I would have liked.

Reactivity, on the other hand, is what Maxwell (2013) stated as “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 124). Again, Maxwell (2013)

noted that eliminating the *actual* influence of the researcher is impossible, but the goal should be to understand reactivity and use it *productively*. This can be an issue in studies that use interview methods because “the researcher is part of the world he or she studies; a powerful and inescapable influence; what the informant says is *always* influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation” (p. 125). This too proved to be an issue in my study. Again, I am intimately involved with subject and students and have taught human geography for 12 years. It would be theoretically impossible for me to not influence the participants or the setting, at least at my school. I also struggled with asking leading questions, and not influencing participants’ responses.

Peshkin (1998) noted the need for the researcher to understand and acknowledge his/her own subjectivity rather than believing that he or she can remain completely objective throughout the research process. Peshkin (1998) cited “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently present in both the research and nonresearched aspects of our life” (p. 17). During his fieldwork at an urban high school, Peshkin (1998) confronted what he termed his *subjective I’s*, those times when his subjective ways of viewing a phenomenon and the world were consistently breaking through into his thoughts and feelings. These subjective I’s are similar to Maxwell’s (2013) researcher bias. Peshkin (1998), like Maxwell (2013), did not suggest getting rid of subjectivity altogether, as this would be an impossible task, however he believed that one should be acutely aware of their subjectivity and continually monitor it and keep it in check. Methods to mitigate researcher bias and reactivity are discussed in the next section.

In an attempt to mitigate researcher bias and reactivity, I employed Maxwell's (2013) validity tests checklist found on page 126. I provide a short list here to show my attempts to prevent researcher bias and reactivity from creeping into my study.

1. *Intensive, Long-Term Involvement*

Maxwell (2013) noted that long-term involvement in the form of repeated observations, interviews, and the "sustained presence of the researcher in the setting studied," can help the researcher keep checks on "spurious associations and premature theories" (p. 126). In this study I conducted two focus group and individual interviews over a span of a 2-month period and I placed myself in the setting in which the study was conducted. This was the method I used to keep my premature theories from creeping in to the study. Reflecting upon this now, I realize that a more varied participant pool, perhaps extended to another high school, and a greater length of time spent with the participants would have decreased the validity threats and increased the robustness of the study results. It was not possible in this study as I was losing my window of opportunity to conduct the study. This could be considered for future research on the topic.

2. *Rich Data*

Maxwell (2013) suggested that intensive interviews can help one gather "rich" data but that requires "verbatim transcription" of the interviews, not just my personal notes or thoughts about what was significant. In this study, I provided the participants' words and voices in the text of the document. Often teenagers speak imprecisely and in circles about what they think, and I have to wait patiently for them to come around to what they mean or help them go back and think about what they are

trying to ask me or tell me. It is a consequence of their underdeveloped brain and convoluted thought patterns.

3. *Respondent Validation*

Respondent validation, or *member checks*, is a system of asking for feedback and the conclusions from the participants that are being studied. Maxwell (2013) cited this the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what” the participants are saying or doing their perspectives (p. 126). This was evident in this study both during the focus group interviews when the participants agreed with other participants’ comments and made additional comments. Jefferson even treated the focus group interviews like a Socratic seminar chiming in when he thought he could add to the conversation. In the individual interviews, participants were able to go into more detail on their thoughts and give their perspective or their thoughts on what was during focus groups and initial interviews. In this study, I think a more varied, larger participant pool and an extended research time would have provided more member checking and perhaps yield more robust data. This could be considered in future research on the topic.

These were a few of the ways that I attempted to handle researcher bias and reactivity although not always as successful as I had anticipated or wanted, which lead to additional suggestions for future research methods to handle researcher bias and reactivity. In the final section of this chapter, I provide a summary of post-intentional phenomenology and the procedures I used to methods I used to gather and organize the data. Following the summary, I present the data in Chapter 4 of this document.

Summary

In this post-intentional phenomenological study, I used Vagle's (2014) five component research design to examine high school students' understanding of culture from engagement with the human geography class. Ten high school students participated in reflective writing pieces, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, which allowed me to weave my way through the phenomenological process. The whole-part-whole data process, as described by Vagle (2014), was used to examine and disaggregate the data into parts to form a, new aggregated whole of the phenomenon. This process led to the development of the focus group narratives and individual interview vignettes from which I crafted the tentative manifestations found in Chapter 5.

In the next section, I present the data from the focus groups and individual interviews in the form of vignettes (Seidman, 2013). The initial focus group interviews are presented first followed by the vignettes and the final focus group interviews. Focus group interviews were chosen to allow for discourse among the participants and to help them feel comfortable and part of the process. Individual interviews are presented as vignettes to allow for a more in-depth look at each participants' story with the phenomenon of understanding culture from engagement with the curriculum in the human geography course. What follows is chapter 4, the presentation of the data.

Chapter IV

INTERACTIVE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Oh, The Places You Will Go! -Theodor Seuss Geisel-Dr. Seuss

An interactive focus group approach was used to allow for a flexible dialogical process to unfold during the focus group sessions. According to Davis and Ellis (2008), as outlined in the *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, interactive focus groups provide a method for conversation where participants are considered as co-participants in the research. Interactive focus groups typically consist of individuals who have an “existing bona fide relationship” with one another allowing for multiple perspectives to emerge (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p. 443). At the beginning of each focus group, I asked students to write a descriptive writing detailing their thoughts on some aspect of culture and to write about a memorable experience they had while engaged in the human geography class. van Manen (2015) suggested that descriptive writings, which he termed Lived Experience Descriptions (LED’s) could come in a variety of forms; written, interviewing, and through observation. Having participants write about an experience, followed by discussion, and my own observations provided a sound platform from which to gather data about the phenomenon. Following the descriptive writing and interactive focus group sessions, I sat with the data and applied Vagle’s (2014) *whole-part-whole* process to examine the data and report the results of the interactive group interviews. First, I read through the whole transcript, which provided an initial read through what Vagle referred to as a *holistic reading of the entire text*.

Next, I read through the transcripts and marked points and passages of interest and made memos in the margins of the transcript for each focus group question. This procedure is what Vagle termed *first line-by-line reading*. At this point, I crafted what Vagle (2014) termed *follow up questions* of information that I needed to delve deeper into in the second focus group interview. Next, I read through the new document with a more intense focus, which provided what Vagle (2014) referred to as the second line-by-line reading of the data. Here, I highlighted and extracted the most thought-provoking passages that spoke to the questions. These passages were then combined to form a new focus group document, reflecting Vagle's second *whole* crafted from the *parts*. Finally, I did a *third line-by-line reading* of the newly crafted document where I set out to, as Vagle suggested, "articulate my analytic thoughts about each part" (Vagle, 2014, p. 99). In what Vagle termed *subsequent readings* in the whole-part-whole process, I returned to each participants' data and began to look for *tentative manifestations* or what van Manen (2015) termed as *themes*. This process is detailed in greater detail in the Chapter 5 of this document.

Davis and Ellis (2008) indicated "ethical concerns" must be considered when working with individuals in interactive focus groups. Of primary importance here is confidentiality of the participants' information that was discussed in the focus group. Davis and Ellis (2008) pointed out that confidentiality and anonymity are very important in "interactive focus groups because of the tendency for deeper emotional and personal disclosure during these sessions" (p. 444). To protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used during the interactive focus group sessions and for the crafting of the text. However, all passages are in the participants own words from their

lived experiences. The data presentation texts were constructed by stating each of the questions that were posed by me as we progressed through the focus group discussions and followed by their responses.

Further, post-reflexions are provided following each question answer segment and each focus group interview to provide clarity on what threads began to emerge from the participants own words and my thoughts on the process. Post-reflexions are provided for each of the focus group interviews and individual vignettes.

The rationale for post-reflexion comes from Vagle (2014) who cited post-reflexion as a method of “bridling, because it allows one to harness what is read and thought” (p. 99). Although one can never completely set aside their “subjective I’s,” Vagle suggested bridling can help researchers “own” their presuppositions and “interrogate how they might influence the analysis” (p. 99). What follows is the discussion from the first focus group at NG. Answers to the focus group questions are given in the participants’ own words.

Interactive Focus Group 1: NG

The first focus group at NG consisted of six participants whose pseudonyms are listed below. A brief introduction of each participant and questions are provided in italics to denote my voice followed by the participants’ experiences with the human geography class in regular font to indicate their voices.

Participants:

Matthew- 9th grade

Georgia- 9th grade

Tess- 11th grade

Kelly- 10th grade

Athens- 9th grade

Osceola- 12th grade

Matthew, a gregarious 9th grader, took the human geography class the semester previous to this focus group with his sister, Kelly. Matthew is inquisitive and often asked deep questions about culture and politics. An accomplished golfer, Matthew made the varsity team as a freshman. Kelly, Matthew's sister, was an 11th grader when she took the class and sat next to her brother in class. Kelly is an intelligent, thoughtful young lady who came to the class with experiences with cultures other than her own that had shaped the way she viewed the world. Kelly and Matthew often bantered with one another during the class and often opened a forum for deeper discussions to occur.

Georgia, a bright 9th grader, had just completed the class the week prior to the focus group and had a fresh perspective on the class and her thoughts on culture. Although she was a freshman, she was comfortable sharing her thoughts and opinions and indicated great understanding for a student of her age. Athens, also a 9th grader, had recently completed the class the week prior to the focus group. She has an interesting background that she shared freely and willingly. She is also wise beyond her years, which mostly I suspect is from her parents and their openness to embrace and adopt a child of another race. Athens is a very open, accepting person who was receptive to learning about culture. Tess, a rising senior, took the class 2 years ago. Tess is an extremely determined, intelligent young lady who has mapped out a plan for her future. Tess was able to explain her understanding and knowledge of culture in a succinct manner. She was able to speak about her experiences in a very precise, concrete way. Osceola, a senior, had also recently finished the class the week prior. Osceola is an intelligent young man who has a bright future ahead of him. He was able to understand the value of learning about culture and intuitively knew that he would benefit from his learning.

Topic 1: Reasons for Taking the Class

I asked the participants to comment on why they decided to take the class.

Matthew commented: “In seventh grade, we had a course where we learned about a lot of different countries. I enjoyed that quite a bit and I want to learn about other countries as well.”

Kelly discussed: “I actually had the privilege to experience different cultures through friend groups at a former school. And, so, when I signed up for the curriculum, I was really interested to find out where a lot of my friends were from. Or, how their culture kind of originated.”

Osceola replied: “I signed up for this class because I really like history and learning about different cultures and other things like that.”

Tess said: “I’m a STEM student, which means that I take a lot of science and math-heavy courses. I really wanted the liberalized experience. I took that with AP Human Geo and it inspired me to take other AP liberal arts courses.”

Georgia admitted: “I was, quite honestly, I didn’t know exactly like what this class was about from you. I knew what it was about but, I don’t think I really knew what human geography was. I knew it was about [laughter] cultures but I don’t know. It was a lot of curiosity for me.”

Athens said: “When I was in eighth grade and I got my sheets to sign up for the classes for my next year. My, brother was helping me, and he told me that “AP Human-Geography was the best class he ever took.” So, he signed me up and I thought, I love social studies so, I wanted to take it too.”

Topic 1 Post-Reflection:

There are a variety of reasons that students took the human geography course. Several of the participants indicated that they had a love of history and culture and so they believed that they would learn a great deal about those subjects. One participant, Tess, a STEM student, discussed taking the class to become engaged in a more liberal arts education. Osceola, on the other hand, took the class because he had heard it was interesting and fun. This too was the case with Athens, as her brother steered to the class citing it was the best class he had taken in high school. However, all came with the common theme of loving to learn about social studies and culture.

The reason I asked this question was to establish when and why the participants took the class. Here I was attempting to give the reader an understanding of the how recently they had taken the class and engaged with the curriculum. Further, I wanted to show their motivation for taking the class. I believed that this would give the reader some insight into who the participants were and how they experienced participant in the class.

Topic 2: What is Culture

I had you write something earlier about what the word culture means to you.

Maybe you can pinpoint a little bit more of what you think culture is? Matthew addressed the questions first noting, "I think culture is the attributes and shared knowledge and habits of a group of people."

Kelly agreed adding:

I think a lot of people have shared a lot of the same beliefs of what comes to mind when I say culture. To me, it's the whys, it's why a group of people maybe grew together. It's why you stay around those people. Why you even expand, it's kind of the fundamentals of who you are and again, why you're in a place your are in. And, so, it's how you perceive the world, everyone has a different way of looking at it.

Georgia brought up a new thought saying:

When I think about culture, it's like I think about the map then I think about the countries and then envision the people there, like what they look like, and then their religion, foods, and the landscape, but, like the countries.

Tess nodded in agreement and added:

When I think about culture, I think of how not only the map and topography, but also religion and beliefs, and ethnicity have shaped people into what they are.

And, when you travel to a different area you realize that it's so diverse from what you know and it's because, they've adapted to their surroundings, and what they have been given.

Osceola expressed some difficulty in describing culture saying:

It's so hard to put it into words because there is so many different things that you can put into culture. There's pop-culture, and folk-culture and different cultural aspects within another, like within a big culture there's smaller certain type of cultures.

Matthew nodded to what Kelly said and continued, “And, then you find that general thing that ties you together like a language. Or religion. And language is important for the culture?”

Tess became very excited and chimed in with:

When I was in your class, we got to the language chapter and there was this one page with the language tree on it and I was like, “Wow,” and later that week I started to try to teach myself Esperanto[laughter]. I was like I would be one in a thousand people who will learn this [laughter] I didn't learn it but, still, it inspired me to learn languages and, I really love learning languages because of this class.

It became apparent that we were moving into a discussion about culture as much more than a single aspect, as each of the participants were talking about different aspects of culture. Georgia offered that it was behaviors and customs as well, saying:

Like, I've had experiences with different cultures through like with my swimming. I have a coach who is a different culture and sometimes she'll say things that to our culture, could be offensive or just like mannerisms, you that we wouldn't do. You just have to be more understanding.

This made Kelly remember an incident from her old school that surprised her:

We were even talking about punishments in my old school when a kid got heated in class one day. The kid was from China and got up and slapped another kid for getting a math answer incorrectly. In his culture that was normal correction.

Matthew agreed with Kelly adding and expanding:

He was teaching him not to be stupid. The most surprising thing I learned about culture in class was the language tree and that everything might just be a different dialect. Because, I was totally blown by the fact that we could all be, I don't know, somehow intertwined and something we all share.

Georgia raised her hand to add something she had not realized before taking the class. She said:

So, I didn't know that agriculture was related to culture. That was a mind-blowing thing for me, and everyone was going crazy when we were talking about like the latitude lines and how that causes what agriculture is in a certain place. And, I just never like realized, like I knew that certain things were grown in certain places, but I didn't know why, and I know now now. It was just crazy.

Osceola jumped in and commented that language was important for culture saying:

If you had certain clients in different places, different countries, I mean the, language for commerce globally is English, but there are some people you may work with lot of clients that may not be able to speak English, so you have to be aware of how important language is.

Tess agreed with Osceola adding:

I have learned some Polish and French. When I started hanging out with older relatives, especially, relatives who at some point had to use like Polish or French to function in their cultures. I'd throw this term out and then it would spark a conversation and start a new understanding with that person that I wasn't able to develop without their language, their understanding. I mean they would be long languages and how it affects perception. But, a lot of Chinese people don't have to work at their language because it is tonal, and it actually affects the way that they hear.

Matthew nodded in agreement and couldn't wait to add:

We heard, certain cultures don't have language for saving for the future. Like which group there's a place to like I believe it was down near Africa, where they didn't have to work for future and they'd only plan for day-to-day. That just blew my mind.

Topic 2 Post-Reflexion:

When I asked about what the participants thought culture is, I received a variety of responses. I received the usual responses of habits, customs, dress, food, and beliefs. Interestingly, as each participant began to share their thoughts, it opened-up avenues of discussion that lead to deeper understandings of what they think culture is.

Language became a common thread among them all as they believed that language was essential to culture and cultural transmission. This discussion served as a spring board for other discussions about aspects of culture. It appeared as though they were coming to some larger realization about what culture entails and that it was bigger than they originally anticipated.

My motivation for having the participants discuss their thoughts on culture was to elicit a discussion about their individual understanding of culture. Little did I know this questions would produce a flurry of cross-talk among the participants whereby they continued to add their definition of culture, the more they talked. I was surprised by the level of their bantering and how dialogical the conversation became for them, the more they discussed the subject. It was interesting to watch the interaction unfold and I am glad I sat back and let them talk.

Topic 3: Vivid Experience

I asked the participants if they could think of something that they learned in the class, or a vivid experience or a memory that really struck them from the class. Kelly laughed and commented: "So many!"

The whole group laughed and nodded in unison. It appears that they are coming to the realization that they all had moments that struck them as interesting. Athens addressed her vivid memory saying:

The Amish community. I was so surprised that people, they just lived off the grid they have their own, I guess something like they have their own sacred area.

But like, area that the government just let them have I think. And, so, they couldn't be touched by society or changed. And, when they did get out into society, a lot of them went back to their family.

Georgia looked at Athens inquisitively and then replied:

One thing that really surprised me was with like the women, I believe it was China or Japan, they all were getting married or they didn't get married and their families just like totally turned on them and then. We watched that video about

the marriage market in China. And, it was just, it was so sad. And, then, like in India with the dowry deaths. It's just compared just seeing like how good I have it, as a female in this country. I can't imagine like what if I didn't want to marry someone I didn't love, or I was forced too. What if I didn't get married and then my family like hated me or like what if I got killed because my dad didn't give my husband a good gift, that's a little crazy. It's because, when you compare it to your own culture things like that sure seem really extreme.

Matthew nodded in agreement as though he was instantly thinking the same thought. Tess chimed in commenting on what Georgia said:

We almost take it for granted about how it just, and I mean, we do live in a developed world country. And, that's what we should expect. But, we're first world economically and for some reason, it's also changed our perspective on quality of life well and it is a cultural thing as well.

This conversation led Kelly to talk about a vivid memory she had about a discussion she had with her dad, "That actually reminded me of the conversation I had with my dad about a video we watched in class. We had a chapter on it. I'm drawing up like a blank on the exact chapter it was from."

Matthew chimed in to help her and added, "Political Geography."

Kelly continued her thoughts:

Yes, and then how we see other cultures and economically, We're all at different levels. And, so, just like with Africa, they've been exploited by everyone around them. It is not fair for us to look at them and expect them to be different. We cannot replace what we took away from Africa. They've gotten taken advantage

of and that really kind of hit home to me because of the different perspectives we have in our family. It led to heated arguments with my dad. But, we're well, you cannot compare cultures like that. That was the biggest thing to hit really deep down for me.

Osceola dovetailed off what Kelly and Georgia said adding:

I don't know like the dowry deaths and kind of the other, certain things that happens in-in cultures. I think that when they look at that, we think of it as some bad and they think it is just something that happens every day. And, also, I had a conversation with my great grandpa who fought against Imperial Japanese in World War two. And, he was a Marine over there and he was talking about, their certain culture and they get cut so cut off from society. And, I think you got to look at it from a broader perspective and just be like well, we might be able to understand them and their culture, they aren't evil as we might think they are.

This spurred a conversation about how big the concept of culture is and how important it is to understand other cultures and practices, something the course offers students.

Osceola was the first to comment on this noting that:

Nowadays, we are so extremely divided. But, if you just talk about that perspectives and kind of even it out and try to understand one another like how we're trying to understand other cultures, I think the world and this country could be a better place we understand.

Matthew said he totally agreed with Osceola's comments and added:

It's just like social media. It's like really, if you think about it, it's not social anymore. If anything, most people are starting to withdraw from conversation.

It's not going to get you to a better solution.

Osceola replied to Matthew's comment detailing:

I think what social media needs to be used for is reaching out to those other cultures because you can reach anybody you want to and try to understand how they think, why they think, why they do what they do, and I think that would help a lot.

Georgia commented to Osceola saying she totally agreed with him and offered:

I just think that culture is the key to like just getting your own opinion. It's like I know that's basically what we've been saying the whole time, but like it's just without it, like if I had nothing to compare all this to, like I wouldn't like to decide what I think is wrong or right. Yeah. It's probably interesting when I read something, I'm like, "Wow." Like, I never thought of it that way.

I saw Tess nodding and asked her if she agreed with the others that when you learn about other cultures it sometimes challenges the way you think about things? Tess commented saying:

Yes. but AP Human really kick-started my understanding of argument and how people see different perspectives. And, after AP Human, I took a lot of different classes all of which where we talked about controversial topics and we argued and being able to understand where another person is coming from culturally allows you to understand how they're arguing and maybe allows you to sympathize with them. And, I think that's something that a lot of people lack today. In the class

like AP Human especially, when exposed to them at an early age could really improve that.

The participants then began to talk about the benefits of taking the human geography class for them in the future. Osceola began by discussing:

I think that this class helps you in college, outside the college and in your job and even just out in life communicating with other people. Understanding other cultures and having tolerance for differences will help in the future.

Tess nodded in agreement noting:

Yeah, even in classes I didn't expect it. I took AP Bio and there was a lot of crossover with Human. We studied how a disease would spread across a population and it brought me back to population studies in AP Human and understanding how a populations work.

Kelly was smiling, and her eyes lit up. Then she offered her take on the discussion saying:

I think, that was an interesting question to me and an interesting perspective of this class, to see afterwards. The class gave me a better understanding and allowed me to elaborate my thoughts if that makes any sense? After this class, I was able to kind of start having my own opinions on things, but now I have a better understanding, a broader understanding. I think that was a neat perspective to see.

Matthew agreed with Kelly adding, "It was interesting, learning about how it all intertwined. Because I really thought religion and culture were alike, I knew they were kind of related, but I didn't think they were immensely related."

Topic 3 Post-Reflexion:

This question was designed to get participants thinking about things that they learned that may have surprised them and how and if now they see culture in a new, deeper way. While of many of them had different aspects that surprised them, they all discussed they were diving deeper in to meanings and understanding of culture that they had not known before after taking the class. Tess was very impressed with the language tree and language as a mode of cultural transmission. Matthew was impressed with the political chapter and the political underpinnings of culture. Kelly agreed with Matthew noting it led to many discussions around their dinner table with their dad and mom. Athens was fascinated with the Amish and learning about how they choose to live off the grid because of their culture. Georgia discovered the plight of women around the world was different than her American experience and that surprised her and saddened her. And Kelly, Osceola, and Tess commented on how learning this information increased their understanding of other cultures' perspectives on things and would be beneficial in the future.

I asked this question because I wanted to understand if the participants had a memory of a vivid experience they had while taking the class that struck them as interesting. I wanted to discover the carryover effect of what they learned in class. It was interesting to me that I got such a variety of responses on many topics from the participants. I had not anticipated going down so many different roads in their learning. For me, Georgia's response was the most interesting and thought provoking as I believe it shows a great degree of internalization of her learning and an equating of that learning to the bigger conceptual picture.

Topic 4: Culture as an All-Encompassing Concept

I commented that most people do not realize that culture is so much more in-depth than they first realize. I asked the participants now after taking the class how would they respond to the idea of culture as larger, more in-depth concept than they thought.

Kelly was the first to respond, giving a profound response saying:

You don't realize it. It is the "why of everything!" Even in English class, all our books, so far, the very first question we've had is, "What is culture?"

And not one person in the classroom has been able to relate religion to culture, which I thought was interesting. But it's, because they were never taught that.

And so, to see that it is a big concept, it's not necessarily ending, there's no bounds to it. That is what was shocking to me.

Georgia nodded her head in complete agreement further discussing:

I feel like before I took this class, I didn't have like the same appreciation for culture. Like, I knew the basics and all that. Like, I'm really starting to feel like I really want to explore, like the world. I know I really want to travel way more than I ever have, learning about these cultures. I just like I can see all the beauty in this now. I just want to experience more things now.

Athens continued the discussion by adding:

Yeah. so, growing up, my parents have always taught us to be open-minded about the world around us, and not to just have our own views, but listen to other people's views. My parents adopted an African-American boy, so, I've grown up with him and that changed my perspective. Just to think how other people live their ways and how we live our ways aren't lways just the same and that's ok.

Tess nodded in agreement and offered:

Absolutely. I took the course as a freshman. It was the first real thought-provoking class I ever took. This class makes you think about issues that are relevant to your life, and before this class, I wasn't taught to think that way. I wasn't taught to think about how my actions, how my culture could affect how I see the world, and how other people might see it totally differently. I was pretty naive coming in, I guess.

Topic 5: New Look at Culture

Based on what I had been hearing from the participants, I asked them if their experiences in the class helped challenge them to rethink the way they looked at culture?

Kelly was the first to respond saying:

Oh. Yes! Throughout the class, I kept challenging my idea of culture.

And I remember through that semester, as we went through the course,

I kept moving through my own understandings. It helped shape what

my idea of what culture is. It was just really neat to see how I was gaining

a deeper level of understanding. I think the process is different for different people.

Matthew nodded and added his thoughts on the process, noting:

I thought everyone else is understanding. And it is kind of interesting

because I remember, I could read something. I'd be like, "Well, what the

heck does that mean?" And then, you'd explain it, I'm like, "Oh, that

makes so much sense.

Kelly continued the discussion adding to what Matthew said:

That was, that was an interesting unit, because I remember, Matthew asked you,

and I went home and asked my mom the same question. And she moved from

Missouri. And so, coming down was culture shock for her. My mom just could

not get it through until she thought, the culture is different. And so, that's kind of

how she explained it to me, just like you explained it to Matthew.

Georgia related it to the religion unit and how she came to understand the complex nature of religion commenting:

I remember during the religion chapter, when we were looking at the map of the United States and, like the different branches of like Christianity in the United States. Like I didn't ever realize how many different religions there are and where they are located. I didn't realize that Baptist wasn't that way everywhere else. So, that was interesting for me. I was like "Wow." It's really not just like predominately Baptists in the United States.

Athens nodded in agreement adding to what Georgia said with, "I was talking about how like I've just grown up around Baptists and the Methodists and just like everything Christianity. I was surprised to learn how large religion really is."

Kelly added to the discussion saying:

That right there has been what's been really cool about this class and, maybe, the school at the same time. It was because we have not really been exposed, at least; I haven't to all of this knowledge. It was really cool to sit there with seniors and juniors and freshmen and see different people and how they've grown has been a really cool and neat process.

Matthew, following Kelly's lead and commented:

I got to see how the environment really changes everything about what you're thinking, your understanding. But I learned being in this class about other cultures and now see things differently than before.

Tess noted that the class not only helped her understand culture on new levels but also:

It has affected the way I view other people. And, my respect for other people because I ever since taking AP Human, I've gained a lot of friends who don't fit the same profile as I do. I've learned how to respect their beliefs and their culture. And I have friends who are Hindu and Muslim, and I can understand why they believe what they believe because they hailed from a different part of the world than I did. And it's actually forced me to change my thinking to now I'm able to think like internationally in between religions, in between cultures, and even between languages.

Georgia nodded in agreement with Tess and added:

The part that really stuck out to me was the part about being more open to people that are different cultures. And I definitely feel like I've noticed a change in myself a little bit. And I find myself like a lot less like afraid to like to reach out to other people that are different than me. And I just find it like really cool sometimes to see other people with different ethnicities and cultures.

Athens rounded out the discussion with, "Yes, I feel that I have learned so much more from taking this class that I did not know before. It has really prepared me to see cultures in new and different ways."

Topic 4 and 5 Post-Reflexion:

I collapsed question 4 and 5 together into one reflexion as there was quite a bit of information that overlapped. We continued the discussion about culture being a "big umbrella" that encompassed so many aspects of information and then I asked if they felt that they had moved from an initial, basic level of knowledge to a more in-depth, deeper knowledge of culture from taking the class. Further I wanted to understand if they felt their ideas about culture had been challenged from participation in the class. Each of the participants agreed that they definitely had moved to a deeper understanding of culture. Kelly said that she was able to speak about that in literature class when asked about what culture is. She mentioned that no one else in the class could tie in religion or language or the many other concepts that make up culture, but that she was able to do so.

Georgia mentioned that it was all of the things we learned in each of the chapters. Further, Tess said she was seeing elements of human geography in her other classes, even math. She said she now sees how big culture is. Athens suggested that she was now able to look at it differently and relate more things as being cultural than before. As for challenging them to look at culture in new ways, all agreed that this was a common thread they experienced from taking the class. Kelly discussed how she now saw how things were related and interconnected. Matthew intimated that he often didn't understand how things fit together, but he would go home and talk to Kelly about it and then he had a better understanding of the concepts. Georgia said that after certain units, like religion, she started to have a deeper understanding of the landscape in the United States and other countries around the world. Tess commented on how she was able to think like internationally in between religions, in between cultures, and even between languages." And Athens, believes the class prepared her to look at culture in new and different ways.

Personal Post-Reflexion: Focus Group 1 NG

I found that I was still nervous about conducting this focus group. I questioned why, but I guess I thought I wouldn't be able to get them to talk. I realize now, I was preparing a platform for them to talk freely about their thoughts and experiences. So, I heard the participant say that the class and the subject matter helped lead them down paths of learning they didn't anticipate. They spoke of deeper understandings, ones that went from initial moments to more nuanced, deeper understandings that often became apparent later after they thought about it. Also, they spoke of thoughts that emerged that progressed from pre-reflexive knowledge to post-reflexive knowledge of understanding culture. Many of them had "Aha" moments where they realized something new and they said changed them, often profoundly, in ways they will continue to remember. Although this was from an initial focus group. Other ideas surfaced that will be address in the individual interviews and final focus groups, but I am confident that I will find the data leading me in new and interesting directions.

The first focus group with NG went well and I am energized to see what I will find with the focus group at EC. However, there is also a worry that it won't go well since I am stepping into a new territory working with students who I am not familiar with nor taught. The only way that I am going to know is to step out and try. What follows is the first interactive focus group at EC.

Interactive Focus Group 1: EC

The focus group at EC consisted of the four participants listed below. In the same manner as the focus group at NG, I offer a brief description of the participants and ask

questions, all denoted in italics. The participants' answers are in regular font to indicate their own words. What follows is the focus group account of the participants in their own words.

Participants:

Jefferson- 11th grade

Evangeline Harcourt- 12th grade

Just Jim- 10th grade

Shirley Shire- 10th grade

Jefferson, a rising senior, is a gregarious, intelligent young man who acts with a purpose in mind whatever he does. He has big plans for his senior year and his life after high school. He has a most interesting background with dual Taiwanese and American citizenship. He was educated in Taiwan, which he said greatly influenced how he looks at education and culture. Just Jim, a sophomore at EC is a very thoughtful, contemplative young man. He had a definitive plan for his future that kept him motivated to succeed. He grew up in a semi-bilingual household as his mother is from Cambodia and introduced him to the language and customs of her family. He was also introduced to Buddhist practices and holidays, which he said left an impact on him and his knowledge of culture. Evangeline Harcourt is a bubbly senior who is about to take her first steps into the real world. She also has ambitious plans for her future admitting that she wants to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services, no small endeavor. She is determined to reach her goal, one she set after taking the human geography class. Shirley Shire is a quirky, intelligent rising junior who admittedly had the least exciting background. After taking to her I realized that was not the case. She too has exciting plans for her future that involve a top university for some type of science degree. She knows that what she learned in human geography will help her get where she needs to go.

Topic 1: Reasons for Taking the Class

I asked the participants at EC what made them decide to take the course and when did they take it. Jefferson stated:

I have always liked social studies and learning about other cultures and it was the only AP class open to freshmen. I joined it because it is the only AP offered for freshmen, and because, not mainly because of that but then for the course itself. I took 2 years ago.

Just Jim discussed that he had the same reason for taking the class saying:

My reason is pretty much the same as Jefferson's, and I knew I wanted to challenge myself academically. I took the class 2 years ago. I mostly joined for the GPA boost. I found that I really liked the content and how it teaches you how to think more in the vein of advanced scholastics.

Evangeline Harcourt agreed with Jefferson and Just Jim adding:

I took the course like everybody else because it's the only AP class, and I knew I wanted to take lots of AP classes, and it definitely opened my eyes to a lot of new ideas and just like the behavioral patterns of human society, which I never really thought about before, and I don't think many people think about. They just go, "Oh, people are doing this and don't pay attention to all these weird patterns that we have," and that was a really interesting thing to learn about

Shirley Shire also agreed but went on a different path citing:

I took the class last year and wanted to learn about other cultures and well yeah that is it because I wasn't really sure what human geography was anyway. Okay, it was the AP course that would help introduce you into the format of how other

AP courses would be set, and I took it, and I didn't expect to like it or anything. I just took it thinking, "Okay I'm just going to get my foot into like the AP door." And, it was fun, and I really enjoyed like the class and like I did well, and I got the highest score possible on the exam. So, I was like, "Okay, apparently I can do this."

Topic 1 Post-Reflexion:

It was important to ask the participants at EC this specific question, as I did not teach this group of students, and I needed to establish where they were in the process of learning about culture and why they decided to take the class. Like the participants at NG, the participants at EC expressed that they decided to take the course for a variety of reasons. However, all agreed that it was the advanced scholastics they were in search of. This was interesting to me as it spoke to their desire to take on a challenging class from the start of their high school career. That was a common thread among these participants that showed a level of sophistication that I don't always see among my students. Having said this, I also got the impression that they knew that they could learn quite a bit about culture from taking the class and that knowledge would benefit them in the long run, something that is discussed later.

Topic 2: What is Culture

I had the participants write a reflective piece on what they thought about culture. Then I asked them what culture means to them. Evangeline Harcourt responded first saying:

When I think of culture, I think of just, people that have different traditions going on. Anything from like the big holidays and religion and that kind of thing all the way down to the way you interact with other people, and the way that you just go about your day, how your family is structured, all of those kinds of things.

Jefferson nodded in agreement adding:

I think that culture is anything that you can identify with, with some like a big group of people. Not necessarily big, but like a group of people that you can identify with through language, habits, or anything.

Shirley Shire discussed her idea of culture by making it personal, saying:

I think of culture as the people in my classes who like don't eat the same foods as me at lunch, or they might not listen to the same kind of music I do. They would speak to each other in different languages, and it's really interesting because you get to learn about their culture through them.

Just Jim added a different twist to the discussion claiming, "I also believe culture it can be expressed through one's demeanor. Other cultures have different ways of behaving in public. Some are very standoffish or more respectful and while others are more open to you."

Jefferson asked if this was like a Socratic Seminar where anyone can respond to another's responses. I assured him it was, and he chimed in with a response to Just Jim's response, noting:

I feel like when you have a demeanor like I'm from Taiwan so like we're very polite and humble. So, like even if we won 1st place we still say it's good luck. And they say it's good luck that they won. It is like when people say I'm blessed or like you're blessed. So, there are some similarities between cultures that you never noticed.

Jefferson continued:

I'm bilingual, so in Mandarin we have certain words that's just dedicated for respect for elders. And different ways that we interact with people. For example,

my great uncle could hit his sister and no one in the family could object. Even the husband, because of course real issues, because he was the oldest in their line of generation. So even the husband cannot protect the sister when he was hitting her. Because when they were young, he put her through college so in a respectful way she can't do anything against it. Yeah, we take respect to the fullest.

Just Jim appeared to be thinking deeply, so I asked him what he was thinking.

He replied: "Yes, I'm trying to take all of this in, because this is valuable, I think. This is a valuable conversation, like we are learning a lot about this."

Topic 2 Post-Reflexion: Topic 2

Each of the participants in this group have, for the most part, interesting knowledge of what they believe culture is. Just Jim had one of the more interesting takes on culture citing it was also a person's demeanor and how they behave in their culture. This led Jefferson to regale us with stories of how the Asian cultures' demeanors and behaviors are different from Western cultures and how that can be negatively perceived, at times. Shirley Shire had the most personal take on the question, perhaps because she had the least contact with other cultures and could only comment on what she viewed in her immediate surroundings. Evangeline's description was the least sophisticated, which surprised me since she is a senior. Overall, they had an opinion as to what culture is and how they would define it.

I was fascinated by the direction of this question and the responses from the participants. Again, these were not students I had taught, so I really wanted to see how they conceptualized culture, as compared to my students. Interestingly, these were a group of students who had either background experiences and knowledge and/or more diverse heritages than mine and I wanted to see how that might have colored their perceptions of culture. I found that it did, in some profound and fascinating ways.

Topic 3: Pre-Class Awareness of Culture

I then asked the participants what they thought their level of awareness of culture was before taking the class. Jefferson responded first noting:

I did not grow up in a bilingual house because my dad didn't allow my mom to have any cultural influence in the household. Her parents were from China, so

she is technically Chinese although her parents left China during the revolution and went to Taiwan. I never spoke Chinese because it would kind of somewhat exclude him. She did try teaching us some Chinese but then we'd lose it within weeks so there's no point of teaching it. She just gave up. I guess we became assimilated into American culture.

Shirley Shire spoke about her experiences, saying:

My level of understanding was probably minimal. I'm White. My family is English, like I can trace myself back to some of the first colonizers of Georgia and North Carolina. So, I'm kind of the cliché, like stereotypical, like just born in the South, raised in the South. I have racist ancestry. I was kept from knowing some cultures, like not on purpose. My mom was accepting but it didn't really happen. I didn't know anyone who's Black until, like probably middle school. Like I just didn't have friends like that because it was just a very sheltered upbringing until middle school.

Just Jim nodded to show Shirley affirmation and then added:

I would say that my understanding of cultures, initially before the class, was pretty decent because, I have the Cambodian ancestry, but I also have the White ancestry. So, it was kind of a polarity that existed. When I would go over to my White family's house, I'd have a little more of twang in my voice. But then, when I went over to my Asian grandma's house, I couldn't really talk to her because I didn't know Cambodian. That was a similar thing to Jefferson. I never really learned Cambodian because I didn't really interact with it enough.

Evangeline Harcourt then discussed her level of understanding:

I'd say I had a moderate understanding of other cultures. My dad travels a lot for work. Especially when I was younger we would go on trips with him a lot to all of the different places he would go, and so I got to see the other cultures. Both my parents did a lot of explaining it but not really showing it as much.

Jefferson then felt like he needed to go further with his explanation. He said: "So, I feel with the more generations, the progression or fusion of cultures it is increasing. It's like a spiral but we're just doing small circles right now, but we still have a long way."

Shirley Shire tried to wrap her brain around the question, fighting for words to explain how she believed that in her own family there was some mixing of the races and how that had an effect on the family dynamics. She said:

I know I have Black ancestry on my mom's side. My sister did a project one time about our family history and she's traced back our ancestry and she tried to call my grandmother to see if she could find anything, and my grandmother told her to stop digging. She didn't want her to know, especially at that time in the South.

But it made me think a lot about culture and what it is.

Topic 3 Post-Reflexion:

This question led to a flurry of crosstalk among the group members. Each had a different experience that led to their level of understanding of culture was prior to taking the class. Jefferson's was quite unique, but he admitted that he still didn't know a great deal. Just Jim felt he had a decent level because he grew up with a parent from Cambodia. Evangeline traveled a lot as a child but didn't think her parents had really shown her different cultures. And Shirley who admittedly had the least knowledge was open to digging deeper into cultural understandings. Even though they came to the class with different levels of knowledge about culture, each stated that they would eventually end up with a deeper understanding, that is revealed later in their dialogue.

I asked this question because I wanted the students to tell me what they thought their level of understanding of culture was prior to taking the class. I thought it was important for my understanding to know how they perceived their own knowledge so that I could foreshadow the use of growth in knowledge as a possible viable discussion. I

needed the participants to reflect on their experiences, so they could understand where they had been and where they think they might be going with their conceptualization of culture.

Topic 4: Aha Moments

I asked the participants if they experienced an “Aha moment” or realization about something in particular in the course that stuck with them? Very excitedly Shirley Shire exclaimed:

The tree! The language tree because you see how everything like language is related and how in the end, we all come from like the same root, the same trunk, like every human is related! And it's weird because you don't think of two languages being related except for until you see the tree and you realize you can trace back from both to see where they connect and it's amazing, because you just see the birth of language.

Just Jim nodded in enthusiastic agreement noting:

The language tree was pretty big for me because, it showed the difference between like how Western languages they have like letters that they make things with but then in Eastern languages they have like a word or character for almost every word in the vocabulary and then they mix words or characters. An in the Sino-Tibetan languages, they may not understand one another because the dialects are so different. I have a personal connection with that. So, just Jim's mother, speaks a dialect in Cambodian that is separate from the dialect that is spoken in the North and in the capital city and which if you look it up there's like Khmer and then there's Mon-Khmer, a North language. And I think it literally means like

“hill people.” So, my mom can understand the North slightly, but not completely. They're almost completely different languages.

On a slightly different path, while we were on language, I heard the participants talking about language. I then asked the participants to tell me what they believed was the role of language in culture? Jefferson was the first to respond, individually, saying:

So, my brother and I, we're both bilingual, so sometimes in classes we just talk in Chinese because it goes faster and then some people can't directly translate it. So, when sometimes I think about this kind of emotion I think I use English just to think it. Sometimes, I use Chinese to think it, because I can go both ways. So, for different emotions I choose a different language to think in and if you switch up to the other language like it has a different connotation to it.

Evangeline Harcourt then returned to the original question to describe what her surprise moments were during the class. She said:

I found it interesting, and I feel like I'm probably the only person that enjoyed this chapter was the urban sprawl section. And looking at like just how we break up our cities and you can go to just about like any big city or like any city off an interstate across the US and it all looks the exact same. And I never really thought about that before, but you can like pull up just a stereotypical picture and you can identify where it is. Even in like city squares. We all build it the same way, and it just all looks the same. You go and look at pictures of places, and it all looks about the same.

Just Jim nodded in agreement adding:

Yes, me too, and it's more because I'm starting to see it now because with all these developments like there's a new exit coming off the highway now. And, I'm starting to see all these trees being cleared out and it's going to be like all the same instead of, you know unique. I've got a Bojangles over here and McDonald's over here and it's weird. There is almost no difference anymore on the landscape

Topic 4 Post-Reflexion:

Although this question started out relatively straight forward, it sparked different interests in each the four participants. Shirley, in particular, was floored by the language tree, and Jim was as well, citing an example from his experience. While on the language path, I asked them if they thought that people think and form knowledge about their experiences in their own language. Each of them said yes in unison, and Jefferson gave a specific example. Evangeline redirected the question, returning to her original thought. She said the urban chapter surprised her the most. She said she never thought about cities as cultural. This lead Jim to a revelation about realizations. He saw that they were all talking about a similar theme. That common theme was they all had surprise moments during the course of the class. Interestingly, as each one commented it sparked a thought in the others, leading to a chain of responses and thoughts. Even if they did not all comment at once, it was evident that they had some revelations that needed to be unpacked in subsequent interviews and focus groups.

