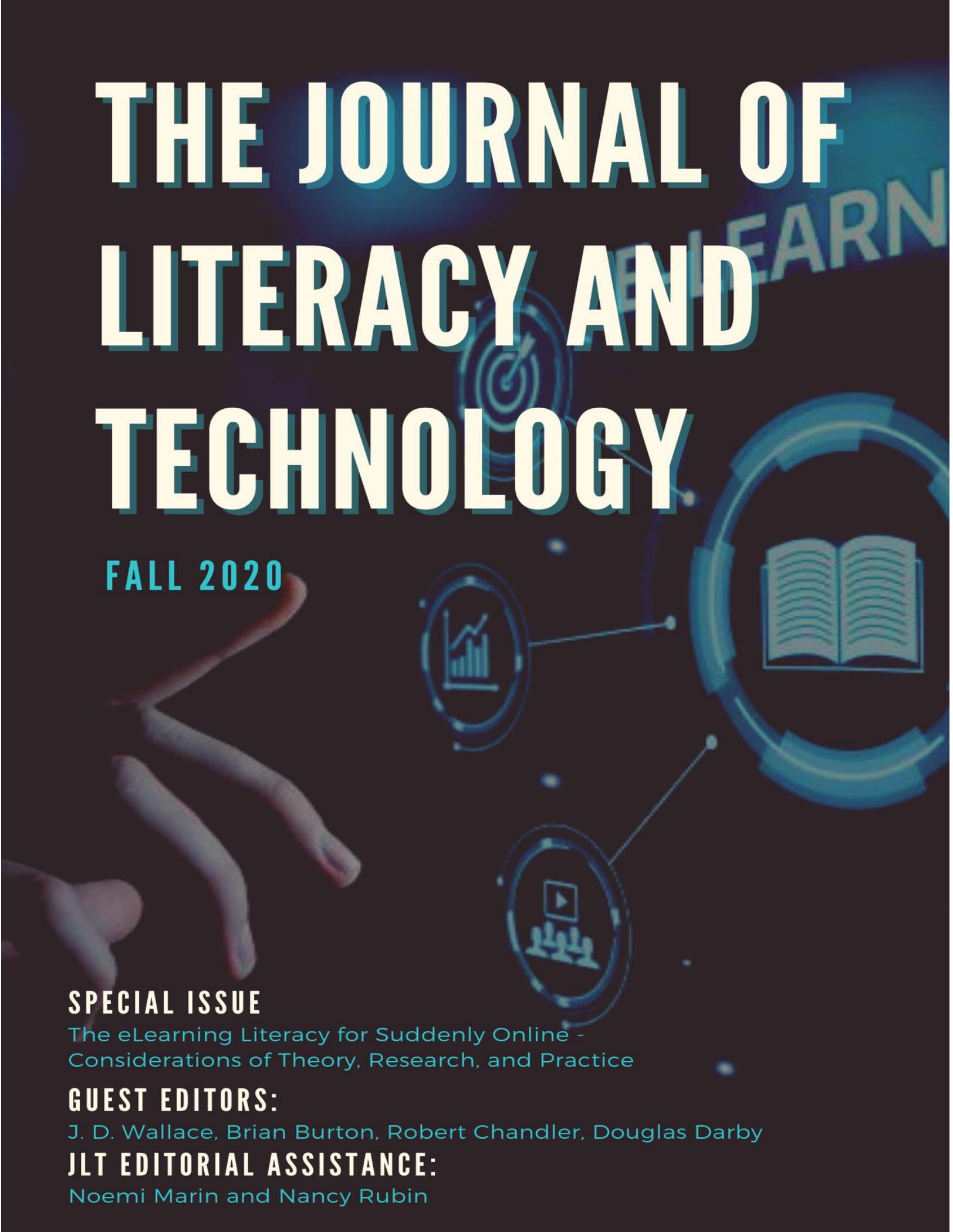


THE JOURNAL OF LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGY

The background features a dark blue gradient with several glowing light blue icons and a hand. On the left, a hand is shown with fingers pointing towards the center. In the center and right, there are circular icons: a target with an arrow, a bar chart with an upward-trending line, a play button, and an open book. A large, faint 'E-LEARN' watermark is visible in the upper right quadrant.

FALL 2020

SPECIAL ISSUE

The eLearning Literacy for Suddenly Online -
Considerations of Theory, Research, and Practice

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How to Be Socially Present When the Class Becomes “Suddenly Distant”

Article Info	Abstract
Jeanine Warisse Turner, Ph.D. Georgetown University, Washington DC	<p>“Suddenly Online,” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, created a unique challenge for communicating presence within the university classroom. Social presence, or the degree of salience of another person within an interaction, was especially challenged within the online context. This paper explored two unique challenges in establishing social presence: 1) the collision of front stage and backstage as faculty and students connected from their homes over videoconferencing and 2) specific strategies created for engaging attentional social presence. Goffman’s (1956) theory of social interaction and Turner and Foss’s theory of attentional social presence (2018) were used to explore the experience of 16 graduate students as they moved from in-person to online classes. In depth, semi-structured interviews were used to examine the key themes associated with the concepts of front stage and back stage and the four choices of attentional social presence as they applied to the students’ experiences. The themes helped to explain the way participants described the abrupt move online. Additionally, participants provided advice and pedagogical strategies are recommended that were informed by these theories to help faculty understand the implications of creating presence within the online classroom.</p>
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Keywords: attentional social presence, dramaturgy, online learning, mediated communication	

The sudden transition to on-line education in the spring of 2020 was, as one student told us “a bit of a shock” (Interview 14, May 27, 2020). While distance learning and online learning has a long history (Spector, 2014), moving from a traditional format to an online format within less than a week is rare.

Virtual learning has been previously introduced quickly during emergencies (Czerniewicz et al., 2019; Tull et al., 2017). Holzweiss et al. (2020) did a case study on the online courses of the college community in Houston, Texas, during the Hurricane Harvey crisis in 2017. The study found that some faculty members didn’t recognize the potential student challenges like bad internet connections or not having a computer and recommended that educational institutions make specific crisis plans in case of an emergency by providing support for students and faculty. Facing the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Sloan Consortium built up an online learning platform (Lorenzo, 2019; Moore, 2012). Researchers found that virtual classrooms helped but challenges still existed. Teachers could not reach some students because the disaster cut off communication. Additionally, some students performed poorly because they could not adjust to the new online learning format.

