The Role Attitudes, Perceptions, and Imagined Communities Play in Identity

(Re)Construction of English Language Learners at Ohio University

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This thesis titled
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(Re)Construction of English Language Learners at Ohio University

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ABSTRACT

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The Role Attitudes, Perceptions, and Imagined Communities Play in Identity

(Re)Construction of English Language Learners at Ohio University

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This thesis examines the role that imagined communities play in the language learning process for learners of English immersed in the United States. Research regarding the imagined communities of English language learners has not focused on students enrolled in an intensive English language program in the United States. In addition, the majority of such research concentrates on adolescent learners of English after they have become immersed within the target language and target language culture.

This study focuses on the imagined communities of 15 female learners of English enrolled in an intensive English program in the United States. The participants represent cultural groups from Brazil, China, and Saudi Arabia. Data was collected via questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and a semi-structured focus group interview. The results suggest that attitudes and perceptions regarding the target language and target language culture are critical to the learners’ conceptions of imagined communities.
DEDICATION

To Michelle
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The field of linguistics is constantly evolving and developing. Many domains are being expanded upon to include different subsets. Perhaps the most vigorous area in linguistic research is second language acquisition, which has experienced significant growth. This has resulted from the increased demand of English in the modern global world and high rates of migration to English speaking countries in quest for education and economic opportunities. Further, the interconnection of international communities has increased the demand for proficiencies in additional languages, such as English.

While a major driving force in the quest for additional languages is interpersonal communication, other areas of concern such as national integration, national security, and foreign policy have added to the need of additional languages at the individual level. As a result, an increased number of learners of English are immersing themselves at universities in the United States. In order to fulfill these demands, as well as the varied demographics of second language learners, the field of second language learning has expanded in the realm of methodology and in the theoretical area. The research paradigm has increased to include multiple approaches ranging from sociology, social psychology, and sociolinguistics amongst others. One such area that has attracted great interest is identity, which has significantly grown since Norton Pierce’s (1995) innovative study on immigrant women learning English in Canada.
Although interest and research concerning identity in applied linguistics has increased, particularly in the disciplines of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), it has not done so without attracting controversy. What constitutes the concept of ‘identity’ in the field has been subject to robust debate. However, the vast majority of research has adapted the poststructuralist viewpoint presented by Norton Piece (1995). Accordingly, identity is viewed as multiple, a sight of struggle, and subject to change. (See Chapter 02 for a detailed discussion of this notion.)

Norton Pierce’s (1995) study and subsequent publications (Norton 2000, 2001) were central in reframing discussions regarding identity and language acquisition. Many scholars (Block, 2007; De Costa, 2010; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Ricento, 2005; Swain & Deters, 2007) assert that her work led to identity being considered an area of research in its own. In accordance, the field of linguistics has experienced a sharp upturn in research on identity. In fact, books about language learning and teaching now include sections on identity (McKinney & Norton, 2008; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Norton, 2010; Ricento, 2005).

Within the framework of the larger field of linguistics, particularly applied linguistics, identity is a prevalent topic (Norton & Toohey, 2011). For instance, research on identity and sociolinguistics (Edwards, 2009; Joseph, 2004; Omoniyi & White, 2007), identity and pragmatics (Lo & Reyes, 2004; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009), and identity and discourse (Benwall & Stokoe, 2006; Young, 2009) now exists. Research concerning identity has also focused on the notion of communities of practice, first
introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991). A community of practice “is a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor” (Eckert, 2006, p.1). A community of practice can impact and influence identity construction because within these communities an individual cultivates their identity and how to express it linguistically. Another prominent research area that has developed as a result of identity enquiry is the notion of imagined communities.

The concept of imagined communities was first introduced into the field of linguistics and SLA by Norton (2001), who examined the connection between imagined communities and identity. In this research, and within the field as a whole, the term ‘imagined communities’ is predominately used in conjunction with individuals learning a language. In a general sense the term references how learners imagine they will use the target language and specifically, with whom they will use it and in what situations and contexts. By doing so, learners are able to invest and become connected with these circumstances and communities. Although this process does not exist outside of the mind, it is argued that these connections can be just as strong as those that physically exist (Norton, 2001). As a result, the learners’ investment in the imagined community is an act of identity. Not only does it allow for identity opportunities in the future, but it also is a representation of how they perceive themselves and who they want to become. Therefore, a conflict may occur within an individual when their imagined community is confronted with a community of practice.

It is now recognized that the language learning process is distinctive to each learner and consequently, is a personalized process. Therefore, this study considers the
viewpoints of three different cultural groups; thus representing Saudis, Brazilians, and Chinese. For many learners the target language community is one of imaginations and aspirations. Possibilities and identity opportunities for the future exist within this community. There have been studies that focus on communities of practice, but the purpose of this study centers on the imagined communities of learners because they are still living with these images. This research seeks to explore the role that attitudes, perceptions, and imagined communities play in the identity reconstruction of learners of English immersed at Ohio University. (See Chapter 02 for a detailed discussion of the interrelatedness of these concepts.)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The current study recognizes that studies have been undertaken regarding the identities and imagined communities of language learners with the vision of identifying implications for language learning (Carroll, Motha & Price, 2008; Cohen, 2012; Cummings, 2006; Hull, Jury & Zacher, 2007; Jin & Li-Chi, 2005; Kanno, 2003; Murphey, Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Norton, 2001; Norton & Kamal, 2003). This research has connected the notions of identity and imagined communities as being fundamental to the language learning process. These studies have made valuable contributions to the field, however, continued study reflects how the field adapts and reflects to the inevitable changing landscape.

Previous research, such as Cohen (2012), concentrates on learners broadly labeled as a result of their native language. In doing so, individuals from diverse and sometimes
vastly different areas are labeled simply as Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic. In addition, past research has not examined learners enrolled in university level intensive English language programs in the United States. Further, much of the research only considers the imagined communities of learners after they have become immersed within the culture of the target language. Oftentimes, the imagined communities they created and brought with them before immersion are not considered. Thus, a complete picture of the individual is lacking. This raises questions about the changes in attitudes and perceptions toward learning English that learners undergo. Such changes can impact identities, imagined communities, and the language learning process. As a result, this could effect learner investment and acquisition of the target language.

This study differs from previous research because it focuses on learners enrolled in a university level intensive English language learning program in the United States and considers what their imagined communities were like before immersing in the target language. In doing so, it takes into account the learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards the target language and target language culture. The contention of this research is that imagined communities, like identity, should be viewed as evolving based on circumstances and situations. Like learners’ identities, imagined communities are constantly in a state of flux, either in a state of harmony or contradiction with reality. Therefore, it is important to consider what learners’ identities and imaginations were like before they began immersion in the target language; as well as how they evolve during the immersion process. By accounting for these factors, this study hopes to provide meaningful discussion on how identities and prior held imaginations and perceptions
impact the language learning process through the comparison of three cultural groups from Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and China.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present study explores the identities and imagined communities of English language learners during the period of immersion in the target language culture. The participants are able to reflect on their attitudes and perceptions about their identities, imagined communities, the target language culture, and the English language before immersing in the target language culture. The specific aim of this study is to examine if learners from the same region share similar characteristics regarding their identities and imagined communities upon immersion in the target language culture. In addition, this research explores learners’ identities and imagined communities while they are in the process of immersing in the target language culture. In conjunction with these aims, this study considers learners’ attitudes and perceptions toward the target language and target language culture upon immersion. Based on its findings, this study attempts to provide insight on the role of imagined communities and identities in the language learning process. This study is unique in nature because it does not focus on a single cultural group, but rather, compares Saudi, Brazilian, and Chinese learners.
1.4 Research Questions

1.) Do learners that speak the same L1 exhibit similar or different attitudes and perceptions towards the process of constructing their identities prior to and while learning English?

2.) Do they exhibit similar or different attitudes and perceptions towards imagined communities while learning English?

3.) Do they exhibit similar attitudes and perceptions towards the English language?

4.) Do they exhibit similar attitudes and perceptions towards the target culture?

5.) Are there differences in the attitudes and perceptions between these cultural groups?

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

This study considers the complexity of concepts that exist within the mind and are not easily definable. Therefore, the following terms are defined with reference to their use in linguistic literature. This section briefly defines the terms identity, imagination, community, and imagined communities. Detailed discussions of these terms are provided in Chapter 02.

1.5.1 Identity

The notion of identity that is assumed in the current study is outlined by Norton (2000), who states that identity references how a person understands their relationship to the world, constructs this relationship across time and space, and understands the
possibilities for the future based on these constructions. Therefore, whenever a learner speaks, they “are negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship in multiple dimensions in their lives” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 73). Norton Piece (1995) defines the identity of language learners as multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change. This understanding of identity provides the framework for contemporary theory of identity and language learning. As such, it has been adapted in the majority of research concerning identity in SLA. The present study recognizes that these distinctions regarding identity provide an appropriate definition for a complex concept.

1.5.2 **Imagination**

In order to properly define imagination it is important to discuss the work of Wenger (1998) along with Norton and McKinney (2011). Wenger (1998) explained that imagination is a process that eclipses time and space where one constructs fresh conceptions of the world and self. It is crucial to note, the author argues, that this understanding of imagination should not be misconstrued with unreachable or misleading fantasy that is removed from reality. Wenger (1998) clarifies this by giving the example that “imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree” (p. 176). The present study uses the definition presented by Norton and McKinney (2011) that views imagination as “a creative process of producing new images of possibility and new ways of understanding one’s relation to the world that transcend more immediate acts of engagement” (p. 80).
1.5.3 Community

For Anderson (1991) a community is a group that shares common beliefs, values, or goals. Individuals gain membership in a community once they are accepted and recognized as belonging by members of the group. People routinely interact with communities, such as the workplace, neighborhood, or religious groups, even if they are not included in the membership of the group. Wenger (1998) outlines three genera that establish membership in a community. The first process is engagement, which corresponds to direct union with a community. The next method described by the author is imagination. Imagination is used to relate with groups even when an individual is not present. The last component, alignment, corresponds with efforts made to fit into the community in order to foster a perception of membership. The current study acknowledges that these factors constitute the communities that individuals interact with daily.

1.5.4 Communities of Practice

The conception of community of practice was established by Lave and Wenger (1991). A community of practice is a group of people that regularly and continually meet and engage in a common activity. This could consist of a softball team, church group, group of friends, or book club. This notion was first incorporated into sociolinguistics by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) during a discussion about language and gender. A key component of the linguistic conception of community of practice is an emphasis on mutual engagement that guides participation.
Eckert (2006) provides the definition of a community of practice that is adapted in the current study. Drawing upon Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of a community of practice, the author states that communities of practice develop “ways of doing things, views, values, power relations, ways of talking… The community of practice is thus a rich locus for the situated study of language use, of language change…” (Eckert, 2006, p.1).

1.5.5 Imagined Communities

The notion of imagined communities was first introduced by Anderson (1991) when discussing membership in nations. The author maintained that the members of nations would most likely never meet or know other members of the nation. However, these individuals are able to form connections with one another through the use of their imagination. These ideas were expanded upon by Wenger (1998) and applied to the field of linguistics when Norton (2001) related it to SLA theory when observing the connection between identity and imagined communities. Imagined communities expand beyond learners’ immediate environments and social networks (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). In doing so, they incorporate perceived experiences and connections with people. Norton (2010) further clarifies that an imagined community is “a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (p. 309). The understanding of imagined communities used in the present study is outlined by Pavlenko and Norton (2007).
1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis will consist of five chapters. Chapter 01 provides the background of the study. Chapter 02 consists of the literature review of relevant studies and theoretical framework relating to identity, imagined communities, and language acquisition. Chapter 03 presents methods for the collection of data and analysis. Chapter 04 will include an analysis of the data and discussion on the findings. Chapter 05 will give the study’s conclusions. This chapter has presented the background information and outlined the statement of the problem. It identifies the objectives of the study and presents the research questions. The key terms are given and defined. Lastly, the organization of the thesis is presented.
CHAPTER 02: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a discussion of central terms, texts, and studies that relate to identities and imagined communities of language learners. This section begins with an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework that is crucial to understanding approaches to studying identity in linguistics and, in particular, SLA. Next, identities and imagined communities are discussed in conjunction with relevant research.

2.2 Poststructuralist Principles of Language

It is important to first discuss the theoretical framework that accompanies identity approaches in the field of linguistics. The vast majority of these approaches correspond to sociocultural concepts of learning and poststructuralist principles of language (Cohen, 2012; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Kanno, 2003; Kanno, 2008; Norton Piece, 1995; Norton, 2000; Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Norton & Kamal, 2003; Norton & Gao, 2008; Norton, 2010; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Pavlenko, 2003; Ryan, 2006). These scholars have all examined identity in accordance to poststructuralist principles of language. In order to adequately address poststructuralist approaches to identity, it is imperative to include a discussion on poststructuralist theories of language and subjectivity. These areas intersect to form the poststructuralist theory of identity as it relates to second language acquisition.
According to poststructuralist theories of language, the process of learning a language is a social exercise. During this practice relationships are formed, mediated, and contested. As a result of these factors, language learning is viewed as interacting with the identities of learners. This understanding of language is often associated with scholars such as Bakhtin (1981), Bourdieu (1977), and Kramsch (2010).

Norton and McKinney (2011) note that structuralist theories of language provide the foundation that poststructuralist principles construct upon. These theories, most notably Saussure (1966) affirms that there are mutual arrangements and construction between speech and language regardless of geographic, social, and communal differences. According to structuralism, the foundation of language is symbols that amount to what is spoken and the meaning of them. Therefore, every linguistic community has unique exercises that provide meaning to the symbols (Norton & McKinney, 2011). These linguistic communities, in the structuralist viewpoint, are uniformed. Thus, in this system the symbols that comprise language have glorified meanings. With regards to Saussure (1966), there is an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified where language users are bound by social conventions. This relationship ignores the agency of language users. However, poststructuralism takes the position that these communities are divergent and oftentimes conflicting. As such, the meaning of symbols of language in this system is dependent upon these struggles.

According to many scholars (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Hachimi, 2013; Marchenkova, 2005; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Norton & McKinney, 2011) poststructuralist theories concerning language and identity is related to the work of
Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). These scholars draw on Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogic notion to assert that language is positioned within utterances. Therefore, language is a social process that exists in dialogue with the other. It is in this process where speakers struggle to construct meaning and thereby use language to engage in speech communities (Norton & Toohey, 2011). This relates to identity because it is through this use of language and engagement with the other that identity is constructed.

