

# Sasha: A Narrative of a Learning Journey of an Instructor

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**Abstract—Contribution:** The American dream leads many immigrants to transfer from many countries to the United States of America in hopes of better education, jobs, and resources. United States of America is known for its opportunities, ambitions, and adventurous possibilities. However, besides the American dream, the land poses many challenges to all international immigrants, specifically students and faculty members, who work hard to find their place in society and culture.

**Background:** This research paper contributes to understanding the immigrant experience through Sasha's story. This is worth telling and reading as her perspectives are unique due to her identity as a Christian minority from India, a woman of color, a first-generation engineering student, and an international student, teacher, and researcher with no existing connection or community support in the United States. Besides the unique aspects, these experiences may provide many accounts shared in many other journeys that often remain unheard and unseen.

This paper presents a story highlighting some aspects of this journey using a lived narrative experience of a South-Asian girl, Sasha (pseudonym). This paper is an inspirational story of a young girl who journeys from a large south-Asian country to the United States to find opportunities and her place. This narrative describes her ambitions, resilience, and perseverance in three roles: student, teaching track professor, and researcher. The story weaves her inspirations, motivations, challenges, and mitigation in all these roles.

**Research Questions:** The paper addresses two research questions: 1) What are Sasha's main challenges as a woman of color, graduate student, instructor, researcher, and professor? 2) From Sasha's perspective, what has helped Sasha overcome these challenges?

**Methodology:** The paper uses Sasha's recorded self-reflections as the main accounts of her story. She maintained regular journals of her journey, and they will be the primary source of data for this study. In her journals, Sasha expressed her emotions, struggles, issues, mitigation, and coping strategies. She also expressed and celebrated her successes during the entire journey.

**Findings:** Using Sasha's reflections and the following narrative inquiry, we will present this journey to new faculty and researchers so they can relate to and adapt to her success, struggles, and emotions.

**Keywords:** *Immigrant, Engineering, Struggles, Identity, Women of color*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The American Dream is a belief in the United States (US) that every individual has the freedom and opportunity to succeed and attain a better life [1]. The US as a country is seen by the opportunities it offers and is known for its ambitions and adventurous possibilities. Due to these endless possibilities, it is famously called "land of opportunities" [2]. Keeping the same dreams, many immigrants enter this land each year. While this land embraces many immigrants, there are constant struggles and endless battles that these immigrants fight with their inner selves. They fear being judged, and some feel threatened by the ever-changing turmoil. Among these immigrants, many take the education route due to reasons including a better education system [3], better job prospects [4], better choices of degrees, and better availability of novel subjects. Throughout the academic year 2022-23, over a million international students embarked on their higher education journey in the US. These students represent diverse backgrounds, originating from approximately 210 distinct locations across the globe. The United States has seen an influx of students from different countries in hopes of better education, jobs, and resources. Better education opens doors to better resources and better vocation. International students accounted for 5.6% of the total US higher education population of 18,961,280[5].

This paper documents the journey of an international woman entering a land of dreams, her survival, challenges, and mitigation strategies in the tough times of her life.

Sasha (a pseudonym) saw the same American dream, which led many immigrants to pack their bags and transfer themselves to the land of a new culture, new language, new norms, new values, yet new opportunities. Like other immigrants, Sasha's journey started with hopes of success, a desire to make things happen, a willingness to work hard, reminders of persistence and resilience, and a motto of "Bring the challenges, and I will deal with them". This journey is not easy, and while being aware of some challenges, things happen quicker in the unknown world, and sustainability demands constant motivation and adaptability. Although life looks charming outside, the layers of these journeys by immigrants are enriched with individual stories that are unheard by many and are inspirational for newcomers. This paper presents an example of

one story for immigrants seeking academic careers in the US. This exemplary story presents Sasha's dreams, successes, and failures. More specifically, within this narration, we document and answer:

1. What are Sasha's main challenges as a woman of color, graduate student, instructor, researcher, and professor?
2. From Sasha's perspective, what has helped Sasha overcome these challenges?