Several studies have already explored the suddenly online experience of COVID-19 from the teacher’s experience. Johnson et al. (2020) surveyed 897 staff and faculty among 672 U.S. higher educational institutions in April 2020. They found that about 90% of the institutions executed virtual learning. After moving the class online, half of the faculty respondents reported that they did not set the same expectations for assignments. Two thirds of

the respondents had had no online teaching experience. Many faculty stated that although they were stressed about being suddenly online, they were always willing to help students relieve pressures by making accommodations like decreasing the workload of the course. Sadler et al. (2020) considered videoconferencing technologies, such as breakout rooms to be a significant tool for online engagement. Trust and Whalen (2020) found that inadequate preparation and training with technologies hurt the effect of teaching remotely. Doucet et al. (2020) reported that teachers had difficulty giving feedback to students in larger classes.

So far, little research has explored the student’s experience during the pandemic. Peters et al. (2020) interviewed 15 graduate students in a university in Beijing, China. Through auto-ethnographic stories, the study described students’ struggles. Some students were so worried about the disease and the university lockdown that they could not focus on their academic work. Others had trouble with communicating and collaborating with fellow students online. This paper seeks to contribute to the literature by exploring the students’ perspective of the experience of the suddenly online transition

Theoretical Perspectives and Research Questions

This study brings together insights from two bodies of theory, dramaturgy as articulated by Erving Goffman (e.g. 1959, 1963) and the concept of interactional presence as developed by Turner and her colleagues (e.g., Turner & Foss, 2018; Turner & Reinsch, 2007, 2011). The former provides an overall framework and helps to

explore the consequences of placing home offices, bedrooms, and other normally private spaces on-line. The latter helps us to understand participant decisions related to projecting, monitoring, and managing on-line presence.

Dramaturgy

Goffman focused explicitly on “social interaction . . . in which two or more individuals are physically in one another’s response presence (1983, p. 2), drawing some of his examples from classrooms (e.g., 1963, pp. 50, 63, 89). But he “did not overlook encounters that were not strictly face-to-face” (Klowait, 2019, p. 606; see, e.g., Goffman, 1963, p. 30, note #5, and 1983, p. 2).

Goffman’s work provides several useful concepts. Those especially relevant to this research include situational proprieties (Goffman, 1963, p. 24), involvement/engrossment and “involvement shields” (Goffman, 1963, p. 38), and the distinction between “front” and “back” regions or stages (Goffman, 1959, chap. 3).

Situational proprieties are ground rules for behavior within a social gathering. Face-to-face interaction “renders persons uniquely accessible, available, and subject [i.e., vulnerable] to one another” (Goffman, 1963, p. 22). Consequently, communities develop normative guidelines some of which—including situational proprieties—become cultural expectations with “moral” force (Goffman, 1963, p. 24). The situational proprieties provide guidance with regard to interpersonal communication-- Among other things, they “shape participants’ focus and intensity of involvement during . . . interaction” (Schultze & Brooks, 2019, p. 713). When

these guidelines are not followed, participants may receive negative sanctions.

Because participants wish to avoid negative sanctions, “we may expect to find a variety of barriers to perception used as *involvement shields*, behind which individuals can safely do the kind of things that ordinarily result in negative sanctions” (Goffman, 1963, p. 39, emphasis added). Involvement (or, more accurately, lack thereof) can be shielded by “blocking perception of either bodily signs of involvement or objects of involvement, or both. Bedrooms and bathrooms are perhaps the main shielding places in Anglo-American society” (Goffman, 1963, p. 39).

The distinction between front and back regions is one that Goffman develops with the concrete example of waitstaff moving from a dining room (in which they served food in a formal manner) and a kitchen (in which they behaved with considerably less formality). In many—but not all—situations, front and back regions are demarcated by a physical barrier such as a kitchen door. A back region “can be instantiated wherever BR [back region] behavior takes place” (Ross, 2007, p. 315). Situational proprieties differ between front and back, and adult persons are expected to recognize and to abide by the appropriate ones.

Attentional Social Presence

Turner and colleagues developed the concept of multicomunication, the simultaneous participation in more than one conversation (Reinsch & Turner, 2019; Reinsch et al., 2008). As part of that work they observed that multicomunicators frequently divide their attention among multiple interactions (Turner & Reinsch, 2007) and discussed how communicators

attempt to project their presence into multiple interactions (Turner & Reinsch, 2011). This work led, in turn, to an analysis of presence in on-line interactions at a more macro level (Turner & Foss, 2018).

Turner and Foss's theory of attentional social presence (2018) describes the need for communicators to address the fact that individuals carry digital devices that can distract them from conversations. The increased practice of multi-communicating demands that communicators must often first engage the attention of their audience before they can start a conversation (Reinsch et al., 2008). Attentional presence describes four strategies for managing attention: budgeted, entitled, competitive and invitational. Specifically, the *budgeted* strategy involves situations where communicators allocate part of their presence to one communicator and part to another. *Entitled* describes a presence strategy where one communicator tells another communicator to put their distracting technology away and focus on the conversation. *Competitive* presence describes situations where the communicator competes for audience attention using persuasive strategies. Finally, *invitational* presence describes a strategy where a communicator focuses completely on the conversation with the goal to understand audience perspectives and learn. Professors often find their students engaging in budgeted presence; professors can respond by trying to establish entitled ("put away your phones"), competitive ("how can I make my lecture more interesting?"), or invitational ("let's discuss this topic together").

The concept of presence has been pivotal to the success of distance learning (Boettcher et al., 2016). Goffman's (1963)

front and back stages and Turner and Foss (2018) attentional social presence are new ways of understanding presence in online educational environments.

Research Questions

To better understand the impact of the spring, 2020 transition to on-line university education we posed the following research questions.

Research Question 1: How did participants confronted with the challenge of being suddenly online manage their front stage and back stage presence?

Research Question 2: How might the theory of attentional social presence provide a framework for understanding the construction of social presence within the suddenly online experience?

Method

Data were collected from 16 graduate students, over a two-week period following the end of the 2020 semester at a university located on the east coast of the U.S. (The study was approved by the University's Internal Review Board as part of an ongoing exploration of presence.) This university suspended in person classes on March 16, 2020 while students were away during spring break.

Respondents

Data were gathered in semi-structured interviews with 16 students; the interviews averaged one hour in length. This study consisted of 13 Chinese students, one U.S. student, one Indian student, and one student from the U.K. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 29. Two of them were male and fourteen were female.

One student was a second-year graduate student, and the rest were first-year graduate students. Two of the students completed their classes while residing in hotels (for quarantine) and then in their own homes in China. Three students shared rooms in India with family or roommates, and 11 students had single-occupancy rooms in the U.S. Interviews are referred to in this research according to their number to keep the participant anonymous.

Interview Questions

In order to explore Goffman's front stage and back stage concept (1963), participants were asked to comment on the logistic challenges they faced ("What difficulties have you had during the online learning process in the past two months?"). Additionally, they described their home environment that they had to create to participate online. To explore the theory of attentional social presence, participants were asked about questions addressing the characteristics of each type of presence. Finally, participants were asked to give advice to both students and teachers on how to approach online classes going forward ("What advice would you give to a student/teacher taking online classes in the fall?").

Analysis Process

To analyze the data, each interview was transcribed, read, and reread for recurring, emergent patterns. Using Tracy's (2013) and Saldaña's (2016) steps to inductive analysis. On a line by line basis, each interview was coded initially with primary cycle coding by *in vivo* codes (Tracy, 2013). These codes were then assigned to categories. As new codes were added to categories, these categories were continuously compared to the initial

category and the definition of this category was adjusted. These categories were grouped, and themes were created to explain the groupings.

The next step of the analysis was to examine the theoretical constructs of budgeted, entitled, competitive, and invitational presence theory to understand how the themes representing the participant experiences fit within attentional presence theory. Similarly, the front stage and back stage concept was used as a code to understand instances where participants addressed the challenges of dealing with their online academic environment within the context of their home environment

Results

All sixteen participants reported a disruption as they moved from the traditional classroom to the online context. They also noted that faculty and some of their fellow students appeared to be having similar experiences. Within the context of how students navigated their experiences of front stage and back stage we identified 8 themes describing their experience. Two themes described challenges associated with connecting to the class: technical issues and lack of transitions. Three themes described challenges with staying engaged during the class: motivation, invisibility and distractions. Three themes associated with describing the experience itself: informality, virtual window, and social presence.

Within the context of understanding the types of presence that students experienced, we found themes that we used to describe participant reflections that were associated with each of the four types of presence. Some themes talked about issues that constrained that type of presence and

other themes talked about how that type of presence was facilitated within the online environment. Specifically, we found three themes within the category of budgeted presence (distraction, invisibility, and technological function), two themes within the category of entitled presence (technical rules and physical classroom rules), two themes within the category of competitive presence (content, and format), and three themes exploring invitational presence (online opportunities, online constraints and informal dialogue).

Front Stage and Back Stage

The first research question asked how participants managed their front stage and back stage presence within the suddenly online environment (See Table 1, themes are organized in order of frequency of themes). All the participants experienced Zoom, synchronous videoconferencing for their classes. As students and faculty tried to translate the classroom experience to the virtual videoconferencing classroom, they discussed the challenge of managing their house environment which became the backdrop for the their virtual connection to their classroom environment by discussing challenges with connecting, staying engaged in class, and the classroom experience itself.

Table 1

Sample Quotation for Each Theme within Front Stage and Back Stage Construct

Sample Quotation	Theory	Theme	Frequencies
Interview 3: “I think I participate more in the face to face more than the online environment. Because I like to communicate directly with teachers or classmates, but in Zoom online classes I can only type to my classmates or raise some questions to the teacher because I don't want to interrupt anyone during the class.”	Front/Back Stage	Technical Issues	21
Interview 10: “So it's not only about how to take a class, but also about the way we regard this class. Most of the students wear pajamas to attend the class. So I just feel like these online classes are totally informal.”	Front/Back Stage	Informality	10
Interview 7: “We can see my professors’ shelves. I can see the setting, I mean, the decoration in their house. I even can see, you know, some of my classmates, they used their own wallpapers on the zoom	Front/Back Stage	Virtual Window	8

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camera which represents their taste. I think it is really interesting.”

Interview 13: “Some professors have shrunk the class time and this means that we don't have much time and many opportunities to participate. Usually, if we did this in a physical classroom, there would be some free time for us to ask questions or talk with the professor. But if it's just one hour, the time is tight and limited, we would just focus on the real important thing to do at that time. So I cannot ask questions like ask as many questions as I can during class time and once it ends it's finished. I don't have the motivation to send an email to him to ask the question if that's not a super important question. For me, it's harder to participate in the virtual class than in face to face classes. And if there's not good timing or opportunity, I usually choose to not participate that much.”

Front/Back Stage	Motivation	7
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Interview 10: “You know, a camera cannot always record every single corner in a picture of yourself. So, there are some, you know, some corner that the camera cannot record. You can always see the picture projecting it on the screen and you will always find that there's a single you know corner that a teacher in the classroom cannot find what you are doing. So it definitely makes it easier to distract to focus on something else.”

Front/Back Stage	Invisibility	6
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Interview 12: “The weirdest thing I noticed is that I would feel like I'm talking to myself. Like, I am not used to Zoom like any kind of video. I've never done video conferencing before this. For the most part, I'm very used to face to face interaction and seeing people in real-time reacting, like how their body positions, you know, react to what you're saying, or

Front/Back Stage	Social Presence	6
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you can kind of feel the presence of a person that way. So I would if I was doing a presentation or like going on like even now, and I'm like, talking just in my apartment. It's like I'm just sitting in my apartment talking at a computer as opposed to talking to a human being.”

Interview 6: “I think At times, it could just like drag on a lot You know, say if they were just like sat talking and talking and talking and it wasn't really like a presentation or the presentation was like one or two slides, but it was just like them being in this environment where you know you have like your phone right next to you, or like a TV or music or the kitchen or whatever, you can just go and do things. Um, I think if they're just going to sit there and talk at you, they're going to lose your attention, super quickly. And they can't really do anything about it because they're not in a classroom where you can't really do those other things.”

Front/Back Stage	Distractions	4
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Interview 3: “I think I participate more in the face to face more than the online environment. Because I like to communicate directly with teachers or classmates, but in Zoom online classes I can only type to my classmates or raise some questions to the teacher because I don't want to interrupt anyone during the class.”

Front/Back Stage	Lack of Transitions	4
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Challenges with Connecting

Technical Issues.

The technical issues associated with connecting could also be distracting. The effort associated with participants trying to decide when to talk and remembering to unmute could contribute to awkward communication. Participants talked about the challenge of sharing a screen with the

rest of the class and then remembering that everyone could now see everything that was on their laptop. Another technical issue that came up involved the use of virtual backgrounds. Zoom technology provided the capability for some students with a certain advanced level of computer processor to change their virtual background so that other people in the class could not see their actual home environment. While some participants

liked the virtual backgrounds, other participants found the virtual backgrounds distracting and disruptive, especially when students changed them multiple times during one class session.

The lack of technical skill of the professor could also be disruptive as professors had to learn how to teach with the technology *while* teaching with the technology. But the most challenging aspect of the videoconferencing environment was the inability to keep from talking when someone else was talking. Or the difficulty in knowing when the professor was looking at a student or when a student was looking at another student. The object of any one person's eye contact was difficult to determine which contributed to the challenge of knowing when to talk. One participant said this:

You can't have multiple conversations going - and there's always that awkward moment where somebody says something right before the professor says something and it's like, "No, go ahead. Go ahead." Everyone's trying to kind of figure out who gets to go first. That was to be the biggest annoying thing. (Interview 12, May 26, 2020)

This technical challenge was noticed by participants as it influenced discussion as well as how it influenced the professor. One participant commented about his professor:

He's used to being in a lecture-style classroom talking to people. . . And he can kind of read the tension or whatever in the room and tell when people kind of want to contribute or raise our hands. Now you can say something, and you'll see 20 squares

of people not react. (Interview 12, May 26, 2020)

Lack of Transitions.

A unique aspect of the suddenly online environment was a recognition that while the virtual window was the lifeline to the class, it did not involve a commute of any kind. There was no need to drive, take a bus, or walk to a class. In fact, a student never had to leave his or her bed. With a click of the computer, the student was in class. There was no transition time built in. Not only was there no need for transportation to the class, the lack of transitions also meant that students did not have to prepare or get their bodies ready in the same way for an online class that they did for a virtual class. They could attend class in their pajamas or at least without changing their clothes. Many of the activities that we might do to get ready for a face-to-face meeting can provide the opportunity for mental preparation time. Even the ten-minute allocation within the university schedule allowing students to move from one class to another gives the student some transition time. Said one participant:

When walking to campus, I step out of my apartment 40 minutes in advance. During the walk, I will adjust my attitudes and have some exercise so when I arrive, I can focus better because I changed not only the physical environment, but also my psychological feelings... but when I stay at home, I just moved from my bed to my desk. (Interview 1, May 18, 2020)

Staying Engaged in Class

Motivation.

Another theme that emerged when examining the front stage and back stage collision was the participant's lack of motivation. The traditional classroom environment, the buildings, and the campus, constructed a space that contributed to a student's ability to focus and engage in the learning contract. For many students, the lack of these cues made learning difficult and made it hard to stay motivated. Said one participant:

Until two weeks ago I used to love the classes. I used to love being there, and now I kind of like hating it and then feeling really bad because the teachers are trying like twice as hard. I just didn't feel as engaged ...I felt really bad because they're putting in like one hundred and fifty and I'm putting in like way less. (Interview 14, May 27, 2020)

This response really illustrated the critical challenge of reducing everything that a university has to offer (buildings, campus, study areas, trees, gates, walls, activities, clubs) to a videoconference window and an asynchronous platform. It reinforces that the front stage and backstage of participants came together to provide a link but with that link, left so much behind while also letting so much in.

Invisibility.

In addition to the window revealing distractions, the virtual window was also limited visibility and sometimes created a sense of *invisibility*. The camera's view was limited to a certain square. Activities outside the square were invisible. Participants talked about the distraction that this window could

create because they felt invisible. This distraction could lead to disengagement. Said one participant:

When I'm in a real class ... I'm used to looking into the instructor's eyes to generate some eye contact or give a nod when I agree with what the instructor said...which helps me concentrate when I'm in a real class, but I'm not that visible in a virtual class. (Interview 5, May 21, 2020)

Another participant reinforced this idea and talked about how the invisibility influenced his motivation to participate:

In a zoom classroom, since nobody is looking at me or nobody's noticing what I'm doing. Nobody is focusing on me, so I don't have to do [participation]. I don't want to do this. So my participation is basically decreasing. (Interview 7, May 21, 2020)

Distractions.

The virtual window provided a view into other homes which could create distractions. When students and professors share the same environment (in an in-person class), the background is shared so it becomes less distracting. When students and professors do not share the same environment, the window into different environments can be distracting, as well as the various environments themselves can distract students. In the example of the student feeding the baby in class, not only were other students distracted, it is very probable that the student mother was also distracted. Participants were connecting from different time zones. One participant asked to give her end-of-semester presentation early in the class period since it was midnight where she was connecting

from and she did not want to keep her family awake. She presented from the bathroom of her house with a shower curtain behind her and the door closed. Said one participant about distractions:

I share the same room. It's my boyfriend, so I don't have an independent space. So sometimes whenever I have class, my boyfriend is next to me, having meetings, or talking. Sometimes he just passed by behind me, it's kind of distracting to me. (Interview 15, May 21, 2020)

Distractions also came in the form of text messages and notifications that arrived on the very same devices they were using for class. Finally, the distraction of the health concern of the pandemic while also trying to concentrate on class was consistently in the backstage of every participant.

Classroom Experience

Informality.

Finally, when it came to the front stage and back stage collision associated with the course, participants talked about the informality of their surroundings and its impact on their participation. Some participants felt more comfortable in class because they were participating from their own room. Others commented that the informal, casual atmosphere could make it difficult to focus. One participant reflected:

I feel more relaxed expressing myself online because it's not in our classrooms where I feel that everyone's looking at me. I feel more pressure to say something in the classroom. Online, I don't care because I'm not so sure that everyone is paying attention to me so I can just

talk freely. (Interview 2, May 22, 2020)

Virtual Window.

The front stage of the classroom collided with the backstage of people's homes. The students and the faculty had a view into each other's worlds. Some connected from a quarantined hotel in China, others from a basement or closet in their family's home, others from a bedroom. The majority of the participants talked about this *virtual window* that provided a view into the backstage of people's lives showing details about those people that would never be revealed in a traditional classroom. For example, some professors or students had pets that walked through the screen, creating a more informal environment. One participant commented:

Our professor has a cat and he likes his cat very much. It surprised me because he was so strict in the classroom. In the course before he never shared his daily life with us. He just talked about the content of courses. When we can see him in his house ... he always interacts with his cat. (Interview 1, May 8, 2020)

While some participants saw this window as an opportunity to learn more about the professor or the people in the class, other participants mentioned the distraction created by this *virtual window*. Said one participant, "One of my classmates always held her dogs and sometimes the dog was barking, and she had to feed her dog" (Interview 2, May 22, 2020). Another participant described watching another student take care of her child during class:

One of the students had a baby. The time that the class met was also the time that it was like lunchtime for

them. She would sit there and feed the baby off camera during class. (Interview 6, May 24, 2020)

classmates and teachers are far away from me. (Interview 13, May 26, 2020)

Social Presence.

A final theme identified as it relates to the front stage backstage construct were comments concerning the sense of presence that participants experienced. Many participants talked about the nature of the online experience and how close they felt to their students and the class. Said one participant:

Sometimes I feel closer because I see people’s faces. But sometimes I feel more distant, we can see each other but it’s hard to have personal conversations with them. So, I have some trouble. I feel that my

The next section of the paper will talk about the types of presence that participants experienced, using the attentional social presence framework.

Attentional Social Presence

The second research question asked how might the theory of attentional social presence provide a framework for understanding social presence within the online experience of students? To answer this question, themes were identified as they related to each type of attentional social presence (See Table 2, themes are organized in order of frequency of themes).

Table 2

Sample Quotation for Each Theme within Attentional Social Presence Construct

Sample Quotation	Theory	Theme	Frequencies
Interview 2: “He said that we had to use our videos so he could see our face each time. And if we just closed the camera and he would call our name and say, ‘Please open your camera, please. I wanted to see all your faces.’”	Entitled	Technical Rules	24
Interview 4: “I prefer sharing my ideas during the office hour in an online environment because I could prepare what I want to discuss ahead of time so I could talk with my professors in a more organized way.”	Invitational	Online Opportunities	19

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<p>Interview 8: “During the first week I could not focus because I was not used to taking class just on the screen. I feel like there is too much distraction beside me. I can have my food. I have my water all beside me and I can play with my phone anytime I want. So that is too much distraction and I cannot focus.”</p>	<p>Budgeted</p>	<p>Distraction</p>	<p>14</p>
<p>Interview 3: “And as for the competitive presence, I think teachers are competing with students' mobile phones. It’s really hard. Some teachers might use their pets to attract students' attention. I think most teachers will improve their content of this course to compete with mobile phones.”</p>	<p>Competitive</p>	<p>Content</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>Interview 12: “We will have a presentation, at the end he would kind of ask, ‘Okay, any questions?’ People would be a little hesitant to answer, I think, for a variety of reasons. So he would just start his questions and start talking. And once he broke the ice that people would start to contribute, I think. People can yield to his authority a lot of times, because he was the person in charge.”</p>	<p>Competitive</p>	<p>Format</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>Interview 11: “About the group project, I still find it easy to have some face to face communication and we can meet in the library and ask some questions and have a deep conversation. But if it’s over Zoom, I fear that some people are tired, and some people just refuse to say things and some people may get confused. Sometimes it’s a little awkward to talk over the internet. So, I think the efficiency of group discussion is not very great.”</p>	<p>Invitational</p>	<p>Online Constraints</p>	<p>8</p>

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<p>Interview 7: “At the moment that you turn on the camera, you will notice that on the screen people can only see part of you. They can’t see your table. They can’t see what you’re doing off the camera. You know, you do something with your mobile devices off the camera.”</p>	<p>Budgeted</p>	<p>Invisibility</p>	<p>6</p>
<p>Interview 4: “Before every class begins, Dr XX will have a very casual talk with us like just talk about our recent life, the coronavirus, just like that. It isn’t related to the teaching, just the casual talk. Sometimes he would say, ‘You’re so shy. What about the coronavirus in China?’ or ‘What do you think about it?’ something like that.”</p>	<p>Invitational</p>	<p>Informal Dialogue</p>	<p>5</p>
<p>Interview 1: “If I am in face to face classes, I dare not check my phone. I will put it in my bags and just check the emails after classes.”</p>	<p>Entitled</p>	<p>Physical Classroom Rules</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>Interview 5: "I think as we can activate multiple conversations at the same time, just as budgeted presents define will have a virtual class, you can use the chat functions on zoom and immediately ask whatever you want to ask where you have a question."</p>	<p>Budgeted</p>	<p>Technological Function</p>	<p>1</p>

Budgeted Presence

Budgeted presence involves the practice of multicommuting or participating in multiple conversations at once. Many of the participants discussed how the compartmentalization or the *invisibility* of their behavior to the professor and the other students, as well as the *technological functions* of Zoom on their laptop had a huge impact on their decision to multicommutate. The invisibility of their behavior meant that students needed to

police themselves to keep from multicommutating. Said one participant:

One of my good friends was in literally every single one of my classes and so the entirety of each class we were just texting each other the whole time. In that sense everybody else was not as engaged or motivated or focused... And then as I said, no one can see everything that you're doing so. It makes it a little bit easier. (Interview 6, May 24, 2020)

The *invisibility* of multicommuting behavior and the appearance of other students not as engaged influenced students to multicommutate more. Said one participant, “I noticed that some of my classmates, they talk less in a zoom call class. Actually, sometimes it seems like they're playing games or doing other things and other people don't pay attention to teachers at all” (Interview 2, May 22, 2020). One participant talked about the importance of taking ownership of her own classroom environment by removing these *distractions*:

Now if I want to pay full attention to the instructor, I need to do more ... like muting my phone. Exit messenger on the desktop or open the zoom... so that I can't see any other applications in the background. I think that helps me concentrate. (Interview 5, May 19, 2020)

Finally, another participant reinforced the invisibility challenge:

In the space that the camera cannot catch you just can do whatever you want. Maybe you can use your mobile device to reply to your friends' messages. I know some of my friends watched a TV series. (Interview 7, May 21, 2020)

Finally, in addition to the distractions from having immediate access to the digital devices to keep you from class, a *technological* function within the videoconferencing environment allowed students to multicommutate within the context of the class. With the chat function built into the videoconferencing environment, students and faculty could participate in a chat about the course content while the professor or other students were talking. Students could chat generally with

the whole class or privately chat with individual people. When this practice was encouraged by the professor, it could keep students more engaged. Said one participant, “I think as we can activate multiple conversations at the same time...you can use the chat functions on zoom and immediately ask whatever you want to ask” (Interview 5, May 19, 2020).

Entitled Presence

Entitled presence concerns efforts by the communicator to control the attention of their audience. Participants compared *technical rules* in the online environment with *physical rules* in place face-to-face. The traditional classroom environment of face-to-face in the same room offers a power and authority to the professor that could allow them to make *physical classroom rules* regarding use of laptops or digital devices. Specifically, many participants mentioned how their professors had *physical classroom rules* preventing the use of digital devices. In the online environment, the lack of visibility of the professor, as well as the need to use a digital device to access the course, made the implementation of entitled presence less feasible. However, many professors exerted *technical rules* in their online classrooms to try to control the environment. Specifically, participants noted that some professors required that students show themselves on camera. Said one participant, “A lot of my professors were adamant about keeping your video on while you were in class to make sure that you're actually participating” (Interview 12, May 26, 2020).

For those students that could not show themselves on camera because of a technical problem or a bandwidth challenge, professors told them they needed to participate frequently in the chat. One

participant talked about her experience, “One student went back to China and her computer was broken. The professor said she must send him a message privately every three minutes or five minutes to prove that she was listening to his class” (Interview 10, May 18, 2020). Other participants talked about feeling silenced when professors used the “Mute All” feature. Said one participant, “Some of my professors, they were like directly muting all of the students. We have to listen, like we cannot speak anymore” (Interview 7, May 21, 2020).

Competitive Presence

Competitive presence is an important strategy for professors in the traditional, face-to-face environment as they vie for the attention of the students in their classroom. This strategy is even more important in the virtual, online environment where the students face distractions (only some which they can control) in their home environments. Many of the participants talked about specific strategies that they saw professors use. It seemed professors focused on both *content* and *format* strategies to compete for student attention. For *content*, some professors used simulations, technological tools, and videos to engage students. In addition to attending to course content, professors also found ways to structure the session to keep students engaged. For example, professors used break-out sessions to create opportunities to mix up the content using a different *format*. One participant talked about how a professor would organize the class around the thoughts of the students:

There is one class where our professor would ask each of us to submit one to two of our personal thoughts about that week's topic and

then she organized the class based on what our thoughts were. We were more involved - more like a mutual communication. (Interview 8, May 18, 2020)

Invitational Presence

Finally, invitational presence is a strategy that requires a partnership. Unlike competitive presence where the professor oversees the content and is trying to convince the students to engage or to persuade students to engage, invitational presence is much more of a dialogue or partnership. Participants described finding invitational presence most often in small groups or in office hours. Some technical features helped to construct invitational environments providing *online opportunities*. Just as participants saw breakout rooms as a mechanism to keep students engaged, some participants saw the breakout rooms as an opportunity to engage in dialogue in a more intimate way. One participant talked about the opportunity of virtual break out rooms for creating space for students to talk during class, “My professor used breakout rooms. Basically simulating the idea you would do in a normal classroom when you turn your desk to the left or right to talk to the people next to you” (Interview 12, May 26, 2020).

Some participants talked about the value of the chat function for creating a dialogue within the context of the class. One participant suggested that professors should create questions throughout the lecture and encourage students to answer the questions in the chat. They suggested, “I think like it would be good to establish like okay, I'm going to talk for 15 or 20 minutes. If you have any questions, put them in the chat and I'll answer them” (Interview 12, May 26, 2020).

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An interesting surprise in the data was the opportunity for invitational presence created by virtual office hours. Many participants talked about how much easier it was to get to office hours, so it then helped them to be more comfortable. Office hours were much easier to get to and created a more “equal” setting since the student was participating from his or her own environment rather than meeting in the office of the professor. One participant commented on this:

I think the office hour creates an invitational environment because the professor invites us to an online meeting where we can talk to each other. Online virtual office hours are more comfortable and relaxed than real office hours - communication actually increases. (Interview 2, May 22, 2020)

While some technical features like breakout rooms and chat could facilitate invitational presence, the lack of spontaneous opportunities for interaction that could be found in a traditional class were difficult to replace. In this way, some of the features of the virtual environment created *online constraints*. Said one participant:

I did feel that it's harder to talk to the teachers privately and classmates as well in class. If we go to the actual classroom, we can talk with the teacher after class - like during the break or after the class and with classmates. Online, we don't have this kind of opportunity. (Interview 13, May 26, 2020)

Participants also talked about the casual conversations that led to an environment more conducive to dialogue.

Some professors would ask students how things were going with the quarantine or to express concerns about the students' uncertainty about classes, graduation, or life outside of school. Participants reflected that this dialogue occurred much more often in the virtual classroom. Said one participant:

Professors would occasionally talk about just random things in life. One would talk about his dog or show pictures of his dog and ask people to show pictures of like their dogs ... just taking a little break to have a real-life conversation. Just to get you engaged again. (Interview 6, May 24, 2020)

While some participants viewed this *informal dialogue* as productive and contributing to the class, other participants felt that it was a waste of time and that it took away from course content. One participant felt that the professor might be filling up time because he had no other course content to fill up the time. He thought that the professor was also trying to be aware of the variety of time zones that students were dealing with and reduced the time of the class, “ I also think a part of the reason was that they didn't necessarily have enough content to go for the full two hours” (Interview 6, May 24, 2020).

Advice

As part of the questions that participants addressed, the advice that participants had for future classes was illuminating. This advice was provided not only for future pedagogical strategies for faculty but also for students going forward into a new online course. Considering the frameworks discussed, the advice of many students for faculty could be categorized as *entitled presence* (See Table 3). Ironically,

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with the lack of structure associated with the online environment, and the distractions created by the front stage and back stage challenge of combining their academic environment with their home environment, many participants wanted faculty to articulate more explicit guidelines for students. While faculty were trying to relax some of their requirements to be more flexible to the needs of students during a very difficult time, many participants expressed that they needed more structure. One participant said:

It just doesn't feel normal. I think I need to come up with strategies to make it as normal as possible. Maybe teachers could enforce a dress code, make turn on the video be strict about deadlines. I would like things to be more normal. (Interview 14, May 27, 2020)

Many participants talked about the importance of faculty requiring video of all participants. Obviously, bandwidth issues needed to be considered, but to the extent to which students can use their videos, requiring that videos be used could be helpful to keep the class engaged. Said one participant, “I know it sounds a little bit inhuman, but I really hope that every teacher could set up rigid rules that a student should open their videos and keep the videos on” (Interview 10, May 18, 2020). Other participants focused on *competitive presence* strategies by encouraging content that could be more intense to keep students engaged. Said another participant, “I think if teachers can create online quizzes during the class, it will give students more pressure to push them to focus on the classes” (Interview 2, May 22, 2020). Another participant focused on the importance of consistency in class timing:

I think classes need to be consistent. You know, if a class is meant to be two and a half hours like stick to that don't cut it down to like 15 minutes or whatever. They kept changing the time of the class and the length of it ...I think consistency is key. (Interview 6, May 24, 2020).

Another participant advocated cold calling. She said, “Cold call is definitely an effective way that you can use...please” (Interview 7, May 21, 2020).

Finally, participants also talked about the importance of *invitational presence* strategies. These participants suggested that faculty should continue to find ways to understand their students and reach out to them to get to know them. Said one participant, “I think it's better to communicate more with students to care about them... It's better for them to care about each of them, to listen to their voices, and give them more opportunities to express themselves” (Interview 13, May 26, 2020).

Advice participants had for students facing online classes also involved *entitled presence* (See Table 4). Specifically, participants emphatically advised students to remove distractions when participating in classes. Said one participant, “Students should put away their phones or just shut down their phones, when they are taking online classes so they can pay more attention” (Interview 3, May 22, 2020). Advice also included the importance of managing their *front and back stage*. Said one participant:

Maybe dress less casually. Make your desks tidier and don't put pillows around you that makes you feel you're at home...or you can move to another room or your lobby

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to give you a different environment and the feeling of having a real class. (Interview 5, May 19, 2020)

Another suggested:

Set up that routine and those boundaries so you can have the difference between like being in class and like watching TV - get into that classroom mindset. (Interview 6, May 24, 2020)

Finally, participants encouraged *invitational presence* by suggesting that students talk with their professors about what they need. Said one participant “Tell [professors] what you need ... Maybe next semester I will say that, well, Professor, I am really that kind of student who cannot focus, so could you call me? And I think I would do much better” (Interview 7, May 21, 2020).

Table 3

Advice for Teachers

Quotation	Theory
Interview 5: "I think professors can expect all the students to turn on their video cam. Because if they all just show their profile photo or they turn off the video cam, it didn't give reactions to the professor, so they can't feel what you think. That will decrease their activity to teach."	Entitled Presence
Interview 1: "Give them some small break during the courses and notice the time. If the courses will finish at 4:30, don't delay to five o'clock because they may need a break for the next courses. I always just close this zoom meeting and jump to the other without any real break. You're so tired, but they may have a less conception of the time on the Zoom. If they can set alarms on their phones, after one hour have a small break, and it is time up for the close and let us go."	Competitive Presence
Interview 14: "Maybe like once or twice in the semester do a one-on-one check-in or not even a one-on-one even like one-on-three. Because I understand it's difficult for teachers to spend so much time, but if you do a one-on-two like do it in pairs or threes, so maybe four times a semester do one-on-fours. That's possible. I think that would be quite helpful I think."	Invitational Presence

Table 4

Advice for Students

Quotation	Theory
<p>Interview 1: "Have a comfortable chair. Because if you need to have online courses you need to sit in front of your desk for a long time. I feel very hard on my muscles. If you need to take online courses, you need to have comfortable chairs and check your internet connection stable. It's quiet without any noise. Do not put your mobile phones on your desk if you want to focus on it better."</p>	<p>Front/Backstage</p>
<p>Interview 10: "Turn your video on. Because it will really help you to concentrate on what the teacher has said, and it is really important because our classes are very essential and critical for our development in the future. Last semester we needed to take virtual classes. If we still have many virtual classes next semester, I hope I could soon turn on the video to feel the connection between each other as much as possible."</p>	<p>Entitled Presence</p>
<p>Interview 12: "You may not be able to get as much in class time as you want. But it's also the ability to do these Zooms that allows you to really reach out to your professors and have one-on-one time with them more easily. You don't have to make an office appointment or go to the office or do any of that you just can do all from your apartment."</p>	<p>Invitational Presence</p>

Discussion

The results of our study support several conclusions. First, humans need situational guidelines, that is, agreed-upon proprieties in Goffman's terms (1963). An important insight from this research points to the co-created environment made up of contributions of the faculty and the students. The absent, invisible member that is critical to the development of learning and community is the physical space at the university—what Goffman would term “a

specific material setting” (Schultze & Brooks, 2016, p. 714; cf. Klowait, 2019). Absent this particularly important element, both faculty members and students need to engage in the learning experience in a new and different way. The physical environment of the university and the transitions to and from campus are instrumental to the learning environment so students and faculty need to work together to create an online environment that helps students transition into a learning mindset. This new virtual

environment is co-created by both the faculty members and the students and requires a new type of motivation and involvement for each.

We were struck by participant requests for explicit expectations and rules within the classroom—built-in transition time, rules for camera use (keep the video on), and strategies for calling on students. What became clear from the research was how important it is for faculty to be very explicit about what they are doing and why, so that students understand how the classroom objectives are being translated within this new environment. We expect that many faculty members failed either to recognize the absence of well-established proprieties for the new physical environment or to explicitly provide guidelines for themselves and their students. Similarly, students did not realize how much focus and attention was required of them when the physical infrastructure was stripped away.

Disruption of the Involvement/Shield Economy

Second, our results demonstrate that the transition to on-line education disrupted the classroom economy of involvement and engrossment. That involvement expectations constitute a moral order is vividly illustrated by the participant who acknowledged “feeling really bad because the teachers are trying like twice as hard. I just didn't feel as engaged” (Interview 14, May 27).

While the physical environment of the university and the copresence of faculty and other students helped to create a sense of urgency, focus, and agency, the on-line environment (as deployed in the Spring of 2020) does not. Furthermore, the transition to on-line education has provided students with an enlarged repertoire of involvement

shields, meaning that when involvement lags, the disinterested auditor can easily hide that fact and, as some respondents noted, multicomunicate, play games, or watch television while ostensibly attending class. This issue does not, of course, affect only students—the faculty member who appeared not to have prepared sufficient material to make use of the allotted class time may have been struggling with his own motivational challenges. Both students and faculty need to work to compensate for the invisible work that the campus infrastructure did in the traditional face-to-face environment.

New “Front-ish” Regions

Third, our results provide a new perspective on Goffman's front region and back region concepts. In Goffman's original formulation, front stage and back stage were physically close, allowing a person to move physically from one to the other. The transition from front to back (or vice versa) was frequently marked by a door, curtain, or passageway which restricted or precluded observation (Goffman, 1963, p. 253). While the virtual window (provided by Zoom or another service) that allows on-line education can be assessed in terms of front and back stage, it also shifts the perspective in important ways. We note, for example, that the virtual window links two back regions. Both professor and student are located in spaces that were, a few days ago, emphatically backstage—a bedroom, a kitchen, or even a bathroom with a shower curtain backdrop.

Furthermore, the virtual window seems to create expectations that both spaces, which have now become regions in which professors and students perform their appropriate tasks, should become more like front spaces with, perhaps, fewer pillows, children, and cats. Our students noted the

informality that one would expect when looking into a back space: In some cases they found it charming. But, on balance, our respondents would like for their classmates and professors to behave in manners more like those they display in front regions.

Yet the back regions that are partially visible through the virtual window are unlikely to become fully front regions. Those spaces are frequently private living quarters, and—just outside the camera’s view—normal backstage life is going on.

It is not just the limited camera view that is important. Both participants can toggle their computer camera and microphone between “on” and “off,” retaining the ability to transform the performance space into a hidden back space where one can attend to private matters such as blowing one’s nose or speaking with one’s significant other. However, this description suggests more control on the part of the faculty and students than might be available. Depending on how many people are sharing the physical space, unplanned disruptions can take place. Thus, the regions made accessible by the narrow eye of the computer camera are not likely to become front regions so much as “front-ish.” Perhaps a good analogy would be what marine biologists refer to as the “intertidal zone,” that is, the part of the seashore that is underwater at high tide and dry land at low tide (National Geographic Society, 2019). The intertidal zone is, in marine biology terms, an extreme system that subjects its residents to drastic changes and stresses.

Attentional Social Presence

Fourth, our results illustrate the usefulness of the various categories of attentional social presence (Turner & Foss, 2018). Students clearly budgeted their

presence between class and other activities such as exchanging a message with a friend. Their descriptions of professorial behavior also provide evidence of attempts to produce entitled, competitive, and invitational presence. Reinsch and Turner have argued that entitled presence is not a viable instructional strategy for on-line interaction—they propose invitational presence as an ideal alternative (2019, p. 162). The results of the current study raise questions about those views. Several participants explicitly called for faculty to maintain an entitled presence, manifesting a desire for clearer behavioral standards and a more front-ish experience.

Future research could explore student experiences of online classroom behavior once they have had more time to be socialized to it. Many of the participants in the present study had never experienced online classes before so the experience was very new to them. It would be interesting to follow students who gained experience with the online classroom to explore how their notions of presence have changed or evolved. Additionally, it would be interesting to further explore use of some of the strategies suggested to see whether they created a better learning environment for students. The lack of transition time for students and the need to create a psychological break between one class and another or between one class and the next part of the day seemed very salient. It would be interesting to continue to investigate strategies that students and professors can use to improve the transition between these virtual spaces.

Conclusion

This research explored graduate students, many of whom were international students who were also participating in class from far away spanning different time zones. This research provides insights about their perspectives but may be different than that of an undergraduate student perspective or a more domestic group of students. Additionally, the small sample size and cultural differences associated with this group of students who primarily identified as Chinese may frame a specific perspective regarding classroom interaction, professor

pedagogical style, and online versus in-person experience. However, all of the students had experienced at least 9 months of graduate school within their university within an in-person environment. This study provides a fresh, real time perspective, in close proximity to the experience of going suddenly online.

The intertidal zone is a challenging place to live. Those creatures who thrive there—and many do—have adapted to the environment. As professors and students in the age of COVID-19, we too must learn to adapt, to do our work within the purview of the front-ish region of the virtual window.

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