Similar to the work of Bakhtin (1981), the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) relates to poststructuralist theories of language. Bourdieu’s (1977) work is concerned with language and power. Like Bakhtin (1981), Bourdieu (1977) asserted that language is a social process, but is also political in nature. Thus, the understanding and significance of an utterance occurs based on the significance and understanding of the person who utters it. In short, the value of an utterance cannot be separated from and is understood according to the value from the individual (Norton & McKinney, 2011). Bourdieu (1977) also argued that the goal of an utterance is not simply to be understood; the individual further desires to be “believed, obeyed, respected, and distinguished” (p.648). Nevertheless, power relations between interlocutors are often imbalanced and fluctuate based on circumstances and contexts (Norton & Toohey, 2011). The poststructuralist principles of language are also connected to poststructuralist principles of subjectivity.
2.3 Poststructuralist Principles of Subjectivity

Poststructuralist theories of subjectivity are grounded in the work of Weedon (1987), who examines the identity positions of individuals and groups engaging in speech acts. According to Weedon (1987), language is a social act and is part of the process that defines an individual. “Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (p 21). Therefore, Weedon (1987) demonstrates that the identity of an individual is understood in accordance with social relationships. It is through these relationships that an individual formulates their understanding of themselves and how others construct their understanding of them. This understanding is based on particular situations and contexts and thus, is varied, inconsistent, influential, and evolving (Norton & Toohey, 2011). This is important because prior to this distinction the identity of an individual was understood as being fixed and unitary (Norton Pierce, 1995).

The identity approach for studies in second language acquisition does not consider learning to be an independent process. Conversely, this approach considers SLA to be a social process that exists within specific situations and contexts (Norton & McKinney, 2011), which corresponds to the theory of “situated learning” presented by Lave and Wenger (1991). The above discussion provides a good background for a discussion of the theoretical framework of identity and imagined communities that incorporate these poststructuralist principles.
2.4 Identity

Throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, identity was viewed as static and learners were neatly placed into fixed categories based on personalities, learning styles, and motivations (Norton & Toohey, 2011). However, as a result of Norton Pierce’s (1995) research, identity is now viewed in the poststructuralist theoretical framework. In her landmark study, Norton Pierce (1995) examined five immigrant language learners in Canada. She related the poststructuralist works of Weedon (1987) and Bourdieu (1991) to identity in order to understand and analyze qualitative data collected in the form of interviews and questionnaires. The author demonstrated how one learner, Martina, had multiple identities as an immigrant, mother, language learner, worker, and wife. Martina’s identity was a site of struggle because she struggled to speak in the workplace; but empowered herself by drawing upon her multiple identities, thus reframing her identity and claiming the right to speak.

Norton Pierce (1995) also focuses on Eva, who exhibited an identity that changed over time. Initially, Eva viewed herself as an immigrant and illegitimate speaker of English. However, over time, Eva began to view herself as a multicultural citizen and legitimate speaker of English. The significance of Norton Pierce’s (1995) study is exhibited through the many scholars that cite her work as essential to deliberations on identity (Block, 2007; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Ricento, 2005; Swain & Deters, 2007). It is within the framework of this work that led to identity being recognized as a research area within the field of SLA in its own accord (Zuengler & Miller, 2006).
In his work, Block (2007) examines the link between L2 learning and identity. In regards to this research area, Block (2007) states that the poststructuralist conception of identity “has become the approach of choice among those who seek to explore links between identity and L2 learning” (p. 864). It is within this framework that Block (2007) examines numerous studies (Kinginger, 2004; Lam, 2004; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001; Teutsch-Dwyers, 2001) that incorporate the poststructuralist theory of identity into their data analysis. In doing so, Block (2007) further solidifies the link between language learning and identity.

By drawing on the poststructuralist theory of identity, Norton and McKinney (2011) examine how learners struggle when engaging in discourse with speakers of the target language. The authors provide the understanding of ‘identity’ that is assumed in relation to the current study. Hence, identity references how a person understands their relationship to the world, constructs this relationship across time and space, and understands the possibilities for the future based on these constructions (Norton, 2000). Therefore, whenever a learner speaks, they “are negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship in multiple dimensions in their lives” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 73). This distinction is important to the current study because when learners speak, they do so in reference to past, present, and future utterances. In doing so, the present utterances may be made in reference to, or have implications, for future utterances and membership in an imagined community.
2.5 Identity and Imagined Communities

To examine what constitutes an imagined community one first needs to discuss the viewpoints of Wenger (1998) who outlines the process of engagement, imagination, and alignment. It is through these means that individuals associate, connect, and gain a feeling of membership in a community. These factors compose the communities that individuals interact in daily and relate to participants of the current study because their perceptions and attitudes can be considered prior to and during immersion at Ohio University.

To broaden the correlation of identity and language learning, as well as expand upon the notion of imagined communities, it is important to discuss the work of Wenger (1998). Identity is linked to learning because, as Wenger (1998) states, “learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity” (p. 215). Therefore, the act of learning, especially learning a language, is a transformative experience. Ushioda (2011) reaffirms this notion and applies it to language acquisition by concluding that learning a language gives an individual a voice and thus, an identity in the target language. Involved in this experience is the learners’ creation of imagined communities. The notion of imagined communities was originally introduced by Benedict Anderson (1991), when he referenced nations as imagined communities because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, p. 6).
This idea of imaged communities was expanded upon by Wenger (1998), who theorized that people also associate with communities of their imagination through “expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p. 176). This notion was applied to SLA theory when Norton (2001) observed a relation between imagined communities and identity. In this study the author discussed the role of imagined communities when students were not participating in the language learning classroom. Norton (2001) concluded that when the classroom environment is at odds with learners’ investment in imagined communities, they are less likely to participate. This is similar to the findings by Campbell and Storch (2011) that learners who have a “clear future images of themselves” can be positively motivated when this image aligns with the activities in the classroom (p. 156).

Norton and McKinney (2011) point out that this use of imagination is “a creative process of producing new images of possibility and new ways of understanding one’s relation to the world that transcend more immediate acts of engagement” (p. 80). Therefore, this process of imagination would manifest when one is learning a new language because it offers possibility and fresh perspective of seeing one’s place in the world. This would become especially true when an individual is moving to a different culture and immersing in the language they are learning.

The understanding of imagined communities used in the present study and what it references is explained by Pavlenko and Norton (2007). Imagine extends beyond learners’ immediate environment and social networks to their perceived experiences and connections with people. Hence, imagined communities refer to how learners imagine
they would use the target language in discourse and in what context (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). In short, it is a process where learners imagine what community they will gain membership into via the target language. This corresponds with the notion of imagined communities expressed by Cervatiuc (2009), who states, “imagined communities can be generically defined as communities of practice to which individuals seek entrance” (p. 257). Accordingly, this converges with the theory of possible selves, which represents learners’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The implications are that when learning a language, learners imagine who they might become in regards to specific communities.

Kanno (2003) also demonstrates the significance that learners’ imagined community could have on their identity through a longitudinal study. Rui was a Japanese teenager who lived the majority of his life in English speaking countries but steadfastly maintained his identity as Japanese by sustaining his Japanese language proficiency. Since Rui had been away from Japan for such a long period, he imagined a construct of Japan that had little similarity to reality. Regardless, the author concludes, it was this imagined community of Japan that resulted in Rui maintaining his language proficiency. When he eventually returned to Japan and found his actual membership in the community to be vastly different from his imagined community, Rui declared that he did not want to be Japanese anymore (Kanno, 2003). This study is important because, although it did not manifest in reality, Rui’s imagined community gave him a sense of direction to attain his
goals and membership in his imagined community. It also illustrates possibilities for when an imagined community differs from physical experiences.

An important study for the current research is Cervatiuc (2009), who demonstrates that some learners are able to gain symbolic membership in an imagined community that enhances and facilitates acquisition of the target language. In this scenario, learners are not fully accepted and integrated into their imagined community, but have started the process. In doing so, they choose to affiliate themselves with certain aspects of the imagined community that are available to them. This results in a greater investment in the language and thus, assists acquisition. Cervatiuc (2009) concluded this by using the theoretical principles laid by Norton (2001) and applying the poststructuralist tenets of Weedon (1987) and Bourdieu (1991) to help analyze the data. The researcher gathered data from interviews containing flexible and open-ended questions. However, before the interviews were conducted, the 20 participants completed a background information questionnaire. This study is relevant to the current research because the participants had partial access to their imagined community. Additionally, some of the interview questions used will be modified and applied to the current study.

Cohen’s (2012) study presents the framework that the current research builds upon. In his research, Cohen (2012) examined three adolescent learners enrolled in an ESL program at their high school. This study differs from previous research because the learners had immediate access to their imagined community since they were enrolled in one mainstream class. The construction of the participants’ imagined communities was influenced as a result of this access. In turn, the students believed that their ESL program
was not demanding enough when compared to their single mainstream class. As a result, the leaners created an imagined community of mainstream classes that were demanding with a rigorous workload. Subsequently, the learners invested more in their learning experience so they would be prepared for such coursework. Similar to the current research, Cohen’s (2012) gathered his data by interviewing the participants.

Imagined communities and the imagined identities that accompany their construction are meaningful to understanding SLA because there is a correlation between investing in an imagined community and language learning success. The target language community for many learners is a community of the imagination and desire. It is within this community that possibilities and identity opportunities for the future exist. Therefore, within an imagined community the learner assumes an imagined identity. It is within this context that a learner’s investment in the target language can be understood (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

2.6 Language, Gender, Culture, and Identity

This study acknowledges that there has been research concerning the identity of language learners that focuses on the issue of gender (Koven, 1998; Norton-Pierce, 1995; Pavlenko et al, 2001; Safiyiddeen, 2008; Teutsch-Dwyer, 2001). These studies examine gender issues within the poststructuralist framework. Although these studies do not explicitly examine gender and the imagined communities of language learners, they are still relevant to the current research because they discuss identity, which is interconnected with imagined communities. According to Edley (2001), language is the primary means
through which gender is interpreted. Therefore, a discussion of language and gender is pertinent to the current study because it focuses on women. This section will outline how gendered language impacts identity and consequently language learning.

Gender is related to language learning because gendered identity is created through social and cultural practices. When one is learning a language, especially immersed in the target language culture, their comprehension and implementation of gender changes (Pavlenko et al, 2001). As a result of immersion in the culture of the target language, the authors argue that language learners begin to critically examine their perceptions of gender that they learned and their target language and target language culture. In doing so, the learners sometimes rebuff or embrace gendered practices that are influenced by the target language and target language culture (Pavlenko et al, 2001).

This has implications for language learning, as is discussed in research by Koven (1998); Pavlenko & Lantolf (2000); Safiyiddeen (2008); and Teutsch-Dwyer (2001). Language learners may restructure their identities based on the available communities of practice in an attempt to integrate into the target language community (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). They may also resist implementing identity formations that are influenced by the target language community. As a result, Teutsch-Dwyer (2001) concludes that the learners may minimize contact with the target language and target language community. In turn, their opportunities to use the language in authentic contexts may decrease, resulting in a limited, basic proficiency of the target language. Beyond adapting or resisting identity constructs influenced by the target language and target language community, learners may seemingly construct distinctive selves that correlate to their
native language and the target language. Koven (1998) contends that the performance of bilinguals’ gendered identity depends on which language they are speaking. This is demonstrated through research on bilingual Portuguese peasants. These findings correspond to the claim made by Cameron (1998) that the cultural philosophy of a particular society impacts the formation of an individual’s gendered identity.

Safiyiddeen (2008) examines how female Arabic speakers construct gender in their L1 (Arabic) and in the L2 (English) that they are learning. The author notes that while learning the target language, participants are potentially in contact with their native language and native language culture, therefore they “might be confused between the two cultures, especially in their ambitions, experiences, and styles of living. This confusion affects their linguistic practices and cultural identities” (p. 184). This is especially relevant to the current study because of similarities with female participants who are in contact with their native language and native language culture.

Safiyiddeen (2008) discovered that three main techniques of gendered identity construction for female Arabic speaking learners of English occurred. The first of which is that a group of learners embraced the target language cultures stereotypical representations. The second group of learners only partially accepted stereotypes of the target language culture. The third group refused to identify with the cultural stereotypes of the target language culture. Safiyiddeen (2008) further states:

They may either undergo different degrees of transformations in their understanding of gender or may use the foreign language only as a means of translating their native language culture, i.e., find words to express gender
ideologies of their native language culture. Participants whose gender construction undergoes transformations when they learn a FL, may have either reached a level of social and cultural awareness that is in harmony with the foreign language culture or are living a duality (an ideological dilemma). The way they construct their gender identity or express their ideology partly reflects the native culture and partly reflects the TLC. On the other hand, the way participants construct their gender identity in the NL and FL reflects the native culture regardless of the language being used (p. 196-197).

Safiyiddeen’s (2008) discussion of how Arabic speaking female women construct their gendered identity when learning English demonstrates the complex and fluid nature of identity formation. This discussion also highlights the influence of the target language culture, which can at times be at odds with the learner’s native language culture, and how they interact with one another. The findings of Safiyiddeen (2008) correspond with the notion expressed by Pavlenko et al. (2001) that when language learners are immersed in the target language culture, they begin to examine the target culture in relation to their native language culture. In doing so, they are able to consciously decide and construct their gendered identities. As is discussed by Safiyiddeen (2008), language and discourse is crucial to this process:

The language of the learner becomes an important tool for establishing one’s social identity in the changing reality within which second language speakers need to function. Since gender identity is a social and cultural construct, the participants, as a result of exposure to the new cultures try to modify the previous...
models to fit the present ones. That’s why most of the participants reject the local culture and are unconventional; exposure may result in changes in ideologies, practices and gender (p. 211-212).

According to this perspective, language is a part of the means through which identity is expressed. The circumstances that surround this expression of identity are often changing and are influenced by the culture of the target language. This includes perceptions of gender that are perpetuated by the target language culture, as well as preconceived notions expressed by the native language culture. As a result of these circumstances, language learners can modify, adapt, or change their conception and practices of gender. At the very least, these circumstances force learners to examine their gender ideologies. In respect to the participants in Safiyiddeen’s (2008) study, this often resulted in a change of gender beliefs and practices for the Arabic speaking women learning English. This transformation led the author to conclude that the participants desired to formulate their gendered identities according to the cultural norms of the target language culture.

Although the majority of participants fall into the category outlined above, some of the participants did not adapt the cultural norms concerning gender and constructed their identities accordingly. Instead, the author concluded, they merely “use language as a means to translate expressions of gender identity from the native language to the foreign language instead of inventing new ones” (Safiyiddeen, 2008, p. 213). Perhaps the discrepancy between these two groups could be a result of the imagined communities that the language learners have invested in. The author describes the group as being extremely conservative. Additionally, they are learning English for specific, job related purposes.
Therefore, these individuals may desire to use English as a means to gain employment within their respective Islamic countries. In doing so, their imagined community, as well as native language culture, may be in conflict with notions of gender expressed by the target language culture.

Also of importance to the current study are perceptions of the target language culture regarding females and their native language culture. The importance of this factor is stressed in Mir’s (2011) study about Muslim women constructing American identities. Specifically, the author is examining how Muslim women living in America construct an “imagined American community” (p. 550). The author asserts the importance that the American culture’s perception of Muslim women has on the construction of their imagined American community.

Muslim women, often the first to be recognized as Muslim due to their clothing, were objects of fear and pity as Muslims and Muslim women. Hyper-feminized as helpless and immobile, Muslim women were at the forefront of efforts to represent and protect Muslims. Their identity work was critical to their legitimacy as Muslims and as Americans, as women who were, typically not hijackers and (usually not) suicide bombers (Mir, 2011, p. 548).

