

BEING INDIAN IN THE TIME OF TRANSNATIONAL SCREEN MEDIA
CULTURES: AN URBAN CHILDREN'S STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to answer these research questions: what role do transnational screen media play in how urban Indian children think about their culturally hybrid identities? In what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities?

Using survey and ethnographic research methods comprising a survey for children, participant observation and in-depth interviews with children, and in-depth interviews with parents and teachers, the research for the study was conducted in Bangalore city in southern India.

The study found that the children's major socialization agents, i.e. the family, the school and the transnational screen media they consumed played an interrelational role in children's formulating and negotiating their culturally hybrid identities. The implication of this finding is that as these children mature, they are challenged to exercise a critical reflexivity that may only reconcile the differences between their perceptions of mediated globalities and their lived sociocultural contexts uneasily, at the intersections of these children's sociocultural identity markers.

Keywords: cultural hybridity, children, identity, transnational media, India

To anyone around the world whose life has ever been touched by popular culture, and to
my *sheros*.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Made in India

“29 States & 7 UT’s [Union Territories], 780 Languages, 3000 Castes, 6 Religions, 6 Ethnic Groups, 29 major festivals & 1 Country! Be Proud to be an Indian[.] Happy Independence Day.” As I was preparing to catch a flight from Bangalore city, India to Philadelphia, U.S.A. on August 15, 2015, this was a text I received from *Airtel*, India’s leading mobile service provider. This text is the epitome of the common cultural trope ‘unity in diversity’ that recurs in both public and private institutional rhetoric about India’s multiculturalism. The text also characterizes the complex diversity that any researcher, whether of Indian origins or with aspirations to study any aspect of India must take on. And any rapidly evolving major cities around the world today represent paradoxical and surreal snapshots of diversity, making them curious geopolitical and sociocultural entities of interest in theorizing globalization across academic disciplines.

‘Namma Bengaluru’ (‘Our Bangalore’ in Kannada)

My doctoral dissertation project focused on one such city, Bangalore, in Karnataka state of southern India. As of 2020, an estimated 471 million people (35%) of India’s 1.38 billion population (18% of the world’s population) lives in urban conglomerations (O’Neill, 2022, a & b). As of 2019, Bangalore was the fourth most populated city in India with 11.4 million people, following Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata (Kanwal, 2021). The city has acquired its share of titles over the years such as ‘Garden City’, ‘Pensioner’s Paradise’ and in recent years ‘Silicon Valley of India’ (Sudhira, Ramachandra & Subrahmanya, 2007). This is also the city I call home, one that I have seen transform in over thirty years into a complex fusion of the local, regional, national and the global.

Bangalore is the capital city of the southern Indian state Karnataka. Although Bangalore's origins can be traced to the twelfth century, as Sudhira, Ramachandra & Subrahmanya (2007) note, Kempe Gowda¹ is credited with founding its modern incarnation in 1537. As history would have it, Kempe Gowda constructed four towers in four directions extending from the heart of the city, points which he imagined the city would grow out into. Even by the early 1960s, the city had outgrown these boundaries. The Wodeyars of Mysore (now Mysuru) ruled Bangalore until the reign of Hyder Ali and later his heir Tippu Sultan towards the end of the eighteenth century. This reign however did not last very long because the British defeated all rulers of Mysore to establish a Cantonment in 1802 and officially took over from indirect rule through Mysore in 1831 (Sudhira, Ramachandra & Subrahmanya, 2007).

After India's independence in 1947, Bangalore was made capital of Karnataka (then still Mysore) state in 1949, instituting the Bangalore City Corporation (BCC, also known today as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) as the city's administrative body. BBMP functions through division of the city into zones and wards therein ("BBMP About Us", 2016). Bangalore city belongs in the district that goes by the same name. In terms of the religious mix, nearly 80% of the district's population practice Hinduism while 14% follow Islam and about 6% Christianity. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are practiced by less than 2% of the city's population (Census of India, 2011a).

Officially now known as Bengaluru, the city's title was changed as recently as in 2014 in a bid to leave behind at least some of its many enduring remnants of former

¹ 'Gowda' is also a dominant caste community in Karnataka, to be discussed in the context of names and castes in Chapter 5.

British rule in India (“It is official: Bangalore becomes Bengaluru”, 2014). Other Indian cities have been renamed similarly, such as Madras which became Chennai, Bombay which is now Mumbai and the former Calcutta which is now Kolkata.

As a researcher with *ethnographic intent*², I use ‘Bangalore’ instead of ‘Bengaluru’ in reference to the city throughout this study, a decision that acknowledges my post-colonial identity in two ways. Firstly, I am most comfortable communicating in English, which is also the medium of my dissertation. Secondly, the proper pronunciation of ‘Bengaluru’ in Karnataka’s native language Kannada has a ‘la’ sound with no equivalent in English, so I prefer to use ‘Bengaluru’ only when speaking in Kannada. Incidentally, Bangalore was also declared the most linguistically diverse city in India last year with Kannada being the mother tongue of 44.62% (less than half) of its population (Kadilal, 2021). This figure also represents the massive influx of people from other countries (foreigners from an Indian standpoint, be it as expatriates, workers, etc.), states, cities, towns and villages in India that Bangalore has witnessed the last two decades as a result of global, national, regional and local migrations.

Identity Intersections

Many social and cultural intellectuals have highlighted the inevitable link between one’s personal and educational trajectories in shaping one’s choice of research problems and methodologies (Pieterse, 2015; Wolcott, 2002). Moreover, many have reflected or demonstrated historically, however unintentionally or intentionally, to varying degrees, the same ethos. The quintessential theorist on social class, Karl Marx, despite his own

² All *italicized* concepts and terms not explained in this chapter will be discussed in Chapter 2, to establish how I explicated them or operationally defined them for my study.

relative class privilege in Germany, developed his striking critiques of capitalism as a direct result of analyzing his lived experiences in England and France, in relation to human social history (Ritzer, 2011). Cultural theorist Stuart Hall's lived experiences as a Jamaican-English immigrant in a racially conscious England and Michel Foucault's covert sexual orientation in a heteronormative France resulted in what are now considered, somewhat ironically, canonical literature across diverse disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.

As a media researcher with a passion for cultural studies, my research interests have always been rooted in experiences of people whose media interactions resonate with my own: urban Indians with economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989), who grew up with access to and consuming a fusion of internationally, nationally, regionally and locally produced popular culture. Thus, as an initial step in a larger and longer philosophical, theoretical and methodological trajectory, it was only fitting that I should choose to study interrelations between media, culture and identity in an Indian context. I conducted my doctoral dissertation research in Bangalore, India to understand how urban children consuming *transnational* screen media formulate their *culturally hybrid* identities, while negotiating with the forces of naturalized sociocultural identity markers such as age, gender, class, religion and *caste*.

How urban children with relative class privilege, growing up in relatively safer and protective environments, formulate their identities is an interesting research topic for several reasons. While all human identities are fluid, complex and everchanging through their lifespans, childhood as a life stage is one where such children's individual and collective identities are in a flux because their identities are still being formulated in

negotiation with socialization agents such as the family, the school and the media. These institutions exercise an authority and/or influence over such children's lives because childhood is a life stage of relative psychosocial and physiological dependence, and absolute financial dependence. Thus, studying such children in any sociocultural context can help us understand the interrelationships between mutually constituted and constituting categories of the 'global', the 'national', the 'regional' and the 'local'. This understanding is significant because it helps explain how cultures are hybrid, what kind of hybrid culture one is grappling with, and why such hybridity matters, both theoretically and practically. To better explain how and why my research interests, lived experiences and my own culturally hybrid identity as media consumer, practitioner and researcher intersected to lead to this study, a brief and purposive autobiographical narrative follows.

Glimpses of Girlhood

Cartoons more often than not evoke a fuzzy nostalgia in anyone who has grown up in a twentieth century culture with a TV in their homes. Growing up as an able-bodied, cisgendered girl in an Indian, Hindu, neither traditionally upper caste or lower caste, urban, middle-class, multilingual household in the 1980s and 1990s, TV as a medium with its messages, was a crucial part of my childhood. I recall distinctly the day when my parents replaced the black-and-white TV in our living room with a color one. For a few years, this 'idiot box' brought American cartoons such as *Chip 'n' Dale*, *My Little Pony* and *The Glo Friends*, and live action shows such as *Star Trek* into our home on Sunday mornings. In the decade that followed, 'foreign' TV (from my standpoint as an Indian viewer) particularly, as a category of TV channels became a routine part of my

adolescence (see Butcher, 2003; Kohli, 2010; Kumar, 2006; and Rajagopal, 2001 for perspectives on Indian TV histories). Such early life experiences mark, for many, an unconscious, firsthand interception of *globalization*, a set of processes that have long been linked inextricably with both communications and media technologies and the messages they enable.

Arranged marriage, a historically dominant, religious, caste and class-based social practice in India, brought my parents from relatively different backgrounds together. To explain *caste* simply, there were historically four major occupation-based categories in order of hierarchy among Hindus, i.e. the *Brahmins* comprising the intelligentsia, the *Kshatriyas* who were the rulers and warriors, the *Vaishyas* who were the traders and the *Shudras* who held menial jobs. The *Dalits* were groups of people who were excluded even from the hierarchy of castes ('What is India's Caste System?', 2019). Even though this system was officially abolished in 1950, casteism is a form of prejudice that persists today in India much like racism or sexism persists in the U.S. and other countries.

My parents' same-caste marriage coupled with their individual migratory trajectories resulted in my growing up in a multilingual household where I was able to pick up three South Indian languages with varying proficiency. Most urban, educated Indians are bilingual at the very least, and often multilingual. English medium schools require children to learn two other languages, which are frequently India's national language Hindi and the official language of the state that the child resides in. As another indication of post-colonial legacy, English also persists alongside Hindi as one of India's official languages. I learnt my family's native tongue Telugu at home, Bangalore's native language Kannada in school, and Tamizh/Tamil from my parents' passion for consuming

popular culture, music, movies and TV serials. I also learnt India's national or official Hindi in school, and French later in college. My penchant for learning languages grew because of my exposure to studying about predominantly British cultures via English medium schooling, and American popular TV and movies as well. As an instance of how my popular cultural exposure transcended Anglo-American influences, I recall how my loyalties to America's MTV were waylaid abruptly when the local cable TV operator decided to provide us the feed from France's music channel Ma Chaine Musicale (MCM).

Girl, Interrupted

My first academic as well as more conscious casual encounter with globalization began in the early 1990s in Bangalore. During this time, India was slowly moving away from its hitherto socialistic political ideologies to embrace liberal economic policies (Kumar, 2006; Rajagopal, 2001). While I learnt about globalization as an abstraction from an economics textbook in high school, I experienced its consequences intuitively as a teenager, through the arrival of cable and satellite TV into our family living room. My fervent consumption of several American TV shows ranging from *The Wonder Years* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to MTV music videos, alongside academic validation of my aptitude for learning and using British-(South) Indian English led me securely towards the humanities and social sciences in college.

The legacy passed on from the elite of independent India foregrounded science as a solution to India's problems (Parameswaran, 2001). Such a legacy naturalized the scientific professional ethic that many like my own parents were oriented into. Both my parents pursued scientific professions. My father was a veterinary science researcher, and

my mother is a medical doctor and both held state government jobs until their retirement. My family's emphasis on my education however was first a tool towards social upward mobility. My mother's uneasy migration from a village to a city between school and college, marked also by a shift from speaking Telugu to having to use English, left her believing that her children would only be world-ready through the acquisition of English proficiency. As Kapur (1998) notes, English in the Indian context is significant "not simply as a colonial hangover or mental habit" (p. 393) but as a language of power that enables both national and international life opportunities. My father's potent identification with a traditionally backward caste, notwithstanding his own remarkable intragenerational social upward mobility, was a result of his harsh caste and class based formative experiences of prejudice, be it during his schooling where Brahmin children always performed better, or in his career where Brahmin colleagues tended to receive most promotions and thereby occupy positions of power.

As Parameswaran (2001) notes about her own experience growing up as an urban woman in India, I was also raised in a context where education was considered beneficial for younger women. The notable difference between our individual experiences is caste-based, which posed further challenges to my intent to pursue higher education in a discipline that my culturally hybrid self had come to value. Parameswaran (2001) acknowledges how her upper caste status and her parents' professional status as educators provided her with unconscious cultural capital that she was only able to critically evaluate after moving to the U.S. She notes how her family's emphasis on her education was rooted more in the merits it provided to compete in the "marriage market" (p. 74) rather than as any real tool to achieve socioeconomic independence. When the time came

for me to choose what kind of ‘science’ to specialize in, I had to fight to make the case for pursuing the social sciences and the humanities rather than the natural sciences because to do so had traditionally been the privilege of upper class-caste women who, it was assumed, needed an education only to become more marriageable.

Meanwhile, my English school teacher in the twelfth grade had also informed me about how students with an inclination towards the humanities like myself were increasingly pursuing higher degrees in the burgeoning and lucrative fields of mass media and communication. Applying the analytical tool of *intersectionality* to this formative experience has helped clarify this: a combination of English being my forte, my pitch to my parents that I was going to pursue higher education in an up-and-coming and lucrative field, their passions for the performing arts that did not result in their being able to pursue non-scientific career paths, and also my being a woman who could be “married off” if all my other life choices failed, is what resulted in my pursuing an undergraduate degree in “communicative English”, English literature (which mainly comprised British canonical texts for study) and psychology (comprising foundational European and American scholarship). Whereas my older brother who had journalistic aspirations only ever had two career path options to choose from: become a doctor like one of my parents or become an engineer. My father encouraged him to pursue software engineering because that too was a burgeoning and lucrative field at the time.

Media Practitioner and Market Researcher

Equipped with undergraduate and graduate degrees in communication, I spent several years as a professional in Bangalore’s emerging media industry. The formative experiences hitherto described are a microcosm of what being global mean for many

Indians like myself. In their exploration of how postcolonial and communication studies intersect through globalization, Shome and Hegde (2002) have captured succinctly what being “Bangalorean” meant to me until I moved to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. They observe how,

(...) the city of Bangalore in India is now one of Asia’s biggest “tech cities”—the Silicon valley of South Asia. The changing and yuppified cultural and physical landscape of this city produces varied forms of cosmopolitanisms and varied re/replacements of certain sectors of the population—mainly “thirty something” middle and upper- middle class professionals—that are not a result of any kind of colonial migration. Rather, they are indicative of how we need to rethink issues such as third space, diaspora, and nomadism (...) (p. 257)

Before I moved to Philadelphia, I worked as a media professional in two different jobs in Bangalore: as an assistant director at an outfit that produced regional TV advertisements (mostly in the Southern Indian languages Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, and sometimes in Hindi) and audiovisuals for corporate clients (mostly in English), and as a manager of market research at a regional (Kannada) entertainment TV channel. I had often felt like a misfit because I was already far too ‘Anglicized’ and ‘Westernized’, to feel like I belonged among colleagues who were deeply invested in their regional roots, particularly their language affinities. Even my decision to quit the Kannada TV industry was driven by my rejection of what I used to refer to as its “pseudo-corporate” values, that often clashed with the worst of the local culture taking the form of social prejudices such as sexism, toxic masculinity and a convenient lack of acknowledgement or awareness of what constituted workplace sexual harassment.

Student (Again) to Researcher

Speaking of diaspora, once I arrived in the U.S., I learnt soon enough from interacting with a few Indian friends who have lived in the country for a while that I was

now officially a “fobbie” or an “FoB”, which is short for people “fresh off the boat”. This popular expression among migrant communities in the U.S., not surprisingly, also inspired the title and theme of a TV series by the same title on ABC TV Network. Both family and friends who have lived in the U.S. and newfound acquaintances also readily acknowledged that I could just as easily retort if offended, by calling them “ABCDs” or American Born Confused ‘*Desis*’, meaning one’s countryman/woman/person, in other words, fellow Indian, in Hindi, if they so qualified.

Today, my adoption of all things ‘Western’, from food and fashion to attitudes and values, all point to my apparent globalized identity. Darling-Wolf (2014) calls attention to the fact that ‘the West’ today, particularly in the context of media globalization, is frequently used to refer solely to the U.S. and this problematically ignores the differences that might exist within and between other Western countries. In my case, when I say ‘Western’ here, I mean Anglo-American primarily although not exclusively. Moving to the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. in Media and Communication further enhanced my preoccupation with such a globalized identity. As an international graduate student in the U.S., I found myself regularly negotiating between how I want to and how I sometimes felt compelled to represent myself as a nomadic woman of Indian origins. I was not only hailed to perform my gendered nationality habitually, whether academically or socially, but to also justify why this nationality was not in line with what others, either locals or other “fobbies” might expect based on popular stereotyping. I had to on multiple occasions justify that although I was from India, I was not into Bollywood or cricket, that I ate all kinds of meat despite being raised in Hinduism, a religion that deems cows sacred creatures, and that I had chosen to make connections with fellow ‘desis’ in

Philadelphia organically rather than deliberately. I also often confronted the envy of fellow international students, often from the Global South, for the competitive advantage I possessed because of my relative English fluency.

I got used to well-wishers' –and there is never a dearth for them among Indians– pejorative remarks about my professional identity even while transitioning from a media practitioner to an academic. On visits to India during summer breaks between years in my Ph.D. program, I would hear comments that left me furious in the moment. For instance, a relative in Bangalore made her views about my intellectual pursuits clear when she claimed, “but all said and done, science is supreme”. Another relative in Chicago reacted mockingly to my conversation with his son at length about the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, with rhetoric about the types of questionable research projects U.S. taxpayers' dollars were being spent on. In other words, I have apparently wasted precious years of my life on a faulty professional path that is neither comprehensible nor valued in my closer familial and social circles.

The personal lived experiences I have hitherto described begged the question, should being Indian even merit a unifying definition in the way individuals see themselves? Parameswaran's (2001) has been reflexive about how her moving to the U.S. prompted her development as both feminist and woman of color to engage more systematically in cultural critique. And Kim (2005) in her ethnographic study of Korean women in Seoul has argued, global TV itself can pave the way for a critical reflexivity among people because it provides them with access to a mediated abundance of information about other cultural realities against which their own realities may be evaluated. My own reflexive urge to fully engage with, perform and also participate in a larger multicultural and

globalized identity alongside diaspora I knew personally prompted my choice to pursue a Ph.D. in Media & Communication in the U.S., a country that is undisputedly the world's largest producer of popular culture, if not arguably also amongst the most influential.

Thus, my gendered, multicultural personal and professional experiences, embedded in further multicultural mediated environments led me to the realization that cultural interpretation is crucial to (a) my own identity and its meaning to me as both person and researcher (b) the identities of those I intend to research and (c) the intellectual insights academic and social communities might gain from such research in the context of media globalization.

Everything from prior decisions about the institutions you attended, the classes you selected, the research problems that interest you, and the kinds of people whom you have chosen (consciously or not) for role models as researchers and professional associates, influence the course you are setting. (Wolcott, 2002, p. 61)

My cumulative scholastic experiences and significantly, four years in the U.S. academy only strengthened my resolve to pursue cultural research. What follows is an overview of the context and communities that my study focused on, and a statement of what my research goals and questions were.

Telly-ing It Like It Is

Much has been written about Indian TV audiences since TV's humble terrestrial beginnings in India in the early 1960s until its unprecedented growth via cable and satellite technologies over the last two decades (Butcher, 2003; Kohli, 2010; Kumar, 2006; Mankekar, 1993, Rajagopal, 2001). And yet, considering the UNICEF figure that India has 253 million adolescents, the highest number of them worldwide, where one in five people is between the ages of 10 and 19, ("Children in India", n.d.), there are too few

in-depth studies on children and screen media in India (Banaji 2017; Kapur 1998). In India as in many other parts of the world, TV remains as pervasive a medium as ever. What has changed about the way people with access to consume audiovisual content that was traditionally produced for TV viewing is that such content is now also accessible on other screen media devices such as computers, tablets and mobile phones via the internet. As of 2011, nearly 50% of the 250 million households in India had access to a TV (Census of India, 2011b). In 2020, TV penetration increased to 69% because households in semi-urban and rural areas in India purchased most TVs (Sun, 2022). The two main factors that have influenced such growth in TV penetration are improved digital connectivity and the growth of regional TV content.

India has more than 749 million internet users that are only estimated to grow in both urban and rural areas in the years to come (Basuroy, 2022a). Most people access the internet using mobile phones, because these devices have more utility value; they are more affordable than desktop computers or tablets and offer low-cost mobile data too. In my study, the families I gathered data from were privileged in terms of having access and using several screen media devices, and sometimes even more than one internet connection routinely. In terms of time Indians spend on screen media consumption, TV is still the most preferred medium with people watching more than three hours of content, while computers, laptops and mobile phones are used for around half that time each day (Basuroy, 2022b). So, people in India spend close to five hours a day on an average using screen media devices.

Transnational Content: TV and Other Screen Media

The proliferation of transnational media outlets and content, particularly in the

children's genre of the Indian TV business, was symptomatic of pervasive media globalization that began in the mid-1990s. American media conglomerates such as Time Warner, Disney and Viacom operating transnationally own most children's English language pay TV channels in India. Most of these channels are also available dubbed in some Indian languages, and air a combination of syndicated, transnational as well as locally produced animated and live action shows with children as their intended audience (Bhagia, 2013). In this sense, children's transnational TV content can be considered culturally hybrid content. There are also a handful of regional children's channels airing in the local languages of the states of South India. They are Chutti TV in Tamil, Kochu TV in Malayalam, Chintu TV in Kannada and Kushi TV in Telugu (Chakrapani, 2013).

Since the entry of several subscription-based, streaming and video on demand media platforms, also known as over-the-top (OTT) platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ and Netflix in India in recent years, urban Indian children today have access to an overabundance of transnational screen media content that can be consumed on various digital media devices. I familiarized myself with content on children's transnational TV in preparation to conduct fieldwork because I anticipated that the children in my study may be watching these TV channels. I also anticipated that children might also be consuming screen media content online using other screen devices. I also expected that children might be consuming general entertainment, news and sports channels with their families.

Research Goals with Intentions

In the ethos of a cultural studies approach, my study drew from interdisciplinary scholarship on anthropology, childhood studies, economics, history, media studies,

psychology and sociology, to build on the complementary theoretical frameworks of media studies of childhood and globalization. Using theories of cultural hybridity from multidisciplinary globalization literature, and applying intersectionality as an analytical tool, I chose to work with children because their life stage is one where children both construct and negotiate their identities iteratively through engagement with key socialization agents in their lived sociocultural contexts. This choice is significant because in studying these children's thinking about their identities as they navigate through their relationships with screen-mediated and lived worlds, we can potentially learn, relearn or unlearn some of our present understandings of how screen media and national identity are interrelated.

Aside from extending the now sparse corpus of work on children and media in India, my study also intended to contribute to scholarship on how intersectionality as an analytical tool can help us understand how different sociocultural markers of identity interact with one another and the media, to complicate cultural hybridity as a human condition, in complex cosmopolitan contexts such as Bangalore.

Being Indian Children in the Time of Transnational Screen Media

My study focused on understanding the relationship between a) the transnational screen media the children consumed, b) their views on the sociocultural identity markers they were born into and being raised with, and c) how these markers relate to what children perceive as their cultural or national identities. The research questions (RQs) I set out to answer were:

RQ1) what role do transnational screen media play in how urban Indian children think about their culturally hybrid identities?

RQ2) in what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities?