#### A. Positionality and Philosophical Lens

We acknowledge that the story is a derivative of the one of the authors, where the author confirmed the accounts of the narration. As the study's researchers, we bracketed ourselves from our current personal views and used Sasha's documented written journal to narrate her story. For this purpose, we used the constructivism worldview [6] to analyze these journals and constructed the understanding of reality through our experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. We recognize that there could be multiple realities, thus we constructed this knowledge as researchers, where the participant was actively engaged. Being international women of color, we both firsthand experienced the challenges ourselves, and we ensured that our current thoughts and perspectives didn't influence and derive meaning from Sasha's journals Fig.1 and self-reflections and we stayed true to journal descriptions and reflections.

For this purpose, we use two authors in varying roles and in different stages. In the first stage, authors reviewed the journals and coded the data into categories of challenges and mitigation strategies. In second stage, one author focused on organization of data, determination of themes, and the other author (also the journal's writer), focused on reflection on the journals and ensuring that the personal journey is clearly depicted via themes and organization. Both authors collectively worked on interpretations and maintained the objectivity and creditability of the work. We used narrative analysis to keep Sasha's unique perspective intact and used her interpretation for construction.



Fig. 1. Sasha's journaling

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN

For story creation, we used a version of narrative inquiry [7,8], where we arranged Sasha's lived experiences according to chronological order to answer our research questions best.

#### A. Data Collection

We recreated Sasha's story using her self-reflections in her over the years journals. Sasha's journal data were detailed accounts of her journey, her dreams, and the ups and downs of life. She wrote these journals in a conversational style where she spoke with her inner self. As rich data was available for multiple years of her journey, the journal's data has been spurred throughout this paper, sharing Sasha's feelings, experiences, and learning. In her journals, Sasha expressed her emotions, struggles, issues, mitigation, and coping strategies. She also expressed and celebrated her successes during the entire journey.

#### B. Data Analysis

We use narrative thematic analysis (an approach of narrative analysis) as data analysis mechanism [9]. We chose the approach as the content in the journals was our primary focus. Within the approach we first organized and prepared the data, then coded the data according to the two deductive themes [10]: 1) challenges, and 2) mitigation strategies. We identified that challenges and mitigation strategies have other layers within Sasha's life (e.g., student, professor, and researcher), this we further categorized the data according to various roles Sasha has which presented challenges and posited mitigation strategies, and lastly made the interpretation. While Sasha's journals also documented aspects of her personal life, in this paper, we focused on creating the narrative using her three roles: student, teaching track professor, and researcher. However, to arrange these accounts chronologically, we made the story of her dreams, expectations, and challenges together. Also, the story weaves her inspirations, motivations, challenges, and mitigation in all these roles during the process. Further, to recreate the story in narrative form and meaningful storyboarding, we also used pictures as derivative measures to explain the narration.

## III. RESULTS

#### A. Who is Sasha?

We describe Sasha as an international woman of color who saw a dream and, despite all odds, fulfilled it. She is daddy's princess "Fig.2", a protective sister, a loving and obedient daughter, and a caring and hardworking human being. Sasha was raised in a south-Asian, middle-class Christian household. The primary focus was on educating the family's children regardless of gender. Her parents viewed education as a way of life for their children and wanted to equip them with the best knowledge and higher education.

#### B. Sasha's story of the American dream

This journey started when one of Sasha's neighbors stopped by to drop off a souvenir gift her son had brought from his work trip in the US. Sasha witnessed how her father shared intense admiration for their neighbor's son and his accomplishments.

Like many, Sasha's American dream started with a desire for achievement. For her, the sense of achievement is to see pride in her father's eyes.

*One day, I will make my father proud.*



Fig. 2. Father-daughter bond

The souvenir was an American layered chocolate (used as a young girl's metaphor). As the rich taste of chocolate melted on her tongue, Sasha listened to her father's tales of their neighbor's son, freshly returned from the US. His stories painted a vivid picture of a land of opportunity and dreams—where she knew she needed to be. Growing up in a middle-class South Asian household, success was equated with academic excellence, yet the allure of the US transcended traditional aspirations. It was a land depicted in Disney shows and Hollywood movies as the epitome of freedom and greatness, a place where dreams could take flight. Her dad's excitement about the American dream made Sasha make that her dream.

*I will find that chocolate*

Sasha had a big dream, and although it had many unknowns, including the scary thoughts of leaving her house's safe and comfort zone, she challenged herself. Although she loved her safe space, she also had big dreams, and with big dreams come significant risks and responsibilities. She knew if she wanted to achieve her dreams, she would have to take risks and face challenges. Her journey started with dreaming about this country and making it to this country.

*C. Sasha, in preparing for her dream*

Sasha started vocalizing her dream to others. She began preparing for this dream by getting her bachelor's in engineering from one of the top 10 universities in the South Asian region. She aimed to get an engineering degree and move to America to obtain her graduate degree. Her bachelor's degree was in civil engineering, with many options for pursuing a master's degree. She has seen her college seniors use this

approach to pursue their dreams in America. She prepared for her GRE and TOEFL exams. These are two exams which assess your English and mathematics skills. Along with these exams, Sasha prepared her statement of purpose, which is critical to admission into graduate programs.

*D. Sasha, in the US*

Sasha entered the US to pursue her dream through an educational route. She got admitted to a few universities in the US, but she chose University of Florida (UF) because it offered her a 40% scholarship and the fact that Florida's weather is close to where Sasha is from. Sasha felt like she was in an English movie; she loved looking at the clean city and the tall buildings. She applied for a master's in structural engineering and got it. She wanted to expand her civil engineering degree.

*I love this; I feel like I am in a movie; people are so friendly and nice. Sometimes, I am concerned about why they are so nice to me.*

Sasha faced multiple challenges, including cultural adaptability, finances, lack of support, finding part-time jobs, and the immigration process.

*Some people seem very friendly, and others do not like me. People here either love my accent or they make fun of my pronunciation. Why are some people so friendly? What do they want from me?*

She disliked her first semester, getting used to a new place and new country. Sasha had significant dental issues and suffered from pain and lack of sleep. She couldn't get help because she didn't have dental insurance. She decided she had to go to India to get the help she needed.

*I have so much pain I can't get medicine here without a doctor's note. I can't sleep. These painkillers do not work on me.*

She also struggled with health complications, which were not covered under her student insurance. Many international students do not have dental insurance when they enter this country.

*I have severe toothache and can't go to the dentist; it is too expensive. The student clinic here is awful. They removed my wisdom tooth, but the pain continued. The pain is still here after 10-15 trips to the student clinic. I do not trust the clinics here; they can't tell me what's happening. I am going India to see if this can be fixed.*

Not having a car is normal, taking buses to places is normal, doing all things on your own is normal, living paycheck to paycheck is normal, and going to bed on an empty stomach is also normal on some days.

#### *E. Sasha, as a graduate student*

She struggled with her accent and the rate at which she spoke to the students. She had to work on her accent to be more understandable to her classmates. There is less preference for the Indian accent when compared to British or other English formats. Sasha entered her Master of Science program. She enjoyed the fact that she could pick the timing of classes, which was different from what she had seen predominantly in India. She was worried about her grades because her scholarship depended on her grades. Despite the struggles, she also got to see the opportunities it brings. For instance, she was selected as a fellow for the International Road Federation (IRF) and was paid \$1000. She got to meet like-minded students. That's when she realized you could shine if you work hard and are talented.

*If I work hard, I will be seen.*

This journey can be scary. The Ph.D. journey can break you down in ways few discuss. This PhD journey for Sasha started okay. It only feels like a master's program until you have to start working on finding the topic for your future dissertation. Not getting proper guidance can leave you feeling helpless and hopeless.

It makes you question your worth, fills you with fear of the future, wondering:

- a. *Will I graduate?*
- b. *Questioning myself worth*
- c. *Answering questions asked by everyone on when I will graduate.*
- d. *Worrying about finding a job within 90 days after graduating.*
- e. *Worrying about applying for your OPT that lasts for one-year.*
- f. *I was worrying about finding a job that would support my visa.*

These were all concerns and questions Sasha had within her mind. Sasha struggled with the lack of mentorship in her PhD program, and she constantly feared that she would be unable to complete it. Sasha had invested 5 years into this program. As an international student, Sasha was also worried about her status on an F1 visa. There was a constant worry about funding for her semester. Sasha was funded based on her teaching responsibilities. PhD students go through a lot of struggles.

*I do not want to go back to my parents. I can't face society as a failure. I am afraid to go back. What if I cannot graduate? What if I cannot get a job? What will I tell my parents? What if I lose my funding? What if I fail to pass my defenses?*

As an international student, that's a primary concern students have. They worry about funding, their GPA, and their prospects.

One event that remains close to Sasha's mind is the last three months before her final defense. Sasha knew this was her final

stretch, and she could see her finish line, just a few more months of tackling fears of the unknown. Sasha decided to go all in and finish her final dissertation. She sat down with her friends and had a stern talk. She said for the next three months, she will be unavailable.

*I will take a break from my regular activities, so I cannot hang out for the next few months. I won't be able to talk about boy problems or anything.*

She had to take a break from the regular things she did, like working out, serving at church, hanging out with friends, or even cooking, for that matter.

*I am eating Nutella and crappy food to get through this.*

Some nights, she ate out of Nutella jars or ate pre-cooked meals. Sasha never wants to do that again, but she recognizes how that helped her get through that hardworking season. She knew she had to channel all her energy into one thing. She knew she couldn't handle multiple things seeking her attention. She set a goal, and she conquered it effectively.

Towards the end of the PhD run, all students channel their energies into achieving their goal of walking across that stage and being called doctors. Your only goal at this point is to graduate and find a job. Every PhD student thinks life is golden once you pass the threshold, not knowing all the unknown that comes along.

*Once I graduate, things will improve, and I can rest and sleep peacefully. Once I get that job, things will get even better.*

Sasha thought that once she graduated and got a job, it would make things easier, which it did. But responsibilities increase every year, every semester. Sasha was able to graduate with her PhD "Fig.3" and find a job in academia. Her teaching responsibilities paid off, as she secured a job in academia in the direction of her passion.

#### *F. Sasha as Teaching Assistant*

Sasha started her student journey as a master's student. In her 2nd semester, she was allowed to be a grader and assistant for a design STEM course called Technical drawing and visualization using AutoCAD. This course develops students' understanding of two- and three-dimensional graphical methods of visualizing and communicating construction projects.

*I love helping students. It makes me feel purposeful.*

She struggled with managing her master's classes and a part-time job. She felt the master's classes were hands-off compared to what she had experienced as an undergraduate student in India. Sasha also struggled with homesickness as she missed her friends and family, just like every international student.

*I love being in the classroom, I forget everything else in my life. This makes me happy.*



Fig. 3. Sasha graduating

*This is hard, and some kids hate me. I know who wrote that mean comment.*

She had to read student evaluation comments and was disappointed with reading them. Though sometimes harsh, these evaluations are essential in becoming an effective instructor. The tools set by the universities can be practical and reasonable at times. However, Sasha didn't like reading those comments. She looked at them as a learning process instead of just brute criticism. She began to note these student comments to help her teach.

Like existing literature, Sasha felt that students sometimes write heartbreaking comments that are not truly reflective of her efforts.

Her journal entries indicate emotions where she blamed and questioned herself and her choices.

*I am curious to know if I belong here. I do not know what to do. People will realize that I am not good enough. I need to learn how to proceed further with this degree.*

*I have no time between teaching and assisting classes to finish my degree.*

*Is this imposter syndrome????*

People in higher education, like Sasha, will experience imposter syndrome at some point in their careers. Impostor syndrome is when the individual thinks they are fraudulent and that someone will see them as an imposter [11].

These responsibilities helped Sasha become a teacher, and she loves her teaching responsibilities. Sasha put effort into speaking slowly and worked on pronunciation to help her be a better instructor. This opened doors for Sasha and led her to continue her educational and teaching pursuit.

#### *G. Sasha as Instructor*

The students who pursue a PhD in America have two options: academia or industry. 1) Teaching faculty and 2) Research faculty. Teaching faculty have the option of research but mainly focus on teaching. Research faculty mainly focus on research but also handle some grad classes. People who hold a PhD have a niche and get to work on that in academia or the industry. Sometimes, the industry is more tempting because of the pay. Sasha chose the teaching track path and was selected as a faculty to teach the same course she taught/ assisted as a graduate assistant. She has seen this course evolve for almost a decade and taught "Fig.4" her first semester of this design course at the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic—the beginning of the new normal. During COVID-19, Sasha struggled more than usual, felt she was alone and had to make drastic changes to her STEM courses. She questioned her abilities and whether she could handle the change and teach students well.

*What is happening right now!! I just started my new job, and the world is shutting down. I have never taught online! How will I do this? I miss being in person, and I am going to feel alone.*

*The students are not listening, so I need to make videos so they can work outside of the classroom. I need to give them directions that can help even if they aren't listening in class. What do I do???*

She re-evaluated the course structures, material, instructions, and assessment for transitioning to Emergency remote instruction (ERI). Being a new faculty member during the onset of the pandemic, she had to adapt quickly to the rapid transition of modality between semesters.

It went from in-person classes to ERI to online courses to Hybrid classes, online classes to in-person classes with limited students, and entirely in-person classes. Different modes of instruction emerged. Despite being a new Professor, she handled the demands placed on her by the onset of the pandemic with gumption, keeping her students' education as her top priority.

*I do not want to be online, and this is new. Should I make the classes flexible? I may need to stop taking attendance.*

She made her classes flexible. Initially, she was hesitant about the online teaching mode, but she grew to appreciate the perks of online teaching for teachers and students.

*I feel exhausted; I just learned one way of teaching into another, and now there is Hybrid/HyFlex. It's great for*

*students. I feel exhausted. It feels like having two sessions, answering students in person and catering to online students. I do not want them to feel ignored. They are so demanding.*

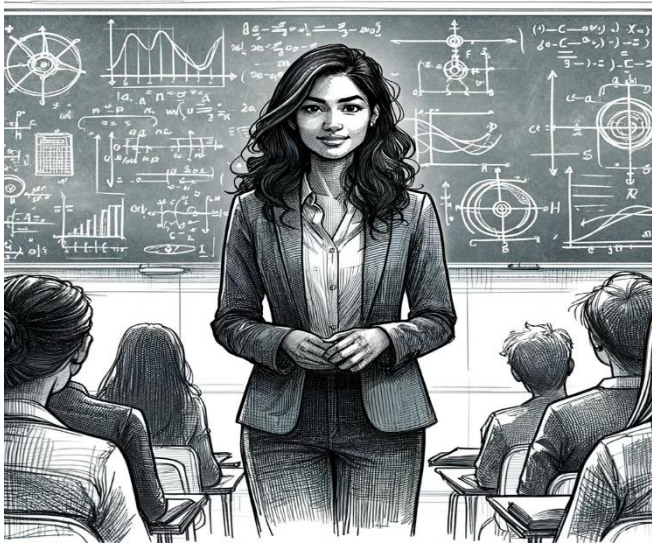


Fig. 4. Sasha Teaching

Before she could get comfortable with this modality, the modality changed from online to Hybrid/HyFlex. She participated in the Hybrid/HyFlex workshop to prepare herself for this new mode of instruction. According to Sasha, Hybrid/HyFlex was the most challenging mode of instruction, teaching both online and in person in the same classroom at the same time. All the materials for the course were provided through the Learning Management System (LMS). She felt overwhelmed and exhausted during this semester.

*Well, we are finally back in the normal classroom. I might keep the online office hours. I like making videos. This helps me answer questions from students more efficiently. I can direct them to videos, which helps them practice.*

*There is something new I learn every semester. I need to tighten up the syllabus to prevent loopholes.*

Sasha changed her classes based on her reflections and students' comments she received from evaluations. She modified the course layout for a better flow of the course.

*I love the course organization. I think this is great.*

Students thought she could do better. She looked at their comments and issues and added videos and assignment instructions more directly than where she had them before.

*I don't think I can ever please these kids; they always have something to say.*

After talking about this to her mentors, she realized it was not about pleasing the students. It's about educating them, doing your best, and improving the course as and when needed. Sometimes, students have the best critique to help level up the course.

*I feel excited and nervous reading these evaluations. I love the sweet comments. They are wonderful. The bad ones break my heart.*

Sasha reads the evaluations at least twice; the first read is always emotional. The second time she reads them, she reads them after a 2–3-day break. She feels she is more rational in understanding the comments for what they can do for the course instead of feeling like it is an attack.

*Are they even listening to me? They asked me the same questions again and again; I just explained it like four times.*

Sasha realized she needed to help them even outside the classroom. She posted announcements repeating the information she shared in class, hoping to help students. She also started making small videos that were repeated questions.

*I think I like making videos, but the editing part sucks.*

*Not having a grader for this course sucks; I must grade them all on my own. It takes me ten solid days to grade them. They want the grades back in a day. I am not able to grade all in one day.*

Sasha developed a rubric that made it easier for her to grade. It was a sliding scale of different submission requirements.

*This still does not work in getting them to understand the rubric. They still do not understand.*

Sasha met with a mentor to ask for guidance, and they said she could explain the rubric to the students and lay out the expectations for exactly how it would be graded.

When it's not the struggles of teaching, writing papers, attending meetings, and managing time, there was the fear of visa policy changes or shutdowns due to pandemics or wars in different areas of the world.

*Will I be able to get back into the country if I leave? Will my green card process speed up? Why is this process taking so long? I am tired of answering my relatives about my green card status.*

Being an immigrant is a joyous achievement, but it comes with a package of stressors, one of which is your visa situation and your progress to a green card. You can't leave as you wish because entry becomes difficult if your visa has expired. Getting visa appointments can sometimes be so difficult that people do not leave the country for a long duration. Unable to see family for a long time.

Sasha has grown as a human because of the challenges she has faced. She recognizes that as she gets older, the challenges will also grow, but she will be able to handle them better because of her experience. She navigated those challenges with the help of her community, which supported her. Working out helped her build resilience and inner confidence; the heavier her lifts, she knew she could do anything. Her church friends enabled her to seek a mental health counselor who helped her with the final stretch of her PhD. Sasha also believes that her therapist has continued to help her amongst her support system, which keeps her going as her challenges keep increasing in the work world. Nutella can also help!!!

#### *H. Sasha as a researcher*

Sasha was hired into a department different from her engineering major. Her research skills had to be honed here. She had to learn about the educational side of engineering. She collaborated with some of her new faculty to write papers. Some were successful, some weren't. She only knew quantitative analysis. Being in this department allowed her to learn about qualitative analysis and mixed analysis. This opened doors for new learning. Though this was exciting, she felt internal pressure to perform and do better. Despite the pressures she faced, Sasha successfully immersed herself in research and generated valuable contributions. Her "breadwinner" course, which sparked her passion for teaching, also led to several publications. In one paper, she focused on how renovating the course using UF+Quality Matters standards can positively impact student performance [12]. She also published work on the impact of different instructional modes [13] during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Sasha explored programming courses, researching the effects of extra credit on student success [14], the relationship between LMS and student engagement [15], and factors influencing self-efficacy in programming courses [16].

### IV. DISCUSSION

#### *A. What challenges does Sasha encounter as an international student, professor, and researcher?*

This narrative suggests that the US is a dream country for many immigrants because of its depiction in Disney shows and Hollywood movies [17]. Like Sasha, many immigrants face many challenges in their journey from graduate students to academic careers. This narrative suggests that the initial challenges are Linguistic barriers, aka their accents; this could be because people often preferred British or other English variations [18], and there is social and cultural isolation. We found that Internationals like Sasha go through many struggles [19] and have other academic stressors; this could be because of the pressure of maintaining a competitive GPA while balancing research and teaching responsibilities and funding uncertainties [20], including the risk of financial support running out. One of the main challenges was the visa struggles, which can weigh heavily, and this is because without a visa, you cannot enter the

US. This narrative suggests that the university's student evaluation tools can sometimes be effective and reasonable, as backed by literature [21]. This narrative reinforces what is already in the literature, as a teacher, reading student evaluation [22] can trigger internal insecurity and reinforce imposter syndrome. Acknowledging these challenges is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive academic environment. Sasha's journey provides internal and external insights into the world of international students and academics, highlighting their struggles and resilience.

#### *B. How does Sasha navigate these challenges and adapt to her new roles and environment?*

We found that to navigate various challenges and adapt to her new roles, Sasha relies on academic and external mentors. This study suggests that she found support in her church community, a mental health therapist. She also maintained her well-being through regular gym sessions and started believing in herself; this could be due to the positive impact her mentors and community had on her. Our results also suggest that she enjoyed an occasional Nutella treat. Amid the new normal [23], Sasha could tackle the challenges and move forward successfully, though initially, she questioned everything. Acknowledging these challenges and learning from others' journeys can be a pillar of support to other international students and academics. This study can provide a ray of hope to students who question their ability and struggle with imposter syndrome.

### V. LIMITATION AND FUTURE PROSPECT:

It is challenging to determine an average rate of success for individuals with profiles like Sasha's, as each person's journey is unique. Despite facing multiple challenges, people like Sasha maintain high morale. In general, the US has a significant number of immigrants from India. These individuals tend to be more educated, often holding managerial positions and earning higher incomes. They also exhibit higher English proficiency and participate in the labor force at a greater rate than the general population. Achieving proficiency in English and obtaining higher education can lead to better job opportunities, ultimately providing financial security and freedom [24].

While it is difficult to determine an average rate of success due to the uniqueness of each individual's journey, future research could expand on the numerical aspects of this study to gather more comprehensive data on the rate of success. Additionally, future studies could adopt an autoethnographic approach, incorporating real-life images to provide a more detailed and personal perspective on the journeys of individuals like Sasha.

### VI. CONCLUSION:

Looking back at her journey, the following have helped Sasha navigate her fears. To thrive during the challenging journey of pursuing a PhD, it's essential to establish support systems and prioritize self-care. Seeking mentors who have traversed similar paths, offered valuable guidance, and serve as beacons of hope during difficult times can make a huge difference—

additionally, finding a mental health counselor to effectively process fears and challenges, preventing them from defining your self-worth and cultivating a life outside of graduate school to maintain balance and perspective, supported by a network of friends and family who provide solace during challenging moments. Collaborating with professors to create a graduation plan and outlining clear steps toward success can be helpful for graduate students. Finally, physical health should also be prioritized by exercising regularly, getting adequate sleep, and taking breaks to recharge. These strategies foster resilience and well-being, ensuring a fulfilling life experience.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To assist the writing process, the help of AIs was used; for example, we used AI to correct grammar, check sentence formations, and improve writing. We also acknowledge the use of AI for creating images. I also want to acknowledge my friend Barnett Chenault III for helping create these AI images.

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