As a result of these factors, the author concludes, some of the women chose to adapt more of a Western attire and less of a traditional, Muslim one. This attire mainly consisted of not wearing the hijab. Additionally, these women oftentimes decided not to speak up and correct cultural misconceptions perpetuated by Americans. Instead, they chose to remain silent when looked at as being a representative of Muslim culture.
Furthermore, the author states, these participants chose to position themselves within communities of practice that were almost exclusively made up of Muslims.

Conversely, some of the women rebelled against this perception and asserted themselves as women who were not only a good representation of their culture, but had a right to be heard. Mir (2011) describes these participants as having “loud identities” (p. 554). They expressed their identity not only through their clothing, one that resembled traditional Muslims, but also through their words. These individuals decided to speak up, as the following quotation demonstrates:

I speak out a lot more in class, especially... being an international studies major.

Class is always interesting because I’m always one of the [few] Muslims in the class...When they’re talking, heads turn towards you. You’re expected to speak.

If you don’t, then you’re completely selling out (Mir, 2011, p. 555).

This demonstrates how the participants construct their gendered identity to rebel against the perceived perceptions of the American public. This practiced gendered identity is intentionally at odds with how the American culture stereotypes Muslim women. However, it is important to note that the women in this study were first or second generation American citizens who grew up speaking Arabic and English. Although they were Muslims and descended from Middle Eastern counties, thus fitting the profile of what a Muslim looks like, they were in fact born and raised in America. Regardless, this study is important to the current research because it demonstrates how Muslim women feel they are perceived by the American culture.
An Arabic speaking female who was learning English at a university in the United States and wore the hijab also reflects these perceptions. According to Cole and Ahmadi (2003), the woman “expressed being perceived as docile, oppressed, and as having limited English speaking ability because of her veil” (p. 49). This example depicts the influence that gender and native language culture have on perceptions of the individuals by the target language culture. When the learner is aware of these perceptions, they undoubtedly influence the construction of their identity and imagined communities in regards to the target language and target language culture.

The current study focuses on women from Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and China. The following sections will briefly review literature that has been written about these groups and make a connection to language learning. With this in mind, it is appropriate to transition into a discussion of the identities and imagined communities of Saudi Arabian leaners of English.

2.7 Saudi Arabian Learners of English

Since September 11, 2001 there has been an increase of research regarding English language learners from the Middle East, and in particular, Saudi Arabia. Within the last five years, such research has shifted their focus towards issues of identity and language learning, which was previously not an area of concentration for TESOL post September 11, 2001 (Giroir, 2014). Current undertaking of such research coincides with a substantial increase of Saudi learners of English in the United States. In fact, according to Giroir (2014), the number of Saudi learners in the United States has skyrocketed from
2,500 in 2005 to over 50,000 in 2011. As a result of such an increase in the number of English language learners from Saudi Arabia, it is not surprising that issues relating to identity are coming to the forefront of the TESOL field. However, there are still few scholarly articles that focus particularly on Saudi learners. There has been a tendency for past research to focus on the issue of Islam, however, it is possible for learners to share the same faith but come from varying cultures and practices that are ethnically diverse (Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007). Research by Al Harthi (2014), Amin Mekheimer (2011), and Giroir (2014) provide insight on the perceptions of Saudi Arabian learners of English relating to identity and imagined communities.

Giroir (2014) details how perceptions shape experiences with the target language community for two Saudi Arabian learners enrolled in an IEP in the United States. For one participant, Musa, the perception of living in the United States was shaped by the media, such as American movies, television and video games. According to the author, this contributed to a perception of the United States as “the land of opportunity” where Musa stated, “I am not in my country. I can do whatever I want” (Giroir, 2014, p. 44).

Giroir (2014) discusses how for some Saudi Arabian learners of English in the United States, it is difficult to make friends with American students. One participant, who contrasts making friends with international students compared to American students, highlights this fact. “The international students are more open, well, not more open, but more willing to meet. But the American, like, you are coming to them, they have their own lives, own friends, own system, and you just bust in, and, you know, some of them doesn’t like it” (Giroir, 2014, p. 44). This quote demonstrates that some Saudi Arabian
learners of English perceive themselves as outsiders. In doing so, according to the author, these individuals position themselves with other international students, and thus, their imagined community is one of international students.

Although Saudi Arabian learners of English may identify with an imagined community of international students, it is possible to realign this position through their communities of practice that exist outside of the classroom. In Giroir’s (2014) study, one such participant sought out instances to interact and participate with Americans in order to form friendships. This was done through participating in activities such as volleyball and seeking out interaction with Americans by making themselves available through spending hours in the lobby of their dormitory. In doing so, they were able to interact and participate with Americans. This process eventually led to the formation of friendships with American students.

For some participants, the perception of being an outsider was used as a resource to meet and form relationships with Americans. This was the case for Alim, who used his identity as a Saudi Arabian Muslim to fuel conversation and correct inaccurate stereotypes. This notion is personified by Alim’s statement about his American friends. “All my friends, before they meet me, they told me ‘We were afraid about you. We don’t want to be close to you’ ” (Giroir, 2014, p. 49). Regardless of this initial resistance by others, Alim’s perception of Saudi Arabian’s as friendly people who like Americans fuelled his desire to resist and debunk stereotypes. However, this example does illustrate how perceptions of the target language culture regarding the culture of the language learner can influence the perceptions of the language learner. In this case, Alim used the
target language culture’s perceptions as a means to engage in discourse and form friendships.

Another factor that can influence the perception of a language learner is the perception of the language learner’s family and friends toward the target language culture. In the case of Alim, his family and friends had a negative perception of the United States. As a result, they did not support his decision to study in the United States. According to Alim, his family and friends state that, “If they (Americans) don’t like us, why would we go there?” (Giroir, 2014, p. 48). Although this could have negatively impacted Alim’s perception of the target language people and culture, he resisted this perception. Instead, according to the author, Alim configured his identity as that of a “transmigrant” or global citizen.

For Saudi Arabian learners of English a clash may exist between the target language culture and L1 culture. This conflict may arise from “social images created towards the target language culture and speakers” (Al Harthi, 2014, p, 71). As a result, the author contends, this process may have negative implications for the learners and discourage use of the English language. This assertion further highlights the significant influence that the target language culture can have on language learners.

Similarly to Giroir (2014), Al Harthi (2014) discusses the impact of the perceptions and attitudes of the language learners’ family and friends towards the target language culture. Al Harthi (2014) contends that the viewpoints of parents play a significant factor in molding the perceptions about the target language culture of the English language learner. In turn, these factors influence the language learner’s
“imagination of possible selves” (Al Harthi, 2014, p. 73). In other words, this corresponds with what imagined communities the Saudi Arabian learners of English deem possible and in what contexts they will use English in the future. This parallels Kanno and Norton’s (2003) discussion about factors that can influence “what kind of adult the students will grow up to be and what communities they will join in the future” (p. 287).

Al Harthi’s (2014) study is particularly relevant to the current research because the author focuses on the imagined communities and identities of Saudi Arabian women. However, the research differs because the participants in Al Harthi’s (2014) research are women that are studying English at a university in Saudi Arabia. This differs from the present study because the participants are studying English at a university in the United States. However, Al Harthi’s (2014) study provides insights into the identities and imagined communities of the learners and “how English influences and is affected by Saudi females’ identity construction and how learners cope with their local ideologies and the new ideologies held by the English language” (p. 74). In addition, the research examines “the impact of pupils’ future expectations and attitudes towards the imagined community” (p. 74). Similar to the current study, the primary method of data collection is individual interviews.

As was discussed in Giroir’s (2014) study, the media played a significant role in generating perceptions of the target language culture for participants in Al Harthi’s (2014) research. The following quote by one such participant illustrates this point.
I like to watch English films. I have learned a lot about the Western people through those films. I wish to complete my university education abroad and communicate with those nice and respectful people there (Al Harthi, 2014, p. 77). Therefore, the author asserts that media forms, mainly that of films, influenced the participants imagined communities. Furthermore, this encouraged the learning of English by imagining herself as a member of these imagined communities.

Another participant in Al Harthi’s (2014) study echoed sentiments expressed by participants in Giroir’s (2014) research regarding America as the land of opportunity. In Al Harthi’s (2014) study, one participant declared that “English is freedom” and “you can discuss and say what you want without being worried about anything” (p. 78). This perception resembles an imagined community that the participant in Giroir’s (2014) study also aspired to become a part of. Additionally, Al Harithi (2014) maintains that for one participant, English was “a gateway to travel and access other cultures and new ways of life” (p. 78). This also corresponds with notions expressed by the subjects in Giroir’s (2014) study where the Saudi Arabian language learners aligned their identity with that of global citizens. Therefore, the participants believe that learning English will enable them to travel and gain knowledge of other cultures.

Through the use of individual interviews, Amin Mekheimer (2011) discusses the impact of the target language culture on language learning. Specifically, the author focuses on the culture associated with English language communities of practice for Saudi Arabian students learning English. Amin Mekheimer (2011) stresses that the culture of the target language can strongly influence acquisition of the language. Similar
to Al Harthi (2014), the author highlights the importance of accentuating a positive cultural image of the target language because it may be at odds with the culture of the learner’s L1.

As did the studies by Giroir (2014) and Al Harthi (2014), Amin Mekheimer (2011) highlights the impact that friends and family have in influencing the imagined communities that language learners associate with the target language. In the case of Amin Mekheimer’s (2011) study, the participant directly traces his primary imagined community to his father’s blueprint for his life. That being, how the participant will learn English, why they will learn English, how they will use English presently, how and for what purposes they will use English in the future. The author maintains that the father’s plan for the participant was extremely influential in the development of their identity as an English language learner. Although to a more extreme degree than the previous studies by Giroir (2014) and Al Harthi (2014), this example supports the impact that family and friends have on the identity and imagined communities of language learners.

The impact of the target language culture on the language learner cannot be understated. This influence is illustrated by one participant in Amin Mekheimer’s (2011) study who states, “I learned values in my own culture as well as values of the English speaking peoples. I developed an international vision and language ability” (p. 47). This example highlights the fact that by learning a language, one is undergoing a change in their identity. The influence of the target language culture is exhibited through learning the values associated with speakers of the target language. In doing so, the participant is undergoing a change in their perceptions. By developing an international vision, the
participant assumes an identity corresponding to that of a global citizen. Part of this vision comes through the participant connecting with the target language culture through the media. In this case, radio is the preferred means because it “introduces more of the English cultures to me as never available on TV” (Amin Mekheimer, 2011, p. 48). These examples correspond with the findings of Giroir (2014) and Al Harthi (2014) regarding identity and imagined communities of Saudi Arabian learners of English.

2.8 Chinese Learners of English

As Gu (2008) notes, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has undergone a transformation in regards to English language learning as a result of the Reform and Opening policy of 1978. The PRC has since actively supported cultural and economic relations with western countries. The relationship between the PRC and western countries, particularly cultural and economic interactions, has greatly improved and been actively supported by the PRC (Gu, 2008). As such, many international companies located in China conduct their daily operations in English as opposed to Mandarin (Zhang, 2003). Thus, this has resulted in a shift in the use of English from solely international purposes to everyday use amongst corporate Chinese. Beyond this factor, there has been an increase in international communications resulting from the steady rise of businesses entering the Chinese marketplace (Gu, 2008). These factors have led to an increase in Chinese students learning English at universities abroad, including the United States. In fact, according to Arkoudis and Davidson (2008), China has the most English language learners in the world.
Gu’s (2008) research is especially relevant to the current study because it focuses on female Chinese learners of English. The author collects their data through interviews and draws conclusions regarding the identities and imagined communities of the learners. This is done by drawing on Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice framework to investigate the relationship between learner’s identity and imagined communities. However, the participants in this study are enrolled in English courses at a university in China. Nonetheless, the implications of this research are relevant to the current study because it provides insight on the identity and imagined communities of Chinese learners of English before they arrive in the United States.

Another important facet of Gu’s (2008) study is the role that gender plays on the construction of imagined communities and identity. For one of the participants, Helena, gender roles played a significant part in the construction of her identity as an English language learner and the formation of her imagined communities. In the case of Helena, the widespread view of her hometown was that it was inappropriate, as well as unnecessary, for women to pursue a college degree. Her family members, including her mother, shared this viewpoint.

The role of parental influence, as discussed in the work of Giroir (2014), Al Harthi (2014), and Amin Mekheimer (2011), did not deter Helena from pursuing her dreams. This did, however, impact her identity as a Chinese learner of English because she often felt unworthy and as if she did not belong in comparison to her classmates. As a result, Helena sought English speakers outside of her classroom environment to connect with. She found this belonging through a friendship with Margret, who introduced Helena
to values that contrasted with her Chinese ones, which influenced her identity and imagined communities. Gu (2008) states that, “communicating with Margaret and other English speaking friends brought Helena a more specific imagined identity, that is, one with an easy job, enough salary and a happy family” (p. 63). Prior to this, the author argues, Helena constructed her identity in conjunction with the gender role that had been imposed on her as a woman who “should not expect too much from life (Gu, 2008, p. 63). Despite this preconceived notion, Helena was able to reconstruct her identity and in doing so, invest in the imagined community she perceived through her relationship with native speakers of English. Furthermore, part of this could be attributed to the influence of media, specifically English movies, which the author concludes conveyed the culture associated with the English language. This claim is not without merit because the influence of media on perceptions of English language learners was also highlighted in studies by Giroir (2014), Al Harthi (2014), and Amin Mekheimer (2011).

Gu (2008) offers interesting insight on two other Chinese learners of English regarding their identity formation and construction of imagined communities. One such learner, Pauline, had multiple identities and imagined communities that fluctuated based on her surroundings and communities of practice. These included becoming a successful businesswoman, living like a Western middle class woman, becoming a professor, and becoming an interpreter working for the government (Gu, 2008, p. 60). As a result of these imagined identities and communities, the author describes how Pauline would seek to immerse herself in communities of practice that she felt would assist her self-
actualization. In doing so, the author maintains, Pauline had multiple imagined identities that often resulted in inner conflict and struggle.

Interestingly, Gu (2008) concludes that the multitude of Pauline’s imagined identities and communities were influenced by an imagined identity developed during childhood. This imagined identity was described as a “person who can live like the actresses in movies, being dressed beautifully and living romantically” (Gu, 2008, p. 60). The idea that an imagined community can be influenced by a past imagined identity is not without precedent. Norton and Gao (2008) declare that an imagine community “may also be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships. In essence, an imagined community assumes an imagined identity” (p. 114). Furthermore, Pauline’s connection to movies and their influence in the formation of her imagined identity and subsequent imagined communities further exemplifies the impact that media can have on these factors. This connection is also outlined in research on Saudi Arabian learners of English (Giroir 2014, Al Harthi 2014, Amin Mekheimer 2011) as well as in the example of Helena, the Chinese learner of English (Gu, 2008).

The author describes two main imagined communities that the participants aspired to join, that being the “Chinese educated urban community” and the “English speaking Christian community” (Norton & Gao, 2008, p. 113). Both of these imagined communities were heavily influenced by the immediate surrounding environments and communities of practice available to the participants. The “Chinese educated urban community” corresponded with all of the participants’ imagined identity in a field of academia as a researcher or professor. This also related to a desire to live a more western
lifestyle. Associated to this was the imagined community of the “English speaking Christian community” which was associated with an educated, western lifestyle. There were a variety of factors that influenced these imagined communities, including the role of the media in representing the culture and values connected with the English language.