I delved into the participants' "aha" or surprised moments that they may have experienced while taking the class. I wanted to see if the participants at EC also had moments of surprise and wonder in their learning about culture like the participants at NG. I was interested to hear the EC participants describing similar moments of surprise and even citing new ones. Thoughtful Jim, suggested he was having a revelation about all the realizations. I am beginning to see that there is more unpacking to do of all of these concepts in future meeting with the participants.

Topic 5: New Understanding

I asked the participants if they learned something in human geography that built on their awareness of their environment that they then began to see on the landscape.

They all nodded and smiled in unison. Shirley Shire was the first to discuss her thoughts, saying:

It ruins the innocence of like our hometown is growing so much. But then you realize we're just becoming another like any other town, like *placelessness*. I was born in Roverdale [pseudonym] and my dad grew up there and so like, he took me driving one day there to visit his old house, and he told me that Roverdale [pseudonym] used to be like Newnan. I see things that I never thought about before and so I do notice it now.

Evangeline Harcourt nodded her head in agreement and added:

I live in Stanford [pseudonym], which is still considered one of those small towns, back in the backwoods country, but that's one of the things we've been fighting hard as this little town because I look back year and a half, 2 years ago, they were like less than a dozen shops in downtown and everybody knew everybody who lived there. And in past like 2 years we've had the movie industry move in, and we're now like the biggest movie industry in the world and we're just huge, and we're booming and some of the shows are being filmed there that we have a huge tourism industry now.

Just Jim agreed with Evangeline Harcourt noting:

Well that reminds me, we were driving through Senate one time and we saw like the cast for *Walking Dead* giving tours and stuff and I was the only one who even recognized like one person. I don't even watch the show, but I recognized one of the actors. I was thinking about it afterward and realized we had talked about changes in the landscape in human geography.

Jefferson saw different things on the landscape, saying:

It becomes more analytical of what you see and not see. When you see like watch the news, you also become more aware. That's because of the class or like it's related to this, especially politics, we just see how it goes and ties in. Definitely so since Taiwan has been in and out of the picture.

I changed the direction of the question a bit and asked the participants to comment and expound on if they had or anticipated having an experience with culture that resulted in any benefits as a result of taking the class. Evangeline Harcourt answered first as she is the veteran of the group. She commented:

I think one of the things that you lose over the time is a lot of those like specific vocab words and the details of things. But I think that one of the things that stuck with me is just looking at how I treat others. And the reason behind people and that not everyone has the same culture, not everyone has the same history and so don't always judge somebody based on your viewpoints. Look at where they are coming from and their side of the world and just like look, don't make assumptions about the world. I look at other cultures with a more open eye now.

Jefferson agreed with Evangeline and added:

I feel like it becomes more ingrained that you don't double think, check it or think about it because it kind of goes into your mindset after a while. Or like you automatically think about that. It becomes a part of you, of your thinking, instead of like something you have to reflect upon, does that makes sense?

Shirley responded next positing:

Yeah, I feel like the class, helps you with the understanding of cultures. You can understand better and you help and are more accepting. You might not agree with

some of the aspects, but you can understand better and you're not as prejudiced I guess.

Just Jim agreed with Shirley, saying:

The human geography like the course definitely helped with, not only interacting with other cultures, but seeing how other cultures interact with each other. And that was like my biggest take away from the class. How different people act within the cities and how like some like random cultural aspects, like ethnic restaurants, can affect like an entire community or something. And it opens your eyes to stuff like that and you just see more.

Jefferson inserted:

I found it becomes like you only learned about it or you only have a background understanding of it but then you understand the concepts more easily and more in-depth and better understanding of it as well as just knowing like the superficial facts and story, like the textbook answers. You actually get to understand the stuff underneath the surface because it goes in depth. It can explain how you should understand the landscape around you.

Evangeline also had interesting information to add to the discussion, noting:

I think that human geography had more work than I think I did in most of my classes. But I think that's a good thing. But I think it did teach me a lot more about just like time management and the best ways for me to study. Because it's taking real-world stuff that you interact with every day. And changing your perception of it and adding more layers and more details to what you had never thought of before. And I think that's something that's the hardest thing to learn in

school. Whereas with human geography you're taking concepts you already know a little bit about and now having to change what you think of them.

Just Jim nodded in agree with Evangeline adding:

The class helped with formulating thoughts to express that you understand them.

Because when I joined this class I wanted like the hardest workload. I didn't want like, um, easy mode or anything like that. I wanted to be hit it as hard as possible so that I knew how to prepare for future classes.

Jefferson had a unique experience that he shared with the group:

I've been to like eight different schools in total. So, I feel like workload wise and like getting the understanding of like the class itself is kind of different because none of my classes can compare to the class that I had in Taiwan. It's easier to understand because in Taiwan we just focus on the facts and textbook, but we don't go into the deeper understanding of stuff like we did in human geography. And beyond the surface of just learning the concept.

Shirley Shire added:

Well, it was my first AP class, so it helped me see things in a new way. So, that kind of just helped me start up what I was planning on doing for the rest of high school. And everyone else basically covered my opinion on everything else.

Evangeline Harcourt agreed with Shirley noting:

I absolutely agree that it's one of those classes that teaches you to think because you can't just to memorize this stuff. Like there's too much information just to be able to memorize and try to regurgitate information. You must understand it and

how does this concept affect the world you're in, which you just can't regurgitate.

You must be able to formulate your own opinions and understandings on it.

Just Jim nodded in agreement adding:

I think it really helps you with taking information and analyzing it rather than just repeating information. And it's more about what you can do with that idea. It was like moving away from memorization and into analysis and concepts. The class helped me do that.

Topic 5 Post-Reflexion:

This question became a hybrid question that a little bit following the participants cross-talk. All agreed that they saw changes in the landscape after taking the class. They all felt that they noticed and reflected more about what they were seeing and could often put a name to the phenomenon after taking the course. Shirley mentioned placelessness or everything looking the same. Evangeline now saw the relationship of the movie industry and the changes in her small town. Just Jim also noted that and said that he started to think about it more. While Jefferson said he became more aware and analytical about things that he saw. There was a common theme among all the participants that the class helped them to be successful in other classes. They noted that they understood other cultures better and how they interact, as well as, gaining an understanding that you can't just get out of textbooks. They agreed that they were analyzing events and information on deeper levels and that they believed that the course helped them become more successful in high school.

I wanted to know if the participants had experienced witnessing evidence of the learning on what we call in the human geography class, the cultural landscape, as the ones at NG did. I was trying to remain consistent in my questioning but knew I had to ask this group a few more, and perhaps nuanced questions as I had not met them before this focus group. Also, the dynamics of this group was different than the group at NG. Despite these disparities, the group at EC were citing similar ideas as the group at NG, initially leading me to see that the course has this effect on students and not necessarily the teacher. This is a concept that I will need to explore in more depth throughout the rest of the study.

Topic 6: Vivid Memories

Finally, I asked if they had an experience or a vivid memory of something they learned in the human geography class that they still think about today. Evangeline Harcourt was eager to answer the question and noted:

The state versus nation idea. And I think that was definitely a lightbulb moment for me and thinking about what really makes a nation a nation versus what is a state. And then you get into like the United States versus Europe concept with the European Union and then there is the United Nations. And you really have to turn those concepts in your brain.

Just Jim agreed with Evangeline adding:

I agree with that nation state idea because after human geography I went into European History and it really changed like how you think about how France, Spain, and England were related because of Charlemagne. And then later you got the German States, and it was good for history too.

Jefferson had a surprise moment with the city models. He discussed:

So, my moment is actually the city models. I never memorized any of them. But it ties in like all the other concepts, language, culture, human population, urban development. So, understanding that there was a history and culture behind societies that goes behind every single different model really helped. Yeah, this is like overall and ties in with everything else, and everything goes back to culture.

Shirley Shire had a different moment of surprise that lead to a profound statement. She said:

For me, it was later in the semester. We watched this movie called *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. The movie explained basically why the European culture became so predominant in our world because even today you see the Europeans are the wealthier ones. It explained how just basically pure, the pure luck of geography just like how geography is everything. The Europeans had an advantage. They just happened to be so lucky in the trade. Basically, geographically lucky in trade. The pure luck of geography.

Evangeline Harcourt excitedly raised her hand to respond, adding:

I became fascinated about diseases from learning about John Snow and the cholera epidemic in London, and how he used geography to solve the epidemic.

That's one of those things that everyone can remember in class where they talked about it, but I want to find evidence to support knowledge of how diseases spread.

You need geography for that.

Just Jim astutely added: “Empiricism. That's like, you know, observing and proving things with evidence and stuff.”

Personal Reflexions: Focus Group 1 at EC

Pre-Reflexive Thoughts:

I was much more nervous with this group than with my group, going into this focus group. These were students that I had not met nor taught before, and I was not sure what the group dynamics would look like. I also wondered if I would find the same remarks and discussions that NG participants had provided, just days before. There is always the danger that I was leading the NG participants and that they were just telling me what I wanted to hear since they know me and how I teach. Yet, if I really wanted to know if there was something to this phenomenon of shifting conceptualization of culture in students who had taken the human geography class, then I had to venture out and talk to a different group of students who had not been in my class. If I heard similar comments from these students that I had heard from my own and others throughout the years, then I might be onto something big!

Post-Reflexive Thoughts:

My fears and concerns were unfounded. This truly makes my research so much more relevant, at least to me. I see now that while my teaching style may have an impact on my students, it is truly the curriculum that influences students' lives in profound ways. I heard these students saying the same things my students recently in the focus group interviews. I am excited to delve deeper with all these participants and see where it leads!

Summary of the First Focus Group Interviews

The focus group format provided a forum for the participants from NG and EC to discuss their thoughts concerning the questions I asked them about the human geography course. The participants talked freely and openly about their experiences and thoughts, which often dovetailed off others' responses. Responses to the focus group questions provided other areas to explore in their individual interviews. What follows are the vignettes of each participant crafted from their individual interviews conducted after the first focus group.

Individual Vignettes

In the spirit of bricolage, I will overlap Seidman's (2013) vignette development with Vagle's (2014) *whole-part-whole* data analysis method to craft a text of each participants' words. Seidman suggested that a vignette is "an effective way of sharing interview data" that typically "covers a more limited aspect of participants' experiences," as compared to profiles (p. 122). Further, Seidman cited that we "interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories" and that vignettes "allow us to present the participants in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and convey a sense of process and time" (p. 122). Seidman delineated a process to develop the vignettes that aligned with Vagle's *whole-part-whole* process. First, Seidman suggested reading the text holistically, followed by a reading where *passages of interest*

were noted and marked. Next, those passages were combined to form a more concise, rough draft of the vignette. Finally, the last step in the vignette creation process was to reread the rough text to pull out the *most compelling passages*, “those that you are not willing to put aside” (p. 123). From these final passages, a vignette was crafted. Vagle’s *whole-part-whole* process of data analysis aligns with Seidman’s vignette development. I began with a holistic reading of the text followed by the first line-by-line reading of the text. Then, I reread the text and marked passages of interest, which corresponded to the second line-by-line reading of the text, lifting narratives where appropriate to craft an initial, rough vignette. Finally, I reread the new document, pulling out the most compelling passages, which were used to craft the final vignettes. This process and the resulting vignettes reflect Vagle’s (2014) *whole-part-whole* protocol where a final crafted document results from analysis of the individual parts. What follows are the individual vignettes reflecting each participants’ experiences with and stories related to the phenomenon. The vignettes are a compilation of the individual interviews. To distinguish between my voice and the participants in the following passages, my voice will be set in italics and the participants in regular font.

Osceola

Osceola is the quintessential 12th grade, Mr. High School. A strikingly handsome young man. He was the high school varsity quarterback and varsity soccer goalie. He made straight A’s in high school and was in the top 20 of his graduating class. He was accepted to every college to which he applied was even recruited to attend Harvard and play football, although he had to decline due to financial reasons. He has

accepted an invitation to attend a major university in the South to play football and pursue a corporate law degree.

Osceola was born in Tallahassee, Florida. His dad had a job in athletics and he was always around athletes and athletics all his life. He thinks that's what made him interested in all the sports today. He grew up around sports all his life and began playing football at a young age. He excelled at several sports at an early age and was the only 8th grader who played on the high school varsity football team. As a result of engaging in sports at an early age and continuing throughout his life, he was exposed to other cultures through travel teams. He has met people from all around the United States, Canada, Nigeria, and Jamaica.

Osceola discussed his background and exposure to other cultures prior to taking the human geography class.

As part of my experience traveling with ball teams, I was exposed to people from all over the United States and Canada. One time my dad worked with two Jamaican people, and I would hang out with their sons a lot and go over to their house and eat different types of food, Jamaican food and stuff, and they introduced me to a different culture than what I was used to, especially at a very young age. I also played against a school here where two or three Nigerians and then a couple Jamaicans played on the team. They didn't speak much English. They were speaking in their Nigerian tongue and I didn't understand them. Nigerians were just cool to meet. I got to talk with them a little, as much as I could. I found out they weren't from America; they were from somewhere else just by the language they were speaking. That's how I found that they were from Nigeria just by asking them. I didn't really get to learn like much about that

other culture because we were just playing soccer. It was just cool to play against different people and stuff like that. They have different ways, even with sports, there's a different way they play the sports. In America it is more like a team-oriented soccer. Even Coach Campbell will tell you this because he's from Jamaica and he always says America's team pass the ball more than teams from other places. And then Jamaicans and Nigerians and even some places over in Europe, it's more about getting the star player the ball and let him move around and do whatever to score. They had the one guy, who was Nigerian, he was really good. They'd get him the ball and the whole team was focused so their offense attack was him. They get the ball to him, and he would make the passes and the team focused on getting him the pass, so he could score. That really surprised me because it was different than here in America. It is a different way of playing soccer. I didn't think there was a different way of playing sports, so it really surprised me. It is definitely a cultural thing. Looking back now, I didn't realize that I was learning about other cultures, it just happened. Now when I look at it, I realize that I was learning about other cultures and thinking about that.

Based upon what Osceola earlier, I asked him to tell me about his class experiences that changed the way he looked at culture and the big concept of culture.

Customs are definitely part of culture. As I was saying earlier, for me to know other culture's customs can help them when they interact so they are respectful to one another. I also think politics plays a big part. I would say because that's what I want to major in and I like to tie things back to politics and stuff like that. Different cultures have different political stances on certain things. I mean that's why we have disagreements in the world. So, it is super important for people to know about other cultures' politics and

their political takes on the world and how they negotiate things. I think economics is under that big concept. I think language is under that. I mean that if there's so many things, it's hard to name just a few but, dialects of some of the different languages. There are so many different things, it's hard to name all of them. It is a kind of way of life. It's about how they go about their day to day lives. What they do what's normally expected of them in their culture. So, the culture is different and the jobs that they do. That's another thing because jobs people do, the food that they eat, when they eat the food, how much they eat of it. I have even learned in here that certain European countries eat six or so small meals throughout the day, take a nap, eat more meals.

I think if we can better understand a couple of things that make up culture, then we can be a lot more sound as a human culture. And if we can start a talk and, we can start seeing stuff through other people's eyes. Not necessarily changing your views to how they see it but just understand where they're coming from. There's too many different opinions and cultures out there about the world. Everybody just can't be peaceful all the time. But you can be peaceful at some point and try to talk to people. I guess sympathy for them but just like understanding of other people, I think is a good thing that we should all understand each other's culture. I think if everybody took human geography and learned about other cultures then that understanding of other cultures would be helpful.

Osceola indicated previously that he now saw culture as a larger concept. He expounded on specific content knowledge he learned from taking the class and how that helped him with real life applications.

Language definitely is a big one. The language unit. I talked about with my job and understanding each other different dialects and languages is a huge thing to have. So, you don't miscommunicate with each other. I didn't know the English was like the language of commerce. I just figured that wherever you were doing business, you tried to talk in their tongue. But then I realized as I went around with my dad has some, business stuff going on overseas. I was asking him about that. And I was like, "how do you communicate?" And he was like, "A lot of them speak English." But, I think languages can be a huge barrier, which I experienced this. The other day at my job, I work at the solicitor's office here in Coweta County. We had a man, I believe he was from Mexico, he spoke Spanish, and he was talking to one of the officers, and they were trying to translate. They had a translator, who was trying to translate. The translator was missing some of the words that he was saying, and it got extremely heated because he thought he was saying one thing when he really was saying another thing. So, finally, they got another officer that could speak the same language, so they weren't having to translate and go through different people, so things would calm down and they could get the situation under control. And, that's kind of one of the other reasons that I think like it shows you how much language can affect kind of altercations with each other and how it can make things heated if you don't understand why another culture is doing one thing or saying one thing if you don't know what they're saying.

Also, if you had certain clients in different places, different countries, you may work with lot of clients that may not be able to speak English, instead of getting a translator and then just like I said, like with the police officer and everything, they were misinterpreting what they were misinterpreting what was be said. In a business deal with

corporate law that will affect a whole company if you don't do it right and don't get in sync with somebody else that you're trying to talk to. You can take down the company for sure. So, language is key to so many things, and it can give you a leg up on so many things in life.

Knowledge of other cultures can also help me later in life, especially if my boss or whoever is of another culture. Knowing about someone else's culture could help me to know how to approach them and how to get things done in the right way without getting them irritated or causing tension. I think learning information in the human geography class about the Japanese culture or German culture is definitely important especially if I have a Japanese boss or a German boss I would need to know their customs and the way they do certain business things. So, I would know what to do. Like knowing how to shake his hand because that could even mean something. You shake his hand the wrong way and you lose his respect, and this would be bad for business and possibly rude. I think it is important to learn what the certain cultures expect from you in a business situation or even a friendship situation and their customs. I think that will help me to get things done the right way and honor someone else's culture. I think that this class taught me a lot about how to look at culture.

Osceola discussed how he felt he progressed from an initial understanding of cultures to forming a new, in-depth understanding of culture from taking the class.

I learned a lot more than what I knew coming in to the human geography class. I mean I knew some stuff, but I didn't have a deep understanding of other cultures. I didn't know so many things and it helped me understand different things about culture and how important it is. Like I said, do not prejudge about anything. Try to understand

everybody's culture and how they do it and why they do certain things. So, because we have to live in a global world, and I think this is one of the few courses that can give you that. I think we live in a global world where even in some countries there are thousands of different cultures and languages. So, I mean I think just understanding each other's cultures and knowing that there's just tons of cultures and different ways of thinking out there. I mean there's so many different cultures that we have to be able to work with especially once we move on and get into the workforce you have to work with these different cultures and understand how they think and what they think and try to get along with them, and I think I can easily get along with people. I really try to get along with other cultures. And cause there's just so many different cultures, in America. One of the greatest examples where I think it's one of the most multicultural places because we just have so many people immigrating in from other countries, it's a country of immigrants really. There's not really one set culture, like you see in other straight European countries like France or even Japan where it's just Japanese culture and that's really it. So, I think this class helps us in high school because I mean, there's so many different cultures even in this school of people trying to understand each other. It helps you in college because you're going to be around cultures different from your own, and it will help you when you go on to work with other people that come from so many other places.

I remember we were discussing Africa and the Outback in Australia and I was surprised about a few things. I knew there were people who used to live in prehistoric days with hunting and gathering. But, I was just so dumbfounded like I couldn't believe that there are still people out there that are living this way with how our world is today and especially in America we have so many different forms of technology and stuff like

that. Like even our people in poverty here I mean they still have access to other technological things. They got all this crazy jewelry and everything and they're still going out and they're making huts out of whatever they can find in nature. That really surprised me about how uneven development is. I thought that was a kind of an eye-opening moment there.

And then also the different languages and how people speak differently. It was also interesting to find out about how speakers of one type of Chinese may not be able to understand or talk to people of another type of Chinese. So, if language is the way to show someone's culture then how will people then like tell each other about their culture? And most likely that will cause them to think differently because they think in their own language. So, you can see how cultures developed as well as someone's culture developed around the language.

Post-Reflexion: Osceola

Osceola discussed the changes he experienced in his understanding of culture from taking the class. He said that he had some experience with culture growing up, but he was not as knowledgeable as he once thought. He now able to see that culture is a much broader concept than he once believed. He was able to articulate that he now sees culture as the language one speaks, customs people engage in, and the way people approach one another. He claimed that he now sees the more in-depth nature of culture and provided an example from his job. He said he believes that he will benefit from the experiences he learned about culture in the human geography class, and cited several examples of how he anticipates using the knowledge he learned in the future.

Osceola's interview surprised me a bit. He is an extremely articulate young man when you talk to him in person, but I found he struggled at times to put his thoughts into words and explain his developing conceptualization of culture. The atmosphere during the interview was pleasant and very dialogical. Osceola likes to talk, which was helpful. However, I wondered, after I left the interview, if it would be hard for some of my other participants, especially the younger ones, to put their thoughts into words. I knew I would find out soon, as I had an interview the next day with one of my younger participants.

Athens

Athens is a very polite and quiet young lady who proved to be quite astute considering she was a 9th grader when she took the human geography class. Her brother had previously taken the class and strongly encouraged her to take the class as well. He told her that it was the best class he had taken in high school and that she would learn a lot about culture and the world. Athens came to class everyday with an eagerness to learn and participate in the experience of an upper-level class as a new student to the high school. She always had a smile on her face and a delightful attitude that proved to be beneficial to her sharing her story. What follows are Athens words about her background and her experience with the human geography class.

Athens spoke about her background and heritage.

So, my grandmother is from New Zealand and all our family grew up in New Zealand and a couple of them lived in Australia. So, in, World War II, she ended up nursing my grandfather back to health because he was in the United States Army. They ended up getting married and moving over to the US and they had my mom and so, I've grown up knowing that I have family in Australia and New Zealand, but I never really got to meet them until 2015. Growing up with my grandmother was very, it's kind of obviously different, but she just didn't know the right from wrong ways to say things because, she was so worried that what she said are not socially acceptable here. We have tea every single day. And the tea was terrible every because we couldn't put any cream or sugar, and it was just tea with water and she wouldn't let us do any water, it was like straight up tea in a tiny bit of water. It was very cultural thing because that was her culture and for me there's like only a smidgen of water and I was like, "No, we just want

more water.” It was so strong and so potent. So, I knew that my grandmother was different because of her accent. We'd go to the drive-thru and they're just like, “Can you repeat that?” Like taco, she'd say taco in a really weird way with her accent. It was very different. So, I did get a strong sense of cultural aspects from her because around her house, she had different decorations and decor that just is not normal here. And, the Kiwi from Australia, not like the fruit, but the bird, it was everywhere, that was like her thing. We had so many stuffed animals and pictures everywhere. It was insane.

So, my mom always grew up with her father being a little more, like, not liking the African-American culture. So, when she had kids, she decided that she's going to have an African-American child no matter how hard it is, she's like, “I'm going to have one. So, she and my dad ended up adopting a young man and he's been my brother since 2007 or 2008, around that time. And we met him because my dad coached him in football.

So, he wasn't officially adopted until 2009, but we met him in 2007 and his family. They never brought him to the football practices and the way approached us, they were standoffish because they didn't like us. Then his family ended up abandoning him. So, we took him in as a part of our family and just have raised him ever since.

So, culturally, just getting to know how we did things around our house was new for him and that it's okay to have second helpings of food, it's okay to ask for water, it's okay to get water yourself and just different things. I'm not saying like this is how it is in every Africa-American household, but it was for him. And Christmas, he did not get Christmas presents his whole entire life. So, I was waking up on Christmas day getting Santa Claus presents and him getting them and he was like, “Oh my goodness.” It was

like something he had never had before. So, it was different for him to get used to that. I mean I realize that not every African-American family doesn't give presents. We still are friends with his grandmother, who still wanted to be in his life, and she is very nice and very kind and they treat their kids with so much respect. It wasn't the whole entire race problem or the human race. It wasn't an ethnic problem it was his parent's problem. So, I did know growing up not to pinpoint that problem on everyone.

So, another thing, a couple months ago, my cousins ended up hosting a child from China and they still have her. She's from, it's not Beijing, but it's very close to Beijing. It's like how Newnan is to Atlanta. So, she grew up there and her family, um, she has a little brother, I think he's four. So, when the child law of One Child, got passed and they ended up having another kid, and she moved here.

And something I never knew about their culture just shocked me entirely. And family when she came to visit us and then she went back home. She told me, she was like in tears when she's telling me this, and I was like, "What is going on?" and she's like, "My father told me to stop eating food because I've gotten bigger." I was "like he didn't know how to say that." It was another cultural thing. She's like, "but it's okay because we're supposed to be small." I was like, "No, like, eat as much as you want, like, there's plenty." It's just like, "If your dad wants you to work out more, do that." And she's like, "No, he wants me to stop eating." I just told her like, "It's okay to have smaller portions, but, like, that-that was kind of rude of him." And, she has a boyfriend, I don't like him that much. He told her that she needs to lay off Big Macs. So, and he's from China, too, he's an exchange student. So, I just kind of took it into consideration, that must be, like, a cultural thing. Like the men tell the women how to eat or something. But, I was not very

happy with that. She'll be with them for 4 years. Yes, 9th grade through 12th grade. Kendra talks Chinese, like, she talks four languages, actually. Mandarin growing up. She spoke that. She learned Spanish because in her elementary school, they are forced to, not forced but, they are taught to learn Spanish. She has French and she knows a little bit of South Korean.

I have three brothers. Linerious, is my African-American brother, but I call him L. I was around six or seven when we adopted him. When he came home the first time, I was like Bryce has a new friend. Then he stayed for weeks, and I was like "Oh, Bryce has a best friend!" It wasn't until I think, like 2 years ago, that I finally learned the story of how he got with us, but like since I was younger it's just like, "Well, he's been with us for so many weeks, might as well call him my brother. My mom came and sat my younger brother and I down and it was like, "Oh, he's going to live with us from here on out and he's your brother now." So, we're like, "Sweet, okay." And, we have a very big family reunion in the middle of July every year. When we took L for the first time, to the family reunion, it took a little while for people to understand, "This isn't family, you adopted him?" and we're like, "Yes, we did." It was funny how my uncle came out and was like, "Oh, there's Bryce's friend," and I was like, "No, that's my brother." I got to be, "That's my brother." I was very proud.

Athens discussed her exposure to culture prior to taking the human geography class.

Other than what I already told you, my middle school was diverse. We had programs that taught us about diversity. Like we had diversity day, I was a part of the activities, everything single year. And we had just different things like around the school

that would tell us how like diverse cultures is, and how we need to be open to other people and just how everything is just great.

Then there are my cousins in Australia. Okay, so there's Lisa and Weldon. They live in Western Australia, and they do cattle ranching. Yes. With helicopters. We talked about this in class, and I was like wow. They can practice that type of ranching because of the line of latitude. So great! I never put the dots together about South Africa on the same line. You were telling us about the Argentinian steak and it all started making sense. Well, Weldon does that in Australia. So, they have their own helicopter company, and they have cattle across the plains and everywhere in the outback. It's insane. So pretty too! When I heard Lisa talk and then I heard Weldon talk. Because Weldon's from New Zealand. I was just like, "You all don't sound the same." but, like, at the same time they do. But it was very awesome to hear his accent. Those are the only two in Australia because the rest of my grandma's family have moved back to New Zealand. There is her brother, her sister, and all their families. I still send my cousins a care package of American food that they don't have. They don't have Coca-Cola there, and I sent them goldfish and Skittles and just things like that. And they send me chocolates and things. I just thought about something, since my grandpa is from the United States, my grandmother is from New Zealand, I am part of both cultures.

Athens spoke about her thoughts about culture now after taking the human class geography.

When I think of the of culture and this class, I think of so many things. I think of language, housing, traditions, religion, ethnicities, and the list goes on, like everything. Even learning habits like education, basically everything fits under it. Especially

everything we learned in this class. It is a big concept. It's hard to you know, to gather altogether because of that big concept of culture it just is so large. I also have to say religion. I didn't realize that before, but I thought about it during the religion part. So, my grandmother from New Zealand she was Catholic. I'm not sure if that's like what everybody is in New Zealand, but she grew up quite a Catholic and my mom grew up Baptist, I think? Oh, it was either Baptist or Methodist. I can't remember, but my dad grew up strict Southern Baptist like, be home before the lights go out. Baptist like to the hardcore Baptist, so, when my parents got married and then coming from like just different aspects of religion, they're just like, "So, how are we going to raise our kids, like what part of Christianity are we going to raise our kids?" So, we ended up going to a Baptist church and that's where we are today. So, when we actually adopted L, he was not religious at all. Like he never grew up religious or in church. So, that's another thing that L had to get used to is we went to church every Sunday. We celebrate Christmas and Easter and just things under that umbrella. And so that was something he had to get used to and I think it didn't take one just waking up earlier on Sundays. So, definitely religion hits home. So, I do remember like my dad say, he wasn't trying to be rude or anything, but like on my way to my nana's house on Christmas, we always passed a movie theater, and my dad goes, "Oh, there are the Jews." And, my younger brother would always get so mad at him and be like, "Dad, you can't say that. They're Jewish" and like, "They've got so much hard time life in their life." And then like learning that atheism was a thing. I had no clue that atheism was even a something thought might be a religion like until, I think seventh or eighth grade, I was just like, "Atheism?" Oh, it's seventh grade when we were learning about religion. It's like Atheism, we're like, "Who's an Atheist?" It seems

like everybody believes something. Yeah, whether you're Hindu or Islamic or anything. I was just like, “How do you just not believe in anything? So that took me by a total surprise.

Athens reflected on where she was in her understanding of culture when she started the class, and where she feels she is now in her understanding of culture after taking the class.

What I thought I knew coming into it, like, before the class I would say, “Oh, I was a 10.” like I knew it. When I got to the class, it was like, I don't know everything. Like, I'm a five, like, maybe not even a five. I don't even know how to word it because, I have never learned this much before. Like, all these classes, math class and science class, oh it's cool, numbers and science and everything but no social studies/human geography is where I was like, it broadens people's horizons. I think the world would be such a better place if they took this class and just like getting to learn about the different aspects of life and culture that like you really don't know. You can't know everything in life about different cultures unless you stand in their shoes and like walk their life, but I feel like I'm getting that strong sense of like place and cultural aspects in this class. I was like, “That's great.”

Specifically, I can remember going from not knowing that, just a type of fence on the side of the road is some type of culture is just saying that fence to me like, “Oh Mom, like that's pop culture. That's pop culture.” Or, like religion and the places that people are cremated in the Hindu religion. I am starting to see things on the landscape, and I recognize what it is now. Like, now I want to go see Amish country. I was so surprised to learn about the Amish and their ways. I feel like I want talk to them, but I'm no, I don't

know if it's, like, against their rules or anything. But, I feel I just want to see what they do. Like, churn butter. I find them so interesting. I get why they're doing it now because it's their way of life and that's the way they've grown up. I just want to know who started that. Like, why did they decide to not industrialize with everybody else, why did they just like decide that? Their ways, the best way or the highway. So, I just wanted to know what made them think that, like, that was the best thing for their culture. So, I just I love watching the Amish people in the environment. And then there is the Rumspringa, where they go out into society for a couple of years to see if they want to go back to their homes and I was thinking, if they were me and just like thinking if I were Amish, I'd go back. I would never abandon my family, so I know how hard that must be for them. Like, I would be terrified if I were in the Amish country and then go into New York.

I did have a few moments where I went “whoa.” So, the Amish were definitely one of those times but also when we talked about language. So, language, like we were talking about it in the focus group. It surprised me very much because I knew that northern people had accents and southern people had accents and people from the southwest and the northwest. And all just different walks of life, they had different accents than us. But, I didn't expect the words to be so different, like you told us about the word rotary. I had no clue what a rotary was. And I was like, “What? What's a rotary?” So, I guess it's like a roundabout and I was like, “Oh, a roundabout.” I made that connection later. So, the language concept of culture was definitely something that just took me by surprise. You think in your language. I imagine it would be like, I can't think about any, like, especially with just high school Spanish. I used to think, “Okay, this is it in English, so what is it in Spanish?”

Where I see myself going, I think I've had this, like, a pretty set standard since I was in second grade as being a teacher. And I want to go to UGA. I also want to travel and see all the different cultures we learned about. Maybe even do a teaching job overseas. I also want to travel around the United States to see the different regions we talked about in class. I know I will understand things better now.

So, I do see myself growing too, like, growing as a person. I think this class has made me grow so much. Like, just coming from who I thought I was to who I am now. I'm just a different person because of this class. I have learned so much. Oh, I am an improved person all the way. I think I know a lot more about culture. Okay, this is kind of weird, but it's my journey to be on *What Would You Do?* that TV show. So, I always think in my head, what would I do? Like, if this were a real situation, what will I be doing? I just apply culture to that and then I know how that's just their way of life, and I need to respect that that's their way of life.

Post-Reflexion: Athens

Athens reflected on her past and what she thought she knew about culture. She said because of her background, she thought she knew a lot about culture claiming she was about a 10 on a scale from 1 to 10. She said that she came to the realization that she didn't know as much as she originally thought. She said that she has never learned so much in any class, and she couldn't wait to see where this would lead. When I probed her to talk specifically about what she learned, her responses were much less nuanced and more concrete than Osceola's, presumably because she was in 9th grade when she took the class. She did provide several concrete examples, that of fence types and certain language terms, but she still discussed how she learned a great deal about culture, and she expected to grow from the experience of taking the human geography class.

I included Athens in this study because she asked to be part of it. In fact, her words were, "I would love to be part of your study!" I hesitated at first because she is a 9th grader, and younger students sometimes have a difficult time nuancing and articulating the discussion to express themselves effectively. That is what I worried about after Osceola's interview. But, I am glad I set aside my bias and let her be a part of the process. Otherwise, I would have missed a great dialogue.

Kelly and Matthew

Kelly and Matthew are a sister and brother who experienced the class together. They sat next to each other in class and routinely bantered back and forth. Both have striking red hair and beautiful blue eyes and appeared to be the perfect picture of what one would typically think of as Irish heritage. Matthew was in 9th grade and Kelly was in 10th grade when they took the class. They came to the class after having transferred from a private school in the area and proved to be astute thinkers as a result of their exposure to other cultures in their former school. They were interviewed together and thus presented together in this vignette as they experienced the phenomenon of cultural understanding in the class together. Their names are bracketed to denote which of them was speaking.

Kelly and Matthew discussed their background and exposure to other culture prior to taking the human geography class.

[Kelly] I grew up and my mom wanted us to be very well-cultured because we started out in a local school here. It was a private school there about, maybe 10 kids in a classroom, and we knew everybody. They were all southern families, and it was very one way. Uh, and then, so, at first grade they moved us to a bigger private school to kind of get more diversity and to experience other things. Both my parents are from a small town, in Kansas and Missouri so they didn't have that opportunity. My dad was in such a small town. He did not know there were other people than White people. He knew, but he never seen someone of color until he was like 17, late teens.

[Matthew] I didn't know that.

[Kelly] He hadn't seen another person of another color, another anything. You can ask him. You can ask him. So that was a very limited perspective, and just because he's now, he's in the world. He's in the South, but we went to our school, I don't know if I'm supposed to say the name of it? Okay, of Westwood [pseudonym]. We had a huge diversity. I was involved in theater, and so a lot of different cultures. I got to experience a lot of Hindu culture. Whenever I'd go on sleepovers, we'd eat their food and learn their religion, and so I grew up with it as almost as a second nature. So, coming to public school now is a kind of a shock because no one else has kind of had that cultured experience, and so that's been something that this class kind of brought back to me, and so now I can learn about their lives. Now I see how different it is for other people because I had never known that that was different, out of the ordinary to grow up that way.

We know a bit of it because my grandmother and I, that was something that we used to do together, and so from Denmark, we kind of traced back and I've gone to all the sites, whatever, from where we came originally. I know it seems weird because everyone always mistakes us for Irish because of the flaming red hair.

[Matthew] Yeah, we're like, oh. Yeah, they're actually like super nice as you say, and somehow, she knows a bunch of redhead facts. You know, it's actually a curse to be blonde. Redheads are supposed to be blondes but were malformed. Mutation of a gene. And then our mom is from Croatia, our mom's family. Mom's from Missouri.

[Kelly] It was quite a mix, and the Denmark side was pretty recent. I want to say two or three generations above us, I believe. We had grandparents around when we were growing up. They were from Kansas and then Missouri. My grandma on my dad's side,

she was heavily involved in more of the culture side of things, and so we'd go through the family trees, and she had pictures on the wall. Yeah, they've been almost everywhere, so they were big travelers. And that was one of the things that she left us with. Different things from all around the world. She kept track of everything.

[Matthew] They have been everywhere in the United States, they've been to China and kind of different places. We rarely got to see them because they're in Missouri, but we saw all the ones in Kansas more often. So, my background is pretty much the same as Kelly, but I had some things different about school. We started out at Honor school [pseudonym] and then we switched over to Westwood, and we really liked Westwood because they diversified quite a bit, and we got to learn not only about other languages but about religion, which I thought that was a really big aspect. And, it was interesting seeing the difference between our school now and Westwood because the environments are totally different. And, at Westwood, a lot of them were very cocky, but we weren't quite sure why. Yeah, and they were kind of, well, everyone there was very successful at something whether it's sports or academics. And, I don't know, it's a mix of a lot of things. I remember 8th grade like, almost everyone in my science class was Asian. I think there were three White kids. And we were wondering why it looked so different for a while. And barely, anyone shared our opinion on politics, and so we would have to debate hard against certain people.

[Kelly] Everyone was very proud of their culture there. People there follow stereotypes quite a bit, and so their cultural stereotypes. It's kind of funny, so that what their success was in or was according to their stereotype, which was actually pretty interesting. Yeah, I was, while a lot of it was Hindu it's because I was a nerd and so if

you were there, if you were White especially redheads and a girl, you were not expected to take the honor's program classes. I was the only one in my class. Also, mostly males, and of Indian origin. I didn't realize that we were the minority until we came to this school. I did the statistics. I've looked it up, we're about 60 to 40. It was close. It was really, really close. Yeah. But we didn't have a mix with the Latin side of things. We did not have that hardly at all. I've noticed that this class helped with that too, speaking up, but more of the debate side of things. It's because you can really understand the 'why.' That was really interesting. It's kind of like sitting here and then going on back through all our background and thinking, "Wow." Now I kind of see what that was about. Yeah, and so we have a lot of bilingual friends here, or at least I do, but it's a completely different language than it was up there because it was Hindi, and it was all sorts of different little things, so it's very interesting.

[Matthew] Yeah, it's like there, they always wanted to be number one, whether it's putting someone else down or whether it's just being the best, but the majority will try and put you down. I mean, a lot of times, certain people in class didn't feel like they could contribute, and I was one of those people because I was worried the response I'd get from the class, and so that did affect my learning a little bit because I didn't feel like I could ask certain questions. I was in the middle school so mostly the high school was a lot worse than the middle school. Kelly had it a lot worse. And she experienced a lot more of that than I did. If you're a girl, that's a little bit more of a stressful time.

[Kelly] It wasn't high school for me. Yeah, because you knew the salaries of everyone's parents and that matters to students. So, I felt like I was in the minority and afraid to speak out. Yeah, we even had a chant where you had to say certain things. No

one really understood culture there either, but they thought they did. And so, they would do little chants from like indigenous people where they thought that they were from, and it was weird. It was really, bizarre. So, when we came to this class it was wild. Oh yes. I'm sitting there like, "What the heck? No one's raising their hand. People are not scared." It's weird. I think it was great to take the class with Matthew. It was, it was cool. Just because I think we had a similar background, but we were able to bring in different stuff of how we studied, how we remembered things and played off of each other in class.

Based upon their discussion about their backgrounds, I had Kelly and Matthew discuss their thoughts about culture now after taking the human geography class.

[Matthew] Well, I think the main thing that everyone can get is the visual things, like oh, festivals and parties, and certain like Day of the Dead, and everybody can usually see that and understand part of it, but they don't really know the basis behind that and the knowledge of really like the underlying themes. There would be their religion and the reason being the customs and culture of the country. But also, as I said before, religion is under that. As I talked about before, religion is so important to cultures. So is their type of economy. Which goes back to language, again. But, I could just go through all the units and say that fits under it and that fits under it and that fits under it. It's like everything. Oh, and it really helped me in Spanish as well. I knew somethings that I learned in the human geography that helped me in Spanish like the sound shifts and cognate stuff.

[Kelly] Language, religion, migration, folk and pop culture, economics. It is about everything. I didn't realize that before but now I see it everywhere. Migration hit

home. And I think that's a big reason of why there's still many variations of religion. There are variations of different events and so that was cool. Urban was a new thing for me. Because that was a new thing about this class, it was because I'd taken maybe a few sciences like that where it was cumulative. But to the degree where you had to string classes together, we are still going over the very beginning stuff and the core on the day before the final test. It all came together under that big umbrella. That was cool to me. So, I kind of learned a new understanding of how to piece everything together. I learned to string the concepts together. It even helped with pre-calculus being able to string concepts in the equations.

Kelly and Matthew expanded on content that they learned in human geography that changed the way they look at culture.

[Kelly] The African unit really stood out for me. Political structures, political but then it was Africa mainly for me. And immigration and populations from the videos we watched and the articles we read. That was the immigration. And then, in the beginning, I want to say I realize what makes a society, so that's when it clicked for me. Kind of everything came together about different realms. And so now when I look at politics either at home or with other people, I'm kind of thinking of where they are and their stage of building a civilization and development. And so that's what my biggest takeaway was. And so that was really interesting.

[Matthew] I think it's interesting looking at Africa and a lot of those countries. But I thought China and India were interesting too because you'd see parts where their economy's like some of the most successful in a year of biggest growth. But then there's parts where, in the country, they're starving, and it is like really China is trying to pose

like it's one of the biggest powers in the world nowadays but really parts of it are in terrible shape. Also, language and religion and how big a relation they had. And, really it is interesting seeing how people were like ideological concepts where it's like, do you believe in Christianity, or Islam or something just based on where all the civilization started and how the language and the religion intertwined from there and kept spreading outward. In addition to all the dialects, you see how important language is for concepts and culture. Like some languages don't have a concept for savings because they don't have a concept for future. I thought it was interesting because it's like whenever you're talking about becoming bilingual and learning other languages, I never quite understood how one language would be easier than the other. Because I'm like it's still starting from zero and going forward. But really it does make sense and that if you don't know certain words in your vocabulary it changes how you think. And the Gullah people and their language. I didn't know anything about that or them and now I know about their pidgin language. I thought it was interesting and it made so much sense after you learn about it.

[Kelly] That was an interesting thing to me, because one of my biggest things as a kid was how did that culture get there, and why do they speak that language. And so, to see how the language tree branches back to a native tongue was the coolest thing to me. There were parts in different books that explained it like the Bible or other books, and that languages could have a common root, was interesting. And so, I kind of, understood more of where my friends are coming from with being bilingual. You wouldn't understand it, if it's not in your language. It never clicked to me what they were talking about until this class, talking to other people, and realizing that really you don't have words that we can explain things to them and they can't really explain certain things to us.

[Kelly] I thought I was kind of well-versed and then didn't really understand how much I was lacking until I kind of took the class and understood the different mind frames, the whys, and the hows, and what is culture. Because like I was thinking not many people know a lot about culture nor really taught what culture means. I didn't know what culture meant until I took this class and I've had years and years of advanced histories. It's kind of washed over. When the whole course is on culture you really understand. Like I said, no one in my English class could answer what culture was. But I thought about it, in the beginning of this class I couldn't have told anyone what culture is. Now I am getting that, and was able to define culture in my English class.

Kelly and Matthew shared how specific content knowledge from the human geography class that changed the way they look at culture.

[Kelly] That was a great class especially coming into a new school and principal to new teachers and everything. It was really, helpful. It has been like peeling back the layers of an onion. It already has helped a lot. I feel like if you're in a dark room almost and certain lights go off and you can, kind of, see to the end of that little light and then the next little light goes off, and then the next little light goes off, all of a sudden, it was like, "Wow, I am a little further down the road in my understanding. The more I think back on certain things I learned here, the more I bring it to other classes. I wanted to say on the way to school. I remember seeing types of fences and pointing it out to Matthew and my mom and identifying what types of fence they were. It was the day of the folk/pop culture. And so that played a role in helping me with that.

I also remember the urban unit and the organization of cities. I'm thinking about that now because I had that course. I didn't understand it at first but then I saw it when

we went through Atlanta. We went through the timeline of city development and then I saw it for myself and it all made so much sense.

I also went abroad my eighth-grade year and got to see France and England. I wish I had taken this class before I had gone because I would be so much more aware of things now and appreciated it more. We are planning a trip to Croatia for my dad's 50th birthday and now I can't wait because I will know so much more and see more things on the landscape. I think I have a more tolerant view of other cultures now and see things in a different light and will be able to understand about cultural differences when I travel this time. I think I am more well-rounded in that respect now after taking the class. I think part of that was the bantering that occurred in the classroom on culture brought that more into perspective. And so, after learning about culture in here, and differences in cultures I understand so much more. Even though we are different, I've got a new understanding to listen and understand others.

[Matthew] I was making more and more in-depth connections. I mean, we learned quite a bit. I'm interested in learning more about European countries and the unions and immigration policies. I remember I was going down to a golf tournament, and it was a championship in Orlando and we're looking around in Celebration, Florida. I remember from our book there is a section on it and I believe it was in the urban chapter and it is called new urbanism. I thought, oh we talked about this and now I am seeing it on the landscape. And it also made me think of all the sector models and all the different things. And especially in Atlanta, I remember the one that's Buckhead and everything, the Urban Realms model. It was great because I was seeing it and thinking about at the same time. We saw that too in Glenwood Park in Atlanta. I was able to see

how Atlanta has sprawled and that too in places like Glenwood park are going to be more of the norm. Then there was the unit on agriculture. We really looked at differences and what impacts you. I remember in our food unit, whenever we were talking about GMO's and how some countries ban them. Kelly was telling me about Europe and France and how the food's outstanding. Yeah and it is interesting. And like, how there's always that one fundamental belief in certain religions and how like there's the site in Jerusalem where it all comes together and have like our Muslims, and Christians, and Jews all think that place is sacred.

Kelly and Matthew commented on what it was like to take the class together.

[Matthew] Well, it helps a lot because Kelly is very smart and I've always, kind of been curious to see how she goes about with her studying ways because she's book smart, but sometimes she has her moments. Yeah, she doesn't know her lefts and rights, that's what worries me about her. Yeah, so, I kind of got to learn a little bit from her but also, I think we kind of bounced ideas off each other and how I got to hear her understanding of the topic and read her mind. And especially whenever we're doing vocab, we remember certain things in certain ways. We both have to have a visual. Yeah, we'd have to have a picture of how the things would interact and how it would all come together. And especially this class, it actually mattered. And I know this sounds crazy, but I mean in other classes, like at Westwood, I'd memorize the vocab and as soon as I was done with that portion of the test, I would forget it. It would never come up again unless I'd be doing science, it wouldn't really matter. But here, the vocab was the main concept, which is interesting because it's like, you just look at something and you'd be like, "Oh, I had that down," and then you get to the book definition and you're like, "What the heck does

that mean?" We both come home from Westwood irritated and tired about other stuff. It was kind of hard to be nice to each other. But here, we had each other to talk to. And I feel like we're so close. I feel like, honestly, she is a year ahead version of me, or I'd like to think so. It's nice because I know, like, I kind of need that push to keep studying. Like even now, it's like hard for me to keep working and it is nice to have her because I'd be like, "I got to beat Kelly." It was a friendly competition. It also led to big discussion with our mom and dad at the dinner table. We even texted dad during class and had a banter going on. So that was a lot of fun.

[Kelly] Matthew is right. I really don't know my lefts and rights. It runs in my family. No, I really don't know what that's about. We really did have bigger discussions. We could explain the meaning of things and talk about it. Yeah that was kind of new because Matthew has different opinions about things and took different things away from the class and sometimes it was the opposite of what I thought. It would then continue at home. Yeah, there were a lot of cool things about taking the class with a sibling. We had a very different relationship before this year. We weren't as close but after the class we are now. I think a good part of it was this class. But in different ways. Because we had very different lives at Westwood. And so, I think after you go through a class together, a semester together, and you can bounce ideas off one another, you become closer. I think that there's a greater understanding between Matthew and me. I think we have always been close. I don't really see other people that act like that. But I think it's because we take the time to think about where the other person is coming from? And, yes it was like a race like Matthew said, but a friendly race. It also led to some really great discussions at home like Matthew said. That or my dad would bring up something like, "America's

number one.” And he had this we are superior here in America attitude rather than being accepting of other people. It was kind of a thing where we said, “Dad, let's think about that.” And Matthew was like, “Yeah, let's think about that.” So, he and I got to tag team him. That is what this class does for you. We did get to mess with our dad and as Matthew said we even got into on a text during class. So, you can say that my family learned a lot about culture and human geography from us.

Post-Reflexion: Kelly and Matthew

Kelly and Matthew also discussed their background and experience with culture. They had more experience with culture and other cultures in their old school than many of the other participants, as their former school was culturally diverse. This gave them a unique perspective on culture. Despite this background, they were able to recognize that they learned more about culture from taking the human geography class. Kelly claimed that she was able to see that culture involves many more things than dress and habits. She cited several concrete examples of culture especially about how Africa stood out to her as important, politically. Matthew cited concrete examples of culture that he learned from taking the class, like customs, and the language in which people converse, but he also said he was seeing what we learned on the landscape and making bigger connections. Kelly and Matthew provided useful information that will serve to push the conversation about culture to the next level.

Kelly and Matthew's interview happened much like the way they behaved when they had the class. They bantered back and forth during the interview, often completing each other's thoughts. This occurred frequently when they were in the human geography class and I believe that is what helped them to make deeper connections culture. They admitted they spoke to their parents frequently about what they were learning and their thoughts on culture. The atmosphere during the interview was pleasant and uplifting. Kelly and Matthew are two of the positive and expressive students that I have taught. It was easy to talk to them and it didn't feel like an interview. As I delve into this interview process, I am beginning to get my bearings on how to conduct a good interview.

Georgia

Georgia is a lovely rising 9th grader. She always came to class with a positive attitude and great enthusiasm. She was naturally curious about learning and asked many questions during the class. She was the one student that I think had the most “lightbulb” moments, those times when she came to a deeper understanding of a concept. She

intimated to me that she was nervous going into the interview, as she felt that she might say something wrong. I assured her that what she thinks is not wrong, and I wanted her to speak freely. What follows is Georgia's understanding of her experience with culture in the human geography class.

Georgia spoke about her background prior to taking the human geography class.

So, I was born close to here. I was born in another part of Georgia, but I've lived here, I've lived in the same house my whole entire life. Yeah, which is uncommon like I don't know what it's like to move. Yeah, which is another reason why I haven't been exposed to as much as other kids that were in our focus group. So, I've always lived in the same house. I live with my mom and my dad, and I have a little sister. She's about 3 years younger than me. I have been in the same place my whole life; I've grown up in the same church. My dad is an associate pastor. That's his job. My mom is teacher here at this school, and I've been in the same school system. I went to school at Southgate [pseudonym] which is, you know, close to here. I've been coming here to the high school since I was in kindergarten, you might have seen me around here sometimes. Then so I went to Main Middle School [pseudonym] with pretty much all the same people from elementary school. Now, I'm here now at NG with pretty much the same people. My dad is from Carroll county and all his family pretty much lives there. My great-grandmother and my grandparents, who have been married forever, and my great grandfather passed away, but my great grandmother is still alive. She's my favorite person.

My grandmother is so wise. I love her. I love talking to her. Well, ever since I've been like a little girl, we've gone to her house for every single person in my family's

birthday. She lives in this small house kind of in the middle of nowhere. There are a bunch of pastures around, like just stereotypical southern house, like that's my family. In my literature class we were reading the book *Tuesdays with Morrie*. I had to do a project where I had to interview someone that I thought had a lot of wisdom. I went to her house last week and I interviewed her, and I just learned a lot of things about her like the way she grew up. She grew up on the same land. She was like the oldest of seven kids maybe. She had a brother die from, like a fever or something like some disease, and she just told me stories about basically living on nothing and they were very poor. She had to make her clothes and like all kinds of stuff. Her background made her into the person that she is now, like how family-oriented she is, and how involved she is in her church and how when we go to her house like there's so much food on the table like when we're done like it looks like no one even ate anything. She's just come such a long way like from having nothing and having to do everything for herself. I really admire her for that.

On my mom's side, there is my great-grandmother, Granny Helga. She came from Germany. She was young probably less than 10. Granny Helga raised my mom in Tennessee. Yes, I do have family from Germany. My mom's side is very into ancestry. Yes, and, I'm related to Robert E. Lee, closely. Yeah. my grandma, my mom's mom, her last name is Rosa Lee. So, like it's really close. He was one of her grandfather's, I think. I think on my dad's side they're Irish and maybe Cherokee Indian.

Georgia continued discussing her exposure to other cultures prior to taking the class.

Okay my grandpa had three wives. His third wife, I mean, I guess she's not really my mom's stepmom. She didn't raise her though. So, one of my grandpa's wives is

Filipino. She's from the Philippines. She goes back all the time, but she lives here. I don't see her a whole lot, but when I did see her growing up, I thought she was so weird. Okay, so we went to visit her in December. It was the day after Christmas because she's missing an arm, and she can't drive. She is very vocal and sometimes says weird things. She started talking about me and telling my parents I need to be in like beauty pageants, and then she but then she turned around and started talking about my sister and pointing out her acne and stuff and like right in front of her. But, my mom's like, "Okay, she didn't mean it" and just different things that she'll say sometimes or a little like, we wouldn't say that here.

I don't think I have really a lot of knowledge of other cultures. Since taking this class, I have noticed more about culture and friends that I have from different cultures. I do have a friend that I swim with and we've gotten to be pretty close. She and her family are from South Korea. I've just been a lot more fascinated with her culture. At first, I didn't really like to ask her questions about it. I was kind of like scared too for some reason. A few weeks ago, I just started asking her about different things, and she wasn't like offended or anything. I don't know why I thought she'd be offended. I'm a lot more fascinated with it now.

Georgia commented on specific content knowledge on culture that she learned from talking the class and how that knowledge could be beneficial to her later.

My favorite chapter, maybe it was because it was one of the first ones, but like I really liked population. Which is why now it seems like a random one. I felt like it started to make sense I was thought "Wow" and now when we're watching the news or I see something going on in a certain country, I know why things are happening maybe

based on their population or religion. I didn't realize how tied together a lot of the religions are, how they have shared sacred sites and founders. My dad went to college to study the Bible. So, I've been able to talk to him more about religion, it is kind of giving me a little bit more education of my religion and other peoples religions. He started explaining things, and I was like, "Oh yeah, because I learned about this in the class. I've been able to engage more in talking to him about that stuff too, and I didn't even know things about Christianity about how it diffused and how closely tied Islam is to Christianity. That kind of surprised me. I started noticing things I didn't realize or think about before and that was one of them.

I believe it will help with interacting with people of other cultures and people of my own. And just being more aware of what their culture can help, and the ways I can be a better person towards them and be more understanding of who they are. Also, it helped with setting goals for myself and not trying to stay where I am. I know that exposing yourself to different things makes you better and it expands who you are. And, I guess kind of the fact that I realize that there's so much more than just this. It makes me want to do more with my life. And, now I am seeing things we talked about in class on the landscape and calling it out when I see it. We were driving down the interstate a few weeks ago but we just kept seeing gas stations. I was like "look at all of this *placelessness*." And my parents said, "what is that?" And I was, like, "Have you ever noticed that, everywhere looks the same, when you're driving down the interstate?" My parents said, "I guess so." So that was fun and cool to inform them.

I have decided that I want to travel and see the things we talked about in class. I've thought about Germany, because that's where my ancestors are from. But I really

don't have one place. I love Europe, of course. I would also love to go to Israel and see some of the sites we talked about in the religion chapter. I have a cousin on my mom's side. He decided to become a missionary, so he went to Israel for 2 years? He's like me. He grew up in the same house, but back up in Tennessee. And, he came back and 2 months later he found a job in New York near Brooklyn, in a Jewish community. And, then we read about all the Jews living in an ethnic neighborhood near there.

So, I have also found that I was using some of the stuff we learned in human geography in my other classes. In one of my classes we had a vocabulary test on different Latin and Greek roots, and I thought we learned about that in human geo too. Like interfaith and intrafaith boundaries. Then I remember one day we were talking about like the bubonic plague or something, and then in two of my other classes we talked about the bubonic plague on the same day. I thought it was kind of creepy, like did they plan that, but kind of cool too. And, your stories helped me remember stuff so when I got to the test I just thought about those stories, and I remembered it better. I know that I will find more things that I will use in the rest of high school and probably after. I can't wait to see what happens.

Georgia spoke about the "Aha" moments she experienced from taking the human geography class that changed the way she looked at culture.

I haven't been raised to think that I'm superior to other people or that I haven't been taught in any ways like that, but I mean, it's just that what I've been exposed to and I don't think I've ever thought that but like I feel like now I just kind of appreciate other people. When we don't have knowledge about other cultures, there's no way to know. It's almost like now I have like the full story of things. I don't look at other cultures and

say that is weird now, because I am aware of differences and tolerant of them. Yeah, it's kind of interesting like from the way I've been raised. I remember one day we went to Six Flags and it was Muslim Day. I was probably about like eight or nine. I did not know there was such a thing as Islam. There were all these people like on the ground praying. And like just singing all these songs that I remember. I still remember that today just being like, "What are these people doing?" I had a conversation with my parents, and I was just like asking them so many questions and just like different things. Now looking back on it, I see all these things that I thought were like so weird, now it doesn't really faze me anymore. I see it as their culture.

I'm learning about like the "why" of so many things. I guess I've just known little things, but I've never thought like, "Why is it this way or why," why things are grown here and not here. I definitely look at that differently too. Even my grandmother was talking to me and telling me about the jobs that were around where she was little and what agriculture they did. Because we were talking about agriculture whenever I interviewed her, so I asked because I was curious. I thought "Oh yeah that makes a lot that makes sense!" It's because of this. I guess I feel a lot more educated when people talk to me about things in the world or just even like watching the news. And that's always what's neat to me because I imagine kids all grow up differently, right? I lived in a little bubble. But, that bubble is getting bigger now after taking the class.

I don't feel like I've ever had like a strong desire to like go places, but now I want to go everywhere. My family travels every now and then. We went on a cruise in February to Mexico. So, I feel like I would really love to travel more, and that's kind of something that I really know I want to do in my future and experience different cultures

because they're fascinating to me now. So, I would like to go to some place and rebuild it up. We also sponsor a child in Haiti. And it's amazing when you write in the letters and say, "Well, we bought a goat with your money" or "We did this" and you know it's a little thing but when you think about it just like having a goat. Just something that small makes all the difference.

I still say I had a limited amount of understanding of culture. Yeah, I probably am a one on that before I took the class, and now I'm probably like eight or seven. Yeah, I've still got a long way to go. Well, compared to where I was it seems like I learned a lot. I know I probably there's a lot more to learn. And, when I came to this class I mean, I was expecting to not like it honestly. I mean, because it was an AP and it's the first AP class I've ever taken, and I just was like I don't know if I am going to like it. I didn't really know if I was going to be kind of fascinated by it and the topic and if I was going to enjoy it. I guess I thought it was going to be boring maybe? It's really surprised me. It wasn't boring at all. It's completely the opposite. I found the more challenging material were probably the ones where I learned more about the topic, like the language chapter.

Georgia commented on her understanding of culture prior to taking the class and what she thinks her understanding of culture is now after taking the class.

Yeah, I guess I just thought it was dress and food because I don't know, I guess it's more than just, like, countries? But now I know there's a lot more to it. Now I would include so much more like religion, language, urban, and agriculture. And, the pop culture is interesting too because this place is just consumed with pop culture, then in other parts of the world, you almost don't see any of it. I didn't always realize the impact

that our country has on other parts of the world too. I mean it's pop culture in a vague sense. It's tougher in our country too because pop culture gets in the way of religion and morals and different stuff like that. While some countries fight it. There is so much more, and I know that I am not giving everything. I will say it is just like everything we talked about in class.

Post-Reflexion: Georgia

Georgia also experienced changes in the way she looked at culture after taking the human geography class. She admitted that she didn't come to the class with a great deal of knowledge about culture. She said that she now realizes, after taking the class that culture is religion, language, urban environments, agriculture, and folk/pop culture. She made some deeper connections with culture after taking the class and noted that she now saw what she learned on the landscape when she was out with her parents. She even informed her parents what placelessness is and that gave her an immense thrill to be able to teach her parents about something that she had learned in the human geography class. Again, as Georgia is one of the younger participants, her answers were much less nuanced and more concrete. However, Georgia commented that she did learn so much more about culture after taking the class.

Georgia is a quiet, shy young lady and I was a little worried that I wouldn't be able to get her to open up about her experiences and conceptualization of culture. She admitted that she was afraid that she would say something wrong and ruin the study, but I assured her that she could never say anything wrong that would ruin the study. In fact, as we got going in the interview, Georgia lightened up and started to talk freely. I was amazed at some of the revelations that she had about and her perceptions of culture. She was the participant that I feel grew the most in her thought patterns about culture from taking the class.

Postscript:

I wanted to add this postscript here after receiving the AP exam scores. Georgia scored a 5, the highest one can receive on the AP exam. I believe that is great evidence of enduring understandings that show she did experience a profound encounter with the phenomenon.

Tess

Tess, a rising senior, is a brilliant young lady who has a definite plan for her future. She wants to become a medical doctor and study degenerative diseases. She is

well on her way after completing 10 AP classes in her high school career. She is a highly motivated learner often doing outside research on subjects that sparked her curiosity. She took human geography 3 years ago and during the course tried to teach herself Esperanto after learning about it in class. Tess can speak to the value of the class in helping her develop deeper understandings. What follows is her story.

Tess discussed her background and experience with other cultures.

I was born in a rural town in Virginia, and we go back and visit it every summer. And it's rural. There's like, 2,000 people that live there and a ton of cows. It's so different from where I live, which is very suburban now. But, after a couple years, we moved down to the Atlanta area, Metro Atlanta area, and started school. I always went to public schools. Both of my parents believed in education, especially higher education, and both have graduate degrees. And they really encourage me to work hard in school and try new extracurriculars. So, as I got into middle school, I was doing multiple sports. I played an instrument. I was good at school. I was really passionate about my education, and that progressed into high school, to where I started taking AP classes. The first being AP human geography and that really got me excited about culture, and the world, and it made me realize how much where I was from, has shaped me and how grateful I am for such a nice educational experience. Because you know, if I had grown up in that rural Virginian town, I wouldn't have had the same educational experience. I wouldn't be where I am today.

So, my freshman year, I joined the STEM program at my high school, which is a very difficult program, and that's an understatement. But I started off my freshman year taking sophomore and junior level math and science classes. I took chemistry and

physics as a freshman. I took 3 years of math compressed into one year, and I was happy with how my science and math classes were going, and I was doing well in them, but I wasn't getting the liberal arts experience I wanted. And, my mom actually encouraged me to take AP human geography. We weren't sure how I was going to do in an AP class as a freshman, but we were just trying to diversify my high school experience, and not make it so stiff and linear. It's helped me think in a different way, and it's helped me approach my science and math AP classes in a more critical thinking approach. I don't know how to describe it, but more people can just see the problem for how it is, and I can see the problem, and how I can change it.

My experience with culture was quite minimal. The most exotic place I have ever been is Florida. I mean, growing up, my parents had told me about their travels because they traveled a lot in college. They got to study abroad, and it's like, I want to do that too. Somehow, the idea got into my head after AP human that I was like, "I'm going to study abroad in India someday." I actually applied for a scholarship to study abroad. I didn't get it, but I was like, "I could study in India for a semester at one of their phenomenal schools." And, AP human kind of started my cultural understanding. I really want to travel. I value experiences that are different than what I'm used to. So, I'm into trying new foods, and new things, and if we are in Atlanta, we'll go to Little Five Points, which is like a bunch of miniature cities, like micro-cultures in a city. Just so I can experience parts of the world in my own locale. I've never really been anywhere, but I've always really liked history and geography. I like learning about other places because it's just so different from what I know, but when I took AP human it changed all of that. I was able to learn at least vicariously by taking the class.

Tess spoke about specific content knowledge on culture that she learned from taking the class and how it has already benefited her.

I would say foreign languages. I already love English. I love reading. AP Lang has really helped to develop that further, but now I can appreciate other languages for what they are and how they are equally as complex as English, if not more so in some. Like, I was learning about tonal languages, and it's just totally different from what I know, and it is amazing how people can understand and develop that skill. Just like I can develop my English-speaking abilities. During the class, I tried to teach myself Esperanto after we saw a video discussing it. It was formulated so that it would be easier to learn than any other language because it's based on something like French, and Dutch, and English. Dr. Esperanto tried to combine a bunch of like Romance languages with German and I think Slavic languages to make it easier for a lot of people to learn so that you could have a lingua franca.

The language you speak causes you to think in a certain way. You think based on norms set by other people speaking that language, so I mean if you were to go to a different culture, a different country the way that people express their thoughts even in English might be totally different than the way you might. Just because they're more expressive, less expressive, more blunt, and especially on college tours when you're taking a tour with an international student he'll be so blunt with you. For example, I was touring this one school, I was touring a school, which is in Atlanta but it's right on the outskirts of Atlanta. It's a gorgeous area and there's a lot of international students coming in and one of the people who was conducting my tour was Chinese, and she was like yeah most of the time we have six to seven hours of homework each night and it's nothing big,

ah it was worse in high school. I was like what? She was so honest that it kind of surprised me. I know you go into a college tour thinking okay they're going to tell me what I want to hear, but they are also going to tell me the truth about the school, but she did not convince me to want to go to the school. She was so honest she's like, "it's really hard here, there's not a big social scene." I was like oh my gosh you are not selling the school. But, academically it's a phenomenal school.

I see this class helping in the future in several ways. Well it has already helped me. In literature class last year within the first few weeks we had to write about what we think culture is. Because I had this class, I was able to write a more concise, accurate description. Because once I could apply terminology and understanding of human geography, which encapsulates so many topics that I could actually understand why my parents took me to museums when I was a kid. They took us to Broadway musicals, and art galleries, and ballets. And at first, I was like, "Oh man, this is cool. I'm living the life." But, then I understood why they did that. They did it to promote cultural awareness even though we couldn't travel.

Since taking this class, I have such an appreciation for our religion, for our culture, what we build on the landscape. And yeah, most of the art and the music was created first, out of necessity so that we can aesthetically be pleased by our senses, but also just because it's a cultural thing. The reason that people should take this class, is because there really is a topic in it for everyone because it is such broad topic. Culture that is. It's broad and it can encapsulate every interest of every person because we'd have one chapter where I was just enamored with language or agriculture. And then we'd have the next, where it was based on historical happenings and the person sitting next to me

would be like, “Oh, I know about this. I read *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.” We had a varsity athlete in my class, and we'd talk about how sports evolve in foreign countries, and I'm like, “Oh, I think that's kind of cool.” I like that sport. It's just, there's really something in this class for everyone if you take it.

In the future, I'm going to apply the class by traveling especially in college and grad school and experiencing the world and understanding it and appreciating everything that's around me that I have yet to see. I want to go to Thailand because I really love the food. It's gorgeous there. The people are very polite. The houses are nice, and it's an environmentally friendly area. They're in water conservation mode all the time. You can pass by a lot of farm areas where they're growing rice, and like I've never seen a rice farm before. You can see Asian elephants. Well, I mean that's not the main reason I want to go. It's mostly for the beaches, the cool architecture that's different. Everything over there is contemporary, where tourists go at least. The people, I've never met a person from Thailand. I want to see the things we learned about in class.

Finally, I want to go to Poland because we have family scattered over there. I was just so curious about my heritage that I looked up everything, and I realized that wow, I'm really into one of the generals that helps conquer the Italians, and gave Poland its land back, and the Polish national anthem actually mentions this guy that I'm distantly related to. I've learned the Polish national anthem. Then I learned basic phrases in Polish, and I got all of this information, one from my dad, but also from my grandfather who spoke Polish. His father had immigrated from Poland, and actually served in World War I as a submarine captain. He was fluent in Polish, German, and English. So yes, I

want to go and travel and see where my ancestors are from, something that this class did for me.

Tess explained how she felt she had progressed from pre-class reflective, thought about culture to post-class reflective, thought about culture as a result of taking the class.

I mean that happens more often than you think. You go in public you see people who are from a different area speaking a different language and dress differently rather than judging them you just kind of think about how their culture and environments shaped them versus how yours shaped you, and you learn to appreciate who they are as a result. I've gained a lot of friends from cultures foreign to my own, and I mean when I go out to the barn or on a long road trip I'll see a field burning. It's like oh, *slash and burn agriculture*. Little terms will just pop up, and I'm like oh I kind of remember that now. Because now you have a name for it. You start to notice it on the landscape and you are like that's cool, but you never really understood the phenomenon, but now you do.

That speaks to the big concept of culture we talked about in the focus group. Culture is an umbrella that encapsulates pretty much every aspect of humans and most prominently it's religion, language, habit, architecture, and agriculture. Okay I'm going through the chapters in the geography book now, but it is okay because everything that shapes who we are as humans is part of culture. It could even be abstract too because it could be just one experience and that's part of your culture but that's why when someone says that there is a cultured person it's often based on how much they've traveled or what experiences they've had.

When I was growing up my parents taught me that culture is a pretty broad subject, but I had a better idea coming out of human geography what that broad subject

actually consisted of because I mean my parents would tell me about how they lived in England and how it was although they spoke English and had similar habits it was different culture over there. People were very different, and they told me not to judge anyone based on where they were from. And, I was like okay, cool. I didn't really take it too seriously until I got older and I began middle school and early high school when I started to understand what culture actually was. It wasn't just one big thing. It's not easily definable for that reason. It's pretty abstract I guess. This course is a great course to expose them to a broader concept of culture. This class has something for everyone to learn. Especially when it comes to culture because I'm more appreciative of other cultures. I'm more understanding of other cultures, and you know what goes into their culture. I think it is important for people to have that knowledge.

I think that this class helps people to really dig deeper into concepts, especially culture, and when you take more classes that are related into liberal arts. I know when people think of liberal arts they don't think of biology, but biology is exactly that because it studies populations and the way populations and how they are altered because of the environment and migration like we did in human geography. Also, psychology, the study of the mind and how people function, works perfectly. It's in tandem with human geography because you study people think and different cultures think in different ways. That was the class I took after AP human, so it was quite sequential, it was nice. It is also related to statistics, because we looked at population statistics in human geography and we calculated population densities of certain countries. It's just a broad topic too. It related to everything and environmental. I didn't realize how much humans impacted the world until one, I took this class, and secondly, I took environmental, and then AP Lang

just because you study literature and how people speak and write. So, I believe that people need to be more aware, I'm sure, of other cultures. Especially now that America is becoming as diverse as it is, especially in cities. I know that we live near Atlanta, which is quite diverse. This class helps them to do that.

Post-Reflexion: Tess

Tess was quite articulate at explaining what she thinks culture is and how she benefitted from taking the class. She sought out opportunities to learn about culture even though she admitted that she has little experience with culture prior to the class. She provided examples of how she experienced learning about culture in the class, especially the language unit noting that she even tried to teach herself Esperanto after learning about it in class. Further, she made connections to her learning, often citing that she saw evidence of what she learned on the landscape. Tess also cited using concepts from human geography in her other classes indicating that she benefitted from what she learned in the human geography class.

Tess was extremely easy to talk to during the interview sessions. She has a confidence about herself and her knowledge of subjects that comes across when she speaks. Her information was of importance to me as she had taken the class 2 years prior to the study and was able to provide some thoughts on how she thinks she benefitted from taking the course. Tess's interview was the first interview with a student who had taken the class in the past and could discuss her thoughts on changes in her conceptualization of culture.

Jefferson

Jefferson, a rising senior, was by far my most interesting participant in terms of his background and cultural heritage. As you will discover in the following vignette, Jefferson's story is quite fascinating and possibly more common in the United States today than most know. He was very engaged in the dialogue and brought a very compelling angle to the discussion. He is an intelligent, ambitious young man that is determined to be successful. What follows is Jefferson's story.

Jefferson discussed his background and engagement with other cultures.

Hi, I'm Jefferson, my mom's side of the family is Taiwanese, they immigrated over to Taiwan during the Chinese revolution. My dad is Malaysian even though his

ethnicity is Indian, and they moved to Malaysia for a job opportunity. So, that is kind of, very diverse. I was born in Riverwood [pseudonym], Georgia. I grew up until the 3rd grade going to Odum [pseudonym], Charter School, then Williams [pseudonym] Elementary School. I didn't have an accent like I do now. I spoke like I guess with no accent or maybe a little southern accent, I guess.

I didn't even have any exposure to Chinese except, like say mom or grandma and Chinese because that's what I would call my relative. I didn't know the meaning behind what they were saying. I didn't really learn Chinese because my dad couldn't connect and speak it. We did learn a little through my mom, but then we'd forget because our community was all white except for another Asian family down the road. We lived in a very White sub-subdivision. We were one of the only two families in the church that was non-White as well. Back then it was all White in this part of Georgia before people started immigrating in. I didn't really notice my racial difference until I went to Taiwan because as a kid we grew up where the majority was White and then me and John, my brother were the only Asian ones, maybe one or two Blacks, but that's it. There were barely any Hispanics. So, we didn't really like notice race until we moved to Taiwan in 3rd grade we moved there. We went to KAS which is Kash American School [pseudonym]. It is an American school system, an international school. Apparently, it's part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) because the outreach programs, a lot of ambassadors stay there. Then we stayed in that American school system. They had one hour of Chinese, so that's how we learned our Chinese. The next year we went to the municipal school since our family couldn't keep on paying because it's super expensive. And then we learned Chinese within 1 or 2 years and then that's when we were supposed

to come back for 6th grade, but I got to an art program, so I stayed there. It was one of the most prestigious art programs there. So, I stayed, and my brother stayed with me and then we came back to the United States in 9th grade because we think we should at least come back for high school before college, instead of just skipping into college because it was going to be harder as international students going back into the US education system even though I have dual citizenship. I have United States and Taiwan citizenship.

I am a first generation Asian American. Many people immigrated during the Chinese revolution if they could before that during the Ming or Qing Dynasty. So, my grandma was the first one to move there with her parents and so, my mother might be considered Taiwanese, but I don't know. I'm considered Taiwanese because your family must be in Taiwan for three generations before they considered Taiwanese. Then their passports say Taiwan. So, I guess that makes me a first-generation Taiwanese as well.

Jefferson discussed how he experienced culture shock when he went to Taiwan.

My brother John just stayed home. We couldn't even stay with our grandma because she wasn't that fluent in English. We had to stay with our aunt because, she worked at an international company, so she is somewhat bilingual, so she could speak to us. When we stayed with her for 2 months and then we came down to the south to go to KAS, the international school. And then so, we weren't really used to it, I guess, especially since we were going from the suburbs to the city. We went to the capital and then the second biggest city, so those are very highly populated areas. I say I'm still in love with the city because it's completely different than the suburbs. It was so completely different, not just language, cultural wise. Some stuff you can't do, some things you can do. For example, I'll give you the extreme case about how my great uncle can hit my

great aunt without any repercussions or anyone stopping him because he was the oldest and the elder of all the generations. And then for me, since I'm the oldest, I also get more money during New Year's Eve. I'm the first one to get the money and I have more responsibilities family wise. Anyone after the daughter is excluded because they get married out into another family, so the kids wouldn't be representative because my parents were divorced, so I am on the family tree and it continues the family line from there.

That's something interesting, like they completely cut off the daughter once she's married out. And then like the festivals, because we do have a lot of festivals, Chinese and at the KAS we celebrate both Chinese and American cultures since it is like a midway between Taiwan and US. There is like different cultural habits and just like language, culture, Chinese or US culture, but also like city and urban, I mean urban and the suburb cultures. Yeah, Asian cultures and Asia in general, I feel like Asians are touchier in a sense than the US. I mean physically. US people like to say like I love you more, are more passionate with their kids. But, I've seen guys sit on each other's lap and that's fine in Taiwan or even Korea or Japan and a lot of other places because it's culturally acceptable. So, big differences like the small things, I guess, add up. In Taiwan, even now if I did someone else a favor I'd still say thank you because I'm still feel like that is what we do in Taiwan. We are very polite with saying thank you. Unlike today, I helped a teacher tear down some posters and she said, "Thank you," I even responded with a thank you because that's my habit.

So, when we went to that school, we were so Americanized, so to speak. We grew up in America, and I had never been out of the United States. So, we went to the

municipal school because we had connections to get in because we were American. If you have connections, it is easy to get in and get stuff. At the municipal school, we were the only American or like non-Taiwanese people there I guess. And so, they let us cut in front of lines, they let us have all priorities even though we were not White or like Caucasian, but they still idolized Americans. We were given privileges, and we were also despised because of it, some people said you're lucky with like the lottery. The metaphor is the lottery because you get to be born in the US. Yeah, because a lot of people in the US don't realize how lucky they are to be in the US, but then once you go out, you live outside the US, there were some people who resented us for being from the US, but the majority still idolized us. Even sometimes when they were referring to westernized cultures or western celebrities they called them God and Goddesses in the sense of the Greek terms. They put God right after the girl or guy term making it. So, they really idolize Western.

Jefferson discussed his experience with other cultures.

At the KAS the international school, we had Russians, we had Australians. There were Russian there because their dad was there on some kind of business. So, they had like five siblings at KAS. There were also people there from New Zealand. But most were Americans whose parents worked in the embassy or some business. And, it was mostly the Americans who were idolized, not the Australians or the ones from the UK. When they think of Great Britain, they think of the royal family only.

As far as my knowledge of other cultures, I thought I was normal. Well, it's debatable because, when I got back to the US, because I've been back for like 5 years and in that 5 years, Newland [pseudonym] has become way more populated with diversity.

Most of my friends are now, they're, like, they all mixed, it's White, Indian, Asian and Black so like, it's interesting to see how diverse it is because from my experience it's just being known as we'd call Caucasian majority society versus the 100% Asian society. So, those were like the only cultural things I think I know. But when I came back there was more, uh, there was more diversity with, Latinos. Also, African-Americans. My ex-girlfriend is African-American. So, I have more cultural awareness, I guess.

Jefferson expounded on the times after taking the human geography course that he saw things on the landscape that he learned about in the class.

So, once I took the course, when I was thinking about culture as like the whole my thoughts were naiver, I guess, or like, not refined. But after human geography it became more refined, and you can become more analytical, like the different city models. I went from a suburb to an Asian open city to a US open city. Because those are two different city models. And then the small things that you notice as different like *placelessness*. There is *placelessness* in different parts of the US. But, if you go to a different country, the small things that you notice are different. Not just place that is different, but also the people and how they interact, you can definitely tell the difference.

For instance, I feel like it is that way in Taiwan. But that also might be because my background, because I lived with my grandma and she's traditional. She says, we have the white light skin because that means your white collar instead of blue collar. She's a teacher at the most prestigious high school for girls in the south, and she went to the only college that was available back then for women. So, she's very high up in social structure, because in Taiwan we really respect teachers. Like, they get pension from their salary without having to pay for it. So, we really respect our teachers that way. When

you go into a classroom, the whole class stands up and has to bow down and say hello, so, then upon the teacher agreeing with it, then you can sit down.

When they're going you also have to stand up and say thank you and then goodbye, then they leave the classroom then you sit down. So, we're very respectful of our teachers, so, she's very, high up in the social hierarchy, I guess. Even though our income was middle class, our social status was higher up in the middle class. So, we were invited to galas and stuff like that. So, there's differences in how they treat you differently. That is definitely different from what teachers are treated like in the US.

Looking back, I think about how my grandmother wasn't 100% okay with me having a Black girlfriend, even though she said she was. She is more open-minded except when it comes to her family and stuff. So, she would use different vocabulary words to say things. But, that's the beauty about languages, like the different vocab words you can use and synonyms with different connotations. That's one of the beautiful things about Chinese that they have more spectrum I guess, of each kind of word description. So, they have a broader spectrum of how you can describe things. So, I knew what she meant by the way she said it.

Jefferson spoke about what he identified as culture after taking the human geography class.

Anything you might identify with or with someone else. I say that because like in Taiwan we actually had a civics class. Our social studies are very broad, and we have to take all of these social studies every single year. So, we talked about primary and secondary cultures and stuff like that. So, I was introduced to cultures at a very young

age, more like six or seventh grade. So, I'm more open minded I guess with culture, especially like there's definitely cliques at school. So, you know, that's also culture.

I would also say language, religion, and oh yeah population. Again, it ties everything in, like the history of how something was built. So, it brings in other concepts like, spatial distribution, migration, and population growth, just everything. And then there are the city models. They are very culturally designed, in terms of their appearance. The two cities I lived in were the first modernized ones, so they're not that different. But like one of the major historic cities is completely different, because the cities are like a maze, or like a labyrinth. It was designed to keep away thieves, so you can't run away. There's also like, since girls couldn't go out except during the day, they had walking extended pieces, like bridges I guess, across the street so the girls can go to each other's houses without going through the streets. That is interesting but that was during the Ming Dynasty. It was full of historic architecture.

So, culture wise, and sticking with cities, I was interested in the different components that make up cities, culture wise. One of the big things in South American cities, is like how they have temples and all and how the US and the UK don't have that. Taiwan used to have that, but they started to build up because of economic development. I actually thought about going into urban planning because of this class. The class tweaks a little bit of understanding of culture, because it has something for everybody. Especially with like multimedia. So, like if it goes through the textbook, you don't understand it, then you might watch this movie or that, then you have a better understanding of it. I know a lot of people in my classroom they weren't the most

textbook people. So, watching movies, and videos actually helped expand upon your understanding.

Jefferson discussed the moments where he realized that he had gone from pre-reflective thought about culture to post-reflective thought about culture after taking the human geography class

From what I heard from my peers talking, but for me myself, I wouldn't say that because before I went to Taiwan, I was considered White because, like, everyone else is White. So, they didn't discriminate a lot. When I came back, you could sense more of discrimination, but it also could be because as a kid you didn't realize it until later on. Once I got back, I had an understanding of that culture shock. Especially, before I got enrolled in EC we went on a cruise in from Alaska to Vancouver and I met some American and she just asked me, "Where are you from?" I said, "The US," because it's an international cruise and then she was like, "Where are you actually from?" I said, "I live in Georgia, if you're asking." And she said, "No, where are you really, really from?" Then I said, "Taiwan if that's what you're asking. But, I said I was born and raised in the US. But it's a funny thing how they'll think you're from somewhere else, some other country than US.

Jefferson then discussed how experiences he had in the human geography class had transferred to other areas of learning.

I would say it's become like, I had the understanding, but it was more like unorganized and all over the place. It became more structured, and analytical and more refined afterwards. Like AP Bio we did population structure and the growth model. We also did it in AP Human Geography. Also, we talked about it in AP Environmental

Science, because it does affect the environment. It also helped in AP calculus because we could talk about population growth. We had to like use like different equations to model it. The concept goes on and on.

It goes a lot into it. Because you choose your electives in the US, so you can connect the class to the other disciplines. I always wanted to pursue a business in biomedical, so I wanted STEM. I also wanted liberal arts, so you can make the connections between the two disciplines. This class lets you do that. That's maybe why we can innovate more, because we have more understanding of other backgrounds, not just our own. So, that's one of the dilemmas of being a specialist in something. Like when you're developing maybe you're trying an innovation, you have to know people's needs and like you can't just be 100% database. You also have to have some humanity. Humanity goes into it. I want to be innovative and that's what a class like human geography helps you with. It gives you a broader look at culture and helps you with other classes.

Jefferson spoke about the ways he had benefited from learning about cultures in human geography.

More open mindedness. When I talk to my friends, I can agree with both sides even if they both they hate each other. And that's how I often play the mediator role, intermediate person, because I can get both understandings and somehow integrate so they understand each other at the end. So, it just helped me to be more open minded, connect things more easily than most people, and become more analytical. I am able to see I want to think out of the box sometimes as well because of the broad understanding of all those topics.

So, last year I went to DC for an internship for 2 months at the National Institute for Health (NIH). It was so interesting because, the minorities were actually the majority in our clinic. I interned at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), which is Cancer Institute. So, we had three main doctors; one from Japan, one from Taiwan and one from Ireland. And then we have some others from China, Africa, and Germany. We also had someone from France. There's a lot of diversity at the National Institute. I found the class helped with the different concepts of health and integrating into it. It was very interesting work because it was so diverse culturally. I feel like the class and my background helped give me an edge with that, dealing with diversity.

I remember a time when I used something I learned about in this class to solve something. Like, one of my AP Lang teachers got upset because foreign students don't look you in the eyes when they are talking to you. Most teachers don't realize that some foreign students do not look you in the eye, because out of respect, they're not supposed to. Like I think that's one of the things I do just not looking people in the eye, because in Taiwan it's a sign of disrespect. So, like a lot of teachers think it is rude because you don't do that and in Taiwan, when you're yelled at we're not supposed to respond. But in the US, sometimes they want you to respond depending on the situation. So, it is like there's a difference. So, you just have to be more understanding, like communicate more. Like afterwards, I would go back and talk to the teachers, like my AP Lang teacher and say, "sorry about this, in my culture this is how we do it, so, that's why I didn't do it back to you," and then we just talk it out. That's the best thing to do. Communication is key to like when you're talking about having different cultures talking to each other.

It also helped me with assimilating into American life and understanding social media and understanding some others' relationships. I would go on Instagram, you can see a lot of posts showing, like the differences. I saw memes pointing out all the differences in cultures that I knew were not right. And then I saw how some people talk to their parents and me and my friends, because we're both Asians they would think, "oh, I can never talk to my mom in that way, I'm afraid that she'd kick me out of the house." Like, some people call their moms by the first names, and I just couldn't do that. I had to adjust to calling adults by the first name sometimes. So, I'm just not used to it. But, this class helped me realize and adjust to the cultural differences. Sometimes you have to realize that it's not attitude, that's just communicating.

Finally, it has helped me talk to people with some authority about other cultures and try to help them understand differences. I'm on the school council so I go do school tours around school. I was talking to a freshman class today, and I asked them, "what do you think about the school?" And stuff like that and they said, "Teachers aren't as considerate, they don't let you do stuff." I told them it was for their safety and others safety. And, they just like stopped talking because they didn't realize that respect goes both ways. Or just cultural, it's not just race. Like even with Asians. We also have a social stratification, where Chinese is above. Chinese don't like the Japanese especially after World War II, so they see them as very small. And then in Eastern Europe, Eastern Asians are normally looked down upon. In Southeastern Asia, they look down upon East Asia. They also have stereotypes with tension between them that can be understood once you get to know them. I had to explain that the other day to someone and then I also had to dispel that all Muslims are not terrorists. So, when someone in my class said that all

Muslims are terrorists, I pulled up the FBI statistics showing that there are more White supremacists. It is stuff like that I learned how to do from taking the human geography class that I know will continue to help me in the future.

Post-Reflexion: Jefferson

Jefferson articulated quite well how he believes that he had a good understanding of culture prior to taking the human geography class, because of his background. However, he said that he learned about some aspects of culture that he did not know before and that he witnessed seeing the concepts on the landscape. He mentioned placelessness and then tied the concept to the US and Taiwan. He described what he now sees as culture that he learned from taking the class, and said he found that he was reflecting on culture much more. He described how the human geography class had helped him already in other classes and activities, he does in the summer on internships. He said that human geography gave him an edge when working with other cultures.

I didn't know what to expect from this interview. I found Jefferson to be quite engaging and almost entertaining during the first focus group interview. He had a lot to say during that focus group and frequently bantered back and forth with the other participants at EC. He treated the focus group interview like a Socratic Seminar where he interjected his thoughts when he heard something of interest from other participants. I wondered how the individual interviews would play out with Jefferson because of his gregariousness and openness to talking about his culture. Jefferson did not disappoint in his interviews. He provided a wealth of information about his shifting conceptualization of culture that he acquired from participating in a human geography class.

Just Jim

Just Jim is a reserved, thoughtful 10th grader who also has a unique background. His mother is Cambodian, so he grew up with what he terms as a "mix" of cultures. Just Jim is very contemplative when responding, often taking several minutes to think about his response before answering. Just Jim is a very intelligent young man who has distinct plans for his future. He plans on going to Georgia Tech and majoring in some science field. What follows is Just Jim's story with the phenomenon.

Just Jim shared his background and exposure to culture.

Just Jim here. I was born here in Georgia, and I have lived here for most of my life. I've been brought up with my mom being Cambodian and my dad being American. He is also from Georgia. We've had a mix of cultures in my family. On Sundays, I would go participate in some festivals that my Cambodian family does and then other times, I'm just sitting at home or go to my grandma's house on the Georgia side. Then the next Sunday, I would be at my Cambodian grandma's house.

Then also living in Georgia when I was in White Elementary school [pseudonym], there was a lot of culture mixing there because they had just built the school for all the new houses. And, there was a lot of mixing there. I got to learn about lots of new kinds of people that I hadn't met before. At White, there were Mexicans and there were Blacks, and I had a Peruvian friend. I am still friends with him. There were probably other cultures, but I don't know because I really didn't think about it much because of my background. So, I did get exposed to other cultures in elementary and middle school.

When I was a kid I was taught, it's like some phrases in Cambodian just so when my mom would say something, I would know what to do. Like if she said, "leang saam at moukh robsa anak," that means wash your face in the morning when you get up. It's kind of fun to be able to communicate in another language. I've lost some phrases over the years because she doesn't say them as much anymore because I learned, you know, sufficiency. But she still uses the Cambodian language especially in public when she says personal things and doesn't want anyone else to know.

I think learning another language really helps with development. It gets the different parts of your brain going because you're learning different things, but also how

the same things can be different. It is like you are in a secret club sometimes. It lets you see how everything fits together. Learning another language makes you think in their language and culture. There are simply some things that don't translate at all. So, you have to try to understand them through their language. You try to go back and forth between English and how would you say that in Cambodian so that forces you to think about culture. And their culture and how to use the right words. Like trying to understand someone else's mindset.

When I go to Cambodian New Years, they have a lunar calendar so it's generally around Easter in April. So, we go to the Wat, which is one of their temples where they do different things. When I go there, my mom is like talking to all these people and I have no idea what's going on. And then, you know, I'm just handed like food and some stuff. And we just go sit down and eat the stuff, and we hear the singing and stuff going on, and it's generally a good experience. So, it was a good experience, I was living the Cambodian culture.

I was encouraged to learn the language and about the culture, but my mother never sat down and formally taught us, but if I asked for something she would respond in Cambodian. So, I have lost some of it, because if you don't use it you will lose it, you know. At my Cambodian grandmother's house, it's different because I can't really talk to her. I understand like, sometimes she's like "Eat chicken," and stuff like that. She can speak some English. She speaks more English than I speak Cambodian, definitely. When I go over there, it's more like, "Hey, what's up?" And then when I go over to my Georgian grandmother's house, I can have actual conversations about what's going on and everything. But I have been blessed to have grown up with a grandparent from another

country. It's a great experience that not many people get to have. I wouldn't know what to do if I hadn't been raised in this cross-cultural kind of household. I wouldn't experience another culture without like forcing myself to go out and make it happen. I got to do it within the comfort of my own family.

Having this background has made me a lot more accepting of other cultures. I understand some things like how different cultures do somethings. It just opens up things. I've seen this before. I know what's going on. So, I came to the class with some knowledge of other culture because of my background. My Cambodian family is Buddhist. So, I had some knowledge of their traditions and stuff like reincarnation and how they wrap foil on babies' heads for good luck and good fortune. We have a couple paintings of the Angkor Wat, the sacred place. It's like pretty much the biggest thing about Cambodians, it's even on the flag, you know. I also have like a landscape of like a general village. A family friend painted those for us. I also have elephant things because the elephant is revered in Cambodia. I have one hanging on my wall. So, it all makes me feel connected to another culture. I am proud that I get to know a culture that's like thousands of miles away.

Just Jim commented on how he thinks the concept of culture is more all-encompassing than he thought before he took the class.

There are so many things that I would say are culture. First, I would say language. As I said before. Language is so important for the way you think and your culture. It is a way to express your culture. That has been my background. I have seen how language fits in and is important to culture. Then, there is religion. I said that I have family that are Buddhist. I see how important it is to them and how they show their

culture through their rituals, like that foil on the babies' head. Ethnicity is under there. Well, really even location. There is just so much. I mean can I just say everything? I could just run through all of the chapters and topics we talked about that would be part of it. You don't realize it at the time, but it is all those things. Like I didn't think that urban, like cities were cultural but then when we talked about cities and how they were built I went, "Wow, even that is culture." And, yeah, that goes with human geography because it's like an introductory course to like all that culture stuff. Not introductory as in rudimentary, but as in getting you to see how culture is bigger than you thought. It introduces you to just the concepts and lets you think about it more.

Jim share that his experiences in the class led to times when he learned something in human geography and then saw it on the landscape.

I can remember doing the religion chapter, and we saw the Angkor Wat. I kept thinking, "I know this stuff it was pretty cool." I would be reading the book and I would turn around and look at people, "This is mine, this is Cambodian." "This is mine, these are my people."

I also see it in my other classes. I'm in European history right now, and I see how Spain and France split. So, through migration and other stuff, we have languages splitting and then you have English and German being alike and French and Spanish being romance languages. So, they kind of have the same roots and they are easier to understand, whereas Mandarin is not. That seems so crazy to us. It seems crazy that two speakers of some form of the Sino-Tibetan language family could not understand one another. I mean they all speak Chinese. But, no they don't all speak the same form.

Whoa, gentrification, whoa, wait. I remember we were on an academic field trip and I think we were going through, I can't remember the name of it, but it was like a small town and it looked like the downtown where I live, almost, but I said, "Wow." And I said the gentrification! I thought "wow." This actually happens, and I'm seeing it happen. I was gaining experience with the subject and then seeing it in the real world. I finally had a name for it. It's really an all-encompassing thing.

Jim expounded on how he thinks that he went from a pre-reflective understanding of culture to a post-reflective, look of culture after taking the class.

Being half Cambodian and half American like it was just my life. Then like when I took the course, I saw all these things coming together and how even so much more and like the culture from this thing affects everything. You start thinking about things more than you did before and they are deeper thoughts. It's eye-opening because it all goes full circle. And when you see that, it's really amazing because you may have forgotten specifics, but I know certain concepts are still being employed. I mean, in high school, you only hear about friends telling you to learn, Spanish, German, and maybe Mandarin if you want to go into business or something, but like you never hear human geography to find out about language. I watch all these different language channels, and they're really interesting because they also incorporate how history affects language, and it's honestly amazing. Basically, it's the human journey.

In relation to each other courses, once your head is opened up about culture, then you can open up your mind to different things with history, and I found it helped in other classes. Actually, I think it was pre-calculus. Where I just sat there, and I linked together like Trig and then all that stuff about circles and angles and stuff and then it was like,

“Wow, this is like when I learned about culture and geography and stuff.” Yeah, if you do the course properly, like as a student, then it helps open your mind up to understanding everything else.

Jim spoke about the Aha moments he had during the class when something really surprised him.

Well, my favorite chapter or unit was the language chapter. And again, that is the one that impacted me the most. I had an interest in learning Cambodian, and I still do. I found the language tree fascinating and when I opened the chapter to that page I remember my mouth kind of dropping open because I had never seen anything like that. And, the fact that we could all have had some sort of common language was crazy to me because of where we are now, through migration and everything. It made me want to know more about how it all happened that people in one part of the world spoke a totally different language than someone else, somewhere else.

Sorry I am stuck on language. I can't remember the old language, the one before the Nordic. It started with an N, I think. I think it is Nostratic. Then the tree branches from there and you get Proto-Indo European trunk. It is just crazy. And then the whole rest of the tree. You get the rest of the tree. You get to see all of that in human geography. Not just one languages journey because human geography is about the human journey. You get to see that and have a name for it too. It reminds me of that saying, “What do you call a zebra if you've never seen one?” It is the same thing with human geography. What do you call some cultural thing, like language, if you have never seen it?

Then there was the urban chapter. The city models and stuff. The city models were interesting. Oh, yeah. That was really interesting because I had never really thought about it before. Like you always assume that cities are planned, right? Instead of happening randomly. It's really eye-opening to see that. There is that one model with the wealthy people in the middle or something and then as you went outward, it got poorer and poorer. The Latin American city model! Where the slums and the squatter settlements are on the outside. Like Mexico City. It's like this huge industrial area and then like you have these slums and stuff. It made me wonder if that goes back to Aztec times, building the city where they did. You don't see that in European models or even in the United States. It's like culture again. It shows up everywhere. So, that really was big.

Jim spoke about his future plans and if he anticipated the information he learned in human geography might help him.

I plan on either going to Tech if I decide to go more on like the chemistry route or Emory if I decide to go on more on the doctor route. Immediately, I will be taking more AP classes to help ensure that I am getting the upper level stuff I need. Thinking back, when I was in 9th grade, if you told me that I would be taking four AP classes by my junior year I would have pushed you out the door. But here I am doing that. But when I was in ninth grade, I wanted to try Human Geography to test out how AP would work and when it started, I really liked it and I would be glad going forward and doing more.

I think taking some liberal arts classes like human geography is helpful to even science people because it helps you connect different things. I think it helps you think outside the box. It is kind of like learning to play an instrument. There is math that goes

into it. Learning to play an instrument is my favorite example of showing how different things interact to bring about a new experience. I think it helps with creative thinking. That is kind of what I think human geography did for me.

Also, we talked about population stats and diseases in biology just like we did in human geography. So, I think there is a carry over to other classes. I think that too many people have a general preconception that only like calculus and physics were like hard enough to be AP. But I am like, "I took Human Geography," and I was like, "You can learn this too," and it's all good stuff. I tell them that you will find lots of stuff from human geography in all of your other classes. I think it is hard for them to believe it, but I keep finding places where I use human geography in so many of my other classes. But you really do.

Post-Reflexion: Just Jim

Jim also articulated his thoughts on what he believes culture is and how that had changed as a result of being in the human geography class. He said it gave him a sense of connection to his Cambodian people and that he was able to see evidence of that on the landscape. Further, he expounded on how the class has already helped him with other classes in high school, like biology with running population stats and he was able to anticipate how the concepts he learned in human geography would help him in the future. Jim provided several examples to back up his thoughts about the changes that occurred in his understanding of culture and how that has been beneficial to him already.

Jim, like Jefferson, was another interesting participant who had such a unique background that I couldn't wait to explore. Jim's mother is Cambodian, and his dad is from the South. I wasn't sure what I would hear from Jim, as he was the most reticent participant in the first focus group discussion. I believe that is because Jim is a thinker that reserves his comments until he had a moment to think before he spoke. My thoughts proved to be true, as Jim would only comment after he thought about what he wanted to say during the conversation. Jim proved to be the most post-reflexive participant who had concrete thoughts about his shifting conceptualization of culture.

Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline Harcourt is a bubbly, outgoing senior who has ambitious plans for her future. She is very involved in drama club and starred in their recent play. As for her studies, she is very serious, and made it a point to take classes that would support her desire to work in the medical science field. She intimated to me that she wanted to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services, a lofty goal. She also has a unique background in terms of her parents and her dad's job. What follows is Evangeline's story and encounter with the phenomenon.

Evangeline shared her background and experience with other cultures.

So, my parents had me when they were in their late 20s', they're still together. I grew up in a two-parent household. My mom was a stay at home mom, up until I went into school, and now she has been a paralegal, a caterer, a party planner, a preschool teacher and now she's a real estate agent. My dad works in Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT), as a HAZMAT consultant. He started with the airplane industry and then moved over to his own consulting firm and he travels the world and teaches people how to ship hazardous material. So, anything that can cause potential hazard in transport, he goes to their facilities and audits them, points out their issues, and trains them on all that kind of stuff. He started at Delta in the environmental department doing environment clean up. And, then 9-11 happened, and the anthrax scare happened, and then the environmental department became the investigate why this plane went down, so he started being called out to all the plane crashes figuring out why they went down, was it mechanical, was it a bomb, so what caused the things to go down. Then he was recruited

to work for one of the largest consulting firms in the world. So, he goes all the world, and when I was younger we would travel with him a lot, and so we go to all kind of different countries. My dad has also worked with the United Nations. So, I had a lot of experience traveling.

So, I mentioned I traveled a lot. I've been to like almost all the states, in the United States. This summer we are going to Switzerland, the U.N., and then spend a week in Paris. I have been to most of the continental US. I have been to a couple of islands off the coast of South America. I've been to Mexico. I've been to Jamaica. I've been up into Canada and then we have been to Germany when I was younger. I have also been to Aruba. Aruba is probably my favorite. I went when I was about seven years old, and it just the beaches are different than any beaches you get here. Like it's very different, in Aruba. It wasn't as dirty, and it felt much more separated and isolated from everything. The culture is different like even the Mexico is very like family based and much more community.

So, I had quite a bit of contact with other cultures growing up. Like even the states we have gone to with my dad in the US and other countries, he's meeting with like governments officials from all over the world. I have met one of the former prime ministers of the U.K. and diplomats from all kinds of different countries. The most interesting diplomats I have met are from China and Japan. I think because they are so formal. And they like everything well-mannered and the food culture is really different. And then like you don't leave anything, you try to eat everything. You never like spit anything out or let anyone know that you might like something or dislike something, everything is good. It is just the culture of eating. It would be super disrespectful.

I guess I have had a lifestyle most people don't get exposed to. So, others I know take a trip to South Carolina or Florida. We take trip to Mexico. And, whenever we go shopping, we don't go to like the big mall. We will go to like one of the little towns and get a taxi, and have a taxi drop us off in a random village to go shopping. We went to swim with turtles and it was just like this little local shack that we found inland where the turtles would come. So, yes, I have had a different background from most people.

Evangeline commented on her level of understanding of cultures before taking the class and what it was like after taking the class.

I thought I knew a lot of stuff because I had been exposed to different cultures and that people are different. But I hadn't really looked in depth at what the similarities and differences are and human behavior, in the way we clumped together and the way we don't. We just deal with things and why different groups are more developed than others. Things that like definitely stuck with me that I hadn't really thought about before.

There's been a couple of times that I've like, we've gone on road trips because we like to drive instead of fly to places especially in the US. That way, we can stop and do different random things when we come across something, but I thought, "I have no clue where in the country we might be because this looks like any stop off the interstate." I learned about that in human geography. We called that *placelessness* and I was starting to see it on the landscape and think about how I had learned that. And I had a name for it.

I think that like definitely stuck out to me was state versus nation. Nation-state and like that just blew my mind. Because, I had never really thought about like, "What does the nation mean? What does a state mean?" and like, "What is a nation? What is a

state? We're not really a state, we're more of a nation.” And like the United Nations should be called the United States. And, like I remember trying to explain this to my parents, multiple times, and they were like, “I have no clue what you are talking about.” They still don’t know and wonder why I was so fascinated by it.

I would say that the class did increase my awareness and I have retained information and sometimes it takes prompting to get out, but like I'm definitely more conscious of other cultures and what going around me. I pay attention to like what we're doing to other countries and how other countries are reacting, all that kind of stuff that I like didn't pay attention to before. It is really a fascinating progression.

Evangeline discussed about the specific content knowledge on culture that she learned from taking the course and how that knowledge already has or could benefit her in the future.

It was the political unit. Like I mentioned before, the idea of how nations and states are formed and how governments are formed. Because, you really, I mean, we don't really think about it, you know, like, isn't everybody the same? Doesn’t everyone have the same structure, politically? I was fascinated by the unified versus federal government systems. And, then you could look at see what places were federal or unified, nations or states or even nation states. Then you could see how it was culturally driven, especially in the case of Japan. I feel like, I don't know, a centralized government, in my opinion, would be more of a nation state because they're more unified and have more centralized beliefs. Whereas, a separated government encourages more separate thinking and more diversity.

So, I have written essays in like English essays, analyzing human behavior based on something like I learned in Human Geography and in history classes. I think it helps a lot. I'm like, "Why do we do the things we do, and why all these civilizations all developed the exact same way, hearth wise?" Those kinds of things are all things I think like routed back to the fact that I took AP Human Geography.

Well, I also worked for Congressman Drake Ferson [pseudonym]. I spent a year working as his intern and we had all walks of life. They would come in there and I think it did kind of help me mature, and just like being more tolerant, and more understanding that people are different. I think it does help you to open your eyes to be more accepting and don't just come at it from, "Oh. Well, you need to be more like me." It helps you to be more culturally aware and understanding of others.

Also, because I learned about political structures in human geography and I want to help with serious illnesses, I want to focus on places that are underdeveloped. I think we write off Africa because it's like they aren't developed. They're so poverty stricken, and we think maybe some if it is we just don't know to what to do. It's too overwhelming a problem. Well that's where most of the world's overpopulation comes from is from Africa, I don't know. I think part of the problem is that yes, like the developed world stepped in and took advantage of Africa. That is something that I would like to work on in the future. Learning about this in human geography helped me realize that is something that I would like to do.

Evangeline spoke about how she now sees culture as much more of an all-encompassing concept than she initially thought.

Basically, it is the way we talk, like our language, to the things we eat, to the way we drive. Also, it is mannerisms, the way we dress, and facial expressions. I could just go through the chapters and units, and all of that would have to be included. It expands your interpretation of culture. It encompasses the religion you practice, the way we build cities, political relationships, and economics. You really go from an initial understanding to a deeper understanding after taking the human geography class.

Like, you go from a narrow view of US culture to an understanding that Africa has a culture, Asia has cultures, everyone has a culture. But after the class I think I do look at it more in depth and like the differences, and the way we do everything to the way, we express ourselves, different languages, different ways of dressing and eating and like what the basic interaction structure is. Are you, ah, family-based? Are you individual-based? Are you friend-based? I think all of that goes into different cultures. I have seen some cultures where they speak the same language, they live in the same place but their completely different mannerisms and it's even kind of the same foods. It's just on the basic level rather than process. They live very differently than us and they talk differently, and they interact with each other differently. But that is all a part of culture.

I can remember recently something happened that helped me realize how important language is. A deaf lady was at a job fair, and she was lost, and not handling it well. Her interpreter had stepped away to take a phone call, and this woman was freaking out and I watched multiple people from the office try to talk to her in passing and like not really pay her attention because they didn't realize she was deaf. While I'm almost fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). And so, I went out and signed to her, and asked her like what she was looking for, and where she was going. Just like the look on her face

when it went from someone just assuming that she would be fine and could get by, to someone who was actually signing, and try and make that effort to communicate with her, was like amazing. It was. It was one of those like, moments when you're just like, I can't believe that just something as small as communicating with someone in their language can make such an impact. It made me think about the importance of language and how it personal it is to people.

Evangeline expanded upon her “aha” moments she had during the class that really stuck out to her.

Well I think like the language tree. I had been exposed to a little bit because I took Spanish in middle school. But I didn't know anything about the tree or languages in general about how they came about and all the families. So, I think like AP Human Geography did a much better job of explaining it and going in depth on all the languages. I think that was something that like because I had been exposed to so many languages that I was aware of a little bit more. It definitely did express more to me, more understanding. And, the political structures that countries may have, and places was one that I was like yep that's definitely a thing I see. The nation state idea ones one that definitely clicked. There was just a lot of background information that really helped change the way I look at things and at culture.

Evangeline commented on how the course had influenced what she wants to do in the future.

Yes, I want to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services one day. I know I am going to need culture for that job. The main reason that made me realize that that's exactly what I wanted to do is I knew whenever I like went into high school I wanted do

something that's kind of science related. My dad was a scientist by education. I love science. It's what I'm good in, so I'm going to do something science related. No clue what I was going to do. I never thought about politics for. I wasn't super interested in it. I never really looked into it. I took human geography and got more interested in it. I got more into what was going on in the world. I started watching the news more and that kind of thinking about biology. I read the hot zone which is an account of the history of the Ebola virus. And that's when I realized like I'm really interested in this, and so I decided I want to be a pathologist and like get my degree in that in studies pathologist and eventually end up as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

So, I realized that I could combine a science background with the political structures unit from human geography and make a career of it. I actually did research on the Ebola virus after that discovered that if they had asked the local villagers how they deal with it, they could have saved many more lives. So, I think like we need to be more conscientious of the past and other ways people have dealt with things rather than saying we can do it ourselves. I think we need to look at other cultures and know other cultures.

Post-Reflexion: Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline had a much broader background with culture before taking the class. She traveled extensively with her family because of her dad's job. Yet, she indicated that the human geography class did expand her understanding of culture. She said she had an "aha" moment when she learned about language and the language tree, and the political unit influenced her so profoundly that she wants to go into a career in politics. She said the human geography class opened her eyes to the importance of understanding culture and being more tolerant of other cultures.

Evangeline's background and her ability to travel as a child, definitely helped her form an understanding of culture at an early age. I did not know going in to this interview that she had such an extended travel history. As we began to talk, it occurred to me that I needed to understand what her thoughts were about culture from those travels, so I asked her to explain her experiences and the effect, if any, on her views of culture. I wanted to know if her ideas about culture had changed or shifted after taking

the class. Evangeline indicated that she believes that her ideas had changed and that she did experience a shift in her conceptualization of culture after taking the class. In a sense I was surprised by her comments, although looking back I am not sure why I was. Jefferson and Jim indicated they had the same shifts in their conceptualization and they have pretty diverse backgrounds. Evangeline just approached her understanding from a different angle than Jefferson and Jim, but she did experience a shift.

Shirley Shire

Shirley Shire is a rising 11th grader who is also quite bubbly. Her pink streaked hair confirms her spunky nature and openness to be honest about her background and experiences. Her appearance belies her true intelligence and insight into life. She is a writer of fantasy pieces that aspires to go to Georgia Tech to study something in the engineering field. She intimated to me that she would also like to be a cartographer, at least on the side. We sat down and talked about her experiences in the human geography class. What follows is Shirley's story.

Shirley discussed her background and exposure to culture.

I was born and raised in Coweta County. My father's side of the family is from Germany. It's kind of distant. I think he said that we like his father's mother came from Germany, so I think it's like I have someone in my family I know for sure might have been Nazi. That's all I know. Then on my mom's side, she can trace her ancestry back to some of the first colonists from North Carolina. We can trace all the way back to the Revolutionary War when we were fighting. We did fight on the Confederate side during the civil war, so that changes things because it was on a tobacco farm in North Carolina. We have evidence, of course, of slaves. We owned slaves. Not very bright part of my history. I mean, you know, it's part of your history so you don't sweep it away. We just like we can't erase it. You have to learn from it. Don't repeat the mistakes of your ancestors, I guess.

So, my mom was born in North Carolina. She moved down after she got a divorced. She lived in a small town so after she got a divorce in her 30s, it was like early 30s. It was kind of seen as like, “Oh my goodness, that's so horrible you shouldn't be getting a divorce.” It's like, “Oh, we live in the Bible Belt. You get a divorce your family doesn't talk about it. You cover it up, and kind of deal. So, my mom moved like to Georgia. To try to get away from that. She moved in with her great uncle, and my dad lived here, and so they met eventually through like his adopted family and her and like, her co-worker. Six months later, they were having a kid so. Oh, yeah, my dad, he was adopted. His biological ancestry is German but, he later found his mother. His adopted family, they adopted him after he had been abandoned by his mother and father. And he was raised by his neighbors who later became his kind of informally adopted parents so they're my kind of grandparents in their own way, because they were the only ones to care for my dad. I lived in the same house since I was like three months old, and the first house I lived in was only like 30 minutes away from the house I live in now, so I didn't move very far.

As far as exposure to other cultures when I was growing up, I didn't have a ton, but I was exposed to Spanish language and culture by my mother. My mother is a dental hygienist, and in order to kind of make herself more competitive in her field, she learned how to speak Spanish. So, she would sometimes teach us Spanish words. We don't always speak in Spanish at my house, but occasionally, we like say something in Spanish and like we know what it means because it's just something my mom grew up saying. Like I remember one time, I know this is not the actual translation, but we asked her what we're having for dinner one day. I think I was like first grade and she said, “Pero

Calientes” and the exact definition is hot dogs. We say pero calientes because it's just kind of a funny little joke we have like with my mom knowing Spanish.

My middle school there was definitely some kids who had different cultures. I remember they had different customs and stuff. But, mostly it was White and African-American kids but there was also a few Asians. So, when I first came to EC, I'm like, “Whoa.” I first thought you know I was surprised at the amount of diversity in this high school. I have a girl in my German class who's taking German and her family, her mom is fresh off the boat from Germany, and she speaks German at home. And, at the same time there is a kid sitting next to me and he was speaking fluent like Spanish. Then there's a girl I know who speaks fluent Spanish, and fluent English and she's taking French right now because she's like, “I might as well know as many languages as possible. So, going to high school here has really increased my exposure to other cultures. I think it has helped me learn to around different people and maybe learn from them.

Shirley discussed why she took the class, and the moments when she was surprised by something she learned.

I took it because it's the only one offered to freshmen. So, I was like, “I want to get my foot in the door.” The first day Mr. Dorman [pseudonym] started teaching and I was like, “Oh” I kind of liked it, and we started talking about maps and stuff and like I've always been my fantasy nerd, so I was like, “Oh okay.” I was just kind of looking at maps of like in my books, and like kind of relating it to what I was learning, and it made it interesting to myself. I know this sounds weird, but I was surprised. I just kind of got it from day one honestly. I guess it all made sense to me. I'm in STEM, but I've always

been a little bit more right brain which is kind of weird for being in STEM, because you think that I'll be a left brain. But I found that human geography got to my right brain, and it was so interesting. I just kind of got it.

I would also say the language unit. I love the language tree. Well, I know we talked about that in the focus group. I think it's more than just a language tree, because you see how people see through their language. Language is how you think, and people who come from same places think the same way. So, you see romance languages and they're all connected. You see like English and German are connected and other languages like Frisian and Dutch. You kind of see that it isn't just languages. This is people. This is how people are interrelated. It's more than just language.

Shirley discussed specific content knowledge that she learned from taking the class that made her rethink about the world or look at it in a new way.

I love learning about the ancient civilizations like when we learn about like the cradles of civilization, and all the different places and their hearths. I realized I guess when I was growing up I always saw the world as just today. I didn't really think about it like in the whole past. I think about it in the context of everything that came before where the world is now. When I look around, "Oh." I recognize urban sprawl that we were talking about in the group session. I recognize that in the many cultures in the world now, but I resist people thinking "Oh. There's just poor because it's that way." "No. It's not. It's because they might not have like the same opportunities because they didn't have the same conditions.

This started to make sense because Europeans were just lucky basically. We happened to be the ones that could do make steel really well. We happened to be the

ones to perfect the guns. We happened to be the ones who had horses readily available, and like we just kept having basically coincidence after coincidence like geography, like geography so. We were blessed by geography.

Also, you forget like, “Oh, I’m English. We have, we’ve been here like 300 years at most.” You don’t really think about it. This was like lands that came from the Mesoamerican like a hearth. We came from a totally different one. The European hearth, I think. We came from that one and we’re all the way over here now. It’s weird. It is weird how it all fits together.

I also think that I saw how big culture is and that so many things that we don’t think of as related to culture is definitely culture. To me, it’s even how we learn. Our education system is a huge part of our culture. I learned the American education system is very different from well, the German or Korean one. The German one, I almost feel like it’s harsher. The American system gives more say equality and freedom to choose than the German system. The American system I feel like gives the students more choice, and it gives them more freedom and flexibility. In the German system they take a test somewhere in 8th grade, and that determines what you will do as a career, like in a trade. But I guess that they are used to it. And look at how successful their economy is.

I’ve only heard about the Korean system from like Koreans who they’re like, “Oh, I went through the Korean system until like the fourth grade and I think was the most stress, they put a lot of stress on you.” You get good grades, but the suicide rate is so high because of this like extreme pressure they put on by school. Like I know, I have a friend whose mom left Korea because she couldn’t take it anymore, and she dropped out, so she was such a like disgrace. She came to America, and she found she had a good

education. She got into colleges, she graduated from college, but she was a drop out in Korea, and she was always going to be a drop out in Korea. I have a friend and he told me, he said, "Korea doesn't have a drop-out rate, it has a suicide rate."

Japan has a huge problem with this as well. The Asian cultures take school much more seriously than the Americans do. Japan has a problem with kids who'd rather commit suicide than drop out and like very high suicide rate in Japan as well. We had a controversy earlier this year about a YouTuber who filmed in the Suicide Forest at the bottom of Mt. Fuji, and actually found dead bodies hanging from the trees and stuff. There were signs there that read think of your family. This is not something that we can even wrap our brain around, here in America, but to Asians you would be dishonoring your family if you didn't do well in school. Here in the West, if we heard that we would think that committing suicide would not help. That would probably make the situation worse. But for them that's what makes it better like, "Oh, you think about their family's honor." So, I thought that was an interesting and maybe tragic difference in cultures, at least it seems that way to me.

Shirley reflected on her thoughts about the class, and how she thinks she progressed from a pre-reflective thought about culture to post-reflective thought about culture.

You start thinking a different way, and it really help kids who take AP Euro or AP Environmental. I've seen they start thinking a bit differently and like they can start like going around noticing things that they didn't notice before. You are looking at problems from different angles than just one, because you know different ways to think about it. You don't really notice it because it's just how you see things now. And it's so gradual,

it's over a semester so it's not just there's one day like I didn't have an "Aha" moment, so it wasn't like one day that I was like, "Oh." I see the world differently now.

Like when they clear cut trees over on that road to build neighborhood and stores, I'm like urban sprawl. And I see in the movie industry look like moving in, and I'm think, "Oh, well." I start realizing like I how that has influenced what is being built because they want the movie industry to go there. And you start thinking about it and seeing it.

Shirley talked about how she anticipated using information she learned in the class in the future.

It has already helped me in other classes. AP Environmental Science is a course I took last semester so, it was one semester between taking AP Human and AP Environmental Science. When we got in there we start immediately talking about Malthusian Theory and then the demographic transition model, and I was sitting there like, "Didn't I just learn this?" And I was like, "Okay, so they applied it to different things." We started talking about carrying capacity. Basically, it's what look at in human geography, but just science. It was more science-based and made it so much easier when you have that background. Like the courses is so easy once you know it. I don't know how easy it would have been without knowing it, and that is because I had human geography.

I think it's even outside of the classroom. Because once you get out of classroom, kids in here especially in the South are pretty prejudiced. I am lucky to go to school with kids at EC, and go to other classes, like a smaller and like less diverse like high schools. I think it's harder for them to understand diversity. I think the only reason EC doesn't have problems with prejudice, or not many problems, is because we have so many

different ethnicities, different cultures. But this class helps for like small towns only White folk like when it's only White people and like everyone's the same culture, same Southern culture. It's kind of hard to see diversity and understand it.

This class also made me want to study my roots and travel to Germany and Europe. I'm German on my dad's side, so it is a part of my history, and I may want to go into architectural engineering. You hear German engineered on many products like German steel. It's like German is a good language to learn if you want to go to engineering.

I really want to go to Leipzig, Germany. It looks so beautiful there and like it's got a very youthful culture which is very hard to find in Europe nowadays because their population is aging. It shows the Demographic Transition Model (DTM) that we learned in human geography. Oh, there I go talking about human geography. I also want to go to Berlin. It has another youthful population, but I am worried that I will stick out like a tourist. So, I will probably stick to smaller towns. Oh, there is another town I want to go to. The reason why I want to go there but it has something to do with my family. That is where my family gets our name. I think it is Bamberg and I want to go there. I found out that my last name is sort of the same as the name of the town. "Oh, my goodness, you're from here." So, we have an English version of the name but like it's close enough.

And then I would like to go to England to see my mom's side. I think I have I have royal blood I think on the English side. I have I traced my ancestry back to a lord who fought in the Battle of Hastings. He was English, I believe from the very southern tip of England. I had to do it for a project but like it was so interesting. I traced my lineage back to England to some house. But like that's another thing. I can't remember

the house, but I found this kid who was half-Japanese, half-English and he's like, "Oh yeah, I'm from that house too." We kind of looked at each other. Talk about human geography! It was weird because he's half-Japanese but like he's related to me through the English side. So yeah, I want to trace my ancestors and see the places they are from.

I also want to go to Georgia Tech. That is my dream school. So, learning about other cultures in human geography will definitely help. It's a pretty diverse because it has people from all walks of life, people from every culture, that want to go there. So, this information is definitely going to help. I need to know this kind of stuff, so I can relate to other people I don't know. I may have a roommate who's from a different culture and I need to start like realizing things like cultural differences, so I can be understanding. I'm going to probably work with people who have different cultures that I don't understand, but I will need to try to. I have like thoughts that I don't really understand because I come from a different culture. I need to learn how to analyze that, and I need to figure out a way to understand it and understand where they're coming from.

Finally, Shirley commented on how she sees as much bigger than she initially thought and what she includes now as culture.

I think that people think culture is just like the way you talk, you know, the foods you eat, how you dress, but culture is not just those little things, culture's a big thing. It's everything. So, if were to say what culture is, I would definitely include language, and the way people communicate within their culture. We already talked about how important language is for cultural communication. I would also say it is religion, and the practices that people do depending on what religion they believe in. It is also, habits and customs that go with their culture. It could be related to folk culture or it could be more

like America and pop culture. But then I saw that in the urban chapter too. The way that people set-up cities is very much a part of their culture. Come to think of it, all of that has a lot to do with population and migration. We learned about that in the human geography class and then we talked about that in AP Environmental and AP Bio, believe it or not. Oh gosh, I just went through a bunch of the chapters in human. So, yeah it is everything, all of those things I just said and more.

Post-Reflexion: Shirley Shire

Shirley articulated her thoughts on culture, and how she now thinks that culture is a larger, more inclusive concept than she initially believed. She said that she now believes culture encompasses more than just styles of dress, saying culture includes language, religion, pop/folk culture, urban environments, and habit. She also said that she witnessed evidence of her learning on the landscape when she was out, citing urban sprawl as something she noticed. Further, she said she had benefitted from taking the human geography class as it helped her in other courses such as environmental science. She anticipated using what she learned from the human geography class when she goes to college.

Shirley's bubbly personality created a warm, relaxed atmosphere during her interview sessions. Shirley talked at length about her past and how that influenced her thoughts about culture in the present. I found her interview interesting as she was open about what she said were the "bad" parts of her heritage and how she understood that was part of her past. This indicated to me that she had a maturity about what she thought about her past that she was not willing to allow to influence her future. Shirley said that she is more tolerant of other cultures as a result of examining her past. She indicated that she had experienced a shift in her conceptualization of culture from participating in the class.

Summary

The individual interviews provided great information about each of the participants' backgrounds and personal thoughts about the human geography course. Their backgrounds were as unique and varied as each of them and served to highlight their approach to the human geography course content and the takeaways they received

from taking the class. What follows is the final focus group interviews with the two schools.

Interactive Focus Group 2: NG

The second interactive focus group at NG consisted of the same participants. The participants were previously introduced in the dissertation in relation to first focus group and more in-depth in each of the individual vignettes. As with the first interactive focus group, my questions are in italics to indicate my voice, and the participants' answers are in regular font to denote their voice. What follows are statements and questions that are focused and derived from answers given in the previous focus groups and individual interviews, to drill down on the themes that are manifesting from the data.

Participants:

Matthew- 9th grade

Georgia- 9th grade

Tess- 11th grade

Kelly- 10th grade

Athens- 9th grade

Osceola- 12th grade

Topic 1

On the College Board (2017, December 11) website there is a statement about the human geography course that reads; This course is designed to help you see the world in a new way. How would you comment on this statement?

Matthew was the first to respond to the statement claiming:

I definitely agree. I got to see everything in a different in-depth way. In Atlanta, I got to see a lot of the sector models. And, I remember I went down for a tournament in Celebration, Florida, and I saw the new urbanism, and everything is very close, just for green energy and walking and cutting down on pollution.

And, it was interesting. So, I think it helped me think in a new way, more understanding the “whys.”

Kelly, Matthew’s sister agreed wholeheartedly noting:

Yes, I definitely think so. For me, it wasn't as much what I saw physically, but more the interactions between people, which I didn't actually expect from this course at all. So, it was a kind of fun surprise from that. It was really the whys behind it, why people behave the way they do because of their culture. Kind of where they're coming from. I know in our family, more than conversations, I was able to dig a little deeper on what my point was in how we connect the world around us.

Tess responded next, agreeing with Kelly and Matthew but adding:

I agree because prior to taking human geography, I could only see the world in a clear historical and geographical standpoint whereas, afterward, I could see it in a comprehensive anthropological way, that really identified all of the factors that affected the why or the where.

Athens discussed a very personal understanding of the statement, commenting:

Well, when I started getting around, just looking around the county we live in, I was noticing all the fences that were around and the pop culture and the folk culture and I take that into consideration. I noticed all the different fences. It's like a split rail but then it's a wood one. Or I see this old church and it looked like a traditional church that's in the book. And I think about how religion is part of culture but now I see it and have a name for it.

Georgia nodded her head in agreement commenting:

I most definitely agree. I have seen a lot of the new urbanism in Atlanta. In class we were talking about horizontal and vertical integration in the media and retail. I was able to recognize that, and it seems like I see things and it's like, I know exactly what it is and why it is now. Because before, this class it just there and never crossed my mind. How there is just like, a strategy behind everything. I was making all of these connections. It's fun to like, sit in class just to be like, making all these connections.

Osceola was the last to answer, saying:

Well, yeah, I think I've learned so much and look at the world differently. Especially what we're talking about the news outlets, how every single one of them tells the same story in a different way, whether it's Fox News, CNN, ABC, NBC, or any news stations. I think, I have come to realize that a little bit more and be more attentive when I'm watching news and trying to kind of find the true facts and then, observing making my own opinions about what's going on in the news.

Topic 1 Post-Reflexion:

Each of the statements that I had the participants respond to were thoughtfully crafted from the themes I was seeing in the dialogue during the first focus group and individual interviews. This statement was designed around a statement I read about the course being designed to help students see the world in a new way. I wanted to see if this was a common thread among the participants. Interestingly, they all agreed that this was the case, but they may have different examples to support their claim. Osceola and Georgia discussed the vertical and horizontal integration of media and retail outlets. Matthew recognized changes in the urban landscape, whereas Athens, was more literal seeing different types of fences and architecture. Kelly was able to see and understand interactions between people. And, Tess saw the why and the where of things, in a more anthropological way. Either way, each of the participants were changed and now looked at the world in a new way, a way they said that had changed how they looked at world forever.

This question was taken from College Board's (2017, December 11) website that describes the design of the course. Asking students to respond to the statement, the course is meant to help you look at the world in a new way, was used to shore-up what I had been hearing from the first focus group and all of the individual interviews. I used the statement to help them wrap up their thoughts and provide a final culminating answer to the idea of seeing the world and culture in a new way. I believe it was a successful way for the participants to do just that.

Topic 2: The Why of Where

I then asked the participants to respond to the statement derived from our textbook by geographer Marvin Mikesell (As cited in the Debli textbook, 2007, p. 9) that human geography is the "why of where." I ask them to comment as to what that statement means to them.

Statement 2

Matthew answered the prompt first, stating:

I guess, I would look around and see certain things, but I never understood why, and I just kind of accepted them as that's what they are. But I got to see that there actually is a reason why certain things like the sector models. Everything has a reason, and just to make everything more efficient whether it's for economics or just for the people. Now I can't go out in Atlanta and not see the things we talked about.

Kelly enthusiastically chimed in, noting:

I think that describes the class pretty darn well about see the why's about many things, especially going through it with Matthew because we didn't see the same why's all the time. He's my brother and he understood the why almost in a completely different way than I understood the why. It is like Tess said the last was that how previously how she viewed the world differently. It kind of your

eyes are open to so much more. It's not just geography and it's not just the physical aspect of the world. It is really what culture is, not the blanket vocabulary statement you learn in English. And so, that is kind of neat.

Tess tied together different regions of the state and how they are connected, responding:

Well, just looking at the state of Georgia where we live, I mean, we're in Newton [pseudonym], and Newton was traditionally a textile town. And then you go out to north Georgia, to Dahlin [pseudonym], and that's carpet. You go to South Georgia and it is peanuts and other cash crops. But then, you go to Atlanta and that's where it connects all of those and sends them out to other areas of the country and of the world. Ultimately, it all connects in a large city like Atlanta.

Athens agreed with Matthew and added:

Like Matthew was saying with the sector model, I never really understood why things are arranged in the grocery store the way they are. But with the sector model being explained to us and how the milk was always so close to the market because they wanted it to be closer to the people because it would go bad. It kind of all just clicked and came together. And I was very intrigued.

Georgia related her why to culture and people discussing:

As far as the why, I'm also seeing a lot of the why as far as people and things they do, different cultures because like we talked about in my interview, I just grown up here, so I didn't have a lot of experience with different cultures. But now, from learning human geography, I feel like I know a lot of that stuff that I wouldn't have otherwise known about people. Yes. So, it's just kind of like open

a lot of doors to things that I wouldn't have had an opportunity to find out for myself.

Finally, Osceola related the whys to agriculture and his new understanding saying:

Oh, yeah, especially, what Tess was talking about with agriculture. I always knew, Kenya was known for coffee, and the Mediterranean was known for these different fruits and wine. I never knew like why it was there, but now I know, it's like certain latitude lines and they specialize in what they're good at. But there's certain reasons why they actually do it. That's something I definitely learned from this class and some knowledge that I will never forget.

Topic 2 Post-Reflexion:

The “why” of where is a common statement in human geography. I have found that the statement applies to not only the physical location of phenomenon, but also the why of the dynamic interactions that occur at those locations. The participants reflected upon their experiences in the class and articulated their understandings as an interplay between physical location and the reasons for that location on the landscape. While each participant had a different answer, one or two may have bumped off another’s response. The common thread was they all experienced a realization that they had experienced greater understanding of the why of things on the cultural landscape. Matthew said it was the urban environments and that he would never look at Atlanta the same again. Kelly, his sister, commented on her cultural understanding of the whys and how her eyes were opened to so much more. Tess discussed it from a regional agricultural standpoint, noting it all came back to the capital, Atlanta. Athens had the same realizations as Matthew about urban environments. Georgia also related it to an understanding of the why cultures do things the way they do them. And, Osceola also discussed agriculture and why they produce food where they produce it, noting that he would never forget that knowledge. The take away from this is that the information that students learn in the class has a profound impact on how students come to understand the world around them.

Just as the previous statement was designed to provide participants with a moment to wrap up their thoughts, this statement was also designed to provide a platform for the participants to express their thoughts on the why of where. I was curious to see how the participants handled this statement and what they would say. As in the first focus group, the participants responded with a lot of back and forth among each other. It is fascinating to see that at this end stage of the game they are still actively engaged in

the discussion and willing to offer their perceptions of their changing conceptualization of culture.

Topic 3: Deeper Levels of Analysis

Many of you reported in your individual interviews and focus group interview that you were analyzing culture on a different level now. How would you respond to that statement now?

Matthew, again was the first to respond to this statement, noting:

That's a tough statement to answer. Well, I think, it's a lot. Really, it's all wrapped in your question of what culture is. And, I guess, analyzing the different knowledge of people and the whys of how they got there and seeing from their perspective is just where they're raised in the environment or just seeing their habits, whether it's religion or speech and the different dialects. And I guess, understanding all of that really is finding out that is their culture. Like language and how we all may have had the same mother tongue just different dialects. So yeah, I guess that I was looking at things on a deeper level. I understand things on a deeper level.

Kelly nodded in agreement with Matthew adding:

In quite a few ways. And to what you were just saying to Matthew, too, is how we are different, and that's okay. That's kind of what I learned, too, usually in a class that is culture-based you learn that we're all the same. And you are kind of in that mold. But in this one, I learn that is not true. We really are different based on origin. And you start seeing that this matches my culture here and this matches a culture there. And so, to analyze things like that opened up a whole new kind of understanding, a lot more doors for me. And so, even when discussing politics,

economics, languages, I've definitely learned to analyze things on a deeper level.

You realize you're not finished with analyzing something. You keep going deeper into it.

Tess compared her level of knowledge before the class with her level after taking the class saying:

Well, when I was taking the class, I really just studied to get through the test. I'd know the terminology. And I may have since forgotten most of the terminology, but I've still retained its meaning. So, I actually embraced a much deeper understanding of such a small topic that seemed arbitrary before the class. But now, after the class and after many other classes, I'm able to apply it to my life and to the real world.

Athens agreed with Tess and added:

Like Tess was saying when learning about the subjects, I would just read like for our vocab test, I would read the definition and use a quiz to learn the definition, but not really retain what the definition was saying. I decided that I just need to actually sit down and get what the vocab is telling me, and I would have to actually analyze word for word what the meaning is. So, I started seeing it on a deeper level. Learning about culture on a deeper level.

Georgia had a more global perspective regarding her level of understanding, discussing:

For me, it's more of a different perspective on things. I think I analyze more from a world's standpoint now, rather than just like the USA. Because, you know we're like trained to kind of think about just like us as a country and what can we do for

our country, because it's all about our country. But, after taking the class, I started to look at the world from cultures. I know more about other countries, and I feel more pride in like the world as a whole and all cultures.

Osceola agreed with the statement noting how the class improved his analytical abilities, saying:

I think so. Yeah, I've always been an analytical guy. I believe you have to be able analyze certain things in certain situations and try to make the best possible decision out of those situations. But I think it's helped me to see different perspectives, from cultures around the world, and how culturally people do certain things. Dealing with people from different countries, everything you understand their customs and analyze kind of their body language, and what they're doing, it helps me a lot in this process.

Topic 3 Post-Reflexion:

This statement was also carefully, and thoughtfully designed to probe further into their conceptualization of culture from taking the class. Although it may have appeared differently for each one, they were able to articulate the changes to their levels of analysis. Kelly and Matthew expressed it in similar ways in a more concrete way and how they saw those changes in understanding related to the landscape. Tess discussed her deeper level of analysis and how it affected her understanding of the real world. Georgia, rather astutely for a freshman, spoke about her newfound understanding from analyzing the world led her to form a global perspective, noting pride in the world and world cultures. Athens also talked about her deeper level of understanding that helped her become more analytical. Osceola rounded out the discussion also postulating his increased analytical abilities as a result of taking the class.

I was curious about how the participants were analyzing the world after taking the class as many mentioned this was a result of taking the class. I wanted them to explain in more detail if this had occurred for them and how it had occurred. This again led to some bantering among the participants about their analysis, yet all agreed that as a result of their changing conceptualization of culture, they analyzed information on new, deeper levels.

Topic 4: New, In-depth Understanding

Again, in your individual interviews and focus group interviews you all said that after taking the class you had new, in-depth understandings of culture than before you took the class, citing that you saw evidence of your understanding on the landscape.

How would you respond to that now?

Matthew responded:

I would say so. It's like what I was saying with the language and the religion, those are two major things, but there's always other layers like Amish and their material culture. How technology is not valued to them like it is in our society, and how they just value other things like the home and family. Yeah, it's like a sacred religion in which they value and hold each other really close.

Kelly nodded in agreement with Matthew citing a personal example:

Yes, again, a big part of that is, for me, understanding that it's not just find your answer and you're done, you have to find the definition of the why. And, it explained a lot to me about former relationships that I did have with different friends of different backgrounds from our old school. Thinking back, I understand that there were different reasons behind some of the actions that they had or the way they went about what they saw. And so, for me, the biggest part of the multi-layered thing was understanding that there is a reasoning behind that, just like the Amish of the why. It is understanding the why behind it.

Tess enthusiastically agreed with the questions and spoke personally about the experience:

Okay, absolutely. Just to use a specific example, I'm going to talk about India. I have a particular obsession with India ever since this class. And, taking this class made me realize why the different regions of India, whether you're from Jaipur or the south or the north or out in the east, and why the marriages are very different there. It's because there's about a hundred different religions there. There's so many different forms of language and dialects that all shaped the community. And what I realized about cultures is that, yes, we are from a very large industrialized country and each state is different in its own respect, but every country is like that.

Athens spoke about what she believed she knew before coming to the class and then what she believed after taking the class, saying:

So, when I came into the class, I wanted to say that I was a pretty culturally diverse person. But just then learning about all the cultures that are within our own country and then outside of the country like there's hundreds of thousands of them and I just didn't realize at first so just learning about those cultures and how I applied myself to them I was very surprised and shocked. I guess that is what I would say was a more in-depth understanding of culture.

Georgia spoke about her understanding before and after taking the class, discussing:

Yes. I don't think I had a very multi-layered understanding before this class. I feel like as I've gone through this class more as I've been able to see the different aspects of culture. I've really had like a desire to figure it out. I have a

fascination with different cultures now. So, yeah it is more in-depth, and I have seen things on the landscape like *placelessness*.

Osceola also agreed with the question, answering:

I think I do have a more in-depth cultural understanding now. Like I explained that I had something happen at work that opened my eyes and demonstrated the multi-layered aspect of culture. It made me think about how many layers there are to communication and culture. And how important it is to look at those layers.

Topic 4 Post-Reflexion:

This question was developed to delve deeper into the concept of the deeper layered nature of cultural understanding. The common thread among the participants is that they did have a deeper level of understanding of culture and it was manifested often in their post-reflexive thoughts. Kelly related it to experiences she had at her old school and how she understands that now. Tess looked at the idea from a global experience citing India as an example. Georgia and Athens compare their pre-class with their post-class understandings noting the increase in the layers. And, Osceola also related to past experiences noting newfound levels of understanding. All agreed that their understandings of culture had increased and become deeper.

I used this question to really pinpoint and note that shifting conceptualization of culture that students had reported experiencing from taking the class. I wanted to understand, one last time with this group of participants if they had really perceived that they understood more about culture and had thought about the process of how they arrived at those thoughts. The participants reported a deeper understanding of culture that had actually shifted through from the beginning of the class to the end of the class, something they had not anticipated occurring nor had I thought about at the start of the study.

Topic 5: Lightbulb Moments

Finally, I asked participants to complete the sentence, I had a “lightbulb” moment when I suddenly realized _____. Matthew, interestingly commented, saying:

I guess, I had one every unit. I guess the biggest lightbulb moment was looking back on it and seeing how it all came together. In the beginning, I was just going from one unit to another not making connections. And so, I was thinking that doesn't really have anything to do with the culture. And, then I thought, maybe it does. And then like I got how it all came together and how you had to go through certain chapters and concepts before you can understand. I didn't understand certain timelines then. And then later we studied a little bit more about the timeline of events and things and it actually came together. I was like I get it now.

Kelly commented on what Matthew said, adding:

So true. So, he's not lying at all. That's very, very true. There was a lightbulb moment in every chapter. I think he did. He would get it. We talked about it afterwards and especially because we had different levels of understanding. So, it was just that because I was older. He would get in the car we were talking about every unit and he had lightbulb moment. I would love to say that my big lightbulb moment was during the semester. But it was really about 6 weeks ago. I thought that my lightbulb moment was the language tree. And even parts of the industrial thing Matthew was talking about. And so those were mini light bulb moments, but then talking with my dad and with Matthew and I, arguing our points about why other nations are underdeveloped. We're all on the same side, but how we could explain where they were coming from and in their journey as people. I never thought that I would take that viewpoint, but I did. And so, for

me, that was a light bulb moment and I thought this was why we took the class to further and get that understanding.

Tess explained her lightbulb moment as:

I'd like to say it was during a particular chapter, but actually it was when the class came full circle during the review for the exam. I thought all of these things are coming together, and I understand this. All, of these terms are connecting in one question, and I was able to deduce it. But that's really when everything clicked for me, and I had a full understanding of what I just learned.

Athens explained her lightbulb moment, noting:

My lightbulb moment was when we were learning about the lines of latitude and agriculture. I remembered that my uncle lived in South Africa and he has a farm there too and it just all came together with the lines of latitude and the cattle ranching and that's just so rich.

Georgia felt she had lightbulb moments at the beginning and end of class, claiming:

My lightbulb moment I feel like at the beginning of this class and then at the end. I didn't really know like what I was in because I didn't know what this class was about. Then we started to talk about population. I didn't know about it, but it just like made so much sense to me and I was just kind of like blown away. And I never realized how much things affect each other. And how like this is one little thing like population, affects all these other things. I think the reason the population was like one my favorite was because it was like the first one that stood out to me. And also, like pop culture, I never realized how much America

is pop culture. I didn't know exactly what pop culture was. I didn't realize how much pop culture there is here because of our technology. And now it all fits together.

Finally, Osceola discussed his lightbulb moment as:

No, I think we've got to go back to media. That's my big thing, my lightbulb moment right, because I'm a big politics guy and I like politics. I think we got to go to media, the influence of the media. And I think that was a big, aha moment with how the media will portray things and how it influences the people in our everyday lives. And how others think and how they view our country. So, that's my lightbulb moment.

Post-Reflexion:

Although different for each participant, all admitted to having a lightbulb moment where they realized or learned something new and exciting to them. This was a common thread among them and they each instinctively knew that they were changed. Matthew admitted to having one in just about every chapter. Kelly said she had some during the course, but a major one just nearly 6 weeks before while she was having a discussion with her dad. Tess had a lightbulb moment when realizing how all of the information came together. Georgia had lightbulb moments continually throughout the course. Athens noted it was with agriculture, and Osceola said it was when he truly realized the impact of the media.

Personal Post-Reflexion: Interactive Focus Group 2: NG

As I begin to wrap up the final discussion with the first group, I know that I have reached the saturation point with this group as I am beginning to hear repeating of information. I am also beginning to see the emergent themes in the discussions. I am seeing that these themes will provide the basis for the tentative manifestations that will bring the phenomenon full circle and lead to a discussion of the research questions and findings. I have the final focus group with the other group of participants in 2 days and I look forward to hearing what they say about their shifting conceptualization of culture.

Interactive Focus Group 2: EC

As with the focus group at NG, my questions are in italics to indicate my voice, and the participants' answers are in regular font to denote their voice. What follows are focused, detailed answers to a series of pointed questions or statements that I posed to each participant to drill down on the emergent themes that were manifesting from the previous focus groups and individual interviews. What follows are focused, detailed answers to a series of pointed questions or statements that I posed to each participant to drill down on the themes that were manifesting from the previous focus groups and individual interviews.

Participants:

Jefferson- 11th grade

Shirley Shire- 10th grade

Just Jim- 10th grade

Evangeline Harcourt could not make this focus group due to a prior engagement.

Topic 1: Look at the World in New Ways

On the College Board (2017, December 11) website there is a statement about the human geography course that reads; This course is designed to help you see the world in a new way. How would you comment on this statement?

Jefferson began by saying:

I think it's true because before the course, you see it, but you don't really see it.

When you take the course and after, you'd become more analytical of it. You notice the differences or even in the micro differences that lead up to the facts behind it. You can see where you where you learned it if like you didn't take the course before it. You understand more about the world and others.

Just Jim nodded in agreement giving his account of the statement

I would also agree that it has succeeded in changing my worldview on things.

Like what Jefferson said, it changes the way you analyze things and helps you analyze it better and understand it more.

Shirley Shire laughed and lamented:

Maybe I shouldn't have gone last because that's basically what I was going to say, so, yeah, definitely, with the analyzing part. Like you see what you once just noticed, but now understand, you understand the reasoning behind certain things. They don't just exist, they have purpose. Like, especially urban sprawl. You see a lot of urban sprawl. You, kind of realize this is urbanism like slowly expanding out from like Atlanta and stuff. So, I see Atlanta differently now because of what I learned in the class. I notice things more. I heard it has a huge problem with pedestrians getting hit by cars.

Jefferson agreed with Shirley Shire adding, "I noticed that too. The sprawl and how Atlanta had no barriers to stop it from spreading. That is kind of why it is all over the place."

Just Jim also commented to Shirley Shire's response, noting:

Oh, yeah. The thing with the urban sprawl in Atlanta stuff, like, I never realized how big Atlanta actually was, I went until, this is class and urban sprawl and everything. What Shirley said is kind of tragic in an odd sort of way.

Post-Reflexion: Topic 1

The first statement elicited similar responses from each of the participants that started a banter between them that was interesting and refreshing to watch. The common theme for this group was analysis on deeper levels but when Shirley Shire took the conversation to a more concrete level, it sparked another

discussion about urban environments. Ultimately, this lead each of them to the realization that they would never look at Atlanta or any urban environment the same way again. That is what I find so refreshing about this class! The way it changes one's thinking about the world and culture that has long lasting benefits for students, as witnessed by these participants' words.

Topic 2: The Why of Where

I then asked the participants to respond to the statement derived from the textbook by geographer Marvin Mikesell (2007, p. 9) that human geography is the “why of where.” I ask them to comment as to what that statement means to them.

Jefferson offered:

That's definitely a true statement because I think like when you, how shall we say it, you notice it, but you don't think the reasoning behind it. And once you learn about how human geography ties into everything in real life and everyday life and you notice like, “Oh, these people and their way of life came about because of what happened to them,” or like this is the sequence of actions that took it to exist. We become more noticeable about the smaller stuff.

Just Jim nodded in agreement with the statement, discussing:

Oh yeah, definitely I agree with that. Uh, like, an example would be the declining birth rate and growth rate in Europe and Western Europe. Because like you would only ever hear about it and you would say, I guess because they're rich, a core country. And then, you would see, the whole domino effect of the rich countries not having kids. And then, they only have like one or two kids, and then their kids want to grow up and get jobs instead of making more kids. And then all the kids have chain reaction so, you see the entire length of the process.

Shirley Shire agreed with Jefferson adding:

You definitely, like Jefferson said, you have a broader understanding of things, it's kind of a repeat of the last question. You know you can understand things better and everything around you. Especially with Europe and stuff. You see these issues, and then you also see issues of like where race and culture like conflicts come into play. And you understand. You have a better understanding of why these things are the way they are. So, I guess you see a stringing together of whys.

Just Jim added:

I feel it's more like a web. Almost like, one thing connects to four things, and then four things connect to four more things, and then suddenly you have everything all together.

This statement from Just Jim caused Jefferson to exclaim excitedly:

Yes, yes!

And Shirley Shire to take it to a whole different level, claiming:

Yeah. It's like one of the obsession things you see in the movies or TV shows. It's like the detectives trying to figure stuff out, and he's like attaching everything with the rope. And like, you realize, "Oh my goodness." Like all these threads like they're all interwoven and like a spider web of how the world works and why everything happens.

In turn, this led Jefferson to say:

Well, yeah, like adding on to that. I suppose once you've taken other AP classes, you can tie that information together through AP Human Geography. So, like AP Human Geography, is the intermediate stop where all the other knowledges tie

into each other. And so, it becomes like a web, like how they said it. And so, it becomes so interconnected that it becomes like a sheet of this knowledge. It's like the six degrees of separation, like they have for people, but for knowledge instead. It all comes full circle.

Shirley Shire concluded by adding:

That sounds like a game that my friends and I play where you put things into Wikipedia and say you start with Bugs Bunny and then you have to get to Ebola. You are trying to see how few clicks it takes to get to Ebola from Bugs Bunny by clicking through articles and sub articles and random things. And you see that so many things are really connected. Six degrees of separation. Human geography does that for you!

Topic 2 Post-Reflexion:

Again, these participants are weaving these similar threads as the group at NG. The common theme here was the tying together of knowledge that leads to greater understanding of the whys of things. Jefferson said it was the understanding of the whys that lead to knowledge of why people and cultures do what they do and how it led him to an increased noticing of other things. Just Jim discussed how this led to a chain reaction where he got to see the entire length of the process. This in turn, lead Shirley to talk about her greater understanding of things and her stringing together of whys. Then, Just Jim made a brilliant remark that set off another round of discussion about this statement. He claimed the whys are like a web that had many strands of connectivity. Shirley Shire excitedly exclaimed that it was like a detective trying to put together clues of a crime, and Jefferson compared it to sheets of knowledge coming together, as in the six degrees of separation.

This was an exciting transaction to witness and made me think about how much I love talking to these students about their experiences. It has been so interesting and exciting to talk to and witness this groups discussions and the give and take of their relationship with one another. This has been the highlight of my study and I am thankful that I was able to work with them.

Topic 3: Deeper Levels of Analysis

Many of you reported in your individual interviews and focus group interview that you were analyzing culture on a different level now. How would you respond to that statement now?

Jefferson responded first again, saying:

It definitely did add to that. Because it makes you analyze stuff. It's a more observational class like sciences. So, to say they were just facts, but then the human geography course actually ties into the why behind the facts and makes it more like giving it more like societal, historical background making it more understandable to real life and current issues. So, it makes it more integrated into our lives. So, we become more understandable of the differences.

Just Jim, thoughtfully replied, adding:

Analyzing, analyzations. Let's see, I think it does help you analyze things at a different level. You know I had a good point when Jefferson was talking, but I forgot it because I was analyzing so much. This class taught how to connect everything and think about how it relates to what you already know, and what you will learn eventually. It helps set you up for analyzing later like other college classes.

Shirley Shire agreed with Jefferson, adding her thoughts:

Yeah. It's a lot like what Jefferson said. He was talking about how a lot of times you just have to observe things, just look at the basics of it and just make your response based on that. With AP Human Geography, you have to look deeper. You have to look kind of into the threading of like the entire world. Like you

have to look into how it affects society, how it affects cultures, how it affects like just people's emotions, how they think. You have to look at that. You can't just see something and just say, "Oh it's this." You have to look at it and have to understand this is this, this is how it affects things, this is how it became. You have to just look past this superficial. It also forces you to think outside the box and everyone needs to know how to do that

Topic 3 Post-Reflexion:

Although this statement did not elicit a lengthy response on the part of the participants, it did yield nuggets of wisdom. Each of them readily agreed that they were analyzing things on a different, deeper level. The common theme is the class helps you to analyze the world and the information presented in the class in deeper ways. Jefferson said it ties together the whys behind the facts. Just Jim said analysis of information helped him think in deeper meanings, that also helped with other classes. And Shirley claimed the class helped her think outside-the-box in new, deeper levels of information.

Again, this group is so interesting to watch and listen to their discussions. They all enthusiastically said they analyzed information on deeper levels and they articulated that quite well. I love Shirley's response that the class helped her with outside-the-box thinking. This is something I hoped that the course provides students and it was interesting to note that she chose those words to describe the class.

Topic 4: New, In-depth Understanding

Again, in your individual interviews and focus group interviews you all said that after taking the class you had new, in-depth understandings of culture than before you took the class, citing that you saw evidence of your understanding on the landscape.

How would you respond to that now?

Jefferson responded first, commenting:

Well, I come from a multi-cultured background so I, like, observe the differences between cultures. The biggest thing that AP Human Geography gave me was that

you notice the reasons behind it. So, you know, like everyone knows these different cultures because there's always conflicts between different cultures. But the things you don't realize are how similar the differences are and why they came about. Like if you go back to the societal issues, the historical issues, then you know how interconnected that they are behind it especially the language web where you see how they are all connected in some way or another. What we don't all realize is that they are all connected, and we all can trace back to like similar ancestry. So, it's just how fascinating, nowadays, what all we see is the differences but not the similarities.

Just Jim astutely made a statement before commenting:

I've been seeing that, um, interconnectivity has been like a major theme with these questions. Everything is there. Everything is there, and it never leaves. You just have to find it and put it all together. And to do that, you have to think on multiple layers about culture, and think in ways that you would not have before. And it's crazy how you do that. The class did that for me.

Shirley Shire discussed how she understood her understandings, saying:

Okay. So, I think before I came into this class, I think I had like 2D understanding of everything. It was just like you see what's on the surface, but you don't really see. You just see it. You don't really see anything else. You don't see the life of it. You don't understand how it interacts with everything. You just see a very like stagnant image of it. And so, I think after the course, you get a more 3D understanding. You see how it's almost alive, and you see how it interacts with other things. No, you just see in a deeper way. It is cool because, like, you see a

lot of times places like New York is fashion forward and you don't really realize why until you realize, "Oh, they get it before us for a certain reason and then we get it from them." And you don't think about it. You think you just get it directly from the source, but you don't really. You get it like a diluted form. But that realization came later. It came later and progressively overtime. And I didn't really think about it until like at the end of the course. And like I was just kind of thinking about it probably the last few days in school. It was like, "Oh, well, I guess that is true." And like you just kind of start piecing it together over time and you just see how it works with the whole world and everything.

Topic 4 Post-Reflexion:

This group also indicated that they had gained a new, in-depth understanding of culture from taking the class, Jefferson said, the biggest thing that he learned about culture was the reasons behind everything the things and how they occur culturally. Jim said he could now think on multiple levels about culture and that is what the class did for him. Shirley cited that she had moved from a 2D understanding of culture to a 3D understanding of culture and she could see how things interact now and in a deeper way.

I love Shirley's comments again. She is so animated when she speaks and that comes out when she talks about something, she is passionate about. Her comments about moving from a 2D to 3D understanding of culture really show her shifting conceptualization of culture she experienced from taking the class. The class really made an impact on her understanding of culture and she also indicated would have long-term benefits.

Topic 5: Lightbulb Moments

Finally, I asked participants to complete the sentence, I had a "lightbulb" moment when I suddenly realized _____.

Jefferson commented first, saying

It was mostly for me the definite lightbulb moment was when we studied the urban chapter. Because I lived in Taiwan and the US, I have seen how different

cities are set-up and how much culture has to do with it. Since we studied cities around the world, I used what I know about Taiwan and Atlanta and I could see the differences of how different cultures make urban places.

Just Jim commented next, noting:

The language tree was pretty big for me because, it showed the difference between like how Western languages they have like letters that they make things with but then in Eastern languages they have like a word or character for almost every word in the vocabulary and then they mix words or characters. So that was my lightbulb moment.

While Shirley described it as

For me it was the tree! The language tree because you see how everything like language is related and how in the end, we all come from like the same root, the same trunk and like every human is related! And it's weird because you don't think of two languages being related except for until you see the tree and you realize you can trace back from both to see where they connect and it's amazing, because you just see the birth of language.

Topic 5 Post-Reflexion:

This group also had definite light bulb moments. Two had overlapping moments, while Jefferson's stood in contrast to the others. Despite this, a lightbulb moment was a common theme among them. Jefferson's had to do with urban landscapes and he was able to see the cultural underpinnings to how cities are developed. Just Jim and Shirley Shire both were amazed by the language tree, but for Shirley it is was much more about cultural diffusion and how culture is transmitted through diffusion processes. Just Jim was simply fascinated with the language tree and the interconnectivity of things and people. Regardless of what the light bulb moment was, they each had one, which I have found is a very common occurrence in the human geography class, from what the participants were noting.

Personal Post-Reflexion: Focus Group 2 EC

This was such a wonderful group to work with on this dissertation study. Although, they were a smaller group, they were interesting to talk too. I also realized that I had reached data saturation with this group as I was hearing the same information. I believe that this was because of the way I broke down the information and zeroed in on the final set of statements, as I was noting the themes from previous focus groups and interviews. The themes were manifested for all of the participants, albeit to varying degrees. Again, I believe that these themes will provide the basis for the tentative manifestations that will bring the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture full circle and lead to a discussion of the research questions and findings. I heard the same themes with this final focus group and know that the process is now complete. I am so delighted I had the pleasure of working with this group of participants!

Summary of Final Focus Group Interviews

In summary, the final focus groups with NG and EC produced some interesting information as to what the students were thinking regarding some specific statements I posed to them. All of the participants came to similar conclusions regarding their depth of understanding following the class, understanding of the why of many things, seeing the world in a new way, analyzing information about culture in deeper ways, and having a lightbulb moment at some point during the class, if not more than one time. They all agreed that they had experienced a shifting conceptualization of culture from taking the class and understood the long-term benefits they had acquired from taking the class. In the next chapter, I set forth the tentative manifestations that became apparent from the participants' voices during the focus group and individual interviews sessions.

Chapter V

TENTATIVE MANIFESTATIONS

In this study I examined the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture as experienced by 10 high school students who participated in a human geography class. The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of these students and how, and in what ways, they became more aware of culture after they took the class. More specifically, I sought to understand what the process of learning about other cultures really looked like to students who had taken the class and if the understanding of other cultures had left a lasting impact on their lives. I used three overarching research questions to guide my examination of the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture as experienced by high school students from participation in a human geography class.

1. How do 10 high school students shift from an initial conceptualization of culture to a broader, deeper understanding of culture and its many variances encapsulated in the concept of culture?
2. What are the lived experiences of 10 high school students who took a human geography class that contributed to their understanding of culture?
3. What are the long-term benefits that students experienced or anticipate experiencing from taking the human geography class?

This study used post-intentional phenomenology to address and answer the research questions and gain an understanding of the phenomenon of students' progressive understanding of culture. I chose the post-intentional phenomenological framework as it

allowed me to move through what Vagle (2014) deemed as the phenomenon with intentionality, examining the data in all of its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. Vagle (2014) believed that movement through the data in this manner would help the researcher discover the tentative manifestations, or themes that presented, demonstrating the essence of the phenomenon. In this chapter, I share the participants' voices from focus groups and individual interviews to illuminate those manifestations and provide evidence of participants' movement through the phenomenon. By sharing these narrative experiences, it is my hope that the reader will gain a vivid picture of the uniqueness of each of the participants and their journey, in and through, their developmental process of understanding culture.

The first and second tentative manifestations are related to the process participants went through in their thought patterns about culture. Participants' experienced shifts in their conceptualization of culture and were now experiencing deeper, more complex, and changing thoughts about culture. The changes in the process of their shifting conceptualization of culture was clear but different for all of the participants. The third and fourth tentative manifestations are related to outcomes that participants experienced from taking the class. As a result of the participants shifting conceptualization of culture, they experienced changes in their behavior that led to greater levels of tolerance and acceptance of others and transfer of knowledge to other situations and found real-life application of their knowledge.

What follows is the narratives that illuminate the four tentative manifestations that I saw in the data, that of (1) shifting conceptualization of culture from initial thoughts about culture to deeper, more complex thoughts about culture than previously

experienced , (2) shifting conceptualization of culture that changed thought patterns related to culture, (3) shifting conceptualization of culture that led to a change in behavior resulting in greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others, and (4) shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concepts of culture.

Tentative Manifestation 1: Shifting Conceptualization of Culture from Initial to Deeper,
More Complex Thought About Culture Than Previously Experienced

As I talked to the participants in the first focus group and individual interviews, it quickly became clear to me that they were able to articulate that before the class they had a surface level understanding of what culture entails and they indicated they thought they had progressed in their understandings of what culture entails. I could see that it was like peeling back the layers of an onion to find a deeper understanding of culture, both for them and for me listening to their voices. It was interesting to note that the commonality for all participants was they believed they had experienced forming new and deeper levels of understanding of culture, albeit, in different forms and levels. The younger participants, although having had the class more recently than Tess and the participants from the other school, had the least nuanced answers, possibly because they were younger and less equipped, cognitively and linguistically, to describe their experiences or possibly because they had not had time to reflect on or incorporate and use the course content yet. Several mentioned that they thought they knew more about culture at the beginning of the course and then realized that they weren't as knowledgeable, in retrospect, as they thought. All of the participants noted that they had a much deeper understanding of culture at the end of the course than they had at the beginning. Further,

they all indicated that their understanding of culture became broader, and more inclusive of traits associated with culture. Many noted they now included language and the ability to communicate as part of culture and cultural transmission. In the following section, I provide the participants' narrative voices that speak to the process of how the first tentative manifestation unfolded.

Osceola

Osceola described how he initially progressed through those layers of understanding about culture and how he had a hard time defining culture initially. He found that as he began to look around and think about his learning, he began to see that culture was deeper than he originally realized.

Initially, I had a hard time defining culture. It was hard to put into words.

There's pop culture and folk culture. Like within a big culture, there are smaller certain types of culture. Then I started to look at culture, and realized that it was deeper than that, like dowry deaths in the Indian culture, and we think of that as bad, and it is, but it is something that happens every day. I know that there are more layers to that definition of culture. I knew before that coffee was grown in certain places and so are grapes, but I never really knew why. After the class, I understood the why of so many more things and how it is all related to culture. I think I do have a more multilayered understanding of culture now.

Osceola expanded upon the specific ways he thought he thought he had gained a deeper understanding of culture from taking the class and importance of understanding culture. He also addressed his experiences as a child growing up and how he experienced learning about culture and how he now sees the process of learning about culture.

I had been exposed to other cultures my whole life through the sports activities that I participated in when I was younger. My dad worked with a lot of people from other countries, and we would play soccer together and sometimes I would go over to their house and eat different types of food. But, I didn't think about it a lot and I didn't really get to learn much about their culture. Now, when I look back, I was learning about other cultures, I just didn't realize it then.

Osceola then spoke about the specifics of his deeper level of understanding relating it to an occurrence at work that changed the way he thought about language and communication. He explained how an incident at work helped to see the deeper layers of culture.

Specifically, I now realize that there is so much more to culture than I first thought. It has so many more layers than I once thought. It is also deeper than I once thought. I now know that customs are important with other cultures. We have to understand and be respectful of other cultures. Also, politics has a cultural component. Different cultures have different political stances. So, it is super important for people to know about other cultures and their politics. I would say that economics and language are part of culture. There are so many things, so it is hard to name them all, but I learned how important language is to culture at my job. I saw how language caused a problem at my work, and it opened my eyes and demonstrated the deeper layered aspects of culture. It made me think about how many layers there are to communication and culture, and how important it is to look at those layers.

Osceola elaborated on how he felt he progressed from an initial, level of understanding of culture to a new in-depth understanding of culture from taking the class and how he felt that the course would help him in the future as a result of those new in-depth understandings of culture. Osceola describes how he believes he progressed in his level of understanding of culture, how he now sees culture, and the benefits he anticipates from gaining that understanding of culture.

I learned a lot more than what I knew coming in to the class. I mean I knew some things, but I didn't have a deeper understanding of other cultures. I didn't know so many things and the class helped me understand different things about culture and how important it is. I now understand that there are different ways of thinking and we have to be able to work with everyone. So, I think that this class helps people in high school, because you learn about different cultures and trying to understand one another.

Well and there is language. I learned about the deeper levels of language and the variety of dialects and how it can cause people to think differently, because they think in their own language. So, you can see how cultures developed as well as someone's own culture developed around the world. I know that there are many more ways that the class developed my understanding of culture on deeper levels that will become apparent as I go off to college and the real world.

Athens

Athens shared with me what she learned in the class that changed her knowledge about something on a new, deeper level and what that looked like to her over the course of the

semester. Athens noted her understanding of the Amish community had deepened, as well as her understanding religion and the multiplicity of religions around the world.

For me, it was the understanding of the Amish community. I was so surprised that people, they just lived off the grid and they have their own, I guess something like they have their own sacred area. But like, area that the government just let them have I think. And, so, they couldn't be touched by society or changed. And, when they did get out into society, a lot of them went back to their family. Also, I was talking about how like I've just grown up around Baptists and the Methodists and just like everything Christianity. I was surprised to learn how large religion really is. I feel that I have learned so much more from taking this class that I did not know before. It has really prepared me to see cultures in new and different ways. So back to the Amish. Like, why did the Amish decide to not industrialize with everybody else, why did they just like decide that? Their ways, the best way or the highway. So, I just wanted to know what made them think was the best thing for their culture. Also, the Amish were definitely one of those times but also when we talked about language.

Athens expanded upon the ways she felt like she had a deeper understanding of culture and how her initial understanding was not very developed. She offered that her thoughts on her initial understanding of culture was not as developed as she once believed.

So, I started seeing it on a deeper level once I took the time to analyze the concepts more than just learn vocabulary. I was learning about culture on a deeper level. I thought I knew a lot about other cultures and had pretty good understanding of culture before taking this class because of my background, but I

figured out I really didn't know as much as I thought. What I thought I knew coming into it, like, before the class I would say, "Oh, I was a 10." Like I knew it. When I got to the class, it was like, I don't know everything. Like, I'm a five, like, maybe not even a five. I don't even know how to word it because, I have never learned this much before. Human geography is where I was like, it broadens so many people's horizons. I think the world would be such a better place if they took this class and just like getting to learn about the different aspects of life and culture that like you really don't know. You can't know everything in life about different cultures unless you stand in their shoes and like walk their life, but I feel like I'm getting that strong sense of like place and cultural aspects in this class. I was like, "That's great." So, I do see myself growing too about, like, growing as a person. I think this class has made me grow so much. Like, just coming from who I thought I was to who I am now. I'm just a different person because of this class. I have learned so much. Oh, I am an improved person all the way. I think I know a lot more about culture. I think I am. Now I think if this were a real situation, what will I be doing? I just apply culture to that and then I know how that's just their way of life and I need to respect that that's their way of life.

Kelly

Kelly discussed how she had moved through a process that lead to a new, deeper understanding of culture. She noted that she challenged herself throughout the class as to what she believed culture entails and then cited some application of the concept of culture.

Throughout the class, I kept challenging my idea of culture. And I remember through that semester, as we went through the course and I kept moving through my own understandings. It helped shape it what my idea of what culture is. It was just really neat to see how I was gaining a deeper level of understanding. I think the process is different for different people. You don't realize it. It is the "why of everything!" Even in English class, all our books, so far, the very first question we've had is, "What is culture?" And no one in the classroom has been able to tie-in religion to culture, which I thought was interesting. But it's, because they were never taught what culture is. And so, to see that it is a big concept, it's not necessarily ending, there's no bounds to it. That is what was shocking to me.

Kelly spoke about her realization that she was seeing culture on a deeper level, which had changed how she perceived culture. She described understanding the why behind what people do and how that changed how she thought about people from her past. Kelly was able to take the concept of culture and apply to situations in her past and realize why people behave the way they do.

Yes, again, a big part of that is, for me, understanding that it's not just you find your answer and you're done; you have to find the definition of the why. And, it explained a lot to me about former relationships that I did have with different friends of different backgrounds from our old school. Thinking back, I understand that there were different reasons behind some of the actions that they had or the way they went about what they saw. And so, for me, the biggest part of the deeper level thing was understanding that there is a reasoning behind that.

It is understanding the why behind it.

Kelly described what she thinks a deeper understanding of culture means to her. Kelly likened culture to a “big umbrella” that has many more facets than she once believed, and she now has the ability to string concepts together and see how ideas fit together. Kelly’s comments demonstrate how she was working through the shifting conceptualizations of culture from initial, surface level to more complex thought about culture when she says how that culture is larger than she once thought.

For me, culture is about everything. I didn’t realize that before, but now I see it everywhere. It is language, religion, folk and pop culture, economics, urban environments, and even migration patterns. Migration and its role in culture really hit home for me. And I think that's a big reason of why there's still many variations of religion. There are variations of different events and so that was cool. Urban was a new thing for me. Because that was a new thing about this class, it was because I'd taken maybe a few sciences like that where it was cumulative. But to the degree where you had to string classes together, we are still going over the very beginning stuff and the core on the day before the final test. It all came together under that big umbrella. That was cool to me. So, I kind of learned a new understanding of how to piece everything together. I learned to string the concepts together.

Matthew

Matthew spoke about how he also felt he had moved through a process that lead to a new, deeper understanding of culture and how it helped him see how everything has a reason. Matthew experienced shifting conceptualization of culture from only an initial

understanding to more complex understanding and thought of culture and claimed he would never be able to look at things the same anymore.

I got to see how the environment really changes everything about what you are thinking, your understanding. But I learned from taking this class about other cultures and now I see things differently than before. I asked Matthew what thoughts made him believe he had a deeper understanding of culture. I guess, I would look around and see certain things, but I never understood why, and I just kind of accepted them as that's what they are. But I got to see that there actually is a reason why certain things happen like the urban sector models, they were planned. Everything's has a reason, and just to make everything more efficient whether it's for economics or just for the people. Now I can't go out in Atlanta and not see the things we talked about. It's that big. I now know that culture is so much more layered than I thought. I now see that religion, language, folk and pop culture, even urban, like I said before, are part of culture and effect how we look at people and the world. One thought that stands out to me is when we were talking about some cultures not having a word or language for the future, so they don't save money and only plan day-to-day. I had to think about that and that just blew my mind that I understood their thoughts.

Georgia

Georgia commented on her thoughts about her moving to deeper level of understanding of culture. She related it to an incident she had about religion. Georgia was able to look back in the past and retrospectively realize that is how some engage in their cultural practices. Further, her shifts in conceptualization of culture from initial

understanding to more complex thoughts about culture and gave her an ability to see the uniqueness of culture.

I haven't been raised to think that I'm superior to other people or haven't thought about it before, but I feel like now I just kind of appreciate other people. I am definitely more aware of it, like knowing. When we don't have knowledge about it, there's no way to know. It's almost like now I have like the full story of things. I don't look at things and say that is weird now because I aware of differences and tolerant of them. Yeah, it's kind of interesting like from the way I've been raised. I remember one day we went to Six Flags, and it was Muslim Day. I did not know there was such thing as like Islam. There were all these people like on the ground praying. And like just singing all these songs that I remember. I still remember that today just being like, "What are these people doing?"

I have like conversation with my parents and I was just like asking them so many questions and just like different things. Now looking back on It, I see all these things that I thought was like so weird and now it doesn't really faze me anymore. I see it as their culture. Another thing that really surprised me was with like the women in China who didn't get married and their families just like totally turned on them and then. We watched that video about the marriage market in China. And, it was just, it was so sad. It's just compared just seeing like how good I have it, as a female in this country. I can't imagine like what if I didn't want to marry someone I didn't love, or I was forced too.

Georgia described what that deeper level of understanding looked like to her and how the understanding encompassed more than she initially thought. Georgia said she now sees

culture as encompassing more than she once thought and that the concept is more layered than she first believed. Georgia was moving from initial understandings to more complex thought about culture.

I don't think I had a very deeper level of understanding before this class.

I feel like as I've gone through this class more, I've been able to see the different aspects of culture. I've really had like a desire to figure it out. I have a fascination with different cultures now. So, yeah it is more layered and deeper. For example, I guess I just thought it was dress and food because I didn't know. But now I know there's a lot more to it. Now I would include so much more like religion, language, urban, and agriculture. And the pop culture is interesting too because this place is just consumed with pop culture, and then in other parts of the world, you almost don't see any of it. I didn't always realize that, like, the impact that, like, our country has on other parts of the world. There is so much more, and I know that I am not giving everything. I will say it is just like everything we talked about in class.

Tess

Tess commented on the shift in her level of understanding culture from before the class to the time after taking the class. Tess said that the class affected the how she views other people and that as a result of her conceptualization of culture shifting from initial understandings to deeper understandings, she changed the way she thinks about culture.

I took the course as a freshman. It was the first real thought-provoking class I ever took. This class makes you think about issues that are relevant to your life, and before this class, I wasn't taught to think that way. I wasn't taught to think

about how my actions, how my culture could affect how I see the world, and how other people might see it totally differently. I was pretty naive coming in, I guess. The class has affected the way I view other people, and my respect for other people, because ever since taking AP Human, I've gained a lot of friends who don't fit the same profile as I do. I've learned how to respect their beliefs and their culture. And I have friends who are Hindu and Muslim, and I can understand why they believe what they believe because they hailed from a different part of the world than I did. And it's actually forced me to change my thinking to now I'm able to think like internationally in between religions, in between cultures, and even between languages.

Tess expounded on the ways she felt that she had gained a new, deeper understanding of culture and how she now sees culture and how that change of conceptualization of culture helped her dig deeper into concepts.

You go in public you see people who are from a different area speaking a different language and dress differently rather than judging them you just kind of think about how their culture and environments shaped them versus how yours shaped you and you learn to appreciate who they are as a result. Culture is a concept that encapsulates pretty much every aspect of humans and most prominently it's religion, language, habit, architecture, and agriculture. It could even be abstract too because it could be just one experience and that's part of your culture but that's why when someone says that there a cultured person, it's often based on how much they've traveled or what experiences they've had. I think that this class helps people to really dig deeper into concepts, especially culture. It's

just kind of like open a lot of doors to things that I wouldn't have had an opportunity to find out and for myself.

Jefferson

Jefferson spoke about what a deeper understanding of culture looked like to him. Jefferson described his deeper understanding as relating to his multi-cultural background and his ability to observe the differences between cultures.

Well, I come from a multi-cultured background so I, like, observe the differences between cultures. The biggest thing that AP human geography gave me was that you notice the reasons behind it. So, you know, like everyone knows these different cultures because there's always conflicts between different cultures. But the things you don't realize are how similar the differences and why they came about. What we don't all realize is that they are all connected. So, it's just how fascinating how, nowadays, what all we see is the differences but not similarities. It all comes full circle with this stuff.

Jefferson commented on how after taking the class he realized how much larger and deeper culture is than he initially believed. Jefferson experienced shifts in his conceptualization of culture from an initial understanding and thoughts about culture to more complex deeper understandings of culture from taking the class.

I would say language and religion and oh yeah population. Again, it ties everything in, like how did it bring in the history of how it was built. So, it brings in other concepts like, spatial distribution, migration, and population growth, just everything. And then there are the city models. They are very culturally designed, in terms of their appearance. But like one of the major historic cities

are completely different. So, culture wise, and sticking on cities. I was interested the different components that build up cities, culture wise. One of the big things in South American cities, is like how they have temples and all and how the US and the UK don't have that. Taiwan used to have that, but they started to build up because of economic development. I actually thought about going into urban planning because of that. It tweaks a little bit of understanding of culture because it has something for everybody.

Just Jim

Jim talked about how he felt he had moved from an initial, level of understanding about culture to a deeper understanding of culture after taking the class. Jim likened his deeper understanding of culture to opening his mind to understand how different ways of thinking.

The biggest thing that human geography provided was learning how to write and communicate ideas. I was thinking things were happening, but they're all happening at the same time and interacting with each other all at the same time. And it really opens up your head for all these different ways of thinking and to analyze all these different things.

Also, the human geography like the course definitely helped with, not only interacting with other cultures, but seeing how other cultures interact with each other. And that was like my biggest take away from the class. How different people act within the cities and how like some like random cultural aspects, like ethnic restaurants can affect like an entire community or something. And it opens your eyes to stuff like that and you just see more.

Jim commented on how he now sees culture as much more than a single aspect, but as a larger concept than he did initially. Jim experienced shifting conceptualization of culture that moving through initial thoughts to more complex thoughts about culture because he now sees the multifaceted nature of culture after taking the class.

There are so many things. First, I would say language. As I said before.

Language is so important for the way you think and your culture. It is a way to express your culture. That has been my background. I have seen how language fits in and is important to culture. Then, there is religion. I said that I have family that are Buddhist. I see how important it is to them and how they show their culture through their rituals, like that foil on the babies' head. Ethnicity is under there. Well, really even location. There is just so much. I mean can I just say everything? I could just run through all of the chapters and topics we talked about that would be part of it. You don't realize it at the time, but it is all those things. Like I didn't think that urban, like cities were cultural but then when we talked about cities and how they were built I went, "wow, even that is culture." And, yeah, that goes with human geography because it's like an introductory course to like all that culture stuff. Not introductory as in rudimentary, but as in getting you to see how culture is bigger than you thought. It introduces you to just the concept and let's think about it more.

Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline explained her initial understanding of culture prior to taking the human geography class. She described how she thought she had a moderate level of

understanding of culture, but she had not really taken an in-depth look at similarities and differences between cultures.

I'd say I had a moderate understanding of other cultures. My dad travels a lot for work. Especially when I was younger, we would go on trips with him a lot to all of the different places he would go, and so I got to see the other cultures. Both my parents did a lot of, like explaining it but not really showing it as much. I thought I knew a lot of stuff because I had been exposed to different cultures and that people are different. But I hadn't really looked in depth at what the similarities and differences are and human behavior, in the way we clumped together and the way we don't. We just deal with things and why different groups are more developed than others. Things that like definitely stuck with me that I hadn't really thought about before.

Evangeline commented on her progress from an initial, surface level to a deeper understanding of culture after taking the class. Evangeline saw her progression through understanding culture because she learned to think and to understand concepts, as opposed to memorizing facts.

I think that human geography had more work than I think I did in most of my classes. But I think that's a good thing. But I think it did teach me a lot more about just like time management and the best ways for me to study. Because it's taking real-world stuff that you interact with every day. And changing your perception of it and adding more layers and more details to what the you had never thought of before. And I think that's something that's the hardest thing to learn in school. Whereas with human geography you're taking concepts you

already know a little bit about and now having to change what you think of them.

It's one of those classes that teaches you to think about the world. Like there's too much information just be able to memorize. You must understand it and how this concept affects the world you are in. You must be able to formulate your own opinions and understandings on it.

Evangeline also commented on her thoughts on the multi-layered nature of culture and commented on what she sees culture. Evangeline saw her shifting conceptualization of culture to be a movement from initial understanding and thoughts about culture to more complex, multifaceted understanding and thought about culture.

Basically, it is everything, from the way we talk to like language, to the things we eat, to the way we drive. Also, it includes mannerisms, the way we dress, our facial expressions, and the way we behave. I could just go through the chapters and units and all of that would have to be included. It expands your interpretation of culture. You really go from an initial understanding to a deeper understanding because you are exposed to so many more aspects of culture.

Like, you go from a narrow view of US culture to an understanding that Africa has a culture, Asia has cultures, everyone has a culture. But after the class I think I do look at it more in depth and like the differences and the way we do everything to the way we express ourselves, different languages, different ways of dressing and eating and like what the basic interaction structure is. Are you, ah, family-based? Are you individual-based? Are you friend based? Like is an education-based system or a work-based system. I think all of that goes into different cultures. I have seen some cultures where they speak the same language,

they live in the same place but their completely different mannerisms and its even kind of the same foods. It's just on the basic level rather than process. They live very differently than us and they talk differently, and they interact with each other differently. But that is all a part of culture.

Shirley Shire

Shirley discussed her progress from initial, surface level understandings to deeper level understandings of culture and how that developed for her. Shirley described her background as a starting point for her understanding of culture and progressed to how her shifting conceptualization of culture helped her form broader, more complex understandings about culture.

My level of understanding was probably minimal. I'm White. My family is English, like I can trace myself back to some of the first colonizers of Georgia and North Carolina. So, I'm kind of the cliché, like stereotypical, like just born in the south, raised in the south. I was kept from knowing some cultures, like not on purpose. My mom was accepting but it didn't really happen. But after taking the class, I had some deeper levels of understanding. For instance, I actually love writing a lot and I like writing fantasy. So, you have to make your own world and culture. And so, that actually helps when I'm writing fantasy though it's a weird thing like to connect human geography with writing fantasy. It actually, helps a lot because now I can understand and know how cultures interact because I've taken the human geography course. You have a broader understanding of things. You know you can understand things better and everything around you. Especially with Europe and stuff. You

see these issues, and then you also see issues of like where race and cultural like conflicts come into play. And you understand. You have a better understanding of why these things are the way they are. So, I guess you see a stringing together of whys. It also helped me see culture as more than just what people wear and what they eat, but culture is not just those little things, culture's a big thing. It's everything. So, if were to say what culture is, I would definitely include language and the way people communicate within their culture. We already talked about how important language is for cultural communication. I would also say it is religion and the practices that people do depending on what religion they believe in. It is also, habits and customs that go with their culture. It could be related to folk culture or it could be more like America and pop culture. But then I saw that in the urban chapter too. The way that people set-up cities is very much part of their culture. Come to think of it, all of that has a lot to do with population and migration. We learned about that in the human geography class and then we talked about that in AP Environmental and AP Bio, believe it or not. Oh gosh, I just went through a bunch of the chapters in human. So, yeah it is everything, all of those things I just said and more. It is a big concept.

Summary Tentative Manifestation 1

Tentative manifestation 1, shifting conceptualization of culture from initial to deeper, more complex thought about culture than previously experienced, was experienced by all the participants but in different and varied ways. The participants sought to make meaning of their journey from initial, surface level understanding of

culture to a more nuanced, deeper understanding of culture. Although their experiences were as individual as they are, there was a consensus that there was an awakening to the notion that culture was much more complex than they initially knew or assumed. For some, this awakening, or shifting conceptualization of culture, happened gradually over the length of the course. For others, it came at the end of the course when they reflected upon their knowledge and newly found understanding of culture and the complexities that surround the concept. Either way, this was perhaps the strongest manifestation in that each of the participants experienced a change in their understanding of culture that ran deeper than they once believed, which is something the course is designed to do.

I believe that the participant's experiences with learning about the complex nature of culture speaks to the first manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture from initial, surface level to more complex conceptualization of culture than previously experienced, as participants continually commented that they knew more about culture after taking the class and knew on they knew it on a deeper level than they previously experienced. Their understanding of culture became deeper and more nuanced about the subjects we discussed in human geography. Further, the participants indicated that they now saw other, new aspects of culture that they had previously not considered to be related to culture. Many had never really considered language to be culturally driven, and a method of transferring culture throughout societies and globally. This new revelation was eye-opening to many of the participants and helped shift their conceptualization of culture to a more complex, thought provoking subject that they had experienced than before taking the class. The next section

Tentative Manifestation 2: Shifting Conceptualization of Culture That Changed Thought Patterns Related to Culture

Initially, I anticipated collapsing this tentative manifestation with the first tentative manifestation. But, the evidence was just too strong for it to stand alone as a separate tentative manifestation. The participants often cited they experienced a shift in their conceptualization of culture that changed their thought patterns related to culture, noting that they saw evidence of the shift in conceptualization on the landscape when they were out and about in their environment. The participants said that sometimes this occurred immediately and sometimes it was a delayed response when they were out and about in the environment and reflecting on their learning. Some participants were able to explain this manifestation quite eloquently while others struggled to put it into words, succeeding after thinking about it for a moment. Either way, it was clear that they were progressing and shifting in their conceptualization of culture that was changing their thought patterns. For many participants they were reflecting on their thoughts about culture after taking the class and finding evidence of it on the landscape or for others it was paying more attention to their thoughts. Further, for some it was a gradual progression in their thoughts, while others said that had flashes of insight through the class. In the next sections, I will layout the relevant participant's narratives that illuminate the second tentative manifestation.

Osceola

Osceola commented on how he had progressed in his shifting conceptualization of culture and how his thought patterns had changed in relation to culture. He noted that he was analyzing information in different ways after taking the class.

I've always been an analytical guy. I believe you have to be able analyze certain things in certain situations and try to make the best possible decision out of those situations. But I think it's helped me to see different perspectives, from cultures around the world, and how culturally people do certain things. Dealing with people from different countries, everything you understand their customs and analyze kind of their body language, and what they're doing, it helps me a lot in this process. So, I am reflecting a lot more now about the process after taking the class. Well, yeah, I think I've learned so much and look at the world differently. Especially what we're talking about the news outlets, how every single one of them tells the same story in a different way, whether it's Fox News, CNN, ABC, NBC, or any news stations. I think, I have come to realize that a little bit more and be more attentive when I'm watching news and trying to kind of find the true facts and then, observing making my own opinions about what's going on in the news.

Athens

Athens discussed the shifts in her conceptualization of culture and the changes in her thoughts about culture and how she believes that she has progressed in her knowledge about culture. Athens noted that she was seeing evidence of her changes in thought patterns on the landscape when she was out with her mother.

For me it was seeing evidence of the things I learned on the landscape.

Specifically, I can remember going from not knowing that, just a type of fence on the road is some type of culture is just saying that fence to me like, "Oh Mom, like that's pop culture. That's pop culture." Well, when I started getting around,

just looking around the county we live in, I was noticing all the fences that were around and the pop culture and the folk culture and I take that into consideration. I noticed all the different fences. It's like a split rail but then it's a wood one. Or I see this old church and it looked like a traditional church that's in the book. And I think about how religion is part of culture but now I see it and have a name for it. I was starting to see it on the landscape, think about it, and put a name to it. That was really interesting.

Then we were talking about language in the focus group and I knew that that northern people had accents and southern people had accents and people from the southwest and the northwest. And all just different walks of life, they had different accents than us. But, I didn't expect the words to be so different, like you told us rotary. I had no clue what a rotary was. And I was like, "What? What's a rotary?" So, I guess it's like a roundabout and I was like, "Oh, a roundabout." I made that connection later.

Kelly

Kelly discussed her progression through shifts in her conceptualization of culture that lead to changes in her thought patterns. She described the changes in her thought patterns about politics, population, migration, and how all of it is related to culture.

The African unit really stood out for me. Political structures, political but then it was Africa mainly for me. And immigration and populations from the videos we watched and the articles we read. That was the immigration. And then, in the beginning, I want to say I realize what makes a society. I started to think about culture more, that's when it clicked for me. Kind of everything came together about

different realms. And so now when I look at politics either at home or with other people, I'm kind of thinking of where they are and their stage of development. And so that's one of my biggest takeaway was. And so that was really interesting. It happened when I started reflecting on it. I could see that I had started thinking about it, like I had not thought about it before.

That right there has been what's been really cool about this class and, maybe, the school at the same time. It was because we have not really been exposed, at least; I haven't to all of this knowledge. It was really cool to sit there with seniors and juniors and freshmen and see different people and you could see how they've grown in their understanding of culture by what they were saying in class. And that has been a really cool and neat process to watch.

I think shifting conceptualizations of culture and changes in thought patterns idea describes the class pretty darn well and especially going through it with Matthew, brother, because we didn't see it the same way all the time. He's my brother and he understood the somethings in a different way than I understood. The class, kind of opens your eyes to so much more. It's not just geography and it is not just the physical aspect of the world. It is really what culture is, not the blanket vocabulary statement you learn in English. And so, that is kind of neat.

Matthew

Matthew commented on how he felt about progressing in shifts in his conceptualization of culture and how it led to changes in his thought patterns about culture. Matthew described how he saw evidence of his changes in thought patterns

when he was away on a golf trip and he saw something on the landscape that triggered a memory he had from class.

I think it's interesting looking at Africa and a lot of those countries. But I thought I thought it was interesting because it's like whenever we were talking about becoming bilingual and learning other languages, I never quite understood how one language would be easier than the other. Because I'm like it's still starting from zero and going forward. But really it does make sense and that if you don't know certain words in your vocabulary it changes how you think. And the Gullah people and their language. I didn't know anything about that or them and now I know about their pidgin language. I thought it was interesting and it made so much sense after you learn and think about it.

I was making more and more in-depth connections. I mean, we learned quite a bit. I'm interested in learning more about European countries and the unions and immigration policies. I remember I was going down to a golf tournament and it was a championship in Orlando and we're looking around in Celebration, Florida. I remember from our book there is a section on it and I believe it was in the urban chapter and it is called new urbanism. I thought, oh we talked about this and now I am seeing it on the landscape. I really started to think about it and then I would see it somewhere and think that we had learned about it and it really does exist. I guess, I would look around and see certain things, but I never understood why, and I just kind of accepted them as that's what they are. But I got to see that there. Now I can't go out anywhere and not see the things we talked about. It's that big.

Georgia

Georgia spoke about how she felt about moving through her shifting conceptualization and how it changed her thought patterns about culture. She described an incident that happen to her where she saw evidence on the landscape of her changed patterns of thought.

I am seeing things we talked about in class on the landscape and calling it out when I see it. We were driving down the interstate a few weeks ago but we just kept seeing gas stations. I was like “look at all of this *placelessness*.” And, my parents said, “what is that?” And I was, like, “Have you ever noticed that, everywhere looks the same, when you're driving down the interstate?” My parents said, “I guess so.” So that was fun and cool to inform them. But now I see it and reflect on it more and understand it more. In class we were talking about horizontal and vertical integration in the media and retail. I was able to recognize that, and it seems like I see things and it's like, I know exactly what it is and why it is now. Because before, this class it just there and never crossed my mind. How there is just like, a strategy behind everything. I was making all of these connections. It was fun to like, sit in class just to be like, making all these connections when I started to think about it.

Tess

Tess also spoke about her shifting conceptualization of culture that help her note the changes in her thought patterns about culture. Tess commented on seeing evidence of that change in her thoughts when she saw *slash and burn agriculture* occurring on the

landscape. Further she noted her timeline of the progression of her shifting conceptualizations of culture.

I mean that happens more often than you think. You go in public you see people who are from a different area speaking a different language and dress differently rather than judging them you just kind of think about how their culture and environments shaped them versus how yours shaped you, and you learn to appreciate who they are as a result. I've gained a lot of friends from cultures foreign to my own, and I mean when I go out to the barn or on a long road trip I'll see a field burning. It's like oh, *slash and burn agriculture*. Little terms will just pop up, and I'm like oh I kind of remember that now. Because now you have a name for it. You start to notice it on the landscape and you are like that's cool, but you never really understood the phenomenon, but now you do, and you have a name for it.

I'd like to say it was during a particular chapter that I finally understood everything, but actually it was when the class came full circle during the review for the exam. I thought, "all of these things are coming together, and I understand this." All, of these terms are connecting in one question and I was able to deduce it. But that's really when everything clicked for me and I had a full understanding of what I just learned later after thinking about it all.

Jefferson

Jefferson discussed his shifting conceptualization of culture and how it helped change his thoughts about culture. Jefferson noted he realized that he experienced a shifting conceptualization and how it changed his thoughts when he began to see

placelessness on the landscape when he was out driving around. Further, Jefferson explained how he felt the course added to his understanding of culture.

After taking human geography, I feel like the information becomes more ingrained that you don't double think, check it or think about it because it kind of goes into your mindset after a while. You automatically think about that. It becomes a part of you, of your thinking, instead of like something you have to reflect upon, does that make sense?

I found it seems like you only learned about it or you only have a background understanding of it but then you understand the concepts more easily and it is not just like the superficial facts and story, like the textbook answers. You actually get to understand the stuff underneath the surface because you are thinking about. It can explain how you should understand the landscape around you.

So, once I took the course, when I was thinking about culture as like the whole, my thoughts were naiver, I guess, or like, not refined. But after human geography my thoughts became more refined, and you can become more analytical, like the different city models. And then, like, the small things that you notice as different and when you say *placelessness*. There is *placelessness* in different parts of the country. But if you go to a different country, the small things that you notice are different. Not just place but also the people how they interact, you can definitely tell the difference. So, I was reflecting on what I had learned and. Also, I would say it's become like, I had the understanding, but it was more like unorganized, and all over the place, and it became more structured and more refined afterwards.

The course did add to my understanding of many things. Maybe not right away, but later when I thought about it. It makes you analyze stuff. It's a more observational class than sciences, which mostly just facts. But the human geography course actually ties the why behind the facts and gives it a more societal, and historical background, which makes it more understandable to real life and current issues. So, it makes it more integrated into our lives. So, we become more understanding of the differences.

I suppose once you've taken other AP classes, you can tie that information together through AP Human Geography. So, AP Human Geography, is the intermediate stop where all the other knowledges ties into each other. And so, it becomes like a web. And so, it becomes so interconnected that it becomes like a sheet of this knowledge. It's like the six degrees of separation, like they have for people, but for knowledge instead. It all comes full circle.

Just Jim

Jim commented on his thoughts regarding his journey with the shifting conceptualization of culture that he experienced and how it changes his patterns of thought. Further he too noted the changes in his thoughts by citing evidence of his learning when he was driving and when he was on an academic field trip.

I started to see it on the landscape when I was out on the weekend. I'm starting to see it now because with all these developments like there's a new exit coming off the highway now. And, I'm starting to see all these trees being cleared out and it's going to be like all the same instead of, you know unique. I've got a Bojangles over here and McDonald's over here and it's weird. There is almost no difference

any longer on the landscape.

Also, I can remember doing the religion chapter and we saw the Angkor Wat. I kept thinking, “I know this stuff it was pretty cool.” I would be reading the book and I would turn around and look at people, “This is my people, this is Cambodian.” “This is mine, these are my people.” Then, I remember we were on an academic field trip and I think we were going through, I can’t remember the name of it, but it was like a small town and it looked like downtown Newton [pseudonym] almost, but I said, “Wow.” And I said the gentrification! I thought “wow.” This actually happens, and I’m seeing it happen. I was gaining experience with the subject and then seeing it in the real world. I finally had a name for it. It’s really an all-encompassing thing.

Jim continued and described his thoughts about how human geography helped him see more connections and the interplay of many more ideas and concepts after, which happened after he took the class.

Being half Cambodian and half American like it was just my life. Then like when I took the course, I saw all these things coming together and how even so much more and how the culture from this one thing, affects everything. You start thinking about things more than you did before and they are deeper thoughts. It’s eye-opening because it all goes full circle. And when you see that, it’s really amazing because you may have forgotten specifics, but I know certain concepts I am still being employing. I mean, in high school, you only hear about friends telling you to learn, Spanish, German, and maybe Mandarin if you want to go into business or something, but like you never hear human geography to find about

language. I watch all these different language channels and they're really interesting because they also incorporate how history affects language and it's honestly amazing. Basically, it's the human journey. Yeah, if you do the course properly, like as a student, then it helps open your mind up to understanding everything else. I feel like all the information is more like a web. Almost like, one thing connects to four things, and then four things connect to four more things, and then suddenly you have everything all together.

Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline expounded on her thoughts about progressing through shifts in her conceptualization of culture that helped her recognize changes in her patterns of thought related to culture. Evangeline also discussed *placelessness* as evidence of how she was beginning to see what she learned in class on the landscape.

Human geography takes real world stuff that you interact with every day and helps you think about in other ways, changing your perception of it and adding more layers and more details to what the you had never thought of before. And I think that's something that's the hardest thing to learn in school. Whereas with human geography you're taking concepts you already know a little bit about and now having to change what you think of them. It made me reflect more about what I was learning and then I would see it later.

I thought I knew a lot of stuff because I had been exposed to different cultures and that people are different. But I hadn't really looked in depth at what the similarities and differences are and human behavior, in the way we clumped together and the way we don't. We just deal with things and why different groups

are more developed than others. Things that like definitely stuck with me that I hadn't really thought about before.

There's been a couple of times that I've like, we've gone on road trips because we like to drive instead of fly to places especially in the US. That way, we can stop and do different random things when we come across something, but I thought, "I have no clue where in the country we might be because this looks like any stop off the interstate." I learned about that in human geography. We called that *placelessness* and I was starting to see it on the landscape and think about how I had learned that. And I had a name for it. And I was seeing it on the landscape. I would say that the class did increase my awareness and I have retained information and sometimes it takes prompting to come out, but like I'm definitely more conscious of other cultures and what going around me. I pay attention to like what we're doing to other countries, and how other countries are reacting, all that kind of stuff that I like didn't pay attention to before. It is really a fascinating progression.

Shirley Shire

Shirley expounded on her progression in conceptualization of culture and how it changed her thoughts about culture. She too mentioned *placelessness* as evidence of her changing patterns of thought but also included a profound moment she had when she remembered something she learned in class.

I was born in Roverdale [pseudonym], and my dad grew up there so he took me driving one day there to visit his old house and he told me that Roverdale used to be like Newton. I see things that I never thought about before and so I do

notice it now. I saw that that *placelessness* was going on in Roverdale.

For me, I had a moment where I reflected on something profound, but it was later in the semester. We watched this movie called *Guns, Germs and Steel*. The movie explains basically why the European culture became so predominant in the world because even today you see the Europeans are the wealthier ones. It explained how just basically the pure luck of geography, and showed how geography is everything. The Europeans had an advantage. They just happened to be so lucky in the trade. Basically, geographically lucky in trade. The pure luck of geography. That was really profound to me.

Shirley commented on how the class changed her way of thinking, and she began to see how interconnected concepts are and how the realization of the interconnectedness changed her understanding of culture.

You start thinking a different way. I've seen they start thinking a bit differently and like you start going around noticing things that you didn't notice before. You are looking at problems from different angles than just one because they know different ways to think about it. You don't really notice it because it's just how you see things now. And it's so gradual, it's over a semester, so it's not like there's one day like I didn't have an "Aha" moment with that. So, it wasn't like one day that I was like, "Oh." Like I see the world differently now. For me, it is like one of the obsession things you see in the movies or TV shows.

It's like the detectives trying to figure stuff out and he's like attaching everything with the rope. And like, you realize, "Oh my goodness." Like all these threads like they're all interwoven and like spider of how the world works and why

everything happens. It is like a game that my friends and I play where you put things into Wikipedia and say you start with Bugs Bunny and then you have to get to Ebola. You are trying to see how few clicks it takes to get to Ebola from Bugs Bunny by clicking through articles and sub articles and random things. And you see that so many things are really connected. Six degrees of separation. Human geography does that for you! With AP Human Geography, you have to look deeper. You have to look kind of into the threading of like the entire world. Like you have to look into how it affects society, how it affects cultures, how it affects like just people's emotions, how they think. You have to look at that. You can't just see something and just say, "Oh it's this." You have to look at it and have to understand this is this, this is how it affects things, this is how it became what it is. You have to just look past this superficial. It also forces you to think outside the box, and everyone needs to know how to do that!

I guess the best way for me to put it is, before I came into this class, I think I had like 2D understanding of everything. It was just like you see what's on the surface, but you don't really see. You just see it. You don't really see anything else. You don't see the life of it. You don't understand how it interacts with everything. You just see a very like stagnant image of it. And so, I think after the course, you get a more 3D understanding. You see how it's almost alive, and you see how it interacts with other things. No, you just see in a deeper way. It is cool because, you see that culture is deeper that you thought before, and don't really realize it until you realize it. And you don't think about it. You get a diluted understanding of it. But later you get a realization. For me, it came later and

progressively overtime. And I didn't really think about it until like at the end of the course. And like I was just kind of thinking about it probably for last few days in school. It was like, "Oh, well, I guess that is true." And like you just kind of start piecing it together over time, and thinking about it all, and you just see how it works with the whole world and everything.

Summary Tentative Manifestation 2

Tentative manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture that changed thought patterns related to culture was demonstrated in all the participants. All of the participants spoke about progressing in their shifting conceptualization of culture that changed thought patterns related culture then seeing evidence of the changes in their thoughts on the landscape. Athens, Matthew, Jefferson, Jim, Evangeline, and Shirley cited seeing evidence of their learning on the landscape when they were out in their day to day activities. Also, they said that seeing the evidence on the landscape led to more reflecting about their understandings and to making deeper connections with their learning. Shirley commented on had probably had the most profound change in her thoughts about her understanding culture, demonstrated this when she said she went from a 2-D understanding to a 3-D understanding that lead her to see how things worked in the world. Others, like Jefferson, Athens, and Georgia now had a name to place on phenomenon that they witnessed on the landscape. Athens and Georgia even talked to their parents about what they learned and saw. Also, the timing and the process of the participants' reflecting on concepts they learned in class, and on their understandings of those concepts, varied across the board. Some had flashes of insight right away while others came to realizations over time and throughout the course. Either way, each of the

participants did progressively move through a shift in their conceptualization of culture that resulted in changes in their patterns of thought. I will discuss and provide the narrative of a benefit that the participants cited, that of shifts in their conceptualization of culture that led to changes in behavior resulting a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others.

Tentative Manifestation 3: Shifting Conceptualization of Culture That Led to Changes in Behavior Resulting in a Greater Level of Tolerance and Acceptance of Others.

Each of the participants experienced not only a greater awareness of other cultures, but also changes in their behavior that resulted in a greater tolerance and acceptance of other cultures citing that as a benefit they gained from taking the course. I had not anticipated finding this manifestation so ubiquitously among the participants, but it was expressed by all of them, often over the course of several discussions. Gaining a greater tolerance and acceptance led several to discussions about their newly found open-mindedness for cultures that changed their whole outlook on life. Athens shared that she realized she could think and feel differently than someone of another culture and still be accepting of the differences, a thought that was life changing for her as she had grown up in a somewhat sheltered household. The following sections exhibits the narrative voices of the participants that demonstrate the tentative manifestation of the shifting conceptualization of culture the led to changes in behavior resulting in the participants having a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of other cultures after taking the class than they did before taking it.

Osceola

Osceola discussed the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices. Osceola noted the extreme divisions that seem to exist between people and why it is important to understand how others think.

Nowadays, we are so extremely divided. But, if you just talk about others' perspectives and kind of even it out and try to understand one another like how we're trying to understand other cultures, I think the world and this country could be a better place we understand. And, I think you got to look at it from a broader perspective and just be like well, we might not be able to understand them and their culture, they aren't evil as we might think they are. Further, I think what social media needs to be used for is reaching out to those other cultures because you can reach anybody you want to and try to understand how they think, why they think, why they do what they do, and I think that would help a lot.

Osceola further expounded on how he experienced shifts in conceptualization of culture that led to his behavior changing and acquiring a greater tolerance and acceptance for others from taking the human geography class and how that might help him in the future.

I think that this class helps you in college, outside the college and in your job and even just out in life communicating with other people. Understanding other cultures and having tolerance for differences will help in the future. I think if we can better understand a couple of things about culture, then we can be a lot more sound as a human culture. And if we can start a talk and, we can start seeing stuff

through other people's eyes then that would help. Not necessarily changing your views to how they see it but just understand where they're coming from. There's too many different opinions and cultures out there about the world. Everybody just can't be peaceful all the time. But you can be peaceful at some point and try to talk to people. I guess sympathy for them but just like understanding of other people, I think is a good thing that we should all understand each other's culture. I think if everybody took human geography and learned about other cultures then that understanding of other cultures would be helpful. Like I said do not prejudge about anything. I try to understand everybody's culture and how they do it and why they do certain things. So, because we have to live in a global world I think this is one of the few courses that can give you that. I think we live in a global world where even in some countries there are thousands of different cultures and languages. So, I mean I think just understanding each other's cultures and knowing that there's just tons and the different ways of thinking out there. I mean there's so many different cultures that we have to be able to work with especially once we move on and get into the workforce you have to work with these different cultures and understand how they think and what they think and try to get along with them and I think I can easily get along with people.

Athens

Athens spoke about her thoughts on the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices. She discussed how her parents instilled in her the need to be open-minded and how her family adopted an African American boy.

So, growing up, my parents have always taught us to be open-minded about

the world around us, and not to just have our own views, but listen to other people's views. My parents adopted an African-American boy, so, I've grown up with him and that changed my perspective. Just to think how other people live their ways, and how we live our ways aren't always just the same and that's ok.

Athens further discussed how her shifting conceptualization of culture led to her have a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of other cultures from taking the human geography class.

I learned so much more from taking this class that I did not know before. It has really prepared me to see cultures in new and different ways. I think the world would be such a better place if they took this class and just like getting to learn about the different aspects of life and culture that like you really don't know. You can't know everything in life about different cultures unless you stand in their shoes and like walk their life, but I feel like I'm getting that strong sense of like place and cultural aspects in this class. I was like, "That's great."

Kelly

Kelly discussed how she feels about the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices and why she thinks that there is a need to understand other cultures. Kelly noted that this concept hit home when we examined the unit Africa.

How we see other cultures is important. We're all at different levels. And, so, just like with Africa, they've had such digs from everyone around them. It is not fair for us to look at Africa and not try and understand. We cannot replace what we took away from Africa. They've gotten taken advantage of and that really kind of hit home to me because of the different perspectives we have in our

family. It led to heated arguments with my dad. But, we're well, you cannot compare cultures like that. That was the biggest thing to hit really deep down for me. We have to be understanding of other cultures.

Further, Kelly expounded on how she experienced shifts in her conceptualization of culture that led to her behavior change and how she had become more tolerant and accepting of other cultures from taking the human geography class.

After this class, I was able to kind of start having my own opinions on things, but now I have a better understanding, a broader understanding. I think that was a neat perspective to see. I started to understand other cultures for who they are and yes, that increased my tolerance for differences.

We are planning a trip to Croatia for his 50th birthday and now I can't wait because I will know so much more and see more things on the landscape. I think I have a more tolerant view of other cultures now and see things in a different light and will be able to understand about cultural differences when I travel this time. I think I am more well-rounded in that respect now after taking the class. I think part of that was the bantering that occurred in the classroom on culture brought that more into perspective. Even though we are different, I've got a new understanding to listen and understand others.

For me, it wasn't as much as what I saw, physically, but more the interactions between people. Which I didn't actually expect from this course at all. So, it was a kind of fun surprise from that. It was really the whys behind it, why people behave the way they do because of their culture. Kind of where they're coming from. I know in our family, more than conversations, I was able

to dig a little deeper on what my point was in how we connect the world around us. Also, I think that helped me develop more empathy for other cultures and why they do what they do.

Matthew

Matthew also discussed what he believes is the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices. Matthew noted that people should try and understand where others are coming from in the perspectives.

I even see it with social media. It's like really, if you think about it, it's not social anymore. If anything, most people are starting to withdraw from conversation. It's not going to get you to a better solution. People really need to try and understand where others are coming from. Like try and understand their culture and why they do what they do.

Matthew spoke about this shifts in his conceptualization of culture led to him becoming more tolerant and accepting of other cultures and how he gained that from taking the human geography class.

It was interesting, learning about how it all intertwined. I got to see how the environment really changes everything about what you're thinking, your understanding. But I learned being in this class about other cultures and now see things differently than before. Especially when it comes to other cultures.

I guess, analyzing the different knowledge of people and the whys of how they got there and seeing from their perspective is it just where they're raised in the environment or just seeing their habits. The class helped realize that different was ok and I guess that makes me more accepting of other cultures.

Georgia

Georgia expounded on why she thinks it is important to understand other cultures and their practices. She explained that people need to be aware of how mannerisms and language could be offensive.

I've had experiences with different cultures through like with my swimming. I have a coach who is a different culture and sometimes she'll say things that to our culture, could be offensive or just like mannerisms, you that we wouldn't do. You just have to be more understanding. I just think that understanding other cultures is the key to like just getting your own opinion.

Georgia commented on how she thinks her shifting conceptualization of culture led to changes in her that helped her become more tolerant and accepting of other cultures and how this occurred after taking the class.

The part that really stuck out to me was the part about being more open to people that are different cultures. And I definitely feel like I've noticed a change in myself a little bit. And I find myself like a lot less like afraid to like to reach out to other people that are different than me. And I just find it like really cool to see other people with different ethnicities and cultures. I don't think I have really a lot of knowledge of other cultures. Since talking this class, I have noticed more about culture and friends that I have from different cultures. I do have a friend that I swim with and like we've gotten to be pretty close. She and her family are from South Korea. I've just have been a lot more fascinated with her culture. At first, I didn't really like ask her questions about it. I was kind of like scared too for some reason. A few weeks ago, I just started

asking her about different things and she wasn't like offended or anything. I don't know why I thought she'd be offended. I'm a lot more fascinated with it now. I believe it helped with interacting with people of other cultures and people of my own. And just being more aware of what their culture is like. And how I can, like, be a better person towards them and be more understanding of who they are. And just like being a better person. Also, I just kind of appreciate other people. I am definitely more aware of it like knowing. I don't look at things and say that is weird now because I aware of differences and tolerant of them. Now looking back on It, I see all these things that I thought were like so weird and now it doesn't really faze me. I see it as their culture.

Tess

Tess descibed how she believes that it is important to understand other cultures and their practices. She noted how the class kick- started how she understands and can see different perspectives.

AP Human really kick-started my understanding of argument and how people see different perspectives. And, after AP Human, I took a lot of different classes all of which where we talked about controversial topics and we argued and being able to understand where another person is coming from culturally allows you to understand how they're arguing and maybe allows you to sympathize with them. And, I think that's something that a lot of people lack today. In the class like AP Human especially, when exposed to them at an early age could really improve that understanding.

Tess then discussed how her shifting conceptualization of culture had led to her change in her acceptance of other cultures and how it occurred from taking the class and the practical ways it helped her.

It has affected the way I view other people, and my respect for other people because I ever since taking AP Human, I've gained a lot of friends who don't fit the same profile as I do. I've learned how to respect their beliefs and their culture. And I have friends who are Hindu and Muslim, and I can understand why they believe what they believe because they hailed from a different part of the world than I did. And it's actually forced me to change my thinking to now I'm able to think like internationally in between religions, in between cultures, and even between languages.

Prior to taking human geography, I could only see the world in a clear historical and geographical standpoint whereas, afterward, I could see it in a comprehensive anthropological way, that really identified all of the factors that affected the why or the where and it has made me notice the differences between cultures with an appreciation of the uniqueness of people.

Jefferson

Jefferson described the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices and his perspective on that being a Taiwanese American. Jefferson claimed that his dual citizenship helps him see through both lenses.

I believe it is very important. Because I am Taiwanese and American, I can see through both lens. I really know how important it is to understand where other cultures are coming from. I see both sides of the culture and understand both

ways of doing things, so I know that it is important to make sure that you are hearing what they are saying.

Jefferson then discussed how the shifting conceptualization he experienced from taking the human geography class had helped him with acceptance of other cultures. He said that it had really led to more open-mindedness.

More open-mindedness. When I talked to my friends, I can agree with both sides even if they both they hate each other. So, it just helped me to be open more minded, and connect things easily than most people become more understanding, because of the broad understanding of all those topics.

Jefferson discussed an opportunity he had to practice his open-mindedness at in internship he participated in last summer, demonstrating a change in his behavior from taking the class.

So, last year I went to DC for internship 2 months at the National Institute for Health (NIH). It was so interesting because, the minorities were actually the majority in our clinic. I interned at National Cancer Institute (NCI) which is Cancer Institute. So, we had three main doctors; one from Japan, one from Taiwan and one from Ireland. And then we have some others from China, Africa, and Germany. We also had someone from France. There's a lot of diversity at the National Institute. I found the class helped with the different concepts of health and integrating into it. It was very interesting of work because it was so diverse, culturally. I feel like the class and my background helped give me an edge with that, dealing with diversity.

Just Jim

Jim spoke about his thoughts on the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices and how that was influenced by his bi-cultural heritage. Jim claimed his bi-cultural heritage makes him more open to difference in cultures.

Having my background, part Cambodian and part American, has made me a lot more accepting of other cultures. I understand some things like how different cultures do somethings. It just opens up things. I've seen this before. I know what's going on. So, I came to the class with some knowledge of other culture because of my background.

Jim then discussed how his shifting conceptualization of culture had led him to become more tolerant and accepting of other cultures and how he received this from taking the class and how that helped him.

I think the class helped me with accepting other cultures. I was able to see the differences between people and I thought about how it connected to my people, Cambodians. I think when you have a different culture growing up, it is hard to accept people who are different because you feel you are on the outside. But after taking the class, I realized that everyone is different and if I you open up to them then you can learn from their ways.

Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline expounded on her thoughts on the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices as well as how that helped her become more accepting and tolerant. Evangeline discussed how she believes that it made her look at how she treats others.

I think that it one of the things that stuck with me is just looking at how I treat others. And the reason behind people and that not everyone has the same culture, not everyone has the same history and so don't always judge somebody based on your viewpoints. Look at where they are coming from and their side of the world and just like look, don't make assumptions about the world. I look at other cultures with more open eyes now. I am more accepting and tolerant because of the class.

Shirley Shire

Shirley shared her beliefs on the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices. She noted that her high school was so diverse that understanding other culture was almost mandatory.

I would say yes. I didn't have a lot of exposure to other cultures when I was growing up and I told you about my background and some prejudice there. So, I think it is really important to understand other cultures and what they believe. I don't think you can go to a diverse school like this one and not try and find out about other cultures and be interested in their life.

Shirley discussed her thoughts on her shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in her level of tolerance and acceptance of other cultures and how that occurred from taking the class. She also noted how she anticipates that will help her in the future.

I think it's even outside of the classroom. Because once you get out of classroom, kids in here especially in the south, we are kind of prejudice. We're pretty prejudice. I am lucky to go to school with kids from EC instead of ones from

less diverse like high schools. I think it's harder for them to understand diversity. I think the only reason EC students are doing pretty good with prejudice is because we have so many like different ethnicities, different cultures. It's kind of hard to see diversity and understand it. I also want to go to Georgia Tech. That is my dream school. So, learning about other cultures in human geography will definitely help. It's a pretty diverse because it has people from all walks of life, people from every culture, that want to go there. So, going there, this information is definitely going to help. I need to know this kind of stuff, so I can relate to like other people I don't know. I may have a roommate who's from a different culture and I need to start like realizing things like cultural differences, so I can be understanding. I'm going to probably work with people who have different cultures that I don't understand and will need to try to. I have like thoughts that I don't really understand because I come from a different culture. I need to learn how to analyze that and I need to figure out a way to understand it and understand where they're coming from.

Summary Tentative Manifestation 3

The tentative manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture that led to a change in behavior resulting in a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others, was evident in all participants' voices during the focus groups and individual interviews. Each participant discussed the importance of understanding other cultures and their practices while citing how the human geography class helped them develop a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of cultures other than their own. Tess said it affected the way she views other people and the respect she pays them. Jefferson claimed that he

was more open-minded as a result of taking the class. Jim indicated that it helped him appreciate his Cambodian heritage even more, claiming a sense of pride in his background. Shirley likened it to a lessening of prejudice when you know about other people. Georgia was able to maturely state that she could understand other cultures while not losing her own thoughts about their practices. Although the participants were not as verbose about this topic, as they were about other topics, it was clear that they each felt the class had helped them reach greater levels of understanding about other cultures. The final sections outline the last manifestation, that of shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in the transfer of knowledge and real-life application of culture, and a summary of all of tentative manifestations.

Tentative Manifestation 4: Shifting Conceptualization of Culture That Resulted in Transfer of Knowledge and Real-life Application of the Concept of Culture

This tentative manifestation was experienced by all the participants, although to varying degrees and in different ways. The younger participants had less experience with applying the concept to their life, and often had to anticipate how they could transfer their knowledge to future application. For these participants, the transfer of knowledge was an immediate response to events that were occurring in their life. However, they could anticipate how the material learned in the course could transfer to real-life application. For the veteran participants who had the class at least a year ago or longer, the real-life application of the knowledge that they learned in the class was evident and apparent from their voices. They also spoke with ease about their anticipated benefits from the knowledge they gained from taking the class, and how that could lead to real-life applications. The following section provides the narratives that reinforced the

tentative manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of culture.

Osceola

Osceola commented on the specific content knowledge he learned from taking the class the he believed had helped him with real-life application of information. Osceola discussed how he believes language is a key for apply what he learned in the class.

Language definitely is a big one. The language unit. I talked about with my job and understanding each other different dialects and languages is a huge thing to have. So, you don't miss communicate with each other. I didn't know the English was like the language of commerce. I just figured that wherever you were doing business, you tried to talk in their tongue. But then I realized as I went around with my dad, who has some business deals overseas. I asked him about other cultures speaking English.” But I think languages can be a huge barrier, which I experienced this.

Osceola discussed how he anticipants that knowledge will help in the future. Osceola spoke about using what he learned about culture and cultural norms in his anticipated future job as a corporate lawyer.

Further, I think knowledge of other cultures can also help me later in life, especially if my boss or whoever is of another culture. Knowing about someone else’s culture could help me know how to approach them and how to get things done in the right way without getting them irritated or causing tension. I think learning information in here about the Japanese culture or German culture is definitely important, especially if a I have a Japanese boss or a German boss. I

would need to know their customs and the way they do certain business things. So, I would know what to do. Like knowing how to shake his hand because that could even mean something. You shake his hand the wrong way, and you lose his respect, and this would be bad for business or possibly rude. I think it is important to learn what the certain cultures expect from you in a business situation or even a friendship situation. I think that will help me to get things done the right way and honor someone else's culture. I think that this class taught me a lot about how to look at culture. I think that is important, because I mean there's so many different cultures that we have to be able to work with especially once we move on and get into the workforce you have to work with these different cultures and understand how they think, what they think, and try to get along with them.

Osceola spoke about how his shifting conceptualization of culture resulted in his analysis of culture, and the world was on a different level after taking the class, and how it led to a transference of understanding to other knowledge. He noted how he might use the information in college.

I definitely understand more whys of the world, and culture and like I said before, I think that will help me in college and beyond because I will be exposed to a lot more cultures, and I will need to understand them and how they do things and perceive the world.

Athens

Athens discussed how her shifting conceptualization of culture resulted in her analysis of culture and the world was on a different level now, and how it led to a

transference of understanding to other knowledge. She spoke of how she was analyzing on deeper levels rather than just studying the night before a quiz.

At first, I would just read like for our vocab test, I would read the definition and use a quiz to learn the definition, but not really retain what the definition was saying. I decided that I just need to actually sit down and get what the vocab is telling me, and I would have to actually analyze word for word what the meaning is. So, I started seeing it on a deeper level. Learning about culture on a deeper level.

Athens struggled to say how the knowledge she learned about culture might transfer to future benefits, however she thought of some concrete ways she anticipated using the information she learned in human geography and how it had benefitted her already. She noted that she was seeing the big ideas of culture now and she believed she could apply the concepts to what she wants to do in future job.

As far as transference to other knowledge and where that might lead in the future, it is kind of hard to say but I learned that culture was a lot bigger than I had thought. When I think of culture, I now think of so many things. I think of language, housing, traditions, religion, ethnicities, and the list goes on, like everything. Even learning habits like education, basically everything fits under it. Especially everything we learned in the class. It's hard for you to know, to gather altogether because of that big umbrella of culture it just is so large. I also have to say religion. I didn't realize that before, but I thought about it during the religion part. So yes, I guess it has influenced how I understand other knowledge.

Where I see myself going, I think I've had this, like, a pretty set standard since I was in second grade as being a teacher. I also want to travel and see all the different cultures we learned about. Maybe even do a teaching job overseas. I also want to travel around the United States to see the different regions we talked about in class. I know I will understand things better now.

So, I do see myself growing to about, like, growing as a person. I think this class has made me grow in so much. Like, just coming from who I thought I was to who I am now. I'm just a different person because of this class. I have learned so much. I think I know a lot more about culture. So, if was in a real situation, I will have to think what I need to do. I just apply culture to that situation.

Kelly

Kelly discussed her thoughts on her shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in how she was analyzing information on deeper levels now. She noted that she was applying analysis techniques that opened new doors in her thinking. Although parts of this text were mentioned in the first tentative manifestation, it is applied in a different way here to show the change in Kelly's level of analysis of culture.

In quite a few ways. That's kind of what I learned, too, usually in a class this culture-based you learned that we're all the same. And, you are kind of in mold. But in this one, I learned that is not true. We really are different based on origin. And you start seeing that this matches my culture here and this matches a culture there. And so, to analyze things like that opened up a whole new kind of understanding, a lot more doors for me. And so, even when discussing politics, economics, languages, I've definitely learned to

analyze things on a deeper level. You realize you're not finished with analyzing something. You keep going deeper into it.

Kelly then discussed content knowledge that helped her with real-life application of knowledge and provided concrete examples of the application. She described her application of the concepts as lights going off in a dark room leading the participant further down the hall in their understanding.

That was a great class especially coming into a new school and principal to new teachers and everything. It was really, helpful. It has been like peeling back the layers of an onion. It already has a lot. I feel like if you're in a dark room almost and certain lights go off and you can, kind of, to see to the end of that little light and then the next little light and then the next little light, couldn't kind of, all of a sudden, it was like, "Wow, it's a little further down the road. It's a little further." I kind of see that continuing. The more I think back on certain things I learn here, the more I bring it to other classes. There are so many things in that. I wanted to say on the way to school. I remember seeing types of fences and pointing it out to Matthew and my mom and identifying what types of fence they were. It was the day of the folk/pop culture. And so that played a role in helping me with that. Further, it is kind of like your eyes are open to so much more. It's not just geography and it's not just the physical aspect of the world. It is really what culture is, not the blanket vocabulary statement you learn in English.

Matthew

Matthew commented about specific content knowledge that he had gained and how he applied that knowledge in certain real-life situations. His concrete examples of

Glenwood Park in Atlanta and sprawl, and the religious sacred places clearly demonstrated his transferences of lessons he learned in the class.

I think about what I see in Atlanta, and I remember the one that's Buckhead and everything, the Urban Realms model. It was great because I was seeing it and thinking about at the same time. We saw that to in Glenwood Park in Atlanta. I was able to see how Atlanta has sprawled and that places like Glenwood park are going to be more of the norm. Then there was the unit on agriculture. We really looked at differences and what impacts you. I remember in our food unit, whenever we were talking about Genetically Modified Organisms, (GMO's) and how some countries ban them. And Yeah, like, how there's always that one fundamental belief in certain religions and how like there's the site in Jerusalem where it all comes together and have like our Muslims, and Christians, and Jews all think that's placed. So, I guess you would say there was a lot of real-life application.

Matthew then discussed his shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in his analysis of information on different levels that occurred as a result of taking the class. He described that analysis as encompassing knowledge of the whys of culture and the ability to see different perspectives.

I guess, analyzing the different knowledge of people and the whys of how they got there and seeing from their perspective is it just where they're raised in the environment or just seeing their habits, whether it's religion or speech and the different dialects. And I guess, understanding all of that really is finding out that is their culture. Like language and how we all may have had the same mother

tongue just different dialects. So yeah, I guess that I was analyzing things on a deeper level.

Georgia

Georgia too commented on her shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in her learning content knowledge that she believed could lead to real-life application. She noted that she made specific connections with population and migration information and also religion.

My favorite subject like maybe it was because it was one of the first ones and I was kind of blown away by it like how it all goes back to each other, but like I really like population. Which is why now it seems like a random one. I felt like it started like all makes sense I was like, “Wow,” and like when we're watching the news or like I see something going on in a certain country I know why things are happening maybe based on their population or also religion which is also a good chapter for me because I'm pretty interested in it. You know, I didn't realize how like tied together a lot of the religions are, how they have shared sacred sites and founders. My dad went to college to study the Bible. So, I've been able to talk to him more about stuff leading to religion and it is kind of giving me a little bit more education of my religion just like other people's. Me and my dad were actually, talking about that in the car this morning. Yeah, like I really got it. He started saying things and I was like, “Oh yeah, because I learned about this in the class. I've been able to engage more with him talking about that stuff too and like I didn't even know things about Christianity about how it diffused and how closely tied Islam is to Christianity. That kind of surprised me. I started noticing

things I didn't realize or think about before and that was one of them.

She continued that she has already benefitted from information she learned in human geography in her other classes applied that to other classes she was currently taking.

Also, I have also found that I was using some of the stuff we learned in human geography in my other classes. In one of my classes we had a vocabulary test on different Latin and Greek roots and I thought we learned about that in human geo too. Like interfaith and intrafaith boundaries. Then I remember one day we were talking about like the bubonic plague or something and then two of my other classes we talked about the bubonic plague on the same day. I thought it was kind of creepy, like did they plan that, but kind of cool too. And, your stories helped me remember stuff so when I got to the test I just thought about those stories and I remembered it better. I know that I will find more things that I will use in the rest of high school and probably after. I can't wait to see what happens.

Tess

Tess expounded upon her shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in specific content knowledge that she learned that could provide her with real-life situations in which she could apply the concepts.

I would say foreign languages. I already love English. I love reading. AP Lang has really helped to develop that further, but now I can appreciate other languages for what they are and how they are equally as complex as English, if not more so in some. Like, I was learning about tonal languages and it's just totally different from what I know, and it is amazing how people can understand and develop that

skill. Just like I can develop my English-speaking abilities. During the class, I tried to teach myself Esperanto after we saw a video discussing it. It was formulated so that it would be easier to learn than any other language because it's based on something like French, and Dutch, and English. Dr. Esperanto tried to combine a bunch of like Romance languages with Germanic and I think Slavic languages to make it easier for a lot of people to learn so that you could have a lingua franca.

Tess continued talking about language and how she anticipates learning about language in human geography will benefit her in the future. She said that language was a big concept for her and one she thinks is important.

The language you speak causes you to think in a certain way. You think based on norms set by other people speaking that language, so I mean if you were to go to a different culture, a different country the way that people express their thoughts even in English might be totally different than the way you might. Just because they're more expressive, less expressive, more bluntly and especially on college tours when you're taking a tour with an international student he'll be so blunt with you. I see this class helping in the future in several ways. Well it has already helped me. In literature class last year within the first few weeks we had to write about what we think culture is. Because I had this class I was able to write a more concise, accurate description. because once I could apply terminology and understanding of human geography, which encapsulates so many topics that I could actually understand why my parents took me to museums when I was a kid.

Tess then discussed her thoughts on analyzing culture on a different level now and how that benefited her from taking the class.

Now, after the human geography class, I'm able to apply it to my life and to the real world. So that is back to real life application, but I see that I am analyzing information on deeper levels. In fact, human geography was the benchmark for starting my analysis of many things afterward.

Jefferson

Jefferson spoke about the ways he anticipated learning about other cultures in human geography would benefit him in real-life applications in the future. He gave a personal example of situation that happened at school with a teacher and her Asian students.

Besides more open-mindedness in the future, it has already helped with a situation. I remember a time when I used something I learned about in this class to solve something. Like, one of my AP Lang teachers got upset because foreign students don't look you in the eyes when they are talking to you. Most teachers don't realize that some foreign students do look you in the eye, because out of respect, they're not supposed to. Like I think that's one of the things I do just not looking people in the eye, because in Taiwan it's a sign of disrespect. So, like a lot of teachers think it's rude because you don't do that and in Taiwan, when you're yelled at we're not supposed to respond. But in the US sometimes they want to do respond depending on the situation. So, it is like there's a difference. So, you just have to have be more understanding, like communicate more. Like afterwards, I would go back and talk to the teachers, like my AP Lang teacher and

say, “sorry about this, in my culture this is how we do it, so, that's why I didn't do it back to you,” and then we just talk it out. That's the best thing to do.

Communication is key to like when you're talking about having different cultures talking to each other.

Also, I do have to add. The day after the personal interview, we took a mock exam of the AP's Stats and there was a population pyramid on the free response question. I sat there and looked at it. It's all full circle with all the stuff. It was crazy!

Jefferson spoke about his shifting conceptualization of culture that he believes resulted in his ability to analyze information on a different level something that occurred from him taking the human geography class and how he has already benefitted from taking the class.

I would say it's become like, I had the understanding, but it was more like unorganized, all over the place, and became more structured, and analytical and more refined afterwards. Like AP bio we did population structure, and growth model. We also did that in AP Human. It also helped in AP calculus because we could talk about population growth. We had to like use like different equations to model it. The concept goes into it. It goes a lot into it. Because you choose your electives in the US, so you can connect the class to the other disciplines. I always wanted to pursue a business in biomedical, so I wanted STEM, I wanted liberal arts, so you can make the connections between the two disciplines. This class lets you do that. That's maybe why we can more innovate because we have more understanding of other backgrounds, not just our own. So, that's one of like

dilemmas of being a specialist in something. Like when you're developing maybe you're trying to an innovation, you have to know people's needs and like you can't just be 100% database. You also have to have some humanity. Humanity goes into it. I want to be innovative and that's what class like human geography help you with. It gives you a broader look at culture and helps you with other classes.

Just Jim

Jim spoke about his future plans and how he anticipated the information that he learned in human geography might transfer to real life application. He noted that he wanted to go to a prestigious university and there would diversity there.

I plan on either going to Tech if I decide to go more on like the chemistry route or Emory if I decide to go on more on the doctor route. Immediately, I will be taking more AP classes to help ensure that I am getting the upper level stuff I need. Thinking back, when I was in 9th grade, if you told me that I would be taking four AP classes by my junior year I would have pushed you out the door. But here I am doing that. But when I was in ninth grade, I wanted to try Human Geography to test out how AP would work and when it started, I really liked it and I would be glad going forward and doing more.

Jim then spoke about the benefits he already received from taking the human geography class and how that overflowed into his other classes. He discussed receiving benefits in his biology and calculus classes.

I think taking some liberal arts classes like human geography is helpful to even science people because it helps you connect different things. I think it helps you think outside the box. It is kind of like learning to play an instrument. There is

math that goes into it. Learning to play an instrument is my favorite example of showing how different things interact to bring about a new experience. I think it helps with creative thinking. That is kind of what I think human geography did for me.

Also, we talked about population stats and diseases in biology just like we did in human geography. So, I think there is a carry over to other classes. I think that to many people have a general preconception that only like calculus and physics were like hard enough to be AP. But I am like, "I took Human Geography," and I was like, "You can learn this too," and it's all good stuff. I tell them that you will find lots of stuff from human geography in all of you other classes. I think it is hard for them to believe it, but I keep finding places where I use human geography in so many of my other classes. But you really do. And, human geography reflects alternative modern or like contemporary history in this society.

Jim discussed how his shifting conceptualization of culture had resulted in his ability to analyze information on a different level after taking the human geography class and how he believes that has benefited him.

Analyzing, analyzations. Let's see, I think it does help you analyze things at a different level. You know I had a good point when Jefferson was talking, but I forgot it because I was analyzing so much. This class taught how to connect everything Human Geography reflects alternative modern or like contemporary history in this society. So, like any AP class as if like bounce off each other and think about how it relates to what you already know, and what you will learn eventually. It helps set you up for analyzing later like other college classes.

Evangeline Harcourt

Evangeline commented on her shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in her acquisition of content knowledge that she learned in the class that she believes resulted in real- life application that might or has helped her in the future. She discussed the political unit as being particularly important to her.

It was the political unit. Like I mentioned before, the idea of how nations and states are formed and how governments are formed. Because, you really, I mean, we don't really think about it, you know, like, isn't everybody the same? Doesn't everyone have the same structure, politically? I was fascinated by the unified versus federal government systems. And then you could look at see what places were federal or unified, nations or states or even nation states. Then you could see how it was culturally driven, especially in the case of Japan. I feel like, I don't know, a centralized government, in my opinion, would be more of a nation-state because they're more unified and have more centralized beliefs. Whereas, a separated government encourages more separate thinking and more diversity.

Evangeline discussed how she has already benefitted from the human geography class and how it led to benefits in her other classes. She mentioned that it helped with her English essays.

So, I have written essays in like English essays, analyzing human behavior based on something like I learned in Human Geography and in history classes. I think it helps a lot. I'm like, "Why we do the things we do and why all these civilizations

all developed the exact same way?” Those kinds of things are all things I think like routed back to the fact that I took AP Human Geography.

Finally, Evangeline noted how the human geography class helped her in her decision to go into a career in politics. This was a big revelation for Evangeline as the discovery was made while she was studying Ebola in the class.

Because of what I learned about political structures in human geography, I want to help with serious illnesses, I want to focus on places that are underdeveloped. I think we write off Africa because it's like they aren't developed. They're so poverty stricken and we just, and maybe some if it is we just don't know to what to do. It's too overwhelming a problem. Well that's where most of the world's overpopulation comes from is from Africa and I don't know. I think part of the problem is that yes, like the developed world stepped in and took advantage. That is something that I would like to work on in the future. Learning about this in human geography helped me realize that is something that I would like to do.

Shirley Shire

Shirley discussed the content knowledge that she learned in the human geography class, and how she anticipates using it for real-life applications in the future. She noted the overlap between human geography and environmental science that surprised her.

It has already helped me in other classes. AP Environmental Science is a course I took last semester so it was-it was one semester between taking AP Human and AP Environmental Science. When we got in there, we start immediately talking about Malthusian Theory and then like the demographic transition model and I was sitting there like, “Didn't I just learn this?” And I was like, “Okay, so they

applied it to different things.” We started talking about carrying capacity.

Basically, it’s what look at in human geography but just science. It was more science based and made it so much easier when you have that background. Like the courses is so easy once you know it. I don't know how easy it is without knowing it and that is because I had human geography.

Also, it happened the other day. We talk about how AP Environmental Science is basically the science version of human geography. They're like very similar and so like. I can’t say what the question was on the AP exam because I am not allowed to. Honestly, it was basically the exact same just more science-based and like a lot of pollution because that's what the whole course is about basically. So, human geography really helped a lot like taking that test yesterday. Definitely a lot of overlap.

Shirley commented on her shifting conceptualization of culture that she experienced that she believes resulted in her ability to analyze things on a different level as a result of taking the human geography class.

Yeah. It’s a lot like what Jefferson said. He was talking about how of a lot of times you just have to observe things, just look at the basics of it and just make your response based on that. With AP human geography, you have to look deeper. You have to look kind of into the threading of like the entire world. Like you have to look into how it affects society, how it affects cultures, how it affects like just people's emotions, how they think. You have to look at that. You can't just see something and just say, “Oh it's this”. You have to look at it and have to understand this is this, this is how it affects things, this is how it became. You

have to just look past this superficial. It also forces you to think outside the box and everyone needs to know how to do that!

Summary of Tentative Manifestation 4

This final tentative manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture that results in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of information of the concept of culture, was evident in all of the participants, although to different degrees and ways. All of the participants cited the benefits of taking the class and how it helped with real-life applications of knowledge. Each explained how they believed the information they learned either had already helped them or how they anticipated the information would benefit them in the future. The younger participants, Athens and Georgia could only see the immediate benefits on a limited, concrete scale, and only anticipated how that knowledge would help them in the future. The other eight participants had already experienced immediate benefits and had a firm grasp on how the benefits of the information they learned could impact their future. Either way, it was evident from the participants' voices that they fully understood that there were benefits to them as a result of learning the information.

Summary of All Tentative Manifestations

There was common consensus among all of the participants across the four tentative manifestations, although the depth and breadth of their experiences varied for each of them. All agreed that they experienced shifts in their conceptualization of culture that helped them move from an initial, to deeper, more complex thoughts and understanding of culture than they had previously experienced, often citing similar examples of their progress in the process. Additionally, although not originally

conceived to be a separate tentative manifestation, the shifting conceptualization of culture that student's experiences that changes their patterns of thought, was evident in all of the participants and to compelling to not include as a separate manifestation. Many agreed that they began to see evidence of their learning on the landscape and were able to identify it as such. The third tentative manifestation that of, shifts in conceptual thinking that led to changes in behavior resulting in greater tolerance and acceptance of others, also proved to be a prominent theme for all of the participants. Most cited they had gained a greater level of acceptance of other cultures different from their own, even if they didn't perhaps agree with the culture's practices. Finally, although manifested differently for many of the participants, the shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of information about culture, proved to benefit each of the participants. The transfer of learning lead to a transfer knowledge and application that had a carry-over effect to other subjects and real-life processes. The benefits these participants received from taking the human geography course was clearly evident from their own voices.

Conclusion

Working with this group of participants provided me valuable insight into their experiences in the human geography class. Further, their voices lent meaningful credence to the importance of the knowledge they gained from taking the class. Their statements articulated multiple advantages for students who can gain an understanding of the world and culture from taking the human geography class. They further indicated how knowing about culture can lead to real benefits for them in the future. This affirmed for me some of the anecdotal evidence that I heard and acquired over the years for

providing many benefits to students in the future. Reflecting upon the literature and the lack of qualitative evidence supporting students' views on the subject of culture, I believe the voices of the participants in this study can point toward the value of qualitative research where students' voices are not only considered, but privileged.

The following chapter presents a discussion of the findings to show the connection between the research questions and the manifestations. In addition, the chapter provides sections on the limitations, strengths, and implications of the study, as well as, a conclusion of the findings, and a discussion of future research. Finally, I provide a section on my personal reflection and what I learned from doing the study.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Renowned educators and researchers believe that an education that prepares students for life in a global world is essential for future success (Merryfield, 2012; Merryfield & Kasai, 2004; Reidel & Draper, 2013). For some, part of that education includes the understanding of culture and a greater awareness of what culture entails (Hanvey, 1975; Kniep, 1986; Merryfield, 2008, 2011, 2012). However, where education about culture should be included in the curriculum and how it should be taught was not clearly defined in the literature. Further, the absence of students' voices in the discussion of the process of the process of learning about culture and the success of education about culture was lacking in the literature, as well, although it was cited as important as it could contribute to students' future success (Merryfield, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative studies at the high school level were absent, although high school, conceivably represents an ideal time for students to learn about culture for their future success in college and beyond. High school marks a period of time when students learn critical and conceptual thinking skills about information that can then transfer to other learning situations in the future.

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of shifting conceptualization of culture that students' experience from taking the human geography class and how that shift in conceptualization of culture changes their thought patterns and behavior. The purpose of the study was to understand students' experiences with learning about culture in a human geography class and how that experience morphed, progressed, and changed

their behavior so as to provide a means for their voices to be heard, and their experiences to be described. The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do 10 high school students shift from an initial, surface level conceptualization of culture to a broader, deeper level of understanding of culture and the many variances encapsulated in the concept of culture?
2. What are the lived experiences of 10 high school students in the human geography class that contribute to their understanding of culture?
3. What are the long-term benefits that students experience or anticipate experiencing from taking the human geography class?

In this chapter, I answer the research questions by revisiting the connections between them and the tentative manifestations. I will then discuss the implications of the findings and make suggestions for future research that could shed more light on the phenomenon of high school student's shifting conceptualization of culture. Finally, I will provide a conclusion with my personal thoughts on the process and what I learned from the research. What follows is a discussion of the findings aligned to the research questions and how and how the findings are important to the study.

In the next section, I provided the tentative manifestations and how they relate and align to each of the research questions. Tentative manifestation 1, shifts in conceptualization of culture from initial thoughts about cultures to deeper, more complex thought about culture than previously experienced, aligns with the process-oriented research question 1. Tentative manifestation 2, shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in thought patterns related to culture, aligns with research questions 2. Tentative manifestation 3, shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in

behavior resulting in greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others, aligned with research questions 3. Finally, tentative manifestation 4, shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in the transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concept of culture, also aligns with research question 3. What follows is a breakdown of each tentative manifestation and how they relate and are answer each of the research questions.

Interpretation of the Findings Aligned to Research Questions

Research Question 1 Findings Related to Tentative Manifestation 1: *Shifting Conceptualization of Culture From Initial to Deeper, More Complex Thought About Culture Than Previously Experienced*

In this section, I will demonstrate the relevant findings that align to research question 1, which was concerned with the shifting conceptualization of culture from an initial to a broader, deeper understanding of culture and its many variances, I found would be most valuable for answering the tentative manifestation of, *the shifting conceptualization of culture from initial to deeper, more complex thought about culture than previously experienced*. I provide evidence from the participants' voices that demonstrate to the tentative manifestation and research question. Briefly, the findings showed that students do progress from an initial thought and understanding of culture to a more layered, deeper understanding of culture from taking the human geography class.

The data to support this research question was derived from the focus group and individual interviews. The individual interviews were helpful for gleaning specific information from each participant as they were able to go into more detail about how they formed a new layered thought and understanding of culture that was broader and deeper than what they had before they entered the class.

All 10 of the participants expressed they gained new, more in-depth understanding of culture from taking the class, although the process and level of understanding were different for each of them. Osceola said he believes he has a deeper understanding of culture. He said he didn't know how big the concept of culture was initially, and the class helped him understand different aspects about culture and how important it is. He was able to transfer his knowledge about what he learned about culture to a situation at work when there was a conflict over language. He concluded that he now knows that he was making connections on deeper levels when he witnessed the conflict and understood the importance of language in cultural interactions. He said, "I think that I am making deeper connections to what I learned from the class when I am at work and other places."

Athens shared that she too had a more multi-layered, deeper understanding of culture now after taking the class. For Athens, the layered, deeper understanding was more of a concrete concept where she started to see evidence of the concepts on the landscape. She noticed different types of fences and urban sprawl. She said, "I have a deeper understanding of those things because I learned that in class." She said she was seeing what she learned and felt "surprised and shocked," concluding that she had gained "a more layered, deeper understanding of culture."

Kelly said she definitely believed she has a deeper level of understanding about culture sharing, "throughout the class, I kept challenging my idea of culture." She remembered throughout the semester that the class helped shape her idea of culture. She said as a result of gaining new, layered understanding of culture, saying, "I now understand the actions of some people from my past school." She noted that what she

thought were hurtful actions of those people were just their way of communicating based upon their culture. She said she also has gained a working knowledge of culture as a result of the deeper level of understanding is now seeing evidence of that understanding on the landscape when she travels.

Matthew discussed his understanding on a more concrete level saying, "I got to see how the environment really changes everything about what you are thinking, your understanding." He learned about other cultures from taking the class and now sees things differently than before. He said before taking the class, "I would look around and see certain things, but I never understood why they were that way, and I just accepted them as that's what they are." He said, "After taking the class, I got to see that there actually is a reason for things like the way I was treated at my former school by some people of other cultures."

Georgia shared she didn't think she had a very multi-layered understanding before the class. She said, "I feel that the more I went through the class, the more I was able to see the different aspects of culture." Georgia said she knows that she has a deeper understanding of culture, because she now looks back on several incidents she had before with culture and she is able to now see why people behaved the way they did. She says she knows that is grounded culture.

Tess spoke about how she developed a deeper, perspective of culture after taking the class. She said, "When I go out in public, I see people who are from a different area speaking a different language, and dress differently, and rather than judging them I just kind of think about how their culture and environments shaped them, and "I learned to appreciate who they are as a result." Tess said that she believes culture encapsulates

every aspect of humans, and she said, “Most prominently it’s religion, language, habit, architecture, and agriculture. It could even be abstract too because it could be just one experience and that’s part of your culture.” Tess said she thinks that this class “helps people to really dig deeper into concepts, especially culture.”

Jefferson said, coming from a multi-cultural background, he observed the differences between cultures. He noted the biggest idea that AP Human Geography gave him was that he noticed the reasons behind the differences in cultures. Jefferson said, “That was the multi-layered, deeper understanding for me, and I was seeing everyday things on new levels.” He noted that he was able to use that multilayered understanding of culture that he learned in class at school, and in intern positions he did last summer with people of other cultures, because he has a greater understanding of culture.

Jim also declared that he had a more layered, deeper understanding of culture after taking the class. He said, “The class really opened up his head for all different ways of thinking and to analyze all these different things.” Also, Jim said the human geography course, “Definitely helped with, not only interacting with other cultures, but seeing how other cultures interact with each other.” Jim claimed that he didn’t think that urban environments were culture but then when he learned about it in class he thought, “Wow, even that is culture.” Jim said, “Human geography was an introductory course to like all things culture.” He said that it introduces you to just the concept, and “let’s think about it more.”

Evangeline framed her understanding by saying, “It takes real-world stuff that you interact with every day and changes your perception of it by adding more layers and more details to what you had never thought of before.” She said, “I believe that’s something

that's the hardest thing to learn in school.” Evangeline added, “Whereas with human geography you're taking concepts you already know a little bit about and now having to change what you think of them. It's one of those classes that teaches you to think about the world.” She said, “that you must understand it and how does this concept affect the world you are in. You must be able to formulate your own opinions and understandings on it.” Evangeline further noted that she believes it expands your interpretation of culture, saying “You really go from an initial understanding to a deeper understanding.”

Finally, Shirley shared she has a broader understanding of things. She said, “The class helps you understand things better and everything around you. You have a better understanding of why these things are the way they are.” Shirley said the class helped her see culture as more than just what people wear and what they eat, “But culture is not just those little things, culture's the big things like religion, language, cities, and politics.”

Summary

Overall, there was consensus among all of the participants that they had gained a more layered, deeper understanding of what culture is. Some participants were able to sum up their understanding in succinct terms, while others, struggled to put their thoughts into words. Further, the ways in which the participants shifted in their conceptualization of culture were varied and different for each of them. Kelly, Matthew, Athens, Georgia, and Shirley suggested that it was a gradual occurrence throughout the course. Kelly even noted that she had a moment, approximately six weeks prior to the research, when she discovered how deep her understanding of politics had become when she was having a discussion with her dad. Matthew also indicated that he was still making connections to his understanding of culture the more he interacted with Kelly and his parents. Tess

noted that she had a moment when studying for the final test where all of the “Pieces came together,” in her understanding of culture.

Jefferson, Jim, Evangeline, and Osceola had a better understanding of culture before taking the class and intimated that their shift in conceptualization of culture was more of an incorporating of what they already knew with new, deeper understandings of culture. For all of the participants, the shifting of conceptualization of culture to deeper, more complex understanding and thoughts about culture, typifies the process involved in gaining a deeper level of understanding that students experience from taking the human geography class.

Research Question 2 Findings Answered in Tentative Manifestation 2:

Shifting Conceptualization of Culture That Led to Changes in Thought Patterns Related to Culture

In retrospect, with regards to this tentative manifestation, this is the research question that I think needed to be tweaked, certainly with a better definition of how I believe that it is a lived experience and not just an experience. Lived experiences according to Van Manen (2015) stated, “transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence- in such way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36). For this study, I interpreted lived experiences to mean those experiences that students had as a result of participating in the human geography, when later reflected upon, would provide a “reflexive re-living” of the classroom experiences that would then “transforms the lived experience” into something meaningful to them. Further, it was my hope that the re-

living of the experience would provide that textual expression that van Manen (2015) described (p. 36).

Perhaps the concept of lived experience and my interpretation of it, did not fit well in relation to the human geography. They were first learned in the classroom, yet many of their realizations happened after they left the classroom and engaged with the experiences when they were out of the classroom environment. This I saw as the re-living of the experience while discussing it in the focus group and individual interviews. The question might have been improved by adding an element how the lived experience from the class manifested on the landscape, or how it they were seeing evidence of its manifestation. Also, the question could have been changed to the lived experiences with the human geography course content that contributed to their understanding of culture. Either way, I think this would have added clarity to the question. What follows is a discussion about the tentative manifestation 2 and its alignment to research question 2.

The second research question was answered by tentative manifestation 2. The research question was designed to investigate the lived experiences, before, during, and after, in the human geography class that contributed to their understanding of culture. During the focus groups and individual interviews, participants described their experiences with *shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their thought patterns about culture*, often noting they saw evidence of their learning on the landscape, and their surroundings. This finding was ubiquitous across all participants and provided a look into how those experiences from the start to the end of the class changed their thought patterns about culture. The next sections begin with a discussion of their *shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their thought patterns about culture*.

As with the previous question, the data related to this research question was derived from the focus group and individual interviews. The focus group data was of particular importance in understanding of their shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their thought patterns about culture. Yet, many of them expressed experiencing this tentative manifestation in their individual interviews, as well.

All 10 of the participants reported experiencing a progression in their shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their thought patterns about culture, although for several it was more concrete and less nuanced. Osceola said he believes that he has progressed in shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in his thought patterns about culture. He said he began to see the things we were talked about in class when he was at work and doing other things. For instance, he said, “I really saw the importance of understanding culture and how to communicate one day at work when there was a difficulty with translation.” Osceola said he started seeing the things we talked about outside of class and he started to think about it more and reflect on what he was seeing. He shared that looking back now, “I didn’t realize that I was learning about other cultures, it just happened”. Osceola added he was reflecting a lot more now about the culture and what he was seeing in his surroundings.

Athens explained her thoughts on a more concrete level. She said, “I think that human geography broadens so many people's horizons.” Athens said, “I can remember going from not knowing just a type of fence on the road is some type of culture. I just said that fence, “Oh Mom, like that's pop culture. That's pop culture.” She said she started to see things on the landscape and surroundings, which she recognized and had a name for them now.

Kelly framed her understanding saying, “I think pre-reflective to post-reflective describes the class pretty darn well and especially going through it with Matthew because we didn’t see the same things all the time.” She said, “He is my brother and he understood the why of things almost in a completely different way than I understood the why of things.” Kelly said, “It kind of opens your eyes and then you see it on the landscape”. She noted that she and Matthew were driving to school one day, and she pointed out things they had learned about in class.

Matthew shared that he was making more in-depth connections. He said he learned quite a bit, and he could, “Remember when I went down to a golf tournament and it was a championship in Orlando, and I went looking around in Celebration Florida. I remember from our book there is a section in the urban chapter about new urbanism, and I thought, oh we talked about this and now here I am seeing it on the landscape.” Matthew said he really started to think about it, and then he would see it somewhere and think that we had learned about it, and think, “it really does exist.” He said, “I can’t go out anywhere and not see the things we talked about.”

Georgia said she was now seeing things we talked about in class on the landscape and commenting when she saw it. She said that her family was driving down the interstate a few weeks ago, and they just kept seeing gas stations. Georgia said, “Look at all of this *placelessness*.” And her parents asked, “What is that?” And she said to her parents, “have you ever noticed that, everywhere looks the same, when you’re driving down the interstate?” Her parents said, “I guess so.” Georgia said she sees it and reflects on it more and understand it more as well. She claimed, “Before the class things were just there for me and it never crossed my mind.”

Tess explained what the experience was like for her. She shared in retrospect, she thinks that this class “Helps people to really dig deeper into concepts, especially culture.” Tess said, “Prior to taking human geography, I could only see the world in a clear historical and geographical standpoint whereas, afterward, I could see it in a comprehensive anthropological way, that really identified all of the factors that affected the why or where.” She said after the class and after many other classes, “I think I am able to apply it to her life and to the real world”. She finished by noting, “I had a full understanding of what I just learned later after thinking about it all.”

Jefferson explained his thoughts saying, “Once I took the course, when I was thinking about culture as like the whole my thoughts were naiver, not refined. But after human geography, they became more refined, and I became more analytical, like of the different city models.” Jefferson said he noticed things that they talked about in class on the landscape like *placelessness*. He said, “I saw *placelessness* when I was driving, and I started to think about what I had learned.” Jefferson said he thinks AP Human Geography, “Is the intermediate stop where all the other knowledges ties into each other.” He noted, “That things became more interconnected like a sheet of this knowledge.” Jefferson said, “For me, it was like the six degrees of separation, like they have for people, but for knowledge instead. I saw how it all came full circle.”

Jim shared he started to see it on the landscape when he was out on the weekend. He said, “I started to see it because of all these developments and there's a new exit coming off the highway now. I started seeing all these trees being cleared out, and it's going to be like all the same instead of, you know unique.” Further, Jim said, “Being half Cambodian and half American, like it was just my life.” He cited that after he took the

course he, “Saw all these things coming together and how even so much more and like the culture from this thing affects everything.” Jim said he started “Thinking about things more than I did before and they are deeper thoughts.” He said, “It's eye-opening because it all goes full circle.” He said he felt like “All the information is more like a web.” Jim said, “One thing connects to four things, and then four things connect to four more things, and then suddenly you have everything all together.”

Evangeline claimed human geography “Takes real-world stuff that you interact with every day and helps you think about in other ways, changing your perception of it and adding more layers and more details to what the you had never thought of before.” Evangeline said she thinks, “That's something that's the hardest thing to learn in school.” She said, “It made her reflect more about what she was learning and then she would see it later.”

Shirley said, “I started thinking a bit differently and started going around noticing things that I didn't notice before. She said she started looking at problems from different angles than just one because she knew “Different ways to think about it”. Shirley said, “I didn't really notice it because it's just how you see things now.” She noted that for her, “It was so gradual, over a semester,” and she thought, “Oh.” Like I see the world differently now.” Finally, she said, “I had a 2D understanding of everything. It felt like I didn't really see anything else. I didn't understand how it interacts with everything.” She said, “I just saw a very like stagnant image of it.” She said after the course, “she had a more 3D understanding.”

Summary

Participants' responses to the second research question were answered by the second tentative manifestation and were consistent and strong. They believed they had progressed through shifts in their conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their thought patterns, yet their responses were individual and varied. Athens, Georgia, and Matthew thoughts were more concrete and grounded in what they immediately saw in their environment. Athens and Georgia both cited seeing fences on the landscape and recognizing what type fence they were from taking the class. Matthew saw evidence of *new urbanism*, claiming he could never look at Atlanta the same anymore. Tess said she saw *slash and burn agriculture* being conducted and immediately thought about learning it in the class. Osceola described an incident that he had at work that changed how he thought about culture. Jefferson, Georgia, Jim, and Shirley all spoke about seeing *placelessness* on the landscape and recognizing what it from taking the class. Evangeline had the least nuanced look at her shifts in conceptualization of culture that led to her change in thoughts concerning culture noting that she believed the class changed her perception of the world. Shirley, Jefferson, and Jim not cited concrete examples but also expressed ethereal notions surrounding their shifts in conceptualization of culture that lead to changes in their thoughts about culture saying, "It is like going from a 2D understanding to a 3D understanding," and "It is like a web, where 4 things connect to four more things," and "It is like sheets of knowledge that all come together." Whereas, the other participants claimed that they were actually thinking about things more after taking the class. All the participants believed their experiences were rewarding and led them to a more reflective look and thought about culture and the landscape. What

follows is the final research question and the final two tentative manifestations that answer the research question.

Research Question 3 Findings Answered in Tentative Manifestation 3:

Shifts in Conceptualization of Culture that led to Changes in Behavior Resulting in a Greater Level of Tolerance and Acceptance of Others

Research question 3 is answered by the last two tentative manifestations, that of *shifts in conceptualization of culture that led to changes in behavior resulting a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others* and *shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concept of culture*.

The first tentative manifestation will be addressed in this section followed by the final tentative manifestation in the next section.

The manifestation of, *shifts in conceptualization of culture that led to changes in behavior resulting a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others* was succinctly expressed by all of participants, although to differing and varying degrees. What follows are the participants' narrative voices on this manifestation. This manifestation was expressed strongly by 7 of the participants and less significantly by 3 of the participants. Osceola shared he thinks "we are so extremely divided." But, he believes that if "People would talk about that perspectives and kind of even it out and try to understand one another like how we're trying to understand other cultures, then the world and this country could be a better place." Osceola said he doesn't "Prejudge about anything." He said he tries to understand "Everybody's culture and how they do it and why they do certain things." Osceola noted that because we live in a globalized world, "We have to be aware of cultures, and he think this is one of the few courses that can give you that."

He said, “We have to understand how others think, and what they think, and try to get along with them.”

Athens said she feels that she “has learned so much more from taking this class than she did not know before.” She said the class “Has really prepared her to see cultures in new and different ways.” Athens said, “I can't know everything in life about different cultures unless one tries to stand in their shoes and like walk their life, but I feel like I am getting that strong sense of learning to accept others.”

Kelly shared after this class, “I was able start having her own opinions on things, and now I have a better understanding, a broader understanding of other cultures.” She said she started to “Understand other cultures for who they are, and yes that increased my tolerance for differences.” Kelly said she started to see “Kind of where they're coming from.” She shared that she thinks the class “Helped her develop more empathy for other cultures and why they do what they do.”

Matthew relayed that “It was interesting, learning about how it all intertwined.” He said he got to see “How the environment really changes everything about what you're thinking, your understanding.” Matthew said what he “Learned about other cultures helped me see things differently than before, especially when it comes to other cultures.” He said the class “Helped him realize that different was ok, and I guess that makes me more accepting of other cultures.”

Georgia described her acceptance “As before she took the class, she didn't have like the same appreciation for cultures and people who were different.” She said, “That part really stuck out to her was the part about being more open to people that have different cultures.” Georgia said, “I definitely feels like I have noticed a change in

myself.” She noted that she used to be afraid to reach out different than her, but now finds “I am a lot less like afraid to like to reach out to other people that are different than me.” She said she “Wonders how she can be a better person towards them and be more understanding of who they are”. Georgia said she doesn’t look at “Things and say that is weird now because I am aware of differences and tolerant of them.”

Tess shared that “AP Human really kick-started her understanding of argument and how people see different perspectives,” and after taking AP Human Geography, Tess said she took a lot different classes where controversial topics were discussed, and “We argued and being able to understand where another person is coming from culturally allowed me to understand how they're arguing and maybe allows you to sympathize with them.” She said the class has affected the way she views other people, and “The respect I have for other people.”

Jefferson shared it helped him with more open mindedness. He said, “When I talk to my friends, I can agree with both sides even if they both they hate each other.” He said he often has to play “The mediator role, intermediate person, because I can get both understandings and somehow integrate so they understand each other at the end.” Jefferson claimed the class “Helped me to be open more minded, and I have become more analytical.” He said, “I am able to see more and to think out of the box sometimes as well because of the broad understanding of all those topics.”

Jim described his acceptance of other cultures by saying, “I think the class did help me with accepting other cultures.” He said he was able to see the differences between people, and “Think about how it connected to my people- Cambodians.” Jim said, “I think when you have a different culture growing up, it is hard to accept people

who are different because you feel you are on the outside, but after taking the class I realized that everyone is different, and if I open up to them then I can learn from their ways.”

Evangeline shared the class did increase her awareness and that she has retained information she learned in the class, but she said, “I am definitely more conscious of other cultures and what is going on around me.” Evangeline said, “I have learned to be more accepting of people different from myself.”

Shirley said she wants to go to the prestigious tech school for college. She said, “Learning about other cultures in human geography will definitely help me.” Shirley said, “Those schools are pretty diverse because they have people from all walks of life, people from every culture, that want to go there, so it is important to learn this, so I can relate to other people.” Shirley said, “I believe that I need to learn how to analyze that and to figure out a way to understand it and understand where they're coming from.”

Summary

Overall, each of the participants had specific thoughts their shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in their behavior resulting in their gaining a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others. Although some were more detailed in their expression, especially Georgia, who as a young participant from a somewhat sheltered background, experienced a remarkable revelation about being understanding and accepting of others, were less detailed, but believed they had a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others. Matthew, Athens, Osceola, Kelly, and Tess all agreed that they had experienced a change in their behavior which translated into their greater level of a tolerance and acceptance of others sharing some concrete examples.

While, Jim and Jefferson related their level of tolerance and acceptance to their multi-cultural background, citing that as a benefit they received from taking the class. Shirley noted that her tolerance and acceptance of others had increased to a greater level noting that would help her in the future. Evangeline had the least to say about her level of tolerance and acceptance of others only saying that she has learned to be more accepting of people different than herself. The participants' voices indicated they had gained a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others and understood that was a benefit they received from taking the class. In the next section, I address the research question, 3, and the tentative manifestation that answers research question 3.

Research Question 3 Findings Answered by Tentative Manifestation 4:

*Shifting Conceptualization of Culture That Resulted in Transfer of Knowledge
and Real-life Application of the Concept of Culture*

I addressed the final research question in relation the tentative manifestation of *shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concept of culture*. This manifestation answered the third research question that questioned the long-term benefits students received from taking the human geography class. Each participant realized benefits by taking the class, especially upperclassmen who had already experienced benefits and could reflect on how the class helped them. Having said this, even the younger participant benefited from the class and could speculate on future benefits. All participants had a two-fold approach to explain their benefits, that of how their understanding of culture could benefit them and how their level of analysis of information had changed. In the next sections, I provide the students' dialogue regarding the benefits from taking the class.

Osceola first spoke about the future benefits he believed he received from taking the class. He said, "I think knowledge of other cultures can also help me later in life, especially if my boss is of another culture." He claimed, "Knowing about someone else's culture could help me to know how to approach them and how to get things done in the right way without getting them irritated or causing tension." Further, he said, "I think this class will help me to get things done the right way and honor someone else's culture." Osceola said he thinks the class taught him a lot about how to look at culture. He said, "I think that is important because there's so many different cultures that we have to be able to work with especially once we move on and get into the workforce one has to work with these different cultures and understand how they think and what they think and try to get along with them."

Osceola then commented on how he believes that the class helped him analyze on deeper levels of information. He said, "I believe you have to be able analyze certain things in certain situations and try to make the best possible decision out of those situations," but this class "helped me think and see different perspectives, from cultures around the world, and how culturally people do certain things."

Athens said, "It is kind of hard to say how I might use it, but I learned that culture was a lot bigger than I had thought." She said the class, "Has influenced how I understand other knowledge." Athens said, "I did see myself growing as a person, and that is because of the class," and "I am just a different person because of the class, so if I was in a real situation, I will have to think what I need to do." She said, "I will just apply culture to that situation."

Kelly shared the content knowledge she learned that she believed would have real-life application. She said, “The more I think back on certain things I learned here, the more I bring it to other classes, “in fact “I have already used some of the knowledge I learned in her literature class when giving a definition of culture, and I anticipate what I learned in human geography will help next year in the environmental science class.”

Further, she said she was analyzing information on deeper levels. She claimed, “I am analyzing things on deeper levels and that opened up a whole new kind of understanding, it opened a lot more doors for me.” Kelly noted that now when discussing politics, economics, and languages, she “definitely learned to analyze things on a deeper level.” She explained, “I realized I was not always finished with analyzing something, I had to keep going deeper into it.”

Matthew explained the content information he learned that he believes contributed to benefits. He said he was making more in-depth connections. He said, “I think I am analyzing the different knowledge of people and the whys of how they got there and seeing from their perspective.” He continued, “It is it just where they're raised in the environment or just seeing their habits, whether it's religion or speech and the different dialects.” He indicated he thinks that he is analyzing information and the environment on a deeper level now.

Georgia said that she also thinks that she learned specific content knowledge that would benefit her in the future. She indicated, “I started noticing things and realizing things I hadn't before. Also, she noted that she found that she was using” Some of the stuff” she learned in human geography in her classes. She said she thought she remembered talking about the bubonic plague in another class at the same time she was

learning about in human geography, and she wondered if it was planned. She described, “I think that I will find more times that I will use human geography in high school, I just don’t know yet.”

Tess described her experiences with about content knowledge that she feels could provide here with real-life application of knowledge. She indicated she sees this class helping her in several ways. She said she was able to give a thorough, thought provoking definition of culture in English Class because she had the class. Also, she continued, “I think because I had the class, I was able to give concise, accurate descriptions, because once I could apply terminology and understanding of human geography, which encapsulates so many topics, I could actually understand other classes more”.

Tess agreed that she analyzed things on deeper levels after taking the class. She noted she actually embraced a much deeper understanding of such a small topic that seemed arbitrary before the class. She cited, “After taking the class and after many other classes, I was able to apply it to her life and to the real world, for me that is real life application.” She continued, “In fact, human geography was the benchmark for starting my analysis of many things afterward.”

Jefferson shared his thoughts on the benefits of taking the class. He related it back to his acceptance and tolerance for other cultures. He said, “I believe it helped me to be more open-minded, connect things easily, and become more analytical. Jefferson continued he feels he is “Able to see and to think out of the box sometimes as well because my broad understanding of all those topics.”

Jefferson then discussed his thoughts about analyzing on deeper levels now after taking the class. Jefferson said that the class definitely did add to that. He said the class,

“Makes you analyze stuff. It's more observational class like sciences.” He continued, “To say they weren't just facts, but then the human geography course actually ties into the why behind the facts and makes it more like giving it more like societal, historical background making it more understandable to real life and current issues.” “So, it makes it more integrated into our lives. So, we become more understanding of the differences.”

Jim also talked about his about the benefits of taking the class and his future. He said, “I think taking some liberal arts classes like human geography is helpful to even science people because it helps you connect different things, and it helps one think outside the box.” He continued, “It is kind of like learning to play an instrument, it helps with creative thinking.” Jim also added he kept finding places where he used human geography in many of his other classes. And, He noted, “Human geography reflects alternative modern or like contemporary history in this society. So, like any AP classes bounce off each other.”

Jim also said he thinks he is analyzing information on deeper levels now. He claimed he thinks the class does help you analyze things at a different level. He noted, “The class helps set you up for analyzing later, like other college classes.”

Evangeline commented on the benefits she received from taking the class and how it would help her in the future. She said she spent a year working as an intern for congressman, and the class helped her mature. She said, “I changed my future career path because of the human geography class, because now I want to go in politics.”

Shirley shared her thoughts on the benefits she had gained from taking the class and how it might help her in the future. She said the class has already had helped her in other classes. She discussed, “I took AP Environmental Science last semester and it was

one semester between taking AP Human and AP Environmental Science and there was so much overlap.” She noted she constantly referred back to human geography.

Shirley also agreed that she was analyzing information on deeper levels. She noted, “With AP human geography, you have to look deeper.” She continued, “You have to look kind of into the threading of like the entire world, you have to just look past the superficial, and that has made me an outside the box thinker, and everyone needs to know how to do that!”

Summary

The final research finding showed that all participants either had benefitted already or they could anticipate benefitting in the future. Many spoke about their ability to analyze information at deeper levels and see information in a new light. Several also experienced direct benefits from the human geography class in the other classes often citing a transfer of information. Kelly, Tess, Athens, Georgia, Shirley, Jim, and Jefferson had already experienced benefits in their other classes because of the transfer of knowledge and information. These participants cited using knowledge they learned in human geography in their English, biology, environmental science, and calculus classes. The older participants, Tess, Osceola, Jefferson, Jim, Evangeline, and even Shirley anticipated benefits from taking the class they will use when they go to college. Some said that the transfer of learning would go with them into the future, something the younger participants could likely experience as well. The participants’ voices in this manifestation, shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concept of culture addressed and answered research question 3, as it was evident from what they said that they had already experienced

benefits from taking the class or could anticipate experiencing benefits in the future from taking the class. The next section outlines the limitations of the study and potential problems associated with the limitations. The limitations are delineated first followed by my address of the potential problems.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are always present in research studies, but they are particularly important to address in qualitative studies, as the data is not grounded by numbers, but in this case by the voices of a limited number of participants telling their stories. The two most prevalent limitations in my study are the use of some of my former students, and my bias in asking leading questions of the participants. As to the use of former students, I attempted to mitigate this limitation by including participants from another high school human geography class to understand the phenomenon of the shifting conceptualization of culture in high school students from participation in a human geography class. I wanted to find insights about the course and the curriculum, and not about me as the teacher nor my teaching style. I believed that if the students at the other high school reported the same information as my students, then I had remained to capturing their voices about the class. Further, I believed that this would bring validity to my study by including a group of participants that I did not teach and had no influence over, other than I am another teacher of the subject. However different teaching styles between the two teachers in this study is an important consideration and could have been a potential limitation of the study. I tend to converse a great deal with my students and am very laid back in my approach to teaching, whereas I don't know what my colleague's style of teaching is in this class. The times that I have met him, he comes across as easy going

but I don't know if that demeanor is what he brings to the classroom. Teaching style is a limitation that is worth examining in future research.

The second largest limitation resided with me, as the researcher. The limitation of asking leading questions/prompts of the participants was one that was ever present and harder to mitigate. I had to continually refine and relook at the questions I was asking the participants in an attempt to ensure I was not leading them. This was hard for me as I am a very dialogical person with students and I can talk about the subject with them from many angles. This was the subjective "I," described in Chapter 3, with which I struggled with the most. I tried to back up my questions/prompts with quotes from College Board or our textbook, whenever possible, to try and keep my voice out of the question and answer process. I believed that bringing in authorities and experts from the human geography field in my questions would help mitigate some of the researcher bias. The second problem with the questions was that the participants may have been saying what they wanted me to hear. Again, my attempt to mitigate that was to use questions/prompt with sources from the human geography field so the participants would know that, again these were not my words, and they should answer honestly with their thoughts about the subject.

Several other limitations were present in my study. The small sample size of 10 participants, and the fact they were the best and brightest students, presents issues when considering credibility, and transferability of the findings to larger audiences. Small sample size would be an ever-present issue in this study. It would have been unfeasible to conduct a study using this methodology with larger groups of students. Teenagers have busier lives and bigger concerns than I have ever witnessed in my years of teaching.

Further, the ability to do focus groups and individual interviews with a larger sample size would have logistically been beyond the scope of this study's timeframe, but something that should be considered in future research. As for the students being the best and brightest, I have found, generally, that AP students typically are the students who are brighter and more motivated to learn and achieve. They are also, surprisingly to me, more likely to consent to participate in a study. I say surprisingly, as they are also the ones who are busier, and have more on their plate than regular education students. The fact that these 10 agreed and wanted to participate was welcomed. However, I realize this biases the data, and leads to a lack of transferability to other audiences. This biased data was a chance I had to take considering I was using the human geography class to situate the phenomenon of shifting conceptualization of culture high school students' experience from participation in a human geography class.

Summary

In summary, several limitations were present in my study. The use of former students as participants in the study was a potential source of bias, which I countered by opening up the study to students at another high school. Further, my own researcher bias in asking leading questions was also a limitation in the study. I attempted to mitigate this limitation by citing sources in as many of the questions as I could. The sample size of 10 was a limitation of the study and reduced the transferability of the research to other audiences. Finally, the use of the best and the brightest students in the research was also a limitation, but one I had to take as I was situating the study where the phenomenon resides, that of the human geography class. In the next section, I discuss the findings related to the literature.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings in this study are grounded in the literature presented in Chapter 2, albeit this was a qualitative study that worked with high school students, which wasn't found in the literature. I returned to several databases and poured through the literature to see if I had missed any studies or if there were any new studies. I could not find any additional studies related to high school students' understanding of culture, nor qualitative studies certainly none done with human geography classes. However, this study did examine understanding culture, which was present in the literature.

Mulvaney' (2014) action research project for his Masters Thesis examined short-term targeted research projects about culture with fifth grade students to gauge their awareness of other cultures. Mulvaney used a mixed-method design where she gave surveys and conducted interviews. She found that the students reported a greater understanding of other cultures. In much the same way as Mulvaney (2014), I employed focus group and individual interviews to study high school students' understanding of culture from taking the human geography class. My findings are consistent with Mulvaney's (2014) in that exposure to units on culture do improve students' understanding of culture.

An international study conducted by Beneker, Tani, Uphues, and van der Vart (2013), examined high school students' understanding of world mindedness, and knowledge of geography using a quantitative Likert-scaled survey. Beneker et al. (2013) found that on the open-mindedness dimension, students scored higher on the questions related to culture and cultural awareness. Beneker et al. (2013) suggested that awareness of different cultures could be instituted in the geography classroom to promote a greater

understanding of other perspectives. I used a qualitative design to examine high school students' understanding of culture as a result of taking the human geography course. I situated my research in the human geography class, something that Beneker et al. (2013) suggested for increasing high school students' awareness of culture.

Baltes, Hernandez and Collins (2015) conducted a quantitative study that addressed high school students' cultural awareness following a 4-month period of engagement with a targeted program to teach them about cultural awareness. Baltes et al. (2015) used Likert-scaled surveys to assess their cultural awareness. Baltes et al. (2015) found that following a targeted program to teach cultural awareness improved students' reported understanding of cultural awareness. Baltes et al. (2015) suggested that a benefit of engagement in a targeted program of instruction might be an "improvement in attitudes and an encouragement of positive cross-cultural interactions that can be carried into the workforce of students when they graduate (Baltes et al., 2015, p. 18). In much the same way as Baltes et al. (2015), I sought to understand how high school students understand culture after taking the human geography class. I used qualitative methods to conduct my research and my findings are consistent with Baltes et al. in that the high school students in my study did report a better awareness of culture from taking the human geography class.

Summary

The findings in the literature are consistent with the findings in my study in that students gain a greater understanding of culture after taking a class that is targeted in instruction of culture. Although, my study followed a qualitative approach using focus group and individual interviews to understand culture, findings are supportive of what is

in the literature and point to the need for more qualitative research on the subject at the high school level. In the next section, I discuss the implications of the study.

Implications

The findings of this study present several possible implications. First, there are potential implications for the educational community as to the importance of educating young people on culture and cultural practices. Students can gain invaluable insight and knowledge from understanding other cultures. Further, understanding other cultures can help students gain a greater tolerance and acceptance of others' cultures different from their own.

For educators, the increased knowledge, and the transfer of information to other disciplines that students acquire from taking the human geography class creates a more well-rounded and, as the participants noted, *out-of-the box thinker*. Conceptual thinking is a beneficial skill and can be applied to most any subject and supremely important for innovative 21st Century workers. The findings of this study might inform other educators on cross-curriculum effects that human geography has with other disciplines. The implication of my study for educators lies in the transference of knowledge to other disciplines and situations that occurs for student who take a human geography course

For administrators, stakeholders, and developers of curriculum, finding a place in the curriculum for students to learn about the information offered in the human geography class is important. Students who participate in Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) classes, can benefit from the soft sciences like human geography. The conceptual thinking skills and current information students gain from taking a human geography class will help them understand the globalized world that they

will live in and gain understanding of their role in it. Taking the human geography class has the potential to prepare students to live successfully in a globalized world as out-of-the box thinkers. The findings of this study that demonstrate that high school students gain a better understanding from taking the human geography class, could help administrators and other stakeholders understand the importance of the discipline in giving students an understanding of culture.

Finally, as an aside that I will discuss in the next section, the findings of this study could help inform other researchers of the need to conduct more qualitative studies in which students' voices are given credence. Far too often, students' own voices and thoughts about the educational process are ignored or left unheard. If we are concerned about making education relevant to students' lives and future, we need to listen to what they have to say and how they feel about their education. This study could provide some insight into that process.

Summary

There are several implications of this study for future exploration. There are implications for the educational community for educating young people on culture and understanding culture. Also, for educators, the implications of transference of learning to other disciplines that the human geography class provides is an implication that needs to be considered for producing conceptual thinkers. Finally, for administrators and stakeholders, a new look at how classes like human geography help students become creative, *out-of-the box* thinkers should be considered in order to ensure that students are prepared to thrive in a globalized world.

Future Research

There is a paucity of qualitative research on the subject of students' understanding of culture, especially at the high school level. Further, there was no research that I found that used focus group and individual interviews to captures and privileges students' voices on the subject, although several studies suggested that the combination of data gathering techniques can strengthen and cement themes in greater detail. I conducted a post-intentional phenomenological study to explore the tentative manifestations of the lived experiences of high school students' understanding of culture from participating in a human geography class. Future qualitative research should be conducted to ensure that students voices and narratives are being heard and noted so that educators and stakeholders are understanding how they learn, what benefits they receive from taking certain classes, and how education can be made relevant to their lives post high school and beyond.

Future research could take the form of any type of qualitative research design to include ethnographies, case studies, narrative inquiry, and perhaps a longitudinal study that examined the phenomenon of the course of several years. Certainly, revisiting students and continuing the dialogue over the course of several years would lend powerful validation to the importance of what they learned and the ongoing benefits it had provided them. It would be interesting to see if the momentary snapshot of their multiple, partial, and varied understanding of the phenomenon had continued to persist over time and become larger and more panoramic in view. This could potentially speak to all of the tentative manifestations I found in this study and perhaps continue to lead to more research on the phenomenon and more avenues of exploration.

Summary

As there is a paucity of qualitative research that examines students' understanding of culture, especially at the high school level, possible future research could ensure that the subject is given credence, and students' voices about the importance of learning about culture are being heard and acknowledged. Further, qualitative research could take many potential forms, including ethnographies, case studies, narrative inquiry, and even a longitudinal study to examine if phenomenon of high school student' understanding culture persisted in the future and still provided benefits. What follows in the conclusion to this chapter and my epilogue.

Conclusion

In this study, I set out on the phenomenological journey to discover the lived experiences of high school students' understanding of culture from participating in the human geography class. I had 10 participants from 2 separate high schools respond to focus group and individual interviews about their experiences. The purpose of the study was to not only discover their experiences with understanding culture but also to give them a voice in the process, something that was lacking in previous research studies.

As noted earlier, there is a paucity of qualitative research that not only addresses students' voices and addresses how students gain an understanding of culture. As such, I set out to understand this process. After analyzing the data from the focus group and individual interviews, I provided a platform for students' voices to be heard and I found some interesting, and often not anticipated, results about how high school students come to understand culture. My research shows these 10 students developed their understanding of culture in several fascinating ways, which I articulated in the form of

tentative manifestations as described by Vagle (2014). These tentative manifestations included, *shifting conceptualization of culture from initial to deeper, more complex thought about culture than previously experienced, shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in thought patterns related to culture, shifting conceptualization of culture that led to changes in behavior resulting in a greater level of tolerance and acceptance of others, and shifting conceptualization of culture that resulted in transfer of knowledge and real-life application of the concepts of culture.* These findings represent information that is lacking in the literature and could contribute to a discussion of how students' gain understanding of other cultures and what benefits are provided to students who participate in a human geography class.

EPILOGUE

As I reflect on this study and the many years, I taught human geography, I am overwhelmed with the ability of this course and its content to change students' lives. Delving into teenagers' lives and thoughts can be scary at best, nevertheless I am deeply grateful for the 10 participants who gave of their time and thoughts. I was not sure at first that I wanted to do a study related to the human geography class, much less a phenomenological study, as I couldn't even pronounce the word, but looking back now, it is a perfect fit. It has woven together my passion for teaching this subject and working with teenagers. These two things don't always align, but they certainly did in this case.

From conducting this study, I learned about myself and about the participants' views on the subject and the class. I learned that I have to trust my read of people and things and let what Vagle (2014) termed the manifestation manifest itself in its multiple, partial, and varied forms. For me this meant allowing the conversation to flow back and forth among the participants, and between the participants and me, to ensure that I was capturing their voices about the experience and not my own. A notecard on my bathroom mirror hinted at my fear of not getting enough data and never finishing. The fear partly stemmed from my worry of working with teenagers and perhaps my own worry that I didn't have what it takes to complete this study. However, looking back and thinking about it, I am sure that is a common concern for most people who take on the challenging task of a doctorate.

From the participants I learned to listen intently to what they were saying and not to talk until it was absolutely necessary, a hard feat for an extravert like me. They gave me so many valuable insights into their world and their thought patterns, which can often

be jumbled and confusing. I learned to hold on and wait for them to come to terms with what they were saying and to not make assumptions about the way they expressed themselves, no matter how convoluted it might have been presented. I also learned a tremendous amount of patience working with these participants. When you work around teenagers all day, the last thing you want to do is sit with them after school and talk about more “stuff” that they are thinking. But these participants were real troopers and came through when I needed them for which I am wholeheartedly in their debt.

Further, I learned that someone at my advancing age can learn and continue to learn on a daily basis. Even when I was hearing what the participants were saying about many of the things and questions about which I was asking them, I didn’t see some of the manifestations coming. I had not anticipated finding the class could help increase students’ tolerance and acceptance of other cultures different from their own, as I had heard for many years the expression, “that is so weird” when it came to other cultures. Also, I had never made the effort understand the levels of their learning about culture and was also surprised how multifaceted that learning was. It was surprising to hear the depths to which their new learning had taken them.

Finally, I learned that while I was conducting a post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014), I was also living through post-intentional phenomenology while doing this doctorate, although I didn’t realize it at the time. The more I analyzed and sat with the data, the more I reflected on the journey of phenomenon, the shifting conceptualization of culture that high school students gain from participating in a human geography class. After many post-reflexive moments with the data, a truly lived experience, I can now say I understand what post-intentional phenomenology entails and what an encounter with a

lived experience with a phenomenon looks like. I see the *essencing* of the phenomenon as Vagle (2014) called it from living through the experience. I even saw my own ideas of the shifting conceptualization of culture that I have experienced from teaching this class and how that has had a profound impact on my life and how I teach this class. I intimated earlier that this class is a labor of love for me, but I hadn't really delved, with any depth, into why I felt that way until I did this dissertation. I think I truly understand now why I love this class so much....It has the power to transform people's lives!

In the future, I look forward to continuing to look at culture and learn something new each day about culture that I didn't know the day before. Also, I look forward walking back into the classroom and doing what I do best, educating young minds.

REFERENCES

- Baltes, B., Hernandez, D., & Collins, C. (2015). Increasing cultural awareness through a cultural awareness program. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 5(1), 1-20.
- Baldwin, J. R., Faulkner, S. L., Hecht, M. L., & Lindsley (2006). *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Bednarz, S. W. (2016). Placing advanced placement human geography: Its role in U.S. geography education. *Journal of Geography*, 115(3), 84-89. Retrieved from: <http://dx.doi.org.library.valdosta.edu/2048/10.1080/00221341.2015.1083043>
- Beneker, T., Tani, S., Uphues, R., & van der Vaart, R. (2013). Young people's world-mindedness and the global dimension in their geography education: A comparative study of upper secondary school students' ideas in Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 22, 322-336.
- Brown, I. C. (1963). *Understanding other cultures*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Choi, Y., & Choi, M. (2012). Korean service studies preservice teachers' cross-cultural learning and global perspective development: Crossing borders between Korea and the United States, *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 36(1), 75-104.
- Clarke, V. (2004). Students' global awareness and attitudes to internationalism in a world of cultural convergence, *Journal of International Education*, 3(1), 51-70.
- Dahlberg, K., Dahlberg, H., & Nystrom, M. (2008). *Reflective life-world research*. (2nd ed). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Davis, C. S., & Ellis, C. S. (2008). Interactive focus groups. In Given (Ed), *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Deblij, H., J., Murphy, A., B., & Fouberg, E., H. (2007). *Human geography: People, place, and culture*. New York, NY: J. Wiley & Sons.
- Deleuze, G., & F. Guattari. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, Trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Demovsky, S., (1999). *The global Classroom: A study in appreciation, awareness, and acceptance of different cultures and people in our ever-changing world (Unpublished master's thesis)*. Saint Xavier University, Palatine, Illinois. Retrieved from: [http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED440901 .pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED440901.pdf). (Accession No. ED 440901)
- Denson, N., Ovenden, G., Wright, L., Paradies, Y., & Priest, N. (2017). The development and validation of intercultural understanding (ICU) instruments for teachers and students in primary and secondary schools, *Intercultural Education*, 28, 231-249.
- Ducate, L., & Steckenbiller, C. (2017). Toward a better understanding of culture: Wikis in the beginning German classroom, *The Language Learning Journal*, 45, 202-219.
- Geisel, T. S. (1990). *Oh, the places you will go*. New York, NY: Random House
- Grady, K. (1986). Textual practices and global understanding: The necessity for a critical reading, *The International Journal of Social Education*, 13(2), 56-65.
- Hanvey, R., G. (1975). *An attainable global perspective*. Retrieved from: https://worldview.unc.edu/files/2012/09/HANVEYAn_Attainable_Global_Perspective.pdf
- Husserl, E. (1931 [2014]). *Ideas: General education to pure phenomenology*, New York, NY: Routledge
- Jin, B., & Bennur, S. (2012). Curriculum internationalization focusing on India: Pre- and post-assessment of student learning, *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 23(1), 31-45.

- Kirkwood, T. F. (2001). Our global age requires global education: Clarifying definitional ambiguities. *Social Studies*, 92(1), 10-15.
- Klein, P., Pawson, E., Solem, M., & Waverly, R. (2014). Geography education for “an attainable global perspective.” *Journal for Geography in Higher Education*, 38(1), 17-27.
- Kniep, W., M. (1986). Social studies within a global education. *Social Education*, 50, 536-542.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kurpis, L. H., & Hunter, J. (2017) Developing students’ cultural intelligence through an experiential learning activity: A cross-cultural consumer behavior interview, *The Journal of Marketing Education*, 39(1), 30-46.
- Lee, A., Williams, R. D., Shaw, M. A., & Jie, Y. (2014). First-year students’ perspectives on intercultural learning, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19, 543-554.
- Levintova, E., Johnson, T., Scheberle, D., & Vonck, K. (2011). Global citizens are made, not born: Multiclass Role-Playing Simulation of Global Decision Making. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 7, 245-274.
- Linton, R. (1925). Marquesan culture. *American Anthropologist*, 27, 474-478. Retrieved from: doi:10.1525/aa.1925.27.3.02a00160
- Lopez-Murphy, S. (2013). Evaluating the impact of two globalization projects on college students’ cultural competence and cultural intelligence (CQ), *The Journal of Effective Teaching*, 13(1), 5-18.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Mead, M. (1928). *Coming to age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for Western Civilization*. William Morrow and Company, New York
- Merryfield, M. (1998). Pedagogy for global perspective in education: Studies of teachers' thinking and practice. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 26, 342-379.
- Merryfield, M. (2008). Scaffolding Social Studies for global awareness. *Social Education*, 72, 363-366.
- Merryfield, M. (2011). Preparing American secondary social studies teachers to teach with a global perspective: A status report. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(1), 11-20.
- Merryfield, M. (2012). Four strategies for teaching open-mindedness. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 25(2), 18-22.
- Merryfield, M., & Kasai, M. (2004). How are teachers responding to globalization? *Social Education*, 68, 354-359.
- Moule, J. (2008). Cultural competence in a global society. *Teacher Education and Practice*, 21, 467-469.
- Mulvaney, M. R. (2014). *The effects of a cultural unit on student's global interest and awareness* (Master's Thesis, Saint Mary's College of California). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1654434729).
- Murphy, A. B., & Hare, P. R. (2016). The nature of geography and its perspective in AP human geography. *Journal of Geography*, 115(3), 95-100.
- Myers-Lipton, S. J. (1996) Effect of service learning on college students' attitudes toward international understanding. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37, 659-667.
- Peshkin, A. (1998). In search of subjectivity-one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-21.

- Pew Research Center (2017a). *Statistical portrait of foreign-born population in the United States*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/05/03/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-2015/>
- Pew Research Center (2017b). *Five facts about U.S. rank in worldwide migration*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/18/5-facts-about-the-u-s-rank-in-worldwide-migration/>
- Pew Research Center (2017c). *10 demographic trends shaping the U.S. and the world in 2017*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/27/10-demographic-trends-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world-in-2017/>
- Ravitch, S., M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rawls, J., & Hammons, S. A. (2016). Does delivery format make a difference in learning about global and cultural understanding? *American Journal of Distance Education*, 30(2), 89-97.
- Reich, J. C., (2012). Global learning a general education for the Twenty-First Century. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 7, 464-473.
- Reidel, M., & Draper, C. (2013). Preparing middle grades educators to teach about world cultures: An interdisciplinary approach. *Social Studies*, 104, 115-122.
- Salva, V. (Director), & Bernhardt, K. (Writer). (2006). *The Peaceful Warrior* [Motion picture]. United States: Lionsgate/Universal Pictures.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

The College Board. (2017, December 11). *AP Human Geography AP Central*. Retrieved from <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-human-geography?course=ap-human-geography>

Unruh-Synder, L. J., Lamm, A. J., Brendemuhl, J., Irani, T., Roberts, T. G., Rodriguez, M. T., & Navarro, J. (2011). Enhancing cultural awareness through an agricultural sustainability course in Costa Rica, *Journal of Natural Resources & Life Sciences Education*, 40, 191-198.

Vagle, M., D. (2014). *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. London: Routledge.

Van Manen, M. (2015). *Researching lived experiences*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Villard, J. A. (2003). *Use of focus groups: An effective tool for involving people in measuring quality and impact*. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED482279.pdf>

Zhang, R., Hsu, H., & Wang, S. (2010). Global literacy: Comparing Chinese and US high school students, *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*, 4(2), 76-98.

APPENDIX A:
IRB APPROVAL



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-03603-2018

RESPONSIBLE RESEARCHER: Ms. Steffani Dyer
SUPERVISING FACULTY: Dr. Richard Schmertzling

PROJECT TITLE: *From Stranger to Familiar: A Phenomenological Study Exploring Cross-Cultural Awareness in High School Students Through Engagement in the Human Geography Curriculum.*

APPROVAL DATE: 04.02.2018

EXPIRATION DATE: 04.01.2019

LEVEL OF RISK: ☐ Minimal ☐ More than Minimal

TYPE OF REVIEW: ☒ Expedited Under Categories 6/7 ☐ Convened (Full Board)

CONSENT REQUIREMENTS:

- ☒ Adult Participants – Written informed consent with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Adult Participants – Written informed consent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☐ Adult Participants – Verbal informed consent
- ☐ Adult Participants – Waiver of informed consent
- ☒ Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written parent/guardian permission with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Verbal parent/guardian permission
- ☐ Minor Participants – Waiver of parent/guardian permission
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written assent with documentation (signature)
- ☐ Minor Participants – Written assent with waiver of documentation (signature)
- ☒ Minor Participants – Verbal assent
- ☐ Minor Participants – Waiver of assent
- ☐ Waiver of some elements of consent/permission/assent

APPROVAL: This research protocol is **approved** as presented. If applicable, your approved consent form(s), bearing the IRB approval stamp and protocol expiration date, will be mailed to you via campus mail or U.S. Postal Service unless you have made other arrangements with the IRB Administrator. Please use the stamped consent document(s) as your copy master(s). Once you duplicate the consent form(s), you may begin participant recruitment. **Please see Attachment 1 for additional important information for researchers.**

COMMENTS:

Elizabeth Ann Olphie

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

04.02.2018

Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Form Revised: 06.02.16

EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL REPORT

Attachment 1

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS:

If your protocol received expedited approval, it was reviewed by a two-member team, or, in extraordinary circumstances, the Chair or the Vice-Chair of the IRB. Although the expeditors may approve protocols, they are required by federal regulation to report expedited approvals at the next IRB meeting. At that time, other IRB members may express any concerns and may occasionally request minor modifications to the protocol. In rare instances, the IRB may request that research activities involving participants be halted until such modifications are implemented. Should this situation arise, you will receive an explanatory communiqué from the IRB.

Protocol approvals are generally valid for one year. In rare instances, when a protocol is determined to place participants at more than minimal risk, the IRB may shorten the approval period so that protocols are reviewed more frequently, allowing the IRB to reassess the potential risks and benefits to participants. The expiration date of your protocol approval is noted on the approval form. You will be contacted no less than one month before this expiration date and will be asked to either submit a final report if the research is concluded or to apply for a continuation of approval. It is your responsibility to submit a continuation request in sufficient time for IRB review before the expiration date. If you do not secure a protocol approval extension prior to the expiration date, you must stop all activities involving participants (including interaction, intervention, data collection, and data analysis) until approval is reinstated.

Please be reminded that you are required to seek approval of the IRB before amending or altering the scope of the project or the research protocol or implementing changes in the approved consent process/forms. You are also required to report to the IRB, through the Office of Sponsored Programs & Research Administration, any unanticipated problems or adverse events which become apparent during the course or as a result of the research and the actions you have taken.

Please refer to the IRB website (<http://www.valdosta.edu/ospra/HumanResearchParticipants.shtml>) for additional information about Valdosta State University's human protection program and your responsibilities as a researcher.

APPENDIX B:
RECRUITMENT FLYER

YOU ARE INVITED TO BE A PART OF
IMPORTANT DISCUSSION WHERE
YOU ARE THE STAR!!!!!!



- ★ Are you or have you been a student of AP Human Geography?
- ★ Do you like snacks? Do you like to talk about your experiences?
- ★ Can you provide information about your experiences with cultural awareness?

**If you said yes to these questions... Then I want you!!!... to
consider joining me for snacks and discussion**



I am interested in hearing what you have to say about your experiences and perceptions of your cultural understanding through participation in the human geography class.

If this is something you would be interested in and could contribute to meaningfully, please contact Ms. Dyer at 678-877-7238 or email at steffani.dyer@cowetaschools.net

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to spdyer@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu

Document attached to flyer:

General Information

Purpose of the Study: My purpose for engaging in this study is to explore students' experiences and perceptions of their own cultural understandings and the process of gaining cultural understanding through participation in the human geography class.

Your Role in the Study: As a participant in this research study, you will be asked to provide 3 reflexive writing pieces about your cultural awareness and understanding through engagement in the human geography class. You will also be asked to participate in 2 focus group interviews and 2 individual interviews which will be scheduled, as much as possible, for your convenience. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. It is my hope that your contribution to the study will prove rewarding and valuable for understanding students' experiences and perceptions of learning and understanding of cross-cultural awareness.

Confidentiality: All attempts at privacy and confidentiality will be maintained through the research process by Valdosta State University and the principle researcher to the extent allowed by law. You will not be exposed to liability or damages of any kind. Your names will be changed to a pseudonym and numerically coded to maintain their privacy within 48 hours of collection. I as the sole interviewer, transcriber, and data analyzer will keep all data on my personal passport device and will be password protected. I will not share the information with anyone else, with the exception of my doctoral chair and researcher, who may need to advise me throughout the process. Following data analysis, the writing, and defense of the dissertation and a given amount of time for potential publication of the document, (3 years), I will destroy all documents and delete all files from personal storage devices pertaining to the study.

Consent and Permission Forms: Upon your decision to participate in this research study, I will give you the relevant consent forms that must be filled out and returned to me, the principle researcher. Participants under the age of 18 will be asked to obtain consent from your parent/parents to engage in the study. Participants 18 and older will need to fill out the Consent to Participate form to engage in the study.

APPENDIX C:
INTEREST SURVEY

Sample Initial Interest Survey

I am engaging in a study examining high school students' cultural understanding through participation in the human geography class. As someone who has taken the class and engaged in the curriculum, I am gauging your interest and ability to participate in the study. Thank you for your participation in this initial survey.

Please answer the following questions by clicking on the button that best answers the question concerning your experiences and perceptions and willingness to participate.

1. How long ago did you take the human geography course..... type in a response.

2. I would be interested in sharing my personal experiences and perceptions of my cultural awareness. Yes ☒ No ☐

3. I am willing to engage in reflective writing pieces that discuss my experiences and perceptions of my cultural awareness. Yes ☒ No ☐

4. I am willing to engage in reflective writing pieces that discuss my cultural understanding from participation in the human geography class. Yes ☒ No ☐

5. I am willing and able to participate in focus group and individual interviews with former students describing my experiences and perceptions of your cultural awareness. Yes ☒ No ☐

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed spdyer@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu

APPENDIX D:

WRITING PROMPTS FOR LIVED EXPERIENCE DESCRIPTIONS (LED)

Directions: Please answer the following prompt in at least one paragraph and email your response to the researcher in two days.

Question for initial LED prompt:

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the words “culture” and cultural awareness?

Directions: Please answer the following prompts in at least two paragraphs and give your response to the researcher prior to start of the first focus group meeting.

Questions for LED prompt before the first focus group interview:

1. What were your personal experiences that led you to take the human geography course?
2. What experiences have you had, if any, with someone of another culture?
3. What is your current level of understanding of cultures other than your own?

Directions: Please answer the following prompts in at least two paragraphs and give your response to the researcher prior to start of the final focus group meeting.

Questions for LED prompt before the final focus group interview:

1. Describe a vivid memory you have about other cultures and your cross-cultural awareness from your experience with the human geography curriculum?
2. In what ways has your knowledge of other cultures changed as a result of participating in the human geography class?
3. In what ways do you find that learning about other cultures will benefit you in the long run?

APPENDIX E:
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDES

First Focus Group Interviews

1. Why did you decide to take the human geography class?
2. What is your definition of culture?
3. Explain any vivid moments or experiences (if any) that you had in the human geography class that have remained with you.
4. What are your thoughts, if any, on culture as a large concept?
5. Explain any experiences in the human geography class that helped you look at culture in a different way?
6. Describe your pre-class awareness of culture.

Final Focus Group Interviews (based upon follow-up questions done after first focus group and individual interviews)

1. Respond to the statement from College Board's website: The class is designed to help you look at the world in a new way! What does that mean to you?
2. Respond to the statement in your textbook that human geography is "The why of where." What does that statement mean to you?
3. What does the phrase "deeper levels of analysis" mean to you? (and explain)
4. What does the phrase "new, in-depth understanding mean to you? (and explain)
5. Fill in the blank, I had a lightbulb moment in the human geography class when I _____.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background.
2. What was your exposure to culture and other cultures before taking the human geography class?
3. How would you rate your level of knowledge about culture before taking the class.
4. How would you rate your level of knowledge about culture after taking the class.
5. What aspects of the class contributed to your understanding of culture, if any?
6. What did you learn in the human geography class that changed how you looked at culture, if anything?
7. What are your thoughts about culture after taking the human geography class?
8. What did the process of learning about culture in the human geography class look like for you?
9. What were some of the outcomes you experienced learning about culture in the human geography class?
10. Can you expound about the experiences you had with learning about culture from taking the human geography class, if any?