Based on these RQs, the key theoretical concepts that required a more thorough inquiry were 'transnational', 'cultural hybridity' as a theory of 'globalization', 'identity' and 'intersectionality'. As the title of the study indicates, the study explored what 'being Indian' meant to children living in Bangalore, or in other words how these children formulated and negotiated their 'national identities'. Therefore, Chapter 2 examines these concepts to establish the ways in which they guided my research. As hitherto mentioned, the two complementary theoretical frameworks that my study builds on are media studies on childhood and globalization, using a cultural studies approach. Therefore, I reviewed literature on cultural studies and both these frameworks to situate my study.

I adopted primarily ethnographic methods, i.e. participant observation and in-depth interviews, along with survey research to gather data for my study. Chapter 3 reviews literature on both ethnographic and survey research methods to consider their merits and challenges as they applied to my study. It also states the purpose of my study's methodological design and describes the stages of recruiting participants, gathering, and analyzing data for the study. Chapter 4 details the study's survey research data and analysis. Chapter 5 details the study's ethnographic research and interpretation.

In Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, I answer the RQs as they apply to my study's sample and discuss what we might speculate about these answers about others with commonalities to those in my study sample. Importantly, consider the possible theoretical directions the answers and discussion point towards and identify potential areas for future

research. Finally, I provide a reflexive commentary on my role as a researcher and bring the autobiographical narrative that I began in this introductory chapter to a close.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I examine theoretical concepts that informed my study (*italicized* in the RQs below) to establish how they guided my research:

RQ1) what role do *transnational* screen media play in how urban *Indian children* think about their *culturally hybrid identities*?

RQ2) in what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities?

As mentioned earlier, the two complementary theoretical frameworks that my study builds on are media studies of childhood and globalization, using a cultural studies approach, but with a caveat. To use the words of Canclini (2014):

It is complicated to situate oneself within the interaction between diverse symbolic heritages, it would be even more arduous to try to study these themes from a single national or ethnic point of observation. (p. xlv)

My understanding of these concepts was derived from an interdisciplinary scholarly engagement, one that draws from both the social sciences and the humanities originating from various parts of the world, built from different disciplinary as well as identity standpoints that have influenced each other historically. The disciplinary scholarship that informed my study does not necessarily align unequivocally with the discipline I will be earning a Ph.D. in, nor does the scholarship featured in this review undermine my passion for cultural studies or my ethnographic intent. Even the thematic organization of the contents of this review do not reflect as much a hierarchical representation of what scholarship has contributed the most to my study but is necessarily a logical organization of how different theoretical frameworks informed my study. Therefore, I review literature

that situates my study radically, or otherwise, as one that (I argue in forthcoming chapters) contributes in different ways to each of these featured frameworks.

Specific key concepts problematized in this review to establish how I used them in my study include ‘identity’, ‘national identity’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘cultural hybridity’, ‘globalization’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’. To define the term ‘transnational’ in relation to screen media content for my study, I adopted D’Arma & Steemers (2012) definition. In their analysis of children’s foreign and national TV content in five European markets, these researchers found it methodologically challenging to classify national content because production of TV shows nowadays very often involves inputs at various stages from other countries. Thus, they classified shows as national if national producers or broadcasters were involved in a significant way in creating or financing them. This is an approach I adopted in my study to deal with the institutional hybridity of most children’s screen media content available in India. However, since my study focused on children’s understandings of the media they consumed, I was careful not to prompt children to identify content as Indian or foreign in my survey and in my ethnographic research. I only applied the above operational definition to my analyses.

Identity Matters

What is the point of an identity if it isn't one thing? That is why we keep hoping that identities will come our way because the rest of the world is so confusing: everything else is turning, but identities ought to be some stable points of reference which were like that in the past, are now and ever shall be, still points in a turning world. (Hall, 1997, p. 22)

These words address why ‘identity’ matters to humankind. Any attempt to theorize ‘national identity’ necessitates an exploration of what ‘identity’ itself means and why it matters within the social sciences and the humanities. Depending on the context of its

use, theorists have defined ‘identity’ in both essentialist and constructivist terms. Brubaker & Cooper (2000) have problematized the use of the term identity as an analytical concept because identity functions as both a cause and an effect, i.e. it can help explain actions and also result in actions. In terms of its use as a basis for social and political action, it may be explicated in three ways. Firstly, it is seen as a way towards individual or collective self-understanding that is non-instrumental. Secondly, it can function as either a particularistic or a universalistic structure that imposes order on actions. Thirdly, the social location of the actions is either theorized in particularistic or universalistic terms. In the sections to follow, I discuss each of these explications as they relate to the types of identity, or identity markers that I researched among the children, parents and teachers I worked with in my study.

Towards Theorizing Human Identity

Before examining the aforementioned explications of identity, an understanding of how ideas about identity rooted in the natural sciences were adopted by the social sciences is a useful starting point. In the eighteenth century, Western scientific inquiry about the physical world “possessed an aura of objectivity and neutrality” (Nicholson, 2008, p. 9) that allowed scientists to also make social distinctions using humans’ inherent nature as a justification. For instance, scientists created essentializing oppositional dyads in categorizing women as emotional beings and men as rational beings. Likewise, the categorization of a child as a developmentally different entity than an adult also enabled the attribution of qualities such as innocence to children (Mills, 2000). Sociologist Erving Goffman noted that a distinction needed to be made between two types of intellectual frameworks, natural and social. Natural frameworks refer to the physical world that exists

without human manipulation, common to all living beings and non-living objects.

Whereas human agents create social frameworks within natural frameworks. Cultural analysis became possible when experiences are organized thus into frameworks for interpretation. People function within these social frameworks in order to make sense of events that deviate from what is considered culturally 'natural'. This has implications for what ideas and practices come into being, persist or perish in different social frameworks (Goffman, 1974).

Echoing a similar notion of frameworks, Durkheim and Mauss (1963) emphasized how humans come to categorize the social world while functioning in and as groups. In doing so, humans not only organize things into easily identifiable categories but also place them in relation to one and another. Creating relational categories leads to the construction of hierarchical classifications that privilege directly or indirectly some people, ideas or things over others. This inequality in privileging some categories over others is reflected in how theorists have grappled with notions of identity. In other words, social categories come into being within human-made intellectual and social frameworks, and social actions resist easy interpretation. Keeping in mind these ideas, the next section explores how identity has been conceptualized as both a cause and effect in different academic and public discourses.

Identity as Individual Self-Understanding

Me, Myself and I

Conventional Western psychology and sociology are both fields of study that are concerned with interpreting human faculties individually and collectively. As a way towards individual or collective self-understanding that is non-instrumental (Brubaker &

Cooper, 2000), identity can be understood as the psychosocial self in everyday life. Schools of thought in developmental psychology have historically moved back and forth between the nature versus nurture approaches to understanding human development across the life span. More contemporary thinking in the field suggests that intrinsic (nature) and experiential (nurture) factors interact on a continuum in a person's perceptual development (Bornstein, Arterberry & Mash, 2011). Nevertheless, it has also been established that even though social interactions influence a person's growth, young people also bring with them "temperamental dispositions, unfolding emotional capacities and developing self-awareness that individualize" (Thompson, Winer & Goodvin, 2011, p. 427) their social interactions.

Any concept of self extends beyond subjective self-awareness to also include aspects such as self-representation, autobiographical personal narrative, self-evaluations and finally the development of a social self in time (Thompson, Winer & Goodvin, 2011). Subjective self-awareness refers to how a person consciously perceives herself as unique in experiencing the world around her. Self-representation extends to identifying herself physically, labeling herself categorically, for instance based on gender or age, associating herself with character traits, such as friendly or reserved, and also understanding how processes related to the self such as thinking or feeling occur. Both these aspects of the self develop as early as by a child's second birthday, because by this time, the child is not only able to recognize her mirror image but has also started to use simple language to describe herself. Whereas, it is only in later childhood and adolescence that a child begins to acquire collective self-understanding. Autobiographical personal narrative differs from simply recalling recent events in that the self becomes central to how a child makes sense

of and recounts past experiences. This usually occurs only after age 3. Self-representation evolves into self-evaluations that stem from internalizing how others perceive a child, starting with caregivers in early years, to social comparisons teachers and peers make in later years. The social self emerges more prominently in middle childhood, as children begin to perceive themselves as having multiple selves or identities. They take on many roles such as being a family member or a student to being a team or club member. They also adopt more complex categorizing identities such as class and religion towards adolescence. I used this psychological understanding of children in my study by working with children between the ages of 7 and 17, to make space for a range of views to be voiced on the research topics, based on developmental stages hitherto described, rather than age groups.

Identity as Collective Self-Understanding

We/Our/They

Sociology in Weber's (1979) terms defines and analyzes social actions in terms of causes and effects. A person or a group's action is considered social if it is intentionally directed towards others. However, it is difficult to differentiate between intentional actions and reactions or dismiss inaction or passivity as not intentional actions. Also, the meanings we ascribe to one's actions are based on our subjective interpretations, driven by intellect or emotion or both. Such subjectivity undermines empirically valid conceptualizations of what constitutes social actions. Understanding ultimately emerges through a combination of direct observation and contextualization of social actions, both of which are also interpretive processes (Weber, 1979). This somewhat complicates Brubaker & Cooper (2000) explication of identity as a means to non-instrumental self-

understanding. This dilemma can be resolved by considering non-instrumental actions as those not intended to mobilize sociopolitical action. This definition of identity helped me explore how my research participants thought about their identities on an individual level in routine living. It also reiterated the value of people-centered research methodologies in answering research questions related to identity.

Western literary structuralist theorists (e.g. Barthes, 1973; Derrida, 1973; Levi-Strauss, 1968; Saussure, 1974, etc.), Marxist sociologists and post-structuralists (e.g. Althusser, 1971; Foucault, 1981; Gramsci, 1971, etc.) have provided pivotal discourses based on the idea that any understanding or awareness of a self emerges from being in a social world (Storey, 2006). Althusser (1971) argued that we are born into our contemporary societies involuntarily as “always-already subjects” (p. 311). He categorized social institutions into Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) that exercise coercive control such as the government and the police, and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that help realize the ideas of the ruling class such as the family, schools and the media. People are called upon through ideology to participate as subjects of ISAs and thereby the ruling class. They do so by recognizing such a call and responding to it. Ideology assumes and maintains power through social practices that function only when people answer readily to its call. By this logic, our identities are always-already assigned to us because we belong to an ISA called a family even before we are conceived. However, Foucault’s (1981) theorization of ‘discourse’ as the site where knowledge and power intersect marks a shift away from characterizing power as embodied in concrete, static, and often repressive structures. He rejected the framing of power in terms of binary oppositions of domination and subordination. He argues that

power is exercised through knowledge rather than by means of production in ways that simultaneously empower and restrict people, by engaging them much like ideology does, into discourses as participants or subjects. This understanding of how institutional powers function guided my analyses of how the children in my study whose identities were more in a formational flux than humans at other life stages, make sense of familial, formal educational and mediated socialization agents.

Identity as Particularistic and Universalistic: Class and Gender

With regard to identity as an instrument to social and political actions, it can function as either a particularistic or a universalistic structure that imposes order on actions (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Age, class, gender and race are all examples of this conceptualization of identity. As a basis for particularistic self-understandings, identity becomes instrumental to the interests of groups who define themselves in relation to others, as being different in some significant ways. Thus, in collective contexts, an identity marker denotes similarity between its members, i.e. a cause for sociopolitical action, just as it also results in members perceiving themselves as similar to one another, i.e. an effect of the same. Here, identity either emerges from the processes of self-understanding and group solidarity, or as a dynamic product emerging out of many competing notions of identity. Below, I discuss two such identity markers that were relevant to my study: class and gender.

A Classic Case of Identity

By the above definition of identity, social class (henceforth, simply class) is perhaps among the earliest formulations of identity. However, many cultural theorists and sociologists whose ideas significantly contributed to initial thinking about identity were

not consciously attempting to define identity itself. Rather, identity construction was implied in their abstractions about how modern societies functioned through class. Marx & Engels (1972) proposed the idea that in any society, the manner in which production occurs determines the political, intellectual and cultural relations between different classes of people. The ruling class (also known as the bourgeoisie) was the group that had control over the material means of production. Thus, those in power in any society at a given time determined what ideas are produced, upheld and disseminated to people of other classes (also known as the proletariat). In doing so, they created an elite structure that overpowered the agency of non-elite people. Cultural studies scholar Thompson (1963) in his analysis of class as a historical phenomenon in England asserted that “class happens” (p. 41) when men feel and express their identities based on common inherited or shared experiences in ways that contrast the interests of other men. So, it was crucial that the ruling class disseminate its ideas to the other men as universally acceptable so as to sustain its power. Such conceptualizations of class created essentializing and oppositional dyads just as the nature and nurture dyad discussed earlier.

Furthermore, the Marxist sociological framing of structure and agency as oppositional concepts is questionable because the two do interact with one another to affect each other (Sewell, 2005). Structure is as dynamic as agency, and both involve human actions. Multiple structures can interact in unpredictable, sometimes contradictory ways depending chiefly on the unique characteristics of and contexts within which the agents act. Agents differ in terms of the resources that are accessible to them and their ability to facilitate sociocultural change. If structures were immutable, agency would be redundant. In this sense, even Goffman’s (1974) notion of social frameworks

as rigid boundaries within which agents function is questionable (Sewell, 2005). Nevertheless, such an otherwise sound critique of social structuralism ironically also legitimized thinking about societies as divided into a dyad: the powerful and the powerless. Hegemony or “the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 75) offers a more nuanced understanding of how the powerful exercise their power over those with not as much power. This means that the ruling classes gain the consent of other classes by strategically appropriating the interests of the latter to the extent that the former’s own interests are neither politically compromised nor construed as coercive. Class as a sociocultural identity marker persists today as much as it has historically the world over. My understanding of hegemony informed my analyses of how my research participants’ class privilege influenced their views about other aspects of their identities, and the identities the institutions that bind them call upon them to perform.

All The Singular Ladies, Now Put Your Hands Up

A similar dyadic framework also emerged in early theories of feminism in the Western academy: white men and white women. In the 1960s, both academic and public discourses in the U.S. on particularistic self-understandings emerged in critical response to the dominant modes of identification that those in power had imposed on such identity markers as gender, race and sexual orientation (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Nicholson, 2008). However, particularistic categorization of identity often along the lines of a single identity marker, although instrumental in its bid to provide social justice to historically marginalized groups, also ironically perpetuated thinking about societies as historically divided into other dyads: East and West, colonizer and colonized, men and women, dark

and fair skinned people, heterosexual and homosexual sexual orientations, etc. And within many Western academic and public discourses, these identity markers were fallaciously also considered universalistic categories.

The theoretical weakness of framing sociocultural identity markers as reductively dyadic was challenged significantly by late feminist and post-colonial (to be discussed shortly) discourses. As idealistic as it might have been had it been a historical fact, feminism did not and does not refer to a monolithic movement where women came together to expose and fight against the dominance of patriarchy in societies worldwide. A case in point is Hooks' (1984) (among others') critique of early Western feminist movements, as only being the fight for rights for white, upper-class women. These women had the means to fight for their rights as if they did it on behalf of all women. Whereas they challenged their traditional family roles and joined the work force beside their male counterparts, Hooks (1984) argued that for black women, family was one of their few sources of power and identity in racist environments. Critiques like these paved the way for even more particularistic standpoints or positions from which feminists worldwide could fight against patriarchal oppression. It also established that discourses hail 'always- already' subjects to take different positions in the constitution of power (Foucault, 1981).

The idea that diverse discourses of power are also dynamic, relational and influence each other through complex interactions (Foucault, 1981) marks a radical shift from earlier thinking about identity as both non-instrumental self-understanding and particularistic, in dyadic and oppositional terms. What this idea also means is that knowledge and thereby power, are moving, situational targets, that are neither easily

visible nor defined. This radical shift in Western societies marks also the shift from modernism to postmodernism in the twentieth century that rejected any universalistic theorizing about the social world (Storey, 2012). However, despite this ideological shift in thinking, a formulation of identity that seems to still endure universally is the construct of ‘national identity’.

Identity based on Social Location: National Identity

In the third most common explication of identity as a basis for social and political action, the “social location” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 7) of the actions is either theorized in particularistic or universalistic terms. National identity is one such construct, which is variably, sometimes paradoxically defined, depending on the context in which it is used or produced. Historians and social scientists differ over when nationalism as a movement began. Smith (1998) traces the ethical, philosophical, anthropological, political, social and historical issues surrounding nationalism to argue that perennialist and modernist assumptions about nationalism have created chronic dichotomies. For historians the concept of a nation goes as far back as humans can be traced as evolving in temporally and spatially bounded communities, usually also sharing common ancestries and cultures. Perennialists see the nation as a “politicised ethno-cultural community” (Smith, 1998, p. 22) where claims to nationhood are based on sameness.

For social scientists, nationalism is clearly a modern Western ideology that developed towards the end of the eighteenth century, one that many disciplinary discourses on globalization suggest is waning in light of contemporary globalization (to be discussed shortly later in this chapter). Modernists see the nation as a consciously created “territorialised political community” (Smith, 1998, p. 22) that functions through

communication and citizenship rather than through other commonalities between people. This implies that nations are also divided into other groups based on sociocultural identity markers hitherto discussed such as class and gender. Thus, as Hobsawm (1990) has argued, although a nation may be constructed from above, by nationalists or a government, they are best understood when analyzed from below, through people's identifications of their nationality.

National identity can be defined both as a cause and effect of the ideology of nationhood (Billig, 1995). People's agency in their understanding of themselves is as much national identity as the imposition of such an identity through centralized structural powers. According to Billig (1995), a 'nation' has two meanings, one as a country that people live in and the other as a 'nation-state'. A nation can only exist if the idea of a nation holds meaning and value for people, in other words when a society acknowledges its state of nationhood. In this sense, a nation refers to a geopolitical, bounded entity where people may share commonalities such as a language or religion. As a nation-state, a nation functions through a centralized administrative structure that also constructs nationality discursively. The modern nation-state is bounded by the "sociopolitical system of the state and the cultural order of the "nation." " (Giddens, 1990, p. 14) rather than territorially as was the case in pre-modern agrarian societies.

While postmodernism tends to undermine the importance of nationality as a relevant construct in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, Billig (1995) argues that national identity persists as a force through the simple logic that it is a concept with international currency. The world still operates as a set of nation-states whether or not people are reflexive about their national identities in routine living, or whether others

identify them as belonging to a particular nationality. Thus, national identity is able to, albeit problematically, hail people from other more particularistic identity categories such as age, class and gender under its wing, and in the case of my research participants their religious and caste categories as well.

Nationality does not exist naturally but is constructed and sustained socially through naturalization as an ideology. Nationalism is often used to define a state of extremism that exists outside established nations, where impassioned peoples are fighting for self-determination. In more established nations, Billig (1995) argues that nationalism exists banally. While this argument has merit, it does not consider that several notions of what nationality or national identity mean to people, whether from ‘above’ or ‘below’ may co-exist even within a nation’s boundaries. My study challenged me to think through how institutional notions of national identity relate to children’s perceptions of the same, at the intersections of other sociocultural identity markers.

Intersecting Identities

An analytical tool that helps understand social causes in terms of situated human positions rather than ‘social locations’ is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is the notion that rather than consider particularistic or universalistic identity categories as being singularly instrumental in social actions or resulting in social actions, when considered as intersecting with each other, have better explanatory power of social phenomena. For instance, Hooks’ (1984) critique of earlier waves of feminism urges a reconsideration of feminism at the intersections of gender, race and class. Crenshaw (1991) employed the term to argue that neither gender nor race by themselves as dimensions of identity can adequately account for how violence against women of

color occurs. Intersectionality is a compelling tool to help theorize identity because it not only acknowledges that different markers of identity influence each other but it also helps explain how exactly such markers may interact in the unfolding of social phenomena contextually. Applying intersectionality to theoretical analyses helps researchers also develop a critical reflexivity about how their own identities may produce, reproduce or challenge prevailing academic and social discourses.

In my study, intersectionality applied at many levels. As discussed in the introductory chapter, how I identified myself in relation to the people whose identities I intended to understand, both individually and collectively, was bound to intervene in my research process. Continually reflecting on this awareness before and while conducting the research, while analyzing the findings and most importantly, while constructing the final written product, were all productive endeavors towards applying as well as contributing to knowledge on intersectionality as a conceptual and analytical tool. A cultural studies approach provided the ideal theoretical framework in which to apply intersectionality, while subverting the theoretical pitfalls of deriving essentialist and oppositional arguments from universalist or too particularistic ways of categorizing humans. A brief overview of cultural studies and the postcolonial concept of ‘hybridity’ as they inform my study follows.

Theorizing Culture and Hybridity

Moving beyond the confines of discursive disciplinary approaches to theorizing, ‘cultural studies’ emerged as an alternative approach in response to significant social changes that began in early nineteenth century England and later the U.S. This approach offered ways of thinking about ‘culture’ that emerged from social changes such as

suffrage for the working classes, industrialization and urbanization (Storey, 2012). Its seminal intellectuals in England problematized the way the term culture had been historically defined. Historically, Arnold (1869) had defined culture as all expressions of the best in a society, an elitist premise that characterized the working classes as being anarchical, in other words positioning upper-class cultural practices against what we understand today as popular culture. Leavis (1933) defined culture as something reserved for a select minority with the qualities to appreciate the best in a society. He lamented that this minority culture was diminishing in the wake of a mass culture. Such definitions of culture were symptomatic of elitist fears about a threatened status in a then rapidly changing English society. Hoggart (1990), on the other hand, celebrated working class culture characterizing it as people's everyday practices, created and experienced on their own terms as a group, in the absence of mass culture.

Williams (1961) collapsed the distinction between cultures hitherto defined based on social class, framed in binary oppositions such as good versus bad culture or high versus low culture. He defined culture based on its abstract, concrete and social attributes, as symbolically reflecting values or ideals, physically embodied in cultural texts and practices, and experienced socially in different ways of life. Importantly, his definition extended to mass culture which from the 1930s onwards, had become synonymous with American popular culture. For my study, it was interesting to consider the presence and consumption of transnational screen media content among children today and to what extent it goes beyond the dominance of Anglo-American media, the kind that I grew up consuming. American media and communications theorist Carey (1989)'s ritualistic view of communication echoes a similar recognition of media and communication practices

being embodied in how culture extends through space and time, while constituting and reconstituting itself. In my study, I considered how children's media practices or cultures could be understood interrelationally to their lived sociocultural experiences.

Hall (1993) proposed the now canonical 'encoding/decoding' model to help cultural scholars understand how screen media -in his time mainly film and TV- content conveyed a hierarchical "institutional/political/ideological order" (p. 57) using codes. He hypothesized that audiences may interpret such content from three discursive positions, i.e. the dominant-hegemonic, a negotiated or an oppositional position. Thereby, popular cultural consumption had the potential to become a site of intense identity politics and resistance to hegemonic discourses of culture. I applied this model to my study differently. I used it as a way to think about how institutions code notions of national identity in hailing my research participants, and how the latter in turn respond to this hailing through their culturally hybrid identities. To understand the concept 'hybridity', postcolonial studies offer us some answers.

Postcolonial studies are a branch of cultural studies that theorize colonization by problematizing its enduring legacies for the historically colonized. Their only intent is not critical cultural analyses, but also to act as a transformative intervention that disrupts Western assumptions and discourses about modernity as the only and linearly evolving, universalistic social condition (Shome & Hedge, 2002). In other words, such scholarship typifies social conditions on a continuum between modernity and postmodernity. In doing so, this approach challenges and disrupts Western disciplinary and public discourses. Therefore, postcolonial scholarship has originated largely from the global South, notably from historically marginalized groups such as women and people of color (Mohanty,

1996, Minh-ha, 1989; Shohat, 1992; Spivak, 1988, etc.), and people with roots in colonized regions of Latin America, South Asia and Africa (e.g. Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Chakraborty, 2000, etc.)