2.9 Brazilian Learners of English

There is not a vast amount of research that focuses on Portuguese speaking Brazilians learning English. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is limited analysis regarding constructs of identity and imagined communities of Portuguese speaking Brazilian learners of English. When narrowing the search down to concentrate exclusively on female learners, the availability of previous studies is virtually nonexistent. However, even with these limitations, a discussion regarding Portuguese speaking Brazilian learners of English can still occur.

Rottava and Da Silva (2014) explore the perceptions of Portuguese speaking Brazilians learning English in the United Kingdom. Specifically, the authors focus on how the identity of the language learners effect perceptions of learning the target language. Similar to Norton and McKinney (2011), the identity of the language learners in Rottava and Da Silva’s (2014) study is viewed as “multiple, shifting, and fragmented” (p. 173). This is a viewpoint that is expressed throughout the research discussed thus far in this literature review. Similar to the current study, the data gathered by Rottava and Da Silva (2014) consists of questionnaires and individual interviews. Through their
discussion of this data, the authors touch on issues concerning identity and imagined communities of Portuguese speaking Brazilians learning English.

The questionnaire portion of the data presents some interesting insights into perceptions about the English language and associated culture. 84% of the participants believed that they can learn English through media forms, such as movies, television, and music. This notion corresponds with the influence that forms of media have on language learners, as discussed in studies by Al Harthi (2014), Amin Mekheimer (2011), Giroir (2014), and Gu (2008), among others. Forms of media are an important factor in transmitting cultural components related to the English language as well. However, surprisingly, only 38% of the participants agreed that in order to speak the language well, one must know the culture of English speaking countries. This is interesting because it is seemingly impossible to separate the culture of the target language from forms of media, such as movies and music, which individuals use to assist in the acquisition process. Furthermore, 61 % of Portuguese speaking Brazilian leaners of English agreed that the optimal way to learn English is through immersion in a country where it is spoken. The authors also point out the discrepancy between these two ideas by stating:

They have different opinions about whether it is necessary to know the culture of the country of the language they are learning, despite indicating that immersion is important to learning a language well, which will demand cultural awareness from them whilst in a country where the language is spoken (p. 180).
Additionally, this presents questions regarding how the learners imagine the context and communities of practice with which they will use English in the future. Rottava and Da Silva (2014) shed light on this issue from data gathered via individual interviews.

Through conducting individual interviews, the researchers were able to explore topics that arose within the questionnaire in more detail. One such issue, although not explicitly stated by the authors, is that of how the learners imagine contexts and communities in which they will use English in the future. In the individual interviews, the authors conclude that one of the main themes that emerged was that the learners wanted to use English as means of communication both globally and locally. Specifically, the authors argue, the framework for learning English for most of the participants “relates to enhancing their career prospects by getting a better job or increasing their incomes” (Rottava & Da Silva, 2014). This relates to the imagined communities that the learners prescribe to because it identifies the future environments and contexts in which they imagine that they will use English in. The authors further clarify this notion by referring to data gathered from the questionnaire:

Learners of English have more interests relating to work, particularly as they mention in their complementary questionnaire responses that English can be used around the world. So they seem to relate learning the language with increasing their opportunities to interact either for professional or personal purposes, including for work (p. 180).

Therefore, one could argue, that the learners imagine they will use English primarily for purposes related to work. Although it depends on the individual, this could include using
English for work purposes within Brazil as well as internationally. Based on the learner perceptions regarding the importance of learning the culture of the target language, it is possible to argue that they most likely imagine that they will use English for business purposes within Brazil. The underlying notion that is being expressed here is that the community of practice for the learners is not with native speakers, as studies usually discuss, but is with other non-native speakers. This idea is supported by the three most common reasons the participants listed for learning English. According to Rottava and Da Silva (2014), these three reasons are work opportunities, tourism, and “because it (English) is the most spoken language in the world” (p. 175). This, along with the data regarding the importance of learning the culture of the target language, supports the notion that the imagined community of the learners is not one that includes native speakers. Instead, the participants will most likely use English to communicate with other non-native speakers of English. The notion corresponds with that of Gao, Cheng, and Kelly (2008) that the Chinese learners of English in their study did not desire to assimilate into communities of practice of native English speakers.

The conclusions that Rottava and Da Silva (2014) draw regarding Portuguese speaking leaners of English from Brazil correlate with those of Longaray (2009). In her research, Longaray (2009) examines high school students learning English in Brazil. The author concluded that these students perceive English as a means to advance their professional careers. This is expressed by the fact that their perception of English is “almost always linked to an image of economic success” (Longaray, 2009, p. 235). Therefore, under these circumstances, the learners imagine that they will use English to
become economically successful as a result of more job opportunities and thus, increase
their income. This notion is further exemplified through Longaray’s (2009) assertion that
the learners possess a “belief about English as the language of development and future
possibilities” (p. 235). This idea corresponds with the notion of imagined communities
expressed by Norton (2010), who states that an imagined community is “a desired
community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the
future” (p. 309). In regards to this example, the learners in Longary’s (2009) study see
English as leading to an opportunity for future possibilities, specifically regarding
employment and economic success.

These studies show how identity and imagined communities, as well as
perceptions regarding the English language and target language culture, impact language
acquisition for Saudi, Brazilian, and Chinese learners. In doing so, these scholars draw
upon the notion of identity presented by Norton Pierce (1995) and Pavlenko and Norton
(2007). The above studies clearly show that identity and imagined communities impact
the language learning process. Additionally, this research demonstrates that identity and
imagined communities are influenced by attitudes and perceptions of the English
language and target language culture. The present study differs from previous research
because it considers the attitudes and perceptions that learners held prior to beginning the
immersion process. Further, unlike past studies, this research focuses on university level
students enrolled in an intensive English program in the United States.
CHAPTER 3: METHOD

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodology used for the collection and analysis of data is described. Section 3.1 outlines the theoretical components of the three methods of data collection. Section 3.2 discusses the participants of the study and section 3.3 presents the instruments used in the study. Section 3.4 details the procedure for collecting data, while section 3.5 describes the procedure of analyzing data.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

The data collected in this study is both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The quantitative data was collected through the distribution of a questionnaire. The qualitative data is two fold, whereas it was collected via semi-structured individual interviews and a semi-structured focus group interview. The quantitative data, consisting of the questionnaire, is not the primary source of data used in the study. Rather, the purpose of this data is to complement and help guide the qualitative data.

3.2.1 Questionnaires

According to Dornyei (2007) questionnaires are predominately used to collected quantitative data. Questionnaires can also serve as the basis to guide and help structure the collection of qualitative data, as is the case of the semi-structured interviews in Campbell and Storch (2011). The 3 types of data produced by a questionnaire used in the current study are outlined by Dornyei (2007). The author discusses attitudinal data,
behavioral data, and factual data. Attitudinal data consists of information regarding ethics, views, perspectives, opinions, and interests. Behavioral data focuses on activities, routines, and tendencies. This data can also produce information not only about current behavior but also personal histories. Factual data consists of information regarding demographics. For example: gender, age, nationality, education level, etc. The questionnaire in the current study collects these types of data.

3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Talmy (2010) observes that research in the social sciences has relied on interviews as a means of data collection for decades. In particular, the author notes that in applied linguistics research using interviews has greatly increased, especially in studies concerning participants’ identities, experiences, beliefs, and orientations (p. 128). The current study consists of semi-structured interviews as a primary source of data collection. This method follows the framework of noteworthy studies and scholars in research concerning identity and imagined communities (Cohen, 2012; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2001; Norton & Kamal, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

3.2.3 Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews

Ho (2011) maintains that focus group interviews are “specially set up to explore specific issues and respondents share and respond to comments, ideas, and perceptions brought up in interactive group discussions” (p.1). In doing so, the author asserts that focus group interviews are:
A powerful qualitative research tool in the social sciences. Here, respondent responses are not limited by a set of predetermined questions and the interviewer does not take a leading role as that found in traditional interviews. Thus, respondents are encouraged to disclose information that could be of the highest value to the research (p.1).

Similarly, Dornyei (2007) asserts that the most frequently occurring type of focus group interview is semi-structured ones because they allow for optimal data collection. This occurs because the participants are able to communicate and interact more naturally than a structured focus group interview. These reasons contributed to the current study conducting a semi-structured focus group interview.

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Questionnaire Participants

This research consisted of 15 total participants from the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE) at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. At the beginning of this research, the participants were students enrolled in their first semester of full time and pre-academic English classes. Full time classes are exclusively for beginner level learners, whereas pre-academic classes are for more advanced students. The researcher had access to the students through work in the writing lab in the OPIE program. The writing lab is a supplemental program that students are required to attend to receive assistance with their writing.
According to Ohio University policy, non-native English speakers must have a high school diploma to enroll in the OPIE program. Students’ course level in OPIE is determined based on their score on the TOEFL test. Students enrolled in the OPIE program come from various countries and nationalities. These include Brazil, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Korea, Egypt, Somalia, and more. These individuals hail from different regions and cities within their country of origin. As a result, they have distinct experiences with the English language and culture that influence their language learning experience in the OPIE program.

In this portion of the research, 15 of the participants were females and 5 were males. The 5 males were all Chinese learners enrolled in the OPIE program. Originally, this research sought to include both males and females. However, the researcher was unable to recruit Brazilian and Saudi men to participate in the study. These individuals expressed that they were not interested in participating. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to recruit Brazilian and Saudi men, it was decided to narrow the scope of the study and focus on women.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interview Participants

This portion of the study aimed to interview all 15 female participants that are enrolled in the OPIE program in Ohio University and completed the questionnaire. The researcher sought 5 participants from Saudi Arabia, 5 participants from Brazil, and 5 participants from China. All of the participants were new arrivals in the United States and enrolled in their first semester of study at Ohio University. The semi-structured
interviews lasted from between 45 minutes to 1-hour and 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded so they could be reviewed after the session.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Participants

This study conducted one semi-structured focus group interview. The focus group interview consisted of 3 participants. The semi-structured focus group consisted of participants from Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and China. These focus groups were not segregated by nationality, but rather, consisted of participants from all three nations. The focus group interview consisted of one woman from Brazil, one woman from China, and one woman from Saudi Arabia. Of the five Saudi women who participated in the individual interview and questionnaire portion of the study, two were unable to return to the United States after traveling to Saudi Arabia during Ohio University’s break between semesters. These two participants intended to return to Ohio University, but were unable to do so because of issues with their visas. Of the remaining three participants from Saudi Arabia, two were unwilling to participate in the focus group interview. The reasons they cited for this were that they were uncomfortable speaking in a group of people they did not know and they were concerned about properly expressing themselves to this group in English. As a result, only one participant from Saudi Arabia took part in the focus group interview.

The participant from Brazil and the participant from China were chosen based on their willingness to partake in the focus group interview and the availability of their schedule. Three Brazilian and two Chinese participants were willing to participate in the
focus group interview. However, as a result of conflicts in schedules, only two from each group were able to participate in the focus group interview.

3.4 Instruments

Prior to the collection of any data the participants were explained and given a consent form to sign. The consent form, as approved by the IRB, detailed the manner in which the data was to be collected, stored, and used. This study collected data through two questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured focus group interviews. The first questionnaire was administered when the participants were recruited for the study to determine their eligibility. The second questionnaire was administered after the semi-structured individual interview. The focus group interview was the last method of data collection to take place.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to gather background information and assess the eligibility of the participants. The questionnaire incorporated questions from similar studies by Campbell and Storch (2011), Cohen (2012), Rottava & Da Silva (2014) and Wen (2011). The questionnaire focused on background information such as native language, time spent studying English, where they lived (rural versus city), and general questions pertaining to reasons participants are learning English. The questionnaire also included statements to measure the subjects’ perceptions and attitudes towards the English language and target language culture. All questions and responses were measured
on a 7-point Likert scale, as outlined by Wen (2011). The responses from the questionnaire were used to structure questions for the individual interview.

The second questionnaire was administered after the individual interview. These questions were similar in nature to those in the first questionnaire. Some of the questions were modified to be more detailed. The rational for administering the second questionnaire was two fold. The first reason was to examine if the participants’ responses had changed at all after discussing their attitudes and perceptions of the English language and target language culture in the individual interview. The second reason was if there was any discrepancy in the responses between the two questionnaires, they could help guide questions during the focus group interview.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interview

An individual interview occurred with 20 total participants and lasted from between 45 minutes and one hour and 30 minutes. Questions for the interview were modified from studies such as Campbell and Storch (2011) and Cohen (2012). The interview was one-on-one with the researcher and took place at a neutral location, Alden library. The interviews were audio recorded on the researcher’s laptop. Five of the interview participants were Brazilian females, five Saudi females, and five Chinese females. Five Chinese men were also interviewed, but, as a result of being unable to recruit Brazilian and Saudi men, the interviews with the Chinese men were excluded from analysis.
3.4.3 Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview occurred with 3 total participants. One of the participants was from Brazil, one from China, and one from Saudi Arabia. The participants all communicated using English. The focus group interview was loosely structured to allow for optimal discussion. The interview was guided by questions, presented one at a time, for the participants to discuss. The questions that guided the interview were formulated based on themes and subjects that arose during the individual interview. Some of the questions also related to the questionnaires and were discussed in order to elicit more detail and clarify some items. The interview began by watching 2 videos about Ohio University and discussing them. The first video focused on the community at Ohio University and the second one about students and block parties. These videos were chosen based on themes that arose during the individual interviews and as a means to elicit conversation and make the participants feel comfortable.

3.5 Procedure

Before beginning the study, the researcher met with and received approval from the director of the OPIE program to conduct the study. Next, the researcher met with the coordinator of the OPIE writing lab and received permission to recruit students through the writing lab. Prospective students were first given a flyer that explained the study. Interested students were instructed to email the researcher for additional information. During this process, the researcher explained that he is conducting a study that involves getting to know the students. The students were also told that this is an opportunity to
practice their English skills outside of the classroom. The researcher stressed that the students are in no way obligated to participate in this study and that it had no impact of their grades in the OPIE program. Further, at any point during the study they may choose to cease participation. The students who confirmed their interest set up an appointment with the researcher to review and sign the consent form. At this time the researcher answered any additional questions that the subjects had about the research process. After all questions were answered and the consent form was signed, the researcher gave the students a questionnaire to complete.

Once the researcher received and analyzed the questionnaires to determine the eligibility of the participants, the interview portion of the study was scheduled. The criterion for selecting students for this phase of the research was based on their responses to the questionnaire. Some important responses included a high rating on questions such as, “What is your willingness to participate in interviews with the researcher” and “I often have imagined what it would be like to study English outside of my country” were considered. It was crucial that students who were willing to participate were chosen in order to collect as much authentic data as possible. In addition, only students who were enrolled in their first semester of study at Ohio University were considered eligible to participate in the research. For the participants who met this criterion, an interview was scheduled at a date and time of their choosing.

The students who agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study were given a consent form that allowed the researcher to record the interviews. These interviews were recorded and stored on the researchers password protected computer.
The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes. At the beginning of the interview the researcher casually talked with the participant in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible. This was done as a means of establishing a rapport with the participants, which is essential for obtaining reliable data (Charamaz, 2006, p. 19). The interview was loosely structured in order to allow for themes to develop and be explored accordingly. Some interview questions adapted from Campbell and Storch (2011) and Cohen (2012) helped guide the process. The researcher strove for the participants to tell stories that narrate their experiences. These stories provided insight and were a rich source of information regarding the identity of the participants (Norton and Early, 2012; Thornborrow and Coates, 2005). The researcher transcribed relevant sections of the interviews for analysis.

The researcher next conducted a focus group interview. The focus group interview included three total participants. One participant was from Brazil, one from China, and one from Saudi Arabia. The participants were given a consent form allowing the researcher to record the interview. These interviews again were loosely structured based on themes and subjects that emerged through the individual interviews. Some of the questions also pertained to results from the questionnaires. The researcher encouraged participants to share stories about their experiences. The researcher transcribed the entirety of these interviews.
3.6 Data Analysis

The data underwent a series of analysis when it was collected that was influenced by Charmaz’s (2006) method of grounded theory. However, the data analysis itself does not strictly adhere to grounded theory because the researcher had preconceived notions about the topic of study. In short, the data was not gathered and then the topic decided; but rather, the topic was decided and then the data was gathered. Nonetheless, the grounded theory method influenced how the data was coded and analyzed. This analysis occurred at individual stages to help guide the next portion of data collection. The first stage of analysis occurred after the initial questionnaire was administered. The researcher examined the results to determine the eligibility of the participants. The researcher also used some of the questions from the questionnaire for discussion in the individual interview. This was done to achieve more detailed information about the participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards the English language and target language culture.

After the individual interview, the researcher reviewed and transcribed each audio recording. These interviews focused on the attitudes and perceptions of the learners, as well as discussions pertaining to identity and imagined communities. The analysis of this section of data focused on identifying similarities and differences amongst learners of the same nationality (Saudi, Chinese, Brazilian) as well as between the cultural groups. In addition, themes and categories were identified and coded. This data was used to help guide the focus group interview. Once all the data was collected, it was analyzed as a whole. In doing so, the researcher looked for reoccurring themes, categories and contradictory information between the individual and focus group interview.
This chapter has described the methodology used for collecting data and the process of analyzing the data. It has outlined the theoretical components for the methods of data collection. This section also discusses the participants, presents the instruments and procedure used for data collection.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the study as they correspond to the research questions and discuss these findings. This chapter is organized into three sections, each of which focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of a cultural group that shares the same language and culture. Section 4.1 presents the findings of the Brazilian women, while section 4.2 outlines those of the Saudi women. Section 4.3 concentrates on the Chinese women. The data provided and discussed in these sections correspond to research question 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5:

1.) Do learners that speak the same L1 exhibit similar or different attitudes and perceptions towards the process of constructing their identities prior to and while learning English?

2.) Do they exhibit similar or different attitudes and perceptions towards imagined communities while learning English?

3.) Do they exhibit similar attitudes and perceptions towards the English language?

4.) Do they exhibit similar attitudes and perceptions towards the target culture?

5.) Are there differences in the attitudes and perceptions between these cultural groups?

There are 10 main themes that emerged through analyzing the data collected. All of these themes are interrelated and correspond with the research questions. The themes will be outlined and supported with data. In doing so, they will be connected with
categories that relate to the research questions. There are four categories that the themes fit into, oftentimes simultaneously. In all of these categories, the attitudes and perceptions of the participants are examined. The first category is identity; the second concerns imagined communities; the third is the English language, and the forth is the target language culture. These themes and the categories that they relate to are outlined in Table 1 below.
Table 1

*Themes and Categories of Individual Interviews and Focus Group Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Imagined</th>
<th>English Language</th>
<th>Target Language</th>
<th>Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td>Independence</td>
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<td>Comparing Self to Others</td>
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<td>Global Citizen</td>
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<td>Cultural Representative</td>
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<td>Desire to Travel the World</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
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<td>Influence of Media</td>
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<td>Employment</td>
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</table>
The findings relating to these research questions are presented in the form of data gathered from semi-structured individual interviews and a semi-structured focus group interview. The data gathered from the focus group interview is presented within the same discussion as the findings from the individual interviews. The findings from the focus group interview are presented in such a manner because it sought to confirm, contradict, or provide additional insight regarding themes from the individual interviews. After analyzing the data, it was determined that the focus group mainly provided additional information or clarity regarding the themes and topics. Since this studies research questions are interconnected and impact one another, separating the findings based on research question is both impractical and virtually impossible. As a result, the findings are presented in a manner that highlights the interaction between these elements. In doing so, the research questions they correspond to and answer are referenced for clarity.

4.2 Attitudes and Perceptions of Brazilian Women

Attitudes towards religion, a prominent reoccurring theme that relates to identity and is interconnected with the participants’ views of the target language culture, emerged through individual interviews and the focus group interview. For Brazilian learners, religion played a major role in how they constructed their identity and corresponds to the first research question. All of the Brazilian women identified themselves as Catholic and expressed a desire to continue practicing their faith while in the United States. This is expressed by Sophia, who stated, “I would go to church every Sunday with my family in
Brazil. I am Catholic. I went to church because I used to go in Brazil, so why not come here.” Isabella also echoes this viewpoint:

In Brazil I would go to the church one time a week. I am Catholic. When I first came here, I went to the church. I thought church here will make me feel more comfortable. So I found the Catholic Church when I arrived.

However, the participants soon realized that the Catholic Church in the United States was quite different from the Catholic Church they were accustomed to in Brazil. Julia summarizes this conflict when discussing her experiences:

I am Catholic but here I don’t go to the Catholic Church. I went to the Catholic Church but I hate it. The Catholic Church here is so cold. It’s not like in Brazil; you can’t feel like you are really praying to God. And people don’t talk to you in church. It’s just like an obligation to go to church every Sunday. So I don’t like it.

The belief that the Catholic Church practices in America were different from those of Brazil was expressed by all five of the Brazilian participants. Noteworthy is the description of the Catholic Church as “cold”, which also relates to the attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture that Brazilians also often described as being “cold”. This viewpoint will be discussed in more detail later. However, instead of being deterred they used this as an opportunity to learn about other religions because, as Isabella expressed, “In Brazil it’s just Catholic. Everyone I know is Catholic.” The Brazilian women, in particular Sophia, Julia, and Isabella, all expressed a desire to learn about different religions.
They quickly found a Christian group that they joined because it aligned more to their experiences in Brazil, as Sophia expresses: “It’s nice because it’s more open like Brazil. We talk about the bible and just hang out. They talk to you, they care about you, they invite you to go do things with them.” Although the women found membership within this group, they still maintained their identity as Catholic. This relates to the first research question because it shows that while immersed in the United States, their identities were reconstructed, but they still maintained the core component of their religious identity. Recounting a discussion with her mother during the focus group interview, Sophia affirms that although she does not attend Catholic Church, she has not changed her faith.

I told my mom that I don’t go to the Catholic Church. She thought I was crazy and said you can’t change religion. So I had to explain to her that I am not changing. Just here it is better for me… It’s the same God, I don’t care.

These examples help answer the first research question because, for this group of Brazilian women, their religious identity played a crucial role in how they understand their relationship to the world and with others. Although their religious identity in Brazil was at odds with what they encountered in the United States, they still did not waiver in their belief and adapted according to their environment, all while maintaining a core component of their identity.

When discussing their perceptions of the target language culture, the Brazilian participants provide insight on their identities, target language culture, and imagined communities, thus answering the first, second, and forth research questions. A common
theme that emerged through interviews with the Brazilians was the “closed” and impersonal nature of American culture. Oftentimes, this perception was expressed through comparing American culture to Brazilian culture. In doing so, the participants were projecting what they considered to be a strong attribute of their identity as Brazilians, as well as perceptions of the target language culture prior to and post immersion. The participants almost always expressed this perception of the target language culture while discussing how they believed they would interact with Americans. These beliefs correspond to the participants imagined communities because they outline viewpoints regarding the use of English and living in the United States before immersion in the target language culture. The other Brazilian participants reflected the attitudes and perceptions expressed by Maria during individual interviews.

I thought that I would have a lot of American friends. But now I don’t… It is not what I imagined. I imagined more American friends. Many American friends… But Americans like isolation. Brazilians are more friendly and outgoing. It is very different... It’s more difficult than I imagined.

Maria is projecting her belief that before she came to the United States to study, she imagined that she would have many American friends. She thought that she would use English to communicate with Americans and form friendships. This viewpoint, which was also expressed by the other Brazilians, reveals attitudes and perceptions towards imagined communities because it reflects a desired community of perceived experiences and connections with people. In turn, this answers the second research question.
Since Maria expressed the belief that she would have many American friends, it is reasonable to conclude that she believed that Americans were friendly. This idea was expressed by Isabella, who stated that, “Before I left Brazil, I thought that Americans were friendly, easy to make friends with… But Americans are closed.” This belief highlights attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture as friendly and outgoing before immersion, thus answering the forth research question. However, after arriving in the United States to study English, these attitudes and perceptions change, instead labeling Americans as “closed”. By comparing American culture to Brazilian culture, the participants are reflecting a component of their identity construction. A discernable feature, which Maria perceives as being a shared cultural characteristic, is being friendly and outgoing. This perception was echoed by others in the group, who described themselves, and Brazilians as a whole, as possessing “friendly” and “outgoing” personalities. These are identifying features that they expected to find in Americans as well. However, this perception of the target language culture has changed as a result of their experiences upon immersion in the target culture, thereby answering the forth research question.

These attitudes and perceptions also help answer the second research question by corresponding to those that the participants have regarding imagined communities while learning English. For many of the Brazilian participants, studying English in American represented an opportunity to form friendships with Americans. As a result, they invested in an imagined community that reflected a desired community of Americans, consisting
of experiences and connections with them. In the focus group interview, Sophia summarizes perceptions that were echoed by other members during their interviews:

I was surprised by American culture, the American way, how friendship works. In Brazil you just meet and person and you go and hug them and it’s warmer than here. Americans are kind of cold… not like it would be with a Brazilian. The way we start a friendship in Brazil is different; it’s warmer. Here I think it’s harder to make friends, to have a real friendship. That was shocking.

Not only does Sophia further exhibit characteristics of a shared cultural identity, but she also displays attitudes and perceptions associated with American imagined communities. The fact that these imagined communities do not align with reality is “shocking” to her. As a result, she expresses difficulties making connections and “real friendship” with the members of her imagined community.

This could contribute to the fact that for the Brazilian participants, their communities they engaged in consisted of predominately international students. Sophia exemplifies this fact by stating, “I don’t hang out with Americans really… lots of my friends are other international students.” For Sophia, her experiences with other members in her community contribute to her desire to travel the world and live in another country and culture. “This experience here makes me want to travel more and take my masters in another place, out of Brazil and the United States.” As a result of her experiences in the United States, Sophia is imagining possibilities for the future that, as Norton and McKinney (2011) state, produce “new images of possibility and new ways of
understanding one’s relation to the world that transcend more immediate acts of engagement” (p. 80).

Another theme that emerged was the influence of the media on participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards the target language culture and imagined communities, which correspond to research questions two and four. For many of the Brazilian participants in this study, American culture is very influential in Brazil. According to Julia, many Brazilians strive to replicate an image of Americans presented in the movies.

There is a big influence from American culture. Brazilians love American brands, more than you Americans even… They want to look like Americans. So a lot of people want blond hair too. The movies have shown us what it is like. For me, Americans love money. It’s the first thing I think about Americans. Money, money, money, and work hard to get money.

Julia discusses perceptions regarding American culture that she believes is representative of many Brazilians. In doing so, she discusses physical appearances and ideas about the standard of living. For her, American movies have influenced Brazilians perceptions about American culture. This could help explain Isabella’s perceptions about physical features shared by Americans. Isabella states, “I thought I would only see white people in America. Blond hair, blue eyes. But no, I saw different kinds of people. It’s not true how I thought it would be. There are many different people.” Isabella’s conception of what an American looks like corresponds to Julia’s statements about the perceptions Brazilians have regarding the physical features of Americans. Sophia expands upon Julia’s attitudes and perceptions regarding the influence of media about American standards of living.
I think that movies and TV had a big influence. Cause we know how good and better schools, education, safety, houses, and these things are. We know through media. And we want to see these things. We want to go and see how good it is. Sophia is expressing not just the influence that the media has had shaping perceptions of Americans appearance, but also regarding issues pertaining to standard of living. Taking the influence of the media a step further, Isabella maintains that movies helped create a picture in her mind about what university life is like in America. “Movies helped me figure out how America was. I saw movies about university life. They showed me what it was like.” Sophia also supports this notion, whereas she states, “Movies always show student working real late, like midnight, studying. So I thought it be like that.” For Isabella and Sophia, movies influenced their perceptions of what it would be like to study at a university in America. In turn, they contributed to the construction of an imagined community because the media helped shaped their attitudes and perceptions about university life in America though expanding beyond their immediate environment and social networks. In doing so, Isabella and Sophia perceived connections and experiences with Americans that were not readily available to her otherwise.

With regards to this influence and the implications of media on the participants from Brazil, it is important to note that the movies and television that influenced them were Brazilian media where the actors spoke Portuguese. These forms of media, which included movies and television, were often watched with English subtitles by the participants in an effort to help learn English. The fact that these forms of media are Brazilian, and not American, could explain the dissociation between what they imagined
and reality. It is quite possible that these movies and television obscured the disparity between American and Brazilian culture.

Further, exposing themselves to English subtitles, which the participants did in an attempt to help facilitate their acquisition of English, may have had a positive impact on their speech. This corresponds with Rottava and Da Silva’s (2014) findings that 84% of the Brazilian participants in their study believed that they could learn English through media forms. Interestingly, during their interviews the Brazilian subjects spoke very fluently and informally, oftentimes using informal expressions and slang. This could relate to using media forms, such as movies, television, and music to learn English. These media forms often convey informal speech.

The participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards the English language are highlighted, along with their attitudes and perceptions towards imagined communities while learning English, when discussing the benefits of learning English in the United States. These results help answer the second and third research questions. A common theme that emerged within this data focuses on future employment opportunities and social, as well as economic, status. This is exemplified by Isabella’s assertion that, “In Brazil if you speak English, you are God. Many doors will open for you.” By making such a strong comparison, Isabella is highlighting attitudes and perceptions of the English language. Through possessing such a skill, one is able to achieve higher social and economic status amongst their peers.

Sophia also demonstrates this belief when she stated during the focus group interview that English language abilities “are important to the point where some
companies will hire you over someone with a masters degree just because you can speak English.” Like Isabella, Sophia equates English language abilities with opportunities for employment. Isabella clarifies this point when she discusses her experiences with an international company she works for in Brazil.

I work for a company and they have different companies in different places around the world. They have people working from Asia, South America, Europe, all over the world. So when we start a project, all the project work is in English. All writings, meetings, everything is done in English. Because think about it, you have people from different countries with different languages. You need at least one common language. So the common language is English. So in this company, we talk in English with people from other countries.

By drawing upon her experiences, Isabella is relating her attitudes and perceptions of the English language as essential to success in her company. She is highlighting the important role that English will play in her life. In doing so, Isabella is also outlining perceptions about the context and situations, and thereby pinpointing perceived experiences and connections with people, with whom she will use English in the future. Additionally, Isabella is identifying what Norton (2001) labels, “a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (p. 309). It is interesting to note that Isabella’s imagined community does not consist of using English to communicate with native speakers. Conversely, Isabella identifies members of this community as other non-native speakers of English that will communicate using English.
These attitudes and perceptions of the English language and interrelation with imagined communities have impacted the language learning process for the Brazilians. The fact that their imagined communities differed from their communities of practice was actually beneficial because the participants still actively engaged and sought out contexts to continue improving their language instead of having an adverse negative consequence. In doing so, they broadened the contexts and situations in which they used English to communicate and experience the target language culture in ways that may otherwise have been inaccessible.

The focus group interview provided additional insight because of the way Sophia acted with the other members. The Brazilian participants all expressed that a key component of their identity was their friendly nature. This was evident during the focus group interview because Sophia was extremely friendly and welcoming to the Saudi and Chinese participant. She warmly greeted the other members and always spoke up or started the conversation when the others seemed unwilling to do so. True to her claim that America is a place where you can learn about other religions, Sophia used this opportunity to ask Fatima questions about her Muslim faith. The focus group interview also supported the observation from the individual interviews that the Brazilian participants had excellent speaking skills when compared with the Saudi and Chinese participants.

For the Brazilian participants in this study, their imagined communities fluctuated based on the resources available to them. This corresponds with Pavlenko and Lantolf’s (2000) claim that in order to integrate into the target language community, language
learners restructure their identities based on the available communities of practice. The results presented in this section answer the first, second, third, and forth research questions.

### 4.3 Attitudes and Perceptions of Saudi Women

The influence of religion on identity was also very prevalent with Saudi women. However, unlike the Brazilian’s, there is less of a uniform correlation amongst the members of the group. Thus, these findings answer the first and fifth research questions. There is no doubt that religion is an essential part of their identity construction, however, the degree to which their views on religion align varies. The participants’ perceptions fall into two main categories, those that are more traditional and those that align more with liberal ideals. Two of the participants, Fatima and Salma, best exemplify these categories through data gathered during individual interviews and the focus group interview. The participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards their identities often occurred in conjunction with their attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture, thereby answering the first and forth research questions.

All of the Saudi participants commented that being a Muslim woman in the United States presents challenges. During the focus group interview Fatima expresses some of these challenges, as well as her perceptions of the target language culture, when explaining what it means to be a Muslim woman living in the United States.

American women think that Muslim women are not self confident and that we don’t have a voice. People think this about us because of how we dress and wear
the hijab… I think people look at me like they are sorry for me. But they shouldn’t be. It’s not like that. When I came here, my dad told me that if you want to remove the hijab, or if you are under duress for some reason, just remove it. And he said also just if you don’t like it; if you don’t want wear it, that’s okay. But it’s about religion, which is part of me, so I keep it.

For Fatima, the perceptions that she has regarding the target language culture’s viewpoints on her religion correspond with her identity as not just a Muslim, but a woman as well. Fatima understands how her identity as a Muslim woman is related to her relationship with the outside world, which in this case, is the target language culture. She rejects these viewpoints and does not let the target language culture define her identity, but rather, defines it herself. A key part of her identity is the hijab, which she describes as being part of her. Therefore, even though she could take it off, she chooses not to.

Fatima also constructs her identity through comparing herself to other Muslim women living in the United States and as a representative of her culture.

I feel all the time that I am the person who represents Saudi Arabia and Muslim women. I feel that I must be a Muslim example so they will understand. But some of the other girls, I noticed that they don’t do it. So they just live like Americans here. So I feel embarrassed because they do it. So I feel like I should. I feel it heavier. They feel it’s okay to just live how Americans live here.

This excerpt portrays how Fatima’s faith is a defining characteristic of her identity and answers the first research question. Since this part of her identity is at odds with the perceptions of the target language culture, Fatima feels that she must represent not only
Saudi Arabia, but Muslim women too. She compares herself to other Muslim women from Saudi Arabia in order to construct and help define her identity as a Muslim woman living in the United States. Specifically, Fatima is referencing other Muslim women from Saudi Arabia who do not wear the hijab in order to blend in.

Fatima does not seek to blend in, instead she wishes to portray her culture and faith. In her individual interview, she talks about how “Americans think that we Arab people are terrorists. But we try to show the other behavior, to show that’s not how it is.” This choice may be linked to a defining moment for Fatima that occurred shortly after arriving in the United States. While walking on the college campus with another Muslim woman, an older individual called them terrorists. Fatima described her feelings about the situation very calmly:

We just looked at him and walked off. I think the old man just thinks Arabic people are terrorist because of the media… There are always uneducated people. They don’t know and we understand that. It makes me feel a little sad, but not enough to stop talking to people.

When confronted with this clash of cultures, Fatima handles it very calmly and rationally. She portrays a deep desire to represent her faith and culture. She told various stories where she was in “uncomfortable” situations because of her gender, faith, and nationality. However, in each of these situations she chose to educate the other. This was especially prevalent during the focus group interview, when two co-participants from China and Brazil inquired about her faith and cultural customs. For example, Fatima happily answered queries about body contact with men, driving, and chaperones amongst others.
It is important to note that Fatima does not consider herself to be a conservative Muslim. She drives, has friends from other cultures, friends that are men, and believes that the conservative Muslim women she knows have difficulties learning English and adjusting to life in the United States.

In these contexts, Fatima reaffirms conclusions drawn by Mir (2011) that some Muslim women living in the United States feel that they must represent their culture as Muslim women. In doing so, they rebuke stereotypes and perceptions of the general American public and find their voice and assert the right to speak. This is especially true for Fatima and impacted her use of the English language. As a result of these factors, Fatima experienced many contexts and situations that she otherwise would not have. She says, during the focus group interview, that this has helped her learn and express herself in English. “The uncomfortable situations helped me learn English. I must be careful about what I say and say it right. I must explain so they know and learn.” Fatima did not expect to take on this role before she came to the United States. Yet, she chose to do so due to the circumstances she found herself in. As a result, this had a positive impact on her language learning process. This process of how she reconstructed her identity within the target language culture answers the first and forth research questions.

On the other end of the spectrum are Saudi women whose viewpoints seem to be more liberal. One such example is Salma, who does not wear the hijab. She portrays her identity while discussing her decision not to wear the hijab by explaining, “New generation Muslims don’t cover their hair.” She goes on to state, “A lot of people where I am from think that Europe is a modern society and we should change and try to live like
them.” This explanation not only outlines how Salma constructs her identity as a Muslim women, one that is in conflict with Fatima’s, but also sheds light on her attitudes and perceptions of American culture, thus answering the forth research question. By referencing Europe, a place where she has never travelled, she is projecting her investment in an imagined community that she perceives to align more closely with her identity as a new age Muslim woman. Another explanation could be that her imagined American identity is constructed with the viewpoint of a wider Western culture. This Western culture can be seen as a link that bands Europeans and Americans together. Either way, this correlates to her “dream of living in Italy” that was influenced by movies. Salma provides insight into this dream and the role that English plays in achieving it:

I love Italy because of movies. It looks so great, historical buildings. I think Italian men are really handsome. So I need to learn English here so I can go live there. I need English to talk with people, to live. And then I can try to start learning Italian. But first I need English.

For Salma, the imagined community that she aspires to join is influenced by the media and driven by her identity as a new age Muslim woman. She believes that English will help fulfill her dream. This desire to travel the world relates to her imagined community, which in turn, influences her attitudes and perceptions towards the English language. She believes that the English language presents opportunities to communicate with other cultures. Therefore, these findings answer the first, second, third, and forth research
questions. Salma repeatedly mentions her surprise at the number of international people living in the United States. I thought before I came here, I would have many American friends. But it’s not as easy as I thought. I didn’t expect so many Spanish people, Asians, things like that… I love being with international students. I didn’t know that there were so many international people in the United States. I spend most of my free time with international students.

Originally, the imagined community that Salma expected to encounter in the United States consisted of Americans. However, upon arrival, her imagined community evolved based on the circumstances of her environment, which corresponds with the second research question. She quickly adapted and embraced a community that was not what she originally imagined. Instead of using English with American friends, Salma predominately uses English to communicate with other international students. This aligns with her investment in an imagined community of new age Muslims in Europe, in which English is her means of communication. This claim corresponds with that of Al Harithi (2014), who concludes that for some Saudi learners of English, English is a way to travel and not just experience, but also gain access to other cultures.

Central to the construction of Salma’s identity is the issue of gender. This is exemplified when she compares herself to others that share her culture and faith. Sometimes we have different ideas about religion. For example, supporting the woman. Some of the Arabic cultures don’t. They keep the woman closed in the house. And that man can have 4 wives because of religion. Some of us, we don’t
believe that. They explain our religion different. Other countries think it’s all like
that. But it’s not.

Salma separates herself from others in her culture and defines herself as a new age
Muslim woman. Like Fatima, she realizes how other cultures perceive Muslim women.
However, unlike Fatima, Salma does not seem to feel the need to educate others and be
an example of her culture and faith. This could be attributed to her attitudes and
perceptions of American culture, which answers the forth research question. Salma
believes that “In the United States, no one cares what you do. It’s not just because I am
international. It’s like that for everything. They don’t care about your religion, your
style.” Although Salma acknowledges that other countries have unflattering perceptions
of Muslim women, it appears that she does not consider the United States to be one of
those countries.

For nearly all of the Saudi respondents though, their attitudes and perceptions of
the target language culture, thus answering the forth research question, are linked with
their exposure to the media. These perceptions were at times in conflict with their
experiences upon arrival in the United States. Specifically, the participants mentioned the
influence of American movies. For Fatima, movies provided “a picture of what it was
like, what life was like in America.” This picture, she says, is similar to what she
imagined. She defines this as “more action” and that time would go by faster compared to
when she was in Saudi Arabia. This may account her assertion that living in the United
States is “close to what I thought it would be like.” However, for Salma, the influence of
movies on her perceptions and attitudes of the target language culture did not align with reality.

I think that I would enjoy life, it would be more fun. I think before I came here that Americans enjoy everyday like in the movies. But after I came, I realized that they don’t. They just wait for the weekend so they can drink alcohol... Movies and social media show us that Americans love everyday. But I think that a lot of Americans are not happy.

Salma’s perceptions of the target language culture before immersion were influenced by the media. As a result, these perceptions did not align with the reality she experienced. This, along with the belief she would have many American friends, may have contributed to her embracing and finding membership in a community that did not reflect her imagined community, one that consisted of using English with her American friends who enjoyed everyday like in the movies.

Another crucial theme that emerged through the data is safety. Safety is related with the participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards their identities and the target language culture and thus, answers the first and forth research questions. All of the Saudi women mentioned that safety was a concern for choosing where they lived in the United States. They expressed that as women, it was important to live somewhere where they felt safe. Fatima related safety to her identity as a Muslim woman. “I heard about an Arab women in Canada and she got stabbed 16 times because she was a Muslim and wore the hijab.” For Fatima, being a Muslim woman in a Western society can result in a potentially violent clash of cultures. However, she revealed during the focus group
interview that she feels “Athens is safe and I can live alone.” For these Saudi women, the priority placed on safety is intertwined with their identity as Muslim women. This perception of safety also contributes to their sense of independence, another theme that emerged throughout the data collection.

Another important theme that emerged, the feeling of independence, is linked with perceptions and attitudes towards identity, the target language culture, and the English language. Therefore, these findings satisfy the first, third, and forth research questions. By being able to successfully communicate with the target language culture, the participants feel empowered. Their attitudes and perceptions towards the English language is one that reflects their feeling of independence because it is through the English language that they are able to successfully communicate with the target language culture. This notion of independence, or being an independent person, is an important characteristic in their identity formation. For Fatima, she relates this independence to something that she learned from the target language culture.

I think I learn a lot of things from Americans. My personality has been changing since I have been here. My family has noticed that. That my behavior has changed for a positive thing. For example, I am more independent now because American people are independent. So I learned that.

Fatima equates this independence as something she learned from American people. In doing so, this reflects how it has shaped her attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture. In addition, her feeling of independence contributes to her desire to travel and experience other cultures. “I want to go to other places and learn another
language. I think about Brazil and Turkey.” Not only can this desire be attributed to her feeling of independence, but also to her community of practice that consists of other international students, such as Brazilians and Turkish. This feeling of independence likely stems from her use of the English language to confront and correct stereotypes about her culture. In turn, this feeling of empowerment is associated with English.

The manner in which Fatima conducted herself during the focus group interview supported the conclusions drawn during the individual interview. At first, she appeared to be a little uneasy and shy with the Brazilian and Chinese members. She was quiet and only spoke when specifically addressed or asked a question. However, she quickly found her voice once the topic of religion was brought up and the others looked to her for insight. She politely and patiently answered their questions, particularly from Sophia, about her culture and faith. After this point, Fatima seemed to grow in confidence and soon was offering information without being prompted.

Like the Brazilian participants, the Saudi learners of English often experienced communities of practice that differed from their imagined communities. By drawing upon their identities, and constructing them within the target language culture, they were undeterred to learn English. These participants do not align with Mir’s (2011) observation that when reality differed from their imagined community, the Muslim women chose to position themselves within communities of practice that were almost exclusively made up of Muslims. The participants in Mir’s (2011) sought membership in multiple communities that were oftentimes overlapping. As a result, it was difficult to draw a boundary separating where one community begins and the other ends. Instead, the
Saudi participants in this study position themselves within communities consisting of other international students. In doing so, they facilitate the language learning process by maximizing opportunities to use English. The findings presented in this section satisfy the first, second, third, forth, and fifth research questions.

4.4 Attitudes and Perceptions of Chinese Women

The most prominent themes that emerged with the Chinese participants centered on how they constructed their identity, imagined communities, attitudes and perceptions towards the English language and culture and how these areas correspond to each other. Therefore, these results answer the first, second, third, forth, and fifth research questions. For the Chinese participants, the role of parents was one of the most influential factors in their identity construction. The majority of the Chinese participants initially did not want to live and study in the United States. Instead, it was their parents who decided that they should study at a university in the United States. Vivian outlines this when comparing herself to other Chinese students.

I know some of the Chinese people come here because their parents made them and they don’t want to. So they just spend money and party. Most of the students are supported by their parents.

By comparing herself to other Chinese students, Vivian highlights what she does not want to become. Nora supports this claim when discussing how it was her fathers decision, not hers, to study in the United States.
My father had planned for me to go to the United States to study when I was in high school. But I didn’t want to go when I was in high school because I had lots of friends. So he decided that I will go for university… My father chose this school.

In addition, Fiona supports this notion when discussing the process that led to her studying in the United States. Fiona narrates that it was her parents’ idea to send her to school in the United States.

They wanted me to experience a new country and a new way of studying and learning. They think my personality is good for studying in the US. They gave me a choice and I said yes, I want to do that.

Fiona continues by expounding upon what she means by having a good personality for studying in the United States.

By my personality, I mean that when I do something I have a lot of different ideas. But in China you have to answer a certain way. In America they prefer your opinion. You’re allowed to be creative. But in China you can’t be creative. So it was my parents’ idea, they thought that it might be good for me. Before that, I never thought about going to the United States.

Through this explanation, Fiona describes the influence of her parents, as well as attitudes and perceptions about her identity and the target language culture, thus answering the first and forth research questions. Her parents were the most significant factor that led to her studying in the United States. Fiona also references her personality as a creative individual with opinions that matter. In doing so, she provides insight into
the construction of her identity. Further, through this discussion, Fiona compares China to the United States. Specifically, she focuses on factors that relate to her identity, believing that in the United States creativity and opinions are accepted and encouraged.

These viewpoints transition into an emerging theme for the Chinese participants, that of independence. The notion of independence extends not only to individual identities, but also to attitudes and perceptions about the target language culture and the English language. For these participants, their experiences living in the United States have led to a change in their identity, one that gives them a sense of independence. This change in their identity resulted predominantly from their experiences, but a contributing factor was also their attitudes and perceptions towards the target language culture. A common theme that emerged through interviews with the Chinese participants was the viewpoint that American culture was “independent” and “free”. Vivian personifies this idea when she states, “For me, this place is freedom.” This notion was usually expressed in comparison to China, as Fiona does in the following excerpt, which occurred in the focus group interview:

I think America is more freedom. Like with censorship. In China we have really strict censorship laws. The government controls everything. They cut a lot of parts out of the movie. Now that I live here, I never knew parts of movies that were cut out by our government. In our country, the media is limited too. The news… If you live here you can learn about the world.

In turn, these Chinese participants equated the target language culture as representative of independence and freedom. By immersing within this culture, they are able to identify
with a feeling of freedom and independence. Nora outlines this notion by stating; “I am very different from before I came here… I am more independent.” As a result, this manifested in their identity construction, as well as their attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture.

Unlike the Brazilians and Saudis, the attitudes and perceptions of the Chinese participants about the target language culture were not greatly influenced by movies and television. The majority of the participants relayed that they used American TV shows, such as Friends, to help learn to speak and understand English. However, these participants did not believe that TV reflected reality. Kelly, who grew up in Beijing, states that, “I watched a lot of American TV growing up… but I thought that when I came here, it would be different then TV though.” For Kelly and the other participants, their perceptions of the target language culture were shaped through information learned from the news, in school, and from friends who visited the United States. The participants repeatedly used the terms freedom, independent, and creative to describe how they imagined the United States. This is dissimilar to the Brazilian and Saudi participants who described their attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture in more concrete terms supported with examples and thus, answer the fifth research question.

Also in regards to the fifth research question, similar to the Brazilians and Saudis, the Chinese participants all discussed how they imagined that in the United States they would predominantly speak English and have many American friends. However, upon arriving in the United States, they soon realized that this was not the case. Unlike the
Brazilian and Saudi participants, the Chinese did not adapt to their environment and engage with other international students. Kelly provides evidence to support this claim:

I thought that I would speak English all the time before I came. I did know there were a lot of Chinese students, but I thought that they all spoke English and they would speak English with me. I had some friends who came to the United States many years before me and they didn’t learn anything. I thought that maybe this was their choice and that they didn’t want to talk or know American people. I thought that it was an individual choice. But I think that’s just how it is.

This demonstrates that once they realized it was difficult to make American friends, their communities consisted of only Chinese. As a result, they predominately speak Mandarin. Kelly seems to express the notion that once reality differed from her imagined community; the ability to alter or change the situation was out of her control.

A common theme that continually emerged for the Chinese participants was the inability to make friends with Americans. This seemed to result from the perception that Americans are more exclusive because they do not start conversations with the Chinese participants. Therefore, the Chinese participants viewed this as denying them the opportunity to learn English because Americans ignore them. However, perhaps from the American standpoint, the Chinese participants did not have the necessary language abilities to join their groups. The Chinese subjects in this study frequently remarked that they often did not know what to say when conversing with Americans. They equated this with cultural differences; however, this could have resulted from a lack of English
proficiency. As a result, the Americans they engaged with could have cut them off and denied them access to networks and groups that could aid their English learning.

Unlike Brazilian and Saudi participants, the Chinese did not reconstruct their imagined community based on the context of their environment. They did not seek out other international students or groups to help assist in learning English. Once they were unable to join networks of Americans, either because they were ignored or lacked the necessary language proficiency, they chose to place themselves exclusively with other Chinese. This resulted in negative implications for learning the English language. Nora thinks that this occurs because other international students expect Chinese to be in the United States.

Only Chinese really talk to me. I think other international students, they know Chinese will be here so they expect it and it’s not a big deal. So they treat us like normal, kind of just ignore you or whatever. Everyone knows a lot of Chinese study in the U.S. so it’s normal.

As a result of these attitudes and perceptions, the Chinese participants in this study did not attempt to modify their imagined community and gain membership in communities of practice consisting of international students. Meeting and engaging with other international students would require the use of English in cross-cultural encounters. Face to face encounters during which English is used with other non-Chinese interlocutors would present not only the opportunity to learn, but also practice what they have learned in class. For these participants, reality differs from their imagined communities. Subsequently, their investment in the target language decreases and their progress in
learning the language is impeded. This results from a lack of authentic opportunities, such as face-to-face communication, to practice and use English. This corresponds to Kanno’s (2003) findings that when an imagined community differs from reality, it can have negative consequences for learning the target language. This is reaffirmed by Chinese participants who believe that living and engaging with other Chinese students all day hinders their ability to learn the English language. Vivian declares that:

I thought that I would meet American friends. I need an American friend to improve my English. I think I already come to this place and I am still with Chinese. So, why did I come here? It’s a big problem for me… I speak Mandarin all the time.

The conflict between reality and imagined community is evident for Vivian. She is unable to reconfigure her imagined community based on her environment and the reality of her situation. In doing so, she becomes stuck in a cycle of communicating only with other Chinese. However, instead of altering her imagined community to avoid such situations, Vivian reapplies it to different contexts. “I want to apply to a university program that does not have that many Chinese students. I want to improve my English… My English should be better.” Vivian is simply taking her preexisting imagined community and applying it to a different university, one that she imagines will not have so many Chinese students and thus, different contexts. She believes that once she enters that environment, she will be able to improve her English.
It is evident that for Vivian, her imagined community consisted solely of American native speakers. She does not appear to assume the responsibility to seek out Americans, or even other international students, to provide her with the opportunity to use English. She is unable to join a group or community because she is not making an effort, attempting to engage, or contribute to it. This fact can perhaps be explained by the deep-rooted Chinese practice of receptive learning that is more of an individual and less communal process. Vivian, and the other Chinese participants, are unaccustomed to learning through joint participation, which is often the case in the United States. Unfamiliarity with this practice could hinder and prevent her from considering the possibility of learning English in such a manner.

Relating to claims by Teutsch-Dwyer (2001), the Chinese participants in this study are minimizing contact with the target language. Therefore, their opportunities to use English in authentic contexts are decreasing. This impacts the language learning process because such interactions result in limited proficiency of the target language. When attempting to use English in discourse, the Chinese participants all expressed difficulties communicating with native English speakers. Specifically, they discussed difficulties carrying on conversations, understanding cultural references, and engaging in small talk. Fiona discusses this issue and displays how it is interconnected with imagined communities.

Before I came here I thought that I will meet a lot of American friends and I may have an opportunity to get internship. And just that my English can improve. But I
don’t have American friends. It’s a communication problem… it’s hard to do small talk with them. We don’t know what to say.

Fiona affirms that communication problems stem from lack of opportunities to speak with Americans. Learning communication components of English suffers because her imagined community consists of only Americans. She has difficulty gaining entry and participating in this imagined community because it is constructed around an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Fiona is not envisioning herself as part of the ‘them’ so she is unable and unlikely to reap the benefits of membership.

This example answers the second research question and once again demonstrates potential negative consequences for language learning when an imagined community does not align with reality. A lack of restructuring their imagined community based on their surroundings and engaging with international students compounds the issue. The end result is a lack of authentic communicative contexts with the English language. This example also highlights the influence of employment and how for many of the Chinese participants, it is interconnected with their imagined communities and attitudes and perceptions towards the English language, thus answering the second and third research questions. The Chinese participants perception is very narrow and mainly focuses on English for employment purposes. As such, this prevents them from recognizing other avenues that could facilitate the acquisition of English, such as engaging in student organizations or sports activities.

A common thread expressed by all of the Chinese participants was the importance of English to gain employment in China, which answers the third research question. The
main theme that arose was that being able to speak English equated to employment and economic opportunities, as is outlined by Fiona. “People who can speak English will get high salary and good job because you can work with American people or other countries people.”

This answers the fifth research questions because similar to Brazilian and Saudi participants, English abilities enhance opportunities for the future where they are able to envision themselves as successful members of the workforce. In addition, they believe that they will predominately use English to communicate with other Chinese. During the focus group interview Fiona states, “Even with Chinese people for business reason, we use English.” This could account for why all of the Chinese participants in this study continually referenced the importance of learning English for employment purposes. It appears as if they are prioritizing an imagined community where they will use English with other Chinese in work contexts over the imagined community they originally came to the United States with. Conversely, this could also have arisen as a means to justify or accept that the imagined community they arrived in the United States with, one where they believed they would have American friends with whom they would communicate regularly, differs from reality.

For Fiona, the focus group interview served as an opportunity to interact in English with individuals who were not Chinese in an authentic context. However, throughout the focus group interview she was very quiet and for the most part, only spoke when spoken to. After the Brazilian and Saudi participant spoke, there would often be a pause in the conversation as a cue for Fiona to speak. She never noticed this cue, or chose
to ignore it. As a result, the other members of the focus group would ask her for her opinion or structure a question about the Chinese. Corresponding with the individual interviews from the Chinese participants, Fiona mostly connected her responses with the topics of American friends and employment. Moreover, the focus group interview demonstrated a lack of proficiency in spoken English when compared with the Saudi and Brazilian participant. Fiona often gave short responses that lacked detail. However, when prompted to provide additional information or clarification, she happily obliged. The focus group interview demonstrated that Fiona was usually unwilling or uneasy to speak when she was not explicitly asked to. However, when the other members did ask her for her opinion, she readily accepted this invitation to speak and did so with detail.

For the Chinese learners of English in this study, the impact that imagined communities had on the language learning process is profound. When the Chinese participants’ imagined communities were at odds with their communities of practice they, unlike the Brazilian and Saudis, were unable to reconstruct them based on their surroundings. Subsequently, this negatively impacted the language learning process because they minimized opportunities and contexts to authentically use English. The English language proficiency of the Chinese participants in this study was markedly below that of the Brazilian and Saudi participants. In large part, this can be attributed to the impact that imagined communities had on the process of learning English.

This highlights the importance of making learners aware of their imagined communities and possibilities for the future so that they are able to navigate, and if needed, reconfigure them based on the environment of the target language culture. This
could occur in the form of an orientation course, either while still in China or upon arrival in the United States, that highlights the differences between the two countries. Moreover, English language programs at universities in the United States should emphasize activities, such as host families, international student activities, or conversation partner programs, to increase participation in the target language culture.

The results presented in sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 answer the five research questions presented at the beginning of this chapter. As is evident by the manner these results are presented, the attitudes and perceptions surrounding identities, imagined communities, the English language, and target language culture are all interconnected. The intricate nature of these connections results in changes based on the environment, contexts, and situations of the learners. As a result, these factors can positively or negatively impact the process of learning English. Chapter 5 provides a condensed summary of these findings and how these factors correspond with learning the English language.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study does not consider its findings as a complete representation of the attitudes and perceptions of all Saudis, Brazilians, and Chinese. Additionally, it has not explored all of the possible attitudes and perceptions of participants regarding identity, imagined communities, target language culture, and the English language. However, this study does explore these issues significantly enough to draw conclusions based on the data gathered from the participants. This study maintains the validity of findings and claims made based on the data of the participants. In doing so, this study considers its findings to not only be valid, but also contributing to the understanding and body of research concerning identity and imagined communities and in particular, these notions in accordance with university level learners of the English language enrolled in the United States.

This study maintains that identity, imagined communities, perceptions towards the English language and target language culture are all interconnected. These factors, specifically identity, perceptions towards the English language and target language culture, influenced the imagined communities of the participants. For the majority of the participants in this study, a crucial characteristic of their imagined community was that it consisted of native English speakers. However, for these participants their communities of practice often differed from what they imagined. According to Kanno (2003), this can negatively impact the language learning process. This was true for the Chinese participants in this study. However, this factor did not negatively impact the Brazilian and Saudi participants in the same manner.
For the Brazilian participants in this study, their imagined communities differed from what they experienced once they arrived in the United States. Their imagined communities were formulated based on how they constructed their identities, attitudes and perceptions towards the English language and target language culture. These imagined communities were in large part influenced by their religious identity, notions of native English speakers they would encounter in the United States, and attitudes and perceptions regarding the target language culture, which were in large part influenced by the media though movies and television. As a result, when the Brazilian participants arrived in the United States, they encountered communities of practice that differed from what they imagined. However, instead of being deterred, they reconfigured their imagined communities based on their environment and surrounding contexts. This resulted in the participants engaging and participating in contexts in which they normally would not have used English, such as joining a Christian group. In addition, when their imagined community differed from their experiences, they reconstructed it based on available communities.

As a result, the Brazilians gained membership in communities and groups that consisted predominately of other international students. This aligned with their future goals and contexts for using English because they believed that they would be using English in Brazil to communicate not with native English speakers, but rather other international speakers in a work related environment. Therefore the fact that their imagined communities did not align with communities of practice did not result in negative consequences for the language learning process. On the contrary, this actually
assisted their acquisition of English though exposure and membership to communities and contexts that they normally would not have experienced. Since engaging in imagined communities is considered an act of identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011), the participants in this study restructured their identities in accordance with the available communities and groups as a means to integrate in the target language community and thus, assist in language acquisition (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The findings based on the Brazilian participants share a lot in common with those of the Saudi learners of English in this study.

The Saudi learners of English in this study could be classified into two main categories, that being, those who identified as being more traditional Muslims and those that had a more liberal viewpoint. For both of these categories, religion played a crucial role in their identity construction. Some of the participants affirm Mir’s (2011) conclusion that some Muslim women living in the United States feel that it is their responsibility to represent their culture and gender. In doing so, these women assert the right to speak and thus, find their voice within the target language culture. These factors positively impact the language learning process because the individuals experience situations that they otherwise would not have, and in some cases, ones that their counterparts may actively seek to avoid.

Corresponding with Markus and Nurius (1986) theory of possible selves, the individuals who ascribed to a more liberal viewpoint and identified themselves as new age Muslims formed their identity, and subsequently their imagined communities, based on what they did not want to become. In this context, these individuals separated
themselves from the others and invested in an imagined community that they believed would allow them to achieve this conception of their ideal self, as was the case for Salma. For these participants, English was the means for achieving this reality. As a result, this assisted and facilitated in the acquisition of the target language, especially with other non-native speakers.

Similar to the Brazilian participants, upon arriving in the United States the Saudi learners of English found themselves in communities of practice that did not reflect their imagined communities prior to coming to the United States. Namely, their attitudes and perceptions about the English language and target culture did not correspond with what they imagined. As a result, these individuals reconstructed their identities based on the context of the target language culture. Thus, they positioned themselves within communities and groups that consisted of other international students. They did not, as Mir (2011) concludes in her study, position themselves solely with other Muslim women when their imagined communities differed from their experiences.

The result of this restructuring was an active engagement with the target language through communities, groups, and the situations and contexts of their environment. For some, such as Fatima, this helped them find their voice and assert their right to speak in the target language. For others, such as Salma, this corresponded (like the Brazilians) with future contexts in which they believed they would use English. Again, these examples show that for these two groups (Brazilian and Saudi) the discrepancy between their imagined communities and communities of practice did not negatively impact the acquisition of the target language. In addition, this provides further evidence that
imagined communities need to be conceptualized in a manner similar to identity. That being, that they can be a site of conflict, struggle, and changing based on circumstances and environment. However, the findings concerning the Chinese learners of English present a different picture than the Brazilians and Saudis.

The findings in this study portray the Chinese learners of English differently than the Brazilian and Saudi learners in regards to what occurred once their imagined communities did not align with their experiences. Similar to the Brazilian and Saudi participants, the Chinese learners of English constructed their imagined communities on a foundation consisting of interactions with Americans. Unlike the Brazilian and Saudis’s, this construction was not influenced by the media; but more so according to attitudes and perceptions of the target language culture perpetuated by parents and learned in school. The influence of parents for the Chinese learners of English was immense. For all of the Chinese participants, the decision to study in the United States was made by their parents. This impacted their identity construction and attitudes and perceptions towards the English language and target culture. In turn, these factors impacted the construction of their imagined communities.

Similar to the other groups of learners in this study, when they arrived in the United States their imagined communities did not conform to their experiences. Unlike the Saudi and Brazilian participants, the Chinese learners of English did not reconfigure their imagined communities based on their environment, which consisted predominately of international students. Instead, they chose to interact and engage mainly with other Chinese students and subsequently, speak Mandarin the majority of the time. Since their
imagined community did not align with their communities of practice, they became disengaged with not only the English language, but the target language culture as well. These results correspond with the findings of Kanno (2003) that the discrepancy between imagined community and reality could negatively impact the language learning process. The Chinese participants in this study confirm this notion and state it themselves; saying that they think engaging almost exclusively with other Chinese impedes their acquisition of English. As a result, they minimize contact with the English language and thus, authentic contexts and opportunities to engage with the language (Tuetsch-Dwyer, 2001). The impact of imagined communities on the language learning process is evident through these factors. The inability of the Chinese participants to alter their imagined communities resulted in disengagement with the target language and unauthentic contexts for use. Therefore, this group highlights the importance of navigating and reconfiguring imagined communities as a result of the environment learners find themselves in. In order to do so, learners must be made aware of their imagined communities and opportunities for the future that exist within them.

The findings of this study suggest, as Norton (2001) did, that imagined communities could have a profound impact on the acquisition of the target language. This study depicts the complex relationship of factors that influence imagined communities, such as identity, attitudes and perceptions towards the English language, and target language culture. In accordance with these findings, this research suggests that imagined communities need to be conceptualized in a manner that more closely resembles the notion of identity presented by Norton Pierce (1995). Imagined communities, which
according to Norton and Toohey (2011) are an act of identity, need to be viewed as multifaceted, conflicting, and changing based on environment. Imagined communities do not cease to exist; they are dynamic in nature and at times conflicting with communities of practice. Prescribing to this viewpoint can help provide an understanding as to how and why imagined communities impact learners the way that they do. In elevating the discussion and providing additional insight, the hope is that in time, additional research can help pinpoint how language educators can draw on imagined communities and educate students about them in the classroom.

Additionally, this research suggests that although learners aspire to use English through engaging in authentic contexts with native English speakers, this is oftentimes not the reality that they encounter. The findings of this study show that rather than trying to alter their environment to reflect their imagined communities, the participants instead reconfigured their imagined communities based on the environment and opportunities available to them. As a result, they engaged in communities consisting of other international, non-native speakers of English. This afforded them opportunities to use English in authentic contexts that they otherwise may have not encountered. Therefore, the learners of English in this study predominately use English not to interact with native speakers, but rather, with other non-native speakers. In turn, this corresponds with the contexts in which they believe that they will use English in the future.

This study does acknowledge limitations while making suggestions for future research. As a result of time constraints and availability, the current study consists of 5 Brazilian, 5 Saudi, and 5 Chinese participants, for a total of 15 participants. Although
these figures were ample enough for the purpose of this study, a greater number of participants could enhance future research. As a result of scheduling conflicts and, for some of the Saudi participants visa issues that prevented them from being in the United States at the time of the focus group interview, only one member from each group (one Brazilian, one Saudi, and one Chinese) were present during the focus group interview. Having more members from each group present during the focus group interview could help elicit more information and viewpoints.

In addition, conducting focus group interviews with members of the same group (for example, all 5 Brazilian participants) may provide additional insights. However, as a result of time constraints, doing so was not within the realm of possibility for this study. Lastly, although the participants in this study completed a questionnaire concerning their attitudes and perceptions of identity, imagined communities, the English language, and target language culture before being interviewed, it would have been beneficial to administer the questionnaire to a greater number of participants. These limitations are also suggestions to consider for future research.

Despite these limitations, this study considers its findings to be valid and contributing to research on identity and imagined communities in the field of linguistics. These findings portray the impact that these factors have on the language learning process while immersed in the country of the target language. In doing so, they add to the body of research concerning identity and imagined communities, attempting to fill the gap on research regarding international students enrolled in intensive English programs in the United States. Specifically, this research adds to the field because many previous
studies focus solely on a single cultural group. However, this study compares three groups from three different languages and cultures and hence, viewpoints. The findings of this study suggest that in future research the notion of imagined communities should be conceptualized in a manner that more closely resembles the poststructuralist notion of identity, that being, an entity that is multi-faceted, conflicting, and altered based on environment. The findings of this study emphasize the need for future research that explores the identity and imagined communities of students enrolled in intensive English language programs at universities in the United States.
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APPENDIX A: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE #1

Please answer the following questions with the appropriate information.

If you have any questions, please contact Keith Ray at kr246906@ohio.edu. Please put the questionnaire in the mailbox of Keith Ray (by the elevator in Gordy Hall) or drop off at Gordy 361.

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Age: _______________________________________________________________________

Gender: ________________________________________________________________

Nationality: _______________________________________________________________________

Did you ever travel to the United States before you came to Ohio University? If yes, when?

________________________________________________________________________

Are you willing to participate in an interview with the researcher? Please answer yes or no.

________________________________________________________________________

Are you willing to participate in a group interview with 3-4 other international students learning English? Please answer yes or no.

________________________________________________________________________

How long have you been studying in the OPIE program at Ohio University?
Following are a number of statements. Please circle the answer that best describes your feeling regarding the statement.

1.) I want to use English when I travel to an English speaking country.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2.) I think that English will someday be useful in getting a good job.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

3.) I feel English is an important language in the world because of its influence in the global economy.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

4.) I want to meet and be able to talk with English speakers.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

5.) I think that I will need to know the English language for a future career.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

6.) I like watching American movies and TV shows.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7.) I want to have American friends.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

8.) I like English pop music and songs.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

9.) My family is happy that I am living and studying in America.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
10.) I want to live in an English speaking country after I finish school.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

11.) I try to talk to American students on campus.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

12.) Before coming to America, I always wondered what it would be like.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

13.) I did not want to live in America before I came here.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

14.) It is fun to speak English.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

15.) Living in America is different from what I thought it would be like.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

16.) Before coming to America, my friends and I would talk about what living in America would be like.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

17.) I often imagined what it would be like to study English outside of my country.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

18.) Before coming to America, I thought about how I would use the English language to make friends.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

19.) Living in America is just how I imagined it would be.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
20.) My parents/family wanted me to study in America.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

1.) Where did you grow up? In the countryside, city?

2.) What is one of your favorite memories from your childhood? Did you have a big family/ small family?

3.) Have you ever travelled to any countries besides the United States? Where did you travel? How old were you? Who did you travel with?

4.) What do you remember the most about this trip(s)?

5.) What did you enjoy the most/least during your travels?

6.) Did you enjoy going to school in your country?

7.) What did you like/dislike about school in your country?

8.) Can you tell me a story about a fun time you had in school?

9.) When did you first think about visiting the United States?

10.) Why did you want to visit the United States?

11.) When did you first think about studying in the United States?

12.) Why did you want to study in the United States?

13.) Growing up, what was your opinion/perception of the United States?

14.) When you found out you were going to come study in the United States, how did you feel?

15.) What did your friends and family say when you told them you were going to study in the United States?

16.) Before you came, what did you think/imagine your experience studying and living in the United States would be like?

17.) Can you tell me what you thought your daily routine would be like/ what you would do each day?

18.) Who did you think you would socialize/spend time and talk with?
19.) Who did you think you would make friends with?

20.) Were you excited to come study at OU? What were you the most excited about?

21.) Were you nervous to come study at OU? What were you the most nervous about?

22.) What did you think your classes would be like? Describe how you imagined they would be.

23.) Tell me about your trip to the United States. What were you feeling/thinking before you got on the plane? While you were on the plane?

24.) What about when you finally arrived in the United States? What were your thoughts/feelings when you got off the plane?

25.) What did you think/feel the first time you saw/arrived at campus?

26.) Was campus/OU how you imagined it would be? Why or why not?

27.) Tell me about your best experience/the most memorable/fun that you’ve had at OU?

28.) Is there anything about living in the United States that surprised you?

30.) Have you had any experiences where you felt uncomfortable?

31.) Can you describe your first day of class? How did you feel? Was it what you expected?

32.) What are your classes like? Do you enjoy them? Why or why not?

33.) Are your classes similar to the ones you had in your country? Which do you prefer?

34.) Who do you spend time with/ friends with?

35.) Do you talk to Americans? Have American friends?

36.) What language do you think you speak the most, English or your L1?

37.) Is the United States similar to what you thought/imagined it would be like?

38.) Are you enjoying your experience? Are you happy you came?

39.) How is your experience different from what you imagined?
40.) If you could change anything about your experience, what would you change? Why?

41.) What advice would you give someone who is in a similar situation as you (going to study in the United States for the first time).
APPENDIX C: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE #2

Following are a number of statements. Please circle the answer that best describes your feeling regarding the statement.

1.) I always wanted to study in America ever since I was a child.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

2.) I think that English will someday be useful in getting a good job.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

3.) I feel English is an important language in the world because of its influence in the global economy.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

4.) I want to meet and be able to talk with English speakers so I can travel the world.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

5.) I think that I will need to know the English language for a future career.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

6.) American movies and TV shows influenced my perception of what it would be like to live in America.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

7.) Having American friends is more important to me than having international friends

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

8.) I like English pop music and songs.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree

9.) My family is happy that I am living and studying in America.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree
10.) I want to live in an English speaking country after I finish school.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

11.) I try to talk to American students on campus.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

12.) Before coming to America, I always wondered what it would be like.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

13.) I did not want to live in America before I came here.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

14.) Since I have studied in America, my goals and dreams for the future have changed.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

15.) Living in America is different from what I thought it would be like.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

16.) Before coming to America, my friends and I would talk about what living in America would be like.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

17.) I often imagined what it would be like to study English outside of my country.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

18.) Before coming to America, I thought about how I would use the English language to make friends.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree

19.) Living in America is just how I imagined it would be.
Strongly disagree 1   2   3   4   5   6   7  Strongly agree
20.) My parents/family wanted me to study in America.

Strongly disagree 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Strongly agree
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

OU Community/Campus Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh1QXwLpteQ

What are your thoughts on this video?

What do you agree with?

What do you disagree with?

If you were in this video, what would you say?

At the 5:20 point, the man talks about being international and living in Athens. Do you agree with his points?

As an international student, what information would you include in this video that was not included?

Palmer Fest Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvcxmD9asMM

What are your thoughts on this video?

How does it make you feel?

If your parents/family saw this video, what would they say?

What about your friends?

Do you think that this video accurately depicts American students at OU?

Focus Group Interview Potential Questions:

In your country, is it considered important to speak English? Why or why not? Who would you speak English with?

What is it like to be an international student and a woman living in Athens?
How much of a factor was safety in coming to OU/ Athens? What about the rest of the USA?

Do you want to travel to other places in USA? World? Why?

What have you learned about yourself from your experiences living here?

What do you hope to do after OU? What about when you return to your country?

What do you think is the most important thing that you have learned in the US?

What groups do you belong to?

Now that you live here, how important do you think it is to have American friends? What about in regards to learning English?

How do you think that you have changed as a person since coming to the US?

How will you use English in the future?

How do you think your culture as affected your experiences here?

What do you still want to do, that you have not done yet, in US? Athens?

What has been your biggest challenge here?

How have your attitudes/perceptions about Americans/American culture changed since you’ve been here?

How have your attitudes/ perceptions about your own country/culture changed since you’ve been here?

What do you wish you knew before coming to OU?

Do you think your experience at OU, as women, is different from other international students who are men?

Have your perceptions/attitudes about learning English changed since you’ve been here?

How have your ideas changed about what it is like in America changed since before you came or first came here?
APPENDIX E: OHIO UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: Attitudes and perspectives on identities and imagined communities amongst selected groups of English language learners at Ohio University

Researchers: Keith Ray

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

EXPLANATION OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine what students imagine their learning experience will be like. Research has shown that what students imagine their learning experience to be like has implications for their success in the classroom. However, the vast majority of research focuses on adolescents. There is minimal research that focuses on students’ aged 18-23.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a questionnaire. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in one thirty-minute interview with the researcher that will take place in Gordy Hall. Further, you may be asked to participate in a one hour long focus group interview with 3-5 students. If you are chosen to participate in the interview portion of the study, the researcher will contact you via email. At this time you may choose to decline participating in the interview portion of the study. These interview sessions will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. In the questionnaire, interview session, and focus group interview you will be asked to discuss your perceptions and attitudes about what you imagined your learning experience would be like. You will be audio recorded in both the individual interview and the focus group interview.

Risks and Discomforts
No risks or discomforts are anticipated. However, you may feel uncomfortable discussing some of your perceptions regarding your learning experience. At any point you may stop the interview or choose to not discuss a topic.

Benefits

This study is important to research of English as a second language (ESL). There has been minimal research that examines what university level students imagine their learning experience will be like. Research has suggested that it is beneficial for students to be aware of what they imagined their learning experience would be like. This research suggests that this knowledge can assist in the overall success of the student. Additionally, research has suggested it is important for teachers and educators to be aware of these factors when creating classroom activities.

Confidentiality and Records

You may retain the second copy of the consent form for your records. Your information will be kept confidential by protecting all audio recordings on the researcher’s locked laptop in a password-protected file. This laptop is stored in the researcher’s home and only the researcher has access to it. Themes emerging from the interviews will be coded by the researcher with some oversight by the researcher’s advisor, Dr. Peter Githinji. Once this data has been coded and confirmed (approximately September, 2015) the audio recordings will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Keith Ray at kr246906@ohio.edu 440-567-0588 or the researcher’s advisor Peter Githinji at githinji@ohio.edu 740-597-2595.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________ Date_______________

____________________

Printed Name________________________________________

[7/2/2014]

Version Date: