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Los Angeles

Deadly Gun Violence on American College Campuses:

UCLA International Student Perspectives

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Justin Adam Gelzhiser

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Deadly Gun Violence on American College Campuses: UCLA International Student Perspectives

by

Justin Adam Gelzhiser

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Robert T. Teranishi, Chair

American colleges and universities attract nearly one million international students each year to their higher education institutions. Reasons for the high demand of American degree and certificate programs include a major boost in one's social, cultural, and economic capital. Expansive alumni connections, world-class skills training, and enhanced job prospects and opportunities, both domestically and internationally, are made accessible to graduates from American institutions of higher education (IHE). At the same time, choosing to enter a new foreign environment in the United States involves major social and cultural changes as well as financial demands. Universities are at the nexus of marketing to, accepting, welcoming, and providing education to this invaluable part of American campus communities.

International students who choose to make the trek to the United States enter a new foreign landscape that includes concerns of safety, and more specifically, fears and concerns of America's prevalent "gun culture." Utilizing Dewey's theory of experiential learning and a Freirean critical approach, I will use a communication studies approach to examine the lived experiences of Indian and Chinese international students at The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions will be examined to construct a clearer picture of international student educational experiences. While examining general perceptions of safety in America and its college campuses, special emphasis is placed on international student perspectives of the June 1st, 2016 murder-suicide that took place on UCLA's campus. As false rumors of a coordinated terrorist attack and reports of mass casualties were spread on campus, an already tragic event was amplified into a global one.

In-depth interviews and focus groups are used to gain insight into the world's two largest overall global and American higher education populations. Detailed qualitative analyses reveal international students' day-to-day interactions with mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions as well as the part these modes of communication play in international students' visceral thoughts and concerns on gun violence, a prevalent gun culture, and their experiences within American IHE.

Findings show that international students at UCLA see their campus as a "protective bubble" which appears to temporarily assuage safety concerns. On the other hand, they often display contradictory actions and feelings which point to their local environments on and off campus as places that are sometimes safe and predictable and at other times filled with danger

and uncertainty. A discussion of salient themes related to their perceptions of safety demonstrate a direct impact on their educational experiences and daily lives on and off campus.

It is my hope that by documenting and exploring the day-to-day thoughts and feelings of these international students in regard to their perceived safety while studying at UCLA, university and governmental leaders alike can better understand and support the needs and concerns of the United States' vital international student populations. Policy, practice, and future research recommendations are offered.

Keywords: admissions, colleges and universities, firearms, foreign students, guns, international students, student affairs, student support services, violence

The dissertation of Justin Adam Gelzhiser is approved.

Douglas M. Kellner

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University of California, Los Angeles

2018

In memory:

Professor William S. Klug,

UCLA's Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department

Mrs. Jennifer Parks,

Anaverde Hills Elementary School, Kindergarten Teacher

To all the victims of gun violence in America & the educational spaces they impact.

In gratitude:

To the UCLA Police Department (UCPD) and all the brave first-responders around the country.

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When I first talked with my parents about going overseas to South Africa to complete my student-teaching requirement in college, they quickly expressed concerns for my safety. “I’ll be fine,” I exclaimed. I felt an itch to see how schools and universities around the world educated their students that needed to be scratched. It has only intensified. And despite some reservations, they fully supported my trip. They knew I wouldn’t be happy unless I left my comfort zone back in Pennsylvania. This experience forever changed my life. I went on to teach, research, and learn in places like Costa Rica, Japan, China, and California. I am now completing my PhD in Social Science & Comparative Education from UCLA. Without their unwavering support, I could never have reached this point in my life. To them, I say thank-you for giving me the freedom and support to become myself.

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VITA

-

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2016	George Kneller Research Prize, UCLA's Department of Education

Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others.

- *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916, Kindle Locations 70-71)

Introduction

Higher education (HE) is a high stakes game. As the largest single employer in the state of California (Frankel, 2015), The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in tandem with the UCLA Health System, pays special attention to maintaining a positive image both locally and globally. A tarnished university reputation can have major financial ramifications and lead to years of brand name repair. On June 1st, 2016, a murder-suicide occurred on UCLA's campus that shook the university to its core. Misinformation about the event spread around campus and led to a several-hour campus-wide lockdown. Despite a prompt response from law enforcement officials, the damage had been done and questions of campus safety in this affluent part of Los Angeles arose. In short, no one and no place is immune to deadly gun violence in America. The university later received heavy criticism for being underprepared (Pettit, 2016), and the public perception that the picturesque UCLA campus was immune to deadly gun violence was shattered in an instant.

Many people around the world were mentally, physically, and emotionally affected by what happened on campus that morning. Concerned parents, family members, and interconnected communities around the world, both big and small, began the process of making sense of that day's events. Arguably however, few people were more impacted than the students themselves. And among the nearly 44,000 students enrolled at UCLA, international students make up over one-quarter of the population (Nahidi, 2018).

For any students studying abroad in a foreign environment, there are additional challenges, such as cultural barriers, lack of institutional knowledge, and the struggle of navigating a new higher education system that they must overcome when making sense of traumatic events like campus shootings. Once they enter their new foreign institution, they are often overlooked by universities amidst the tens-of-thousands of other students on campus.

Generally speaking, an examination of HE literature reveals a lack of in-depth qualitative research on these vulnerable, yet indispensable, international student populations within American Institutes of Higher Education (IHE). And more specifically, even less is known about how they construct their perceptions of safety in America, their understandings of American gun culture, general perceptions of campus safety and gun violence, and how these constructions evolve and impact their educational experiences. Moreover, little is known about how as international students in America they are directly and indirectly impacted by specific acts of deadly gun violence that occur throughout the United States.

Examining various aspects of international student educational experiences in the context of the deadly act of gun violence that occurred on UCLA's campus (which occurred before they applied to the university during the 2016-17 application period) is therefore a main focus of this study. The study will take a phenomenological approach by looking at how their educational experiences are impacted as they progress from applicant to international students at UCLA (focusing in on students who began their studies in the fall of 2017).

Documenting emerging narratives of the often-overlooked and under-researched international student population at UCLA will allow American universities to better address the needs and concerns of these students, encourage a more open, interactive, and healthy campus

climate, and help universities “practice what they preach” by building more equal, diverse, and inclusive campus communities.

As American IHE make major financial gains from international students annually, they also need to make every effort to support these students in every way they can. Their primary moral responsibility, in my opinion, should be to always put the humanistic needs and concerns of its students above profits. International students are more than the degrees or certificates they receive. Talks of support for international students by university leaders need to be met with related policy and action. More applied research on international students such as what this dissertation hopes to accomplish should be more robustly encouraged and funded by American IHE.

Misconceptions that most international students are wealthy, privileged, and are “doing just fine” does not match the approach that American universities take in engaging other at-risk populations within their local communities. Universities have an obligation to hear the voices and concerns of all students on campus – including their international student populations. Because international student voices and concerns are as unique as they are individuals, American IHE should put forth greater efforts to understand them.

At the heart the study, I am borrowing and translating from several methodological approaches including authors from educational philosophy, and renowned as well as emerging researchers from the fields of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions. The purpose is to construct an analytical framework that best explains international student perception-construction processes from both local and global points of view. It can be understood as a means to examine how information in general is disseminated, accessed, and interpreted by international applicants and students in our globalized world of the 21st century,

and then later with specific acts of deadly gun violence such as those that occurred at UCLA during the June 1st, 2016 campus shooting.

We live in an era where data is spread and received at an unprecedented rate. I argue that these accelerating advances in technology are made possible by processes associated with *neoliberal globalization*. It is my hope that by understanding the processes behind how people form their understandings of foreign locales, and how these perceptions change with first-hand experience that researchers, policy-makers, and the everyday global citizen can objectify, critique, and ultimately improve the way in which they interact with one another in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

In this study, I will first share my account of being locked-down with my 75 students during the June 1st, 2016 shooting on UCLA's campus.¹ It will be followed by a purpose statement as well as research goals & questions. Next, I conduct an inductive review of the literature beginning with a discussion on modern and troublesome trends of neoliberal globalization as explained in HE admissions and student affairs research. Next, I will examine HE literature that looks at general themes of *violence* within college communities. I will then conclude by looking at HE research that specifically examines deadly gun violence, and why it has become a growing concern for college communities.

The next section describes the methodological framework for my study. After explaining the need for conducting more qualitative research projects, I use a Deweyan experiential learning

¹ On that day, I was scheduled to present my findings on a year-long research study which explored whether international students at UCLA were concerned with acts of global terrorism and how this might impact them on campus or in the surrounding community. A main finding from the study suggested that international students were less concerned with global terrorism, and rather with the prevalence of gun-related violence and ownership of firearms among people in the United States (e.g., "fears of American gun culture").

and Freirian critical approach to set an educational philosophical background for my analyses on deadly gun violence at UCLA. I then introduce a communication studies approach to explain how international applicants and students to UCLA interpret campus safety and the act of deadly violence that occurred at UCLA. This is composed of three parts: mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions. The latter concept focuses on *cultural hybridity* which is a model for explaining how cultures do not form uniformly and how information is indeed socially-constructed. Where the economic model of neoliberal globalization is a short-term model for explaining how we are coming into closer contact with each other, cultural hybridity is long-term explanation for how diverse individual interpretations of human interactions ensue. Naturally though, with greater cross-pollination of societies in our contemporary era, I suggest that these processes are becoming more expedited and intensified.

After explaining how international applicants and students use these three interactive information mediums to triangulate and construct their understandings of campus safety and deadly gun violence at UCLA, I briefly discuss how these processes might evolve in the future as certain technologies advance.

The next portion of my dissertation enters into the methodological design & results which describes the in-depth interviewing and focus group approaches to learning more about the international student population at UCLA. Indian and Chinese international students were chosen as they represent the two largest nationalities within the greater global population as well as foreign student populations within American IHE and UCLA. Data was collected and analyzed, and narratives and themes related to the educational experiences of international students at UCLA were elucidated.

I conclude by revisiting research goals, answering research questions, providing a summary of research findings, including an explanation of potential challenges and limitations in my study, describing the significance and contributions of the study, mentioning possibilities for future studies, and ending with a few final thoughts.

UCLA Shooting

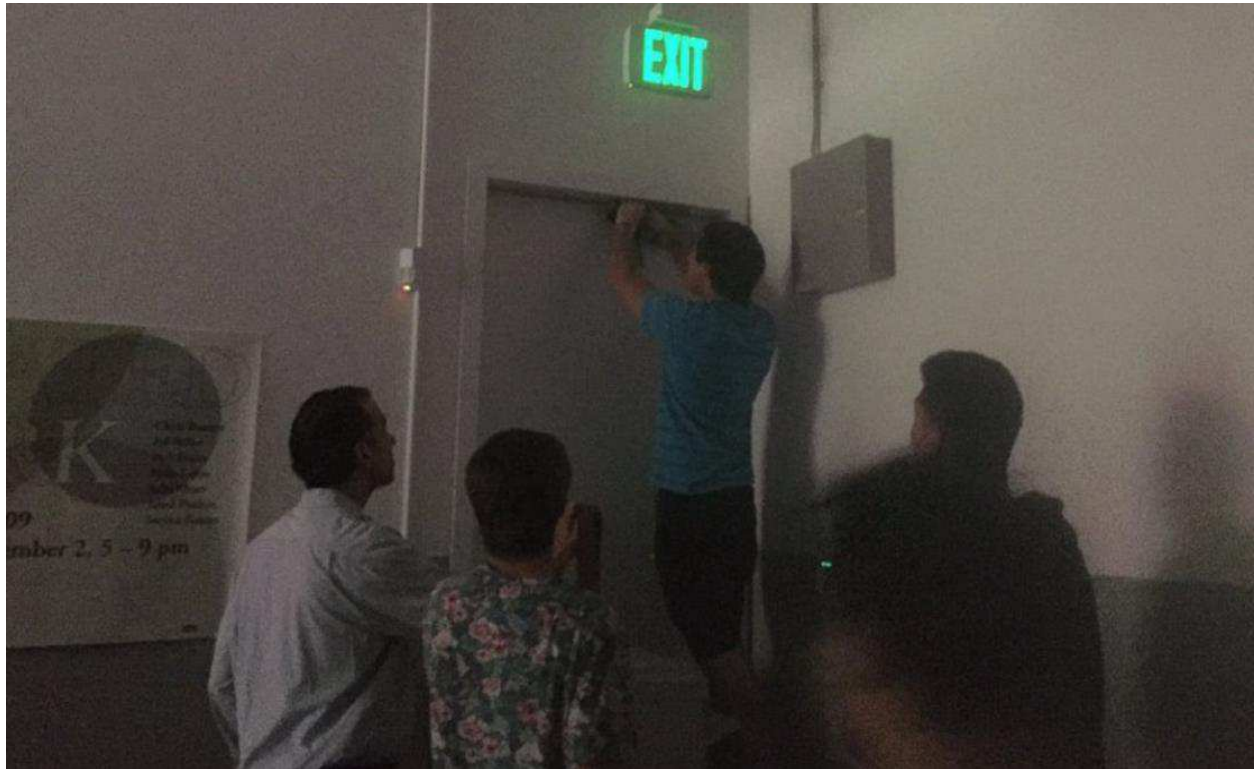
On June 1st, 2016 at 9:49 a.m., UCLA's Bruin Alert (2016) system sent out a message to the campus community that there was "Police Activity in the vicinity of Engineering Building 4. Avoid area until further notice." After seeing the message, I continued my walk on campus and noticed that everything seemed quite normal. Campus wide messages are common and often end up being false alarms or minor incidences.

The impression that I got from students when I first moved to the area a couple of years prior was that the campus is a haven. Maybe the reason for an immense sense of security results from its geographical proximity to affluent neighborhoods such as Bel Air to the north, Beverley Hills to the east, Brentwood to the west, and Santa Monica to the south. In fact, UCLA students call their adopted college town Westwood Village, or the "Westwood Bubble."

Four minutes later, a second alert read, "Shooting at Engineering 4. Go to secure location and deny entry (lockdown) now!" (UCLA's Bruin Alert, 2016, June 1st, 9:53 a.m.). Within moments, the crowded walkways of a college campus during finals week emptied and became silent. Shortly thereafter, I found myself in a computer lab with over 70 of my students behind a locked door. We worked together stacking desks and computers against the entrance, wrapping

belts around the door hinges to prevent entry,² and arming ourselves with fire extinguishers and box cutters to act as makeshift weapons (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Our computer lab locked down.³



(Rapaport, 2016)

After a few disconcerting minutes, the room settled, and students had their first collective moments of silence to reflect upon the gravity of the situation. Sentiments included statements such as, “How could this be happening to our ‘safe’ and beloved UCLA campus?”, and “Well, it

² The university was later publically criticized as many doors on campus, including my own classroom, did not have locks. Moreover, some of these doors were also designed to open outward toward hallways preventing them from being properly obstructed from the inside.

³ One of my students sent this photo to news agencies which then went viral on several mass media and social media platforms.

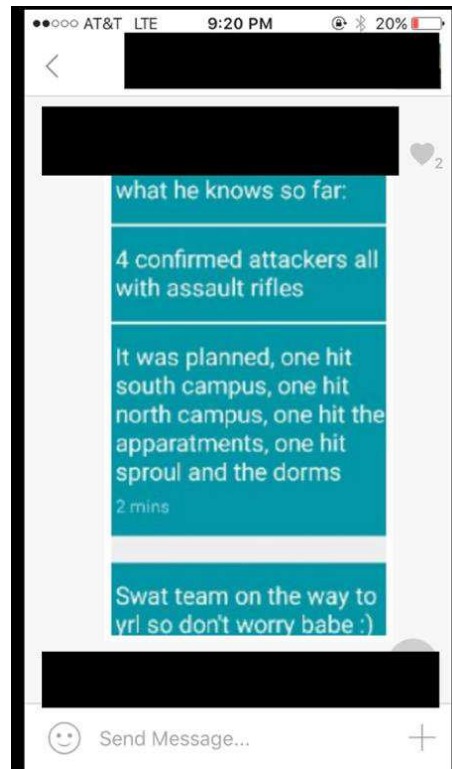
was just a matter of time before something like this happened here.” Reactions ranged from fear and anxiety to complete dismissal among the students in my classroom. Faculty and staff on campus reacted, according to later accounts, with a similar mix of emotions.

To make sense of the moment, students throughout campus began proactively collecting and sorting through every piece of information that they could access. In my classroom, some students tuned into television stations such as CBS Los Angeles and CNN to watch live aerial views of campus (where they could also see their own building on live TV) being filmed overhead from news helicopters (e.g., utilizing mass media). Most also conversed with people locally around campus as well as with others around the world via social media apps such as Instagram and Snapchat (e.g., using social media). And everyone in quiet whispers, talked face-to-face with one another as they sat together in the dark on the cold hard floor. They tentatively and nervously talked to their classmates nearby and shared what they had gathered from mass media, social media, and from various phone calls and texts with their loved ones who were located in various global locales (e.g., engaging in face-to-face intercultural communication).

In other words, as a result of being locked down in a computer lab on campus, they socially and critically worked hard using various mediums of communication to figure out what was going on. With so many moving pieces of information being scattered about, misinformation about the shooting spread rapidly, and false presumptions led one student to write to her close friend that there were “4 confirmed attackers all with assault rifles, it was planned, one hit south campus, one hit north campus, one hit the appartments [sic], one hit sproul and the dorms, swat team on the way to yrl so don’t worry babe:)” (J. Doe,⁴ personal communication, June 1st, 2016) (see Figure 2).

⁴ Pseudonym used to protect student identity.

Figure 2. Instagram screenshot.



(J. Doe, personal communication, June 1st, 2016)

For the students in the room with me, and for all of those directly and indirectly affected by the events of that morning, prior perceptions of campus safety at UCLA now collided with an actual and unprecedented act of deadly gun violence on the Westwood campus (see Figures 3 & 4). Questions about whether this was a random and isolated event, or part of a broader, more serious, and greater systemic problem of American gun violence were now being asked in Westwood, and around the world.

Figure 3. Students searched by emergency responder.



(UCLA Shooting, June 2, 2016)

Figure 4. Emergency responders gathered in front of Engineering IV.



(Chiu, 2016)

International applicants to UCLA, for example, who had heard about this event overseas, and who were getting ready to move to campus in just a few short months, now had to make a judgement call about whether it was still safe to follow through with their study abroad experience. Students who were already enrolled had to consider whether they should take extra security measures in the future when making a trip to campus. Family and concerned community members around the world began looking for answers about whether UCLA was still safe and what it meant for it to be added to the growing list of educational institutions in America where an act of deadly gun violence had occurred.

As I will discuss later, UCLA's reputation as the number-one ranked public research university in the United States helps make it the most applied to university in the world (U.S. News & World Report, 2018). For the international students who were locked down on campus that morning, or even happened to be off-campus, they had the added challenge of interpreting these events while being in a foreign country far away from the comforts of home. They were witnessing the direct aftermath of an unfortunate series of events unfold right in front of their eyes with less contextual and cultural knowledge than that of their domestic peers.⁵ Perceptions of campus safety and gun violence in America that they had heard about and constructed globally, now collided with a confusing new reality locally. The complexity of understanding these events for international applicants who would eventually apply to UCLA during the 2016-17 academic year becomes even more complicated as they did not have the advantage of any first-hand experience on campus to inform their perceptions of safety at UCLA.

⁵ For example, several days after the shooting occurred on campus a candlelight vigil was held in memory of the murdered professor resulting from an act of gun violence. Such occurrences are less likely in places such as India and China where gun laws are much stricter than those in the United States.

At 12:17 p.m., the campus received the final Bruin Alert (2016) which read, “All Clear.” As the immediate danger on campus dissolved, a global ripple effect of perceived understandings of the day’s events was just beginning to take shape.

Purpose Statement

American colleges and universities rigorously recruit international students from around the world to study on their campuses. Financial benefits, internationalization efforts, and establishing global influence with worldwide alumni networks are among the many rewards that IHEs in the United States reap from recruiting and admitting international students. Elaborate branding, marketing, and research strategies by these organizations play an important role in getting students to pay the mental, emotional, physical, and financial costs associated with obtaining a degree or certificate program in another part of the world.

But as the University of California (UC) made it a goal to reduce the amount of non-California residents in its schools in 2016, out-of-state domestic and international students found their chances of getting into a top UC research institution like UCLA diminish (U.C. Office of the President, 2016). However, as international students understand the promise of social, cultural, and economic mobility associated with getting a degree from an elite school within the UC system, they will continue to apply to the top universities in a highly-competitive market (e.g., simply “supply and demand”). This gives universities more leverage to increase financial costs for these populations while addressing specific international student needs at a more leisurely pace.

For the international students who overcome the difficult odds of making it past teen or even single-digit admission rates at the most competitive IHE, many of them feel incredibly

lucky to just be there in the first place. Subsequently, they may feel overwhelmed and intimidated, or they may just not know how to ask a high-ranking institution like UCLA to provide them with more international student-focused support, or fairer and more balanced out-of-state tuition rates and related international student fees. From the first day of admissions to a prestigious university like UCLA, the odds are stacked against these international students.

The setting for exploitation of international students, or at least, lackadaisical responses by American IHE to meet the unique needs of international students, is ripe and ready for change. But by the time most international students realize what a university can do to better serve their interests, they may already be on their way out of the university and headed toward graduation (e.g., the same cycle of imbalances continues for the next cohort of international students). Indeed, understanding one's rights in a new legal, cultural, and academic environment as well as finding the time to plan and mobilize counter-movements is a major roadblock for change among international students within American IHE.

As students make the trek abroad to the United States, they are often left underserved and misunderstood by the very universities that worked so hard to get them to join their campus communities in the first place. International students may in turn feel that they have been treated as degree consumers instead of individuals with unique needs, concerns, and backgrounds (e.g., the generic label of "international student" is often holistically assigned to them by institutions and a lack of adequate applied university research on this population is often minimal or non-existent). And more times than not, student support services aimed specifically at helping international students are insufficient. What can research studies in this area reveal about the deep inner lives and day-to-day thoughts and challenges that international students face within

American IHE? What can the thoughts and patterns that emerge from these narratives tell us about how to better serve these dynamic and precious international student communities?

Research goals & questions

My three research goals for this study are as follows:

- 1) Fill an important gap in existing literature about deadly gun violence on American college campuses and its specific impact on international students.
- 2) Help American universities better understand the thought processes, concerns, and needs of international student communities, and subsequently improve overseas college admissions and student support services.
- 3) Provide the often underserved or overlooked international student community a unique platform through which they can share and voice their lived experiences and hopefully improve the overall quality of their overseas educational experiences.

The main research questions that I will examine include:

- 1) How do international students construct their perceptions of campus safety at UCLA, and make sense of the specific act of deadly gun violence that occurred on June 1st, 2016?
- 2) How do their perceptions evolve as they progress through their educational experiences?
- 3) How, if at all, do these knowledge constructions of campus safety impact international students' lived experiences (i.e., outward actions & internal attitudes) while studying at UCLA?

There's no simple answer to why there is so much gun violence in the United States, but rather a variety of interacting causes, requiring multicausal explanation.

- *Guys and Guns Amok* (Kellner, 2008, p.48)

Literature Review

First, I will explore the general research trends that are emerging in HE admissions and student affairs literature to lay the ground work for this study. Secondly, I will use these two foci within HE studies to investigate the kind of research being done on international students. Next, a review of the literature will be completed on *violence* as a theme in HE literature with an emphasis placed on international students.

I will then narrow in on how instances of deadly and often symbolic gun violence on college campuses is addressed in HE literature. An examination of what is going on, possible reasons why there is a burgeoning trend of occurrences over the past couple decades, and how research understands the impact that these events are having on international students in American colleges is undertaken.

Questions that I will consider include: To what extent does academic literature talk about how international applicants and students understand acts of deadly gun violence on American college campuses? What role, if any, do admissions programs play in these perceptions? How are international applicants being treated by universities to address concerns that they might have as they transition to becoming students? Does academic literature address how perceptions of campus safety and acts of deadly gun violence on American college campuses impact the international student's educational experiences? To what extent do research studies, if at all, examine how a student's outward behaviors towards perceptions of deadly gun violence on

college campuses align or diverge from their internal outlook? And finally, what does the research say about how universities in the United States are or are not utilizing student support services to meet the concerns of international students – examining their perceptions of deadly gun violence on American college campuses?

As international students within American IHE have become a permanent fixture on college campuses, it is important now more than ever to understand their diverse array of needs. It is imperative for universities to provide all students, including international students, a space to express their true feelings, fears, and concerns. Applied and academic research is a major component of meeting intention with action. As international students make the life-changing decision to pursue their educational careers abroad, it should be a top priority, and in my opinion, a moral obligation of universities to do everything they can to not only recruit students from around the world but also use applied research studies to better understand and serve this often overlooked and misunderstood population.

This study aims to galvanize the conversation on international student needs within American IHE. An examination of the literature below will highlight areas where further research on the needs of international students should be addressed, and hopefully, call to attention areas for further investigation and improvement.

IHE & Admissions

Admissions research and international perceptions

From the perspective of the university, understanding how information about acts of deadly gun violence that happen within American IHE as well as in the greater national context are disseminated, interpreted, and ultimately understood by international consumers should be of

major concern to them. As students in vast numbers are being recruited globally by admissions offices to attend their local universities, effective branding and marketing strategies are key for helping international students justify the various costs associated with pursuing a degree in the United States. There is little doubt that the population which universities are reaching out to is truly global in nature. Interested international applicants from nearly 200 countries will have a wide array of concerns, needs, and perspectives that are as individual and unique as the person applying. The challenge is great for American IHE to garner and keep the attention of overseas applicants for years to come and understand how to best reach them while gaining a competitive edge over their domestic and international competitors.

Naturally then, one would expect to see research in HE admissions that reflects a quantitative as well as qualitative and in-depth analyses of the concerns of applicants from all over the world – including the impact of deadly gun violence occurring on college campuses and in the greater national context of the United States. It is common sense to think that both local and global perceptions of events like the act of deadly gun violence that occurred at UCLA on June 1st, 2016 would impact people in innumerable ways. For overseas applicants, additional foreign socio-cultural filters, such as access to certain mass and social medias, or limited face-to-face time with people who are from those respective locales, further complicate and exacerbate the interpretive processes behind such events. So then, what trends are emerging in current HE admissions literature that aim to deeply understand important issues of perception among international applicants? And as we will discuss later, do these trends address important issues of violence as a broader theme, or more specifically, deadly gun violence which has unfortunately remained a cause of concern for educational institutions in the United States?

Neoliberal branding strategies

Within recent HE admissions research, there is a large amount of literature on testing-related admissions procedures (i.e., the SAT/ACT) and challenges that colleges face in embracing a more holistic college admissions process. This is becoming increasingly important as American IHE work hard to remain compliant with new state/federal admissions laws in the United States. As a result, emergent themes include college entrance standardized testing and its effects on underserved and marginalized populations (Chankseliani, 2013; Koljatic & Silva, 2013; Pu, 2013; Santelices & Wilson, 2015), a call for expanded use of “non-cognitive predictors” in the admissions process for all students (e.g., more “holistic” admissions procedures) (Niessen, Meijer, & Tendeiro, 2017; Oliveri & Ezzo, 2014; Sedlacek, 2003), and issues related to affirmative action in student acceptance rates (Berggren, 2007; Stulberg & Chen, 2014; Wang & Shulruf, 2013). These topics look broadly at important issues in HE admissions research. However, they mostly consider domestic concerns within American HE admissions and often group together “international students” into a single and overgeneralized category. Subsequently, these studies overlook specifics about how international student populations within American IHE are impacted by developments in the legal system and the interpretation of laws within admissions offices.

Within higher education literature that does consider international students in the admissions process, themes once again seem to ignore the actual lived experiences of the students and miss them at a more humanistic level. In my examination, HE admissions research takes on a testing and/or branding emphasis which centers on discussions like the pros and cons

of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program⁶ (Conley, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2015; Lewis, 2012), the challenges universities have in maintaining positive reputations as credible and desirable educational spaces as they accept more and more overseas applicants (Tysome, 2003), the influences that immigrant students have on overall higher education costs and affordability (Watzman, 1990), and the surface macro-level survey studies on international student needs (Tas, 2013).

Indeed, the general data collected on international students in HE academic literature often utilizes a quantitative approach, and lacks in-depth analyses of foci such as the unique cultural perspectives of international student applicants – perspectives that students bring with them from overseas and later become manifest throughout their academic careers in the United States (and furthermore as many of them stay in the United States to work and maybe even become permanent residents, or future American citizens). So why then are universities and researchers alike placing such a large emphasis on positivistic studies and on more general trends in American HE while missing the mark on much needed humanistic research – studies that can greatly improve the admissions process for both international applicants and the universities alike?

One possible explanation comes from looking at the prevalence of neoliberal globalization in our modern era. As globalization allows for greater interconnectivity in our world through advances in technology, mobility, and communication, a concurrent economic driving force, namely that of neoliberalism, feeds off this malleable and impressionable global

⁶ “Students at International Baccalaureate® (IB) World Schools are given a unique education. They will be encouraged to think independently and drive their own learning, take part in programmes of education that can lead them to some of the highest ranking universities around the world” (International Baccalaureate, 2018).

environment. Sleeter (2014) describes the concept of neoliberalism within the zeitgeist globalization in the following way:

A restoration of elite power' in which increased privatization and market competition is eroding a sense of the public, linking education more firmly to the needs of large corporations, and facilitating the flow of wealth and power to a small global elite. (p. 85)

In fact, the theories of neoliberalism and globalization can be thought of as existing together within a sort of symbiotic relationship. Clayton (2004) describes how “neoliberalism is a new ideological agenda associated with the new currents of contemporary globalization” (p. 293). In other words, as the world grows closer together, the powerful elite can capitalize on greater connectedness and create more possibilities for promoting their services to larger audience. I argue that American universities are either directly influenced by these powers or are guilty of being incarnations of neoliberal globalization elitism themselves.

And as people around the world feed off the expanding commodification of services, it brings consumers into closer contact with one another as they become buyers of the same products and services. In some fields, this has become known as the “McDonaldization” of the global market, or in the field of education, as the *banking model of education*. The latter idea, according to Freire (1970), can be understood in the following way:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. The capability of banking education to

minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation. (Kindle Locations 1017-1022)

Profit and power for the elite is fueled by passive and subconscious conformity by its constituents. Their "oppressors'" priority is financial success, and as Freire puts it, "humanitarianism" insofar as it leads to continued growth and compliance by those that are put in line. In other words, is recent HE literature on international students, or the lack thereof, a sign of such ideological trends? Academic research which aims to support the voices of the underrepresented, in the case of this study, international students, may only become a priority if it is demanded by those it most impacts most. However, as we mentioned earlier, the cards are stacked against international students who are in a revolving-door HE system – a system that is designed to allure and draw in costumers, and one which is not incentivized to document and understand the individual stories of their often-awestruck consumers.

According to some economists, neoliberalism can lead to greater world-wide gaps in wealth distribution by rewarding those who embrace its possibilities and subsequently improving the consumer's chances of social capital while marginalizing those who do not comply (either because of choice or lack of resources). Piketty & Goldhammer (2014) elucidate economic reasons behind the growing divide between the rich and the poor and which can be understood via a simple formula:

The inequality $r > g$ (rate > gain) implies that wealth accumulated in the past grows more rapidly than output and wages. This inequality expresses a fundamental logical contradiction. The entrepreneur inevitably tends to become a rentier, more and more

dominant over those who own nothing but their labor. Once constituted, capital reproduces itself faster than output increases. The past devours the future. (Kindle Locations 10000-10003)

According to Piketty's argument, the rich abound in wealth because their rate of return in investments is larger than their output. Little by little, certain individuals expand upon their wealth and have more power when it comes to decision-making situations (which henceforth takes away the wealth of much of the world's population). In the case of American IHE, university endowments, administrators' salaries and benefits, and associated school brand names are gaining strength and momentum as prices for students to attend these institutions, and the loans that many of them take out to pay for their educations, become costlier by the day. The elite within those well-established systems continue to thrive as those who struggle to pay rent and place large financial burdens on their families struggle to overcome their day-to-day challenges.

In fact, according to McGreevy (2017), the UC Board of Regents got into hot water when they were recently caught in a scandalous fiscal affair:

The administration of the University of California system pays top workers' salaries and benefits significantly higher than that of similar state employees and failed to disclose to the Board of Regents and the public that it had \$175 million in budget reserve funds while it was seeking to raise tuition, a state audit found Tuesday. (para. 1)

As we see here and will discuss in more detail in the next section, American colleges and universities are indeed far from being immune to the influences of neoliberal globalization within their respective institutions. They may proclaim that they have the best interests of the students in mind, but often times, reality paints a very different picture.

International students as degree consumers

International branding strategies by universities have increasingly become an important topic of discussion in HE admissions research (Gai, Xu, & Pelton, 2016; Rooksby & Collins, 2016). This is not surprising since the revenue which universities receive from international student enrollment is a major source of income, and in some instances, a matter of survival for some institutions (Baty, 2000). It is fascinating to look at the ways in which universities market themselves to consumers all over the world to maintain foreign income sources.

During my own investigation of UCLA from the East Coast of the United States when I was applying to the school, I came across various statistics online showing the university's ranking as a world-class public university in the research, innovation, and technology fields. School-sponsored websites, in particular, instilled in me a sense of awe when thinking about the university, and continually reminded me that becoming a Bruin meant joining a world-class legacy of proud alumni located around the globe. In other words, if I worked hard, got a bit lucky, and ultimately got accepted, then this institution could provide me with the cultural, social, and economic capital to enter the ranks of those who came before me. UCLA's main website puts it best:

For nearly 100 years, UCLA has been a pioneer, persevering through impossibility, turning the futile into the attainable . . . this can-do perspective has brought us 13 Nobel Prizes, 12 MacArthur Fellows, more NCAA titles than any university and more Olympic medals than most nations. Our faculty and alumni helped create the Internet and pioneered reverse osmosis. And more than 140 companies have been created based on technology developed at UCLA . . . this is UCLA. These are the grounds of optimism. ("About | UCLA," n.d.)

University slogans, school songs, unique color-schemes and designs, school seals, mascots, etc. only further build the branding persona and mystic that make attending such a university nearly irresistible. Becoming a Bruin means becoming a part of this exclusive community for life!

For American admissions offices, succeeding in the challenge of maintaining and enhancing their university product brand appeals to overseas applicants can help them achieve other goals as well. For example, American universities striving for greater internationalization on their campuses requires their having more international students and connecting them closely with their domestic peers (ACE, 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). But while universities try to achieve such aims, do international students feel that they are receiving the same kind of care and attention during the overseas application process that their peers do when applying domestically? At any point, do they feel as if they are treated like products or mere certificate or degree consumers? Or do applicants feel that universities are meeting their unique and individual needs as best they can, and efforts such as internationalization, are aimed at them just as much as their domestic peers? According to related literature, a large research gap on overseas applicants within the admissions process are indeed under-examined when it comes to humanistic research. Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, research efforts are abundant that aim to increase short and long-term university profits (e.g., neoliberal emphases and profit-driven models abound).

However, I believe that greater communication between applicants and admissions offices can pave the way for more humanistic research to be conducted and allow for a more successful transition of international applicants to American IHE. Properly guided applied and academic research can allow host universities to more precisely understand the individual needs and concerns of its international populations before they arrive at their respective institutions and better support their educational experiences more holistically. In turn, international applicants are

set up for transitional success within institutions that work hard at understanding these populations before they even step foot on campus for orientation. For universities that can succeed in such changes, I believe this will have great long-term impacts on the reputations and brand names of universities who carry the mantra that success is and should always be defined by placing the needs and success of students beyond mere profit margins.

An appearance of humanism and security can thrive in good times, but when reality hits, such as in a traumatic event like the deadly shooting that occurred on UCLA's campus in 2016, the mirage of international applicant or student support will quickly dissipate and leave underserved students feeling disillusioned and marginalized. Doors did not lock, alert systems left international students not knowing what to tell their loved ones overseas, and the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) office became inundated with requests for support that they struggled to meet, for example. With the latter point, many international students do not have an equivalent CAPS system in their countries and so are unaware of what such services offer. Moreover, many international students do not understand that it is confidential and so want to avoid using these service for fear of someone from home finding out that studying abroad in America is causing them to go "crazy."

A university that is sincere in its intentions and efforts in the good times, can survive in solidarity as a true and united campus community in the hard times. As we explore HE student affairs research, do we find similar neoliberal patterns? What themes in current research on international students and student support services emerge in the literature, and what does it tell us about the current priorities of American universities? We will examine these questions in the next section.

HE & Student Affairs

Student Affairs research and international student support services

The challenge of understanding how international applicants perceive campus safety and acts of violence only intensifies after they become international students on campus. For university students, various forms of violence affecting college campus communities can impact their psychological, emotional, and physical health as well as their overall lived experiences in higher education (Flannery & Quinn-Leering, 2000; Guerette & Caron, 2007). As we mentioned before, international students have additional challenges, needs, and concerns that their domestic peers do not have.

To elaborate on the previous example about CAPS, in a recent discussion with one of my students from South Korea, she mentioned to me that these types of services are not often as well established, and in many cases, just nonexistent within her country's HE system. Consequently, she said that her peers from South Korea would rarely, if ever, use these services or know what they are while studying abroad in the United States. Additionally, she mentioned that there exists a stigma associated with mental health services in her country and a fear of being labeled "troubled" by family members. The problem would be further exacerbated if their mother or father found out they were using such services while living abroad in a new foreign environment⁷ (D. Robbins, personal communication, February 6th, 2017). Therefore, international students from South Korea at UCLA might either be unaware that these services exist on their American college campuses in the first place, or just generally less willing to use

⁷ It is important to note that CAPS is completely confidential for all students and often provided free of charge by universities. In my investigation, many international students still either do not know about these services or do not consider them a viable option despite their proven effectiveness.

them here for fear of stigmatization back at home (e.g., American HE systems are not informing and educating international students about their well-established CAPS services and confidentiality laws that protect students' anonymity while using them).

Among other concerns, there have also been recent reports at UCLA that international students and scholars are being targeted by scammers. In a campus-wide email, the Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars (DCISS) (2017) gave the following warning:

Dear Students and Scholars: The Dashew Center would like to alert you of continued cases of fraud targeting U.S. non-residents and their family members. Reported cases involve individuals posing as immigration and tax officials requesting personal and bank information from non-residents in the U.S. (DCISS, campus-wide email, "[edstudents] Reports of Fraud and Theft Attempts to International Students." February 16th, 2017)

Student Affairs offices are at the forefront of the challenges to provide much needed individualistic support to all students, and in some cases, more specifically for international students. As America crossed the 1,000,000-person milestone of international students in the United States for the first time during the 2015-16 academic year (UF College of Design, Construction & Planning, 2017), it is important now more than ever to conduct more in-depth qualitative research on this often-underserved population to better address their needs while navigating the American HE system.

The following questions emerge when examining this area of inquiry: What general themes in HE literature related to student affairs research are emergent, and what does it tell us about how universities are trying to address concerns and better understand their international student populations? And to what extent and in what ways are international student-support

services on American college campuses, who are often under the auspices of Student Affairs departments, looking for new ways to better improve the international student experience?

Neoliberal patterns continue

Perez-Encinas & Ammigan (2016) emphasize that “while international student enrollment is a key strategy and often the measure for comprehensive internationalization at many institutions, it is important that the support services offered match the needs of this population” (p. 985). UCLA’s Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars for example offers support in the form of student visa compliance assistance, fun and engaging social activities, educational programming, and language classes (Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars, 2018). Many universities in the United States have their own version of this international student center while trying to meet the needs of its international student populations.

Perez-Encinas & Ammigan (2016) go on to describe how the top-five related assessment companies of student support services, namely The International Student Barometer (ISB), Ruffalo Noel Levitz, Studyporals, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and the QS Student Satisfaction gather in-depth mixed methods data on international students studying in the United States, and dedicate themselves to using these analyses to support the efforts of students and universities alike (pp. 988-989). Upon investigation of the research produced by these companies, I found that they often use methods which include quantitative large participant surveys about perceptions of international student services on campus while under-emphasizing more open-ended and in-depth qualitative interviewing techniques.

The former method of data collection can be very useful to universities trying to market to international students and gain a broad understanding of their current needs, concerns, and opinions about services while they are a part of the campus communities. However, for international applicants as well as current students, the rich in-depth data resulting from qualitative studies should not be overlooked. Qualitative studies and humanism-based research approaches can provide data that is often overlooked by over-presumptive quantitative approaches. Researchers have a lot to lose by ignoring or underemphasizing the individual stories and day-to-day accounts of a key population in American HE who can easily get lost in the fray of a massive American HE system.

Emergent positivistic-based themes in HE student affairs research include looking broadly at the readiness and ability of colleges to receive and support international students (Andrade & Evans, 2009; Cho & Yu, 2015; Choudaha, 2016), expectations of student support services and the actual use of them by international students (Hwang, Bennett, & Beauchemin, 2014; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012; Wongpaiboon, 2008), and sources of funding for student support services (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2013). As important as many of these studies are for universities and students, they once again rely on research designs that are too rigid in structure and overlook grassroots experiences and expectations of students. By giving students' a greater voice and active participation in their education experience with more humanistic research, the IHE can get closer to their goal of serving all populations within their campus communities. Within the current structure of these studies, a student may demonstrate a fear of an act of violence occurring on their respective American college campus, but the research does not allow us to truly understand *why*.

How then are such disparities in research directly affecting American HE communities like UCLA? What are international students doing themselves to combat feelings of being overlooked, underrepresented, or misunderstood?

International students not getting the support they need

In a recent response to international students at UCLA feeling under-supported and unnecessarily being grouped together as *international students* (many students feel that this is only one part of their greater identities), the Dashew Center and the undergraduate student government Committee of International Relations “held the first-ever Dashew Community meeting Friday to discuss how to better identify and address issues foreign students face” (Bharanidaran, 2017, para. 2). The meeting came about from a push by international students who feel that the university is often unaware and far-removed from their most important needs and concerns. Consequently, they are now deciding to take matters into their own hands – including conducting their own survey studies on international student needs as well as engaging their peers at the face-to-face level.

The same article later describes why Jack Guo, a former international student from Hong Kong and prior director of the Committee of International Relations, pushed for the creation of this group:

International students have problems that are very different from the problems other students face . . . we see that American students have very few international friends, and even international students tend to group together . . . the committee can research issues like this and help enhance the global education experience . . . while there is a lot of discussion of undocumented student issues, or LGBT issues or black student issues, we

see there is a complete absence of discussion of international students . . . I think that is very unfortunate. (Bharanidaran, 2017, para. 4, 7, 21)

Indeed, it appears that a lack of qualitative data on international students at UCLA is preventing student affairs offices and university administrators from knowing how to offer more acute support to international students. As a result, amidst their heavy course loads and busy lives at UCLA, international students are attempting to bridge this gap themselves.

Ironically, Rhoads and Szelényi (2011) explains how all of this is happening in the context of the city of Los Angeles which is “one of the most globalized urban centers of the world” (p. 119). They later mention how “being foreign-born in Los Angeles, presents a form of identity that paradoxically is both common and unusual, and fraught with personal and professional opportunities and challenges” (p. 119). They also highlight the additional day-to-day challenges that international students at UCLA face as they go about their lives in a foreign environment. Even though they share commonalities with their domestic classmates, they describe how they bring with them unique experiences that shape how they interpret local happenings at UCLA. And of course, I think it is imperative that we put these prior overseas experiences into context with the additional and current practical, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual challenges international students face that their adopted foreign HE institutions may not be aware of or understand.

Rhoads and Szelényi (2011) subsequently introduce the concept of the *pluriversity* to make sense of the increasingly complex educational environment that international students attempt to navigate as they bear their unique needs and concerns. They explain it in the following way:

Contemporary universities are situated as breeding grounds for a variety of goals and influences that create vastly different—and in many ways, contradictory—environments across campuses. In fact, it would be more than feasible at UCLA, on the very same day, to attend a class session decrying the commercialization of public universities and to participate in a workshop providing expert advice to young academic entrepreneurs wanting to bring their scientific discoveries to the marketplace. (p. 19)

In this context of the pluriversity, international students at UCLA, many for the first time, are introduced to conflicting ways of seeing the world amidst dominant hegemonies such as neoliberalism (e.g., “a workshop providing expert advice to young academic entrepreneurs wanting to bring their scientific discoveries to the marketplace”) with efforts by universities to recognize and fight for their individual rights (e.g., classes that are “decrying the commercialization of public universities”). Further stress ensues as international students are sorting through conflicting ideologies as they work hard to survive a foreign HE environment in an extremely competitive academic school like UCLA. The harsh reality for many international students at UCLA is that they are now among others who were also top-achievers in their prior respective educational institutions. Additional stresses of language and cultural barriers, living in a new foreign environment, and so on, further exacerbate various stresses which they are enduring.

The cumulative stresses that international students face combined with a lack of individualistic understanding through peer-reviewed research studies should call American HE universities like UCLA to take more preemptive action in supporting these students.

Unfortunately, when events happen like the shooting that occurred on UCLA’s campus on June 1st, 2016, the current lack of understanding that institutions have about their own international

students is only intensified. The gaps of understanding are only widened, and international students feel more isolated than ever before. With such a large need for in-depth research studies on international student needs why are academia and university administrators not doing more to support these students?

In the next section, we will investigate one major component of added stress that international students face in their new academic environments in the United States – namely, fears associated with violence, and more specifically, the effects that deadly gun violence in America can have on international students within college campus communities.

HE & Violence

Local campus violence, global interpretations

No one is immune to violence. It can strike anywhere, anytime, at anyone. Occurrences of violence that make local, national, and international headlines undergo a complex distributive and interpretive process as they reach people's eyes, ears, and minds globally. Advances in technology aided by the effects of globalization expedite transnational socio-cultural exchanges of information, highlight international media gatekeeping processes, and can make instances of violence that occur hundreds, or even thousands of miles away, feel like they happened nearby in your local neighborhood.

As international students flock to the United States for higher education, perceptions of violence within American college communities that may have otherwise seemed distant and remote without advances in modern technologies (making the proliferation and commodification) are now a topic of discussion for prospective international students. The process becomes even more complicated and continues as the perceptions they made while

outside of Los Angeles soon confront new lived realities as international students in America. The perception-building process in regard to safety that they previously constructed, continues with new insider and first-hand perspectives (although they often chose not to share information with their loved ones at home because they “worry too much about them already”). Any event of concern that happens at UCLA will quickly become world news within minutes with the ease of information sharing and international mobility in our modern world.

UCLA’s Undergraduate Admissions 2014-15 profile boasts that among its 8,931 freshmen and transfers, 45 states and 85 countries are represented. It later claims that the university is “one of the world's most ethnically and culturally diverse communities, students come to UCLA from all 50 states and more than 100 foreign countries . . . 11.9% of whom are international students” (The University of California, Los Angeles’ Undergraduate Admission, 2016). Bauman and Robertson (1995) explain glocalization, or the interactive global process taking place in American universities as places where “there is always an underlining connection between local and global processes . . . the local is constitutive of the global (and vice versa), and the degree to which the relationship between localities and the global is dialectical rather than unidirectional” (as cited in Sklad, Friedman, Park, & Oomen, 2016, p. 327). Indeed, the world seems to be becoming smaller by the day and more interconnected than ever.

My students displayed this process during the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA as they quickly turned to their screens to access a variety of information sources around the world and triangulate information to figure out what was going on. They spoke with classmates nearby both digitally with their Smart Phones and face-to-face as they sat on the floor together. They also shared what they saw and heard locally on campus via digital waves with the rest of the world. The world responded, shared what they were hearing, and worked together to construct a

uniform but fluid picture of what was happening on campus. Information spread person-to-person, screen-to-screen, community-to-community, culture-to-culture, coast-to-coast, and country-to-country. Dialectics were fast in motion.

Violence as a theme in HE research

Information about acts of violence that occur on or near college campuses in America have become more transparent since the Clery Law was passed nation-wide in 1990. The law was named in memory of Jeanne Clery who was “raped and murdered in her residence hall room by a fellow student she did not know on April 5, 1986. Her parents championed laws requiring the disclosure of campus crime information” (“Jeanne Clery Act Information,” n.d.). Consequently, it is now illegal for any American colleges or universities that receive federal financial aid to fail to publically report acts of violence.

As reports of incidences of college violence have become more lucid in the United States, HE researchers in America acquired unfettered access to information that otherwise may have been kept secret by universities to protect their brand names and reputations. Within this context, several major overlapping and converging themes of violence emerged in early 21st century academic research that are pertinent to the efforts of admissions and student affairs offices to understand and support student needs.

Studies on campus sexual violence, including preventative measures within college communities (Galarneau, & O'Neill, 2015; Young, 2015), its effect on academic performance (Mengo, & Black, 2016), and its causal factors (Sutton, & Simons, 2015) recently emerged in greater numbers. However, singularly categorizing violence on college campuses is difficult since acts often happen in tandem with other kinds of violence and can manifest in many

different forms. I think it is best to think of acts of violence on college campuses as being concentric events that overlap in unique combinations with each occurrence. For example, sexual violence can intersect with studies related to Title IX statutes on college campuses (Conley, & Griffith, 2016; Mangan, 2016), domestic or college “dating” relationship violence (Davidson, Lozano, Cole & Gervais, 2015; Paat, & Markham, 2016; Stappenbeck, Davis, Cherf, Gulati, & Kajumulo, 2016), and alcohol-induced violence (Florkowski & Anderson, 2014). However, these are only a few ways that acts of violence within college communities might overlap. As explained in the next section, it is also important to note that various forms of violence that occur within campus communities often begin or end up quickly including communities that exist far beyond the borders of colleges and universities.

From a public health perspective, which is another area in HE research that often investigates violence and can support admissions and student support services research, other combined themes emerge. Some include examining college violence more broadly at the community level (Klaw, Demers, & Da Silva, 2016; Miller-Graff, Howell, Martinez-Torteya, & Hunter, 2015), connections between public health and racially-induced violence on campuses (Merrill, & Carter, 2016), and socioeconomic factors that might act as predictors of college violence (Ravalin, & Tevis, 2017). And naturally, studies have emerged in public health that look for key strategies and best practices to prevent college violence from occurring in the first place (Bennett, 2015).

In my investigation, there seems to be a three-fold pattern within violence research in HE. First, as we mentioned, various acts of violence often overlap. Secondly, studies often have a strong quantitative emphasis using surveys and questionnaires as data gathering tools. Even in mixed methods approaches, a humanistic level of inquiry is often sidelined for larger positivistic

studies. As I will discuss later in this paper, this is a major problem for highlighting and understanding the deepest levels of impact that acts of violence can have on college communities in the United States. And finally, the impact that specific acts of deadly gun violence have on students in HE is under-investigated at both the qualitative and quantitative levels. I found this to be quite shocking considering the prevalence of coverage in the news media of gun-related violence within American schools over the past couple decades.

But before we do a brief overview of literature in HE which in fact does consider the impact that acts of deadly gun violence in American colleges and universities can have on its communities, it is important to first look at a few pieces of background information that will help to contextualize our analysis on this research topic. This will include examining existing gun laws, briefly looking at the worst cases of actual acts of deadly gun violence within American college communities, and finally, considering how these factors shape research efforts, and ultimately, our approaches toward understanding international student perceptions of safety and violence on college campuses.

Gun laws & American schools

It is fitting to start this section by briefly discussing the Second Amendment, or right to bear arms law, in the United States. For people considering or currently studying in the United States as international students, the sheer presence of gun ownership in the United States can be perplexing and alarming. During my time teaching in Japan, it was common for my students to

ask me “how many guns I owned back in America?” As amusing as this question was to me, it was not surprising considering America’s global reputation for its love of guns.⁸

As we saw with the introduction of the Clery Act, government law plays an important role in protecting its people from violence. However, laws at the federal, state, and local levels (including the institutional level) are highly debatable since they are in perpetual state of interpretation and often vie for supremacy as they come into conflict with one another. There are few examples clearer about these challenges than what we see with interpretations of the Second Amendment in the United States. According to the U.S. Constitution, “a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (“Second Amendment | Law Library of Congress,” 2012). Within our modern context over two centuries later, Cornell Law (2017) explains how this law can be understood:

The Second Amendment has most recently been interpreted to grant the right of gun ownership to individuals for purposes that include self-defense. At first it was thought to apply only to the Federal government, but through the mechanism of the Fourteenth Amendment, it has been applied to the states as well.

(“Second Amendment | Constitution | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute,” n.d.)

It is not surprising then that gun ownership is a hot topic in the United States. Each U.S. citizen regardless of state residence is entitled to gun ownership under our constitution (with varying levels of background checks and restrictions according to the stipulations of each state). And as recent events which I will later discuss have shown, international students themselves are also

⁸ This is a sentiment that I heard from the nearly 50 countries that I have visited or lived in over the past couple decades.

entitled to buy and own a gun in the United States if they first pass a Hunter Safety course in their respective state. Gun violence aimed at innocent people no longer includes only crimes committed by American citizens or permanent residents but now also includes acts committed by international students themselves.

However, how this plays out in each state is a different story. California, the state at the center of our study, is commonly known for having some of the strictest enforcements and application of federal gun laws in the United States. LA Times writer McGreevy (2013) writes that “California has the toughest gun control laws in the nation, receiving an A- grade in a state-by-state analysis by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence” (para. 1). In fact, in the case of UCLA, and all schools and universities in the state of California, California Penal Code 626.9(h) Gun Free School Zone states that “any person who brings a loaded firearm upon the grounds of a University of California campus without written permission is subject to arrest and prosecution for a felony crime” (“UCLA Police,” n.d.). This stands in stark contrast to states such as Texas which grants college students the legal right to bring registered side arms into class (Fernandez, & Montgomery, 2015). Later on, in the discussion section, I will talk about how recent events of deadly gun violence in American during the 2017-18 academic year have further exacerbated these debates. Sadly however, it seems inevitable that more school shootings will occur between the time I write this sentence and submit my dissertation. The heated debate about gun ownership and use will probably only escalate further.

Campus safety is an important concern for international applicants & students

Campus safety in America is a very important concern for applicants and students both from domestic and international locales. For international students, they have the added challenge of making judgement calls about safety from their “home” countries and further refining local perceptions while studying abroad in the United States. For those international students who decide to come to America, negative perceptions of studying on a dangerous campus can negatively impact their academic success in the classroom (Baker, & Boland, 2011, p. 683). Not surprisingly then, a survey conducted on international students studying in an Australian university, one of the main locations in the world that receives international students, gives the following explanation for what student support services they considered most useful and those that are in need of greatest improvement:

It is unsurprising that respondents had a high level of awareness about the library, and that it was rated as being important, given the role that books and publications play in academic development . . . in contrast, the campus “Security Service,” which had a high level of awareness, and was considered important . . . was not rated highly in terms of usefulness, and 10 percent of respondents, in a later question, further identified the security service as an area where improvements were needed. (Roberts, Boldy, & Dunworth, 2015, p. 130)

The authors go on to suggest that “campus security,” which was ranked by students as the second most important service (13% compared to 16% for the “library”), may be the case since “respondents were concerned about security and safety on campus” and considered it vital to their overall educational experience (Boldy et al., pp. 130-131). As we will discuss in more detail

late on, the connection between “campus safety” for students on American college campuses is inextricably linked to various themes of violence within HE literature.

The cost & prestige of American Institutes of Higher Education (IHE)

Despite student concerns of safety on college campuses, American IHE still maintain a global reputation for having some of the best colleges and universities. Per the U.S. News & World Report (2017) Best Global Universities Rankings, which are “based on 12 indicators that measure their academic research performance and their global and regional reputations,” eight out of the top ten universities on this list are in the United States. In fact, many studies suggest that individuals from abroad who obtain an elite degree from an overseas institution in their respective field often have opportunities for employment that their peers educated domestically might not (Furukawa, Shirakawa, & Okuwada, 2013; Rizvi, 2011; Shields, 2013). The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is ranked 10th on this prestigious list. It is not surprising then that it became “the first in the country to report a six-figure total for freshman applications” with over 100,000 people applying from around the world (Anderson, 2016).

Due to their high global status, demand has increased to enter some of American’s top-performing higher education institutions. And as one would expect, so have the financial costs – often with international students paying the highest amounts (George-Jackson, & Jones Gast, 2014; Washington, 2016). In the case of The University of California, UC Regents approved an increase for “UC undergraduates at all campuses to pay the same \$12,294 in systemwide tuition and fees. Nonresident undergraduates pay an additional \$26,682 in nonresident supplemental tuition” (“Tuition & cost of attendance | UC Admissions,” n.d.). In addition to international students paying exponentially higher tuition rates than their California-resident classmates to

attend a top-rated school like UCLA, Makinen (2016) mentions that the high cost of living in Los Angeles makes the city the 8th most expensive city in the world to live in.

As nonresident undergraduate students, international students at UCLA pay the out of state fee each year and do not have the option of commuting from their local family homes. Moreover, many international students who want to enter a top institution like UCLA often pay for costly language courses in their home countries as well as in the United States and enter American certificate degree programs and/or community colleges to improve their odds of getting into their choice college. Many international students also do intensive summer abroad programs, pay exorbitant fees to study abroad agencies in their home countries to make the transition overseas easier for them, pay for international moving costs, and hire tutors to help them edit their college essays and study for required entrance exams. But despite these added challenges, the social mobility and distinction afforded to international students who can get admission into one of America's top colleges or universities still seem worth it despite the financial, emotional, physical, and mental costs.

HE & Deadly Gun Violence

Deadly gun violence & American schools: What's going on?

In describing the burgeoning potential of deadly gun violence within educational settings in the United States, Lewis et al. (2016) offers the following analysis:

America's focus on gun violence began in 1999 with Columbine's high school shooting; with 15 killed and 21 injured, this attack is still termed the deadliest high school shooting in America's history. The deadliest attack by a lone gunman in United States history occurred at Virginia Tech in 2007, which left 33 dead and another 25 injured. In 2012,

Oakland, California was riddled with tragedy...where seven were killed and 3 were injured in a pseudo-firing squad manner. In the same year, Newton, Connecticut had 28 elementary school children and staff [that] were murdered by a 20-year old. In Santa Monica, California in 2013, another six were killed and four others were wounded. A year later, UC had a shooting that left six dead and seven others affected. The most recent campus shooting was in Umpqua Community College, Oregon in 2015, which ended with ten deaths and nine injured. There have been at least 136 school shootings since the Sandy Hook tragedy in December 2012, an average of about one shooting a week, which is indicative of the fact that 77 % of violent deaths in schools from 1992 to 2001 resulted from gun violence. (pp. 482-483)

Recent occurrences of deadly gun violence in American schools is truly alarming. In fact, it is almost too difficult to keep up with and follow at times with new headlines coming out one after another. It is not a matter of if another school shooting will occur in the United States, but when.

In the opening anecdote of this paper, I describe an act of deadly gun violence that was unprecedented at UCLA. However, just within 15 miles of UCLA other acts of deadly gun violence have occurred at other universities in the past several years including the infamous Santa Monica Community College incident, which “claimed five lives, plus the gunman, in addition to several injuries and damage to property . . . that ended with him being gunned down by officers during a shootout inside the campus library” (News, 2013, para. 4 & 7), and an incident at The University of Southern California (USC) where a professor “received ‘multiple gunshot wounds to the upper body’ in an attack that appeared to ‘have started in the office area that adjoins the lab’”(Clif, Monk, & Cahill, 2015, para. 9-10). And in 2018, a copycat massacre was prevented at a local school in the Los Angeles area in the aftermath of the Valentine’s Day

shooting in Florida where “Investigators detained the student and issued a search warrant of his home, Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell said. Authorities seized two AR-15 rifles and two handguns, along with about 90 rifle magazines each capable of holding 30 rounds” (Horton, 2018, para. 5).

For international students coming to Los Angeles, this may be a major concern as SMC and USC have international student populations of 12.1% (“Pages - Student Background and Demographic Data,” n.d.) and 24.1% on their campuses (Esser, Smith, & Bernal-Merino, 2016), respectively. According to a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) study of “active shooter” incidents from 2000-2013, results “indicate that, of the 11 defined location categories, the majority of incidents—45.6% of the 160—occurred in an environment related to commerce. The second most common incident locations were in educational environments (24.4%), and the study results established that some of these incidents involved some of the highest casualty numbers” (Blair, & Schweit, 2014, p. 20). Not surprisingly then, both public and private educational institutions in the United States are scrambling to implement and improve upon their active shooter protocols on a continuous basis. This reality only reinforces the need for not just preventing these acts from occurring in the first place, and responding appropriately, but also responsibly handling the “recovery practices involving active shooter incidents” (Blair, & Schweit, 2014, p. 21).

Deadly gun violence & American colleges: Research in HE

Fennell (2009) mentions that “while all crimes on college campuses can “strike fear” into the lives of those in higher education, a shooting is one of the crimes that ranks at the top of the most feared acts of violence” (p. 99). It is not surprising then that researchers in HE have

conducted student opinion survey studies on concealed weapons within college communities (Fennell, 2009; Lewis, LoCurto, Brown, Stowell, Maryman, Dean, & Siwierka, 2016), faculty, staff, and community studies on opinions about the presence of guns on campuses (Dahl, Bonham, & Reddington, 2016; Lovelace, 2011; Thompson, Price, Mrdjenovich & Khubchandani, 2009), and correlative behavioral studies on college students who own and/or can legally carry firearms on American campus responses (Miller, Hemenway, & Wechsler, 1999; Miller, Hemenway, & Wechsler, 2002). A study by Miller et al. (2002) is a good example of the kind of quantitative big picture analysis that exemplifies gun violence research within American IHE:

Overall, we found that students who have firearms at college and students who have been threatened with firearms while at college tend to drink to excess, engage in aggressive and dangerous behavior after drinking, and attend college in regions of the United States where firearm ownership is high. (pp. 61-62)

Symptomatic studies such as these are useful for understanding why gun violence on college campuses occurs in the first place. Consequently, studies that examine ways to reduce instances of gun violence on college campuses (Thompson, Price, Mrdjenovich, & Khubchandani, 2009), and that encourage researchers to “discuss ideas and develop rigorous research designs that examine the phenomenon of violence of all types . . . to make our campuses safer learning environments” (Aronowitz, & Vaughn, 2013, p. 58) have also emerged.

Utilizing a more critical analysis of possible reasons for the prevalence of gun violence in American schools, some authors are turning to media studies to better understand and explain these phenomena. In his book *Guys and Guns Amok*, Kellner (2008) describes a technique used by the media to boost ratings and raise global awareness about provocative events such as gun

violence in American schools. He explains the concept of the *media spectacle* in the following way:

The mainstream corporate media today process events, news, and information in the form of media spectacle. In an arena of intense competition with 24/7 cable TV networks, talk radio, internet sites and blogs, and emergent digital media and cultural forms such as Facebook, Myspace, and YouTube, the corporate media are driven to construct tabloid spectacles to attract maximum audiences for as much time as possible. (p. 1)

Kellner is not trying to undermine the seriousness of events like school shootings that are often covered in media; instead, he is showing how these unfortunate events are being portrayed on our screens by small groups of people as a means of lucrative ratings hikes.

Ironically, IHE in America that market their college brand names globally via new media, use the same means to conduct damage control and counterbalance perceptions of their campuses being construed as “dangerous places” if an act of deadly gun violence were to impact their campus community. In other words, the very marketing arsenal they use for profit becomes their greatest liability if they do not counteract negative news with positive or at least divergent news headlines. I noticed in the first few days after the UCLA shooting that when I typed “UCLA” into Google, news articles were prevalent about the events of the June 1st, 2016 shooting. However, after only a few days, I could not find news on the shooting until the 3rd page of the search engine. I wonder if UCLA itself was at all responsible for this quick turnover of information, or if it just occurred organically. I will leave it up to the reader to decide for themselves.

Building on French theorist Guy Debord’s idea of the spectacle, Kellner (2003) explains how netizens, or the everyday socially-connected internet “citizen,” interprets and spreads events

highlighted in the media. He says that “under the influence of a multimedia culture, seductive spectacles fascinate the denizens of the media and consumer society and involve them in the semiotics of a new world of entertainment, information, and consumption, which deeply influences thought and actions” (p. 2). In this case, interested international applicants as well as current international students in the United States can become an active part of the discourse surrounding the webs of meaning related to perceptions of “campus safety” on American college campuses.

Spina (2000) supports Kellner’s idea that schools are contested terrains where meanings of local happenings are battled over globally. It is suggested that “while schools are indeed sites of violence, they are caught up in a nexus of societal violence and themselves impose symbolic and sometimes physical violence on students” (as cited in Kellner, 2008, p. 19). Spina encourages us to consider how places like universities are caught up in much grander identity battles that extend far beyond campus perimeters. Taking a critical look at the societal level with information about how acts of deadly gun violence on college campuses are disseminated globally can indeed help us understand the symbolic construction of these violent acts.

Spina’s (2004) research methodology thus far is the closest example of what I am proposing more researchers pursue as they attempt to fill an important research methodology gap about how acts of deadly gun violence in American schools impact people around the world. Kellner (2008) explains her research methodology in the following way:

Newman assembled a group of researchers who in the summer of 2000 moved to Kentucky and Arkansas, residing in two communities that had recently undergone deadly school shootings. The researchers stayed about three years in each community,

interviewed survivors, school officials, and others, wrote up studies, and produced the multi-authored book *Rampage* in 2004. (p. 20)

These researchers conducted vital qualitative and long-term ethnographic studies on how deadly gun violence effected these communities. These studies examined the insider's point of view (those who were directly affected by the acts of gun violence). This is an important step in the right direction in understanding the multidimensional impacts that acts of deadly gun violence can have on academic institutions.

However, no study yet has considered how outsiders, or those indirectly affected by these events, make sense of safety within American college communities. Moreover, no study examines how these outsider perceptions (i.e., complete observers) evolve as they become insiders (i.e. complete participants). How then do perceptions built overseas collide and evolve with a student's new first-hand lived experiences on an American college campus? Kellner (2008) goes on to explain how qualitative studies with a critical analyses of gun violence within college communities must be kept in perspective:

I want to argue for multicausal and multiperspectivist interpretations of events like the Virginia Tech massacre or the Columbine shootings (or, for that matter, political events like the Iraqi War [see Kellner 2005] . . . there's no simple answer to why there is so much gun violence in the United States, but rather a variety of interacting causes, requiring multicausal explanation. (p. 48)

In the same way, researchers need to investigate the multi-interpretive and multi-perspective understanding of these events from various points of view and from different corners of the globe. For this reason, studies that examine effects that gun violence has on college campus

communities at the micro level need more consideration – particularly with under-served yet highly connected audiences such as international students.

Deadly gun violence & American colleges: Vulnerable “soft targets”

The June 1st shooting at UCLA could have happened to any of us. Every day, visitors come from around the world to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and make their way to see the picturesque UCLA campus. Moreover, our brothers, sisters, friends, coworkers, or those they know, may have a connection to someone who currently studies on campus or is a part of the “larger community of more than 405,000 living alumni” (“About | UCLA Alumni,” n.d.). Beyond these degrees of separation to UCLA, it is also quite easy to know someone who attends or has attended an American college, even if you live overseas. Unfortunately, these places, which are highly vulnerable soft targets, are increasingly being chosen as locations where symbolic acts of deadly gun violence are taking place.

In fact, any act of deadly gun violence on a college campus has great potential for mass casualties and can have deep and long-lasting psychological impacts on its communities. According to the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs (2016), examples of soft targets are “high-profile public events, hotels, clubs, and restaurants, places of worship, schools, shopping malls and markets, tourism infrastructure, public transportation systems, and events where Westerners gather in large numbers, including during holidays” (“Worldwide Caution,” n.d.). These highly-symbolic locations represent something greater than the sum of their happenings. Pres. Obama (2017) in his farewell speech as the 44th president of the United States, described how symbolic acts of terrorists and national security issues can have a major impact on how we see the world, how others see us, and that even our own “democracy can buckle when

we give in to fear” (“Transcript of President Barack Obama’s farewell speech - Chicago Tribune,” n.d.). In other words, he understood the powerful link between our national security and the success and prosperity of our nation as a democratic society – a nation founded on welcoming the world to come and discover their “American Dream” and study at our world-class educational institutions.

In the aftermath of UCLA’s shooting, Los Angeles city mayor and UCLA alumnus Eric Garcetti, a high-profile public figure, attended the candlelight vigil on campus as community members setup a makeshift memorial on the campus’ iconic Bruin bear statue (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. UCLA community memorial.



(Gelzhiser, 2016, June 4)

If there had been more casualties, it would not have been surprising to have the president himself clear his entire schedule (no matter where he might have been in the world) to be present at this event. In fact, an outcry among community members might ensue if a publically-elected official did not acknowledge their sympathies, or in more severe cases, physically attend community events meant for healing and reflection resulting from local acts of deadly gun violence.

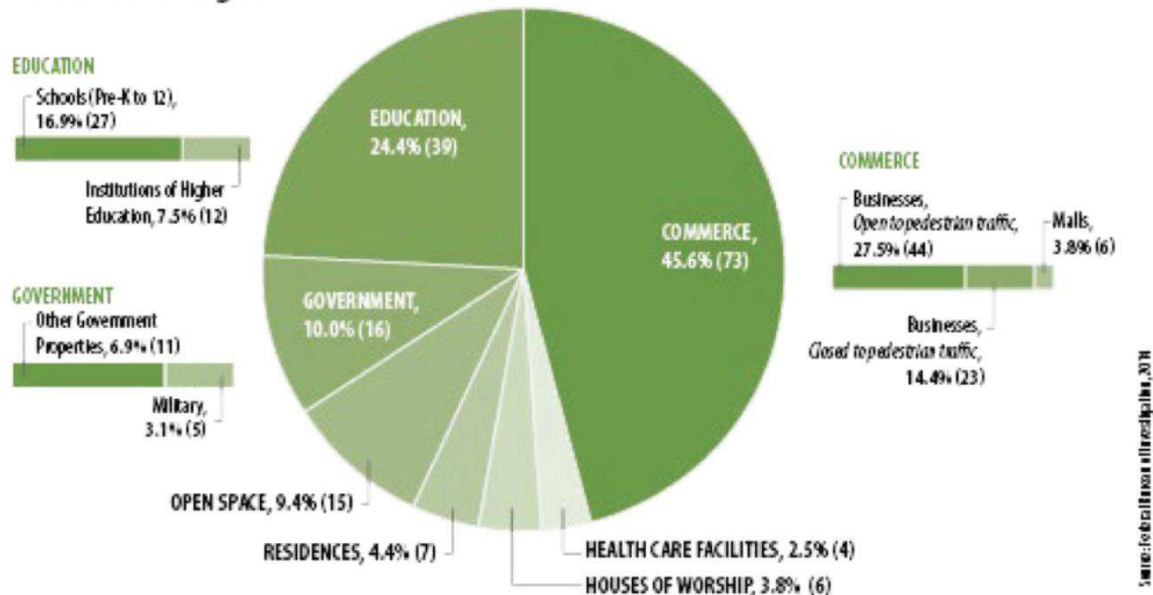
The shooter on June 1st, 2016 at UCLA could have committed his crime off campus in a time and place less conspicuous. He could have done it at night avoiding detection and possibly even gotten away with the crime. Instead, he enacted revenge near the heart of UCLA's campus during the busy morning hours of finals week when most students are on or near campus. He used a gun with almost-guaranteed success in committing his crime. It is also a weapon that can be heard from a great distance. The perpetrator's act took a campus that has nearly 44,000 enrolled students into immediate lockdown for several hours and opened the door for mass hysteria spread to be spread across the campus. As we previously mentioned, the campus community became a place of confusion, misinformation, and ultimately a huge spectacle for the media.

When deadly violence occurs in these so-called soft targets, it can shake us to the core of our beings. And as this danger remains an ever-present concern on American college campuses, we must consider how the rest of the world hears about, understands, and attempts to make sense of these highly-symbolic events. In a study on active shooter situations that occurred in the United States between 2000 and 2013, Blair and Schweit (2014) mention that "educational environments were identified as the second-largest location grouping (39 [24.4%])" (see Figure 6).

Widespread use of technology and the spread of local events globally within minutes is the modern Plato's Cave where our perceptive understandings often come from opaque and indirect sources. And this constructive perceptive reality is just as powerful and meaningful as experiencing it first-hand. Over the past few decades technology has changed the way in which perceptions of events globally are understood. Unfortunately, research responding to these phenomena is once again years behind where it ought to be. When we do not understand these processes, how then can we even begin to understand how international students develop their perceptions of campus safety and violence within American IHE? International applicants become students in their educational journeys, move beyond the shadows on the wall in their home environments, and abruptly exit the cave as they enter into life as a UCLA international student.

Figure 6. Active shooter graph.

**A Study of 160 Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 - 2013:
Location Categories**



(Blair & Schweit, 2014, p. 13)

Deadly gun violence & American colleges: UCLA Responds

In response to the UCLA June 1st, 2016 campus shooting, Chancellor Gene Block and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Scott Waugh created the UCLA Campus Safety Task Force composed of student, faculty, and staff representatives. According to the UCLA Campus Safety Task Force (2016) report, the aim was at “helping the campus to better prepare for and, where possible, prevent emergencies that are unfortunately likely to occur on the campus in the future. Those emergencies include not only similar incidents of violence but also other significant hazards, like an earthquake, fire, or severe weather event” (Forward). The task force was commissioned because emergencies, even relatively minor ones, can quickly escalate in a place like UCLA which “has about 67,000 students, faculty and staff on campus at any given moment” (p. 3).

It is no wonder then that “in anticipation of mass casualties” the “Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Santa Monica Community College police departments, California Highway Patrol, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms [and] the Los Angeles Fire Department also responded” (p. 4). However, the concerns of stakeholders invested in understanding how these events took place and how the university responded to the situation extend far beyond the Los Angeles area. In fact, resulting from the campus murder-suicide, “the campus is also participating in a Homeland Security review under the auspices of the National Education Safety and Security Institute (NESSI), a UCLA program designed to survey and advise schools and colleges regarding the safety of their facilities” (p. 2). The global ripple effect that this event had despite its not becoming a mass casualty situation is interesting to consider. How is this even possible considering the number of murders resulting

from gun violence occurring in the United States each day (many of which result in more than one victim)? More than other factors, it appears that the collateral damage associated with an event is more important than the actual number of people directly affected by the act of gun violence itself.

Describing the emotional and psychological effects that the event had on campus community members who come from around the world, the report cites an important study from Prof. Dunkel Schetter. In this campus-wide survey sent shortly after the shooting took place, it reported that “9% of the undergraduates (and 2-3% of graduate students, faculty and staff) reported symptoms consistent with clinically acute distress” (p. 9) among the 570 total respondents. In this case, it was not about the number of deaths that occurred on campus; instead, trauma among members of the UCLA community resulted from the sudden shock (someone had been shot on their campus), experience (being locked down in a room for several hours), and fallout (the university’s poor handling of its communications to the campus community) resulting from the June 1st, 2016 shooting on campus. The report in its own right highlights another possible reason why this occurred:

It is inevitable that some will get their information—perhaps erroneous—from other sources: the news media, social media, cell phone or text messages from friends and the like; we heard of a number of such instances anecdotally and through surveys. The misinformation and rumors promulgated through social media heightened the anxiety of the campus community. (p. 3) (see Figure 7)

One of my Communication Studies international students told me after a discussion section that “people were going crazy about the June 1st shooting in China – posting everything they could

get their hands on about it” (Jackie Chu,⁹ personal communication, February 1, 2017). If misinformation was spreading room-to-room and building to building on campus, can you imagine how perceptions of varying degrees were spreading globally about this event, and how they only grew in strength over time? With such a large global audience scrutinizing every major occurrence that happens on UCLA’s campus, to a certain degree, is not misinformation to some extent inevitable? Even with future university efforts to stifle the flow of misinformation, only so much is in their control. But I argue that understanding how events such as these are interpreted globally can help universities like UCLA respond in ways that can prevent misinformation from causing more harm during and after such events occur. However, there is a fine line that university officials have to walk between preventing the spread of misinformation and controlling what global citizens have a right to know.

⁹ Pseudonym used.

Figure 7. UCLA report.

(4) Where did you seek information during the incident? (check all that apply)

-Twitter or Facebook	42.38% 239
-Media website	65.43% 369
-TV / radio	45.74% 258
-UCLA website / Newsroom	30.14% 170
-Friends / Family	42.91% 242
-Other (please specify)	19.68% 111
Total:	564

(5) What two sources of information were the most informative or helpful? (check two)

-Bruin Alert text	44.25% - 250
-Bruin Alert email	27.96% - 158
-Twitter or Facebook	16.64% - 94
-Media website	35.58% - 201
-TV / radio	29.20% - 165
-UCLA website / Newsroom	7.08% - 40
-Friends / Family	21.24% - 120
-Other (please specify)	10.62% - 60
Total:	565

(Campus Safety Task Force, 2016, p. 33)

Implications of UCLA Internal Review

Among five suggestions that the UCLA Campus Safety Task Force Report (2016) decided that it needed to focus on in the aftermath of the on-campus June 1st shooting, two of them relate directly to this study:

Victim support: What should UCLA do to best support victims and/or their families, friends, and colleagues? Consider financial, practical, and emotional support needs for students, faculty and staff.

Community support: What should UCLA do to best support community members involved in a lockdown or other emergency situation? This includes psychological

counseling and peer support as well as academic considerations (e.g., extended deadlines). (p. 20)

In addition to shedding light on how information is disseminated and interpreted in our modern era and supporting the individual needs and concerns of international students at UCLA, I also hope that my study can holistically support all victims and community members.

It is my intention to encourage greater discourse between various members of the Bruin community that otherwise are unlikely to engage in dialogue with one another. If we can take a tragedy and the loss of life that happened on campus and use it as an impetus for change, then our campus community can further heal its wounds and strengthen our resolve to support one another in times of need. I believe that filling the current gaps in the literature that I mention in this section can help accomplish these feats.

Additionally, at the end of the above-mentioned survey report, participants had a chance to freely and anonymously write about their concerns. A couple of salient examples about the unique needs of international students in the study are highlighted below which reinforce the need for more qualitative and humanistic emphases when understanding the impact that acts of deadly gun violence can have on college campus communities. They reinforce the need for American IHE to conduct more research on its underserved populations:

As someone from another country I was very surprised that a (tragic) murder/suicide required an armed response from so many police and APC's. At most, especially if there is a note, I would expect three cars and a discrete covering at the doorway . . . The cultures of entitlement, hypermasculinity, armed police, and the availability of assault weapons make public areas, and figures of authority, prime targets. I used to love working with my office door open, i [sic] met folks from other departments, visitors, lost

students, but it makes me uncomfortable now. (Anonymous, UCLA Campus Safety Task Force Report, 2016, p. 35)

This example demonstrates how an international scholar at UCLA is struggling in the aftermath shock of an American campus shooting in a place that they previously considered very safe. Even though my study focuses on international applicants and students, we see here how other international members of campus are sorting through complex thoughts, feelings, and emotions as they heal. A follow-up study to the one at hand could broaden its reach and look at foreign faculty, staff, visitors, etc. I choose to examine students for this study as they are the largest demographic of the international population at UCLA and are naturally most suitable for the convenience sampling method.

In another example, a responder to the survey talks about concerns that he or she has about how emergency situations on campus are received and understood by people who are temporarily a part of the international population on UCLA's campus:

I have a concern about communication. Some short-term visitors to campus may not be on the Bruin Alert system because they don't have a BOL email address (especially true for international students and scholars at UCLA for a short-term program). (Anonymous, UCLA Campus Safety Task Force Report, 2016, p. 37)

Suggestions such as this can help the university understand vital but often overlooked pieces of information about communication with international populations on campus and help them respond accordingly. In this case, the university could give extra training to international students on campus and/or help international visitors respond more quickly to an emergency by having signs/announcements in different languages, etc. Implications for supporting international

populations at UCLA are expansive but will be difficult to determine if we do not take the time to listen.

But my study is not only for international populations; instead, an interpretive study on deadly gun violence at UCLA can help Americans, and American universities, objectify their current subjective realities and become more aware and critical of their own local environments. The importance of understanding the impact that deadly gun violence on American college campuses has on international applicants as well as on the day-to-day relationships, encounters, and overall educational experiences of international students cannot be underestimated. But it also helps Americans see America through a comparative lens.

Moreover, the comparative lens of violence which impacts campus communities can help populations such as American international students studying abroad. By critically analyzing violence on college campuses at home, they can then better understand news or experiences abroad. Henthorn (2017) from the Daily Bruin interviewed current American student Nicole Nordstrom about her experiences while studying at The University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. As uprisings increased among students at the university, some of which became violent, Nicole mentioned that “when I didn’t have school I could go to the beach or hike and it was this odd push and pull between ... understanding the experiences of a student in that country, but also not understanding what my role was beside (being) an observer or a critical thinker” (para. 8). Nicole is demonstrating here the challenge of interpreting acts of violence that are occurring on a college campus while attending a foreign university as an international student. Questions of positionality, foreign and local violence, local credence or acceptance into a new community, etc. arise for Nicole. Understanding these processes at home can help her understand them elsewhere.

And as far as how these events were understood overseas through a glocal communicative process (which I will explore in the next portion of this study), Henthorn (2017) mentions how another student, Lauri Label, heard about the events in South Africa from the perspective of her parents following along in the United States:

It was interesting to hear the news my parents were getting (because) all of it was student violence and none of it addressed how police were responding (violently), and that was a key component of what was going on (para. 14).

Lauri experienced a reality as an international student that is becoming increasingly common on university campuses around the world. The perceptions formed from one's "home" country is confronting actual events of violence within foreign IHE. I will delve more deeply into these processes in the next section. To conclude, I will restate my three research goals for this study for reference:

- 1) Fill an important gap in existing literature about deadly gun violence on American college campuses and its specific impact on international students.
- 2) Help American universities better understand the thought processes, concerns, and needs of international student communities, and subsequently improve overseas college admissions and student support services.
- 3) Provide the often underserved or overlooked international student community a unique platform through which they can share and voice their lived experiences and hopefully improve the overall quality of their overseas educational experiences.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

- Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970, Kindle Locations 996-998)

Methodological Framework

On February 22nd, 2017, two men from India became victims of a racially-motivated attack in a rural part of Kansas (Gowen, 2017, February 25) (see Figure 8). The assailant later described how the crime was motivated by the “foreign” appearance of the men. Like the fallout effects of the shooting at UCLA, an act of deadly gun violence that occurred in one corner of the United States quickly entered news headlines and reverberated in the hearts and minds of people throughout the world. In this case, even though the event did not happen on a college campus or directly to members of a college community, America IHE nevertheless felt the global impact of this local event of deadly gun violence.

Indian students applying to and currently studying abroad in the United States struggled to understand whether this event was isolated, or in fact, symptomatic of a larger societal problem within the United States. As we mentioned previously, HE researchers have placed an emphasis on discerning why these violent events happen in the first place, and on the broad fallout effects of these events (often seen with the use of quantitative survey studies).

However, there remains a scarcity of in-depth qualitative research that investigates how these events affect the long-term perceptions and experiences of international applicants and students within American IHE. Consequently, the lack of applied humanistic research leaves

institutions under-informed and ill-equipped to properly address, among others concerns, issues concerning campus safety among their international populations.

Figure 8. Indian Targeted in Kansas.



(Stroth, 2017)

From the aftermath of deadly acts of gun violence such as what occurred at UCLA and in Kansas, anecdotal evidence nevertheless suggests that international applicants and students are indeed concerned about these matters despite their scarcity in peer-reviewed journals. In response to the Kansas shooting, Gowen (2017) reports in an online news article that current “graduate students said they were changing their postgraduate plans from the United States to universities in Canada or Australia. Others were fielding telephone calls from anxious parents” (para. 6). He later describes the internal struggle that one current applicant in India faces as he considers applying to an American IHE:

Anupam Singh, a master's student, once dreamed of coming to the United States for his PhD studies. But Wednesday's seemingly racially charged shooting of two Indian men in Kansas reaffirmed his growing belief that the United States isn't a hospitable place for foreign students. 'I would be scared to study in the U.S.,' he said Saturday outside a tea stall on the campus of the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi. 'Did you read the newspapers yesterday? Two Indians were shot.' (para. 1-2)

We see here how an act of deadly gun violence in Kansas can create a visceral and negative ripple effect in India, and very likely, throughout other Indian and international populations around the globe.

In the methodological framework, I will describe an approach that aims to make sense of how acts of gun violence in the U.S. are understood internationally by international students throughout their educational experiences. It is important for American HE admissions and student support services offices to see the importance and relevance of these humanistic studies on international student perceptions. I believe they can help illuminate the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual impact that acts of deadly gun violence can have on international applicants and students within their institutions. To review, my main research questions in this study are as follows:

- 1) How do international students construct their perceptions of campus safety at UCLA, and make sense of the specific act of deadly gun violence that occurred on June 1st, 2016?
- 2) How do their perceptions evolve as they progress through their educational experiences?
- 3) How, if at all, do these knowledge constructions of campus safety impact international students' lived experiences (i.e., outward actions & internal attitudes) while studying at UCLA?

Methods Overview

To best address the gaps in the literature, and investigate the following research questions, it is important to consider what methodological framework is best suited for the study. According to Maxwell (2013), answering complex questions such as these requires a research design that considers the following:

To design a workable and productive study, and to communicate this design to others, you need to create a coherent design, one in which the different methods fit together compatibly, and in which they are integrated with the other components of your design. (Kindle Locations 2567-2568)

My approach for answering these questions begins with an educational philosophical approach. The Deweyan *experiential learning* process stipulates that people learn about the world within a social context, and at the same time, individually and uniquely develop their own interpretations of reality (Dewey, 1916). A Freirian critical approach supports the latter idea and challenges the notion that human beings are mere passive receptors through which information is deposited (i.e., a neoliberal *banking model of education*). Instead, Freire argues that humans working together in solidarity can enter a process of conscientization, or self-actualization, which challenges hegemonic powers attempting to limit autonomous thinking (Freire, 1970). International students, in other words, are more than passive actors and products of their environments. Instead, as I will discuss in the conclusion section of this dissertation, international students are now more than ever becoming agents of change.

Placing these ideas into a historical and current global philosophical context, I will weave in the previously described theoretical economic term *neoliberal globalization* and describe how its emergence as the zeitgeist of our modern era propelled technologies to become globally

commodified, and henceforth, altered how people communicate with each other in the 21st century. In such a context, I argue that the educational philosophical underpinnings are pertinent in our current global context, and that it is vital that citizens-turned-global-consumers in the 21st century now more than ever understand and recognize their positionality as autonomous beings.

And finally, I will use a communication studies approach to explain the means through which all the above processes take place. I will begin by explaining the relevance of mass media as the oldest man-made way¹⁰ through which people make sense of foreign environments. The environment where this battle is taking place can be described as a *contested terrain*, or a place where territorial claims on our minds have become a high stakes game in the mass media/new media domains (Kellner, 2003). I will continue by showing how social media and the notion of *networked individualism* poignantly describes how people in the 21st century utilize expanding social networks, the internet, and their Smart Phones to make sense of and interact with the world (Raine and Wellman, 2013). This approach is well-suited for understanding how many present-day students interact with information and relationships in our modern age.

In the context of international mobility, I will consider how face-to-face intercultural communication affects perceptions, attitudes, and actions of people in new foreign environments. Understanding such processes has wide-ranging implications for various stakeholders and individuals alike.

¹⁰ Interpersonal face-to-face communication is of course what originates human civilizations and allowed them to grow and thrive into what we see now.

A qualitative research emphasis

Qualitative research carries a humanistic emphasis. Maxwell (2013) describes that while quantitative researchers “tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variance in y. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, tend to ask how x plays a role in causing y, what the process is that connects x and y” (Kindle Locations 708-710). In other words, qualitative research allows for an examination of interpretive processes that human beings undergo on a continuous basis. It is the job of the humanistic researcher then to understand how they see the world. The goal is not producing generalizable causations; instead, its focus is interpreting individual meaning-making experiences.

While quantitative research tests rigid hypotheses and maintains a rigid research design, qualitative research is more flexible in nature. Maxwell (2013) elaborates further on this idea:

In qualitative research, any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component. In this, qualitative research is more like sciences such as paleontology than it is like experimental psychology. (Kindle Locations 215-217)

A malleable design such as this is well-suited for an interpretive study on international applicant and student perceptions of campus safety and deadly gun violence at UCLA. It allows me to consider the individual’s unique journey into American IHE, and inductively unravel how they navigate a complexifying global environment.

Deadly gun violence and American IHE: An educational philosophical approach

Deweyan experiential learning

In this section, I will describe two key theoretical concepts from the field of education which lay the groundwork for my study. First, the great educational philosopher John Dewey explains in his *experiential learning process* that knowledge-construction of the world occurs foremost through social interaction. According to Dewey, our lived experiences do not happen in isolation, but instead, are cultivated and understood through shared experiences with others.

Grady (2003) further elaborates on this concept:

Dewey asserts that all human experience is social and involves contact and communication. Therefore, humans are social beings that only exist within a social environment. Living and interacting within a social environment has fostered the development of mankind into the complex entity that it is today. This includes the present body of knowledge, which is the focus of the educational system. Dewey explains that people live in a world surrounded by people and other things that are a result of previous human experiences. These combined experiences construct knowledge, as we know it.

(p. 2)

In other words, each person's knowledge is constructed from exposure to and understanding of previous and current human interaction. Dewey (1916) further elaborates by explaining that "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 41). This environment, according to Dewey, is filled with knowledge co-constructed from humans near and far, and from times past and present. The related term *socio-cultural learning* is often used interchangeably by researchers trying to explain the interactive process of knowledge construction (Boyd, Richerson, & Henrich, 2011;

Kameda, & Nakanishi, 2003; Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993; Yamazaki, & Kayes, 2004). In social science fields such as sociology and psychology, this concept also has similarities to social constructivism (Duit, & Treagust, 1998; Powell, & Kalina, 2009).

The education system, according to Dewey, is just one example of a collective body of knowledge that people often use to make sense of the world. It is mentioned here because of the frequency and the regularity with which people around the world go to school and become exposed to similar bodies of knowledge among certain locales. After the Second World War, efforts were made by developed nation states to help developing nations establish educational institutions that would offer access to free schooling. In 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established, and worked toward supporting, among other ambitious projects, this idea of universal education.

While UNESCO became the moral compass for guiding this process, newly formed organizations such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) channeled vital international funds to these developing nations. From the 1950s to the 1970s, an era of optimism permeated the global cultural landscape. Global economic and educational growth was evident. Developing nations received promised funds from wealthier nations and national systems of education were established in various locations around the world for the first time.

Not surprisingly, most of the people you probably know have taking part in at least some level of schooling during their lifetimes. However, in this study we will examine the aggregate effect of schooling (with variances of common knowledge depending on where and how you were educated) with a vast array of other moment-by-moment exposures which supply us with bits of information through which we make sense of the world around us. A process which is

continually refined as we are exposed to a never-ending barrage of new ideas and means to be exposed to them (e.g., interactive influences from mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural communication).

However, as information and knowledge of the world enters these cyclical processes of learning and adapting, how then does living in a globalized world change a person's knowledge construction communities, or social networks? To what extent does an individual's physical proximity now play in how they see the world? Before examining these questions in the study, Dewey challenges us with the notion that regardless of any changes in an individual's networks, knowledge remains uniquely understood by the person who is at the center of the interaction. Dewey (1916) elaborates further on this concept:

There is no limit to the meaning which an action may come to possess. It all depends upon the context of perceived connections in which it is placed; the reach of imagination in realizing connections is inexhaustible. The advantage which the activity of man has in appropriating and finding meanings makes his education something else than the manufacture of a tool or the training of an animal. (Kindle Locations 3315-3318, emphasis mine)

Put simply, individual meaning-making is limitless. According to Dewey, the human mind is more than a stimulus-response, or input-output construction. It is not surprising then that a set of absolute laws in human psychology does not exist; instead, there are just theories for how humans might think and respond. Inspired by the sentiments of Dewey, Freire takes the idea of the creative and autonomous human mind and describes the global battleground it has become.

A Freirian critical approach

According to Freire, a current global hegemony seeks to control the social-cultural realm where the co-construction of knowledge takes place. Freire (1970), pinpoints the emergence and manifestation of neoliberalism as the root cause of human oppression:

We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism that we are witnessing at the end of this century, informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against the lives of the majority. In other words, those who cannot compete, die. This is a perverse ethics that, in fact, lacks ethics. I insist on saying that I continue to be human . . . I would then remain the last educator in the world to say no: I do not accept. . . history as determinism. (Kindle Locations 301-304)

Dominance over widespread content such as that which is found in school textbooks, or in certain portrayals of stories in the news media are keen examples of how some ideologies can gain mainstream dominance over others. If international students believe that American HE certificates, or degree can provide them economic, cultural and social mobility to outperform people in their home country (or be able to compete with those in America if they want to immigrate here), then will they be more willing to uncritically accept ideologies found in these foreign environments and simply *go through the motions* to obtain their respective rewards? Will foreign applicants and students accept the international student label as their main, and in some cases, their only social identifier? Do American IHE have the advantage to simply group together the “international” instead of spending the time, energy, and money to conduct narrowed research on the needs and concerns of these populations? In many cases, the answer is a simply, “yes.”

If international students feel grateful to just be accepted into a top-tier university like UCLA, then they might want to avoid rocking the boat and get through as soon as possible. Or perhaps they may become concerned with succeeding in the existing system instead of being a part of its formation process. In short, with the absence of student advocacy efforts and in-depth research, UCLA can afford to ignore or underemphasize how it supports international student needs and demands. Even if international students carry with them concerns about fears of campus safety at UCLA, they might suppress these thoughts because of what they think an American degree can do for them.

Freire (1970) posits the following idea to further objectify and make sense of the competing power structures at play in society and our place in them:

Humans, however, because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world— because they are conscious beings— exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them: the “limit-situations.” (Kindle Locations 1417-1421)

Freire describes here how people can objectify their lived realities, challenge the power structures that be, and ultimately alter its unilateral influence or control over them. He describes this process as *conscientization*. In recognizing the presence and influence of certain hegemonic power structures permeating our social cultural learning domains, we can then through conscientization collectively challenge the status quo. If we are treated as consumers in HE, and

told to act accordingly, then according to Freire we can in solidarity act to humanize this process by becoming more critical consumers.

In the study at hand, it is important to consider neoliberalism and globalization's influence on how we think, act, and make sense of the world. Even though we live in a consumer-driven global society that doesn't mean it needs to consume us. International students in HE generically labeled are often compared by institutions and in research on a country-by-country, instead of person-by-person, basis. However, as the short-term neoliberal-driven profit margins remain strong, the fears and concerns of international students may remain a peripheral concern for IHE. Efforts by American IHE to spend time and energy building the good vibes and feelings associated with being accepted to and attending one of America's top educational institutions may remain a priority over the visceral day-to-day fears, concerns, and anxieties that international students face in their respective new foreign lands. Consequently, this study aims to unearth what is not talked about or popular to talk about in American IHE but is nevertheless pressing and important.

To connect these philosophical lenses with our next section on communication, I turn to Dewey (1916), who describes the inextricable relationship between contested socio-cultural contexts where man can exert his autonomy, and the process through which it occurs:

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. (Kindle Locations 64-66)

Indeed, Dewey's and Freire's concepts of socio-cultural learning, autonomy, and global hegemonic pressures are inextricably linked to the process of communication in which they take place. What then do these communicative processes look like in our complex global learning environment?

All communication is like art. It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power.

- *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916, Kindle Locations 90-92)

Deadly gun violence and American IHE: A communication studies approach

First, it is important to consider how we define a broad concept like *communication*. I consider it to be the lifeblood of all social interactions. It unites us as human beings. From the moment we are born, we use various forms of communication to make sense of the world. And whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we perpetually use communication as we interact with others to refine our understandings of the world. Meanwhile, we are constantly bombarded with new information as we are faced with the challenge of sorting through often contradictory ways of seeing the world around us.

In this sense, we can define communication as the “act of transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another” (Agee, Emery, & Ault, 1985, p. 18) on a continual basis. As simple as this concept may seem at first, it is really a convoluted process which incorporates complex and colliding elements which I break down into the categories of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural communication. The following section will separately describe each part and later describe their co-dependent and interactional relationship. Such an approach is aimed at highlighting the complex processes that international applicants and students undergo as they make sense of campus safety and the deadly act of gun violence

which occurred on UCLA's campus on June 1st, 2016. They will serve as the lens through which I will conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups.

A mass media approach

What is mass media?

Firstly, mass communication, a subfield of communication studies, is an emerging area of study at colleges and universities all over the world. Mass media, which is often the focal point of mass communication, involves analyzing "a communicator (almost always more than one person) using a mass medium to communicate with very large audiences" (Hiebert, 1988, p. 3). One way to understand the components of mass media is to break them up into several different categories based upon the human senses:

The oldest media are those of printed word and picture . . . they carry their messages through the sense of sight. Radio is the mass communication medium aimed at the sense of sound, whereas television and motion pictures appeal both to the visual and auditory senses. (Agee et al., 1985, p. 22)

According to themes in academic literature, the seven mediums of mass media are books, newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, radio, television, and recordings. As people learn about local and global events, such as acts of deadly gun violence, they often use an aggregate approach to mass media to make sense of the event. New media, or the digitalization of mass communication, has increased the flow through which people learn about events broadcasted through sources such as mass media.

An eighth possible category, video games, is also quickly emerging as a focus of study among social scientists in the mass communication and mass media fields (Anderson, Gentile, &

Buckley, 2007.; Esser, Smith, & Bernal-Merino, 2016.; Juul, 2011). In fact, the ability of video games to transcend language and cultural barriers, both interactively and non-interactively, as well as their preoccupation with violent themes make it a fascinating area to consider when examining how people construct their views of overseas violence.

Considering its specific characteristics, Hiebert, Ungurait, & Bohn (1988) describe how mass communication and mass media are “representative, indirect, delayed, cumulative, quantitative, institutionalized, and costly” (p. 508). In other words, it is a unidirectional interactional platform which exposes its audience to a wide range of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and ideologies about global events. Events that happen in distant locales around the world, such as specific instances of deadly gun violence, are now accessible to a global audience. Even the most well-traveled person would have a minuscule understanding of violent acts that occur throughout our planet’s nearly 200 countries without the transient information provided by mass media.

Since our world is so large and highly populated, how then do some events find their way into the mass media channels over others? Why were the deadly acts of gun violence which unfolded at UCLA and in a rural Kansas community selected to be transmitted into news headlines globally?¹¹ With so many events simultaneously and continuously occurring across the globe, what is the process through which certain new stories, including acts of deadly gun violence, garner mass media attention? In the next section, I will discuss the intriguing mass media multi-stage filtration process that occurs between the news media, gatekeepers and regulators.

¹¹ In the days following both events, I saw headline stories about them in several overseas online newspapers. Additionally, during my interactions with international students at UCLA, I often hear about concerns that their “home” communities are showing about these high-profile events.

Mass media filtration: news media, gatekeepers, & regulators

There is a wide variety of content that we need to consider in mass media that can influence international interpretations of deadly acts of gun violence in America. Sources include content related but not limited to TV shows and movies (including the global influence of Hollywood), combative video games with themes of American violence, books, music with lyrics about gun violence in America, and so on. However, for the sake of laying the proper groundwork in this section, I will place an emphasis on just one component of how perceptions of deadly gun violence in America are understood in mass media despite having application to a variety of sources. My foci will include the relationship between deadly acts of gun violence in America (both real and fictitious), the news media production process, and its recipients.

As various content in mass media is produced, including that of the news media, filterers of this information, commonly referred to as gatekeepers and regulators, take part in selecting what content to share with audiences, the latter making the final judgements as to whether or not content is legally permissible in each jurisdiction. These gatekeepers and regulators range anywhere from “courts, government commissions, consumers, professional organizations, and public pressure groups” (Hiebert et al, 1988, p. 13). According to Noam Chomsky, regulators are indispensable in preventing certain groups from gaining a hegemonic monopoly:

Gatekeepers serve an important societal purpose for eliminating threats at the root level by inculcating the populace, through education, politics, and mass media to not extend beyond “the bounds of the expressible.” That is, the “spectrum of opinion allowed expression ... bounded by the consensus of powerful elites while encouraging tactical debate within it. (Saporta, 1994, p. 59)

Regulatory oversight allows for the diffusion of information to in theory have democratic checks and balances. For without intervention measures about what is broadcasted in mass media, the neoliberal giants of the world would have free reign to produce and air whatever content they see fit despite its misleading or biased tilt.

Various stakeholders in the international perception game have a lot vested in getting the material they want on the air and in encouraging people to think along certain lines. It means big dollars for the winners and great losses for the losers (e.g., a high stakes neoliberal environment). Lule (2015) poignantly describes how mass media can be thought of as “subject to other pressures in this age of high-tech persuasion, manipulation, and propaganda. Economic, political, and personal pressures shape the news around the globe” (p. 122). And although humans learn in a social-cultural environment where they ultimately decide how to make sense of the world, this does not mean others do not want a large influential stake in the process.

Despite the power that gatekeepers and regulators can have on what media reaches the eyes and ears of audiences globally, this does not mean that the original producers of content do not themselves have certain filtration processes in place. Hiebert et. al (1988) elaborates on this process further:

The media are not simply passive agents manipulated by other forces. By making judgements about which of the millions of daily events are newsworthy, about what is important or unimportant, about what is true or false, reporters and editors in the mass media play a role in shaping the course of events. (p. 260)

Subsequently, the creators of media have the first say when deciding what content they want associated with their brand before it ever reaches the consumer. In short, the media itself is an integral part of what viewers end up seeing on their screens.

To explain the threefold relationship of mass media content filterers, Saleem (2007) mentions that from an American perspective on global events “media organization’s ideological stance, government manipulation, corporate and ownership influence and media personnel stereotypes and prejudices also play a vital role in shaping foreign countries image in U.S. media [sic]” (p. 153). I argue that the same is true for the reverse scenario where countries around the world try to make sense of events that occur within the United States. What they see, hear, and understand is majorly influenced by mass media content filters. American IHE are naturally very vested in following and possibly influencing how mass media portrays them in the movies, news headlines, etc. The next section will examine how mass media is shaping what overseas applicants and current international students in American IHE are seeing and hearing in mass media.

Mass media and perceptions of American IHE

Mass media is indeed a powerful influencer. The famous Hollywood director Steven Spielberg (2017) mentions how “from the very first dates of the silent movies and I think early, early on, Hollywood realized they had a tremendous tool, or even a weapon, for change, through cinema” (Harris, M. (Writer), & Bouzereau, L. (Director), 6:37-6:49). Bourke (2013) encourages colleges to consider the role that movies can have on students’ perceptions about what college will be like. He posits the following challenge to researchers investigating American IHE:

Movies that depict higher education in the U.S. offer a glimpse into what might be awaiting those who choose to enter the iron gates and enter the hallowed halls. Even though, as bell hooks (1996) notes, movies are not real, she also notes that audiences do perceive realities from the images projected on the screen. The space between reality and

perceptions of reality is where the power of films lays [sic]. By considering how incoming international students might perceive higher education in the U.S. through film portrayals, educators can work to help international students adjust to the reality on campus rather than the reality on screen . . . Additionally, as interest in studying in the U.S. grows among international students, it becomes increasingly important for greater understandings to be developed of the perceptions they may bring with them. (p. 468)

Growing up in suburban Philadelphia, a place with one of the highest concentrations of colleges and universities in the world, at a young age I remember sneakily watching a myriad of college-themed movies to the dismay of my parents. They were exciting and interesting! The movies told me that the tumultuous high school years were merely a precursor to a life of freedom and experimentation that awaited me in college. UCLA's campus, due to its proximity to Hollywood and collection of iconic and picturesque filming sites, unbeknownst to many, often makes its way into the movie sets as the image of the quintessential American college campus.

In fact, a tour guide at UCLA once told my group that the Westwood campus has portrayed Harvard University in the movies more than the actual Cambridge, Massachusetts located university itself. While walking on campus on a typical day, it is not unusual to see a caution sign warning passersby that filming is in progress, and that by entering a certain location (often in heavy-traffic areas) you are agreeing to be filmed and recorded on camera.

I find in my conversations with international students at UCLA that they are often fascinated and intrigued with the Greek Life culture before they ever arrive on campus. They have seen movies with party themes from highly marketed movies like *Legally Blonde*, *Van Wilder*, and *Old School* (all of which were filmed primarily at UCLA). However, themes revolving around American IHE in the movies, news media, etc. have in the past couple of

decades received growing amounts of attention regarding violence, and more specifically, deadly gun violence on college campuses. What have international applicants and students been exposed to, and how do they understand mass media portrayals of violence and its relationship to American IHE? And what is at stake for American colleges and universities trying to maintain a positive overseas image while simultaneously combating negative campus publicity influenced by violent acts in the United States?

American IHE & international branding: what's at stake?

As we mentioned, positive or negative news stories reported from overseas or other elements of mass media can impact how we interpret events, people, and places globally. But what is at stake for universities? According to The University of California Office of the President (“Chief Investment Officer of the Regents | UCOP,” n.d.) website, “The Office of the Chief Investment Officer of the Regents currently manages a portfolio of investments totaling approximately \$100 billion, which includes retirement, endowment, and cash assets” (paragraph 1). American IHE like UCLA, which often run like major corporations, rely heavily on a constant flow of revenue sources and the prestige from recruiting some of the world’s highest achieving students.

In fact, UCLA’s positive image has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. It has such a well-known internationally-renowned brand name that it even leases its name to clothing stores around the world (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. UCLA Overseas Store.



(China Star News Chicago, 2013)

Hoff (2013) writing for the Daily Bruin describes the power of the UCLA brand name:

Shirts, sweatshirts and jackets line the walls of the store, each emblazoned with the UCLA brand . . . [they] pay homage to a university thousands of miles away. UCLA Apparel Kuwait, the first store of its kind in the Middle East, sells apparel and accessories with the university's logo and name . . . Few universities in the United States license their brands to be sold on apparel in markets around the world, due to limited international appeal of their names, Holmes said. The only major competitor in the niche market is Harvard University, which trademarked its name in 1989, according to the Harvard Crimson . . . Stores and boutiques within high-end department stores have existed in areas such as eastern Asia and Europe for the past 30 years, Holmes said.

“Internationally, the UCLA brand is very popular,” Holmes said. “People are interested in the concept of American colleges, where you don’t just go in to study, but you have a whole life experience. (Para. 1-7)

With such an established name, it is not surprising then to think that a major event at UCLA such as the deadly act of gun violence on June 1st, 2016 would cause some concern among UCLA stakeholders. Hiebert et al (1988) mentions that “the more widely known the participants in an occurrence, the more news-worthy the event” (p. 266). In this case, the more widely known an institution is overseas, then the more likely news of a campus related significant event will make global headlines.

Clearly, a lot is at stake for UCLA to maintain its positive global reputation. However, as we mentioned earlier, the monetary effects that the shooting at UCLA had on international admissions could not have been too widespread as the university had its greatest applicant pool ever in 2016. On the surface, it looks like UCLA has escaped any temporal negative effects that this event could have had on its brand name.

However, as this study intends to investigate, we still do not know the emotional, psychological, and physical impact negative events can have on international students’ educational experiences. With such a powerful name, it will take a lot more than one shooting on campus to get students to ignore the economic, social, and cultural mobility that they can acquire from a degree from a world-renowned institution like UCLA.

At the same time, little is known about what is happening below the surface in the hearts and minds of international students at UCLA – many of whom who may feel overwhelmed, intimidated, and uncertain about their place on this new foreign campus. Without an intentional study on international student perceptions of safety, a study that is complicated by the fact that

many international students often remain quiet to save face and not undergo additional added stress, we may never get to the root of how perceptions of campus safety and the shooting on campus impact this already underserved population. However, if government officials, university administrators, or any other stakeholders want to understand how these events are understood by these populations, then taking time to ask them questions and listen to them is a powerful way to do so. After considering the impact that the news media can have on how people construct perceptions of overseas events, including that of certain gatekeepers and regulators, and the importance of IHE to maintain and build positive overseas brand names, what role do the international applicants and students themselves play in the high stakes American HE environment?

Mass media as a contested terrain

To begin, it is important to consider a critical view of the perception building and brand name constructive process. Freire (1970) encourages us to consider the following:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Kindle Locations 420-423)

In other words, the use of mass media by television networks, university leaders, national and local governments, business organizations, or even grassroots movements always have an aim, according to Shaull. He describes how it is impossible for creators, producers, and markets of

mass media to produce content that does not aim to support one ideological standpoint or view of the world over others. Consumers of this content find themselves amid what one researcher calls a *contested terrain*.

Kellner (2003) describes media culture as “a contested terrain reproducing on the cultural level the fundamental conflicts within society rather than as an instrument of domination” (p. 101-102). Kellner describes media culture as a domain where multiple ideologies compete for dominance – with individuals caught up in the middle. Mass media is a battleground where conflicting powers strive to influence our minds, thoughts, perceptions, and ultimately, our actions.

In fact, the war over ideological dominance within these contested terrains can even turn deadly. Lule (2015) describes the real threat that journalists face in places where competing groups consider them uninvited guests:

In our age of globalization, the entire world can be a war zone. Numerous forces compete for wealth and power, within and across borders . . . all these groups can be threatened by the work of a crusading reporter. All have targeted reporters. The global village is a harrowing place for journalists. (p. 124)

It is not surprising then that sometimes creators of mass media hide their identities to protect their safety. Going as far back as the eighteenth century, we see documented evidence that creators of mass media used pen names to protect their identities and intentionally mislead their audiences. In one of my favorite examples, Benjamin Franklin “created an entire persona for the ‘writer.’ Sometimes he wrote as a woman, other times as a man, but always with a specific point of view . . . many were also humorous, filled with wit and irony” (“Benjamin Franklin. Wit and Wisdom. Name that Ben | PBS,” n.d.). The battle for ideological supremacy is as heated as ever

in our high-stakes globalized neoliberal environment. Today, international applicants and students find themselves in a contested terrain in which their places are unclear or unknown.

Mass media & persuasion: numbers don't matter, ideological dominance does

A high death toll in specific incidents of deadly gun violence does not necessarily constitute coverage by the media. Media coverage also depends on how such events support or challenge prominent hegemonies. For example, let us say that I have a major stake over the content that is portrayed on mass media about a given topic or idea. In this case, I will define what I think constitutes a “terrorist act.” The word *terrorist* is a very broad term and difficult to define, but something that can quickly make a group or person an ally to be protected or a target for attack.

According to McQueeney (2014), the way in which terrorism is defined can be the difference between an act of murder being justified or condemned:

Today, the mass media plays a leading role in defining terrorism (Jenkins, 2003). For example, reporters and politicians are far more likely to apply the label “terrorist” to foreign-based individuals or groups such as al-Qaeda than to domestic hate groups who murder in the name of political goals such as the anti-choice Operation Rescue or the anti-government Patriot movement (Turk, 2004). Moreover, when enemies of the United States—whether political groups or nation-states—wage politically-motivated violence against U.S. civilians it is often called a terrorist act. Yet, when the U.S. government or its allies inflict similar acts of violence on civilians abroad, it is dubbed an act of retaliation or counter-terrorism (Jenkins, 2003). (p. 298)

Regardless on one's political affiliation, or agreement or disagreement with the previous statement, the truth remains that that which is covered in mass media, and how it is covered (in this case it is a matter of semantics about the word "terrorism"), changes how large populations of people might view acts of deadly violence.

To cite another example about the influencing powers of mass media, as numerous deaths were caused by drone strikes in the years after the September 11th terrorist attacks, news agencies knew that many innocent people were being caught up in the attacks. However, as far as we knew, American citizens remained unharmed. But what would happen if an American citizen were to get caught up in a strike? Unfortunately, this eventually happened. According to Entous, Paletta, & Schwartz (2015), "a U.S. drone killed an American and an Italian held hostage . . . on an al Qaeda compound in Pakistan, sparking new questions about the use of the controversial and still-evolving weapon. The intelligence that underpinned the drone strike turned out to have been tragically incomplete" (para. 1-2). In this case, it appears that the accidental death of a U.S. citizen and one of the country's allies became the catalyst for keeping the future targets of drone strikes in check with regard to civilian casualties. While numerous innocent civilians had died previously, it took only a few of the "right people" to die before the numbers seemed to matter and preemptive action was undertaken.

Ideological dominance in this context comes back to our earlier concept of neoliberalism. One of America's great thinkers, Noam Chomsky, in an interview with Wubben (2015), posits the following idea:

From an elite perspective, good education, a passive and obedient populace who lend their weight for an elite group in the democratic process, and mass media production and performance within institutional parameters evidences the landscape of reproduction

where education is in a continual mode of crisis causing risk to the U.S. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; U.S. Department of Education, 2008) while evidence to the contrary is suppressed and ignored. (p. 6)

Good education in this case is that which is created and developed for and benefits the few. In the examples provided above, mass media becomes a powerful weapon for ideological filtering.

News sharing & perceptions of foreign countries

In many cases, news media is the first source of information through which people hear about and construct their perceptions of deadly overseas attacks. And unfortunately, such reports are also common in news broadcasts. As the saying goes in news media, “If it bleeds, it leads.” In fact, it is likely that a viewer will first hear news of an act of deadly gun violence occurring overseas from their local news or from major news networks such as BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, NDTV India, or CCTV. According to Fryman & Bates (1993), studies show how “international news flow has been shown to produce a significant effect on individuals’ perceptions of foreign countries and distant events” (p. 181). In my investigation, themes related to international perceptions influenced by the news media are indeed a common area of investigation (Chang, 1998; Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004; Wanta, & Mikusova, 2010).

Supporting the notion of glocalization, Fryman & Bates (1993) go onto mention how the news media is supporting the idea of “McLuhan's ‘global village’ . . . at least in the sense that events around the world increasingly impact on people and communities” (p. 181). As I previously described, understandings of the world are no longer just limited to local influences, but can even be influenced by people, places, and events on the other side of the world.

To illustrate this point, a study conducted in the field of Foreign Relations used the agenda-setting theory¹² to see “whether coverage of foreign nations in the news influences how important these nations are viewed to be by individuals . . . and whether positive or negative coverage of foreign nations influences individuals' evaluations of countries” (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, (2004). p. 364). Wanya et al. (2004) used the following approach to examine this important question:

The analysis of the present study compared responses to a public opinion survey and media coverage in the period leading up to the survey period. Both looked at countries as "objects" and whether media coverage of the individual countries set the agenda for public perceptions of those countries. (p. 369)

Once the researchers gathered the necessary data, they painstakingly examined it to see whether a relationship does indeed exist between what Americans see in the news media about foreign nations and their perceptions of them. Conclusions shows that “the news media can show the public both how vitally important countries are to the United States and how negatively the countries should be viewed” (Wanta, 2004, p. 375). There is little doubt the same is true for how people in foreign locales come to understand the United States.

One writer offers a challenge to news agencies to more critically consider the power that their news reports can have on how people construct their understanding of events, people, and places around the world. Demers (2007) mentions how “I wish the journalists and media

¹² “Most agenda-setting research since McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study of the 1968 U.S. presidential election has focused on the relationship between the news media's ranking of issues (in amount and prominence of coverage) and the public ranking of the perceived importance of these same issues in various surveys” (p. 257).

Weaver, D., McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (2004). Agenda-setting research: Issues, attributes, and influences. *Handbook of political communication research*.

producers could see how the content they produce socially constructs problems and reality. That awareness still wouldn't guarantee change in the system, because media are structurally dependent on advertisers, sources and consumers" (p. 355). There is certainly a lot of pressure and responsibility laid on reporters to share information with others around the world.

At a more general level, Pietilä (2005) describes how "because the media produce frames making the world intelligible, they 'are especially important sites for the production, reproduction, and transformation of ideologies (Hall, 1981, 34)" (quoted in Pietila, 2005, 240). As we mentioned earlier, forms of mass media have been around for centuries. However, to make my study on international students in American IHE as relevant as possible, it is essential to understand the process and means through which modern day students make sense of the world. The influence of mass media is without a doubt a major factor in these construction processes. In the next section, I will discuss another major influence for how we are understanding and build global perceptions in our 21st century world – namely that of the rise of social media.

*Information not only wants to be free, it also wants to be networked . . .
information has a social life.*

- Networked: the new social operating system (Raine & Wellman, 20012, pp. 2, 223)

A social media approach

Previously, I described the slowly evolving relationship between mass media and society over the last several centuries, and how it has become a major influential factor in how we make sense of events both locally and from afar. This communicative relationship continues to be important in our modern globalized era. In the following section, I will describe another major component to understanding the world that occurs within a social context: social media. Unlike mass media where information-sharing is unidirectional and can either take the form of printed or digital mediums, this digital-only process centers on collaborative understandings.

First, it is important to explain the context in which this communicative process has emerged. As I mentioned previously, neoliberal globalization has led to a greater global push for and commodification of recent technologies. Subsequently, information-sharing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat have emerged. In previous decades, international applicants and students to the United States would rely primarily on books, magazines, movies, etc. (e.g., mass media) and mainly local face-to-face interactions to decide what it would be like to study in a new foreign environment.

However, neoliberal globalization has not only increased communicative technologies but has also made the commodification of American degrees and diplomas more abundant. In

other words, people are talking more glocally, and the persistent desire for international students to attend American IHE has given them a platform to paint a clearer picture of what life would be like abroad. Crowd-sourcing information and perception-building processes aided by new technologies free the modern individual to navigate through multiple and vast amounts of other people's perceptions and orchestrate their own understandings. Hearing comments like, "Can you please put your phone down for a second?" is the new norm in our technology-driven and globally connected landscape. The person sitting in front of us, or the portrayal of American college life in the movies are now only pieces in a much bigger glocal interpretive process.

Westwood Village investigation

Around 7:30 a.m. on March 21st, 2017, I was awakened by a loud knock on my front door. As I opened it, I was surprised to find a UCLA police officer standing on my threshold. He alerted me to the fact that a dead body had just been found about 30 feet from my apartment on the steps of a UCLA-owned faculty apartment complex (see Figure 10). An investigation was under way. At the time, the officer mentioned to me that the scene was being treated as a possible homicide case. After we spoke briefly, he took down my information and continued his investigation.

A little while later as I took a moment to see what was happening outside, I unexpectedly saw the unadulterated aftermath of the incident which I thought had been completed. Before local news vans lined the street, or other local community members became aware of the incident, I issued a word of caution via a Smart Phone app to the local Westwood Village community about the episode within seconds (i.e., the "crowd-sourcing" and social media process had begun).

Figure 10. Dead body found on UCLA property.

UCPD investigating body found on Levering Avenue

BY ALEJANDRA REYES-
VELARDE

CRIME, NEWS

Posted: March 21, 2017 2:40 pm

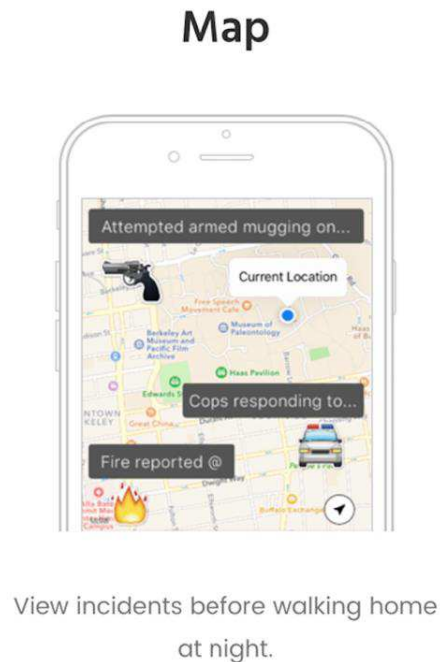


(Jintak Han/Assistant Photo editor)

(Han, 2017)

Without the support of *Wildfire*, an app which allows community members to alert their neighbors to incidences of crime or related safety concerns in their nearby communities, many people would have remained unaware of the scene unfolding nearby (see Figure 11). Unlike times past, when spreading information was mainly a face-to-face process, or meant waiting for the 5 o'clock news to share today's news headlines, technology advances allowed me to communicate to my neighbors immediately, both near and far. A simple phone call to share what was happening might only reach a few people. It is no wonder the developers of the app are comparing the quick dissemination and sharing of information to wildfires that can engulf entire forests within days or hours.

Figure 11. Wildfire app.

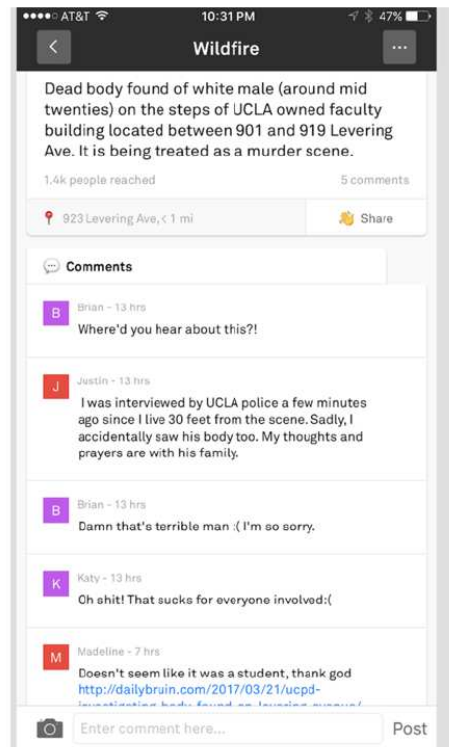


(Apple iTunes, 2018)

As a result of these modern communication platforms, I posted and disseminated an anonymous message that morning to over 1,400 people, most of whom I had never met, within a matter of seconds (see Figure 12). Instantaneously, these people were alerted of the situation via my post, and throughout the day, several of them decided to interact with my posting by adding their own comments and questions underneath the original message. One person even posted a hyperlink a few hours later to a UCLA Daily Bruin article which documented the university's first public acknowledgement of the event. The message I posted on the app, which is connected to other social networking sites such as Facebook, may have been tagged and made its way even further to networks beyond my reach. Who knows, maybe an international applicant to UCLA

heard about the event and added it to his or her cache of information sources to consider when painting a picture of campus safety in Westwood.

Figure 12. Report on Wildfire App.



(J. Gelzhiser, personal communication, March 21, 2017)

An interactive and remote crowd sourcing process among local community members would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Ubiquitous global mobile technology use and the proliferation of apps of all kinds allows the information sharing process to become more streamlined than ever before. My five-year old niece, who recently sent me her first selfie from my sister's cell phone, probably cannot comprehend a world without computers or mobile technology.

Now anyone with a Smart Phone and connection to a server can send safety alerts, news of unfolding events, selfies, pictures of people awkwardly taking selfies, etc. from the palm of their hands. The world of instant information is free of time and physical boundaries. Recently, Facebook added a “Live” option that gives people the power to publically and in real time broadcast whatever they are doing to whomever they want. Sadly, the technology has already been abused by people who want public fame by using the platform to publically harm their victim(s) (Spayd, 2016). The borders of personal privacy are as open as the technology that makes them possible and constructing knowledge about the world is more interactive than ever. If an act of violence occurs in one corner of the world, just one Smart Phone can turn an unknown event into a viral phenomenon within days. Welcome to the new digital age!

Triple Revolution

What specific factors make it possible for people to outpace traditional mass media mediums such as the local news as well as local face-to-face intercultural interactions? Raine and Wellman (2013) describe how *the Triple Revolution* made this possible:

The Social Network Revolution . . . has afforded more diversity in relationships and social worlds – as well as bridges to reach these worlds and maneuverability to move among them. At the same time, it has introduced the stress of not having a single home base and of reconciling the conflicting demands of multiple social networks . . . **The Internet Revolution** has given people communications power and information-gathering capacities that dwarf those of the past . . . each person also creates her own internet experiences, tailored to her needs . . . **The Mobile Revolution** has allowed ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) to become body appendages allowing

people to access friends and information at will, wherever they go . . . people's physical separation by time and space are less important. (pp 11-12, bolding emphasis mine)

The Social Network Revolution can be understood as the general process of globalization that we described previously. It is easy to see how the global landscape has changed and diversified since the end of WWII. Meanwhile, the Internet and Mobile Revolutions allow a burgeoning global population the ability to use new technologies to connect with each other more quickly and easily. I argue that these are made possible with globalization's neoliberal emphasis.

To extrapolate on the idea that our world is diversifying, I refer to a recent United States Census Bureau (2017) survey conducted between 2011 and 2015. When considering the city of Los Angeles, people who are foreign-born, or "anyone who was not a U.S. citizen or a U.S. national at birth," are around 38.2% ("Los Angeles County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau," n.d.).¹³ This means that any local message that someone sends on an app like Wildfire, or posts in Facebook, is very likely to become global with just a few clicks or taps. In fact, my next-door neighbor from Thailand described to me how she used her smart phone to post messages to her friends and family at home the morning that UCLA police talked with her about the body found nearby. The information trail that she started was likely posted and reposted in Thailand and found its way into the eyes and ears of others around the world. One can say that in a metropolis like L.A. it would be nearly impossible for any deadly incident nearby to remain local.¹⁴

¹³ It would not be surprising to see this number reach near 50% over the next decade considering a steady stream of immigrants making the move to southern California.

¹⁴ UCPD suggested that no foul play was responsible for the reported incident.

Neoliberal globalization's effect on the Internet and Smart Phones

Getting new electronic technologies produced by government and university researchers into the hands of the everyday consumer became an interesting proposition in the second half of the 20th century. Key stakeholders and investors saw promise in trying to commodify new discoveries and make them for daily-use in households across the country. After the end of WWII, no one could have imagined that within a few decades, having a television set in one's home would become the new norm for people within developed nations. However, were the abundant sales of televisions just a fluke? Would people continue to allow new products to invade their lives? The world could never have predicted how an electronic message sent from an inauspicious room at UCLA would one day forever change how people transferred information and communicated with one another.

In 1969, UCLA's Boelter Hall became the site of the first ever electronic message sent out between two computers (i.e., the Internet had been born). No one at the time knew how such a barely noticeable event on campus would change how people would eventual communicate with each other around the world – on an almost incessant pace from the palms of their hands. It is remarkable to consider how technology developed in one engineering building on UCLA's campus would decades later allow news of an act of deadly gun violence next door to be disseminated so quickly. Raine and Wellman (2013) describe how one factor, namely that of an increase in global trade, allowed new technologies to garner the interest and capital needed to become commodified globally:

A high level of globalized production and consumption has accompanied peace and more permeable borders. The growth of North America and European manufacturing bases in Asia and Latin America since the 1970s, two-way exports of resources between the

developed and the less-developed worlds, the economic reforms of China in the 1980s and 1990s, and the shredding of the Iron Curtain in 1989-1990 allowed East and West, North and South to open up travel and trade. (p. 26)

By the latter half of the 20th century, no longer would certain products be restrained by legalities. There was much money to be made with global sales of products, and regulations at the local and global levels needed to be cut. Investors' mouths watered, and production lines were set up in various developing countries around the globe to cut costs. The computer in your family room or the automobile in your garage probably has parts and technologies constructed in the corners of the world. People were told what they needed to buy and how to live to thrive in a globalizing world. Neoliberalism was born.

To demonstrate the major strides that companies have made in selling technologies to the everyday global consumer we only need to look at Facebook Inc. On March 24th, 2017, the market capitalization¹⁵ of Facebook, Inc., considered by many people to be the greatest social media platform in history, reached a value of \$405,579,980,414 ("FB stock quote - Facebook, Inc. Class A Common Stock price - NASDAQ.com," n.d.). According to Chen (2015), it is not only social media companies that profit from these modern changes, but the telecommunication companies as well which make interconnectivity possible:

The FORBES Global 2000 is a comprehensive list of the world's largest, most powerful public companies, as measured by revenues, profits, assets and market value. This year's Global 2000 companies hail from 60 countries and account for combined revenues of \$39 trillion, profits of \$3 trillion, with assets worth \$162 trillion, and a market value of \$48

¹⁵ "The total dollar value of all outstanding shares. Computed as shares times current market price. Capitalization is a measure of corporate size." (Nasdaq, 2018)

trillion. The world's largest telecommunication giants have become a strong force on our annual snapshot of the world's largest companies, thanks to an increasingly connected world. (Para. 3)

In fact, China Mobile Limited, the largest telecommunications company in the world was recently valued at \$229,325,408,424 ("China Mobile Limited Common Stock (CHL)," n.d.).

The accessibility and use of the Internet and Smart Phones by consumers around the world is unprecedented, and so are the profit margins. Raine and Wellman (2013) describe how the "internet and mobile phones have facilitated the reshaping of people's social networks, enabling them to be larger and more diverse . . . reconfigured the way people use their networks to learn, solve problems, make decisions, and provide support to each other" (Preface para. 5). We can only imagine how such interconnectivity will continue to expand in the future.

Gatekeepers in a digital age

If information can be so easily disseminated, then what role then do more traditional gatekeepers have, if any, in our globalized world of the 21st century? As digital technologies allow people to share information directly to others without time delay or information-filtering, it seems that traditional mass media gatekeepers may have lost their global information sharing monopolies. In the past, I would have been limited in my ability to share events that occurred nearby; however, I can now accomplish this within seconds. In fact, Raine and Wellman (2013) describe how "the role of experts and information gatekeepers can be radically altered as empowered amateurs and dissidents find new ways to raise their voices and challenge authority" (Kindle Location 508). The new rules of the information sharing game can even allow one of the world's most powerful leaders to circumvent traditional gatekeepers and use digital social media

platforms such as Twitter to speak directly to the American people whenever and from wherever he wants.

In 2016, Donald J. Trump accomplished something that most people thought was unfathomable by winning an election that many considered over long before election day. According to Pres. Trump, a major contributing factor in his success was in his unprecedented personal and direct use of social media to the American populace. He could share information and his opinions to millions of people from the late hours of the night from his private bedroom. McCormick (2016) cites Trumps thoughts on this matter:

Twitter, Facebook, and the like are “great form[s] of communication,” Trump said. “I’m not saying I love it, but it does get the word out. When you give me a bad story or when you give me an inaccurate story,” he jabbed, pointing to Stahl’s CBS and other TV networks, social media gives him “a method of fighting back.” (Para. 4)

Remarkably, Trump continues to use Twitter as a means of direct communication with people around the world as President of the United States. He no longer needs to call a special televised news conference if he wants to post his immediate thoughts to the American people and the rest of the world. But how do these emergent technologies affect data and information-sharing among the everyday global citizen?

Well, put simply, anyone and everyone can be a creator of news ideas and opinions and share them with the rest of the world within seconds. In fact, Aneesh, Hall, & Petro (2011) explain how “the current global media culture is multi-centered; its voices, practitioners, and inventors deriving from all corners of the earth, violating assumptions about center and periphery, North and South, first and third worlds, Western and non-Western, imperial and subaltern, colonizer and colonized” (29). Platforms such as YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram,

Twitter, and Facebook allow anyone with a computer and internet connection to share their lives with others. The same can be said of spreading one's ideological proclivities if they so choose. People can even make a career out of such pursuits if they gather a large enough fan base and become "Insta-famous" or "YouTube stars." Several of my former students at UCLA make exponentially more money than I do through their large groups of online followers.

Moreover, search engines such as Google and Bing can help people find answers to questions and resources that otherwise may have alluded them. Not sure how to ask what you are looking for online? then that's OK. These powerful information-sharing services have spent millions of dollars in research *figuring it out for you*. It is scary how suggestions for searches or misspellings can be so easily deciphered by computer with powerful algorithms working hard from thousands of miles away. If language is an issue, there are translation services a click or tap away that can connect you with information previously inaccessible. How then does a person utilizing social media internationally go about using all these resources to understand an event like the deadly act of gun violence that occurred at UCLA on June 1st, 2016?

The glocal netizen orchestrates the formation of their constructed realities

At the individual level, people are free now more than ever to control their social networks by shrinking, expanding, adding, or erasing them completely. Access to a wide array of individuals to whom they can connect at any time, without space or time constraints, has produced a new kind of social citizen in the 21st century. Raine and Wellman (2013) label such a person a *networked individual*. They live in a way unlike anything their ancestors had in the past:

Many meet their social, emotional, and economic needs by tapping into sparsely knit networks of diverse associates rather than relying on tight connections to a relatively

small number of core associates . . . networked individuals have partial membership in multiple networks and rely less on permanent memberships in settled groups. . . a key reason why these kinds of networks function effectively is that social networks are large and diversified thanks to the way people use technology . . . the new media is the new neighborhood. (pp. 12-13)

In other words, the networked individual is no longer constrained to the terms and norms of their local communities. The emergence of the Triple Revolution made this individualistic landscape possible. In fact, according to Raine and Wellman (2013), “Unlike a village, where everyone knows (almost) everything about everyone else, modern people live segmented lives in which they cycle among different social networks. They handle things by a combination of compartmentalizing their relationships and overlapping their networks” (p. 36). In a world where living in an insular community was useful for survival, people can now rely on others around the world for both their immediate and long-term needs. But as people expand their social networks on social media, how does this effect their interactions with mass mediums such as the news media and other information sources?

A new glocal interpretive process: news and information

Users of social media often spend hours a day glancing and staring at a screen. Unlimited information is at their fingertips. When deciding how they think or feel about something, they can tap into their vast networks to get new and up-to-date information. Raine and Wellman (2013) describe how networked individuals “compare options when they are making decisions, locate new experts to consult, and get second, third, and fourth opinions when they are assessing the advice they are given” (p. 14). If for example they see a breaking news story online such as an act of deadly violence overseas, they can engage sources such as various mass media

platforms, and local and international social networks, both in-person and digital, to begin to make sense of the occurrence.

One of my students recently told me about how her overseas friends communicated with her in real time as the events of the June 1st, 2016 shooting unfolded on campus. She said that they used multiple sources such as Facebook posts, information from local and national breaking news headlines, and computer-mediated group chats with friends and family members to triangulate sources and get a better grasp of what was happening during the lockdown at UCLA. Taking a step back and objectifying the process, it is easy to see how truly remarkable it is and unlike anything we have seen before in the history of human society.

The networked individual suddenly has a lot more sources to use when trying to garner information about people, places, and events. Consequently, the problem is no longer about getting information, but about knowing which sources to trust and how to weigh the value of various sources. With such a large amount of accessible information, contradictory or even fake stories can enter the global discourse both unadulterated and unfiltered. The rise of so-called *fake news* during the 2016 presidential elections is a keen example of such processes.

In fact, fake information in the wrong hands can even become deadly. Misinformed or confused citizens can take actions that result in dire consequences. According to CBS/AP News (2016), on Sunday, December 4th, “A man who said he was investigating a conspiracy theory about Hillary Clinton running a child sex ring out of a pizza place fired an assault rifle inside the Washington, D.C., restaurant on Sunday” (para. 1). It is remarkable to think that gun violence can result from someone carelessly posting false news headlines online. Information in this case is more than a matter of perception but has become as serious as a life or death situation.

What checks and balances then can people utilize in our information-latent digital world

to get a more accurate picture of what may be happening elsewhere? Raine and Wellman (2013) describe a process that many people undergo as they try to construct a more accurate picture of the world:

It turns out that the increasing amount of information pouring into people's lives leads them to turn to their social networks to make sense of it . . . they cycle back and forth between internet searches and discussion with the members of their social networks, using in-person conversations, phone chats, and emails to exchange opinions and weigh options. In short, as the internet and mobile phones proliferate, people behave even more as networked individuals. (p. 18)

The authors argue that greater information sharing among digital networks leads to more collaboration among users and aids in deciphering the situation at hand. I agree with this notion as I have recently noticed the frequency with which students at UCLA habitually check their phones throughout class time, in campus coffee shops, in the gym, or while walking down Bruin Walk¹⁶ trying to dodge underclassman eagerly handing out event flyers. People nowadays seem to reach into their pockets to grab their phones as a sort of tick or habit whenever there is a down moment. I wonder to what extent students use their Smart Phones due to new social norms at universities, or to better assimilate within the digitally-obsessed society we now live in.

Digital networks document and define our lives

In my opinion, few netizens in the world are more obsessed with building and maintaining their online presence and information sharing processes in their daily lives as Los

¹⁶ This is the main thoroughfare that divides the campus into its North (humanities, social sciences, etc.) and South (engineering, medicine, psychics, etc.) sections.

Angelinos. It is just a matter of seconds or minutes before finding someone in the home of Hollywood (i.e., Tinsel town) documenting on social media the cool new cupcake machine they found on the side of the road or showing their arrival at the latest club on their feeds. In fact, the prevalence of people in LA taking selfies or performing in public places for apps such as Snapchat has caused certain businesses or busy thoroughfares to post signs prohibiting such actions (fines can be issued for non-compliance).

I have seen more than one person almost get run over after stopping in the middle of the road to get the “perfect shot.” The love of being watched locally and from afar seems almost habitual now. It is almost as if people here have two lives: their physical self and their online persona. It is hard to ignore the fact that more and more people are keeping a digital diary of themselves (either consciously or subconsciously). In fact, businesses are training employees to be more cognizant of what they post online while schools are working hard to protect minors from harm caused by online information sharing. The saying goes that once something is posted online it becomes permanent. “Deleting” or “erasing” information are just euphemisms for making it harder to access. It never really disappears.

International students at UCLA will notice the relationship between students and their phone almost immediately regardless of where they are from. It will either perpetuate their existing habits from back home or normalize a new international student’s behaviors that deviate from the new norm. Constant information-sharing and documenting one’s life in and around UCLA makes the smallest secret difficult to contain. It makes it impossible to muzzle news and social media coverage of a public shooting.

The way in which we share digital information allows us to consistently create, develop, and maintain new networks. For example, the use of hashtags (#) on social media sites has

allowed us to categorize our activities on platforms such as Twitter. We can now connect with others with just a few symbols who have similar interests to us or are nearby. Using the #LAFun tagline, for example, immediately categorizes one's picture into a public photo diary of other people doing similar "touristy stuff" nearby in L.A (or in some cases are used by others elsewhere to confuse or troll the feeds purely for their own entertainment). The hashtag has even become an important part of social movements to create stricter guns laws in the United States (i.e., #NeverAgain and #Enough).

Our online digital footprints are used more than just for mere documentation. They help us make sense of our experiences by comparing what we think and feel with others. They become an axis point of understanding and interpretation. For example, every spring students who applied to UCLA learn whether or not they were admitted as new students. Euphoric college-bound students with news of acceptance post videos, images, and words of celebration online each year. They share these experiences with their various digital networks around the world, and subsequently, quickly expand any future networks with others who have and are taking part in a similar experience. They are now a part of a bigger Bruin digital family. Snow (2017) documented this happening during the 2017 release of acceptance letters for new students to UCLA:

Screams, emoji and tears of joy echoed across the internet Friday, as thousands of high school seniors learned they were admitted to UCLA's class of 2021 this fall. The overabundance of ALLCAPS was understandable, given that they were among more than 102,000 high school seniors who applied for admission to UCLA for fall 2017 — the largest applicant pool in the nation. Students took to social media to share their reactions, using the hashtag #UCLAbound. (Para. 1)

Making sense of one's emotions like joy, pain, sadness, and happiness have indeed become a glocal process. Digital technology aided by the access of cellular technology around the world has not only given people a global digital footprint but enter them into dialectical processes through which to understand them.

For the international students who began UCLA in 2018, their digital lives will only increase as their glocal networks continue to grow and expand. Raine and Wellman (2013) describe the complex communicative web that people such as today's college students experience in their daily lives:

Maya— like many young adults— is hyperconnected, using many media for (almost) continuous communication presence. They— and their friends— choose the medium that is most suitable for their relationship with the other person, their social context (work, at home, the street), and the nature of the message— it's less confrontational but tacky to break up by email or texting, for example. Often, a conversation started with one medium will switch to another, as when Maya's conversation with Kate moves among email, Facebook posts, and texting on IM. For better or worse, mobile hyperconnectivity means that people never walk— or sit— alone. (p. 112)

Indeed, the thought of being even temporarily disconnected from access to networks near and far can even make people anxious. When I worked as a Resident Assistant (RA) in the Rodin Hall dormitory at The University of Pennsylvania, where some of my responsibilities included monitoring the mental and emotional health of the thirty-two Ivy League undergraduates living in my hall, it was a common occurrence for them to walk right past me in the hallway while glued to their Smart Phones. Some of them told me that they regularly fall asleep in bed while scrolling through their respective apps.

Castells (as cited in Raine & Wellman, 2013) concisely captures the sentiments of this section by explaining modern digital connectivity:

We now have a wireless skin overlaid on the practices of our lives, so that we are in ourselves and in our networks at the same time. We never quit the networks, and the networks never quit us; this is the real coming of age of the networked society. ... people can now build their own information systems. (Kindle Location 2563)

Out of curiosity, I recently asked my students how many of them keep their phones active at night (e.g., not turning them off). Every student in the room seemed confused as to why I would even ask such a question. “Of course, we do” one student replied. They explained to me how it has become their alarm clock, news feed, reminder checker, emergency contact source, social networking platform, etc. The digital life, it seems, is now the only normal way to live.

As I wrap up the sections on mass media and social media, it is important to consider one more important piece to the puzzle of configuring how people in today’s globalized world gather information and make sense of their lived realities. It reverts to the original and most interactive process of all – namely that of face-to-face intercultural communication. In our globalized world, international students throughout their educational experiences engage in these diverse interactions as they talk to various members of their local home communities, interact with an array of people on their respective college campuses, and so on. It seems fitting to look critically at how proximal interaction in our modern world is drastically changing now from how it was in the past. An examination of diversifying intercultural communicative contexts in our globalized world of the 21st century is the focus of the next section.

A face-to-face intercultural communication approach

I will begin this section by briefly defining and explaining the importance of *face-to-face communication*, a major component of interpersonal communication. I argue that it remains an essential fixture of daily communication in our modern world despite a recent surge of technological advances made possible by the Triple Revolution and the emergence of the networked individual. Next, I will place special emphasis on the *intercultural communication* aspect and how this reality diversifies the ways in which people see the world around them.

Even though intercultural communication occurs in the digital lives of networked individuals as well as in the international applicant's home country, due to time and resource constraints in this study, I will place special emphasis on the diverse and data rich face-to-face encounters that students will experience at UCLA. I will conclude my methodological framework by examining how international students build off prior understandings of campus safety and the act of deadly gun violence that occurred on June 1st, 2016 at UCLA from a variety of sources and are experiencing new ways to view their environment through the lens of local multicultural face-to-face interactions.

Using Pieterse's (2015) *cultural hybridity* model, I will describe how these new social happenings in the United States may be challenging neoliberalism's dominant Western hegemonic influence (e.g., providing an alternative to the banking model of education). I explain this as a process of cultural fusion that allows knowledge formations to be influenced by local conversations with people from around the globe. An examination of intercultural communication will be explored in these terms.

I will then use a *repertoire approach* to intercultural communication to explain the way in which we can break down complex social interactions into understandable caches of

nonverbal and verbal communicative elements (i.e., one's *communicative repertoires*) (Rymes, 2014). Finally, I will discuss how Rymes' (2014) *diversity principle* challenges us to consider the innumerable ways that intercultural interactions allow people to interpret, understand, and co-design their communicative repertoires – a major influence through which we build the perceptions of our local environments and of those within them.

The need for face-to-face interactions continues

As the international applicants in my study become international students, they make the long-awaited trip to UCLA to become Bruins. Overall perceptions of campus safety and the specific views about the act of deadly gun violence that occurred at UCLA on June 1st, 2016 now collide with a new reality in Westwood. As I mentioned earlier, face-to-face interactions prior to moving to California were of course a part of how international applicants formed perceptions in their home countries about the United States. Since campus safety and perceptions of UCLA is at the center of my study, and my participants will enter an environment where they will meet others with their own thoughts and opinions on the shooting, I choose to focus on these particular face-to-face intercultural interactions.

When examining face-to-face communications in general, Adler & Rodman (1985) mention how “written messages, like books and letters, do not require face-to-face interaction; neither do mass media messages delivered by radio, television or film” (p. 5). Regardless of how much an international applicant may or may not have felt they successfully deciphered from abroad what life will be like when they come to UCLA, they will soon have direct exposure to a place that for some will fill them with a sense of euphoria and sensory overload as they visit their new home for the first time. Aside from the new sights, sounds, and smells, I think the

communities of people they meet and their opinions about campus safety will both be heard by international students and will vastly impact their perceptions of their new lives abroad.

Even in the age of the networked individual, face-to-face interactions remain a primary mode of communication and means through which we make sense of the world. According to Barker (1984), a main component of interpersonal communication can be thought of in the following way:

[It] can occur in any environment . . . most interpersonal messages are informal, however, stemming from every day, face-to-face encounters. Think of your own communication. Form your first “Good morning” to your last “see you tomorrow,” your interpersonal communication is usually spontaneous, unplanned, and loosely organized, probably even ungrammatical . . . most of this communication involves people close enough to see and touch” (p. 130).

The study at hand looks at the collision between mass media influences, the individual’s life on social media, and the diverse set of face-to-face interactions that they encounter. And as these new international students at UCLA sort through the myriads of information they are receiving from these sources, they will ultimately determine for themselves what all of this means.

However, a tension exists as to where and how to tap into these domains of information. It is not uncommon to witness a clash between digital networks and face-to-face communication on a regular basis. For example, have you ever experienced the frustration of talking with someone face-to-face as they become preoccupied with their far away digital networks via their Smart Phones? How did you respond? Did you confront them about their apparent lack of attention or mental disconnect from your conversation, or simply ignore this new social taboo? It is common for a phone to buzz, beep, and ring while physical encounters are taking place. In

fact, some college professors have gotten so frustrated with keeping their students' attentions in class during the age of the Smart Phone that more and more of them are implementing "no-technology" policies in their classrooms.

Nevertheless, according to Kiesler and Cummings (as cited in Raine and Wellman, 2013), even in the world of a networked individual, a permanent need for face-to-face interactions remains in locations such as the workplace:

As much as people depend on ICTs to communicate, networked organizations must have some in-person contact. That is the way they get a more multidimensional range of information about one another— how they look, talk, and smell; what the office gossip is, especially regarding their own standing within the firm and who is working on what.

With such bonding, workers get tacit knowledge: the unwritten lore of organizational memories and know-how. As one entrepreneur told NetLab's Transnational Entrepreneurs project that "successful collaboration is a full-contact sport." In-person contact is crucial for adding a human touch to glocalized networks. (pp. 190-91)

As people gather as much information as they can to develop judgements about an event or occurrence at work for example, some of the richest data comes from the face-to-face interactions that they engaged in. Overlooking basic face-to-face interactions would indeed make a study on perception-building incomplete.

Reading a person's body-language (gestures, mannerisms, etc.), seeing how they dress, shake hands or bow, begin and end conversations, smell, or just the collective aura they give off impacts how we interpret others' words and the degree to which we take what they say seriously. It helps us consider the ways in which international students at UCLA might judge the credibility of another student's thoughts on campus safety, or it might even impact whether they engage in a

conversation with someone in the first place. The impact of face-to-face human interaction can never be underestimated for it plays a major role in how we perceive the world around us.

Face-to-face interactions at UCLA lead to a greater hybridity of thought

When international students arrive in Los Angeles, they experience a new, abundant, and diverse collection of happenings that they otherwise would not have had prior to arriving in LA. Whether they come from a more homogenous local environment, such as an eastern or southern Asian country, or from a western global metropolis like Paris, new interactions will abound at UCLA. UCLA is indeed a global university in a global city. If you look hard enough, you can meet someone from one of the nearly 200 countries that exist on our planet.

Previously, we talked about the importance of culture in human interaction and the interconnected relationship between culture, community, and communication (Dewy, 1916), and how face-to-face communication is the oldest existing form of these human interactions. As UCLA students begin their new lives in Westwood, they bring with them an assortment of cultural experiences and communicate with one another through these subjective lenses to form new communities of thought. As cultures and ideas collide on campus and in the surrounding communities, how can we better understand the effect resulting from these interactions?

When considering the impact of globalization at UCLA, there are several theories that researchers use to describe the vast array of interactional effects of culture in such contexts. Pieterse (2015) describes three of these models in the following statement while arguing that one best explains the relationship between culture and society in our modern age:

Each paradigm represents a different politics of multiculturalism. **Cultural**

differentialism translates into a policy of closure and apartheid. If outsiders are let in at all, they are preferably kept at arm's length in ghettos, reservations, or concentration zones. Cultural communities are best kept separate, as in colonial "plural society" in which communities are not supposed to mix except in the marketplace, or as in gated communities that keep themselves apart. **Cultural convergence** translates into a politics of assimilation with the dominant group as the cultural center of gravity. **Cultural mixing** refers to a politics of integration without the need to give up cultural identity while cohabitation is expected to yield new cross-cultural patterns of difference. (p. 60, my emphasis)

I will explore these “new cross-cultural patterns of difference” in my study using the model of cultural mixing or hybridity. I want to understand how international applicants as networked individuals formed their ideas of campus safety at UCLA from abroad and now how these perceptions collide with other cultures and preconceptions formed elsewhere. Simply put, how do these “new cross-cultural patterns of difference” converge at UCLA and alter international students’ perceptions of campus safety?

As neoliberalism has made the means of technological commodification possible, and in turn allowed Western thought to dominant the global landscape, a different understanding of the effects of globalization is also emerging, which opens the door for greater heterogeneity of ideological thought. Pieterse (2015) explains this concept in the following way:

Most globalization literature took shape during the 1980-2000 phase of globalization when neoliberalism and American hegemony were the overriding trends. So, keynotes of globalization literature have been critiques of neoliberalism and of structural adjustment policies that Washington institutions prescribed for developing countries, with critiques

of American hegemony. During the past two decades, these features have gradually weakened. Neoliberalism and hegemony have not left the stage, of course, but they are past and face mounting problems. A new phase of globalization has begun in which emerging societies play a greater role. (“preface to the second edition,” ix)

Many of the participants in my study come from these “emerging societies.” It is interesting to consider what impact they have on other developing and existing hegemonies.

The tension between the effects of neoliberalism and the emergence of cultural hybridity from places which previously had limited impact on global ways of thinking will now serve as the basis for our discussion on intercultural communication. Geertz’s (1973) thoughts on *culture* can now be understood not only as a local happening, but as a glocal as well:

The concept of culture I espouse . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

As international students arrive in their new home at UCLA, the new “webs of significance” they form for themselves becomes a major component in their knowledge constructions – including those of local campus safety and deadly gun violence. Next, I will define and explore the concept of intercultural communication and related concepts to wrap up the methodological framework section of this research study.

What is *intercultural communication*?

Globalization has diversified face-to-face interactions on an unprecedented scale. Just a few decades ago, people that would most likely never have come into direct contact with one

another now often find themselves into close physical proximity to one another (i.e., international airports, sporting events, coffee shops in L.A., etc.). But how can we clarify our understanding of intercultural communicative interactions to make it researchable? Scollon, Scollon, & Jones (2012) proposes the following solution to a complex problem:

All communication is to some degree intercultural . . . the biggest problem with the word culture is that nobody seems to know exactly what it means, or rather, that it means very different things to different people . . . it is best, then, to think of culture not as one thing or another, not as a *thing* at all, but rather as a *heuristic*. A *heuristic* is a “tool for thinking.” . . . we should not focus so much on the people and try to figure out something about them based on the “culture” they belong to. Rather we should focus on what they are *doing* and try to understand what kinds of tools they have at their disposal to do it.

(pp. 2-3, 5)

Pieterse’s model of cultural mixing is indeed a heuristic one. It is best then for me to focus on the actions or trains of thought of my participants that are culturally manifesting. Indeed, I agree it is better to focus on what individuals are doing rather than on trying to make incomplete and overgeneralized inferences about a people identity (such as what “country” you are from, as is reflected in much of HE literature on international students).

One common misconception that I notice people make about culture is that they often develop tunnel vision about one’s identity in these regards. This is problematic for a variety of reasons. Basing your understanding of a person based on what it means to be “Indian” or “Chinese,” for example, constrains and stifles a person’s identity and limits them to overgeneralizations and oversimplification. How then can we understand the influence of

international students studying in L.A. to the degree that internationality impacts their understanding of campus safety at UCLA?

A Repertoire Approach

One model for analyzing a person's actions within these intercultural contexts seems most fitting for a study that looks at how local and global factors influence a person's perceptions about people, places, or events in the world. Stemming from Pieterse's hybridity model, Rymes (2014) lays out a fitting analysis for examining these communicative interactions:

The term *communicative repertoire* is now used to refer to the collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication (gestures, dress, posture, accessories) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate (Rymes, 2010). One's repertoire can include multiple languages, dialects, & registers, in the institutionally defined sense, but also gesture, dress, posture, and even knowledge of communicative routines, familiarity with types of food or drink, and mass media references including phrases, dance moves, and recognizable intonation patterns that circulate via actors, musicians, and other superstars (Rymes, 2012). So, an individual's repertoire can be seen as something like an accumulation of archeological layers. As one moves through life, one accumulates an abundance of experiences and images, and one also selects from those experiences, choosing elements from a repertoire that seem to communicate in the moment. (p. 4)

As a researcher, exploring my participants' communicative repertoires at UCLA allows me to best explore these data rich interactions. When I conduct the in-depth interviews and lead the focus groups, I need to pay close attention to the vast amounts of often-overlooked information

that they are sharing with me and others in the room about the ways they interact with and construct their views of the world.

Observing *how* my international student participants describe what they think and feel about the UCLA campus shooting and overall perceptions of safety in America can be unmistakably informative. Rymes leaves us with one final idea to consider as we examine the impact that diverse perspectives can have on how we see the world around us.

Diversity principle

This study aims at examining the complex interplay of information interchanging between people in proximity to one another as well as those from afar while making sense of their educational experiences at UCLA. Rymes (2014), applying Pieterse's idea of cultural hybridity in the context of the 21st century, develops a principle of interaction that I expect to see taking place during my study at UCLA:

While some communication theorists have speculated that globalization and mass media lead to homogenization of cultural elements, it turns out quite the contrary has occurred. Massive circulation of language and messages has not led to homogenization of language and communication, but to a massive diversification. This tendency can be stated as follows (Rymes, 2012): **The Diversity Principle:** *The more widely circulated a communicative element is, the more highly diverse the interactions with it will be.* (p. 11)

The “massive diversification” of language and communication naturally leads to an infinite amount of information processes and ways of interpreting the world. I agree that the same process is ongoing as my international student participants think, feel, and decide what campus safety is really like at UCLA. What then will they share with people back at home when asked

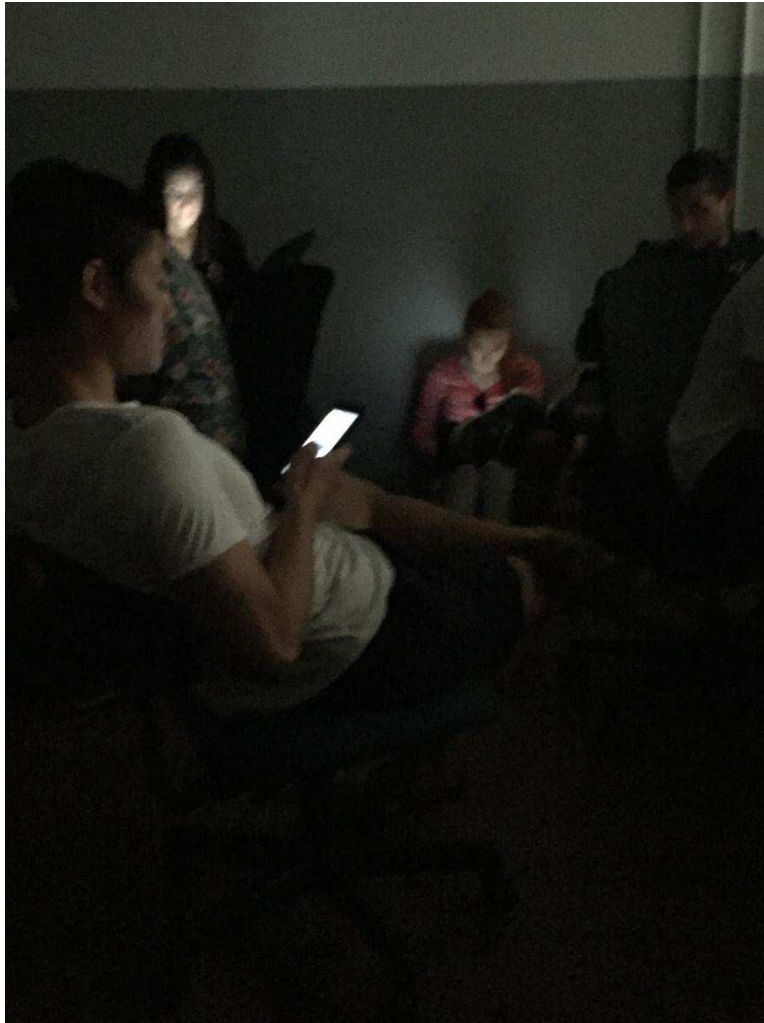
whether or not they feel safe on campus? Would they recommend others to come study here? How is the diverse communicative landscape or exposure to various communicative repertoires challenging their views about their new lives as UCLA students living in Los Angeles?

Interplay of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions

In prior sections, I examined the impact that mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions can have on people's understandings of the world around them. Even though I separately explained each means of communication, it is important to remember that their complex interplay and the overall aggregate effect of these lenses provides various information sources necessary to socially-construct and individually interpret (hopefully in a critical manner) the greater world.

The human mind is ultimately the information nexus point through which one's subjective reality is created, developed, and understood. During the active shooter situation at UCLA, my students sitting on the cold hard floor co-constructed their perceptions of what was happening by sharing the information they found (see Figure 13). It ranged from sources including news media outlets transmitting on their phones, chats on their computers, audible phone conversations with loved ones, and digital Bruin alerts sent out to the university. Almost instinctually and effortlessly, they gathered every source of information that they could find to make sense of the unfolding events. Even though the events of June 1st, 2016 have passed, they continue to partake in the same socially-constructed multi-medium communicative means in which they can understand the world and those within it.

Figure 13. UCLA students during the campus-lockdown.¹⁷



(Gelzhiser, 2016)

From the computer lab room where the students and I found ourselves that morning, bits of information and local perceptions were being shared by people from around the global community. Interactively, people attempted to fill in gaps for one another as perceptions became either reinforced or challenged as new information or opinions rolled in. Once the lockdown was lifted, the process continued as next year's applicants considered how this event might or might

¹⁷ Faces are blurred to preserve anonymity.

not impact their willingness to come to UCLA and their perceptions of feeling safe on campus and in the surrounding community. Future triggers such as a new act of violence, a random overheard conversation about campus safety, annual memorial services to remember the tragic events of that day, etc. makes what happened on June 1st, 2016 an ever-present part of the campus psyche and how it understands its community members and the environment in which they live.

Now it is time to discover and investigate what some of these perceptions actually are among international students at UCLA. After briefly talking about how future technologies hope to intensify the glocalization process even further, I will enter into the methodological design and results section of my dissertation.

In 10 years . . . Facebook's augmented reality

During the 2017 F8 conference, Mark Zuckerberg (2017), a chairman, chief executive officer, and co-founder of Facebook introduced several highly secretive projects that his company is working to fully implement within the next 10 years. Theoretically speaking, his speech illustrates a clear duality between neoliberal globalization's commodifying effects on technology and expansion of western ideologies with Pieterse's cultural hybridity model. For example, one recently introduced concept, *augmented reality*, intends to use current technologies like mobile devices, and futuristic ones like digital contact lenses to accomplish the following:

When we talk about augmented reality, there are three important use cases that we think about: the ability to display information, like directions, or messages and notifications; the ability to add digital objects, like the chessboard or the TV screen I was talking about; and the ability to enhance existing objects, like your home or your face. ("Facebook CEO

Mark Zuckerberg's Keynote at F8 2017 Conference (Full Transcript) | The Singju Post,"
n.d.)

Zuckerberg is describing here how people can use technology to add digital information and objects to the world around them (and interact with them as if they are physical). Don't have a chessboard? That's OK. Just add a digital one in front of you. If you don't like your face, then alter it digitally without the need for plastic surgery. Then whoever has access to these technologies will see you via their digital lenses or screens the way you want to be seen. I understand it as neoliberalism's technological commodification and Western culture's push to conform to one way of doing things meets hybrid and limitless ways to interact with others on this platform.

Furthermore, by combining virtual reality with augmented reality, Zuckerberg (as cited in Hedger, 2017) describes further possibilities:

This virtual reality experience is going to give you a taste of what it's like to have this real sense of presence with your friends, no matter where they are in the world, and to start interacting with all kinds of digital objects on the road to fully augmented reality (para. 4).

If these technological proposals pan out, then the way we co-construct the world around us will never be the same. And if that is not remarkable enough, what if we did not even need devices to use these technologies in the first place? What if our brains directly, and uninhibitedly, could construct augmented realities with others' input? According to Zuckerberg (2017), one day we can do the following:

And you're also going to hear from Regina Dugan about some of the work that we're doing in building even further out beyond augmented reality, and that includes work

around direct brain interfaces that are going to eventually one day let you communicate using only your mind. (“Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s Keynote at F8 2017 Conference (Full Transcript) | The Singju Post,” n.d.)

Dugan (Inverse, 2017) later describes at the F8 conference how our mouths’ abilities to produce words are too slow for what our minds want to share. In other words, it is proposed that our brains think faster than our ability to speak so the latter needs a new pipeline through which we can communicate more quickly and directly with others. I wonder if they will also design a pop-up blocker for our minds as well. And if you thought my methodological framework of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural communication was complicated in explaining how people socially construct their social realities, one can only imagine how much more complicated this might become with these new additions.

The reason for the shooter to shoot someone matters. If its someone random shooting people, then I worry. If its personal, then it's not that bad.

- Female participant from India

Methodological design

The following section will outline the methodological design that I use to form the narratives and themes on how UCLA's international populations make sense of campus safety, and more specifically, the act of deadly gun violence that occurred on UCLA's campus on June 1st, 2016.

Criterion for participation in the study required that respondents were in their 1st year at UCLA as either undergraduate, or graduate international students on an F-1 Visa.¹⁸ The participants were also never a UCLA student before the 2017-18 academic year and were not on campus on the day of the shooting. The countries of India and China were selected to focus the efforts of this study since they represent the largest international student populations on campus as well as within the overall global population (see Figures 14 & 15).

¹⁸ According to the U.S. Dept. of State website, to be an international student in America "you must have a student visa to study . . . your course of study and the type of school you plan to attend determine whether you need an F-1 visa or an M-1 visa" ("Student Visa," n.d.).

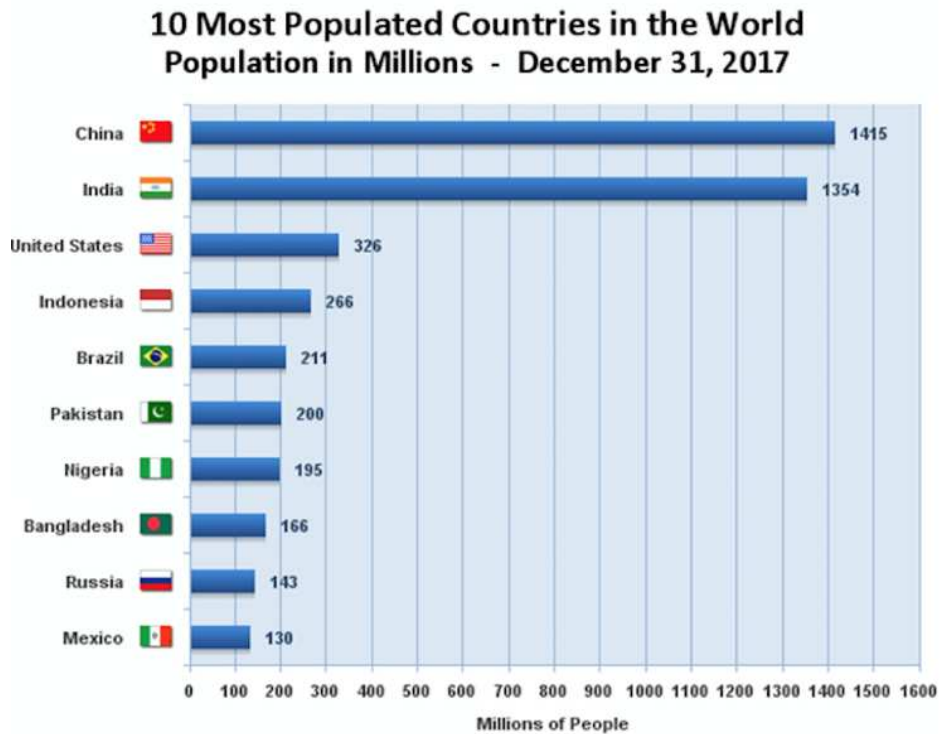
Figure 14. UCLA international student percentages.

**Table 2-5: Historical Enrollment of Graduate Division
International Students by Region & Country: Fall 2001-Fall 2010**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	
Africa											Africa Other: Algeria, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe
Botswana	-	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
Egypt	13	12	7	9	14	16	15	17	15	9	
Ghana	2	3	3	1	-	-	-	1	2	2	
Kenya	3	2	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	2	
South Africa	2	1	2	3	2	4	6	5	4	4	
Other	22	12	11	9	11	8	8	8	4	4	
Subtotal	42	30	27	27	31	33	34	35	30	23	
Asia											Asia Other: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Macao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Vietnam
China, People's Republic	380	392	393	347	338	327	344	371	430	514	
India	120	126	121	123	104	127	116	126	144	204	
Japan	93	89	92	86	80	79	82	77	62	50	
Korea, Republic of	190	202	223	210	206	213	214	227	223	200	
Taiwan	160	156	166	163	157	162	161	156	161	176	
Other	104	110	113	94	93	97	102	97	96	106	
Subtotal	1,047	1,075	1,108	1,023	978	1,005	1,019	1,054	1,116	1,250	
Europe											Europe Other: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Byelarus, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine
France	29	25	24	24	19	24	25	21	23	26	
Germany	27	30	30	28	19	21	22	22	23	15	
Italy	39	40	37	28	22	16	24	19	28	22	
Turkey	36	37	35	33	24	24	30	33	36	35	
United Kingdom	32	34	34	32	25	24	19	29	25	19	
Other	171	186	180	156	127	113	94	92	79	81	
Subtotal	334	352	340	301	236	222	214	216	214	198	
Middle East											Middle East Other: Iraq, Jordan, Oman, United Arab Emirates
Kuwait	2	1	2	-	-	1	1	2	4	4	
Iran	31	31	35	31	33	29	30	30	35	31	
Israel	19	12	14	18	12	20	19	21	25	21	
Lebanon	5	5	2	2	3	4	5	6	5	6	
Saudi Arabia	3	2	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	3	
Other	4	4	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	-	
Subtotal	64	65	58	55	52	56	57	61	72	65	
North America											
Canada	62	53	56	53	53	46	51	56	72	76	
Mexico	36	34	35	30	24	32	44	45	45	46	
Subtotal	98	87	91	83	77	78	95	101	117	122	
Central America/Caribbean	9	7	5	4	2	3	4	3	3	2	Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos Islands
South America											South America Other: Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay
Argentina	25	29	25	14	10	11	15	13	9	12	
Brazil	32	33	28	22	21	22	23	18	22	28	
Chile	21	22	18	18	17	17	16	14	15	17	
Colombia	7	4	7	8	9	6	10	11	8	9	
Venezuela	6	3	-	-	-	1	1	2	5	5	
Other	15	16	19	18	16	20	19	15	13	7	
Subtotal	106	107	97	80	73	77	84	73	72	78	
Oceania											Oceania Other: French Polynesia
Australia	8	11	6	4	3	3	6	7	8	6	
New Zealand	2	3	7	6	4	4	6	5	3	3	
Other	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	-	
Subtotal	10	14	13	10	8	7	13	13	11	9	
TOTAL	1,710	1,727	1,739	1,583	1,457	1,481	1,520	1,556	1,635	1,747	

(UCLA Graduate Programs, 2011 p.16)

Figure 15. Global population breakdown.



(Argaez, 2018)

Recruitment methods included sending IRB-approved information to as many international students on campus as possible via platforms such as the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and International Student Leadership Association (ISLC) LISTSERV's. Social media was also utilized by posting the same IRB-approved information to platforms such as Facebook within groups such as the UCLA Transfer Student Community. Over 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA were contacted during this process. The goal was to find as wide an array and randomly selected group of students for this study as possible who met the previously mentioned research study criterion.

Two focus groups were held that consisted of one group of students from India and one from China. Two in-depth interviews were also held with two students from each country. The

goal of this qualitative research approach was to triangulate the data collected and look for commonalities/patterns that emerged among the research participants. Upon completion of the described research methods, a sense of “saturation,” or exhaustiveness of the data was reached, and it was considered unnecessary to gather more data.

The design utilizes a phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing and focus groups to better understand the international students’ lived experiences regarding campus safety throughout their education experiences. According to Seidman (2013), the phenomenological in-depth interview approach includes, “primarily, but not exclusively, open-ended questions . . . to build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p.14). The focus groups and in-depth interviews examined the participant’s past, how they understood campus safety at UCLA leading up to studying as an international student at UCLA, aspects of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural communications as well as the students’ current lived experiences at UCLA. The student’s future thoughts on how their information sources and interpretations about campus safety at UCLA might develop over time were also considered. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. After each transcript was completed, I overlaid it with my own interview notes and produced the following results. Informal conversations with students before and after the in-depth interviews and focus groups yield additional information that was used for analysis.

Participant introductions: Indian & Chinese students

For the participants from India and China, the goal of the second leg of recruitment was to have participants come from as many regions within their respective home countries as

possible (and thus provide greater insight and points of view within my results sections).

Additionally, students were intentionally selected from a wide-range of academic majors and degrees of study as possible. They come from a variety of physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities programs. The distribution was around 60% female and 40% male.

To protect the identities of the participants, their actual program of study was replaced with their level of degree program. Since many programs at UCLA are very small (some with fewer than 10 students), the participants' identities were at risk if their home town, year, and degree were made available. Therefore, they were omitted. Additional confidentiality measures were used, such as using pseudonyms for the in-depth interview participants.

The following two maps, and lists of UCLA international students from India and China demonstrate the wide-ranging geographic distributions of the participants as well as provide us broader contextual information for the study (see Figures 16 & 17; Tables 1 & 2):

Figure 16. “Home” of participants from India.



Table 1. Biographical information of UCLA Indian international students.

Age	Year at UCLA	Degree Level	Hometown	Location before UCLA
22	1st	Masters	Muzaffarnagar	New Delhi
22	1st	Masters	Pune	Pune
22	1st	Masters	Bengaluru	Bengaluru
22	1st	Masters	Ludhiana	New Delhi
23	1st	Masters	New Delhi	New Delhi
23	1st	Masters	Bangalore	Bangalore
23	1st	Masters	New Delhi	New Delhi
25	1st	Masters	Mumbai	Mumbai

Figure 17. “Home” of participants from China.



Table 2. Biographical information of UCLA Chinese international students.

Age	Year at UCLA	Degree Level	Hometown	Location before UCLA
22	1st	PhD	Changsha	Beijing
23	1st	Masters	Shengzhen	Hong Kong
22	1st	Masters	Harbin	Harbin
24	1st	Masters	Fuzhou	Liverpool, UK
22	1st	Masters	Beijing	Nanjing
22	1st	Masters	Nanjing	Atlanta, GA, U.S.A.
23	1st	Masters	Jiangmen	Jiangmen

Deadly Gun Violence on American Colleges Campuses:

Critical perspectives of UCLA international students

In-depth interviews

I interviewed four international students who come from Indian and China, respectively. They were chosen from different geographical regions of their countries to see how their experiences of knowledge building diverge and converge prior to and throughout their educational experiences. I wanted to see how their prior experiences in their respective areas inform their current understandings of campus safety at UCLA, and how this might affect what they say to others in the future about their experiences on campus. Aside from the obvious geographic distribution, it is my hope that including countries and regions with different political and economic climates can provide the study with as much contrast as possible. The following in-depth interviews produced thought-provoking accounts of the educational experiences of these international students from India and China currently studying at UCLA.

“Karen”

Karen is a 22-year old 1st-year female graduate student at UCLA studying within the Social Sciences. Prior to becoming an international student on campus, she was born and raised in Changsha, China. She has no sibling(s) due to China’s one child policy that began back in 1979 and was only recently repealed. Karen has no problem being the only child, and actually thinks she is happier because of it. It allows her to “receive more attention from her family.”

After finishing high school, she moved away from home for the first time in her life and began her undergraduate studies in Beijing. She attended the prestigious Peking University

where she did not notice too many day-to-day life changes from her previous life in southern Hunan province. She felt that this move away from her family and to another part of China was important to “help her grow-up more quickly.”

Not surprisingly then, graduating from Peking University was the “great milestone” of her life thus far. It was something that she did on her own away from the comforts of home. This positive experience boosted her confidence and motivated her to make another, farther away, move from home. This time, however, her educational journey would take her somewhere overseas, she thought. “Naturally,” she said, “I would go to either Britain or America.”

She feels that it is important for her to “see a world outside of China . . . (experience) a cultural background and taste of American-style.” She felt coming to UCLA would be fun, a new adventure, and although “not Harvard or MIT,” allow her to study at a school with a great reputation, provide systematic training in her areas of interest, and one that would provide greater social mobility than if she had never left China.

However, she had never been to the United States before moving to Los Angeles. In fact, this was her first trip ever anywhere outside of China. Consequently, her parents were very concerned for her safety and when learning of her intentions to study overseas they requested that she “study in Britain because it’s safer than the United States.” She is not sure where they got this idea from. But she reassured them that LA is one of the safest places in America. She later confessed to me that this was indeed a lie, and simply a way to help her parents cope with the idea of applying to, and later attending UCLA. The temptation to begin her new graduate lifestyle at UCLA was pressing, and indeed sounded to her like a perfect fit.

But what made her choose a university in Los Angeles over the myriad of other options all around the country? *La La Land*, featuring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone, is one of her

favorite movies. She first watched this movie while attending university in Beijing, and felt that it painted a “colorful, sunny (e.g., perfect weather), and romantic” image of Los Angeles.

Moreover, her two favorite American TV shows, *Big Bang Theory* and *Modern Family*, were also filmed and situated in California. This gave her a window into a West Coast style American life where the “freedoms and equalities” that she saw on the screen presented the individualistic lifestyle that she was craving. This of course stood in contrast to the group-mentality mindset that she had grown up with and experienced back in China. Naturally, in her mind, she considered what place could be better for a young woman branching out from a more homogenous and hierarchal society than a country like America, a state like California, a city like Los Angeles, and a world-renowned school like UCLA?

Even though she could not access video-streaming and online media services like YouTube, Netflix, and Hulu in China, they can still be accessed illegally online without much effort. Various viewers post them online with Chinese subtitles and they can be viewed almost anywhere. Additionally, Chinese sites that are approved by the government, including Youku and Sohu, allow her other ways to gain a clearer picture of what life might be like living in America.

Social Media sites, Weibo and WeChat, also supported by the Chinese government, provided further information that she could compare and contrast with the illegal sites. In her searches, she often came across news about the U.S. and current events. She filtered searches so that articles related to gossip news about American and British celebrities, and into the secret lives of people in Hollywood, would come up. However, despite her interest in these light topics, she would inadvertently be exposed to articles approved by the Chinese government which discussed concerns of safety, and gun violence in America. She said that “it feels like guns are

not controlled here (in the U.S.) . . . when I applied for graduate school my parents were worried and said many raping's [sic] and shootings happen here." Since she did not have any American friends in China, she and her family relied heavily on the digital world of mass and social medias, respectively. In other words, the Great Firewall, and the information that made it through this wall, mainly painted a picture of America as "being much less safe than China." Isn't it the case that countries "prefer bad news about other countries," she suggested?

At the same time, she felt that "bad things also happen in China too . . . isn't it the same story everywhere?" It was important to her to begin her new experience in LA like a "blank piece of paper" open to new first-hand experiences as to what it is really like living in LA and studying at UCLA.

However, after arriving in the U.S., she experienced her first major concern of safety in the fall of 2017 with the Sepulveda Pass Wildfires. Early one morning (but primetime in China), her parents used WeChat (the most frequently used messenger application in China) to make sure she was safe. She did not yet know about the nearby wildfires, whose evacuation zone later reached to just across the street from UCLA, until her parents across the world alerted her to the growing concern. Upon hearing the news, she told her parents that "she was just fine." Her parents, first read about the event on WeChat with the various "Los Angeles-themed" blogs that they subscribed to on it when their only daughter decided to attend UCLA. Ironically, she says, "My parents usually know more about current news events in Los Angeles than I do."

The June 1st, 2016 murder-suicide that occurred at UCLA is not something she wants to spend time thinking about. However, she believes that the shooting was done by a "crazy person" and this is concerning because "it is safer in China where you don't have guns." In other words, she worries about the accessibility to guns here in the U.S.A. which allows an otherwise

benign situation to quickly get out of control. Why guns are so accessible to the everyday person is a concerning reality.

Moreover, other concerns of safety derive from the fact that she is not a native from LA and lives in a society that she is less familiar with than her home environment. Naturally then, she takes many safety precautions in LA such as avoiding being out late and staying in groups whenever possible. She just always wants to be safe and never put herself into any compromising situations.

When it comes to her thoughts on Americans and guns, she believes that only some “radical people like guns here, but not all Americans . . . I can’t imagine someone in my department actually owning a gun.” At the same time, outside of her small and tight-knit group of friends and colleagues at UCLA, she does not know who might have one. Subsequently, she wishes she were better educated about the differing gun laws in America. She feels this can help her to get a bigger picture about what might be going on around her.

As an international student in America, her friends are mostly Chinese students in her program and who happen to live around her in the college apartments. This group of people from her home country provides her a sense of community and security. And now that she is in America, she can once again use Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram that she has had for years but were blocked in China shortly after she first downloaded them. Nevertheless, her friends still mainly prefer to use WeChat since it provides them a seamless transition with life back in China and her new friends in LA.

Even though she now feels that guns are not as serious a problem as what was portrayed in mass media and social media back in China, she still worries about her safety here in LA at night. In fact, late one night after she first moved here, she was forced to walk home because got

out of school late and the university's shuttle service, the Bruin Bus, had stopped running. On her walk home, she was harassed by a homeless man who screamed at her and which left her quite concerned for her safety when she left campus. Indeed, she feels safe whenever physically on campus, but once she exits its boundaries, she feels more vulnerable. She worries about reliving this traumatic experience each time she leaves campus late after studying. Therefore, as a precaution, she plans her schedule around getting home early, or at least finding herself in a group where she does not have to address any potential concerns alone.

One major shock that she had and still wonders about when she goes to UCLA is how there are no campus walls, or ID check points around the perimeter of campus. At Peking University, "someone checks your ID before you can even step foot on campus," she explains. In fact, she says that there should at least be security checks when entering the library. It is a new experience for her that campuses are open to anyone and anything at any time. Even for universities in China that do not have security, to enter the campuses, they at least have walls surrounding the whole university. This she feels acts as a clear sign that visitors to the campus should have a clear purpose for entering its grounds. In contrast, the UCLA campus' open environment encourages anyone from the street, in her opinion, to enter whenever they want. Despite this however, she tells her parents that "it's quite safe in Westwood" so they do not worry about her – especially since they pay for her to live in university housing.

Another worry is that there do not seem to be many cameras on campus. In Peking University, she notes, "there are cameras everywhere, in classrooms, when entering dormitories, in offices, so that potential crimes can be taped. Also, cameras are all over the streets in Beijing to deter crime and keep those accountable who choose to break the law. The lack of cameras, or presence of cameras, gives her greater anxiety because anything can happen and people who

want to commit crimes might have greater courage and reason to do so since it might be easier to get away with breaking the law here.

She also suggested that a greater police presence on campus with people checking IDs would bring her a greater sense of security, on the one hand, but at the same time, worries that is could also have the opposite effect and cause her more worry with the sight of officers nearby. Overall, she thinks that her concerns about safety and her own few negative experiences are worth the benefits she will get from having a degree from the United States. Her degree helps her grow as a person and can lead to a better life in the future. Contrary to what she learned from the media in China, she now sees that “American diversity” is a great strength. She wants a chance to learn more about what this really means. An education from a well-known place like UCLA, and in a metropolitan and individualistic city like Los Angeles, is worth the price of living in a country that has too much gun violence and a lack of restrictions for the owning or buying of new weapons by the everyday citizen.

“Eve”

Eve is a 24-year old 1st-year female graduate student at UCLA working toward a professional degree. Prior to becoming an international student on campus, she was born and raised in Fuzhou, China where her native language was Mandarin. She also has no sibling(s) due to China’s one child policy. After high school, she went to study in Suzhou and completed the last two years of college overseas at the University of Liverpool, England. Reflecting back on her upbringing in China, she jokingly says that it always had “bad traffic, too many people, and many aggressive drivers.”

In 2016, she graduated from university and decided to take a gap year before beginning her graduate studies. During this time, she entered a program at Columbia University in New York City where she was required to spend six months in Harlem (the northern part of Manhattan Island) and then once again ended up moving back to Europe for the remaining six months in Paris. During school breaks, she traveled and volunteered as a teacher in places such as India and Greece. However, her most unforgettable experience was her trip to Mauritius where she bravely took up surfing.

Just two weeks before arriving in India, she heard on the news from her family in China that women were being targeted on public buses. They were being raped and later killed by aggressive local men. Expectedly, her mom was very worried about her upcoming trip, and tried to encourage her to reconsider her plans. However, she admits that “whenever I make a decision, I won’t give up easily . . . I won’t let the fear of potential danger get in the way of new life experiences.”

Shortly after arriving in India, she had the “most shocking overseas experience” of her life. Apart from being followed one night by a man on a motorcycle, her most unfortunate event actually occurred during the day while eating lunch. Around 2:00 p.m., a group of men standing near her visibly displayed condoms which had been tucked away in their clothing. She explains that “one of the men took one out, unrolled it, and dangled it in front of her.” This experience left a negative lasting impression on her perceptions of overseas safety; but once again, she determined that it was better to educate herself and be more cautious in the future than just shelter herself away from the world. She was not going to “let safety concerns get in the way of her dreams.”

Even though many Chinese people travel before eventually committing to study at an overseas degree program, she sees herself as different from other people from her country. Eve attributes her strong sense of personal autonomy to her father who has a similar personality. Meanwhile, her mom tends to be “on the more conservative side.”

Despite all of Eve’s traveling, she had never been to California before beginning her degree program at UCLA. In fact, aside from knowing that her area of interest was well regarded at UCLA, she did not want to overthink her decision to come here. The University of Liverpool, Columbia University, and now UCLA all provided her with name recognition that would help her one day move forward in her respective career. However, she was well aware of the “sunny skies and urban life” that awaited her here in southern California.

The positive impression she got of LA was supported by the movies and online videos of “American life” that she was exposed to on various media platforms (which often came in the form of various blogs she subscribed to). Her affinity for various kinds of music also encouraged her to embrace the West Coast lifestyle and be open to what life might be like here. She had considered going to Michigan at one point for school, but it was just too small, and Los Angeles gave her more options her chosen field, and just overall, more to see and do.

When it comes to the news media back in China, Eve admits that she “doesn’t like their news channels.” For her, they are not a good source of information about what other parts of the world are actually like. Although, she cautiously critiques her perception of Chinese media because she knows that it is “a very sensitive topic how the government controls the media.” While her parents watch “First Channel,” or CCTV each day at breakfast and dinner, she likes being in control of the information that reaches her eyes and ears. CCTV, for example, is too predictable and carries too broad of a focus for her. Each day, the news she says, runs the same

way: “The first 10-minutes it talks about various events happening in the country, the next 10-minutes about the president, and finally the last 10-minutes it shows various parts of the world and how they are in suffering.”

Naturally, when in China, she does not have Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or Google accounts. Instead, she relies heavily on Weibo, WeChat, and the combination of news headlines, blogs, celebrity followings (and whatever they (re)post), random videos, etc. to decipher for herself “what is really going on in the world.” Indeed Weibo, which is similar to Twitter in the United States, allows people to post pictures and allows insider-access to various people’s lives. In her opinion, she considers this “real news because the TV is controlled by the country and projects what they want me to see . . . big things like economics and so on . . . but on Weibo, I choose everyday whatever I want to see.”

The impressions of the U.S. that she built for herself includes a place that has “more freedom . . . where you can say what you want to say. You can even go on strike on the streets, and fight for things like gender-equality.” She also felt that a life here in California could be freer than in the United Kingdom. After her experience there, she felt that “there are British people and then their immigrants.” In a place like Los Angeles, she felt that everyone was an immigrant trying to better their lives.

At the same time, however, she feels that China is safer than America. I “don’t feel safe walking at night here. I have to stay late at night and go home from 2-7 a.m. sometimes. I don't feel safe walking on the street here, not even within university graduate housing.” She is worried that there are “crazy people who want to rob you, they can use guns freely, and can appear at any time.” Consequently, she uses Uber whenever the local school transportation services end in the late evening. She says that “if I walk alone at night, I am very sensitive. I just run home after

midnight . . . in China, you can just walk on the street. It is much safer! People might steal a lot, but they don't shoot at you and hurt you.”

Now that she is at UCLA, she often uses Facebook along with her previous mediums of communication to learn more what is going on around the world. She still does not prefer reading the news or watching TV. As a busy grad student on a budget, she “doesn’t want to pay for cable and just doesn't have time to watch TV anyway.” Instead, with her subscription to American video-streaming services like Netflix, she can watch one of her favorite shows *Black Mirror* whenever and wherever is most convenient for her. Throughout the day, she also uses Instagram. But unlike the younger generations, she does not see a need for the very popular Snapchat app where you can send and share pictures for only 10 seconds of viewing time per message.

Even though she did not have any American friends in China, her new life at UCLA includes some Americans that influences how she sees her new environment. They teach her about local life, share a lot of slang, and they often play her favorite card game together, *Cards Against Humanity*. It is a game where you combine several different cards to create the most outlandish combination possible so that judge chooses your choice over others.

When Eve considered where to live in Los Angeles, it was important for her to be somewhere near campus. She is concerned about robberies and the sheer number of guns that may be on the streets. When she was in Harlem, she had no choice but to face living in a less-than-safe neighborhood. Education is important to her and she does the best she can to remain safe. From online messaging groups, she heard from other Chinese students who have, or are attending UCLA that living in Westwood is relatively safe. There is even one group on WeChat that includes over 500 Chinese graduate students at UCLA. They often relay various bits of

information to one another about local happenings. It is a powerful resource for local data gathering and can also act as a warning system for any impending danger in the area.

The general consensus however is that UCLA is much safer than USC (its rival school). Eve heard when she was in China how Chinese students were targeted with guns and killed because of their appearance of wealth. Eve said that “I heard that some USC Chinese students with a second-hand BMW were killed and robbed.” She expressed confusion how people do not need to take an exam here to buy a gun and how unsafe this can be. She would never consider traveling to USC at night since it is “extremely dangerous.”

When we discussed the murder-suicide that occurred at UCLA, she expresses that she “wasn't worried too much about it . . . I can handle myself and just have to be super careful.” She shared some details about how a PhD student shot a professor because he felt that property was stolen from him. “In my opinion,” she says, “stuff like this always happens when crazy people can use guns. It is not fair!” But her parents felt it was OK for her to come to UCLA because she had already traveled so much, and she would live near campus. Once again, she did not want an unrelated event to dictate how she lived each day.

At the same time, mass shootings like those that took place in Las Vegas happened to “innocent people.” For Eve, fears of a future act of gun violence impacting her life does not revolve around a retaliation shooting; but rather, an indiscriminate public shooting in a crowded space. She never knows when she can be just “walking on street in America and someone shoots her.” This would never happen in China, she suggests.

Her mom subscribed to extra news blogs on WeChat that center around events that occur in Los Angeles. She shares them with Eve when she is so inclined. Her mom talked with her a great deal about the Florida shooting that took place in a local high school. It was a cause of

alarm for her and she wanted to make sure her daughter was just fine. Just as Eve did when her mom learned about the Sepulveda Wildfire that was approaching campus shortly after she moved to Los Angeles, she takes her own pictures and shares them directly with her mom. Eve says that “my family saw on the news cars driving through the middle of fires. When I shared my own photos of clear blue skies and sunshine, they were able to relax back in China.” “I don’t want them to freak out,” she says. In worst case scenarios, she still has her Chinese SIM card, so she can directly call her mom in case of an emergency.

“Sneha”

Sneha is a 22-year old 1st-year female international graduate student at UCLA studying within the Physical Sciences. She was born and raised in Muzaffarnagar district, India where she code-switches between Hindi and English in her day-to-day life. She is proud of her hometown, and close with her very large and extended family who mostly live in the area. Her uncle, who was born in India, has lived in the United States for over 35 years. She says that it is not uncommon for Indian families to have at least a few relatives in other countries, such as the U.S.

Back in Muzaffarnagar, she lives in a community that includes people from a vast array of different castes and religions. Sometimes there are major conflicts and clashes between groups, and as a result, problems of safety and security arise. She explains, for example, “that there are sometimes random arson fires and other kinds of attacks on city buses and trains.” She attributes some of these recurring problems in her country to the extremely high poverty-rates.

After finishing high school, she attended college in India’s second most populous city, New Delhi. It was her first time living away from home. However, as a matter of personal choice and convenience, her new location was still located close to her hometown, so she could

regularly visit friends and family. She coins this important social-support network as her “connected sphere.” This sense of community, she explains, is necessary in her day-to-day life and is a major part of her decision-making processes. Naturally, when she contemplated attending graduate school outside of India for the first time, and possibly somewhere in the U.S., it was a major decision that she felt was necessary to first discuss with her close-knit friends and family.

Even though she had traveled quite a bit around India, she had never been abroad except for one visit to see her uncle in California before coming to UCLA. While contemplating whether or not she really wanted to become an international student in the U.S., thoughts and concerns of safety crossed her mind. Most notably, she worried that she might encounter “possible issues of racial discrimination” and did not know how she would be received as an Indian living in the U.S. She wondered how people might manifest their xenophobic feelings, and considered the potential of verbal insults, minor confrontations, and even more seriously, possible acts of racism in the form of gun or knife attacks.

Consequently, she also had serious conversations with her dad and later her undergraduate academic advisor before making any decisions. She considered whether it makes more sense to wait another year or so to see how things develop first. She did not know if she wanted to live in a place where people might shout, “you are not welcomed here in this country” or put her in harm’s way.

In addition to information she garners from face-to-face and digital conversations within her connected sphere, Sneha also follows the news media to make sense of the world around her. While her dad watches the local news on TV, she prefers following domestic and international

sources online as they pop up on her Facebook wall. “Unfortunately,” she says, “it is normal to hear about acts of violence and shootings in the U.S.”

In fact, it was from digital social spaces such as Facebook that she first heard about the June 1st, 2016 shooting that took place at UCLA. Sadly however, she now forgets the specific details of that event since it blends into the *mélange* of gun-themed occurrences of violence which are not uncommon to read about online. Consequently, she knew that if she came to the U.S., she had to be careful and not just blindly trust anyone she met. She needed to take precautions and responsibility for her own safety. During a visit to Stanford while visiting her uncle, she made it a point to take notice of the security poles around campus. She would later take the same approach at UCLA after she arrived. She wishes “UCLA had more of them.”

At the same time, the perception in India, according to the various digital spaces she interacts in, such as Instagram, makes her feel that, “California is extremely safe since it is one of the most diverse and therefore accepting states.” She felt that she would not stand out at a place like UCLA and therefore be less likely to be caught up in a racial attack, or a random act of violence. In fact, she had originally thought about going to Georgia Tech, but after digging a little bit deeper online, it appeared that “LA is probably safer than Atlanta.”

Mass media also played a large part in making her feel comfortable with the decision to move to an American metropolis like Los Angeles. One of her favorite TV shows, *Friends*, gave her a glimpse into what she thought living in a diverse urban center in America, in this case New York, might be like. According to what she saw on TV, she felt that America’s densely populated areas are indeed “open to a lot of different perspectives.” Despite, the negative coverage of events that occurred in the U.S. that she saw in the news and on her social media, it still seemed like a place that is overall open to new ideas, and friendly. She also thinks that

various media sources can be instructional-tools that teach people in India how to “take precautions and help keep others safe as well” when going to America. For example, she learned that “911” is the number she would need to know if she ever had to contact emergency services for any reason.

Since Sneha is now pursuing a degree in the tech sector and hopes to land a job in a related field in the future, going to school in the Golden State, or “the home of Silicon Valley,” could not hurt. “There is a lot happening in America,” she says. She posits that this view is held by most people in India as a result of which people they hear on the news and see online. And UCLA, “boasts some of the best professors in the world and has a great reputation,” she says.

To keep up to date on her new life here, she prefers using Facebook and the news feeds on her wall to build a clearer picture of recent news events. This pattern has changed little from her prior life in New Delhi to her new life in L.A. Sneha explains that “she has the exact same kinds of social media in India that she has here in the U.S including, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp.” Whatever news events she comes across on her various social media platforms remain the main source of information in her constructing of the world around her.

When she recently learned online about the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, she notes that “the scariest part is that it can happen anywhere to anyone.” As alarming as this event was to her now that she studies within an American university, she has learned to accept the potential for danger no matter where she goes. She laments that there is no place that a person can completely escape from dangerous situations.

To check in and keep her community back at home abreast of her life at UCLA, she regularly contacts them via platforms like FaceTime every few days. When the Sepulveda Wildfires occurred during her first quarter on campus, she turned to the internet to find out what

was going on and promptly contacted her family. She also updated her status on social media websites to let those that cared for her safety back in Muzaffarnagar know that she was not in any immediate danger.

Aside from this event, she has not encountered any other major problems with safety while studying at UCLA. Although, she says, she has had “a few other minor concerns of safety” such as when a few random people screamed at her from their car windows as they drove by, and one very peculiar event when an unknown person in one of her classes randomly began screaming at her professor. The unidentified man began saying things like, “do you even know what you are talking about” and “do you know what it means to teach?” She said that this would never happen in India and was shocked at his brazenness. She later said that she thinks he was not even a member of the class and just came in off the street. It made her question her safety that someone could potentially enter any place on campus that they wanted and that there were few security guards around check student IDs.

Apart from these random occurrences, she is happy and feels safe living in Westwood. She said that she “spends 95% of her time around UCLA” and does not venture out to other lesser-known parts of the city often. “Problems seem to happen outside of Westwood,” she says, “so I have never been and have no desire to ever visit Downtown L.A.” Since her program is only two years long and she takes the university’s evening van home from school if it is past 10 p.m. and avoids walking alone anywhere in Westwood after midnight, she is not concerned about anything bad happening to her. And most of the time, she is with groups of her friends – many of whom take the same classes and are on a similar schedule to her own. Her local community provides a blanket of safety and security that she is grateful for. Even though another shooting at UCLA is possible in her mind, “you can’t predict everything,” she says.

“Raj”

Raj is a 22-year old 1st-year male international graduate student at UCLA also studying within the Physical Sciences. He was raised in Bengaluru, India where his native language is Hindi, but he also uses English and Kannada (the local dialect) regularly. He is a proud older brother of one sister with whom he remains in contact daily. One of his fondest memories as a child was traveling on the train with his family on a two-and-a-half-day journey from southern to northern India. While reflecting on the nostalgia of this moment, he says that “my family was all together comfortably in our own compartment with my parents happily holding hands and various family members chatting with one another. We were without a single worry or concern.”

He had never been to America before coming to UCLA to study or had any American friends back in India, but he has gone on a few short trips to Singapore and Malaysia (which are located not too far from home). Despite never having been to the U.S., he does have some relatives who live in California. He feels very lucky having a support network nearby UCLA that he can rely on whenever he needs extra help or to get a taste of Indian life while studying abroad. They also provided him a unique window into what life might be like for an Indian living and studying abroad on the West Coast.

For Raj, mass media however, provided him the biggest source of information as to what life might be like living in the U.S. His favorite TV shows *Friends*, *Prison Break*, and *Breaking Bad* helped him gain insight into American culture which would be useful if he attended graduate school at a place like UCLA. Moreover, TV shows like *Modern Family*, which he considers to be more of the reality TV genre than a sitcom or drama series, allowed him to “enter an American household and get a glimpse of life elsewhere.” Raj exclaims, “Aside from being in a more developed area, Americans are just like Indians!”

Raj also uses social media in his day-to-day life. Currently, he only has Facebook because he does not see a need to use other popular apps on his Smart Phone or computer. On Facebook, which is also his primary source of international news, he feels that stories about America typically discuss politics and their direct impacts on India as well as on Indian expats living abroad. He sees the new presidency with Donald Trump as a galvanizing issue that directly impacts Indians who want to come to America to live and work. American political news stories also sometimes talk about the problem of guns in America. Again, he says that this is discussed in the context of politics. Raj says, “Americans seem to like guns and that this is a part of living in this country.”

When he moved to America, one major challenge he faced was learning how to live on his own for the first time. Back in India, he was told by his parents what chores he had to do each day and did not have to worry about adult-things like paying bills and going to work every day. Additionally, the differences in the systems of education between the U.S. and India, in his opinion, kind of reflect this experience. Rays explains, “classes are taught differently here . . . in India there is a lot of respect between you and the professor . . . you know what you have to do and just do it.” On the other hand, he explains, “you can’t just use your mobile phones and computers in classes there like you do here.” In other words, he feels that the culture of hierarchy and respect for authority in India permeates its pedagogical practices and classroom climate. In America, he likes the freedom he has to live more independently but often finds it challenge to understand and navigate.

This same theme came up again when he talked about perceptions of safety on campus at UCLA. He says, “I don’t know how I feel about the fact that if I carry a gun to class tomorrow no one will stop me. I can do whatever I want and only maybe get caught later. There are no

safety measures in place here.” In fact, the perception of there being a lack of security presence at UCLA is something that has come up quite often with international students that I speak to. They are shocked that no one asks for identification at entrances and that the local college campus seems to seamlessly blend in with the surrounding neighborhoods (e.g., no border walls).

Despite this perception, when Raj had been accepted to both The University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and UCLA, he chose the latter because he thought it would be much safer. “UCSD is very close to the Mexican border,” he says, and “watching TV shows and the news taught me that the border near UCSD was a bit unsafe . . . there are more local gangs and terrorist problems.” He felt that UCLA, being several hours further away from the border than UCSD, provided a nice cushion in which he could be further removed from border-related concerns. After moving here however and visiting those locations, he realized that his perceptions were mainly unfounded.

Opportunity was also a reason for him to come to UCLA from India. “It also had the potential for more job prospects,” he says. Being located in a large urban environment that is also the home of Silicon Valley was a major motivation for going to school here. He knew that his program was well-known, and even if he went back to India after graduation, his degree would become very useful for reasons of social mobility back at home.

After arriving at UCLA, he feels that his local life in Westwood is relatively safe. He worries most about his bike being stolen and having to eventually buy a new one. Despite living away from his family, he has built for himself a new community of friends, all of whom are Indian and who are in his program and live nearby. “I go to class, go home, study, sometimes meet friends, and then do the same thing the next day,” Raj explains.

However, because of one experience he does not have the same view of safety when going to other parts of L.A. During one trip to Downtown L.A., he was waiting for a Greyhound bus to take him to another city. He shivered in fear when he saw, “people looking at him, randomly shouting, and even fighting each other.” He has learned that when it is necessary to visit such places, he mostly stays in groups, prefers to take Uber instead of public transportation, and remains vigilant at all times.

Raj follows a pattern that I have noticed from other international student participants in this study. From their home countries, they get a perception from various media sources that American indeed has safety concerns. However, once they arrive here and find their niche, they quickly get comfortable as long as nothing directly happens to them, or someone from their local communities. In short, they promptly let their guards down.

At the same time, they are also aware of becoming “too comfortable here” and having a false sense of security. Raj feels that “another UCLA shooting could happen again,” and “doesn’t see the campus in the same way as if the shooting had never happened.” Consequently, he makes minor day-to-day changes in his actions around campus, such as keeping his eyes open a bit more and “watching people just a bit more carefully.” Perceptions of safety, and lack thereof, ebb and flow as the days go along with no specific rhyme or reason how he will feel on a given day.

One reason for this inconsistency is that his family in India is not here look out for him. He has to take care of himself and cannot ever fully let his guard down. There are fewer people, he feels, looking out for his best interests. Indeed, the participants that I am studying are at a crucial and transitional period in their young lives. They are learning how to solidify their sense of independence, expand their identities, build career options, and do so within a foreign land. It

is not just their sense of self that is on the negotiating table, it is also their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are intermixed in this process.

The local day-to-day groove that Raj has built for himself around UCLA provides a nice transition point for him to be free, independent, and away from the security of home. At the same time, it also provides a certain level of predictability and assurances of safety. He can play soccer on campus with friends on the weekends and walk to meet his other Indian acquaintances whenever he needs a break from his studies. He recognizes that he wishes he had more American and international friends in L.A., but even at school-sponsored events, “Americans don't really interact with international students and take initiative to talk with people . . . well, I guess I do the same thing as well,” he admits. The point of these social events, in his opinion, ends up being an opportunity for free food more than anything.

Meanwhile, Raj contacts those who are close to him back in Bangalore daily. He talks with his sister all the time on Facebook Messenger and with his dad on the phone. While he spoke often with his more distant relatives during the first three months that he moved here, he now speaks with them more sporadically. During the Sepulveda Wildfires that occurred near UCLA, he was in close constant contact with his family and friends back in India via social media and video chats. He also was contacted by his relatives in California to make sure he had a safe-house nearby in case he needed to evacuate the local area. Technology makes him feel very close to home, provides a sense of security, and allows access to his various Indian communities whenever he needs them.

In fact, they ease his anxiety and give him a sense of protection that allows him to not overthink events like that which occurred with the mass shooting at a concert venue in Las Vegas while he was studying just a few hours away at UCLA. “If it happens, you can't help it! Don't

restrict yourself, go and take calculated risks,” he says. And although mass shootings in India are usually a result of “religious clashes in which you know who the intended target is, anyone can become an innocent bystander,” he says. Raj concludes by saying that “95% of my routine here is the same as India and I just feel that things can go wrong anytime and anyway . . . it is not limited to just the U.S.”

Focus groups: Indian & Chinese students

At the center of our study is a world-renowned research university. According to an official campus website, UCLA defines its core aims as follows:

UCLA’s primary purpose as a public research university is the creation, dissemination, preservation, and application of knowledge for the betterment of our global society . . . in all of our pursuits, we strive at once for excellence and diversity, recognizing that openness and inclusion produce true quality . . . addresses pressing societal needs and creates a university enriched by diverse perspectives in which all individuals can flourish . . . located on the Pacific Rim in one of the world’s most diverse and vibrant cities, UCLA reaches beyond campus boundaries to establish partnerships locally and globally. (“Mission & Values | UCLA,” n.d.)

At UCLA, like many American IHE, a thriving campus community is inextricably linked to efforts to establish inclusivity on campus locally while building relationships globally. For a university that finds itself in one of the world’s most dynamic cultural centers, namely that of Los Angeles, understanding its diverse populations is paramount to its success. My hope in the following section is to utilize this data-rich environment and highlight the enlightening themes that emerged from engaging them. I hope it will provide the reader rich and tremendous insight

into international student educational experiences and their varying perspectives on campus safety at UCLA and gun violence in America.

Deadly gun violence and American IHE: A communication studies analysis

The following sections will explore the salient themes that emerged during the focus group interviews. In some cases, they will expand upon previous ideas that were illuminated during the in-depth interviews. In other cases, they will introduce new thoughts and provide more robust examinations of the research questions. Questions related to communication (e.g., the use of mass media, social media, & face-to-face intercultural interactions), information-sharing, and perception-building are investigated.

A mass media analysis: Chinese & Indian international student perspectives

During the focus groups, I spoke with Indian and Chinese international students at UCLA about their exposure to and the impact of mass media in their day-to-day lives. The purpose was to begin to understand how they construct their views of safety throughout their educational experiences via this one-directional medium of communication. I wanted to learn more about how critically they look at mass media as well as what kinds of regular interactions they have with it. The goal was to see how such exposure might impact their understandings of the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA and perceptions of campus safety.

Exposure to mass media is constant & intensified

Participants in the focus groups quickly and clearly made a distinction about how they interact with mass media compared to that of their parents, grandparents, and older community

members. While many of the “older generations” regularly read and prefer hardcopy books, newspapers, and magazines, these students said that they almost always access forms of mass media digitally (i.e., a form of new media) from the palm of their hands.

Their engagement with mass mediums is in piecemeal fashion throughout the day whenever and wherever they want it. They wake up and go to bed reading news stories from their Smart Phones and laptops. They start and stop TV shows without hesitation (often jumping around to various genres and “binge” watching for hours on end). They begin a music video, pause it, check their Facebook or WeChat, and then go back to where they left off. They do not wait for a TV show to begin in their living rooms (most of them do not actually own one at UCLA), rarely stand-in-line at movie theaters to catch the latest flick or wait to listen to something on the radio at a predetermined time. Such approaches seem outdated to them. Even though they often have second-hand exposure to the more “archaic way of doing things” because of older generations living around them, ultimately, they prefer access to information “when they feel like it.”

In the same light, while their parents may inadvertently expose themselves to only a few gatekeeping sources that provide limited amounts of information, these international students pull from a vast amount of mass media sources (usually lawfully, sometimes not). Sometimes this occurs in the form of blogs, vlogs, reposted news stories on social media, Snapchat feeds, YouTube videos, and so on. In fact, the way in which my participants expose themselves to the news media, in particular, provides a keen example of their diversified interactions with mass media as a whole.

Learning about international breaking news, for example, is not just a constant process but a varied one as well. They are alerted to new and updated news stories from around the world

with each new ring, ding, buzz, or chime (each app has its own unique alert sound, so they know even before they look at their screens which platform is offering up new information). Even without a notification, they may come across news while surfing the web or doing online shopping. News information is always vying for their attention from a myriad of new and old authors alike spurring them on to learn something new. While many of their parents regularly watch CNN India or CCTV (Central China Television) from a stationary screen at a set time of day, they get their news information from one-time authors as well as trusted repeat sources on a non-stop basis. Sometimes they do not even know where information about a particular news event is coming from and are not too rattled to later find out that it was just more “fake news.”

News media is underscored and born in social media

As I hinted at already, exposure to news media for the international students in my study is often inextricably linked to their social media platforms. Information about a major event such as the UCLA June 1st, 2016 campus shooting, for example, could have previously taken hours, days, or even months for them to learn about. Now it is likely just sitting on their Facebook walls within moments, waiting to be read. Since the advent of social media, it is even possible now for people across the world to learn about an event that directly impacts the UCLA campus community even before its own students do.

On December 6th, 2017, as the international students in my study were getting ready to complete their first quarter at UCLA, a major wildfire broke out in close proximity to the UCLA campus (see Figure 18). In the early morning hours as most UCLA students were deep asleep, their friends and family members across the world in India and China had already learned about the developing story.

Figure 18. Sepulveda Pass Wildfire.



(Twitter, 2017)

In fact, many of the participants from the focus groups learned about the nearby wildfire from their overseas family members who saw the news on their social media news feeds and subsequently contacted them before they even realized where the source of an increasingly strong smell of smoke was coming from. Others learned about the event in the early morning hours when they randomly woke up and checked their social media apps, such as Facebook and WeChat (which some of them say is regular habit). A smaller portion of the international students heard about the event when they received local alerts on their phones encouraging them to prepare for a possible evacuation. However, not all the students learned about the event that morning. One male participant from India who is a self-proclaimed deep sleeper said that he just

ignored all calls for his attention including his mom who he “put on silent mode when she kept on calling.”

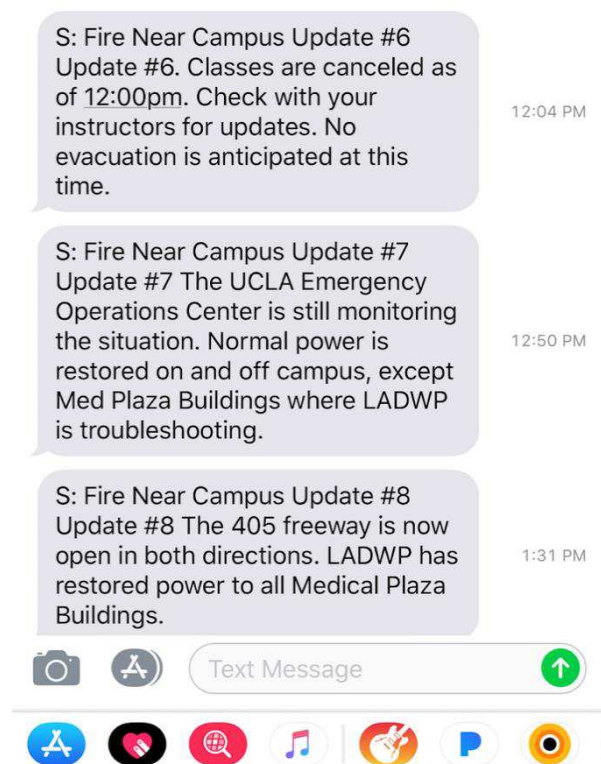
As the evacuation zone reached Sunset Blvd. which borders “the Hill,” or UCLA’s undergraduate residential area housing over 10,000 students, the international students continued to follow the developing news on their social media apps taking part in a combination of news checking, messaging, calling, and posting. Their Facebook walls lit up with new news stories from both local and international sources and their phones provided the latest updates about campus closures at UCLA. Meanwhile, their Snapchat videos of local friends preparing evacuation kits and exhibiting a wide range of emotions about the developing story led them to read more closely posted stories on these same platforms. Their social media lives further reinforced the need for them to take seriously the news stories that intermittently found their way into the same screen space. The interchange between news and social media is seamless for them.

In fact, their social media posts can become news itself. They do not just post news to their friends on social media in isolation. These stories are often recirculated and reposted as news for people outside the source’s direct digital network. Another example of this can be seen when the promised effectiveness of UCLA’s revised alert system, updated after the campus shooting, failed horribly, and students took screen shots of the untimely cancellation of classes. Although it was decided that classes would be cancelled at 12:00 p.m. (noon) that day, the message did not reach most students until 12:04 p.m. despite the clearly polluted air swirling about and intense smell of smoke in Westwood.

As thousands of students struggled to commute to UCLA with the 405-highway closed in both directions (one of the most heavily traveled roads in a city known for extremely bad traffic),

the international students took to their social media and posted their thoughts. After a large outcry of students who displayed their dismay over UCLA's lackluster response to the wildfire on social media, the President of the Graduate Student Association, Michael Skiles, in turn, went to the news media to publically call out the university for their late and dangerous response. In other words, an abundance of social media information led to the creation of new news media within a sort of cyclical fashion, and the Chronicle of Higher Education article itself then later became a topic of discussion on social media (see Figure 19).

Figure 19. "12:04 p.m."



(Gelzhiser, 2017)

Skiles' discussion with the reporter also called attention to the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA. Adams (2017) asked him to provide reasons why the failed alert system on the day of the

Wildfire could have had a detrimental impact on the student body. Their conversation developed as follows:

Students were concerned by the emergency-alert system's delay because it could put them in graver danger if, for example, there was a shooter on the campus, said Mr. Skiles. "People could die as a result if it takes that long for information to get out," he said. Mr. Skiles said the delay called to mind a June 2016 incident in which a former graduate student fatally shot a professor on the campus and then shot himself to death. "UCLA's administration promised they would fundamentally overhaul their procedures, so they would be able to communicate with the university in a timely manner," Mr. Skiles said, but students worry that "that's not the case at all." (para. 8-9)

What may start out as a social media post(s) may soon become or lead to a new news story, and vice versa. No longer do the *Times of India*, or the *People's Daily* dictate how and where the international students get their news stories. As one of my Sociology students recently said to me, "When my phone died, I felt like the world had ended."

Gatekeepers: Indian accessibility and Chinese inaccessibility

However, as interactions with mass media among the participants in this study appear to align, the actual sources and kinds of information that reach the eyes and ears of my participants within their home countries differs drastically. In an earlier section, we talked about the role of gatekeepers in filtering information sources from around the world. In this section, we will examine the impact that gatekeepers in two particular countries, namely India and China, can have on international perception-building and with acts of deadly gun violence like that which occurred at UCLA on June 1st, 2016.

For the participants from India, they feel that there is little-to-no gatekeeping difference between their country and the U.S. In fact, with mass media, they appear to have access to the same American movies, television, and music at home that they do here. They have the Indian versions of online streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, video watching capabilities on YouTube, and access to music services such as Apply Music where they can stream the latest songs with relative ease and convenience. The only hindrances they said in having access to these services were minor time-delays in service, or financial concerns with having to pay a bit more for extra international, or domestic-adapted versions of American products and services. Ultimately, however, this made little to no difference to the Indian participants eventually getting their hands on whatever mass media sources they wanted – mainly unfiltered and unhinged.

On the other hand, the Chinese participants spoke a great deal about and seemed very aware of the “Great Firewall” which restricted the flow of information from international locations such as the U.S. to China. Aside from the more obvious restrictions of not having Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Yahoo, or Google accounts that will be discussed in a later section, they also acknowledged the fact that they knew mass media (sources such as news media, movies, TV shows, and music) is heavily filtered and influenced by the Chinese government. They even have their own version of Netflix called iQiyi.

The consensus among the Chinese students was that mass media, such as news events, were national-centric. They believed it focused on more domestic concerns and promulgated ideas that show “their country was doing better than other places around the world.” They critically expressed the flaws in this system and said that it was challenging to get a balanced view of what was happening elsewhere while tens of thousands of full-time government employees work hard each day to restrict and filter information flows. When they came to the

U.S., however, most of them were eager to subscribe to video streaming services like Hulu and Netflix and could finally watch YouTube videos unrestricted from previous filters.

Gatekeepers: Divergent impacts of mass media on perceptions of safety

All of the Chinese international students who took place in the focus group expressed concerns for safety in America before coming here based on what they saw in mass media. In one section of the focus group, they unanimously agreed and expressed awareness that their “socialist country” made it a point of painting both a positive and negative picture of the United States. However, they said this depended on what the topic of discussion happened to be.

When Chinese mass media sources talked about America’s research capabilities, for example, such as those that derived from its world-famous colleges and universities, the news media and films, for example, highlighted the U.S.’s success while also pointing out that China is close behind. Alternatively, however, safety outside of China, according to their news, movies, and television shows, clearly portrayed America as where their citizens can attain a world-class degree (which can also improve human capital within a knowledge economy especially in regard to STEM-related fields), but which came at a tradeoff for one’s own safety and well-being. America, according to their mass media, is simply, “not as safe as China.”

On the other hand, members of the Indian focus group repeatedly said that “America and India are about the same” in terms of safety according to their mass media sources. They see American violence portrayed by Hollywood in its movies, hear explicit lyrics about violence on American streets within music videos, and get direct access to an influx of news stories about instances of mass shootings, school attacks, or xenophobic happenings in the U.S.

At the same time however, mass media platforms in India often share stories of women being raped and killed on public buses, hotels being overcome by terrorist attacks and how to respond in such situations, and talks of nuclear tensions with its adjacent neighbor, Pakistan. The types of danger may vary from country-to-country in their opinion, but they believe that no single place is exempt from concerns of safety no matter where you may live on the planet. Indeed, a variety of music videos, TV shows, documentaries, sports events, comedy news shows, etc. that are shared between Los Angeles and India only help illuminate which things they should be most concerned about overseas in America. They can access this information anywhere and at any time . . . or “when their internet doesn’t suck.”

America’s not doing enough to stop their gun problem

The barrage of information that both the Indian and Chinese participants get from mass media regarding safety and gun violence in America, in their opinion, blends together over time and into a narrative that reinforces the idea that “America has a major gun problem.” Moreover, in both focus groups, the sentiment was also clear that the slew of mass media information warning them about deadly gun attacks in the United States left them wondering why “America is not doing more to stop their gun problem.” It is not just that guns can be easily purchased in the U.S., but that they are also having a detrimental impact on society.

The news that they see, for example, points out details about particular acts of gun violence that occur in the United States as well as one failed attempt after another to curb violence. Sometimes the perpetrator bought the guns legally and other times they stole or bought them through an illegal third party, but either way guns are still finding their ways into the hands of people looking to cause harm. “America has lots of guns,” commented one student from India,

and these guns are being used to attack night clubs, schools, airports, concert venues, and so on. They perceive their decision to come here to study as an international student as a reality in which guns can be bought by almost anyone and used by these same people to cause massive harm both physically and psychologically. At the same time, the country in which these events are happening is not finding a way to improve them. They have come to accept that their lives in America as international students will follow a two-prong approach in regard to gun violence in America: they will hear regularly about new acts of unnecessary gun violence occurring in the United States (likely at a school or university not much different than their own) but laws designed to assuage and effectively address this problem will be stymied by ineffective political choices.

Various forms of mass media in both India and China widely disseminated information about the largest mass shooting in American history which took place at the Pulse Night Club in Florida (which was later surpassed by the Las Vegas shooting in 2017). One of the Chinese participants described how she felt when she saw a music video in China by Sia called, “The Greatest” (see Figures 20-22). This video, which is a clear reference to a targeted attack on members of the LGBTQ community at a gay nightclub in Miami, had a strong emotional impact on her. She said that it made real to her the prevalence of guns in America and the risks of an attack directly impacting her anywhere and at any time. She concluded, “It was really scary . . . what if it wasn’t a gay club and I was there.”

Figure 20. Sia's music video with dancers in a nightclub.



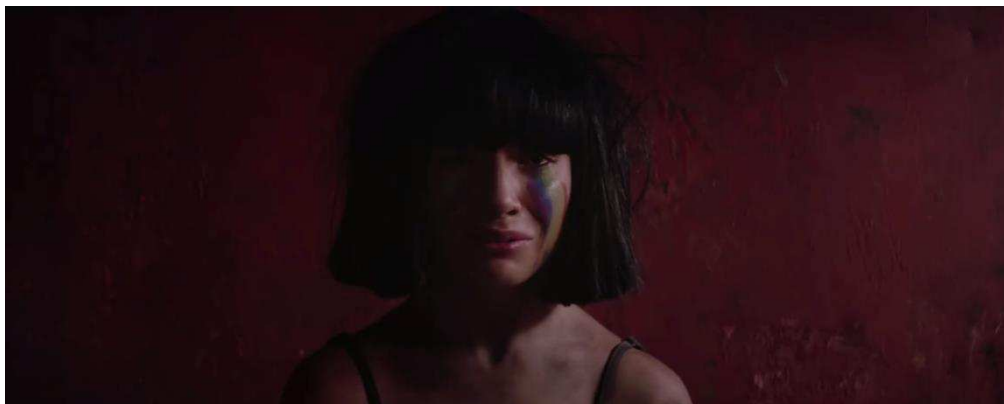
(Baum, 2016)

Figure 21. Sia's music video showing bullet holes & murdered dancers.



(Baum, 2016)

Figure 22. Sia's music video showing distressed reaction to gun attack.



(Baum, 2016)

America has world class research, innovative, and technological institutions

All of the participants in the study, both from India and China, had strong opinions about apparent gun problems in America. On the opposite side of the same coin, however, and as I mentioned earlier, they were also well aware of how UCLA is now ranked the top public research university in the country. “That’s why I came here,” professed one participant. Regardless of the cost-benefit analysis (e.g., safety vs. degree-acquired formula) that they concoct when deciding whether or not getting a degree from here in the U.S. is worth the potential risk of putting oneself in harm’s way, they attribute the sheer dominance of American IHE over opportunities in their home countries or elsewhere as reasons for coming here nevertheless.

According to the participants, mass media sources such as news articles remind them that the majority of the top-100 universities in the world are located in the U.S. Getting a degree from one of these prestigious schools in America provides life-altering social, cultural, and economic opportunities (whether they stay stateside, return their respective countries, or go elsewhere). If they come to a place like UCLA, then they believe their lives will be forever changed by an institution that can set them apart from everyone else back at home.

The participants in both focus groups were also very aware of the cutting-edge theoretical and applied proprietary research that is produced by UCLA researchers. They know that this is a major reason why UCLA is ranked so highly on the international scale. They read about university rankings, or lack thereof in their news feeds, social media apps, magazines, and advertisements in their home countries. They are constantly reminded at home through the movies, news journals, and research articles of the prestige associated with “getting into Stanford, Harvard, MIT, or CalPoly.” Some local and national higher education support services

even guarantee admittance into at least one of these elite schools for the right price. As we mentioned earlier, UCLA clothing and bookstores are located all over the world and serve as an additional reminder of what it might feel like to become a part of a prestigious American IHE. When I asked them whether they have seen a Peking or Delhi University clothing store here in L.A., they simply laughed.

Moreover, entering a private Ivy League university or a top public university like UCLA or UC Berkeley is what many people in their home communities consider a pinnacle of “success” – one that would bring honor and prestige to their families and local communities, provide new job prospects, and label them as “high-achievers.” Considering this state of affairs, it was not surprising to hear that all of the participants in the study were willing to pay the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual costs associated with living abroad, and away from the safety and predictability of their home environments for one of these exceptional degrees. They are not dissuaded by the financial costs of paying massive out-of-state tuition bills, a high cost of living in L.A., added travel expenses, and having to confront thoughts of safety problems here and which are depicted in mass mediums at home – after all, “doesn’t everything of value come at a cost?” Both China and India are emerging nations where research, innovation, and technology are expanding by the day, but in the participant’s opinion, Chinese and Indian programs do not yet match those of the United States. As one participant put it, “the professors are just so famous here at UCLA!”

“Some are safer than others”: How international students rank American universities

During the focus groups, one other salient theme emerged regarding mass media and international student perceptions of campus safety in the United States. The participants in the

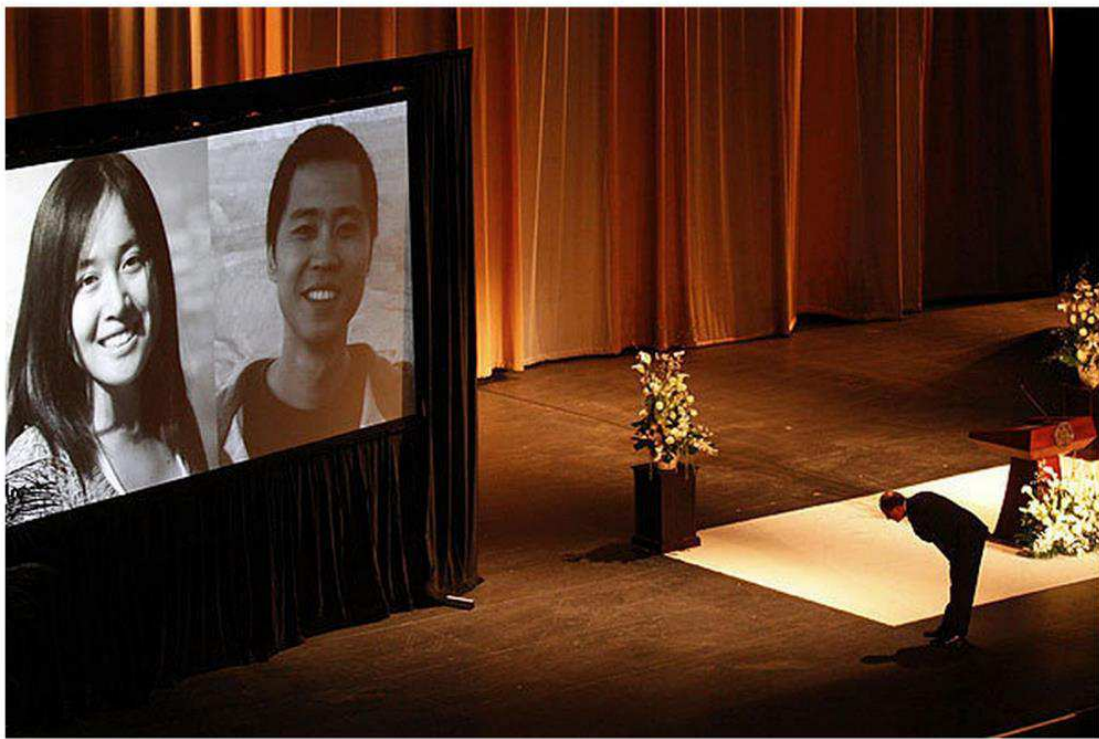
study discussed various websites that they use to help them determine which cities, and areas within cities, are safe and unsafe to study in. Websites include various crime maps of the United States usually created by national sources recirculating American news and coming up with their own school safety ranking systems. The collective opinion among several of the Chinese students was that schools located in and around St. Louis, Missouri are the most dangerous places in America to study. Interestingly enough, many of the Indian students agreed that Detroit, Michigan was the number one place to avoid.

Regardless of these differing views about safety in various cities in the U.S., both groups agreed how the city of Los Angeles should be broken up into “safe” and “unsafe” regions. The topic of discussion followed a main thread about campus safety at The University of Southern California (USC) and its rival school UCLA. USC, which is located closer to Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA), and which will be discussed in greater detail in another section of this dissertation. They consider it much less safe for international students than UCLA despite the June 1st, 2016 campus shooting. Mass media including UCLA’s official website, student YouTube videos, frequent Hollywood films and TV shows that were filmed on campus, etc. demonstrate how UCLA’s affluent location can provide the international students a certain level of safety during their studies on campus. The international students feel that “money leads to safety.”

On the other hand, they spoke about USC as a place where campus safety is a major concern (see Figure 23). One example of this is the difference in free transportation services provided by UCLA and USC. The latter actually offers receive free Uber rides to its students on campus to their nearby homes. For the international students at UCLA who have only a bus and

shuttle option that does not take students to their doorsteps, this speaks volumes to them about concerns of safety as a campus that is less than 15 miles away from UCLA.

Figure 23. Memorial service for murdered Chinese students.



(Sinco, 2014)

At the same time, they still felt that if USC's academic reputation is better than UCLA, then safety and security come in second place. Only a couple of the students within the whole study objected to these beliefs. If we "want to meet outstanding professors, then I will go to less safe place," one student said. Additionally, even though the international students from China read news reports about international students from their country being targeted, shot, and killed in years past (despite USC denying these claims), and unofficially rank USC as less safe

compared to UCLA, most still agreed that they would choose the latter if it provided them a better educational experience.

A social media analysis

In the following section, I will describe the themes that emerged from the focus groups with the international student participants regarding their use of social media and its impact on perceptions of safety, and in particular, acts of gun violence in the United States. I will expand on the discussion about mass media by examining how these recent technological advances intensify how international students construct these perceptions. This is the second of three approaches stemming from the field of communication studies that I use to build a clearer picture of how international students view safety in American IHE – understandings which directly impact their educational experiences.

Gatekeepers: Indian accessibility, Chinese adaptability on social media

As I spoke with the participants from India, they described a seamless transition with their digital social media lives in south Asia to their new lives abroad in southern California. “Yeah, we have the same stuff over there,” they pronounced in unison and ever so jubilantly. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. are a part of their everyday lives both in India and in the U.S. Once they arrived in Los Angeles, aside from the obvious time differences and impact on live messaging, they quickly and effortlessly continued their digital social media lives by simply turning on their Smart Phones when they landed. Their networks would remain

the same with the exception of the new friends they would later add as they formed new relationships in and around UCLA.

In contrast, the participants from China talked about their dual “Mainland social media networks” and “Western ones.” While in China, they mainly use WeChat (WhatsApp), Weibo (Twitter), and QQ (MSN). Renren, which is the Chinese equivalent of Facebook, actually means person-person, “人人,” or where people can see each other “face-to-face.” Well, at least digitally. The reason for living two concurrent and sometimes interconnected social media lives is because of gatekeeping differences between the countries of India and China.

Some participants from China had Western apps before they were blocked by the Great Firewall and keep them in hibernation for whenever they go abroad (or gain limited access to them via VPNs on the Mainland before inevitably being shut down by eager censors). Others never had Western social media apps before and enjoyed the process of creating them so that they could more easily connect with their new non-Chinese friends and acquaintances. They enjoyed describing how strikingly similar the Chinese and Western versions were to each other and telling their friends at home about their recently divergent social media life in L.A. However, even though they now regularly use apps like Facebook and Instagram during their educational experiences at UCLA, they will not be forgetting to continue their Chinese social media platforms anytime soon because “that’s how I still talk with my friends and family back home,” explained one of the participants from China.

Gatekeepers: Practical & ideological barriers for the Chinese participants on social media

Most of the students from China feel that they have quickly adapted to using these new digital social media platforms in the U.S., but also mentioned that their presence serves as a

constant reminder that they are international students in a new land. When sharing information from outside of the Firewall with their friends and family back at home, it can be a complicated and time-consuming process. For example, they need to use creative means to post and share Western-written news stories directly on social media apps of their family and friends at home. They cannot simply find a link they like on YouTube and post it online for comment. It simply won't connect.

Habitually using Chinese-approved apps and information sources with those at home also leads them to continue this pattern with Chinese friends and classmates in L.A. They expressed “the ease of typing Chinese” and using certain features such as fun-themed Emoji with their nearby Chinese acquaintances since they capture more accurately what they are trying to communicate. The dual lives of their social media use allow them to have one foot in new and existing relationships with their Chinese community and another in the non-Chinese social spheres.

And unlike the participants from India, the Chinese students are regularly reminded that their dual social media lives do not only have practical challenge, but also ideological ones. The Great Firewall is more than just an inconvenience for them in China and the U.S. It is a reminder that they are now living in a new land with access to different and often contradictory perspectives. They hear viewpoints on their American social media platforms that offer new ways to think about events and people both near and far. Trying to critically discern happenings becomes much more complicated with contrasting views but can also be an enlightening process for them at the same time. The Chinese students feel that contrasting information is good for them and challenges them to be more critical of everything they are exposed to. Now more than ever, they feel they cannot take what they read from their networks on social media at face value.

At the same time, just because they now have greater access to Western social media apps and ideological viewpoints that does not mean they can necessarily tread lightly with how they engage them. According Mozur (2018), Chinese international students studying abroad may now also be held accountable for what information they share with others even with American-owned apps such as WhatsApp:

Zhang Guanghong recently discovered the changing landscape for technology firsthand. Mr. Zhang, a Chinese human rights activist, decided last fall to share an article with a group of friends in and outside China that criticized China's president. To do so, he used WhatsApp, an American app owned by Facebook that almost nobody uses in China. In September, Mr. Zhang was detained in China; he is expected to soon be charged with insulting China's government and the Communist Party. The evidence, according to his lawyer, included printouts of what Mr. Zhang shared and said in the WhatsApp group. (para. 5-6)

Indeed, the global digital landscape of information-sharing is a contested terrain where there is a constant battle over what data is shared and who gains access to it. The thought of being held accountable for comments made outside the jurisdiction of a particular country on a platform unaffiliated with that locale demonstrates the continual and perpetual blurring of geo-political lines in our globalized world of the 21st century.

Bloggers and Vloggers are game-changers

Both groups of participants from India and China follow a myriad of “bloggers” and “vloggers.” Bloggers are anyone and everyone who shares original written content or comments about news stories, personal happenings, and so on, from anywhere on the globe. In other words,

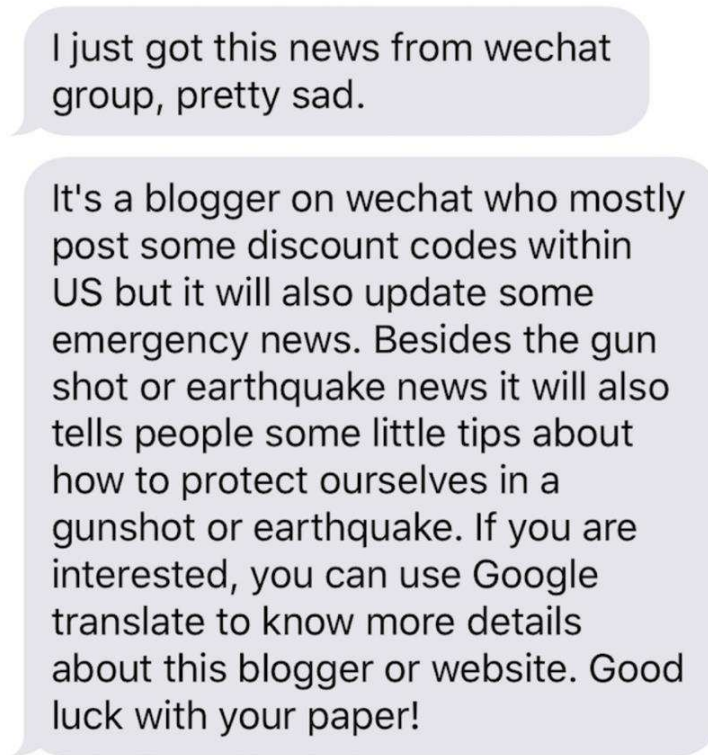
the everyday stranger with access to the internet and a personal device such as a computer, tablet, or Smart Phone can post about local, national, or international news, offer travel tips, offer advice about online shopping deals, blog about other bloggers, etc. One participant from China remarked that she “gets most of her news information from bloggers” and can choose to either remain a complete observer (e.g., viewing blogs as a form of mass media), or take part in the interaction by commenting on the bloggers’ posts and/or others who provide their two cents (e.g., mass media turned social media usage).

Vloggers are video bloggers, those who take the role of the blogger and use a camera to capture their ideas instead of typing them out. They document their lives, thoughts, and opinions on camera. The more famous of whom make a hefty income from their endeavors and often spent hours professionally editing their vlogs. In fact, a couple of my previous students from UCLA are Vloggers on YouTube and make more money in a couple months than I do in an entire year as a Teaching Fellow. These vloggers have huge followings and number of subscribers and are major Influencers¹⁹ with how students within higher education often understand the world around them.

According to these participants, these bloggers and vloggers often pull from a vast wider array of sources and offer their own take on breaking news story lines. Meanwhile, the international student participants regularly follow and interact with several different bloggers/vloggers, triangulating their information sources to leave comments, talk on social media with their friends about what they heard, and ultimately, draw up their own picture of what they perceive about a particular circumstance (see Figures 24-28).

¹⁹ Influencers are people on social media platforms who have large followings of people and often have a major impact on perceptions items, or particular markets sales.

Figure 24. Chinese participant blogger information. (1 of 5)



(B. Carr²⁰, personal communication, February 14, 2018)

As a caveat, the international participants from China made it clear that they think many of the bloggers they get access to in their country are not what they seem. “Some bloggers are paid by the government and do it for profit,” said one Chinese participant during the group interview. “We heard a lot about the Florida shooting in Miami. It was nonstop,” said another participant. In other words, the mass amount of comments that bloggers and vloggers commented on about the Florida shooting seemed a bit suspect to them. They expressed concern

²⁰ Pseudonym used to protect identity.

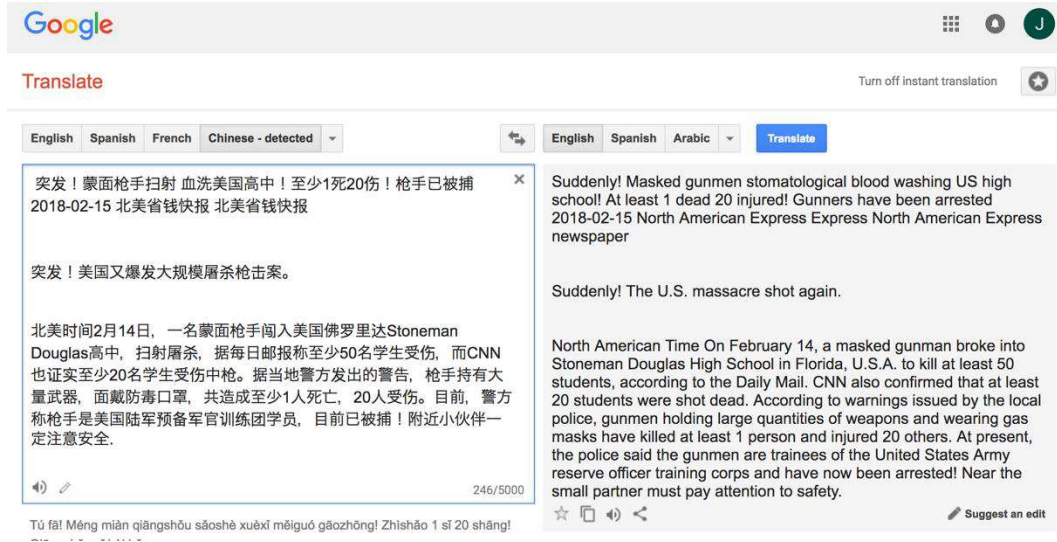
that what they read, and the people they are chatting with in China might actually be a consorted and well-planned effort by the government to influence how their people perceive safety in other parts of the world. And as we mentioned, they mentioned that they think, “We are told that America is not as safe as China from an early age.”

Figure 25. Chinese participant blogger information. (2 of 5)

枪击逃生攻略：如何避开活跃枪手 当突发和枪击，在美国成了常态，希望大家别掉以轻心，能熟读在美帝生活必须掌握的枪击逃生技能。 如果直面枪手 现场行凶枪手概况信息 一个现场行凶枪手是一名单独在一个局限的和人群稠密的空间主动地进行杀人或企图杀人的个人；在大多数情况下现场行凶枪手用的是枪支，对他们选择的目标没有确定的模式和方法。 。 由于现场行凶枪手事件经常在 10 到 15 分钟时间内便结束，执法人员来不及到达现场，当事人个人必须在精神上身体上如何应对现场行凶枪手的局面有所准备 应付现场行凶枪手局面的正确做法： • 清楚地觉察周围的环境和任何可能的危险 • 对你造访的设施内距离你最近的两个出口做好笔记 • 如果你处于一个办公室内，留在那里锁好门 • 如果你在走廊里，进入一个房间里，锁好门 • 最后的办法是采取行动试图制服现场行凶枪手。当现场行凶枪手在近距离内你无法逃离时，如果你能够使他/她丧失能力你幸免灾难的机会更大。当你能够安全时，打电话给 911	Gunshot escape strategy: how to avoid active gunmen When the sudden and the shootings became the norm in the United States, I hope you will not be taken lightly and be familiar with the shooting and escape skills that life in the United States must master. If you face the gunman Scene gunman profile information An on-the-scene assailant is an individual who has voluntarily committed or attempted killings in a confined and densely populated space; in most cases gunmen on fire are gunshots and have no definitive model of the target of their choice And method. . As the scene of the murderous gunman often ended in 10 to 15 minutes, law enforcement officers arrived too late to the scene, the individual must be mentally and physically how to deal with the situation of the scene of shooting gunmen prepared The correct way to deal with the scene of the shooter gunman: • Clearly aware of the surrounding environment and any possible danger • Take notes of the two outlets within your facility that are closest to you • If you are in an office, stay there and lock the door • If you are in the hallway, enter a room and lock the door • The final solution is to take action to try to subdue the gunmen who live on the scene. When the onslaught gunman can not escape at close range, chances of you surviving a disaster are greater if you can disable him / her. Call 911 when you can be safe ☆ □ 🔊 🔊 🔊 Suggest an edit
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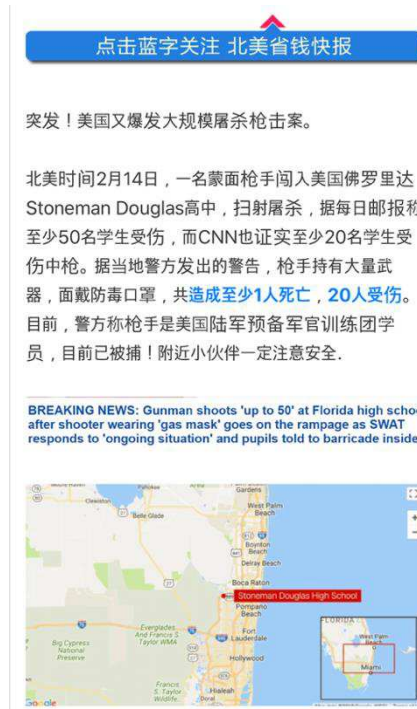
(Weixin, 2018)

Figure 26. Chinese participant blogger information. (3 of 5)



(Weixin, 2018)

Figure 27. Chinese participant blogger information. (4 of 5)



(Weixin, 2018)

Figure 28. Chinese participant blogger information. (5 of 5)



(Weixin, 2018)

“I” orchestrate information sources

The participants in my study like to feel that they are in control and at the center of understanding the world they live in. If they do not know *what* to think about something, like whether it is safe to go to UCLA or not, then they take out their computers, tablets, and Smart Phones and quickly get to work. They take in a variety of mass media sources while simultaneously hitting up their social media connections. They feel no need to wait for the local news to come on and tell them what to think.

Instead, they proactively and habitually open and quickly explore a variety of information sources. If they do not know where to go, then they use search engines, Facebook posts, Instagram messages, etc. to give them direction and go from there. They quickly learn what they do not know and look for the best option to tell them what they should. One example of this connects with the previous discussion on blogs and vlogs. When merely reading or commenting

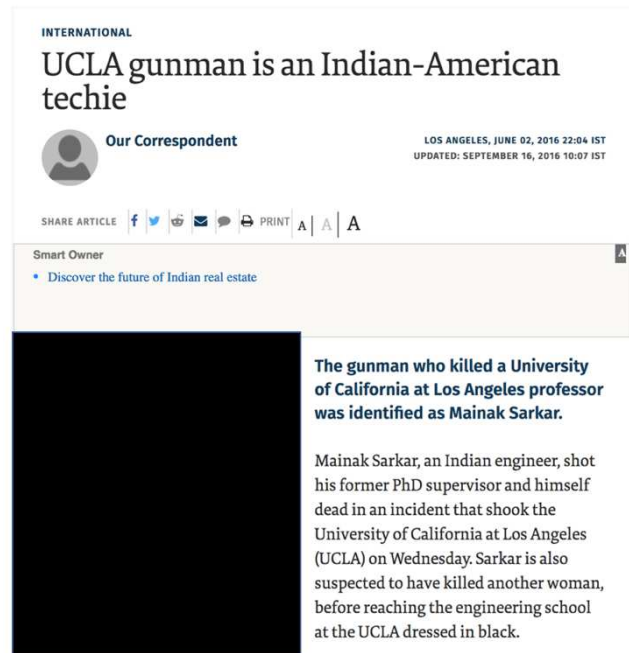
on blogs and vlogs when trying to learn something specific like safety at UCLA, or any other university for that matter, they simply can start their own thread.

Within hours, or sometime just minutes, people from around the world will post news headlines and talk about their own experiences in those areas (or others they know who have a better first-hand knowledge of such places). In other words, using blogs and other social media platforms they crowd source the topic that they want to know more about. And at the same time, they may ask their close friends for advice and those people themselves might even start their own related blog or vlog on their friend's behalf. And at the same time, for the person looking for new specific information, the process is often exhaustive but not necessarily deep. In a way, the process is more often reactionary in nature than a form of deep contemplation or first-hand knowledge.

“An Indian Killed an American at UCLA”

Using their social media apps, the Indian participants in my study spoke about the UCLA murder-suicide in a way that is quite unexpected. According to their local Indian news sources and follow-up discussions on social media, there was shock that “one of their own,” an Indian, killed a white American professor within an elite West Coast university. In this case, it was not just about another shooting that happened within an American educational institution; instead, the situation included “a man of Indian descent using a gun to kill someone.” *The Hindu*, a prominent newspaper in India, provoked a social media storm when it presented the following headline (see Figure 29):

Figure 29. “UCLA gunman is an Indian-American techie.”²¹



(UCLA Gunman, 2016)

They understood the events of June 1st, 2016 at UCLA as something that included someone of their own decent using a gun to bring shame to their country. “How could this happen?” one student remarked.

After the story was posted and reposted all over social media, the international student participants said that the Indian community members from around the world chimed in and shared their thoughts. In their opinion, it was easier for them to come to terms and understand the earlier example that I discussed with Indians being at the center of racist shootings in a predominantly white rural Kansas town. This time however, it was a PhD graduate from a coveted institution like UCLA who studied in one of their most popular fields who sent shock waves throughout India.

²¹ I chose to remove the picture of UCLA’s June 1st, 2016 shooter out of respect for those who were most profoundly impacted by this tragic event.

Chinese perspectives: “UCLA shooting part of a bigger problem”

The international participants from China had a very different take on the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA. They described the event in more *holistic terms* as example of another American shooting another American. In their opinion, they see and talk about these stories on their social media platforms so often that the different events seem to blend together. New headlines and their subsequent discussions further support the idea that no one event is an anomaly. This reminds me of the desensitization that Americans experienced during the height of the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan when new headlines came out almost daily about new attacks on American troops. In a similar light, new acts of deadly gun violence in America feed into the same bigger theme that “UCLA shooting part of a bigger problem.” It is a problem that they do not have in their country and of which America just cannot seem to get a handle on.

Moreover, they are also aware that many acts of gun violence in America happen within educational institutions. Normally what happens in a school or university across the world feels irrelevant to the lives of other in their respective educational spaces. However, as the Chinese students in my study considered becoming international students in the U.S. and at UCLA, they took to social media to talk with other Chinese students who have studied, were studying, or also considering studying in America. As Chinese students are the largest demographic of international students in the United States, they have a large pool of people to talk with online to help inform their decisions of whether or not to attend university overseas in North America. Social media helps them talk with others from their home country and see how they make sense of common deadly gun violence in America.

In regard to the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA, one of the students during the focus group described how she was not a bit surprised that something like this happened at UCLA. On her social media, she had read an article about how UCLA was once ranked as the most dangerous campus in United States (Rodgers, 2012). When she turned to her social media in light of the act of deadly gun violence that occurred at UCLA she was able to share what she had read previously with others online and enter into discussion with them about this.

But whether the international students attended UCLA or not, they said that the prevalence of guns in America means shootings can happen anywhere. This stands in stark contrast to their country where it is illegal to own a gun. They further explained the deep-seeded problem of gun violence in America by talking about the Las Vegas, Nevada “Route 91 Harvest Music Festival” shooting that left 58 killed and 851 injured (The New York Times, 2017). Whether a person visiting America is at a concert, airport, a random street, or school, it does not exempt you from potential harm according to the Chinese participants. A simple fun night in Vegas, in their opinion, could easily turn into the sounds and images that they saw reposted from American news sources in China. The screenshots below are now the first thing that most of the participants think about when they hear the words “Las Vegas,” replaced by the initial images of casinos, gambling, drinking, and shows that the class of students who arrived the year had when they were in their 1st year at UCLA (see Figures 30-33).

Figure 30. Las Vegas Shooting. (1 of 3)



10月
2
2017

拉斯维加斯音乐节枪击致58人死亡，515
人受伤，6名中国游客尚被困封锁区

(The Most Powerful Student Signs, 2017)

Figure 31. Las Vegas Shooting. (2 of 3)



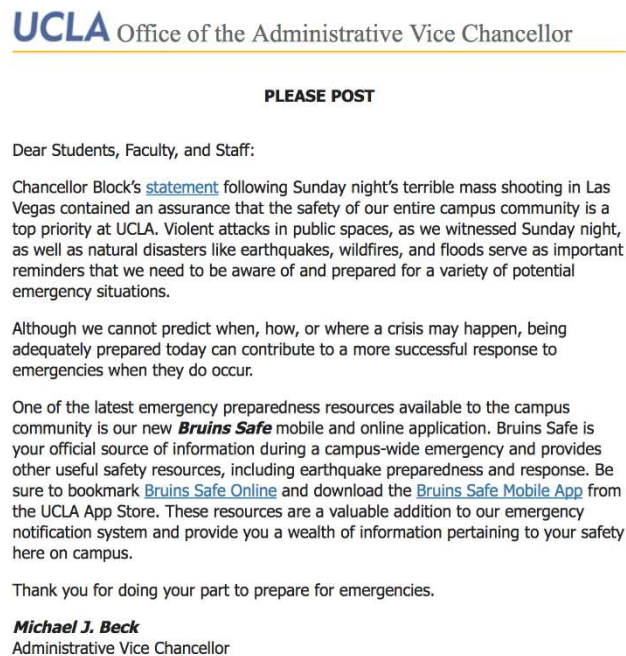
(Beck, 2017)

Figure 32. Las Vegas Shooting. (3 of 3)²²



(NBC News, 2017)

Figure 33. UCLA response to Vegas shooting.



(M. Beck, personal communication, October 9, 2017)

²² On a personal level, one of the teachers who joined the Anaverde Elementary School staff the year after I taught 5th grade in Palmdale, CA before starting at UCLA was among the fatal victims of the Las Vegas shooting.

California's diversity is a security blanket for international students

Despite America's obvious gun problem, most of the participants from India and China explained that they still view California as among the "safer" American states. They feel that it is more inclusive of international visitors because of its diverse population and therefore a better place to study. Prior to coming to UCLA, they used their respective social media platforms not only to figure out which schools are best for what they want to study, but also what the student and local populations would be like. The IHE that were less diverse and/or had fewer Indians or Chinese students, might mean more issues of safety for them. They felt that they might stand out more in a school in Kansas, for example, and therefore be clearer targets for racial or xenophobic acts of discrimination, and related violence against them. They found that the most prestigious universities in the country often already had diverse student populations within a diverse region, and therefore, getting into one of these more elite institutions becomes even more worthwhile.

Indeed, as mentioned previously, Los Angeles County where UCLA resides, has a population of over 40% that was born outside of the United States. The participants from both India and China are comforted by the sense of diversity in L.A. despite not knowing specific facts or figures. The information that they get from social media, including interacting with a diverse array of bloggers and vloggers based out of L.A., provides them a feel that living here is a sort of security blanket or asset, rather than a liability.

There was a sense from their digital conversations with their friends that they will meet students from all over the world at UCLA. They did not think it would be a homogenous social and cultural environment and therefore a relatively safe and comfortable one. Moreover, one student from India said that since "California is a Democrat instead of Republican state, then it is probably more welcome of foreigners and therefore safer for us." It was interesting how he made

a connection between state and local politics and safety. In his eyes, it seems that a political party and state which has proclaimed itself a “sanctuary” environment, and unwilling to support federal agents in their search for undocumented citizens, actually means more safety for him as an international student at UCLA. I will go further into discussion about American politics and its potential impacts on international students in a later section.

In other words, they would be living in a diverse state, in a diverse county, in a diverse city, and studying within a diverse university. As an outsider international student coming to UCLA, there was little worry that they would moving to a new place where they would feel isolated, misunderstood, and alone.

Guns in Westwood: “It’s not so bad here”

During both focus groups, most of the students agreed that things are “not so bad here” in Westwood and at UCLA. The students from China regularly hear about American gun violence on social media back at home, but now that they are here, and do not see its direct impact in their day-to-day lives, they are slowly becoming more comfortable in their new environments. After their move to Westwood, they do not see the everyday citizen walking around with a gun. They do not hear gunshots. They know UCLA restricts guns on campus.

For them, what they have and are hearing on the news and learn from social media about new school shootings seems in a way connected to their lives here, but at the same time not. They know about UCLA’s June 1st, 2016 shooting, but do not see any visible vestiges of its impact in their day-to-day lives on campus – or so consciously think so. One of the students from the Chinese focus group said that “Chinese social media told us that guns are everywhere, but when I came here I realized that maybe it is not a serious problem where I live, and I don’t have

to worry much.” Again, she contributes her feeling of safety in Westwood to the mixed messages she has gotten on Chinese social media and her contrasting first-hand experiences at UCLA.

Currently on WeChat, China’s main messaging app, Chinese students from around UCLA have started a group chat that currently has over 500 people on it. They share various news with each other and keep up-to-date on the latest events. The students expressed this group as a very useful digital social support network. If they worry about their safety while in Westwood or wonder whether it is safe to venture out somewhere else in L.A., they ask their group about their experiences and get feedback. Tips to keep safe in Westwood and things to watch out for may pop up from time-to-time, but since they got here, they reportedly have not had any problems with local acts of gun violence.

For the students from India, they did not know if the shooting that occurred at UCLA was representative of a greater trend of safety around campus. They wondered if it was just one shooting in an otherwise safe area or part of a bigger trend. Social media gives them different viewpoints but overall, they feel they would be just fine here. When they arrived, those feelings only grew. “Yeah, I feel safe here,” one student reported in the focus group. Questions that they heard before coming to UCLA from local communities such as, “Are you sure you are going to be safe?” quickly dissipated. They feel that living in one of the most affluent areas in the country, in a diverse environment, and one that does not seem to have many guns around means that it’s “not so bad here” in Westwood.

A face-to-face intercultural communication analysis

In the final of three approaches in the field of Communication Studies, I will examine how face-to-face intercultural interactions impact UCLA’s Indian and Chinese international

students' overall perceptions of safety and the June 1st, 2016 shooting that happened on campus. The purpose is to examine how these collections of interactions might further impact their educational experiences. I will look at the diverse array of interpersonal interactions that the participants have had over time and consider how they heuristically constructed perceptions of safety and gun violence in the United States. Using Pieterse's (2015) cultural hybridity model along with Rymes' (2012) repertoire approach to intercultural communication, I will further explore why the Indian and Chinese international students at UCLA perceive their lives in Westwood in regard to safety the way they do.

No American friends locally, but global understandings abound digitally

Both the Indian and Chinese participants in my study, rarely, if at all, come into personal contact with Americans while in their respective home countries. In fact, most of their friends at home come from their respective regions and countries. The focus groups spoke in great detail about what it was like to grow up and live in a homogeneous culture. "Life is simple back home," one participant from India said. "My closest friends are those I grew up with," another said. It seems fitting then that a new life abroad in a foreign IHE like UCLA would seem appealing, exciting, and at times, also overwhelming.

Within their communities at home, they were usually exposed to similar types of mass media, and often used the same social media apps as everyone else did. They saw and read online how America is a melting pot and that they can expect to experience a variety of new perspectives and ways of thinking if they come here to study. This is actually why they are coming here in the first place: to live, learn, and research at a university that boasts its diversity of thought.

Even though many of them felt that their face-to-face conversations at home provided them with limited ways through which to see the world, quite the opposite seems to be the case. The lack of face-to-face interactions with foreigners actually spurred them on to seek information sources elsewhere. The students from China, for example, would be exposed to new ways of thinking in mass and social medias and use this as a topic of discussion among their friends. “Are you worried about guns in Los Angeles?” one participant was asked by her parents before she came here. She was in turn able to strike up a conversation with them, compare what they have heard, and co-construct in piecemeal fashion what it means with regard to safety in the U.S. for their daughter.

In other words, they were interacting with people from around the world digitally but using a repertoire approach locally to make sense of what they could not experience first-hand. As new information sources came in via news stories, for example, they could collectively, digitally, and with face-to-face interactions gather an abundant amount of new information. Even though the Indian and Chinese students in my study did not have a chance to sit down with Americans prior to coming here and asking questions like, “What is America really like?” they had other ways to understand safety in America.

Diversity of thought and action with limited travel experience

As the participants considered a life abroad in Westwood, none of them had ever been to Los Angeles before. In fact, among the numerous people I interviewed, only a handful had ever been to the United States – mostly for short-term visits. Most of the Indian participants had never left their country prior to entering the United States while only a few of the Chinese students had significant overseas experience. Regardless of this limited experience, they each had their own

views, opinions, and related actions regarding staying safe in the United States (more which we will explore in the following sections).

Despite limited first-hand experience in the United States, their individual thoughts and actions regarding safety at UCLA and in the local area diversified. Some of the Chinese students had friends who had studied in America before and were able to garner from them information pertaining to their own experiences of safety, or lack thereof, while being an international student in the U.S. Meanwhile, others have family members who live in the United States and were able to share with them their own accounts and stories of safety concerns here.

Interestingly enough, all of the Indian participants and about half of the Chinese students have family members, some close and others distant, in the United States. These family members provided them a unique window into American life. These interactions occurred mostly when their family members would return to their home countries for holidays, weddings, and funerals. Conversations about life in America and what this entails include cultural, social, and economic differences between these two places.

Additionally, even though most of the participants did not have American friends at home, many of them had direct face-to-face interactions with those who did (since they lived there). These relatives offered a unique perspective about life in America that diversified how each of the participants thought about what life was like living in different parts of the United States and whether living in Los Angeles was “one of the better places” or not.

In fact, not only did all of the Indian participants have relatives in America, but seven out of eleven of them were also connected to people who live in California. One-by-one each participant said that their relatives abroad reassured their relatives at home (often aunts, uncles, or cousins) that California is a diverse and accepting place to live. Moreover, if the student ever

needed any help at UCLA, they could just jump on a plane or take a short train ride to a little home-away-from-home. Indeed, this heuristic approach to understanding safety in California is complicated even further as they talked to their Indian-born but American-living relatives on breaks away from their studies at UCLA.

Intercultural encounters in L.A. challenge prior perceptions

After living in L.A. for nearly six months, one student from China remarked, “Wow, it is much safer here than what you see in the media!” Despite all of the years of perception-building that each person has about various locales around the world, nothing can replace the experience of actually going there. Most of the participants from India and China are used to studying in an educational environment that includes a student body with people who are of a similar ethnic and national origin, but this is certainly not the case at a diverse institution like UCLA.

At UCLA, they eat, study, research, play, and learn with people from all over the world. Cultural hybridity is in over-drive for them as they step away from a more homogenous environment in India or China and into one that is truly global in nature. Students from all 50 states, and nearly 100 countries make up their new student body. They live in a city that reflects UCLA’s student diversity and stands in contrast to their home environments.

As I will describe in a later section, this sudden influx of different ways of seeing the world challenges how they understand and perceive their lived experiences while at UCLA. When the wildfire happened near UCLA, the first major instance of a campus-wide safety issue since they arrived on campus, they heard the perspectives of “locals,” California residents from other areas, people from other American states, and of course, from various countries around the world. When classes resumed and it was safe to enter the campus again, this is the topic

everyone was talking about. In their classrooms, libraries, coffee shops, and residential houses, they got to hear what others thought, heard, and experienced with this unexpected event – only further diversifying and later challenging how they and others had made sense of the event.

Intercultural encounters in L.A. challenge perceptions at home

As the international students get ever closer to completing their first years at UCLA, they have innumerable encounters with people on and off of campus. The students from India and China described how their conversations with people since they moved here, including with each other, have impacted how they see their current environment. The topics vary from pop culture and food, to the beautiful weather and “where they should spend Spring Break.” These sound bites, small talk conversations, lectures, and deep conversations with their classmates about their futures are all, little-by-little, impacting how they see the world around them.

At the same time, these students, as I described previously, keep in regular contact with their communities back in their home countries. In many ways, the international students feel that talking with others at home provides a good reference point for how they are slowly changing and developing while living in L.A. Who they were, or thought they were, and who they are becoming range from changes in their day-to-day habits to existential questions about the dichotomous relationship between what they thought before they came to UCLA and what they think now.

The topic of this dissertation, campus safety, and understandings of the act of deadly gun violence that occurred on campus the year before they applied to the university, are also being challenged daily. The students from both India and China hear a lot about guns in America in mass media and social media. But it is also around them every day in their conversations with

one another. On February 15th, the day after Valentine's Day and the aftermath of the Florida school shooting, educational institutions throughout the country lowered their flags to half-staff in memory of those who lost their lives the day before. UCLA followed suit (see Figure 34).

Figure 34. American flag lowered to half-staff.



(Gelzhiser, 2018)

Some of the international students wondered why the American and California flags were lowered on a random Thursday in the middle of the quarter. People from all over campus knew about the shooting, but with a symbolic gesture, they could now feel its impact. A year and a half before, their own campus was stricken by gun violence. Now another school lay victim. The international students hear conversations around them about the shooting, see UCLA's campus respond once again with messages from its school leaders, and now for them, a campus that is

thousands of miles away from Florida is talking about another one of America's schools mourning as they did not so long ago.

**Revisited: Interplay of mass media, networked individualism,
and face-to-face intercultural interactions**

After having thoroughly and separately examined three different aspects of communication studies and its impact on international student perceptions of campus safety and the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA, the following section will look at their aggregate and compounded effect on one another. Mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions, which are examined through the philosophical lenses of Dewey's experiential learning and a Freirean critical approach, highlight how international students' outward actions & internal attitudes are impacted by their perceptions of safety and ubiquitous presence of guns in America. The following emergent themes provide some of the most profound findings of this dissertation research project that were described by the research participants in both the in-depth interviews and focus groups.

UCLA alleviates fears of gun violence while nearby Westwood Villages escalates them

As the international students arrived on campus in the fall of 2017, nearly 15 months after the June 1st, 2016 shooting at UCLA, they finally entered into elite programs on campus that they had spent years preparing for. As anyone who travels to a new location for the first time knows, every experience is new, exciting, and eye-opening. "In China," one student said, "the buildings are so close apart . . . but here everything is so far apart." Another student chimed in, "I had no idea that there are so many coffee shops and places to get Asian food here." During the

interviews and focus groups, the students shared with me these and other revelations they had about their new educational experiences in America. The same was true for their evolving perceptions of campus safety at UCLA and understandings of the June 1st, 2016 shooting.

“Americans don't seem too concerned about guns,” a student from India said, “I was worried before I came here but now I’m no longer that concerned.” The international students from India and China agreed that they thought they would *see* more guns in their day-to-day lives. But they do not. They feel that overall, they are safe on campus. Aside from the occasional UCPD police officer they see with a gun, they do not see the “average American student” walking around with a sidearm on their hip or sticking out of their bags. They talked about how they still cannot believe it’s legal here in America to own a gun, and that they can even buy one since they have a F-1 Student Visa. The consensus was that the less they actually see guns on campus in their day-to-day lives, the more they feel safe on campus and that they will not be directly impacted by gun violence – including becoming a victim of another on-campus shooting at UCLA.

At the same time, however, the nearby “Westwood Bubble,” which begins where the official campus boundaries end and where most of the international student participants live, gives them a sense of concern as they go home each night. Fears of being found alone and becoming a victim of a robbery, either by a knife or gun, drastically increases. “There is a Bruin Bus that takes us home from campus till midnight each night,” said a woman from China. “But I’m in the lab really late and often leave campus alone like 3:00 or 4:00 a.m.,” she continued. She feels that UCLA and Westwood do not have enough lights around campus and in the surrounding village. “There are a lot of homeless people sleeping on the streets at night in Westwood,” she said, “it’s really scary to see.”

Many of the undergraduates at UCLA live on campus, but many of the international graduate students that I interviewed live in graduate housing which is located off-campus and away from the heart of the academic buildings. At the end of the day, the 10-15 minute walk between the the confines of a safe campus and the UCLA-owned housing property is both the time and place they feel most vulnerable and at risk. “I just feel like someone could jump out with a gun at any moment,” responded another student from China. It seems that the common graduate student lifestyle of late nights, early mornings, and off-campus housing does not provide them the assurances of safety that they feel are afforded to the undergraduate communities.

1st year at UCLA: Personal encounters with guns and safety concerns

The overall feeling of international students in my study was that their fears of safety were unwarranted after having lived in Los Angeles for about half a year. However, several of the students in the study did indeed have direct run-ins with safety concerns. One of the female students from India during her late-night walk home in Westwood Village was followed by a man while returning from campus. She explained how she increased her pace as she tried to get home as quickly as possible. The man approached her and starting “misbehaving” in her presence. She eventually got home safely but never reported the incident.

Afterwards, she contacted her family in India and told them of her scary encounter. They told her to be safer next time and offered advice for her to carry pepper spray on her. She heeded their advice and purchased the safeguard in case something similar were to happen to her again. “This would never happen to me in the streets of India where it is always full of people,” she said. As she told her story, the other students in the focus group became alarmed. For some of

them, the first-hand account of violence coming from another intentional student from India was alarming to them. They discussed whether they themselves should buy some sort of deterrent mechanism in case they were to find themselves in a similar situation.

Shortly after, a male student from the same focus group shared his own personal encounter with a concern of safety – by this time it involved guns and the very building he studies in each day on campus. To the surprise and dismay of the other Indian international students in the focus group, he talked about a lockdown that occurred in Engineering IV during the fall quarter of 2016. As he walked through the same building where Prof. Klug was murdered by his former student, he saw “three UCPD officers with guns drawn on the 5th floor” telling him to get inside one of the offices and lock the door behind him. “It was the first time I ever saw a gun,” he exclaimed. According to the participant, the lockdown was not reported via any campus wide alerts or even the Wildfire App.

It was an experience that has had a lasting impact on him. “I didn’t tell my parents about it because I thought they would start worrying about me,” he said. Even he often remembers the event when he goes back to school he says he feels relatively safe on campus. “Maybe too safe,” he says, and later adds, “I should take more caution about my safety at UCLA, but I just don’t.” As he shared his story the other students agreed that they feel safe on campus but maybe this is a just a false sense of security.

In fact, I noticed that the study itself produced a sense of heightened awareness and reflection among the international student participants about whether their feeling of safety on campus needs to be reconsidered. The focus groups provided them a place to talk about an otherwise overlooked part of their day-to-day lives at UCLA. As the students spoke it became

apparent that they knew they should probably think more about their safety but often do not do so due to its provocative and often uncomfortable evoking of emotion.

A contested terrain: Survival skills in L.A.

As the students continue their educational experiences at UCLA, they find themselves in a contested terrain where perceptions that they constructed prior to coming to California now collide with their current realities. There is a constant tension between events that are happening locally, whose meanings are being understood through a global process of information and perception sharing. As I mentioned, as a whole the international students feel safer than they expected to after moving to America. However, the actions they take to keep themselves safe here often reflect points of view that were previously constructed. The international students represent themselves as a contested terrain where views of safety and actions to support them are often in tension with one another.

As the students say they feel safe on campus, they feel less so when the late-night hours approach on campus. “Large groups of people make me feel safe,” says one student from China. The other students remarked how UCLA is a sprawling campus where there are crowds of people from all over the world all throughout campus. But as classes end and labs and offices stay open, they often find themselves away from the security blanket of having others around. In fact, one way that the students from India and China handle this challenge is to find other people from their country who can remain nearby when others are leaving campus. Sometimes these students are in the same program but other times not.

For the students from India, in particular, they feel that staying in groups like at home (e.g., preserving their collective home culture) acts as a key safeguard for them. In other words,

by doing what they would do at home and always finding themselves in large groups with other Indians by default keeps them safe on and off campus. They explained the contrast of their way of living with how many Americans they see around them often live. When explaining what America means to them in a few words, one of the commonly agreed upon terms was “independence.” The very thing considered an important American trait is also something they consider a risk, whereas a group setting is a way to not only preserve their home culture, but also offer them a sense of safety and protection in return.

The international participants from China are all only children. They are less used to being in groups, especially while abroad, than their Indian international student counterparts. They want to have the same freedoms of going places alone as they did in China but must do so with some added precautions. While one student talked about the sense of security she feels when walking around her home city alone late at night, she utilizes the campus van services whenever possible. However, many of the participants from China prefer the added freedom, independence, and convenience associated with ride-sharing apps like Uber or Lyft. “I don’t take the city bus here,” one student said. “Uber is safer than buses and paying a little more it worth the price especially because I am a female,” she continued.

Other keys to daily survival, despite perceptions that UCLA and Westwood are safe overall, include for some students not going out after 9pm, having less than \$20 in their pockets, going south of Wilshire Blvd. where there are more lights and fewer dark areas than in Westwood and on campus, knowing where emergency boxes are located, and choosing safe times to use public transport. Another common theme among the students was that location was everything. No-go areas, as we mentioned, like DTLA evoke strong emotions from students. “I went there once and don’t want to go there again,” said a male student from India. “Some guy

approached me once I was there and I had to run into a restaurant to be safe,” he continued. Overall, the students felt that DTLA was not a desirable place to visit. In their minds, they had constructed a map of where it was OK to go and not go. This mental map, just as their overall perceptions of campus safety and gun violence in America are, is an ever-evolving terrain.

Home culture acts as protection abroad

As the international students from India go about their lives at UCLA, their contact with people back at home is profound. “Yeah, I talk to my mom at least twice a day,” said a female student from India. “My mom worries about me if we don’t talk several times a week,” said another male Indian student. These conversations on the phone and through mass media include more than just people in their immediate families or friends, they are with a wide range of community members, old classmates, and people they have never met, all interacting with one another on one of several blogs they follow.

As I mentioned previously, their collective culture of doing things in groups and digitally with people at home remains the same with all of their new Indian friends in Westwood. Most of them came alone to the campus but now meet and hang out in large groups, often over 10 students in size, whenever going to an event on campus or in the LA area. This sense of companionship and connection is important for these students. However, it also offers an added benefit – namely that of deterrence.

“Yeah, we like to hang out in big groups and just wouldn’t go to some event alone,” one Indian student from Delhi said. As I mentioned earlier, it is when the students are alone late at night coming back from campus that is a major issue of concern for many international students. However, as one student put it, “There are a bunch of Indian students that take the same classes

as I do so we just always stick together when going home.” The process of looking out for each and maintaining a group culture with other Indians on the UCLA campus provide them security, a means of deterrence for being targeted by someone if they were found alone, and even more importantly, a sense of belonging in a new country in a new system of higher education.

The students from China, although all only children growing up who have relatively small families compared to their Indian counterparts, also use digital communities to maintain the collective culture they have at home. As I mentioned earlier, one group chat on WeChat boasts over 500 students on it. So, although they may not be physically walking together in groups of 10 or more like the Indian students, if cause for concern began developing around campus, there are hundreds of digital local crime reporters nearby to keep everyone up to date on what is going on in the area.

Social media chats that foster commonality among community members, in this case being an international student at UCLA from China, are abundant. Each of those 500+ students are also a part of other, sometimes overlapping and sometimes not, digital group chats that are triangulating and crowdsourcing events nearby as they unfold and helping to keep everyone as safe and healthy as possible.

“Open Campus”

In addition to concerns of safety like returning home from campus late at night, the actual layout of campus itself was quite shocking and alarming to the students upon their arrival.

“When I arrived at UCLA for the first time, I couldn’t figure out where it was. I saw buildings with lots of students and signs, but no security guards, fences, or campus walls,” a male student from India said. In fact, both the Indian and Chinese international students in my study were

shocked that UCLA just “lets any person walk freely through campus” and into most buildings and classrooms. “No one checks my ID, even in the library. Can’t anyone just come in?” asked a female student from India.

After a series of terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008, according to the participants, it became required in many public areas, such as trains, hotels, and schools, for bags and IDs to be checked. The students feel that their government’s new security measures, as inconvenient as they are, provide them a greater level of security than what we have in America. One student from China remarked, “My undergraduate university in Beijing has tall walls around the whole campus which guards the school.” How can a place like UCLA, and in America, not have their own?” she pondered. The idea that anyone can enter campus at their leisure is a safety concern for preventing future acts of violence.

Indeed, the actual layout of UCLA seamlessly transitions from the main campus, into Westwood Village, and then eventually into other surrounding neighborhoods. Even though they feel overall that the surrounding area is safe, they feel unsettled that their campus is not more of a student- and scholar-only environment (that at least visitors should be screened at some point). Even though they feel safe during the day with so many people around UCLA, they agree that if the university had had greater protections, then the June 1st, 2016 shooting may have never happened. “Student can bring anything they want onto campus,” said a male student from India. The overall sentiment from the students fell along the lines of wondering who or what is to prevent another disgruntled student from returning to campus to commit a similar act of deadly gun violence like what occurred a year and half before they enter the campus as students themselves.

No campus walls reflect American ideological academic freedom

While talking with both groups of students, I asked them to give me 2-3 words for how they would describe “America.” Their answers were typically related to “freedom, independence, and individuality.” As they went into greater detail about these perceptions, I realized that the way American campuses are set up physically are a reflection of the ideological academic freedoms that we claim to offer. As the Indian students talked about their government’s response to prior terrorist bombings and the addition of metal detectors and bag checkers, they wondered why, after the June 1st, 2016 campus shooting, they do not see more police officers, news walls, ID checkers, and so on around campus. It seems to them as if a serious campus shooting and lockdown never happened on campus.

In China, the students contend daily with the Great Firewall that restricts their information flow and leaves it up to government funded censors to determine what information they gain access to. Their campuses also often have walls. But this is not the case in America. California’s public campuses are open, classrooms are usually unlocked, and libraries have visitors strolling in and out without ID checks. But why is this the case, considering concerns of gun violence in American soft targets like schools? I think that these limited physical protections relate to protections and freedoms of campus ideologies. A public university does not want to keep its tax payers, and visitors from around the world, from engaging with its community. It is supposed to be, in theory, a place of contrasting and even contradictory ideas. A place of debate and democracy. Just like the thoughts and opinions of international students about safety in American schools, it is indeed a contested terrain. However, do these lax protections compared to the environments that the Indian and Chinese international students come from come at a different mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual cost?

Random Acts of Gun Violence like Mass Shootings are the Real Concern on Campus

Even though the international students expressed concern that anyone in America can just walk onto campus with a gun and commit a random act of violence, they do not see all forms of deadly gun violence in the same way. “I’m not concerned with targeted shootings at UCLA. . . . but mass shootings are worrisome,” said one participant from India. Indeed, the same theme emerged when I spoke with the Chinese student participants. Overall, they feel safe at UCLA even though there are apparent flaws with how UCLA seems to protect its campus. “If someone shoots someone because they are mad at that them, then I am not worried about that,” another female student from India said as she also expressed some concern for more random acts of deadly gun violence.

Several participants described concern with the vast amounts of disconcerting information that they are getting from mass media, social media, and daily face-to-face conversations about large-scale indiscriminate shootings that seem to be becoming more frequent not only within educational institutions but also almost anywhere where people are gathered. It is a real and deeply visceral concern for them. Accompanying the newest revelation that another mass shooting has occurred, or was just thwarted at the last minute, is a sense fear and concern (sometimes big and other times small) that would not arise in response to a similar issue back in their home countries. As I mentioned previously, living in a new foreign environment while trying to make sense of something as dire as a deadly mass shooting is only intensified since it takes place somewhere still relatively unknown to them, compared with their domestic peers.

They know the odds of getting caught up in a random act of mass gun violence are very slim, but the possibility of it happening to them remains as real as the news media or even campus-wide email responses to events like the Las Vegas shooting that find their way onto their

screens and subsequently into their day-to-day face-to-face intercultural happenings with others on and off campus.

Between fears of indiscriminately being robbed or mugged with a gun or other weapon, they described the concerns that loved ones have of their being caught up in a mass act of violence as their relatives overseas are exposed to the own form of headline news media, and conversations on social media and with those physically nearby. As another student from India described, “The reason for the shooter to shoot someone matters. If its someone random shooting people, then I worry. If its personal, then it’s not that bad.” The way in which they see a popular international tourist attraction like Las Vegas will never be the same as it was before the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival massacre happened. The victims in this shooting never knew the shooter. Would they?

The students from India, for example, like to go out in their home and do what any person in their early to mid-twenties enjoys doing. They also like to consider visiting or even one day working at places that make California unique, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and even YouTube. After the data collection portion of the research project concluded, an unprecedented indiscriminately attempted mass shooting happened on the YouTube campus in San Bruno, California (see Figure 35). The international participants in my study expressed concern, and rightly so, about when and where the next mass shooting will occur in the United States. As one participant put it, “I was really worried about something happening to me while going through security at an UCLA basketball game.” She felt that being in a crowd out and in the open increased her anxiety and the potential for something bad to happen.

Figure 35. YouTube campus shooting.



(Gelzhiser, 2018)

Contested Terrain: Impact of Trump's travel ban

The intersectionality of education, guns, and politics is unmistakable throughout this dissertation. In the next two sections, I will highlight a couple salient themes that emerged from my conversations with the international student participants regarding this complex topic. The recent provocative actions of U.S. President Trump have indeed had a profound impact on the international student participants' perceptions of safety and welcome-ness in America. It is my responsibility as a researcher to highlight this emerging conversation thread that I experienced during conversations with my participants.

Firstly, it is important to note that discussion of Pres. Trump's presidency and its impact on international students within American educational institutions is a very complex topic that

deserves its own research focus and examination. However, with that said, the “America First” mantra that the Trump presidency has abided by, according to my international student participants, makes them feel “less welcome and concerned a bit about living in the U.S. as foreigners.” In the context of the current American presidency, they feel that they are now more concerned with how they look, act, think, and speak as people studying abroad in the United States. They do not want to draw undue negative attention to themselves for fear of being discriminated against – even in the context of California as “a diverse state.”

Specifically, the Indian and Chinese students cite the introduction of a series of travel bans by the president from the very first days of his presidency onward. In fact, the “Trump effect” that they refer to has even made headlines in India proposing the idea that a decline in Indian international students moving to America to study may be a result of this new perceived hostile environment toward non-US citizens (see Figure 36).

“The overall mentality of not having outsiders here made me at one point reconsider whether I should come to UCLA and just wait a year to see what happens first,” said a male student from India. The other students from India said that they care less about the fact that their own country was not put on the travel ban list and more about the idea that any foreigner going to America would be banned based solely on their national origin. For them this creates a broader sentiment that the U.S. is becoming less welcoming to foreigners, and that includes them. Another Indian student spoke up and said the following when she was debating to come to UCLA: “You will not feel welcome here, or others don't feel you should be here. You can be targeted or discriminated against just because you are from another country.” Her worries of xenophobia seemed to be exacerbated whenever she hears the U.S. President tweet his thoughts about the border wall with Mexico or the repeal of DACA.

Figure 36. News about Trump & international students in Indian news.



(E. Michaels²³, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

However, for the Chinese students, aside from their unanimous feeling that they are less safe here in America compared with home, they are less concerned about who the American president happens to be and more concerned with staying the course and acquiring their world-class respective degrees from an elite institution like UCLA. They seem very aware of the politics of division that seem to be growing around them, especially while living in a notoriously liberal state, city, and university that often seems to directly oppose mandates imposed by the federal government on the state and local levels. However, being from East Asia they believe

²³ Pseudonym used to protect identity.

that they easily fit into a heavily Asian student population at UCLA and in California as a whole. They concede that if they ignore the outside chatter and work hard, then they can accomplish their goals of getting degrees from UCLA and remain above the fray. They want to let Americans deal with their own politics and instead remain focused on the task at hand.

However, at the same time, their decisions to ignore American politics becomes less convenient as the majority of them expressed interest in staying in the U.S. for at least a few years after graduation to work or enter internships. They wonder whether American policy will make it increasingly difficult for them to acquire American jobs when they are here. “America First” to them means little while at UCLA, but everything afterwards when they leave the confines of the Westwood Bubble is another story. They wonder if they will be able to get positions when they feel an oncoming era of “foreigners as second-class citizens.” For them, only time will tell whether their fears will be met, and they will have to consider work opportunities elsewhere.

Contested Terrain: Trump, guns, & schools

Both the Indian and Chinese international students were well aware that most Americans can own a gun if they so choose. Some of them also knew that they can also buy guns themselves if they have a desire to do so. At the same time, they described their ignorance about not knowing how specific guns laws change from state-to-state and what impacts this can have on them. However, none of them knew that guns are although prohibited on UCLA’s campus, while in some places, like the University of Texas, Austin, they are actually permitted in the classroom. In the midst of difficult degree programs at UCLA, they admit they do not have the time to study American gun laws.

At the same time, trying to navigate complex and constantly changing American federal and state gun laws further exacerbates their fears and concerns. They often feel lost in a new foreign environment where they are trying to juggle their academic, day-to-day lives in L.A., new relationships in Westwood and old ones back at home, and so on. The added layer of better understanding the how Pres. Trump's policies on guns and its direct and indirect impact on schools cannot be a priority. However, this does not mean it is not a concern.

A student from China explained that "I know that Americans don't want the government to control them, so they want to have a gun to protect themselves." She understood it was a legal right in this country but just did not see the need for the everyday citizen to own firearms. In fact, international students from both India and China feel that private citizen gun ownership naturally puts more guns on the streets and this cannot be a good thing – especially considering how this contrasts with their home environments' much stricter gun laws.

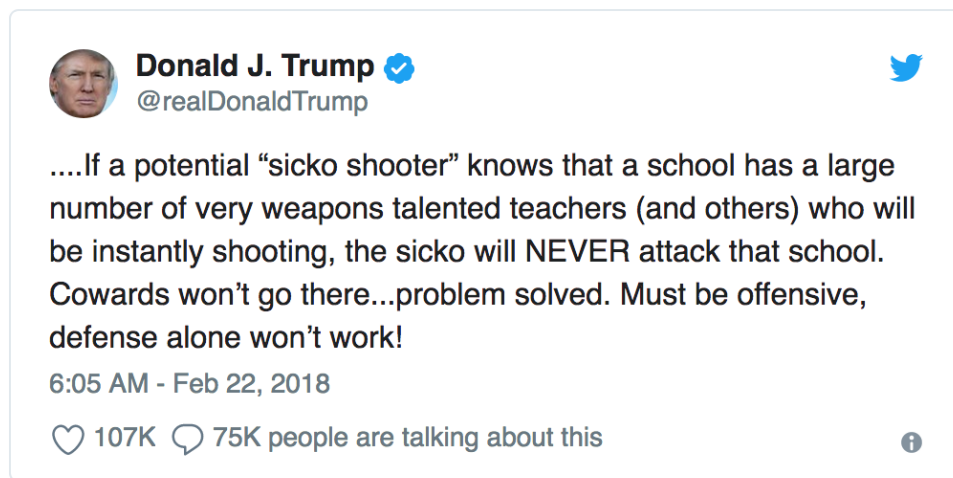
They do not like the thought of the person sitting next to them on a bus or in the library possibly having a gun and ammunition on them. The reason for why some Americans support gun ownership did not matter much to them, they just did not like the sheer prevalence of guns that can be around them at any given moment – despite who owns them or the purpose of ownership.

In fact, the participants unanimously agreed that America should have stricter gun laws that would assure greater safety for them and its citizens. One student remarked, "Mass shootings don't happen in places like Canada. Why don't people see that here?" In the aftermath of the Florida school shooting, sales of bullet proof school bags increased several hundred percent within days (Bayliss, 2018). They seemed bewildered as we discussed the fact that there is even a recent craze in nearby schools as movie and sports stars in Hollywood began buying these

items for their kids to use in schools. “Why don’t they just fix the problem instead of putting a band aid on it,” a male student from India remarked.

On Twitter, Pres. Trump’s preferred method of quickly communicating his thoughts and feelings to the world, he posted the following message that further elevated fears of future deadly gun violence in schools among the international student participants (see Figure 37):

Figure 37. Pres. Trump on Twitter.



(Trump, 2018)

As the president calls for teachers in schools across America’s educational institutions to have a right to bears arms, the fears of the international students in my studies of more violence occurring in nearby schools only increases. The international students expressed disbelief that their very own professors might be able to carry a gun into their school at UCLA. And at the same time, they are eye-witnesses of student leaders around the country pushing back on federal movements to loosen gun laws. The international students find themselves in the middle of a contested terrain taking place on mass media, social media, and the diverse array of face-to-face

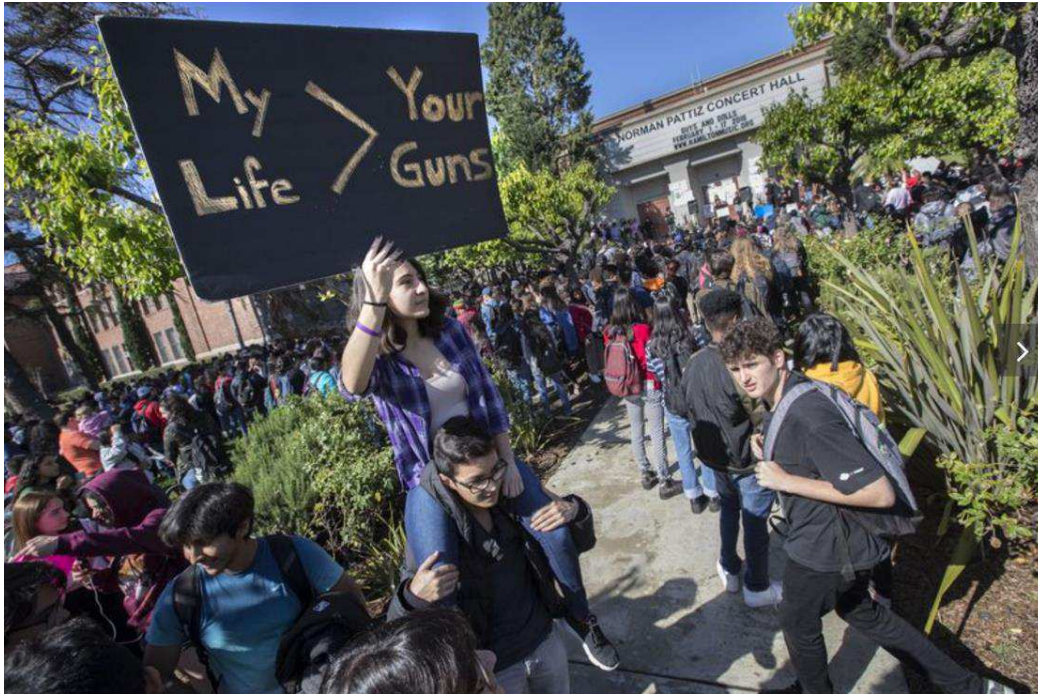
intercultural interactions taking place around them. They see students leading nation-wide “walks-outs” in schools and just do not know how to make sense of it all (see Figures 38 & 39).

Figure 38. Student walk-outs over gun violence in schools.



(The Most Powerful Student Signs, 2018)

Figure 39. Walk-out in L.A. area school.



(Bermudez, Mejia, & Kohli (2018)

Bermudez, Mejia, and Kohli (2018) write in *L.A. Times* that “thousands of students across Los Angeles walked out of their classes on Wednesday to call attention to the effects of gun violence and push for stricter gun control laws . . . the walkouts were expected to last 17 minutes to pay homage to the 17 people who were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., exactly one month ago” (para. 1-2) Indeed, international students find themselves surrounded by the signs of the grassroots March for Our Lives rallies as well as #NeverAgain and #Enough social media movements. What this means for them and their future lives in the U.S. is uncertain, but the fear, confusion, and worry that they are currently experiencing is without a doubt as real as it gets for them. In the last section before I reach the Conclusion of this study, I will talk more specifically about the uncertain futures that await these international students as they go from international student to beginning their respective Optional Practical

Training (OPTs), allowing them to gain additional experience after graduation, and beyond, as possible permanent residents or future American citizens.

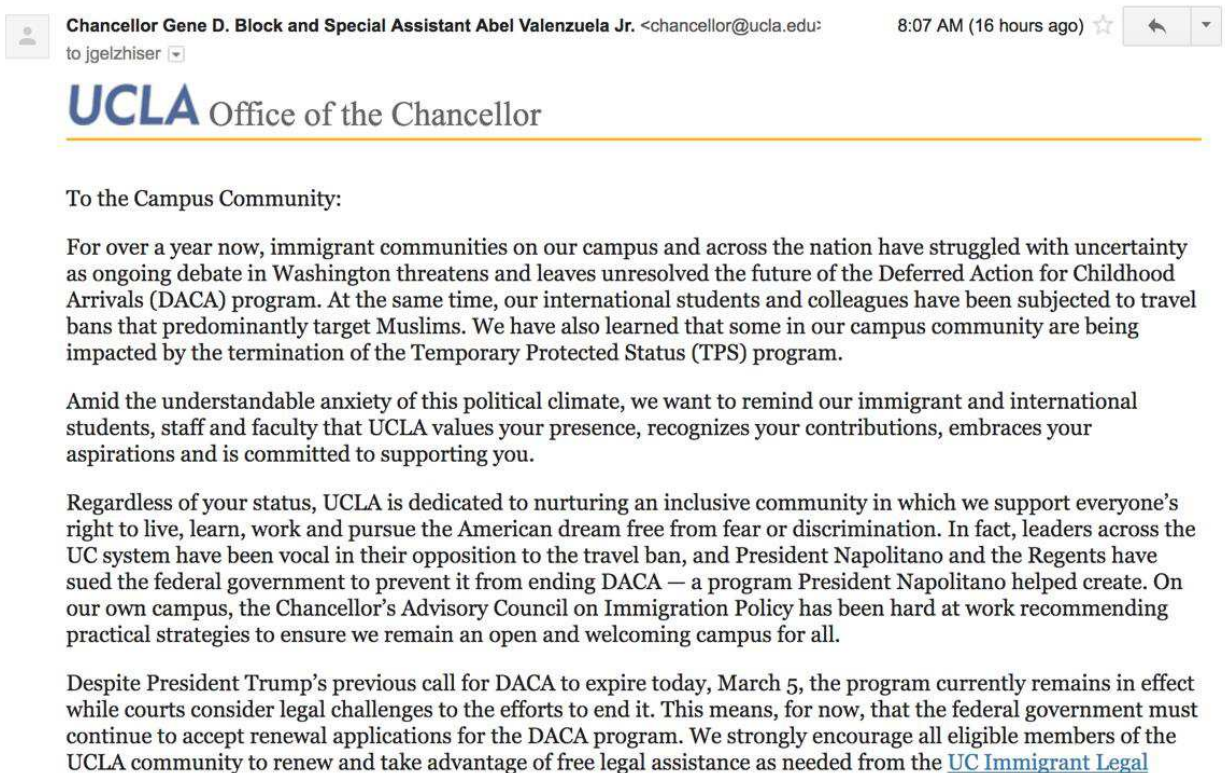
A future of uncertainty

The millions of international students who study in America's educational institutions each year are caught in a storm of gun violence that can happen anywhere and anytime – including the very classes they spend billions of dollars each year to enter. Many of the participants feel that anyone can study anywhere for two years since it is such a short period of time. For the most part, the students feel that they can ignore the acts of deadly gun violence permeating the American landscape and can just go about their day-to-day lives without the crippling fear of an act of deadly gun violence overwhelming them. However, what will happen to these thoughts, feelings, and concerns as they begin their OPTs, or seek to stay long-term in the U.S. as permanent residents or citizens? How is the overwhelming desire to utilize their new elite American degrees in the very country that they acquired them impacted? For many of the participants this is where the rubber meets the road in terms of moving beyond the honeymoon phase of studying abroad in a new foreign land and actually beginning their more long-term lives here.

They wonder if Americans will finally begin to find a way to resolve their gun epidemic. In India for example, when an act of terrorism or gun violence occurs, they feel their government swiftly responds. "Crimes with guns occur in India. But people go back to life the next day because that is their lifeline and their culture. They know how to move on, improve, and then things change for the better in India," said one of the students. Discussions about how L.A. is investing money into being prepared for the next big earthquake ensued. They wondered why

dealing head on with the problem of gun violence in America does not seem to follow suit and even appears to be stymied at every positive prospect of change. They see UCLA administrators' disapproval of Trump policies, but in reality, the current sociopolitical and day-to-day usage of guns does not seem to change (see Figure 40). They can tell Americans are upset but other shootings continue to happen in California. YouTube, San Bernardino, USC, Santa Monica Community College, and UCLA are all victims of gun violence. "When will it stop," they wonder. With such uncertainty, they consider whether it's just safer to get the degrees they came for and go home where life just seems more predictable.

Figure 40. Message from the UCLA Chancellor's office.



(G. Block, personal communication, March 5, 2018)

We unite today as a diverse, nonpartisan, and interdisciplinary group of organizations and advocates to call for Congress to provide dedicated federal funding for research into gun violence.

-March for Science (March for Science, 2018)

CONCLUSION

The number of people directly and indirectly impacted by American gun violence grows by the day. The power of gun violence to alter lives around the globe calls for greater efforts by researchers and policy-makers alike to come up with better solutions to remediate the devastation. A sign of hope is on the horizon in the form of national movements opposing existing gun laws, even as memorial services remembering those who lost their lives to unnecessary acts of deadly gun violence in the United States continue to take place. This dissertation seeks to highlight the often-overlooked population of millions of international students who are currently, have, and will one day choose to study abroad in the United States. They too are impacted by gun violence in America.

In the conclusion section of this dissertation, I will wrap up this study by summarizing what the dissertation accomplished, including revisiting the research goals and questions, discussing the significance and implications of the study, and looking at potential challenges, limitations, and implications for future research. I will conclude with a few final thoughts that emerged during the course of the study.

Summary

Deriving from the thoughts, words, and actions of the international students in my study, salient themes were highlighted that most powerfully illustrate the various ways in which they develop their perceptions of campus safety at UCLA and in their surrounding environments, create their thoughts and opinions about the June 1st, 2016 shooting that happened on campus, and how these perceptions impact their educational experiences. After sharing my first-hand account of the UCLA June 1st, 2016 campus shooting, describing the purpose for this study, and listing my specific research goals and questions, I conducted a related review of academic literature based off of developing themes of higher education admissions, violence, and deadly gun violence research. A major gap in current academic research was highlighted in relation to international students and their perceptions of campus safety and deadly gun violence in America.

Next, I introduced the methodological framework of my study which has a qualitative research emphasis. I then described the importance of having a Deweyan experiential learning and Freirean critical thought philosophical foundation for my study. I continued by incorporating elements of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions to complete the framework for my subsequent analysis. The methodological design and results sections followed, and included a two-pronged approach of in-depth interviews and focus groups. Participants from India and China were chosen in the study in order to better understand how the two largest global and international student campus populations in America make sense of safety and gun violence in America – including the June 1st, 2016 act of deadly gun violence that occurred on UCLA's campus. Themes related to mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions were first analyzed separately and later for their aggregate effects.

The following research goals were explored:

- 1) Fill an important gap in existing literature about deadly gun violence on American college campuses and its specific impact on international students.
- 2) Help American universities better understand the thought processes, concerns, and needs of international student communities, and subsequently improve overseas college admissions and student support services.
- 3) Provide the often underserved or overlooked international student community a unique platform through which they can share and voice their lived experiences and hopefully improve the overall quality of their overseas educational experiences.

A previously overlooked research gap was explored, and often underemphasized international student perspectives in America were given greater voice. As a result, it is my hope that leaders within American IHE can discover unique perspectives about the invaluable international student communities studying on their respective campuses, and hopefully provide them more robust and directed support. I also hope that this study can offer researchers of gun violence new perspectives within their own respective studies and in some way support nationwide changes in our existing “loose” gun laws.

The following research questions that were used to drive the analysis portion of this dissertation include:

- 1) How do international students construct their perceptions of campus safety at UCLA, and make sense of the specific act of deadly gun violence that occurred on June 1st, 2016?

- 2) How do their perceptions evolve as they progress through their educational experiences?
- 3) How, if at all, do these knowledge constructions of campus safety impact international students' lived experiences (i.e., outward actions & internal attitudes) while studying at UCLA?

Patterns of individual and collective usage of mass media, social media, and face-to-face intercultural interactions were revealed that demonstrated how international students' lived experiences in the United States undergo complex and ever-evolving perception-building processes. Their lives are becoming more bound and, in some ways, freed by expansions in digital technologies and their daily use in the context of our globalized world of the 21st century. Their continual interactions with those both physically near and far demonstrate a pattern of understanding that is truly global in nature. What happens in one corner of the globe now more than ever directly impacts people in other corners of the world?

As the international students at UCLA progress through their educational experiences, their perceptions of safety and of the acts of deadly gun violence that occur regularly in America, as well as on their campus on June 1st, 2016, undergo a dichotomous and conflicting reality. With perceptions that they constructed overseas, they describe *feeling* safer than they thought they would before they arrived in the United States; however, their day-to-day actions often contradict these perceptions about safety on American college campuses and even their opinions about the act of deadly gun violence that occurred at UCLA on June 1st, 2016.

Other overarching themes describe international students at UCLA as living in protective mental and emotional bubbles nearby campus where they feel for the time-being that they will be mainly unaffected by deadly gun violence while living in the United States. However, as they

exit their lives as international students, enter into OPT worker programs, and possibly become permanent residents or U.S. citizens, then they feel they will have to more candidly and earnestly face the harsher realities of America's gun problem.

Significance & contributions

When I began this study, some of my fellow researchers at UCLA questioned the relevance of a study about deadly gun violence in America and its impact on educational institutions and international students. Several years ago, no one could have imagined the heightened series of events that would have occurred in the United States in relation to gun violence, and in particular, its connection to educational institutions at the current unprecedented scale. However, during a previous pilot project with international students at UCLA, the international students expressed their growing concern with American gun culture and its related violence, which stands in stark contrast to their own current national contexts. As the pilot project and current research study have shown, more extensive research on this foreign population within America does not only have the power to reveal things about the lived experiences of international students, but it can also help Americans better understand themselves and their own futures. Sometimes understanding events at the local level requires the aid of a more objective, international, and comparative perspective.

Other significant contributions of this study center on encouraging and helping American IHE better serve the international student populations on their campuses, students on whom they often spend millions of dollars to attract to their campuses but who leave disappointed as universities offer inadequate student support and educational services for them once they arrive (e.g., improving both university policy and practice for international students). For example, the

participants in the study expressed the need for more cameras, street lighting, emergency call buttons, security personnel, and even physical walls or security fences to give them a greater sense of safety, and ultimately, peace of mind in and around campus. As some of these suggestions are more easily implemented than others, it also highlights the need for American IHE to offer better educational services to its international student populations. The lack of walls around campus may be a cause for concern for some foreign students, but it does not mean the university is not “safe” and continuously monitoring who is on its campus. As the students saw on the day of the UCLA campus shooting, within minutes hundreds of first responders made their way to campus upon news of a nearby active shooter. Indeed, perceptions of “unsafe places” can be deceptive and misleading for some students, and the university can do a better job of reassuring and assuaging unfounded concerns. Better educational tools, such as training seminars and workshops, can help bridge some of these cultural divides.

Additionally, what “safety,” “violence,” and “crime” look like in one cultural context may vary from one to the next. Greater dialogue between international students, administrators, and even police officers, for example, can help the former populations know when and how to report a crime or suspicious behavior. Policies aimed at specifically improving international student lives within American IHE can make these changes more permanent and accessible to all international students before, during, and after their respective studies. One example of this might include the aforementioned groups working in tandem to make sure that international students understand important local, state, and national laws that they might not necessarily know upon arrival or even after attending American IHE for several years. Indeed, university officials need to work more closely with and engage international student populations through policy and practice to build a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment for everyone.

Furthermore, I hope that in addition to international students, academic scholars, and higher education institutions benefitting from the results of this study, I hope that everyone directly and indirectly affected by gun violence and other forms of campus community violence may be able to relate to and learn from the lived experiences of these UCLA international student participants. The destructive effects of gun violence on college campus communities and throughout the U.S. is a palpable reality. I hope in some way this research can be used to take these terrible attacks on innocent people and build a greater sense of unity not just locally in the Los Angeles area, but in educational institutions around the globe.

Potential challenges & limitations

The following study examines the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of Indian and Chinese students at UCLA. With any qualitative research study, findings are not meant to be generalized and instead are intended to offer in-depth analyses of a small subset of participants. Therefore, the experiences of the study's participants should be understood phenomenologically and not as a representative voice of *every* international student on campus.

Additionally, specific contextual factors such as choosing students from only two national origins out of nearly 100 possible countries further narrows what we hope to understand about the greater international student population, not only at UCLA, but nationally as well. Future studies should be conducted that consider other international student populations within the American HE context.

Moreover, future mixed methods studies should be conducted and take into account both micro and macro levels of examination through both a micro and macro-level lens. Combining research tools such as large-scale surveys with in-depth interviewing, for example, can more

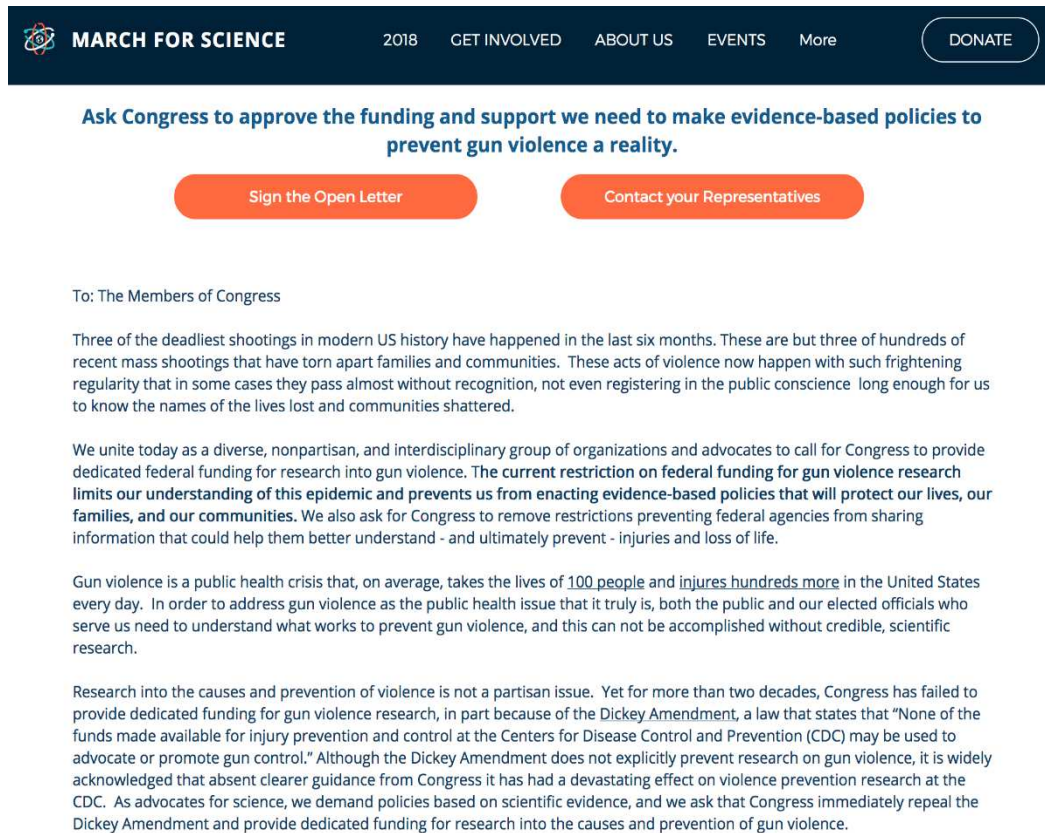
robustly illuminate our understandings of the lives of international students within American IHE.

Finally, undertaking a provocative research topic like the impact of the deadly gun violence on American college campuses can create participant reluctance to enter and stay in related studies. To combat these challenges, I reached out to as large of a research pool as possible to encourage students from an array of backgrounds and experiences to enter the study. However, as the dropping out of one of my participants during the course of this study shows, answering questions about safety, violence, and guns is not always an easy topic for participants to engage in – especially for someone doing so in a foreign environment.

Implications & future studies

As we described ways to improve policy and practice within American IHE that will directly serve its international student populations, there are also several research implications that become evident as a result of this study. One example of this is a need for more studies to be conducted on the impact of gun culture and gun violence not just in schools but throughout various social spaces within the United States. Recently, The March for Science and the American Education Research Association (AERA) released the following statements about a need for greater support and research on *gun violence prevention* in the United States (see Figure 41). As educational researchers throughout the country are calling for more federal funding and research into gun violence in America, it is important to remember the international student perspective. New perspectives are essential for more deeply examining the research topic at hand. To ignore these key perspectives is to forget that we live in a global and deeply interconnected global society.

Figure 41. March for Science letter to congress.



(March for Science, 2018)

Moreover, studies examining the impact of the Trump presidency on international students in America should be further explored. The geopolitical context of federal and state policy-making decisions on a nation that prides itself on being founded by immigrants, and offers the promise of an “American Dream,” needs to be more closely understood. There is no denying the powerful impact and intersectionality of polarizing politics, education, and gun violence in America.

Additionally, studies about a developing trend among international students in America being the perpetrators of possible acts of deadly gun violence need to be considered. Recently, two different cases, one in the area of the Upper Darby School District, a jurisdiction that I

personally lived in for eight years, and at The University of Central Florida, reveal how international students are legally allowed to buy guns while studying abroad in the U.S., and can possibly use these weapons to inflict serious harm on their respective campuses (see Figure 42).

Figure 42. International student threats of gun violence.²⁴



(Almasy & Lynch, 2018)

Studies outside of the American gun culture context also need to be examined in relation to the threat and impact of global terrorism (which was my original research topic when I began this research study). On a recent research trip to Singapore, I noticed that the nation-state has been extensively undergoing educational programming for its residents in preparation for what they believe is an imminent terrorist attack (e.g., “not if, but when” mantra posted all over the city). Even in a place that is considered one of the safest on the planet and has some of the strictest gun laws in the world, they are preparing every day for global terrorists to inflict harm

²⁴ I grew up in this school district for nearly 8 years.

on their citizens with the use of guns and bombs. They even created a new app for their citizens as a prevention and early-warning alert system. This app extends to use within their world-class universities (see Figure 43).

Figure 43. Nanyang Technical University (NTU) terrorism prevention education on campus.



(Gelzhiser, 2018)

Studies on the impact of gun violence on international student populations demonstrate just one specific lens through which I have attempted to demonstrate the need for greater

understanding into their lived experiences within American IHE. Even through one research perspective, a plethora of research findings and implications have surfaced. In other words, this dissertation shows that there is great potential for uncovering a well-spring of invaluable research findings about international student populations within American IHE examined from other lenses beside violence and guns. This is just the tip of the iceberg in regard to discovering key data about the international student experience and ways that IHE can use more in-depth research to better inform a wider range of policies and practices, and ultimately, better serve this invaluable part of the American demographic.

One such finding includes the Chinese international student's thoughts on surveillance and freedom. They are at constant odds with what they can post online and how they portray their digital personas. This relationship becomes even more complex as they use different forms of social media overseas in the United States but worry that they still might be held accountable by their home country for what they do overseas. Lenses and perspectives for more analyses are limitless and by looking through just one lens of gun violence within American IHE one can only imagine how much more rich data on these populations is just waiting to be unearthed.

Final thoughts

As I began the journey of my dissertation research project, I could never have imagined how personally, and directly, deadly gun violence would impact my own life and the educational institutions that I adopted as my homes of teaching and learning. Examples include a professor at UCLA being murdered only a few hundred yards away from me as I walked past his office on my way to proctor my students' final exam during finals week in June of 2016, a teacher from Anaverde Hills Elementary School, where I taught 5th grade during my first year living in

California, becoming one of the 58 murder victims of the largest mass shooting in American history in Las Vegas, and a mass shooting being thwarted last-minute within the confines of my home school district, in which an international student from Taiwan planned to kill his classmates on May 1st, 2018. I never would have thought how personal and deeply impactful this research topic would become. It has now carved out a difficult and emotional research path for my future that I will take on with the utmost intensity, rigor, and humility.

Researchers need to courageously confront the impact and the fear of deadly gun violence that affects our world. Universities and governments alike have a responsibility to fund and support deeper inquiry into these matters. Unfortunately, this topic is becoming more relevant by the day. Meanwhile, I believe that part of the solution to this epidemic lies in movements that international students in America themselves are now beginning to lead.

As the 21st century progresses, if we as a global society are to grow closer together in solidarity, I believe it means first taking a deep look at ourselves and asking how authentic we are willing to be with one another. Ignoring the growing impact of deadly gun violence in our world will only further tear the delicate social fabric that we so desperately need in order to maintain global peace and harmony. We have a choice to either let a small group of misdirected individuals control the direction of our global society, or face our complex reality, and bravely and critically address it head on so that we can collectively overcome evil. Only time can tell us whether or not we are up to the challenge.

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