A key concept theorized in this body of work that informed my study was ‘hybridity’. Bhabha (1994) argues that the term hybridity (with its roots in the natural sciences) is useful to describe an ‘other’ human condition that does not neatly fit into several categories:

“... postcolonial critique bears witness to those countries and communities – in the north and the South, urban and rural – constituted, if I may coin a phrase, ‘otherwise than modernity’. Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive assimilationist, technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate’, and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity”. (p. 9)

My study focused on characterizing the ‘cultural hybridity’ of my research participants, informed also by theories of cultural hybridity stemming from historical and globalization scholarship (to be discussed shortly).

Theorizing Globalization

Globalization represents perhaps the most discursive concept of our times, because it is at once many things: “a process, a condition, a system, a force, and an age” (Steger, 2017, p.1). Differences in theorizing globalization have often revolved around narrow definitions bound by disciplinary confines, whether or not globalization is a positive or negative phenomenon, whether it is a phenomenon or phenomena, and when exactly it began historically (Jones, 2010).

Universalizing Particularistic Theories

Given its theoretical complexity and scope, globalization discourses have evolved historically through grand and influential theorizations in Western social scientific disciplines that were not specifically about globalization processes (e.g. Galtung's (1971) structural theory of imperialism; Giddens' (1990) analysis of the nation-state in modernity as a world condition; Castells' (2004) premise of the world as a network society; Wallerstein's (1976) world systems theory, etc.). While a more nuanced overview of these treatises is beyond the scope of this review, I concur with major critiques of these otherwise compelling and nuanced works (see Jones 2010; Pieterse, 2015; Steger, 2017) that they also reflect the linear, top-down, causal and dyadic ways of reasoning that have endured across Western academic and public discourses. Galtung's (1971) structural theory of imperialism divided the world into 'Center' -usually 'developed'- and 'Periphery' -usually 'developing'- nations, with centers and peripheries even within geopolitical boundaries. Wallerstein's (1976) world systems theory framed the modern world capitalist system as emerging from pre-modern political world empire systems. Giddens (1990) argued that modernity marked a radical break or discontinuity from previous socioeconomic structures, because it gave rise to a more complex structure: the nation-state. Castells' (2004) premised that the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was a crucial determinant in the development of what he called a network society.

Galtung's (1971) definition of 'imperialism' as the "dominance relation between collectivities, particularly nations" (p. 81) foregrounded Tomlinson's (1991) problematization of globalization as *cultural imperialism* (to be discussed shortly) and

later considering ‘communication as culture’. Wallerstein’s world systems theory was among the earliest to consider the nations of the world as being one global system, while also highlighting how the spread of capitalism is at the heart of such a system (Jones, 2010). Giddens’ (1990) idea that modernity challenges people to adopt a reflexivity about their social condition that breaks away from a past where traditions kept together temporal and spatially bound communities. Castells (2004) highlighted the democratic potential that ICTs symbolized in changing the course of how communication and information flow, not necessarily from the ‘North’ and the ‘West’ to the rest. All these aspects of the aforementioned theories informed my data analyses.

Globalization: Good or Bad?

At one end of the spectrum are optimists (e.g. Thomas Friedman) who have been celebratory about the changes globalization brings across aspects of social life (Steger, 2013; Jones, 2010; Tomlinson, 1999). At the other end have been the cynics (e.g. Naomi Klein) who oppose vehemently the ill effects of globalization. Historically, a discourse that has framed globalization as a negative phenomenon is ‘cultural imperialism’, the notion that through imposition of its cultural aspects, one country can overpower another. Tomlinson (1991) problematizes such cultural imperialism discourses to argue that equating ‘cultural’ imperialism to ‘imperialism’ as Galtung (1971) defined it in economic terms (with its roots in colonialism) to neoliberal capitalism undermines all that culture constitutes. He challenges the idea that cultural imperialism as modern capitalism undermines the nation as a social construct, because the concept only acquires meaning from the position of who speaks of a nationality or national identity. Furthermore, he challenges notions of cultural imperialism as modern capitalism being equated to media

imperialism and Western consumer culture. These approaches imply that consumers of both media and other material goods as passive cultural dupes who only receive and imbibe Western products. Finally, he argues that cultural imperialism as a critique of global modernity limits the social imaginaries that the world can envision, in terms of how cultures, particularly non-Western, change over time, when considering modernity itself as a changing phenomenon.

When Did Globalization Begin?

A Eurocentric approach insists that globalization is the evolutionary stage of modernity (Pieterse, 2015), where modernity itself is time-stamped nebulously as beginning anywhere between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth century in Europe (Giddens, 1990; Tomlinson, 1991). Periodization becomes a matter of convenience in order to deal with a time period that is of most relevance to who speaks of modernity (Tomlinson, 1999). To consider that people have been globalizing since the history of humankind itself overcomes viewing globalization as “a theory of westernization, which is geographically narrow and historically shallow” (Pieterse, 2015, p. 4).

One Globalization or Many Globalizations?

Whether globalization is a singular and common thing or whether it is a complex and uneven thing has been long debated. Steger (2017) offers definitions of interrelated terms that resolve the dichotomous, sometimes contradictory, and limited ways of theorizing it previously. While *globality can be understood as a multifaceted condition that confronts most* “borders and boundaries” (Steger, 2017, p. 2), a *global imaginary* signifies people’s growing consciousness of such a globality. Thus, *globalization* can be defined as “the multidimensional and uneven intensification of social relations and consciousness across

world-time and world-space”, marked by “intensifying planetary interconnectivity” (Steger, 2017, p. 14), along four dimensions of social life, i.e. economics, politics, culture and ideology. However, Steger’s (2017) definition of globalization categorizes culture as only one aspect of social life, an idea that is problematized further next.

Globalization as Everyone’s Culture

Culture is general human software—and none of the world’s hard enterprises functions without software. Desires and goals, and methods and expectations in achieving goals, are all of a cultural nature. Power itself is a cultural dream. (Pieterse, 2015, p. 175)

In contrast to Steger’s (2017) categorization of culture, Williams’ (1961) definition of it encompasses all aspects of social life. It is theorizing globalization as culture that helps understand globalization as many globalizations (Pieterse, 2015). In this sense, all communication is culture and all culture communication, when thinking of communication as performative practices (Tomlinson, 1999). Similarly, Appadurai (1996) defines the global ‘cultural’ economy as comprising five interrelated dimensions of flows. *Ethnoscapes* refer to people across the world, those that belong to stable communities as well as those that constantly move around. *Technoscapes* are mechanical and information technologies that make the world converge through time and space. *Financescapes* represent global capital flows that make the relationship between ethnoscapes, technoscapes and financescapes “deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable” (p. 35). *Mediascapes* refer to all the elements of media production, distribution and consumption which create an enduring imagery of the world we live in. Finally, *ideoscapes* stand for political ideologies, which also use imagery that to a great extent is reflected in mediascapes. This model helps to think about globalizing phenomena, not in terms of who is excluded altogether (which is not an invalid argument

in itself), but as Tomlinson (1999) suggests, in terms of the differential power people have in negotiating with its processes. Or rather, as Pieterse (2015) notes, it is more plausible to speak of “asymmetrical inclusion or hierarchical integration” (p. 37) than exclusion in globalization. Furthermore, when we take into account cultural hybridity as a way to think about globalization, the idea that globalization is only for a privileged few, is rendered unsatisfactory in many ways.

From Homogeneity and Heterogeneity to Hybridity

Hybridity unsettles the introverted concept of culture that underlies romantic nationalism, racism, ethnicism, religious revivalism, civilizational chauvinism, and cultural essentialism. (Pieterse, 2015, p. 91)

The major perspectives on cultural differences can be categorized into three paradigms. Cultural *differentialism* values the authenticity of diverse cultures and undermines the cultural changes globalization brings about. Cultural influences are deemed superficial in this paradigm because it supposes that deeper social values and meanings continue to remain distinct. Thus, this paradigm predicts regionalization based on cultural similarity in the future. Cultural *convergence* sees cultural homogenization as a destructive process that capitalism and Westernization wield globally. While there is some merit in these perspectives depending on the context, both are often reductive and cannot adequately explain the complex macro and micro processes that contemporary cultural globalization entails (Pieterse, 2015).

Hybridization however is a postmodern concept that uses as a starting point, the idea that cultural *mixing* is an ongoing reality of the human social condition whether or not it has been acknowledged or accepted in the past (Pieterse, 2015). It is able to challenge the other two paradigms by not assuming the authenticity of cultures and also not assuming

that capitalism functions only through cultural homogenization. In doing so, it not only approaches the future of globalization as less concrete and more flexible but is also able to subvert identity politics in many ways. By this logic, national identity ‘from above’ imposes ideological and geopolitical boundaries over identities that are invariably hybrid.

The concept of hybridity emerges from agriculture where flora was crossbred and biological theories of race that presuppose the purity of races, which become hybrid by being combined. However, sanctifying racial purity in the past gave hybridization occurring through racial mixing a negative connotation (Kraidy, 2006; Pieterse, 2015; Tomlinson, 1999). In the social sciences, hybridity finds its roots in religious *syncretism*, a term that refers to the merging of religions. In linguistics, *creolization* is a hybrid of African and European cultures. The term *mestizaje* that refers to racial mixing in the context of Latin American cultures is also used in hybridization discourses. In postcolonial scholarship, hybridity is the result of an imposed fusion through imperialistic colonization. However, this does not imply that hybridity simply perpetuates hegemony or is a unidirectional process (Pieterse, 2015).

Today, the term is often used in a celebratory way to describe all kinds of cultural confluences such as in art, food and most frequently identities. (Aside: The word *chai* in Hindi translates to tea, so what does that make ‘chai tea’?). Such a light usage of the concept usually to serve marketing ploys disguises the power relations that make such hybridity possible. Structural or institutional hybridity develops from the ways in which globalization reconfigures structures into myriad “transnational, international, macro-regional, national, microregional, municipal, local” forms (Pieterse, 2015, p. 73) while it also creates less organized structures such as diasporas and refugees in hybrid spaces

such as whole cities or neighborhoods within them. Structural hybridity enhances the options available for people to participate both socially and politically in their routine lives. Thus, hybridity functions through both structures and human agency.

A major critique of the application of hybridity is its use as a neutral concept to cultural practices without a critical consideration of the role of hegemony (Kraidy, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999; Pieterse, 2015). As Tomlinson (1999) emphasizes, it is imperative to use hybridity “circumspectly to identify *aspects*” (p. 148) of and not as a general description of cultural globalization. Pieterse (2015) stresses similarly that the context of hybridity matters because through it, we can envision a spectrum of hybridities, where similar or dissimilar entities fuse with varying results, such as appropriation or subversion of established entities. He also calls for the need to differentiate between time periods and patterns of hybridity, and what hybridity means in different cultural contexts as well as within cultural contexts.

My study examined the kind of role the media have in general, and more specifically transnational screen media have in how urban Indian children construct and negotiate their culturally hybrid identities in a culturally hybrid world. Thus, using cultural hybridity as the starting point to describe the identities of the children in question placed them at the margins of several intermingling local, national, regional and global cultures. Studying their sociocultural practices led to theorizing about what kind of agency local actors such as children consuming transnational screen media could have within and despite structurally hegemonic globalized (but also culturally hybrid) institutions. This raised the question, how can one study such an instance of cultural hybridity methodologically?

Kraidy's (2005) critical transculturalism is a research framework that is able to integrate both agency and structure in studying cultural hybridity as a globalization discourse. This framework uses cultural analysis of the local in a deliberate attempt to link particularities to larger social structures. Scholars should be cautious as Kraidy (2005) warns not to adopt a celebratory tone even if hybridity allows multicultural identities more agency than imperialism or hegemony. Further, the emphasis should be on social practices that can be compared in similar local contexts, through a translocal approach, so as to not only model what different forms hybridity can take but also map them on the continuum of hybridities as Pieterse (2015) has argued. Specifically for media studies, critical transculturalism provides a comprehensive methodological approach that explores the "active links between production, text, and reception in the moment of cultural reproduction" (Kraidy, 2005, pp. 149-150). As Canclini (2014) puts it, using macrosocial numerical data simultaneously with descriptions of specific processes, and how "individual and collective subjects represent their place and their agency" (p. 19) in such processes is best suited for the study of cultural hybridity. This understanding informed the methodological design for my study, laid out in Chapter 3. The next section discusses the relationship between national identity, cultural hybridity and the media as it applied to my study.

Cultural Hybrids as Global/Regional/National/Local and Mediated Identities

The erosion of the nation-state, national economies and national cultural identities is a very complex and dangerous moment. Entities of power are dangerous when they are ascending and when they are declining and it is a moot point whether they are more dangerous in the second or the first moment. the first moment, they gobble up everybody and in the second moment they take everybody down with them. (Hall, 1997, p. 25)

This quote is as relevant today as when Stuart Hall penned it more than two decades ago. Russia's war on Ukraine and India's religion and caste-based politics are cases in point of such powers being in dangerous moments. In defining 'ideology' in terms of RSAs and ISAs, Althusser (1971) also argues that ideology's most important characteristic is its materiality. It is through this materiality that ideology is enacted in lived experience, where practices become rituals, or to use Barthes' (1973) term, become 'myth'. Barthes (1973) suggests that myth depends strategically on history and culture to enhance the dominant classes' preferred ideas while suppressing others. It thereby functions as depoliticized speech by converting something imaginary into something seemingly natural. In this sense, despite the arbitrary geopolitical borders and diversity of peoples that might constitute a nation, a preferred ideology or myth of nationality must win over others, and it does so through hegemonic processes.

Anderson (1983) has noted how print capitalism was instrumental in the facilitation of a national consciousness and led directly to the rise of the modern nation state. Just as Althusser's (1971) categorization of the media as an ISA reflects the significance of media in sustaining the state as an entity, Anderson (1983) highlights the inextricable link between the role of the media in the articulation and sustenance of national identity. Billig's (1995) concept of banal nationalism suggests that nationalism becomes banal through the media's routine imagery of national symbols such as a nation's flag. Thus, the media have a crucial role to play in identity representations, in this case particularly institutional notions of nationality 'from above', and even in how people negotiate their culturally hybrid identities through media consumption. In my study, I focused on children's understandings of their culturally hybrid identities, mediated by their

consumption of screen media content and interfaces with other key socialization agents, the family and the school. To engage with the conflation of identity categories that studying national identity ‘from above and below’ demanded, intersectionality provided a constructive, if not imperative, analytical tool. The next section reviews literature on children and media in globalization.

Theorizing Childhood

Being a child, having been a child, having children and having to continuously relate to children are all experiences which contrive to render the category as ‘normal’ and readily transform our attribution of it to the realm of the ‘natural’ (as used to be the case with sex and race). (Jenks, 2009, p. 95)

In defining a child in terms of what characteristics would apply only to someone who may be labeled a child, A child is conceived as a result of male sperm fertilizing female ovum. An unborn child that develops in a mother’s uterus is significantly affected by environmental and sociocultural factors affecting the mother. Its genetic makeup comes equally from the father and mother and therefore, many of its physical as well psychological traits are genetically derived. A young child depends on adult care and in most cases is unlikely to survive without such care. In terms of size and growth, irrespective of its sex, a child starts life physically smaller than adults and grows rapidly from birth to usually into its teens. Alongside physical growth, which culminates in the child becoming capable of sexual reproduction, a child also grows cognitively and acquires language (Davies, 2010). Broadly, disciplines have tended to historically define childhood as a state or construct either using objective or subjective criteria.

Whereas fields such as pediatrics and developmental psychology have focused on studying childhood more in terms of health outcomes, and the acquisition of physiological and psychosocial capabilities for children respectively, others such as

sociology and cultural studies have theorized childhood primarily as a social construct (Buckingham, 2008). Aries (1962) theorizes that historically, it is only after the sixteenth century that the Western concept of childhood being a unique status, one different from that which adulthood occupies, gained attention as a discourse. This indicates that childhood, much like capitalism, culture, hybridity, modernity and nation identity, is best understood as a sociocultural construct and institution that is “neither a natural nor a universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies” (James & Prout, 1990, p. 8). As James and James (2008) argue, whereas using biological age to trace human physical development may reveal commonalities between children, age frequently does not imply similar intellectual and psychosocial development among them. Thus, age as a singular and particularistic identity marker is often insufficient to explain children’s lived sociocultural experiences.

What’s in a Number?

Age as a sociocultural identity marker helps facilitate legal, institutional and also market needs, which have varying consequences for children. For instance, applied developmental psychology has advanced U.S. child welfare strategies among children affected by “maltreatment, parental separation/divorce, and delinquent behavior” (Malloy, Lamb & Katz, 2011, p. 645). Even U.S. academic Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) are required by federal regulation to consider children as follows:

...children are persons who have not yet attained the legal age of consent under the applicable laws in the jurisdiction in which the research will be conducted (Protection of Human Subjects 2017). In the U.S., state law dictates the age of majority. In most states, the age of majority is 18, but there are exceptions (such as, Nebraska where the age is 19). Researchers should also be aware that the age of majority might be quite different in other countries. (CITI Program.org restricted to members only website)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (“Convention on the Rights of the Child, n.d.”). India’s National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), a statutory body under India’s Ministry of Women and Child Development also uses the UNCRC’s definition of a child in all its functions. Market definitions of age -and gender- tend to simplify and diversify children into convenient groups such as toddlers and tweens to sell products exclusive to different developmental stages (Buckingham, 2007).

The UNCRC is a landmark resolution that focuses on the protection of, the provision for, and the participation of children. These codes have inspired institutional efforts worldwide to advocate for child rights as well as research and policy efforts that consider children’s voices (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007). Such research efforts have culminated in the establishment of the academic field called *Childhood Studies*. In recent years, childhood studies have gained significant ground as a legitimate, interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry (Kehily, 2008). This field recognizes that childhood is only one variable in research and can only be understood at the intersections of other variables such as class and gender within diverse cultural contexts. It also views children as active and independent social agents worthy of research in their own right and deems ethnography an effective methodology to study them (James & Prout, 1990). Nevertheless, children are as much active agents as they are particularly more vulnerable than adults as Davies’ (2010) definition of a child discussed earlier explains. And anthropological approaches to studying children are best equipped to understand how both agency and vulnerability materialize in different contexts of childhood, provided

also that researchers are mindful of their ethical roles in working with children (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007). As previously noted, in my study, I worked with children between the ages of 7 and 17 to make space for a range of views to be voiced on the research topics, based not only on psychosocial developmental stages. What follows is an overview of literature on children and media in globalization.

Childhood and Media

Cartoons were once exponents of fantasy. They ensured that justice was done to the creatures and objects they electrified, by giving the maimed specimens a second life. All they do today is confirm the victory of technological reason over truth... In so far as cartoons do any more than accustom the senses to a new tempo, they hammer into every brain the new lesson that continuous friction, the breaking down of all individual resistance, is the condition of life in this society. Donald Duck in the cartoons and the unfortunate in real life get their thrashing so that the audience can learn to take their own punishment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 138).

These words reflect critical theorists' Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) infamous hypothesis on the harmful effects that the mass media, or as they called them, the 'culture industry', apparently heralded for humanity. Their approach resonates with a tradition of experimental media research that has long used causal and correlational hypotheses to explain media consumption's harmful behavioral outcomes in children. Another tradition has taken a cultural approach to explore how children consume popular culture.

Therefore, both these traditions often involved researchers engaging in polarized and oppositional value judgments about children's media practices (Davies, 2008). The institution of the International Communication Association's (ICA) *Journal of Children and Media* (JOCAM) in 2007 addressed the lack of dedicated scholarship on childhood media studies. Livingstone's (2007) work in the first edition of JOCAM discussed the polarizing discourses where social scientists argued that the media had a significant effect

on the rise and spread of childhood problems such as obesity or violence, and cultural theorists assigned more agency to children in terms of how their ability to enjoy or interpret media practices. To overcome these polarities, Drotner and Livingstone (2008) recommended a holistic approach to the study of children's media cultures drawing on both the humanities and social sciences for theoretical and methodological tools. Livingstone (2007) argued that the interdisciplinary nature of media and communication studies could develop "multifactorial explanation" (p. 6) of childhood issues, in collaboration with research from diverse fields, thereby checking to an extent the problems of polarized research approaches. She also calls for the triangulation of traditional survey and experimental methods with more "child-centered methodologies" (Livingstone, 2007, p. 11). It is this call that my study responded to.

Childhood and Media Studies

Children's media studies have traditionally studied children's media industries, media texts intended for young audiences and child audiences or consumers as analytical units. Several studies indicate the innovative combinations of both quantitative and qualitative methods that researchers have employed in analyzing one or more of these three analytical units (Baker & Raney, 2007; Banaji, 2010, 2015 & 2017; D'Arma & Steemers, 2012; Diffrient, 2011; Drotner, 2004; Duvall, 2010; Hentges & Case, 2012; Lacroix, 2004; Lemish, Drotner, Liebes, Maigret & Stald, 1998; Kapur, 1998 ; Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009; Sigismondi, 2009; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013, etc.). Even a decade ago, whereas a significant number of children's media studies originates from and focus on the U.S. and countries across Europe, fewer focus on the South Pacific region, and far fewer on Asian and African scholarship before the institution of JOCAM.

My study also addressed this dearth of scholarship on children's media studies in the Indian context, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Children's Media Institutions

Studies analyzing children's and other media industries have tended to adopt a political economy of communication approach (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012; Lusytik, 2010; Sigismondi, 2009 are examples). In this approach, the production and distribution of media content are considered as processes where the ownership and business strategies of companies foreground and even explain the features of content produced. The findings of such studies indicated that U.S. programming had dominated most of children's TV in countries such as Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Germany (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012; Lusytik, 2010) in 1990s and early 2000s. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this was the case in India too when I was growing up.

Institutional analyses are useful in as far as they provide an overview of the macro processes of media globalization. However, the presence of transnational media content alone does not explain consumption patterns of such media's intended audiences. Interacting factors that account for variations between countries' children's programming include market size, local competition and media policies in effect. Market size factors that are crucial to consider for children's TV are the number of multichannel households and access to pay TV since most transnational children's channels as well as online streaming video platforms are only accessible at a price (D'Arma and Steemers, 2012). This applied to the context of my study too.

Local content becomes significant only to the extent that larger audiences and

thereby larger revenues can justify production costs. Animated content makes up the biggest chunk of all children's TV in most globalized contexts given that animation is cheaper to dub than produce, and also makes for less culturally specific content. Cultural factors such as a shared language, or a history of importing foreign TV content long before multichannel TV where countries are already familiar with international content could also affect attitudes towards "Americanization of TV" (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012, p. 157). This observation was relevant to my study because a considerable segment of India's urban children is fluent in English because of the country's colonized history and post-colonial legacy. In fact, the Indian TV industry's most popular trade press website had reported that the local to international programming ratio grew from 10:90 to 80:20 in the children's TV business in 2016. Programming from the U.S. dominated this genre, accounting for close to 44% of all content, while Japanese content accounted for 17% and Indian content 16% ("MIP Junior: Can Indian animation make its mark?", 2016). In the last decade, industry focus has shifted to the challenges and opportunities that children's content on VOD via OTT platforms has made possible (MIP Junior Puts Spotlight on VOD", 2013).

Children's media industry studies have policy implications especially for countries that are concerned with providing more "indigenous programmes" (D'Arma & Steemers, 2012, p. 160) for children, because foreign programming presents to children less diverse content, not rooted in their own sociocultural contexts. Banaji (2010) takes the idea further by pointing out how most TV content available nationwide in India often does not resonate with the lives of children watching such content in remote areas of rural India. Also, as Sigismondi (2009) points out in his case study on the channel Jetix in Italy,

media globalization trends have made entertainment flows more complex with local productions becoming popular enough to be exported globally, a trend that certainly merits further investigation and one that triggered my initial interest in the Indian context. Tata (2012) links the growth of India's animation industry to changes in content seen on children's TV channels in recent years. She notes how the main characters of shows such as *Chhota Bheem* on Pogo and *Roll No. 21* on Cartoon Network have adopted names from Hindu mythology, creating a new wave of localized popular children's programs.

Children's Media Texts and Environments

As far as analyzing children's media texts are concerned, the literature had initially tended to focus on gender and racial representations of cartoon characters (Baker & Raney, 2007; Duvall, 2010; Hentges & Case, 2012; Lacroix, 2004; Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009, etc.), often relying on cultivation theory and social learning theory to provide a theoretical framework. Cultivation theory argues that the more children watch TV, the more their ideas about the social world resemble what they consume. Social learning theory argues that children are more likely to imitate behaviors of same gendered role models. There was also consensus across literature on children and the media that TV is among the most influential socialization agents. In recent years, children's online practices, be it for education, entertainment, social media use or online content generation have all inspired compelling scholarship, particularly under the JOCAM flagship. These are all themes that emerged even in my study.

Both institutional and textual analyses often make claims about how media industries, texts or virtual environments might affect their consumers or users in specific ways. Such studies work best in conjunction with or when built upon with studies of the

role of the media in lived sociocultural experiences (e.g. Banaji, 2010, 2015; Duvall, 2010; Kapur, 1998; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013, etc.).

Children's Mediated Cultures

Children's audience studies as indicated earlier, have by and large tended to function in polarizing discourses. Buckingham (2007) explores these discourses in the context of marketing targeted towards children observing how one discourse takes a protectionist stance on children as consumers whereas another discourse concerns itself with children being exploited to encourage consumption. Critical debates about adverse effects of media in children's consumption patterns argue that there is an authentic state of childhood that marketers damage because children are inherently more vulnerable, or more familiar with technology whereas adults are exempt from both possibilities. The solution such discourses recommend to this growing and increasingly sophisticated menace is to encourage parents to monitor and regulate their children's media use. Market based debates assign more agency to children as active, discerning and unpredictable consumers who cannot be easily persuaded, a view which conveniently aligns with marketing's true intent to direct children's behavior in preferred ways. Buckingham (2007) recommends that research should consider historical and social factors to understand facets of children's consumer culture. We must consider how the market taps into children's consumption as part of bigger social group dynamics and settings such as within the family, among peers and in schools. After all, children are able to participate economically in the culture of consumption only through their parents' resources. Contemporary child-rearing practices have also changed from being about protection to allowing children the freedom of expression in an environment of

“pedagogic nurturing”, (Buckingham, 2007, p. 19), thereby also impacting children’s mediated cultures.

The most contested notion in polarizing discourses about childhood and media use is that of children’s vulnerability. This escapes a clear definition except when considered contextually, that is to say that specific media influence specific children in specific ways in specific sociocultural contexts. Critics on both sides of the debate have long continued to ask the same questions in study after study but none seem to answer the others’ theoretical or epistemological questions. In particular, careful readers of effects research must reconsider how effects research has evolved, conducting more “subtle, clever, often naturalistic” (Livingstone, 2007, p. 7) studies in recent times. While effects researchers could consider not framing problems by simplistically presuming media definitely have effects, cultural researchers could reconsider focusing unduly on cultural specificities and their preference to acknowledge more differences. Instead, as Livingstone (2007) asserts, the two approaches should compare notes to see what insights one could offer the other. This is an important recommendation because polarizing discourses allow policy makers to pick and choose what research to strategically use to serve their own interests, or to simply turn their backs on inconclusive research that for them is in effect, unusable (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2007).

Deregulation of media in the context of globalization has given rise to the need for media literacy among parents and thereby their children, both equally controversial political movements (Livingstone, 2007). Cultural theorists assign children interacting with the media undue agency to the point where they are unable to make a sound case for censorship of content. Also, media literacy as a tool puts the onus of responsibility for

regulation on consumers themselves and not governments. That said, Buckingham (2007) sees consumer literacy as “a realistic alternative” (p. 22) to polarized ways of approaching consumer culture, provided researchers can spell out what media literacy is and how to apply it effectively. My study aimed to address each of the above-mentioned concerns to the extent possible, as will be discussed more specifically in Chapter 6.

Childhood in Culturally Mediated Hybridity

Earlier globalization trends in the form of transnational media content backed by technological advances redefined how children interacted with media, and this merited more scholarly attention (Drotner & Livingstone, 2008). For particularly in contemporary globalization discourses, as Davies (2005) had argued, children’s screen culture, “far from being an innocent and value-free area of culture, is often found at the cutting edge of the clash between public service values and the market” (p. 391). Furthermore, children had also been historically denied their unique subject positions by being seldom researched in both cultural studies and most contemporary globalization discourses (Davies, 2005; Buckingham, 2008; Drotner & Livingstone, 2008). It is this call for children’s media scholarship that puts children at the forefront of studies that try to understand them, that my study was also a response to.

As far as linking global media cultures with children’s identities are concerned, studies are far and few between. Lemish, Drotner, Liebes, Maigret & Stald (1998) analyzed how globalization features in children’s cultures in Denmark, France and Israel as part of a multinational project. They chose these three different countries in terms of their geographical locations because they would also reflect western, central and eastern European cultural sensibilities respectively. The authors conducted qualitative focus

groups and in-depth interviews with hundreds of children and adolescents, representing both urban and rural schools in the three countries. The five themes or similarities that recurred in their data across countries relate to TV being considered a default medium, children's preferences for foreign fiction programming, their visions of a shared world via media, cultural hybridity and intergenerational tensions related to children's local consumption of global content and their parents' consumption of only local content.

Similar themes are echoed in whatever sparse work has previously been done on the media environments of children in India. However, such studies on Indian children's relationship with transnational media indicate that Indian children's experiences differ significantly from those of children in the U.S. and Europe in some ways (Banaji, 2010, 2015 & 2017; Kapur, 2007). Indian children are socialized within their media cultures into being "laboring adults" (Kapur, 1998, p. 395) or "apprentice citizens" (Banaji, 2010, p. 66) rather than 'children' or consumers in the Western sense, irrespective of their socioeconomic status. There is also ambivalence in the way parents view global TV as both a boon and a bane for their children, educative as well as corruptive in its influence (Cardoza, 2002; Banaji, 2010).

Media globalization has also been linked closely to children's age group, where between age 9-10 the children begin to locate themselves within a global context (Lemish et al., 1998; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2013), using taste markers such as media production quality and language (Drotner, 2004; Kapur, 1998; Lemish et al., 1998). Their preferences for transnational media content and English language programming also reflect their class positions as upper middle class children that have computer and internet access. Children's adoption of a global perspective despite coming from different

cultures does not indicate their “cultural assimilation” (Lemish et al.,1998, p. 554) as much as their coexistence within global and local frames, in their multicultural lived experiences. The discussion so far clearly reinforces how considering children’s identities as culturally hybrid ones at the intersections of sociocultural identity markers such as age, caste, class, gender, regional roots and religion have better explanatory power in helping us understand the role of mediated transnational screen cultures in these children’s ‘local’ lives.

Keeping in mind these perspectives, my study explored how the dynamics of children negotiating cultural hybridity today may or may not align with the aforementioned themes in further multimedia saturated and newer technological contexts.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To reiterate, my research questions (RQs) were:

RQ1) what role do transnational screen media play in how urban Indian children think about their culturally hybrid identities?

RQ2) in what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities?

To answer these questions, I adopted primarily ethnographic methods, i.e. participant observation (simply observation henceforth) and in-depth interviews (simply interviews henceforth), along with survey research to gather data for my study. In this chapter, I review literature on aspects of ethnographic research and survey research as these methodologies applied to my study. I also describe the methodological design I adopted through the stages of recruiting participants, gathering, and analyzing data for the study.

Survey Research

Survey design as a methodology enables gathering numerical data by asking questions about a topic using a questionnaire, to a set of people sampled from a population sharing certain common criteria for selection. What is crucial for sound survey research is a) the type of sampling used, which determines who from the larger population being researched get to participate, b) size of the sample, where the larger the sample, the lesser the margin for error in data gathered, c) how survey respondents are sampled and d) the rate of response, i.e. from those sampled, how many actually answer the survey (Fowler, 2009). At times, the purpose of using a survey is simply to get a better sense of people's views or habits, rather than "numerical precision" (Fowler, 2009, p. 22), where simple random sampling may be used rather than probability sampling.

Probability sampling enables precision using statistical analysis tools. My study required my first having to understand the features of children's habitual media use. So, I used snowball sampling to enable my research process in two ways: a) determine whether parents were interested in their families participating in my ethnographic research as well and b) familiarize myself about patterns of children's media use, and the array of transnational screen media content these children consumed. The latter process enhanced my ability to engage children in dialogical ethnographic interviews about aspects of their identities in relation to the media they used. More details regarding sampling research participants for my study are detailed in Chapter 4.

Having children answer the survey as a preliminary step in the research process enabled my analysis of the relationship between children's screen media consumption and their lived cultural experiences. I also used children's survey responses as an engaging starting point to establish rapport with them in initial interviews. Furthermore, this approach was useful primarily for triangulation, a process by which different methods address the same research problem. Triangulation enables the gathering of more credible data and the drawing of stronger conclusions. It also serves as a complementary approach where numerical and narrative data support each other and provide validity to studies (Hesse-Bieber, 2010).

Ethnographic Roots and Routes

The distinction of ethnographic research lies in this approach's explicit intent to explain "human social behavior in terms of cultural patterning" (Wolcott, 2002, p. 48). A neophyte ethnographer can be sure if ethnography is best suited for a study or not by first asking whether cultural interpretation is the researcher's primary purpose. Ethnographic

methods focus on examining social life in-depth and inductively, using more open and unstructured methods of data collection, and creating knowledge as much through data description as data interpretation (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Clifford 1990). In this sense, cultures are “imposed, not observed” through ethnography (Wolcott, 2002, p. 50). Since the purpose of my study was to culturally interpret the role of transnational screen media in urban Indian children’s identity formulations, ethnographic methods suited it well.

An inductive approach to examining social life gives precedence to the firsthand observation of phenomena in a geographically situated context that has traditionally been called ‘the field’, where the researcher in varying degrees, is usually also a participant in unfolding events. Ethnography has historically required one’s physical immersion in the field for a period of time “sufficient to enable one to participate inside that culture” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 180). Such fieldwork usually involves conducting participant observation, a method where a researcher may adapt her participatory approach based on her identity and her research purpose (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Ethnographic methods usually involve writing detailed field notes from conducting observation, interviews, group interviews or even facilitating focus group discussions. For my study, I chose a field site in the conventional anthropological sense for reasons stated in my autobiographical narrative in Chapter 1. Details regarding recruiting research participants for ethnographic research are in Chapter 5. I took field notes between and during both the observation and interviews I conducted. These notes were instrumental in reflecting on, interpreting and describing my embodied immersive experiences in the field, as will also be illustrated in Chapter 5.

Diverse and Reflexive Ethnographic Intentions

Tracing the history of ethnography, Tedlock (1991) notes how some early Western anthropologists turned their written products into emotionally self-indulgent works in their attempts at self-reflexivity. The array of movements in the wake of human rights worldwide (decolonization of countries, formation of supranational organizations such as the United Nations, women's rights and civil rights movements in America to name a few) that marked the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a diversity of people who began to adopt ethnography. A long overdue gender, class as well as ethnic diversity entered the academy, frequently in the form of ethnographers with origins in non-Western regions of the world (e.g. Behar, 1993; Narayan, 1989). Their work led to the emergence of narrative ethnography, a practice that in contrast to the previously produced self-aggrandizing narratives were more self-conscious interrogations of the researcher's role in the process of cultural interpretation (Tedlock, 1991).

A new wave of scholars, such as critical, cultural, and particularly postcolonial and feminist scholars (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1998 & 2005) collapsed the differences between ontological, epistemological and axiological qualities of the work they do, extending a critical self-reflexivity to ethnography (Tedlock, 1991). As explained in Chapter 1, with regard to my study, I shared several commonalities with my research participants in terms of identity markers, along with both mediated and lived cultural experiences. Therefore, I had to cultivate a critical distance from my participants' experiences to avoid letting resonance interfere with my research processes at different stages. Feminist media ethnographies (to be discussed further shortly) were particularly useful in guiding me in preparation for being in the field.

Media Ethnography

The field has been historically conceptualized in media ethnography as either a site of media production such as a newsroom or a site of media consumption such as a living room with a TV or a movie theater. The site is considered significant for study if it encompasses a medium of communication that people interact with (Murphy, 2011). Cultural anthropologists Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin (2002) note how today's media saturated environments pose challenges as well as opportunities to analyze social life. They recommend that researchers trace the circuits that media take in people's lives, locating them in the larger political and economic contexts of their creation, distribution, use and sometimes appropriation. Also, from an anthropological standpoint of studying media cultures, this implies that media are embedded in the very fabric of social life today and therefore cannot be excluded from cultural analyses. In my study, I considered children's mediated cultures as embedded in the fabric of children's lived sociocultural realities, frequently within familial and school contexts. This is why it was crucial to interview parents and teachers as well.

Media audience or reception studies have historically tended to focus on the consumption of popular culture (e.g. Lull, 1980; Morley, 1992; Radway, 1984, etc.). As Ang (1990) notes, reception studies did well to collapse the distinction between high and low culture and validated the consumption of popular culture as a worthy object of research. However, the results of this ethnographic turn in media studies have also led to what has been described as 'thin' description (Murdock, 1997) as found in cultural studies that have tended to read audiences primarily through texts. At the same time, thick descriptions that attempt to "attend to 'everything'" (emphasis in original, Wolcott,

2002, p. 52) could indiscriminately lead to thin conclusions (LaPastina, 2005). Given the scope and types of data I had to gather to examine sufficiently the complex theoretical concepts in my study, I chose to use semi-structured interviews rather than unstructured ones, designed to make space for facilitating dialogue about media and identity markers, while also letting the interviewees' views lead the way for my probing more organically and spontaneously on specific identity related topics. This approach proved particularly useful when working with children.

In her polemic against some cultural studies that have celebrated consumers' agency in interpreting media messages, Nightingale (1993) insists that using ethnographic techniques such as observation and interviews cannot be justified without researchers also employing the ethnographic intent of cultural analysis. She laments the fact that rather than offer a critique of cultural practices, self-proclaimed fan-scholars writing about fandoms have often provided an "apologia" (Nightingale, 1993, p. 159) for consumers' interpretations of popular cultural texts. Furthermore, Murdock (1997) argues that interviews are to be understood as performances in which respondents "assume identities and manage impressions" (p. 188). They cannot be analyzed at face value as some cultural studies have tended to. In cultivating a critical distance from research participants, not only was I careful to consider interviewees' communications as performative, but I was also reflexive about my own performativity as researcher through each stage of the research process.

Through a review of media production and audience studies, Murphy (2011) has developed a yardstick by which the value of media ethnographies may be judged. Documenting the array of ethnographic interactions and decisions made in the field,

including direct evidence of data gathered, situating mediated experiences within both the local social context and the larger social world, are all aspects of rich media ethnography. Also, negotiating identity is at the heart of rigorous ethnographic practice and scholars have negotiated different aspects of their identity by being reflexive about their presence at various stages of conducting ethnography. I used this yardstick as both a check and a reminder for how to be and stay ethnographic, through each stage of study. Reflexive feminist media ethnographic scholarship helped me reflect on how my identity markers such as being a US-educated researcher, age or even marital status could likely influence the relationships I established with research participants (e.g. Acosta-Alzuru, 2005; Darling-Wolf, 2003; Parameswaran, 2002).

Media Ethnography's Challenges Today

Two trends in recent decades have significantly altered how media ethnographies may be conducted today. The first is the advent of qualitative internet research and the other is the proliferation of global media studies. They have challenged notions of what constitutes both the field and observation in ethnographic studies. Symptomatic of but not exclusive to contemporary globalization are processes such as “migration, tourism, international trade policies, urbanization, natural resource exploitation, war, [the proliferation of] mass media, [and] personal communication devices” (Murphy, 2011, p. 383). These themes featured even in the voices of my research participants, along with reflections on a “global pandemic”.

Both anthropology and media studies have been particularly challenged with reconsidering notions of communities within and beyond geopolitical boundaries in this context (see Conquergood, 1991; Hannerz, 1996). As Kraidy (1999) suggests, unusual

hybrid identities come to exist as a performance of consumption, mimicry and nomadism in local sites where transnational media content is consumed. It is precisely these types of identities that my study sought to characterize and analyze in an urban, globalized Indian context.

Similar to Nightingale's (1993) concerns about uncritical cultural analyses of popular media consumption, Murphy (2005) has observed a problematic trend in global media reception studies where audiences' agency in the negotiation of meanings from global texts through local consumption has been exaggerated at the cost of investigating ideology's relation to lived experiences. Murphy and Kraidy (2003) call for a reformulation of media ethnography in international communication studies because globalization provides significant cultural opportunities to critically analyze local life in relation to hegemonic global forces it is inextricably embedded in. Darling-Wolf (2014) answers this call in her book *Imagining the Global: Transnational Media and Popular Culture Beyond East and West* and my study was conducted in a similar ethos.

Technologically mediated communities have also urged a reconceptualization of field sites as spatially and temporally fluid entities beyond concrete localities, particularly in internet media ethnographies. Arguments on whether the internet must be treated as a site or a medium persist (Markham & Baym, 2009). Ultimately, what is of significance is to consider what the purpose of one's ethnographic research is and methodology is implicated therein. A more practical concern that media ethnographers have begun to negotiate in recent years is the challenge of conducting long-term fieldwork within the structural boundaries of academic research institutions, embodied in the frequent need for publications for promotions (Murphy, 2011). Some scholars have negotiated this

challenge by devising innovative methods such as autoethnography, particularly in fan studies and virtual ethnography, albeit sometimes at the cost of embodied fieldwork. While Murphy (2013) had also made the case for short-term field visits, they are only a starting point in making studies ethnographic and cannot act as substitutes for conducting longer, more immersive fieldwork. My fieldwork was conducted over a relatively long period, extended further due to the outbreak of Covid-19. As a result of social distancing norms, I found myself having to be ethnographic even virtually in this time. I describe such experiences in detail in Chapter 5.

At a time when cultural hybridities and technological convergence are perhaps the only certainties in today's fluid global postmodern condition, ethnography as qualitative inquiry has never been more significant to interpreting cultures. However, mere adoption of ethnographic nomenclature does not translate to serious engagement with its "chore of methodological self-interrogation" (Murphy, 2011, p. 387). Scholars have argued that a distinction needs to be made between studies using one or more ethnographic methods and studies that may be called ethnographies. Covid-19 was an unanticipated and sudden hindrance to my ethnographic intent and process in progress. So, in keeping with the anthropological ethos of embodied immersion in fieldwork, I revised the title of my study by deleting the term 'ethnographic', because my study became a more virtual ethnography inadvertently.

Methodological Design

The purpose of administering surveys to children was to understand the relationship between children's screen media consumption and their lived sociocultural experiences. To get a sense of their screen media consumption patterns, the survey

explored aspects such as children's access to and use of media devices, the duration and context of their consumption, their content preferences in terms of favorite genres as well as specific shows, their favorite characters or people on screens and reasons for why those named were favorites. To consider the extent to which children thought that the content they consumed resembled their own lives, children were asked how similar or not their favorite character or person was to themselves, and how the settings in which they appeared compared to children's own lived environments. Finally, children were also asked to consider what the words 'Indian' and 'global' meant to them (see survey in appendix).

The purpose of using the ethnographic methods observation and interviews was to understand transnational screen media's role in children's understandings of their national identities, at the intersections of other sociocultural markers of identity such as age, gender, class, religion, caste, place of origin and languages spoken. I also interviewed parents and teachers to understand the role that both families and schools as children's key socialization agents play alongside the media, in fostering children's understandings of their cultural hybridities.

The IRB approved my study protocol after three rounds of review. I used snowball sampling to recruit research participants. Being a native who had lived in Bangalore before I moved to the U.S. to pursue my Ph.D., I was able to use both my personal and prior professional connections in the city to recruit participants. I began conducting research in February 2018 and completed it in July 2021. Being in India the last few academic years enabled my long-term embodied immersion in my local field site. Such immersion, which is crucial for conducting ethnographic fieldwork, only helped

strengthen my research process and product.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 impacted my research in ways that required me to modify my study protocol further, leading to two more IRB reviews. I could not administer the survey to children personally any longer. So, I shared both consent forms and surveys with parents either personally or using door-to-door delivery services for those with no access to a printer, and via email or a social media app for those with access to one. I briefed parents on how to administer the survey after acquiring their informed consent and was available over the phone to address any questions or concerns children had. Parents either scanned and emailed or took photos of all filled-out documents and shared them via email or a mobile phone app. I also spoke to some children over the phone after receiving filled-out surveys, to urge them to answer questions they had not answered, and to clarify some of their responses. I switched from conducting interviews in person to conducting them online using Zoom.

As a researcher with ethnographic intent, I was naturally disheartened at the prospect of conducting online interviews with children I had never met before. However, some parents reassured me that their children were so used to being before screens routinely that they would not only be comfortable to meet and talk with me, but perhaps also enjoy a novel activity online. In fact, some were also grateful that my interviews offered their homebound and bored children some respite, and the parents themselves some respite from attending to their children's needs for a while.

In terms of managing the chaos that conducting research with children in India entailed, Acosta-Alzuru's (2005) notes to herself before her trips to conduct fieldwork in her home country Venezuela were inspirational. Her descriptions of Venezuelan life bear

a striking resemblance to what one might expect to encounter even in the Indian context. She notes how she always engraves in her “brain and heart two words: flexibility and determination” (p. 188) when embarking on fieldwork. I added the words ‘humility’ and ‘patience’ to hers and these served me well, especially when working with children.

CHAPTER 4: SURVEY RESEARCH

Recruiting Research Participants

This chapter describes my survey research process and an analysis of the key findings from the data gathered. I had originally intended to approach English medium schools that used different curricula, in different regions in Bangalore, to enable a larger number of children that represented different age groups to answer the survey. However, the children that eventually answered it were approached through their parents, using snowball sampling. Whenever the parents I approached also expressed willingness for their families to participate in the ethnographic research process, I acquired informed consent and suggested that we begin with their children first answering the survey. Even before I began recruiting research participants, I created an MS Excel spreadsheet grid to track potential participants' sociocultural identity markers. As and when I gathered any such details from the snowball sampling process and the surveying process that asked for children's identifying details at the end of the questionnaire (see appendix for survey), I updated this grid. Doing this helped me ensure as balanced an age and gender representation of children as possible in the survey data gathered. I pilot-tested the survey with five children, three of whom I also interviewed eventually. Using snowball sampling also ensure an absolute survey response rate, i.e. the children of all parents who were approached answered the survey.

Media Devices Used and Their Frequency of Use

The survey was answered by 50 children between the ages of 8 and 17, i.e. between school grades 3 and 12, where 23 were boys and 27 were girls. When asked what media devices they had access to in their homes, 47 (97%) children reported having a TV, 48

(96%) a laptop, 30 (60%) a tablet and 27 (54%) a computer. All of them had access to smartphones and the internet. When asked which of these devices children either owned personally or used by themselves, 32 (64%) said they did so with a smartphone, 31 (62%) a laptop, 24 (48%) a TV, 21 (42%) a tablet and 12 (24%) a computer. There were no significant differences between access to and use of media devices between children based on their age group or gender. These figures reflect the near absolute penetration of TVs, laptops, smartphones and the internet in the lives of children in this sample, along with more than half of them also having access to desktop computers and tablets. Considering that each of them had access to at least two or more media devices at home, the figures also highlight the class privilege of these children.

When asked about the media devices children used to watch screen media content, 38 (76%) reported using a TV, 21 (42%) a laptop, 19 (38%) a smartphone, only 9 (18%) a tablet and only 4 (8%) a computer. 23 (46%) children were able to specify that they also used a set top box connection and 33 (66%) the internet to watch content. More girls than boys (ratio 7:2) reported using a tablet. These figures reinforce how a TV is still the most preferred screen device for consuming audiovisual content that was traditionally produced exclusively for TV viewing.

Regarding when and for how long they watched screen media content in a day, 29 (58%) children said they watched content for 1 to 2 hours a day, 10 (20%) of them did for less than 1 hour in a day, 9 (18%) for about 3 hours, 1 (2%) for 4 hours or more, and 1 (2%) reported not watching any at all. On weekdays, 24 (48%) children reported watching content after returning from school, 30 (60%) reported watching before or during dinner time and 13 (26%) did before going to bed. On weekends, 12 children

(24%) reported watching content before, during or after breakfast, 38 (76%) during lunch time or after, 31 (62%) before or during dinner time, and 13 (26%) before going to bed. There were no significant differences between the time of day and duration for which children consumed screen media content based on their age group or gender. These figures indicate that almost all the children in the sample watched screen media content at least for a few minutes every day, with nearly 80% watching content for at least 1 or 2 hours a day. Unsurprisingly, they had more time to watch content throughout the day on weekends when they did not have to attend school.

To gain some insight into the environment in which screen media consumption happens, I asked children about the company in which they usually watched screen content. 40 of them (80%) reported watching content with family members, 37 (74%) also did so alone, while 9 (18%) said they did so with friends as well. Those that watched content along with friends were all aged 12 and above. These figures denote the ritualistic activity that watching screen media content is, both at an individual and a communal level, in the lives of children and their families. They also align with Carey (1989)'s ritualistic view of media and communication practices being embodied in how culture extends through space and time, while constituting and reconstituting itself.

Favorite Genres of Screen Media Content

When it came to genres of screen media content they watched regularly, children selected a wide variety from the list provided. Movies were the most watched genre of screen content, with 43 (86%) children reporting watching them. The next most regularly watched genres of content were sitcoms/comedies (25 children, 50%), followed by cartoons (22 children, 44%), sports (18 children, 36%), music (12 children, 24%) and

children's shows (11 children, 22%). The lesser watched genres were reality shows (9 children, 18%), game shows and talk shows (8 children, 16% each), news (12%), and soap operas/serials (5 children, 10%). More girls reported watching sitcoms/comedies when compared to boys (ratio: 19:6), and more boys watching both game shows (ratio: 3:1) and sports (ratio: 2:1) when compared to girls. These figures show that these children are interested in watching both animated and live action content, without a clear preference for one format over the other.

When asked to name their most frequently watched screen media content titles, children listed a total of 158 unique titles across a range of genres. A few responses describing generic content categories were not counted as unique titles. These categories included items such as "anime", "comedies", "cooking shows", "reality shows", "sports" and "study lecture videos". A few children also specified the platforms on which they watch specific content, such as "Netflix movies", "*Supernatural* on Prime Video" and "basketball skills and matches on YouTube". Significantly, only 21 (13%) titles listed could be categorized as Indian content, indicating children's clear preference for consuming transnational content (87 %).

Based on show related information reviewed online using IMDB and official websites of shows, of the 158 titles named, 44 (27%) live action shows could be categorized as children's, fantasy or science fiction shows and 41 shows (26%) as cartoons. Most live action fictional shows children listed could be categorized as shows intended for children or shows with fantasy and science fiction themes. Therefore, all such shows were placed under a single category. The purpose of the survey was to learn what children watch rather than study the complexity of what screen media content as

texts communicate thematically or whom they hail as intended audiences. So, I acknowledge here that the content hybridity of individual shows requires textual analyses that are beyond the scope of this study. There were 25 (16%) titles that could be classified as activity-based, or entertainer-based, or video-gaming related YouTube channels. There were 12 (8%) reality shows, 12 (8%) TV dramas, 9 (6%) sitcoms/comedies and 9 (6%) movies. Titles of documentary series, game shows and types of sport made up the remaining 3%. These figures indicate that both cartoons and live action fictional shows were the most viewed, followed by YouTube content. When considered together, these children's favorite content genres and titles of screen media content consumed reiterate that they prefer watching transnational animated and live action content over similar available Indian options.

Favorite Shows, Movies and YouTube Content

With regard to the types of cartoons children watched most frequently, among the 41 listed, 35 could be categorized as transnational shows (85%) and 6 (15%) as Indian shows. Of the 35 transnational shows, 16 (45%) were anime shows. Given the range of shows listed, not many titles recurred in the data. The transnational animated shows that were listed at least thrice each (and a maximum of 4 times) were all anime shows: *Boku No Hero Academia* (Japanese title) / *My Hero Academia* (English title), *Doraemon*, *JuJustu Kaisen*, *Naruto* and *Sinchan*. Of the 6 Indian cartoons listed, *Chota Bheem* and *Little Singham* were listed twice each. Among these shows, except for *Doraemon* that revolves around the titular character of a robotic cat, all other shows feature young boys or teenage boys as protagonists. Other shows that were listed at least twice each were the anime shows *Death Note*, *Ninja Hattori* and *Pokemon* -also featuring male protagonists-,

and animated shows *Carmen Sandiego* -the only show featuring a female protagonist-, *Teen Titans* -featuring an ensemble of DC superheroes in their teens- and the timeless *Tom & Jerry*. The minimal frequency of recurring titles reflects the abundance of cartoons that these children have access to. It also points to the popularity of anime shows.

When it came to children's, fantasy and science fiction shows, of the 44 listed, 41 (93%) were transnational shows and only 3 (7%) were Indian ones. The Indian show *RadhaKrishn* which was listed thrice is a mythological, live action show which tells the story of the Indian deity Lord Krishna. Among transnational shows, the American web series featuring superheroes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* and *WandaVision* were both listed thrice each. Transnational shows *Alexa & Katie*, *Free Rein*, *Girl Meets World*, *Good Luck Charlie*, *The Inbestigators*, *Just Add Magic*, *Liv and Maddie*, *Loki* (another MCU web series), *Project MC²* and *Shadow and Bone* were all listed twice each. Except for *Shadow and Bone*, a fantasy series and *Loki*, a superhero (/villain), all other shows feature either teenage girls (*Free Rein*, *Girl Meets World*), teenage girl duos/trios/groups (*Alexa & Katie*, *Just Add Magic*, *Liv and Maddie*, *Project MC²*) or ensemble casts of boys and girls (*Good Luck Charlie*, *The Inbestigators*). Significantly, except for *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* and the Australian show *The Inbestigators* that were each named by boys as well as girls, all other shows named more than once were only listed by girls. Children's favorite shows in this genre are proof of how they are drawn to stories set in imaginary, rather than realistic worlds.

As with cartoons and live action fictional shows, given the range of shows listed, not many titles recurred in the data across other genres and even when they did, they rarely exceeded more than 4 times each. That said, titles of transnational sitcoms/comedies were a clear favorite despite such titles making up only 6% of all those listed. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* recurred 4 times each, and *Last Man Standing*, *Modern Family* and *Young Sheldon* recurred twice each. No Indian sitcoms/comedies were listed. Except for *Last Man Standing* and *Young Sheldon* that revolve around a middle-aged man with teenage daughters, and a 9-year-old boy respectively, all other shows feature young adult ensemble casts. Children's favorite shows in this genre suggest that when it comes to humor, they are just as drawn to stories set the real world, as they are to those set in imaginary worlds.

As was the case with sitcoms/comedies, even though the favorite shows that could be categorized as TV dramas were far fewer (8%) compared to other genre shows, some of these titles recurred too. American shows *Mentalist* and *Suits* recurred at least thrice each, and British shows *Sherlock* and *The Crown* recurred twice. Except for *The Crown* which fictionalizes the real-life stories of members of the British monarchy, the rest of these shows focus on crime and mystery as themes, featuring both men and women as protagonists. Likewise, despite reality shows only making up 8% of the titles, the most popular shows in this genre also recurred thrice each, namely the Australian show *Masterchef Australia* and the Indian show *OMG Yeh Mera India*. The American show *Forged in Fire* was listed twice. *Masterchef Australia*, a cooking competition, was listed by girls only, whereas *OMG Yeh Mera India* and *Forged in Fire*, the former a show featuring stories of people with a variety of talents across India, and the latter a

competition to create the best knife, were listed by boys only. Children's favorite shows in these genres point to a preference for watching rather selective content from a wide array of options.

Movie titles that belonged to a series were considered as a single category. For instance, *Avengers*, *Avengers: Endgame* and *Spider-Man* were all considered a single category, i.e. as part of the *Marvel* film series. Of the 9 movies listed, 4 titles referred to series or franchises such as *DC*, *Marvel* and *Harry Potter*. *The Fast and The Furious* and *Marvel* were the only series that recurred, and both were listed only by boys in their tweens. These movie series hint at the popularity of big studio franchises among these children. As previously noted, movies were the most watched genre of screen content. However, children were not asked specifically to name their favorite movies. Thus, nothing further can be inferred from this data.

YouTube was a category in itself, where 15 children, i.e. 30% of the sample comprising 12 boys and 3 girls, mentioned watching content available exclusively on a YouTube channel. Of the 25 unique YouTube channels named, 19 (76%) were transnational and 6 (24%) were Indian. And yet, the only channel that was listed twice among all the YouTube channels named, transnational or Indian was the Indian comedy channel *Jordindian* featuring two young men. Content created by and featuring YouTube entertainers at their eponymous channels were the most frequently named, even though none of these names recurred. Most of these channels feature these YouTubers' vlogs wherein they chronicle their daily lives, take on challenges and pull pranks, often also in collaboration with other YouTubers. American eponymous channels included Carter Sharer, Ben Azelart, Brent Rivera, Lexi Hensler, Nicole Laeno and Pierson Wodzynski.

Nuseir Yassin at *Nas Daily* and Nigerian comedian Mark Angel at *Mark Angel Comedy* were also named.

The Indian eponymous channels named were *Aashna Hegde*, *Mridul Sharma* and *Niharika N M. Rimorav Vlogs* featuring two Indian men and one woman was also named. These channels also featured vlog content that mirrored the content of American eponymous YouTube channels. The appeal of humor as reflected in children's favorite sitcoms/comedies was echoed even in their favorite YouTube channels featuring humorous vlogs. A couple of activity-based YouTube channels featuring tutorial videos of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) projects were also named. 7 boys, i.e. 14% of the sample, also mentioned watching video game-related content on YouTube. Videos related to the games *Minecraft* recurred 4 times, while *Hermitcraft*, *Clash Royale* and *Fortnite*, were each listed once. *Wallibear*, a channel featuring a young adult who streams his playing the video game *Minecraft Bedwars* regularly, was listed twice. This data points to video game-related content also being a popular niche on YouTube.

Favorite Characters and People on Screens

Children were asked to name two of their favorite characters or people from the screen media content they consumed and provide reasons for why those named were their favorites. They were also given the opportunity to list more such favorites without providing reasons for their liking these characters or people. In response, children listed as many as 240 unique names, where 211 (88%) of them could be categorized as transnational and only 29 (12%) as Indian. Of 240 names, 183 (76%) were those of characters in TV shows, web series or movies, 50 (27%) were of people on screens and 7 (4%) were instances where children named both the actor and the character in a particular

screen role. These figures echo what was established earlier about children's clear preference for consuming transnational rather than Indian content. They also indicate a clear preference for fictional characters rather than real people on screens.

Of the 183 characters named, 110 (58%) were male and 65 (37%) female, while 7 (4%) were anthropomorphic creatures, i.e. bugs or magical and science fiction creatures and 1 (1%) was an animal. Of the anthropomorphic creatures, 6 could be identified as male and only 1 female based on character voices. Of the 50 people named, 31 (62%) were transnational and 19 (38%) Indian, and 39 were male (78%) and 11 (22%) female. Of the 31 transnational people named, 24 (75%) were YouTubers, 4 (%) were contestants on a reality show and 3 (%) were sportspersons. Of the 24 YouTubers named, 22 referred to video gamers' online names, using which they stream videos of themselves playing the video games *Clash Royale*, *Fortnite* and *Minecraft*. All these gamers were male and were listed only by boys.

Of the 19 people named, 5 were either Bollywood or South Indian actors, 5 were YouTubers, 4 were standup comedians, 3 were actors in TV/web series, 1 was a cricketer and 1 was a music director. This data suggests that both boys and girls favor more male than female characters or people, and that possibly there are simply far more male characters or people on screens than female. Once again, this data points to video-gaming related content being a popular niche, and a gendered one at that. Boys seem to be fans of gamers based on the playing skills, just as fans of sportspersons might be. Also, no Indian gamers were named.

As with content titles, considering the number of unique characters' or people's names listed, only 39 names recurred, of which 34 (87%) were of characters and only 5

(13%) of people. Of the 34 characters that recurred, the ones listed most frequently, i.e., 4 times each, were sitcom/comedy characters Jake Peralta from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Sheldon Cooper from *The Big Bang Theory* and also from *Young Sheldon* (a spinoff prequel series of the former show), and Naruto from the anime show *Naruto*. The characters listed thrice each were sitcom/comedy characters Amy Santiago from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and Joey Tribbiani from *F.R.I.E.N.D.S*, animated DC superhero Cyborg from *Teen Titans* and *Teen Titans Go!* and Gojo Satoru from the anime show *Jujutsu Kaisen*, Patrick Jane from TV drama *Mentalist* and Wanda Maximoff (a.k.a. Scarlet Witch) from Marvel web series *WandaVision*.

The favorite cartoon characters that recurred twice each were DC superhero Batman, the robotic cat Doraemon from *Doraemon*, anime show characters Izuku Midoriya a.k.a. Deku, Shota Aizawa a.k.a. Eraser Head and Shoto Todoroki from *Boku No Hiro Akademia*, and Kugisaki Nobara and Yuji Itadori from *Jujutsu Kaisen*. The characters from children's, fantasy or science fiction shows that recurred twice each were MCU's character Bucky Barnes (a.k.a the Winter Soldier), Dean from *Supernatural*, Inej Ghafa, Jesper Fahey and Kaz Brekker from *Shadow and Bone*, Olivia and Madison Rooney from *Liv and Maddie* and McKeyla Macalister (actor Mika Abdalla) from *Project MC²*. Other genre characters that recurred twice each were TV drama characters Harvey Specter from *Suits*, Sherlock Holmes from *Sherlock* and Teresa Lisbon from *Mentalist*, sitcom/comedy characters Chandler Bing from *F.R.I.E.N.D.S* and Rosa Diaz from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, and movie characters Iron Man from the *Avengers* series and Dom (actor Vin Diesel) from *The Fast and The Furious* series. Krishna from the Indian mythological show *RadhaKrishn* was the only Indian character that recurred in the data.

The only people's names that recurred in the data were of YouTube comedians *Jordindian*, entertainer Lexi Hensler and gamer MrBeast, and actors Dwayne Johnson a.k.a. The Rock and Paris Berelc, who plays Alexa in the children's show *Alexa & Katie*. In the case of people too, *Jordindian* was the only Indian name that recurred. The character names that recurred reiterate the fact that both boys and girls favored transnational characters more than Indian ones, and more male characters than female too. The most frequently recurring names were from sitcoms/comedies, once again highlighting the popularity of this genre among these children. Character names from cartoons and children's, fantasy or science fiction shows followed, similarly reiterating the popularity of these genres as well. Most cartoons character names were from anime shows, which also emphasized the popularity of these shows.

Why Characters or People on Screens Were Favorites

When asked why the characters or people they named were their favorites, children's responses could be categorized thematically as relating to a character or person's personality traits or relating to his/her/their being skilled at certain activities. Children mentioned 41 traits, with 21 of them recurring more than once. Synonyms of a trait were considered as belonging to a single category of traits. Of the 21 recurring traits, the most frequently listed personality trait was being funny, which recurred 24 times. Being funny was also described in words such as being "goofy" or "hilarious", "being a good comedian" or having "a good sense of humor". This was followed by intelligence, a trait that recurred 20 times. Intelligence was also described using other words such as being "brilliant", "clever" or "smart", and being "a genius" or "a mastermind". Being kind recurred 10 times, also described in words such as being "caring", "friendly", "selfless",

“sensitive”, etc. Being strong recurred 9 times, of which only on one occasion, a child specified that she meant both mental and physical strength. Being ambitious also recurred 9 times, often described in other words such as being “focused” or “determined”, having perseverance or “a desire to win”, “aiming for the top”, “never giving up” and wanting “to be famous”.

On 7 occasions, children indicated relating to a character for being similar to them in some way. These responses related only to fictional characters, for either being the same age as children, or having similar personality traits, interests, or ambitions. For instance, 1 child mentioned liking a character because she aspires to be a lawyer just like the character. 6 of the 7 such responses came from girls. Being “adorable”, “cute”, “sweet”, etc. recurred 6 times, where once again only girls listed this trait. Being witty and brave both recurred 5 times each. Being cool and morally upright both recurred 4 times each, where morally upright was described in terms such as “always doing what is right and supporting truth”, “always following the right path”, and being “admirable for choosing to do good, to right past wrongs”. Traits relating to being powerful or having superhuman abilities such as being able to fly and being “a half-human, half-robot that shoots lasers from his eyes”, also recurred 4 times. Traits that were listed thrice each were being adventurous, entertaining, hardworking and being a good friend. Being a good friend was described in terms of being “close” and “loyal to friends”, and “caring for friends”. Traits characterized by ambivalence, described in words such as being “likeable yet complex”, “morally grey” or “mysterious” also recurred thrice. Traits denoting innocence recurred thrice, in terms such as being “childlike”, “clueless” or “naïve”. Traits that were

listed twice each were being emotional, being stylish and having a particular manner of speaking, where the latter was described as having a Spanglish accent and not swearing.

Children listed 23 skills that the characters or people they considered favorites possessed, with 10 of them recurring more than once. The most frequently listed skill was acting, which recurred 7 times. Excelling at sports such as basketball, cricket and football, and at playing video games which was described in terms such as being “a pro at Minecraft”, both recurred 4 times each. The latter skill was only listed by boys. Driving as a skill recurred thrice, described in words such as a person being “a 7-time F1 world champion”, with only boys listing this skill. Having leadership skills, musical talents such as music direction and singing, dancing talent, presentation -of content online- skills as well as hacking skills each recurred twice. Being observant as a skill also recurred twice. Even though no single cognitive skill recurred, together, abilities that could be categorized under this type of skill were mentioned 4 times, described in terms of being “creative”, “innovative” and ‘strategic’. The data on why children liked their favorite characters or persons on screens says more when considering what is in essence missing from it. Sociocultural identity markers such as the age, gender, religion, caste or nationality of characters or persons on screens seldom featured as factors influencing who these children liked and why they did so. However, the class privilege of the characters or persons named was implicit in some of the traits and skills children valued.

Collectively, what the findings so far illustrate is that children’s access to multiple screen media devices and content genres have created a routine environment where the consumption of transnational screen media content has become a default choice rather than an alternative to Indian content. This finding is similar to Lemish et al.’s (1998)

finding in their multinational project on global media cultures and children's identities where they found that TV was a default medium. Even children's preferences for fictional content in this study's sample, whether in the form of movies, cartoons, or live action shows, i.e. sitcoms/comedies, children's, fantasy or science fiction shows, is similar to what Lemish et al. (1998) found in terms of children preferring 'foreign' fiction programming. As for children's online media use in this sample, it is clear that YouTube vlogs have also emerged as formidable non-fictional alternatives for children to view.

Mediated Identities

For each of the favorite characters or people on screen that children named and provided reasons for liking, they were also asked to consider how closely the lives of those named resembled their own lives. Whereas 51% of the children said that the lives of those named did not resemble their own lives at all or much, 21% said they resembled somewhat, and only 1% said they resembled very closely. And 20% were unable to say what they thought. When asked to what extent their favorite TV character or person looked or dressed like them, whereas 60% of the children said those named never resembled them or did so rarely, 21% said they resembled sometimes, and only 12% said they did so all the time or often. While 51% of the children said that the settings in which they saw their favorite TV character or person, such as homes, schools, offices, cafes, restaurants, parks, streets, etc. did not resemble settings in their own lives at all or much, 24% said that they did very closely or somewhat. As with responses to how closely the lives of those named resembled their own lives, some children (18%) were unable to say what they thought. 7% of the children did not answer any of these questions.

It is apparent from these figures that more than half the children in the sample reported that neither the appearances, the lives nor the settings in which their favorite characters or persons appeared on screens bore much resemblance to the children's own lives. Nevertheless, these findings also aligned with children's clear preference for consuming transnational content anyway. There were no significant differences in responses between children based on age group or gender to any of these questions. They also support the notion that the content children prefer to consume on screens seldom contain representations of what they are culturally familiar with beyond their mediated environments, but appeal to their culturally hybrid identities. These identities are constituted in as much as they constitute themselves on a continuum of interactions between a child's inherent traits and sociocultural environs.

Negotiated National Identities

When asked what the word 'Indian' meant according to them, children's responses could be categorized in order of frequency as descriptions relating to one's place of origin or lived geographical location, culture, citizenship or nationality, and feelings the word evoked. Some responses belonged exclusively to a single thematic category, whereas longer responses could often be placed in more than one category. Descriptions based on one's place of origin or geographical location recurred 24 times and were expressed in terms of people in/from/belonging to/ being native to/born in/raised in/living in/having parental roots in India. What this figure reflects is the importance that these children placed on their lived locations in formulating their sense of belonging beyond their families. The terms in which this sense was expressed also point to their negotiating their sense of belonging a) globally, as in where in the world they are geographically located

and b) nationally and regionally as within India's geopolitical borders, while speaking from a local context.

Culturally, being Indian was defined 19 times, in terms of valuing the country's culture, being traditional, speaking many languages, celebrating many festivals, practicing many religions, having "a rich heritage" and emphasizing the idea of "unity in diversity". Here are some instances of how children expressed these ideas:

13-year-old girl: "Bollywood and its songs."

13-year-old girl: "Our traditions, culture, clothes, music, dance and food."

15-year-old boy: "Signifies independence, unity in diversity, a unit of patriotism and brotherhood."

15-year-old girl: "Home, culture, tradition, stereotypes, travelling."

17-year-old boy: "The collective feeling of being part of a country, the thought of always wanting what is good for the country as a whole."

17-year-old boy: "A community or a group of people who come together and are united irrespective of the versatile culture, language, traditions, etc."

An Indian was defined as someone who is Indian by nationality or citizenship 8 times. On 6 occasions, children described being Indian in terms of the feelings it evoked for them. Love, pride and respect were sentiments that recurred in this context. On 4 occasions, children who were all below the age of 10 simply said India was their country.

Here are some instances of how children expressed these ideas:

8-year-old girl: "I love my India (drew hearts), it is my motherland!!!" (drew more hearts)

11-year-old girl: "Proud, quickly developing, cultural."

12-year-old girl: “To me, the word Indian means Pride, Honor, Respect and Love.”

13-year-old girl: “The word Indian means a person from India. I am very proud to be an Indian. I respect the word Indian, and I love my country too.”

When considering such cultural descriptions, some infused with feelings of patriotism, what these voices of children also point to is the cultural diversity or hybridity of what their identities mean to them. They could also be understood as negotiated formulations of their identities that are a result of an intersectional understanding of institutional, whether educational, familial, governmental or mediated representations of national identity. In other words, it is more useful to think of national identity as a culturally hybrid construct or better, in terms of transcultural identities.

Culturally Hybrid Identities

Just as children were asked what being Indian meant according to them, they were also asked to reflect on what the word ‘global’ meant. The most frequent response that recurred 38 times related to something that involves or affects the earth or the whole world, all the countries of the world or people around the world. Here are a few voices of children expressing these ideas:

14-year-old girl: “Global means worldwide and can be used to describe anything concerning all the nations, i.e. the human race.”

15-year-old girl: “Relating to the globe or world. Worldly affairs are of utmost importance. It symbolizes peace, stability, unity, sustainability.”

17-year-old girl: “The world, as one.”

Only on 5 occasions, the idea of being accepting and respectful of cultural differences, or in the other words, the notion of unity in diversity was echoed even in understandings of globality:

11-year-old girl: “To me the word global means diverse in many ways. It also means respecting others' diversity.”

11-year-old girl: “The word global means accepting everyone for who they are and being united. To me, it means being united.”

14-year-old girl: “The first thing that comes to mind when someone says global is one big community. The second phrase that I relate to global is unity in diversity.”

Rarely, children linked the word to something specific, such as by relating it to business, connectivity, the pandemic or travel. These descriptions reflected features of contemporary globalization as Steger (2017) has defined it. There were no significant differences in responses between children based on age group or gender. Children's understandings of what the word global means were more focused on the idea of phenomena that have a large-scale impact, and less on the idea of their cultural meaning. What this suggests is that children have global imaginaries, or a growing consciousness of their globalities. More importantly, their identities constitute and are constituted in their culturally hybrid understandings of the global, national, regional and the local.

CHAPTER 5: ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Recruiting Research Participants

This chapter describes and interprets my ethnographic research process, starting with the recruitment of research participants. As noted in the previous chapter, even before I began recruiting research participants, I created an MS Excel spreadsheet grid to track potential participants' sociocultural identity markers. As and when I gathered any such details from the snowball sampling process, the surveying process that asked for children's identifying details at the end of the questionnaire, or from interviewing, I updated this grid. Doing this helped me ensure the representation of a diversity of ethnographic voices in my study, based on sociocultural markers.

When recruiting families, I ensured that the children were a good mix of age and gender groups. Snowball sampling did not lead me to any Muslim families or children studying in state curricula schools. It was not surprising that I could not access children studying in state curricula schools through these families, because many state curricula schools are often also run by the local government, and all the children I interviewed attended the more expensive and private schools. What is interesting to note is that for all the talk of "unity in diversity" and having friends from different religions that self-identified Hindu participants echoed in interviews, none of them were able to connect me with a single Muslim friend. Therefore, I ensured that I recruited at least one Muslim family and one Christian family to make my sample more religiously diverse, even if such inclusions by no means made them representative of larger religious groups.

I conducted 63 interviews with a total duration of approximately 55 hours. Of these, 13 interviews were conducted in person, mostly at participants' homes, thus enabling

observation. One teacher's interview was conducted at a school and two of them at a play school, which was one of the parents' places of work. As mentioned previously, the outbreak of Covid-19 made in-person observation and interviews no longer feasible. I had also originally intended to approach schools in different regions in the city, to enable the recruitment of families that represented the cultural diversity in Bangalore. However, the families that I recruited eventually through snowball sampling were mostly from areas in and around North Bangalore, close to where I lived. I interviewed a couple of families who lived in South Bangalore even though I was unable to visit their homes.

Of the 63 Interviews conducted, 25 were with children, 29 with parents and nine with teachers. Most participants were interviewed twice each, except on rare occasions when I determined that a third interview was required to gather sufficient data. The 12 children interviewed were between the ages of 7 and 17, comprising five girls and seven boys. Of the 14 parents interviewed, six were fathers and eight mothers. All teachers were women. Two children's fathers were unavailable for interviewing. I was also unable to complete the interviewing process with one family because both the mother and child decided they were not interested in being interviewed more than once.

Participant Observation

The eight families I interviewed lived either in independent houses, or in owned or rented apartments. Some of these apartments were in larger gated communities whereas others were in smaller housing complexes. I was able to visit one of each of these types of homes. Most of the couples interviewed had two children. In terms of employment, except for one family where the mother was a homemaker, all other families comprised working parents. While only two fathers had local jobs, one working with a locally

established NGO network and another into the construction business, all others were employed at multinational companies in various domains such as banking, software, digital marketing, industrial manufacturing and medical transcription. Whereas one mother was an engineer working with a multinational software company, three were in the education sector in various capacities such as a speech therapist at a school, a teacher and a tutor, and three were businesswomen who ran education, fashion and law related establishments. Thus, aside from English fluency which was not only a criterion for participant recruitment in my study, but also a marker of participants' relative class privilege in urban India, their residences and professions, the latter also being indicators of their education, also reflected the same privilege.

Since I did use my personal and prior professional contacts to recruit participants, I chose to interview three participants that I have known since my childhood but had hardly stayed in contact with for many years. One was a neighbor, one a relative, and the other a schoolmate. This decision proved to be an advantage because I was welcomed readily into these participants' homes. On a couple of occasions, I was invited to join a family for dinner after an interview. These meals were an opportunity for me to observe family dynamics in a way that only interviewing would not have allowed. For instance, I was chatting with a mother in her open kitchen while she was preparing dinner and her 12-year-old son taught me an effective way to crack open a boiled egg. When I asked where he had learned how to do it, his mother informed me that the child was interested in "life hacks" and often spent time watching YouTube videos on this topic. The family also had a ritual where the children played music on one of their iPhones at the table when they sat down for meals. I remember the children playing the popular musical hit,

Australian artiste Tones and I's *Dance Monkey* on one occasion and telling me that it was one of their favorite songs. The boy expressed an interest in wanting to visit the U.S. and asked me about my life here. At a later stage, being invited to the mother's birthday party helped me connect with several parents whose children eventually answered my survey.

The opportunities to spend time with my relative and her 12-year-old daughter who is also my grandniece, at family gatherings helped me acquire a heightened sense of the girl's passion for many things often considered culturally 'foreign' in India, such as baking sweet foods and listening to English music. We once sat next to each other for dinner at a wedding, dressed in traditional garb, eating with our hands, and discussed our mutual passion for the long-running and popular TV reality show *Masterchef Australia*. There were at least a couple of occasions when I hummed or sang a tune as I so often do rather unconsciously, when the girl was excited at recognizing it instantly, saying for instance "I like Dua Lipa [a popular British artiste], the song is called Levitating!". One time, my phone rang at the dinner table, and she recognized the song that was then my ringtone, popular American artiste Post Malone's *Circles*. These and many other such instances during intended or unintended observation underscored the cultural hybridity of being Indian in Bangalore today.

While interviewing children, noticing things they were wearing or things that were in the rooms that we were in often led to some interesting media-related conversations. For instance, while interviewing my youngest research participant, a precocious and talkative 7-year-old girl, I noticed her "Elsa" watch and asked her about it. What followed was her animated description of her favorite movie, Disney's *Frozen II*, and her favorite character, the protagonist Elsa, who had the magical power to turn everything she

touched into ice. During my interview with a curious and friendly 8-year-old girl, we were seated in the children's bedroom featuring a bunk bed that she shared with her younger sister. During a previous visit, when the girl had asked me what my hobbies were, I had said coloring and she had pointed to a canvas board and some paints in a corner of the living room and said that she had received these from her “Secret Santa for Christmas”. So, during the next visit, she showed me her paintings, one of which I was told was inspired by the animated Netflix movie *Over the Moon*.

In talking about the kind of books he liked to read, a 12-year-old boy brought me his copy of the book *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* to explain to me how it was written as a play and not a novel. I also noticed that he was wearing a Star Wars T-shirt, which led to a conversation about the types of movies he enjoyed watching. In this boy's 17-year-old sister's bedroom, I noticed several photos on the wall, and she pointed to one of her closest friends in a photo, describing her as “a *Gujju*”, or Gujarati, in reference to her friend's regional identity. These types of regional identification are common among many urban Indians when they talk about where in India people are from. In categorizing people this way, many Indians also ascribe some stereotypical notions of what people from different regions are like. For instance, some common notions about Gujaratis are that they are calculative when it comes to money and therefore also have a knack for business dealings. Such occupation or skill-based stereotyping also reflects the casteism that endures in routine living in urban India.

Even though observation became practically impossible when conducting online interviews, I did seize the few opportunities I had to notice and comment about anything that caught my attention in an interviewee's background on video. For instance, I noticed

a guitar on a 13-year-old boy's bed that led to a conversation about how hard his brother and he were finding online guitar lessons. While online interviews were frequently marred by internet connectivity issues for both the interviewees and myself, and ensuing audio and video issues as a result, I took advantage of the types of activities that online Interviews enable in a way that in-person Interviews cannot. For instance, when a 12-year-old boy was connecting to Zoom, I noticed that his profile picture was that of an anime character and asked him to tell me more about it. He explained that it was an image of a character called Todoroki Shoto from the anime show *My Hero Academia*. Similarly, a 13-year-old boy stated that his profile picture was his online "avatar" or "Minecraft skin". He also explained that the video game *Minecraft* lets one choose from a set of default skins, or one had the option of creating one's own online. His gamertag was "Cato Grubbs", based on a character from a book series he had enjoyed reading, called *The Enchanted Attic*. He also shared a school assignment document from a subject called "Global Perspectives" that required him to write an essay choosing from a list of topics. Another advantage of online interviewing was that it was certainly less intrusive for participants, and less challenging for me in terms of having to adapt to unfamiliar physical spaces.

Whether working with children in person or online as the interviewer, I had to make allowances for children to be children. In other words, this involved managing children's unique mannerisms, moods and psychological dispositions. A 17-year-old girl kept checking her phone during an in-person interview and said she was looking at the apps on her phone to help remind her about her media use. Some children were often rather distracted and fidgety during online Interviews. A 12-year-old girl kept muting and

unmuting herself on Zoom because she had got used to doing that for her online classes. When a 13-year-old boy seemed distracted, I asked what else he was doing simultaneously, and he said he was looking online for “the best way to describe” the video game *Brawl Stars* to me.

What was similar between in-person and online interviewing experiences was the welcome and sometimes unwelcome intrusion or presence of others in interviewees’ spaces. When interviewing a 7-year-old girl and an 8-year-old girl in their respective homes, their younger siblings, both girls under the age of 6, were present and often participated in our conversations. These younger siblings also brought things to show me at times such as a book, a photo or a toy. A 4-year-old girl sang songs while I interviewed her older sister, and occasionally also played with my audio recording device. Parents were often comfortable enough to leave me to talk with children and joined us occasionally to check on how things were going, whether during in-person or online interviews. I was also introduced to and sought consent with a couple of fathers, one in person and one online, while conducting interviews with their sons.

My firsthand experience of immersion in ethnographic field work was both rewarding and surprising in ways I could not have anticipated. Whereas observation was a more conscious process of immersion when actively conducting research, an unconscious process of observation occurred through my embodied presence in everyday living. I found myself wanting to take notes on anything and everything about my lived experiences that connected to the cultural hybridity of living in a globalized and urban Bangalore. For instance, a cousin with a career in finance mentioned on a phone call how the U.S. market was slow on account of it being MLK Jr. Day once. A friend going

through a divorce talked about how she had found support in a global feminist sisterhood through Instagram communities online. A hair stylist chatted with me about the many foreigners he had conversed with while growing up in Puttaparthi, a town in the southern state Andhra Pradesh that is most well-known for being the hometown of one of India's many spiritual gurus, Sathya Sai Baba. A chatty cab driver questioned the extent of the global pandemic's local influence, claiming the seriousness of Covid-19 was a hoax created by a corrupt government. It is such instances, in between conducting research activities, that made critical ethnographic interpretation a more insightful process.

In-depth Interviews with Children

On What Came to Mind When They Heard the Word 'media'

The initial semi-structured interviews with both children and parents focused on questions related to their media use, often mirroring questions I asked children in the survey. To understand how media featured in the lives of children, I began by asking them the question "when I say the word media, what comes to mind?". Most children's responses indicated that for these children, social media were synonymous with media. When asked what they meant by social media, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were frequently mentioned. YouTube was the next most popular screen media platform mentioned. Other terms mentioned included 'information', 'entertainment' and 'the news'. A couple of responses such as "files, photos and screen[s]", and "videos, pictures, video games...", along with the platforms hitherto mentioned, point to how screen media devices and content are also synonymous with media today for these children.

On Screen Devices in Homes

With regard to access to media devices and content platforms at home, predictably, survey findings aligned with interview reports. All the families interviewed had a television at home, with a couple of families owning two TVs. A few families also mentioned that the TVs in their homes were no longer in regular use because all family members were only using other screen devices. Whereas some younger children used iPads or desktop computers for online school, all the older children used personal laptops. Most families usually shared tablets, particularly children with their siblings, and many younger children used their parents' smartphones to play games whenever they could get their hands on these devices. All children aged 13 and above also owned personal smartphones. All families either had access to subscription based DTH platforms such as Tata Sky, either along with or sometimes until they had started subscribing to streaming video platforms such as Amazon Prime Video, Disney+Hotstar, Netflix, Sony Liv and Voot. Some families reported subscribing to streaming video platforms mostly after Covid-19. Most used an Amazon Firestick to convert their TVs into "smart TVs". Some families had to invest in more devices to enable children's online schooling, whereas others had access to numerous devices and content platforms well before Covid-19. These reports also reflect the class privilege of families in the study.

On Parental Control or Monitoring of Children's Media Use

Children's accessibility to devices and content platforms went hand in hand with parental concerns about children's media use. Some parents were more conscious than others in how they controlled or monitored their children's media use. For instance, in some homes, the parents had rules about how long their children were allowed to use

screen devices to entertain themselves in a day, whether it was to watch content or play video games. One mother was so exasperated with how much TV her boys were watching at one point, especially during their mealtimes, that she described having to discipline them as “it was a war every day!”. So, when they moved apartments, the parents decided not to renew their DTH subscription. The only choice the children had there on was to ask their parents for permission to use one of their devices, which as the father emphasized, were all password protected.

Whereas in other homes, children had more opportunities to use screen media devices largely unsupervised. An 8-year-old girl said that one of her parents would leave a phone behind at home if they went out without her, which meant that she could use the device in their absence without being monitored. A 13-year-old girl said that she spent nearly 3 hours in a day consuming content either on her computer which was meant for online schooling, or on her phone. From talking to her mother, I gathered that her mother was so busy caring for the girl’s younger sibling that most of the time the girl’s media use was not monitored. Older children also reported using social media apps such as Discord, Instagram and WhatsApp on their phones to communicate with friends online. Younger children accessed WhatsApp on their parents’ phones for information posted on official or unofficial school groups, that included parents and teachers, or parents only.

When it came to the types of content children were allowed to watch, a couple of younger children mentioned how they did not watch some content they were interested in watching because Netflix indicated that it was not age appropriate. However, a 12-year-old boy said that he did watch bits of the DC live action superhero series *Titans* even though Netflix called it violent as well. He claimed that he fast forwarded through the

scenes that he was not supposed to watch! A few parents and children also mentioned that the latter were not allowed to listen to certain types of music due to concerns about inappropriate lyrics. A 13-year-old boy said he enjoyed listening to rap music but only “the non-explicit versions” because he was not supposed to listen to the explicit ones. Overall, irrespective of parents’ varied approaches to managing their children’s media use, they acknowledged that they only ever had limited control.

On What Children Watched

With regard to what they watched, children reported using multiple screen devices to access multiple genres of content, via multiple platforms. Laptops, phones, tablets and TVs were used to watch web series and YouTube content. A few children reported watching children's TV channels such as Disney Junior and Nickelodeon Junior when younger and having switched to watching content only using streaming video platforms more recently. Once again, survey findings were also reflected in children’s responses on their favorite screen content genres and titles. Cartoons, children’s, fantasy and science fiction shows, sitcoms/comedies and TV dramas were the most watched genres. Older children said they watched more cartoons when they were younger, and older boys watched more anime. Few titles recurred among the shows or movies children named as favorites.

On Movies and Theaters

As in the surveys, these children also reported watching movies mostly at home, particularly on TV rather than on other devices. Some of them also had fond memories of going to movie theaters before Covid-19. Except for a handful of Bollywood titles, all other movie titles that children named were of transnational animated or live action

movies, mostly belonging to either the fantasy or science fiction genres. Children also named more unique titles across content genres, other than the ones already mentioned in surveys. These titles highlighted once more the varied content options available for these children's consumption.

In terms of content that children consumed on YouTube, while survey findings indicated that video-gaming related content was popular among boys, interviews helped understand such content's appeal for the boys in this sample. A 13-year-old boy stated that the reason he watched others play games on YouTube videos was so that he could play certain games vicariously. He said "we don't have a PS4 and consoles like that. We watch them play for us. They make it entertaining and it's more fun watching them play than playing ourselves". The boys were not only drawn to such videos because of gamers' impressive skills, but also because of the videos' entertainment values. A 12-year-old boy explained how such videos feature "captions to make them more interesting". The boys in the sample also named more gamers they followed on YouTube, adding to the list of those already named in the surveys. Both boys and girls also named a few games that they played on phones and tablets, which were not named in surveys.

On Print Media, Radio and Music

Importantly, interviews shed light on how children also preferred to consume transnational rather than Indian media content, even when it came to print or audio content. Whereas some children reported that their parents still subscribed to a newspaper, others reported that this practice had been discontinued in their homes within the last few years. Very few children mentioned that they read the newspaper. A couple of tweens reported enjoying newspaper comic strips, and a couple of teen boys reported

following the headlines and the sports news. Only one 17-year-old boy reported keeping up with the news using a news app on his phone, because he was interested in economics. Some children reported having cultivated reading habitually as a hobby, with most usually reading physical books. A few of the more voracious readers, all boys, spoke about reading both physical and electronic versions of books, and only one 10-year-old boy mentioned having listened to audiobooks. All these boys also reported preferring to read content on tablets. Occasionally, the children mentioned reading physical comic books, and in one instance an electronic version.

When asked what kinds of audio media content children listened to, most mentioned that when they were in their parents' cars, they would tune into FM radio stations to listen to English music. Some mentioned how they would play music from playlists on phone apps such as Apple Music and Spotify, or from flash drives using the Bluetooth technology. Some children also reported listening to Bollywood music.

On Children's Online Schooling

The interviews with children, parents and teachers shed light on how the lines between schoolwork and play or leisure time were being blurred for children in the context of media use for online schooling through Covid-19. A 7-year-old girl used screen devices actively for online learning as well as consuming entertainment content. My sense from talking to her parents was that she spent long enough on devices by herself for her parents not to be able to monitor exactly what she used her devices for throughout the day. A 12-year-old girl confessed that even though the school gave her time to complete homework online once classes ended, she never used that time for homework, and that her mother often scolded her for it. A 17-year-old girl stated that her

mother often scolded her brother whenever she caught him secretly using Netflix in between online classes. She added that since the pandemic struck, her brother had also secretly started playing video games on her laptop, without the knowledge of their parents. A 17-year-old boy talked about how boring online classes got on some days and how he would sometimes watch YouTube videos during classes.

The children reported using apps such as Google Classrooms, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Zoom for online school. Some children also took up other educational activities online beyond schoolwork through the pandemic. For instance, a 7-year-old girl talked about learning to code and type online. A 12-year-old girl said that she had attended an online science workshop through which she was able to conduct some scientific experiments at home. A 17-year-old girl said that she was taking a virtual psychology certificate course. A couple of boys were also being tutored online after school hours throughout the week. A 17-year-old boy talked about having found a physics YouTube channel that helped him understand concepts taught in school better. A related trend that became evident through such information was that as children got older, the more time they spent learning online, and the lesser time they had to spare for entertainment activities on screens. This was because their focus shifted from consuming entertainment to consuming educational content online.

When children talked about their hobbies, another trend related to children's media use emerged. Several children had found hobbies in producing original media content. For instance, a 10-year-old boy and his 13-year-old brother had both installed apps on their laptops to dabble in animation and video editing respectively. Two younger girls stated that they had made videos on phones that were later edited and uploaded to their

own YouTube channels, with the help of elders. One video focused on a girl talking about herself and another on baking. A 17-year-old girl talked about having published a story she had written on an app called Wattpad. A 17-year-old boy said that he was into photography and posted his photos online using Instagram. These reports demonstrated the importance that these children placed on performing identities online.

Talking Identity

The second interview with every child focused on asking them questions related to aspects of their identities. I initiated these interviews with a creative exercise where I asked interviewees to introduce themselves as if they were talking to someone they were meeting for the first time. Depending on what aspects of their identities they began with, I probed further into aspects that they did not touch upon. On most occasions these probes definitely included questions about one's age, gender, familial and educational backgrounds. I asked about occupations in the case of parents and future plans in the case of children, leading to questions on national identity, religion and caste. Conversations on familial backgrounds usually lead to information about one's region of origin, mother tongue and knowledge of other languages. Finally, I asked all interviewees to talk about their understandings of the word 'global'.

Introductions

Naturally, most children started by introducing themselves using their names. Younger children followed it up with what grade they were in or which school they went to, and sometimes how old they were. It was interesting to note how age was a significant marker of one's identity as children, but unless asked, no parent volunteered this information in talking about themselves. This observation points to the idea discussed in

the review of literature that age bears more significance in certain human life stages than others, and particularly in childhood. It also carries more weight in institutional rather than routine personal or social contexts.

Children then tended to list some of their hobbies, likes and traits. Girls tended to focus more on their personality traits or psychological self-perceptions, whereas boys tend to focus more on what they were skilled at. Younger children also expressed being self-conscious about aspects of their physical appearances. For instance, a 10-year-old boy said that he looked “like a 2D figure” because he was so thin and had been told so by others. A 12-year-old girl listed her personality traits such as being “funny”, “humble”, “kind”, “loyal” and “short tempered at times”, and also physical attributes such as having “brown hair”, being “long-legged” and “tall”. A 17-year-old girl said she took a psychology test that revealed that she was “a nerd” and “an advocate for peace”. Rarely, children also identified themselves by gender without being prompted. What such responses indicated was that unprompted, most younger children did not really think about, or perhaps lacked interest and awareness of their sociocultural identity markers.

After a few initial interviews, I learnt that unless asked, children did not identify themselves using sociocultural markers of identity such as nationality or religion. At this point, I reframed the question by asking people to describe themselves from a location outside of their country’s, or even planet’s boundaries. In subsequent interviews, I suggested that interviewees imagine that they were on another planet and had to introduce themselves to an alien they had nothing in common with, other than both parties being fluent in English. Using this approach proved effective in getting at children’s senses of their globalities, national identities, and ultimately their culturally

hybrid identities.

Being Humans on Planet Earth

After mentioning their names, children introduced themselves to the alien by identifying themselves as belonging to the planet earth and the human species. I then asked them to describe the planet. This prompted responses related to its geographical features, such as “it is a spherical planet”, “the third planet away from the sun”, with the sun being its “major source of energy”; it is “mostly made up of water and some land”; it has “plants” and “trees” that “grow on soil” and provide us with oxygen... food...”. A 10-year-old boy also added that humans as a species were affecting the planet, saying “sadly humans are destroying nature, so it’s [earth] not as beautiful as it used to be at one point. We take trees and water and use it for whatever we need, which is depleting the natural resources.” His views highlighted the idea that what we may consider truly global in terms of a shared experience is the planet’s ecosystem.

When children identified as human, I prompted them to think about age and gender by asking questions such as “do all humans look like you?” and “do all humans sound like you?”. This approach led to children describing humans’ physical attributes as well as their skills and traits. Some of the children pointed out that because the alien could see and hear them, they did not see the need to describe themselves by age or gender. This response only emphasized the physicality of gender as a marker of identity that colors the way humans tend to categorize and stereotype each other based on appearances. In such instances, I suggested that the children assume for a moment that the alien could not see them and then describe themselves. Children characterized the physical attributes of humans based on both commonalities and differences. For instance, they explained that

certain physical features were “common to all”, such as the number and position of facial features and limbs, whereas other features differed, such as “the colors of eyes, hair and skin”, as well as the sound of voices.

In describing the skills and traits of humans, older children made some thoughtful observations that also acknowledged both commonalities and differences between humans. A 13-year-old boy remarked that humans were “...very unpredictable. Some of them are nice, some of them are not, but if we are able to understand humans, it's very easy to simply become their friend or just get along with them”. A 17-year-old boy explained to the alien that:

Humans are the highest level of species. They have the highest intellect. They are the dominating species. Everything revolves around our species on our planet. We have advancements in every field... defense, warfare, technology... Other creatures haven't reached that level. They don't have proper communication skills, teamwork, community... This is quite strong with our species, but not with other species.

Gender Consciousness

When asked how they thought boys were different from girls, younger children aged 10 and below did not have much to say. In fact, a couple of boys were rather uncomfortable to even answer the question, so I rephrased the question quickly as “bodily parts aside, what do you think are the differences, in the things they do or how they behave?”. A 7-year-old girl talked about how the boys in her grade were interested in sports, and the girls in dancing. A 10-year-old boy remarked that boys and girls “aren't that different”, and that their interests were similar. Some older children who were not as knowledgeable about stereotypes also echoed stereotypical gender-based differences as younger children did when it came to traits. For instance, a 13-year-old girl said that “boys like cars. They're a bit naughty and they take less time to get ready than girls”. A

17-year-old boy noted that while boys and girls were no different when it came to “intelligence”, they differed in “interests, hobbies and behavior”. He elaborated that most boys were into sports, whereas girls were more inclined towards creative activities that required perfection, such as arts and crafts. His twin brother expressed similar views and added that while boys were “both mentally and physically strong”, girls were “gentler”. These views reinforce the idea that childhoods are gendered experiences.

The role of families, schools and the media as socialization agents on gender became apparent in children’s views. A couple of tweens acknowledged gender differences based on their lived experiences, but at the same time, they had also been educated about gender stereotypes and were vocal about being against such stereotypes. For instance, a 12-year-old girl said that while she did think that boys and girls thought differently, none of them should be stereotyped:

Boys are usually stereotyped a lot for being strong, mentally and physically, and girls are stereotyped for being mentally and physically weak and sensitive. About such stereotypes, I think they're really unfair and just because the world has seen a few men who are really strong and a few women who are really weak, it doesn't mean that all the women are weak. I do not like being stereotyped in any way and I don't think anyone should be stereotyped.

A 12-year-old boy said that “even though boys are pretty weird and hoity toity and all, girls are more hoity toity than boys. Some of them are very weird. Some of them are cool.” However, he also mentioned that people are prejudiced when it comes to “standards about what a girl should do or what a boy should do” or what they should wear. He said he did not agree with ideas such as only girls could wear the color pink, and only boys blue. This boy also emphasized repeatedly the influence his mother and his sister had had on his thinking about gender-related and other social prejudices. His 17-year-old sister stated that she had learnt about prejudice in school and researched about it

further. She even attributed her awareness of “feminism” and “sexism” to celebrities being vocal about “scandals” and “discussions on equal pay” via media. She was also grateful that though she was certain her parents had faced sexism throughout their lives, they had not perpetuated the same in raising her brother and her.

India to Karnataka to Bangalore

I asked children to explain to the alien exactly where on earth they lived, and this led to most children either naming their country or the city where they lived. I would ask questions such as “what is India?” or “what is Bangalore?” or “where is it?” to probe into their senses of their lived locations. I asked them to start by naming and describing, the continent they lived in, followed by the country, the state, the city and their area of residence. One 13-year-old boy also reflected on the way humans had divided the planet:

The human mind is very different. Some people are very greedy, and they want a specific place to themselves...they are not willing to share. A species on a different planet wouldn't want to divide everything into such big parts. I think they'd be smarter. They would have learnt how to unite and come together as one. My planet is not as united.

One 17-year-old boy explained to the alien that the country was divided into smaller areas so that the government could “get things done easily”.

When asked how they would describe India to the alien, many younger children described it as a “beautiful” country, with many “places” and “monuments” to visit. Their responses focused on both India’s cultural and geographical aspects, echoing survey responses. For instance, a 12-year-old boy described India as “a religious and cultural land”, “in Southern Asia”, with “a huge population” and “lots of languages”. A 13-year-old girl mentioned that the country had “many states, and every state has its own specialty”, whether it was with regard to the food people ate or clothes people wore. She

also noted that “the weather is different” in different places. When asked if and where they had travelled to in India, most children named a couple of places they had been to, which were often also their parents’ places of origin. This implied that even children’s notions about their own countries within this sample were mostly mediated, formed through interactions with their key socialization agents, families, schools or the media.

Some children also described the country in terms of its strengths. A 13-year-old boy called India a “very strong and powerful” nation with a strong “administration” and “strong military weapons”, that also plays “a big role in international trade”. He expressed how the country contributed to the world noting that “many people also go and work in other countries. Some of the smartest people, like the CEO of Google, is from India”. A 17-year-old boy talked about how great India was because Indians were “open to all religions”. His twin brother described India as a “developing country”. However, not all responses were celebratory, as illustrated in a 13-year-old boy’s words:

If I had to describe India, I wouldn't be so positive with my answers, considering they [the government] are doing a pretty bad job of handling the [Covid-19] crisis right now. So many other countries are focused on better things. These guys [the government] ...it's mainly about them. It's not about the country. They don't really care about the country.

In a similar vein, the boy also thought that Bangalore was also not a “great place to live in”. Even his 10-year-old brother was critical of the city. The brothers expressed their dissatisfaction about the roads in Bangalore, saying some were “not tarred”, and were “terrible”. The younger boy also mentioned that the city is “very noisy”, and the older one that “there is litter everywhere”, and that “the air is not very clean”. When asked if they had any place or places in mind that were better than their country in this regard, the older sibling said “compared to other countries like Australia”, where his cousins lived.

He added:

When we call them up, we do video calls and we see their roads and stuff, which are amazing. I've heard about their advanced daycare system. And I've seen some photos and when they moved into their house, they showed us around the neighborhood.

While most children knew that they lived in a state called Karnataka and named it, they did not have much to say about the state itself, except that it was one of the southern states of India. A 13-year-old girl described Bangalore as a city with a lot of “greenery”, many “malls”, “offices” and “parks”. One 17-year-old boy explained to the alien that the country was divided into smaller areas so that the government identified proudly as “Bangalorean”, praising the city for being “quite united as a whole, like one family”, where many languages were spoken, making communication with anyone convenient. He also expressed his love for “our South Indian, Karnataka food” that “everybody loves”, “no matter where you're from”. All these views point to the varied ideas about and approaches children had towards thinking about their lived locations, national, regional and local.

Familial Backgrounds and Languages

Whereas older children were able to zero in on their exact locations, younger children had limited capacities to describe where they lived in directional or spatial terms. They would describe the types of homes they lived in, but often did not know their addresses, except for sometimes knowing the name of the areas they lived in. Once they had talked about where they lived, I steered conversations towards who the children lived with. When asked about their family members, most younger children were unsure about how old their parents were, and a few of them were unclear on what their parents did for a living, but could name the companies that their parents worked at. Particularly in

understanding children's familial and regional backgrounds, talking to parents was useful. Incidentally, half the parents I interviewed had had arranged marriages, whereas the other half had had love marriages. In India, having an arranged marriage often implies that both spouses belong to the same religion and caste, and share a common mother tongue, whereas in many love marriages, there are differences between spouses based on one or more sociocultural identity markers. Both these facts held good for this sample.

Two families where the parents had had arranged marriages had roots in different parts of Karnataka state and spoke different mother tongues. For instance, a 17-year-old girl talked about her maternal and paternal grandparents being from two different districts, Hassan and Mandya respectively. She had travelled to their small towns "for functions or funerals" and described them as having "dirt roads and small houses". Her mother tongue Kannada is the most commonly spoken language in Karnataka state. A 13-year-old boy talked about his maternal and paternal grandparents hailing from smaller towns in Kodagu or as the British called it, Coorg district, where most people speak a language called Kodava Takk. He was unsure as to exactly where in Coorg his grandparents were from even though he had been there. His 10-year-old brother also talked about having travelled to Coorg and how it was "much greener", how things "were much more relaxed there", and how "there aren't as many job opportunities there" when compared to Bangalore. The older sibling also mentioned that the region had its own festivals, although he was unable to elaborate on them. Thus, exploring children's familial and regional backgrounds brought to the fore their culturally hybrid identities, even within the same state.

At this juncture, it should be noted that regional identities often intersect with one's

mother tongue in India. Aside from most languages being spoken in and around the regions they originate from, they are the most conspicuous markers of an Indian identity, within and beyond India, alongside names. Indian names also often carry various connotations about one's cultural identity to anyone familiar with the country's language, regional and religious diversity. Many urban Indians can guess what part of India a person originates from, and what the person's mother tongue might be, based on first or last names. A 10-year-old boy said that his father was from the southern state Kerala, and even though his mother was born and raised in Kuwait, and his father was also raised in Kuwait for a few years, "they were actually Malayalees". This is a way of referring to people from Kerala, many of whom speak the native language Malayalam. And for some Indians with a more discerning ear, they might also be able to guess what part of India a person originates from, based on his/her/their English accent, because many people tend to speak English by incorporating certain speech qualities from Indian regional languages.

In homes where parents had had love marriages and did not speak a common mother tongue, even though children knew about their parents' backgrounds, they were more familiar with their maternal roots. For instance, a 7-year-old girl stated that her father was part Kodava (from Coorg) and part Tamilian (in reference to people from the southern state Tamil Nadu where the language Tamil is spoken widely), but that she had learnt to speak some Telugu (a language originating from two other southern states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) from her mother. Two 17-year-old siblings talked about the fact that their mother was from Delhi in the north and their father from Vizag in the south, and while they could understand some Telugu, they were more fluent in their mother's

native tongue Hindi. It is interesting here to consider the role of these mothers' stereotypically gendered roles in child-rearing and their children's affinity towards the former's native tongues.

As noted in the introductory chapter, most urban, educated Indians are bilingual at the very least, and often multilingual. English medium schools require children to learn two other languages, which are frequently India's national language Hindi and the official language of the state that the child resides in. As another indication of post-colonial legacy, English also persists alongside Hindi as one of India's official languages. All the children in this sample were familiar with at least 3 languages. Some children had also opted to learn a non-Indian language, French or Spanish, as a second language instead of an Indian language. For instance, a 7-year-old girl had learnt some Spanish at her previous school and had started learning French once she changed schools. Her mother expressed her concerns over her daughter's inability to speak Marathi or Malayalam, the parents' native tongues. To address this concern, she had enrolled the girl in classical Carnatic music classes in the hope that the girl would pick up Indian diction.

Most Indian languages are derived from Sanskrit. In fact, most Hindu names have meanings in Sanskrit. A 17-year-old girl explained that her first name "means progress in Sanskrit, which is one of the oldest languages and often called the mother language of many languages in India". A few parents had made their children switch from learning the national language Hindi or the regional language Kannada, to learning Sanskrit in high school because it was believed to be easier to learn. For parents who were neither fluent in Hindi or Kannada because of their regional roots, they found it difficult to help children learn these languages well, and Sanskrit seemed like an easier option perhaps

because it comprises many of the root words found in many Indian languages. What stood out about language as a marker of identity in the case of the children in this sample was that most of them said that they were most comfortable speaking in English, and mostly spoke English in their homes. Once again, these children's linguistic diversities were representative of their culturally hybrid identities.

Religious Consciousness

When asked about their understandings of religion, and their own religious identities, while most of the children were aware of their religions by birth, some who identified as being Hindu were not really invested in the religion's beliefs and practices. Most children were able to name a few major Hindu deities and a couple of major Hindu festivals. For instance, a 10-year-old boy named the three major Hindu deities Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to explain that Hindus differed from Christians because the latter prayed to Jesus Christ. His 13-year-old brother also named the same three deities and added that "we have a *puja* [prayer] room, but we barely use it. We only use it for festivals".

Most Hindu children were aware that it was a common practice for Hindus to light a lamp before praying each day. Even though I did not ask the 7-year-old girl about her views on this topic specifically, her religious inclination was apparent in the religious practices she talked about performing along with her mother. For instance, she mentioned having gone to a temple with the Hindu deities of the "the 9 planets and the sun", in reference to the *Navagraha*, 9 deities of planets that do not coincide with all the planets of the solar system as is commonly understood scientifically. She also spoke of going to a "Shiva temple on Mondays", which led to her narrating a story that she had heard in school about how Lord Shiva's son Lord Ganesha came to acquire an elephant head. A

17-year-old girl identified as a “slightly religious” Hindu. She noted that there were “3 crore [30 million] gods in Hinduism”. Even siblings differed in their views on religion at times. Whereas one 17-year-old boy identified as a Hindu, his twin brother held more inclusive views:

I don't actually identify myself with any religion, but I was born in a Hindu family. I've been exposed to other religions. My mom reads the Bible. So, we celebrate Christmas as well. When I was young, I sang in church...in the Christmas choir. I have friends of all religions too.

Most children named several religions that they had learned about in schools, thereby highlighting the role of schools in socializing children into their cultural identities and lived realities. A 12-year-old boy talked about acting in a play based on a story from the Hindu epic *Ramayana* at school. A 13-year-old boy said that he had “made a video about Billy Graham, who’s a famous missionary in America, and that's someone who shares God's word with people who don't know about it”. He added that his school was “a Christian-centered school, so basically everyone in the school is Christian and all the teachers are Christian too”.

The views of the two boys who identified as being Christian and the one girl as Muslim were evidence of their families’ role in socializing them routinely into their respective religions. A 13-year-old Muslim girl, whom her mother described as “obedient”, seemed to practice what was expected of her without needing to understand why such practices were significant. She said that she had to “read *namaz* [prayers] 5 times a day”, facing towards “Mecca in Saudi Arabia”, because it was “god’s house”. She added that the Quran was about “what Prophet Muhammad did” and was “written by Allah”. Similarly, a 10-year-old Christian boy explained that “Jesus died for the sins of everyone in the world on the cross. And he rose again on the third day so that whoever

believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. He talked about being a part of a church group that was reading all the books of the Bible in 15 months, and rattled off the names of all the books, that he seemed to have learnt by rote. The boy’s commitment to his religion was heightened by his explanation that he had “been reading the Bible over and over again. It's not like a storybook. It's like rules you have to follow. Like the ten commandments. They're all true stories. It's history.” His older brother, a 13-year-old, compared India’s secularity as different from countries that are “driven by religion, for instance Iran. If you're not a Muslim, then you can get discriminated [against] and maybe even harmed for it. We learned that in history in school”. A difference between Hindu and non-Hindu children in this sample was that the Hindu ones were better informed about other religions than the non-Hindu ones were about religions other than their own. However, considering that only 3 of the 12 children interviewed were non-Hindus, it must be reiterated here that this difference cannot be generalized beyond this sample.

The role of the media in influencing children religious sensibilities manifested in interviews in two ways. Whereas such influence made some children think critically about religion, others perceived religion as a pathway towards righteous living. A 17-year-old girl attributed a lot of stereotyping about “Hindu-Muslim rivalry” being perpetuated by “the news”, citing an example about how a Muslim event was singled out for the spread of Covid-19. A 12-year-old girl expressed strong opinions against religion as a concept saying “I'm a Hindu, but I don't really understand the logic behind religion because the moment you have things that separate people, there are always going to be fights and riots”. She talked about learning from watching the news about how people

discriminated against one another for being from a certain religion. She believed that there was a lot of hatred between all the religions lately, saying:

Let's take the most common example... Muslims...because there are many Muslim terrorists, everybody thinks every single Muslim is a terrorist. There was a story I read called *Eid* by Paro Anand. After the terrorist attack on the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, a Muslim boy in school who is very nice is discriminated [against] and bullied because everybody thinks all Muslims are terrorists. What I learned from the story was to never discriminate [against] people based on their religion.

A 17-year-old boy was fascinated by the life of the Hindu deity Lord Krishna as depicted in the mythological show *RadhaKrishn*. He talked about how there was proof that Lord Krishna existed, and spoke passionately about what Krishna's purpose was:

At that time in the world, people had wrong ideologies and were behaving in ungodly ways, so he came to teach people what love was... love and respect. Love is a connection of the soul, not through the body, not through the mind. It does not go with external appearances. His bigger mission was to make people understand the path of righteousness or the path of *dharm*.

The boy also added that he was reading an English version of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* and claimed "if you read it, it will change your life". His mother and he also spoke passionately about practicing a type of meditation called *sahaj yoga*, which the boy claimed helps one "achieve a witness state", in a "collective consciousness", by raising one's "*kundalini*". Both mother and son reported having switched from practicing this meditation with a group, to "sessions on YouTube" through Covid-19. The boy's twin brother who also watched *RadhaKrishn* mentioned that he was reading an English version of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a part of the epic *Mahabharata*. What stands out from these children's voices is the fact that some of their understanding of their religious identities as well as religious sensibilities stemmed from English print media, in relation to familial and school influences. In fact, these children's understandings differed considerably, pointing to how religion is an important and controversial sociocultural

marker of identity in Indian contexts.

Caste Consciousness

I asked children what their understanding of the word ‘caste’ was and in instances where they had any sense of it, I probed further into their awareness of their own caste identities. What most children described during interviews was the idea that the caste system was an ancient way of how Indian society was divided based on people’s occupations. As noted in the introductory chapter, there were historically four major occupation-based categories in order of hierarchy among Hindus, i.e. the Brahmins comprising the intelligentsia, the Kshatriyas who were the rulers and warriors, the Vaishyas who were the traders and the Shudras who held menial jobs. The Dalits were groups of people who were excluded even from the hierarchy of castes. Most children in this sample were unable to recall the names of all four categories in their descriptions. Neither did any of them specify that it was a Hindu system. Children aged 10 and below had not yet been taught about the caste system in school or learnt anything about it from any elders.

While a 13-year-old girl thought that it was a system practiced during “British” rule in India, a 17-year-old boy said that it was a part of the “Vedic civilization” in Indian history. A 12-year-old girl mentioned that even though she did not know her caste, she knew that her paternal grandmother was a Tamilian Brahmin. She had learnt about caste in school, and knew that “the highest is Brahmin”, “they have thread ceremonies, and they don't eat non-veg[etarian food]”. She also said that her mother had told her how she had a lot of Brahmin friends in school and all of them “were nerds”. Only one pair of siblings, the older one a 17-year-old-girl and her 12-year-old brother were aware that they

belonged to a caste called “Gowdas”, a dominant community in Karnataka. Whereas the boy was aware that there are different subcastes among Gowdas, and that his father was “one kind” and his mother was another, the girl was able to name these subcastes as “Gangatkar gowdru” and “Das gowdru”. Thus, for most children in this sample, caste was a rather abstract and mostly irrelevant or invisible marker of their sociocultural identities in routine contexts.

However, some older children had been exposed to it through schooling and the media. For instance, a 13-year-old boy remarked that fortunately, he lived in urban India where caste did not matter, but that “in many underdeveloped parts of Karnataka”, people were still discriminated against based on caste. He lamented the fact that some “people haven't been educated that all humans are the same”. Another 13-year-old boy noted, “I don't believe in it. I believe everyone should be treated equally, not based on their religion or their race or anything”. This boy also recalled vaguely that he had learnt about how the caste system in India was similar to “the feudal system” in Europe.

In my interviews with parents, I drew from my own lived experiences of encountering caste. In certain institutional contexts, caste became relevant in ways that never mattered in my routine living. One context was when there were forms to fill out when applying to colleges. One was frequently asked to name or check their religious and caste categories in such forms, whether in publicly or privately funded educational institutions. Another context was when arranged marriages were initiated. What I did not anticipate was that even the children in this sample would discuss caste in similar contexts as a couple of girls did. A 12-year-old girl mentioned that even though the teachers in her school probably knew about her caste because many such identifying

details were listed in the child's school diary, children were discouraged from talking about it unless they felt comfortable to do so. Echoing a similar sentiment, a 17-year-old girl remarked that people should only be required to declare their caste by providing the relevant paperwork, if they want to make use of the reservation system to secure a college admission. Reservation is India's contentious and primarily caste-based version of an affirmative action system. The same girl also mentioned that caste comes up when marriages are being arranged. She spoke about "a mind block" that many Indian elders have about someone marrying outside their religion or caste, although she conflated these identity categories with race:

I know someone who is scared to tell her family that one, she's dating and two, he does not belong to the same religion. I don't know how my parents would react if I brought a white guy home and said I'm in love with him!

What such views indicate is that caste as a sociocultural marker of identity does still tend to matter in the lives of these children as they mature.

Being Indian in Relation to the Global

To explore children's understandings of their national identities, I often used children's survey responses to the questions about what came to their minds when they heard the words 'Indian' and 'global' as starting points. Children's views reinforced the recurring themes that had emerged previously through survey findings. Aside from descriptions of India in geographical and cultural terms as illustrated previously, children related the term 'Indian' to one's place of origin, citizenship or nationality, and feelings the word evoked. Below are some children's views that illustrate these themes:

12-year-old girl: "Being Indian means being traditional... following our culture... It means to be diverse, different and unique. Sometimes, it also means to be united."

This view represents the confusion and contradictions some parents also expressed in

thinking about what being Indian means, because as discussed in Chapter 2, national identity itself can mean different things depending on who claims or endorses it.

13-year-old girl: “A person who is from India. It's a privilege. Not many people are from such a diverse and awesome country like ours. India has more languages within one country than any other country.”

17-year-old girl: “I am Indian and proud of its [India's] development over the years and how far it's come. I think it has a long way to go but we're doing the best we can. Change starts with you, so if you change, your country can do better.”

17-year-old boy: “If you go around the world, it's a tag. It differentiates you from other countries in terms of a nationality.”

This view also echoes the idea discussed in Chapter 2 that a nationality has international currency as a concept, but it needs to be differentiated from national identity, based on who claims or endorses it.

Conversations about national identity tended to flow naturally between talking about India in relational terms to what was perceived as ‘foreign’, thus addressing simultaneously children’s senses of their globalities. Once more, children’s views on the term ‘global’ reflected some of the recurring themes that had emerged in survey responses. Children related the word to something that involves or affects the planet or the whole world, and all the countries of the world. Some children linked the word to a specific phenomenon, in words such as “global pandemic”, “global warming”, “multinational companies”, “the internet... connecting with people anywhere as long as you have Wi-Fi access”, etc. Cultural diversity was rarely associated with ideas of what ‘global’ meant. A 13-year-old boy was critical about how countries of the world were in

fact divided even diplomatically. Commenting on the role of the UN as someone who went through the newspaper regularly, he said:

The United Nations is supposed to maintain peace and friendly relationships between countries and strengthen countries that are underdeveloped. There are still countries that don't like each other and have unfriendly relations. They [the UN] aren't there to unite all the countries and come up with decisions. They can't stop a war. I don't think they can hold a country accountable if they break some laws.

The same boy also spoke about a subject called “Life Skills” in his school where his teacher had taught him about “unity in diversity” in India. The role of the school in influencing children’s notions of national identity and globality was evident in both what teachers mentioned they tried to inculcate, as well as what children said they had learnt in schools. For instance, some teachers talked about the emphasis schools placed on older children participating in “mock” or model UN competitions. A 13-year-old boy who mentioned having a subject in school called ‘Global Perspectives’ explained that children learned to compare “local, national and global” perspectives on a range of topics. He had chosen to write two essays on subtopics under the categories “water, food and agriculture” and “deforestation, habitat and ecosystem loss”. The same boy also talked about how he had edited a montage of video clips that children in his school produced “celebrating India” on “Cultural Day”.

Culturally Hybrid Mediated Identities and Transnational Media Content

Just as I asked whether children had travelled to places within India, I also asked them whether they had travelled abroad. In response, some children mentioned having visited places such as Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the city Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and the Maldives on vacations. Once again, this data suggests that children’s notions about places and cultures beyond India’s borders were mostly mediated, formed

through interactions with their key socialization agents, personal and social connections, schools and the media. For instance, a 7-year-old girl talked about how much she loved snow and wanted to see it. Her fascination for snow extended even to her choice of favorite character, Disney princess Elsa from the *Frozen* film series, whose magical power as previously noted, was being able to turn everything she touched into ice. The girl also talked about having seen photos of her cousins in a snowy place, although she did not know exactly where they lived. The families' relative class privilege once again revealed itself, be it in interviewees' talking about international travel experiences or having familial connections abroad.

Most younger children could say definitively that some of the movies, TV shows or web series they consumed were not set in India, even if they could not be more precise about where exactly these were set. The responses were similar when discussing both animated and live action shows. An 8-year-old girl said that the show *Just Add Magic* is set "some place abroad" and "not in India". A 10-year-old boy who was a big fan of the *Tintin* series, be it the comic books, the web series or the movies, did not know where Tintin lived. When talking about movies, he mentioned Disney's *Moana*, saying "I think it's in Hawaii, but I don't know where Hawaii is". In describing her favorite show *The Inbestigators*, a 12-year-old girl said that she thought the show is set "in America... in the countryside", whereas the show is actually set in Australia. When asked how she knew it was not set in India, she compared the roads she saw on screen to the ones she had seen in real life to note that "they [Americans] have proper roads...but ours here are sometimes not tarred, sometimes they're rocky... very dusty...".

Even when some older children claimed that settings were fictional locations, their

awareness of screen media content being transnational was apparent. For instance, a 13-year-old boy talked about how the video game *Brawl Stars* was not set in a specific location but that it could be played in “in different environments”, such as a cemetery, a desert or “a Mexican stall”. A 17-year-old boy explained that the anime show *Naruto* was “a fantasy”, but that “it could be in Japan”. His twin brother talked about forming “impressions based on what you see in videos of people” from India and abroad. A 17-year-old girl reasoned that she enjoyed watching transnational content precisely because it was “alien or foreign”, saying “it's so different from what I'm used to. I don't want to watch stuff that I already see every day”. It was also interesting that she noted that for her, ‘foreign’ does not refer only to things “outside India, but anything that I'm not used to... anything unknown”. That said, she also noted that the term ‘foreign’ is often “automatically associated with the U.S.” and “white people”. When asked why she thought so, she said:

I've never known anything else, but of course now with Black Lives Matter, my perception of America is growing. Europe also comes up, but everyone is in awe of America and adapting to their culture so much. I have a friend who loves all things American. Her impressions come from social media. On Wattpad, most of the stories are set in America and in American schools. You're free to date anytime you want... the schooling and education system is different... Americans move out of home after 18. It seems so cool, but I really don't want to move out of my house because I don't want to cook for myself! I'm pampered here. Why would I want to stop that?!

The girl's 12-year-old brother also echoed his sister's views, while admitting that he had learnt many of these things from conversations with his mother and sister, and “also the news and YouTube”:

Well, I don't want to be racist, but most of them are white because the whites are the majority in America, whereas the blacks are a minority who are fighting for justice. They treat blacks like slaves. So, now they're changing. They keep saying black lives matter...fight for the blacks...blacks need justice...

Even the boy's description of being Indian was in comparison to being American. He said that he preferred the "cultural" rather than "the Western" ways. He also conflated nationality with religion when he remarked that Christians first dated and then got engaged, and that "Christians mostly have love marriages, and Indians mostly have arranged marriages". When talking about weddings being different in the two countries, he remarked that Indian clothing was a lot more "colorful". What he said next about American weddings was as amusing as it was telling about the role of screen media in how this boy perceived the U.S. The boy was under the impression that some Americans got married in churches, while others did "in barns"! When asked how he had come to this conclusion, he described watching it in a movie and explained that "because they [media producers] know how it is, it must be true. I haven't been to America, so I'm basing it on movies".

Two children were connected to other national cultures through food that they learnt about via screen media. A 12-year-old girl who loved watching TV shows on food was keen to travel abroad to be able to try authentic cuisines. She wanted to know "how real sushi" and how "proper Malaysian and Chinese cuisines" tasted. A 13-year-old girl who was also into food shows talked about how her mother and she both enjoyed trying to cook non-Indian foods such as "lasagna" and "spaghetti".

Class

Even though I did not ask questions about social class as an identity marker with any of the interviewees, some of the things they said were clear indicators of the same. For instance, a 12-year-old girl told me that the houses on the show *The Inbestigators* were not very different from the house she lived in. An 8-year-old girl talked about there being

“a clubhouse” in the gated community where she lived, with facilities such as a gym and a sauna. She pointed to the view from outside her apartment window and showed me a basketball court and a tennis court on site, where she played in the evenings. A 13-year-old boy told me about how his school library subscribed to the car magazine *Top Gear*, related to the long running British TV show about cars with the same title. He said he would go through the magazine to find out which cars were the most expensive, so he could tell his friends about it. A 17-year-old girl talked about how her teacher asked students in a class on accounting about how many of their parents owned businesses, and how much pocket money each of them got every month from their parents. The girl explained that she found the teacher’s queries inappropriate but also not surprising because of the kind of children that went to her school.

Even the future educational and career aspirations children expressed having, when they did have a sense of these things, reflected their class privilege. The fields that children wanted to work in ranged from aeronautics and automobile designing, to industrial and organizational psychology and quantum mechanics. However, even within this sample, class differences between families were deducible when children spoke of material possessions in terms of the brands of media devices the families owned, or the cars their parents drove. One 13-year-old boy also talked about how decisions to buy physical books to read or what versions of video games to buy were often made based on how “expensive” these things were.

Children sometimes shared information about their personal and social lives that helped me understand them better as people through their lived experiences, and not only as media users. When children spoke about their social lives, they often expressed their

sense of isolation through Covid-19. While a couple of children moved apartments between interviews, a couple of others also changed schools. A 7-year-old girl talked about video calling her best friend frequently because she missed her. An 8-year-old girl said that because she had changed schools during Covid-19, she not only missed her friends from her previous school but had also not met any of her new classmates in person. A couple of sporty 17-year-old boys spoke about how bored they were because of not being able to meet their friends to play as well as watch cricket matches on TV together.

Children's Identities and Transnational Screen Media

The interviews I conducted complemented survey research findings that for the children in this sample, transnational screen media content is a default choice and that children's favorite characters or persons on screens were liked for their skills and traits, rather than their bearing sociocultural identity markers such as age, nationality, geographical location, race or religion.

Not only did interviews also indicate that both anime shows and YouTube content were popular among these children, but they also helped understand the reasons why they were.

What the interviews were instrumental in understanding was how such media consumption and the children's culturally hybrid identities, at the intersections of their urban, English-speaking and relatively privileged social class identity markers, irrespective of their age, gender or regional roots, engaged with each other. They established that the screen media content these children preferred to consume seldom contained representations of their sociocultural identity markers to negotiate with.

Furthermore, they established that transnational screen media, along with schools, played a substantial, or even central role in children's understandings of their globalities, while also providing insights into how and why they accomplished this.

Finally, ethnographic research was key to understanding that these children's major socialization agents, i.e. the family, the school and the transnational screen media they consumed played an interrelational role in children's formulating and negotiating their culturally hybrid identities.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer two RQs:

RQ1) what role do transnational screen media play in how urban Indian children think about their culturally hybrid identities?

RQ2) in what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities?

I answer the RQs as they apply to my study's sample in this chapter and discuss what we might speculate about these answers about others with commonalities to those in my study sample. I also consider the possible theoretical directions the answers and discussion point towards and identify potential areas for future research. Finally, I provide a reflexive commentary on my role as a researcher and bring the autobiographical narrative that I began in the introductory chapter to a close.

Research Questions and Answers

So, what role do transnational screen media play in how urban Indian children think about their culturally hybrid identities? I answer this in two parts. First, I discuss the features of children's habitual media use in my study sample. Next, I discuss how these features related to how the children thought about their identities.

Transnational Screen Media Worlds in Children's Lives

In terms of the types of screen media content the children in this sample preferred to consume, fictional content, whether movies, cartoons or live action shows such as sitcoms/comedies, children's, fantasy or science fiction shows, was the most preferred. Both survey and ethnographic research revealed that children's favorite characters or persons on screens were liked for their skills and traits, rather than their bearing

sociocultural identity markers such as age, nationality, geographical location, race or religion. The survey findings also suggested that both boys and girls in the sample favored more male than female characters or people. However, such favoritism was perhaps more a reflection of how many more male characters or people are represented on transnational screen media than female ones.

Many children in the survey sample also enjoyed viewing non-fictional content such as YouTube vlogs and video-gaming related videos. While the contents of these videos can be construed as novel programming genres unique to online media platforms, they can also be understood as evolved versions of traditional TV reality shows. However, they do differ from traditional TV reality shows in some ways. Firstly, these videos often featured individual YouTubers, thus giving their followers the illusion of sharing a more intimate connection with the person on screen. Secondly, these YouTubers posted content they produced themselves, creating an illusion of such content being more authentic than content that traditional media producers or even gatekeepers create and curate. Through such production, YouTubers also inspired their followers with the idea that they too could produce similar content, without the hassle of presenting their talents to off-screen industry gatekeepers or on-screen reality show judges.

The ethnographic research also indicated that children in this sample watched other YouTube content such as news videos and videos where movies and TV shows were discussed. Once again, while such videos could be construed as novel programming genres, they can also be seen as evolved versions of traditional TV news stories. They differ from traditional news stories in that their producers are usually also consumers themselves, not unlike the consumers of such videos. While this might make such videos

more relatable to viewers, it also increases the chances of such videos presenting biased misinformation as facts. What is relevant about the features of YouTube videos to this study is the fact that children's mediated understandings of their globalities, or in other words of transnational cultures, can be very misleading and problematic. Such imagery is potentially even more hegemonic and stereotypical than mass media imagery that global neoliberalism at its heights has produced and reproduced.

Both survey and ethnographic research made clear the popularity of both anime shows and YouTube content among these children. Although this finding may suggest that there was perhaps more diversity in the transnational imagery that these children had access to and consumed routinely, it might well still be perpetuating the production of stereotypical imagery that more established forms of mass media are known to reinforce. Whereas it can be argued that children have the ability to make meanings of adaptations of media texts across media formats through a process of intertextuality, in this sample's case, since the children also preferred to consume transnational print and audio content as well, there was little scope for meaning making via cross-cultural intertextuality between Indian adaptations of transnationally produced content and vice versa. All these claims are also only informed speculations and not generalizable beyond this study sample. Since the purpose of my study was not to examine children's media industries, texts or discourses on any of these research areas, my analyses of the content discussed so far are at best cursory and potentially useful broad brushstrokes of the contexts I was immersed in. Critical cultural studies of online media texts and industries are needed to further examine the validity of such claims beyond this sample.

In effect, transnational screen media content lured children in this sample into

becoming a part of mediated communities, both fictional and non-fictional, inhabited by characters, people and places that bore few resemblances to most of the children's sociocultural identity markers and lived environments. The sociocultural identity marker that connected those on transnational screen media and the urban Indian children interacting with them in this study was primarily social class. As previously suggested, the class privileges of both the characters and persons children named as their screen favorites as well as children's own privileges manifested in discernible ways. The colonial and post-colonial legacy these children's English fluency represented was perhaps the most conspicuous marker of the class privilege that lured them into understandings of their globalities through transnational screen media.

Transnational Screen Media and Children's Identities

As is evident from this study, for people living in India, being Indian also means negotiating with the forces of naturalized sociocultural identity markers such as age, gender, class, intraregional origins before familial or ancestral migrations from villages or towns to cities, multilingualism, religion, caste and names as well. The survey research was as telling in what it revealed as what it did not about the screen media content available for children's consumption in this study sample. It pointed to the fact that even if there was screen media content that represented the children's sociocultural markers of identity and lived experiences more closely, these children preferred consuming transnational screen media content that appealed to their culturally hybrid identities. Thus, their identities were being constituted in as much as they were constituting themselves on a continuum of interactions between a child's inherent traits and sociocultural environs. What became apparent from the ethnographic research was that

these children's major socialization agents, i.e. the family, the school and the transnational screen media they consumed played an interrelational role in children's formulating and negotiating their culturally hybrid identities.

It can also be argued that the lack of resonance between the mediated transnational screen media content children routinely consumed, and their sociocultural identity markers seemed to lure children further into rather than away from consuming such content. While survey research established these children's access to multiple media devices and consumption of multiple genres of predominantly transnational screen media content, ethnographic research highlighted how the outbreak of Covid-19 only intensified media use and consumption.

So, in what ways does transnational screen media consumption influence these children's perceptions of their lived sociocultural realities? The ethnographic research indicated that transnational screen media, along with schools, played a substantial, or even central role in children's understandings of their globalities. Furthermore, it provided insights into how and why such content fostered children's understandings of their globalities. Even parental concerns about their children's media use focused on the time children spent on devices and the child-appropriateness of content rather than the content's representations of 'foreign', rather than Indian cultures. Thus, transnational screen media content seemed to act as both a lens and a shield for these children, influencing a relational understanding of their national, regional or local identities or fostering a limited understanding of them, via global media cultures. As a lens, such media imagery provided these children a magnified view of mediated global realities. As a shield, such imagery protected these children from the realities of their lived

sociocultural environments. From the teachers I spoke to, the school's role as a socialization agent in fostering national pride only shielded children further from the reality of India's identity politics, particularly of religion and caste. Most parents I spoke to talked about how closely religion and caste are tied to Indian politics.

Study Implications

Considering that transnational screen media consumption acted as a shield against children's understandings of what it means to be Indian in this study, I now reflect on the potential implications of how this may influence these children's lived sociocultural experiences in the future. Both survey and ethnographic research supported the notion that the screen media content these children preferred to consume seldom contained representations of their sociocultural identity markers to negotiate with. I argue that such negotiation becomes taxing labor as children mature into adults and have to bridge the gap between their perceptions of mediated globalities and national realities. They are challenged to exercise a critical reflexivity that may only reconcile such differences uneasily. For instance, some of these children's parents expressed their regret in not leaving India in the past when such opportunities presented themselves. Here it should be noted that even though better economic prospects might be the most compelling reason for why many Indians migrate abroad, the families in this sample as noted previously as well, also enjoyed considerable relative class privilege in India.

More than wishing for better economic prospects for their children, some parents expressed palpable disillusionment in the state of India's current political and sociocultural climate, and fears about how much worse things may get moving forward. Most teachers I interviewed talked about knowing several alumni that had relocated to

other countries, and school children who aspired to relocate. Importantly, the data in this study suggest that the popular Indian cultural trope of “unity in diversity” is essentially a convenient escapist notion that urban Indian adults turn to, as they are challenged with the reflexive labor of negotiating their culturally hybrid identities routinely in relation to their lived sociocultural environs. Ironically, such negotiation that many urban Indian people might find too challenging beyond a point in their home country is probably what also makes many of them adaptable and even outstanding global citizens as diaspora in countries with relatively healthier sociocultural climates. What is even more ironic to consider is that the exposure to mediated globalities that might lead many urban Indian people to become diaspora is perhaps also what elevates their senses of nomadism in other countries, on account of their culturally hybrid identities.

Ultimately, what my study contributes to our understanding of cultural hybridity is that on the continuum of cultural hybridities (Pieterse, 2015), one bound within Indian geopolitical borders is particularly complex. Therefore, it challenges individual agents with taxing reflexive labor to negotiate their culturally hybrid identities in routine living.

Reflexivity and Resonance

The sociocultural markers of my own culturally hybrid identity as a researcher are as follows: a petite, brown-skinned, 41-year-old, Bangalorean, U.S. educated, academic, middle class, multilingual, agnostic, cisgendered single woman. At different stages of conducting fieldwork, at least a few of these markers became topics of conversation with interviewees. After playing back audio recordings and listening to myself speak in initial interviews in preparation for subsequent, I noticed my tendency to share my own experiences or views, particularly if they resonated with what interviewees said. I resisted

the urge to do this thereafter and succeeded in being empathetic without talking about myself necessarily. With the participants that I knew before I began fieldwork, I also noticed that it was easier for both interviewer and interviewee to digress from the topics being discussed and for conversations to become too personal. I also noticed my tendency to want to educate and engage in intellectual discussions with interviewees. Rather than curb my natural tendencies altogether in interviews, it helped to be mindful of them in future interviews. In doing so, I used both empathy and resonance to my advantage, while also reminding myself regularly to remain curious about and open to whatever views interviewees expressed. I also reminded myself about the purpose of the study and its research questions before each interview.

Working with children was as enjoyable as it was challenging. As interviewer, to keep up with and make sense of younger children's often fragmented sentences and narrative tendencies to go off topic called for the utmost patience and persistence. At times, I also chose not to probe further into certain topics based on my sense of what interviewees seemed comfortable to reveal or not reveal about their lives in initial interviews. With some children, I let my sense of their intellectual capacities and personality traits direct decisions on whether to probe further into some topics. I did on occasions get the sense that the older children I interviewed had engaged more consciously with the media they were consuming between interviews, almost as if they had paid more attention to such content to report them to me. My own knowledge of and passion for popular culture as academic and consumer were frequently useful in interviews. Being cognizant of how these were strengths during interviews made me mindful of how they can be weaknesses when interpreting qualitative data. Thus, while

coding and analyzing the data, I considered critically whether or I might be placing undue importance on what some interviewees said that I may have potentially prompted them to think about or explore further, however intentionally or unintentionally.

The voices of my research participants echoed my own childhood and earlier adulthood experiences ever so often during interviews. This experience only sharpened my thinking about my research topics from a critical distance, while occupying the unique position of both an insider, considering my own sociocultural identity markers listed earlier, and an outsider, as an academic returning to study similar identity markers. To conclude on a more personal note, what I know for sure is that growing up as I did on foreign media, much like the children and parents in my study sample, enabled the most enriching and excruciating experiences of living my nomadic life between India and the U.S. over the last decade. Being in India reminded me of the reasons why I left in the first place. I acknowledge the many privileges and perils of my globalized Indian, or rather my culturally hybrid identity. I continue to negotiate both the privileges and perils as human and academic, with exhaustive reflexive labor.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Hi!

Here is a list of questions that should take you no longer than 25-30 minutes to answer. Please answer all questions. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Thanks.

Survey

1. Which of the following do you have in your house? Check **all** that apply.
 - A TV
 - A computer
 - A laptop
 - A tablet
 - A smartphone
 - Internet

2. Which of the following do you own or use by yourself? Check **all** that apply.
 - A TV
 - A computer
 - A laptop
 - A tablet
 - A smartphone

3. Using which of these do you usually watch TV? Check **all** that apply.
 - A TV
 - A computer
 - A laptop
 - A tablet
 - A smartphone
 - A set top box connection (such as Tatasky or Dish TV)
 - InternetOther (please specify):

4. For how long do you usually watch TV in a day? Check only **one** that applies.
 - Less than an hour
 - One to two hours
 - About three hours
 - Four hours and above

5. When do you usually watch TV? Check **all** that apply.

On weekdays:	On weekends:
<input type="radio"/> In the morning, before going to school	<input type="radio"/> Before, during or after breakfast
<input type="radio"/> At school	<input type="radio"/> During lunch time or after
	<input type="radio"/> Before or during dinner time

- After returning from school
- Before or during dinner time
- Before going to bed
- Before going to bed

6. Whenever you watch TV, you usually do it... (Check **all** that apply):

- Alone
- With family members (father /mother /grandfather /grandmother /brother /sister /cousin)
- With friends (classmate/schoolmate/playmate/neighbor)

With others not listed above (please specify):

7. What are your favorite kinds of TV shows? Check **all** that apply.

- Children's Shows
- Cartoons
- Movies
- Music
- Sports
- Talk Shows
- Soap Operas/Serials
- Sitcoms/Comedies
- Game Shows
- Reality Shows
- News

8. From the shows that are on TV or on the internet right now, what shows do you watch regularly? Please list as many as you can think of.

9. Name your favorite person/character from any of the TV shows you listed.

10. Describe why this TV person/character you named is your favorite.

11. To what extent do you think the life of this favorite TV person/character in the show you named resembles your own life? Check only **one** that applies.

- Very closely resembles mine
- Resembles my life somewhat
- Does not resemble my life much
- Does not resemble my life at all
- I can't say

12. How often do you find that this favorite TV person/character you named looks or dresses like you in the show? Check only one that applies.

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

13. To what extent do you think the show settings in which you see this favorite TV person/character you named (such as homes, schools, offices, cafes, restaurants, parks, streets, etc.) resemble settings in your own life? ? Check only one that applies.

- Very closely resemble my life
- Resemble my life somewhat
- Do not resemble my life much
- Do not resemble my life at all
- I can't say

14. Name another favorite person/character from any of the TV shows you listed.

15. Describe why this TV person/character you named is your favorite.

16. To what extent do you think the life of this favorite TV person/character in the show you named resembles your own life? Check only one that applies.

- Very closely resembles mine
- Resembles my life somewhat
- Does not resemble my life much
- Does not resemble my life at all
- I can't say

17. How often do you find that this favorite TV person/character you named looks or dresses like you in the show? Check only one that applies.

- All the time
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

18. To what extent do you think the show settings in which you see this favorite TV person/character you named (such as homes, schools, offices, cafes, restaurants, parks, streets, etc.) resemble settings in your own life? ? Check only **one** that applies.

- Very closely resemble my life
- Resemble my life somewhat
- Do not resemble my life much
- Do not resemble my life at all
- I can't say

19. Name any other favorite people/characters from any of the TV shows you listed earlier. Feel free to list as many as you can think of.

20. What does the word “Indian” mean according to you?

21. What does the word “global” mean according to you?

22. Finally, would you be interested in talking about the questions you just answered sometime in the future? Please check only **one** of the options below.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I don't know

End

Please provide the following information:

Full name:

Age:

Grade/Standard:

School:

Nationality:

Date:

Time: