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Untold Stories of US Immigrant Mothers of D/HH Children

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Abstract

In the United States, one unresearched or undiscussed immigrant population is immigrant parents of children with disabilities. Research shows that immigrant parents of deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) children migrate to the US to find better opportunities, resources, and services for their D/HH children and an environment in which their D/HH children can thrive away from the native country's social-cultural stigma (Steinberg et al., 2002; Stone-MacDonald, 2019). Like many other parents of D/HH, they lack previous interactions with a D/HH person; they experience challenges and stress when raising their D/HH children; however, being an immigrant with a D/HH child is a unique experience. Using the lens of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and an intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989), the current study examines the lived experiences of US immigrant parents of D/HH children and their journey to resilience.

Keywords: immigrant; deaf; deaf children; immigrant mothers; community cultural wealth; intersectionality framework

Immigrants who relocate to the United States are sometimes accompanied by their children with special needs, adding to the tremendous number of hurdles they must learn to navigate. Generally, immigrants go through life-changing experiences involving stressors such as career changes, unfamiliar networks, separation from relatives, and change in their citizen status (Glick, 2010; Gonzales, 2017). Moreover, when an immigrant parent has a child diagnosed with a disability, they face the additional challenge of caring for their special-needs child and accessing appropriate health care and special education services and support, all of which create a great deal of stress as the parents search for answers in a confusing new cultural setting (Chiri, 2012; Millau et al., 2016). Hence, immigrant parents of children with disabilities experience double the pressure of immigration and disability. In addition, most of these parents lack access to services for their children due to cultural differences and a lack of experience with local systems, worsened by the lack of translated materials and/or interpreters to assist them in understanding what is available and presented to them (Povenmire- Kirk, 2010).

In the case of D/HH children, US immigrant parents often are not proficient in either English or American Sign Language. Generally, 90-95 percent of D/HH children are born to hearing parents, and one of the biggest challenges for all parents of D/HH children is language and a communication system (Kushalnagar et al., 2010). Lack of a shared language between

parents and their D/HH children is a struggle no matter what language hearing parents speak, and additional language barriers between parents and service providers in the host country compound their parents' stress; these communication problems prevent them from effectively supporting their D/HH children (Crowe, 2013; Gerner de Garcia, 2000; Steinberg et al., 2002). Also, parents' response after their child's diagnosis as D/HH varies along a continuum, ranging from those accepting the diagnosis and willing to learn alternative ways of communication to those rejecting that the child is D/HH and being unwilling to learn to communicate and interact with the child (DesGeroges, 2016). Therefore, the experiences of US immigrants who are also hearing parents of D/HH children can be stressful. It is vital to understand why and how some immigrant parents thrive while others fail, learning from their stories of resilience—their ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from complex life events such as immigration (Alsharaydeh et al., 2019).

Previous research on immigrant parents' resilience has focused on individual family adjustment and adaptation to stress and crisis. However, often ignored are the structural and systematic roots of many struggles stemming from the broader context of sociopolitical challenges and structural oppression that can negatively affect resilience (Vesely et al., 2017). In addition, previous research that examines fathers and mothers of a child with disabilities reported differences in the experiences of a (Gerstein et al., 2009; Crnic, 2009; Levert & Bourgeois-Guerin, 2009). This study only looks at mothers because none of the participants we found through our snowballing were fathers. Hence, the current study examined the experiences of US immigrant mothers with D/HH children and how they developed collaborative resilience involving service providers. In examining immigrant mothers' experiences caring for D/HH children in the US, the study adopted two theoretical frameworks: community cultural wealth (CWW; Yosso, 2005) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

The community cultural wealth (CWW) theoretical framework shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of minority communities to focus on and learn from the often unrecognized and unacknowledged array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by these socially marginalized groups. The CCW framework includes six tenets or forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, resistance, familial, and linguistic capital. In this study, CCW theory examines the forms of capital from which immigrant mothers draw their knowledge of and experiences with D/HH children as they move from their home to their host country. Aspirational capital is immigrant parents' motivation to attend to the needs of the D/HH child. Linguistic capital is involved how the immigrant parent uses or is required to use (even if unable) multiple languages to access needed information and help. Familial capital refers to the availability of a family network to attend to the immigrant parents' and D/HH children's social and emotional needs and provide support and strength for parents continuing to meet the evolving needs of their children. Social capital is how immigrant parents network and use professionals and other individuals in the community to attend to the needs of their D/HH children. Navigational capital is how parents navigate their host country's laws and systems to

access their D/HH children's support resources. Finally, resistance capital refers to how a parent can resist oppression as an immigrant parent with a D/HH child.

The second foundational theory in this work, intersectionality, is named for a term coined to show how variables such as gender, race, class, and ableism interact simultaneously to form one's social identity and shape one's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality in research provides a lens for understanding complex identities and explaining how people's living conditions are affected by the existing social structures (Bowleg, 2012). In the current study, adopting intersectionality as a lens allows us to examine the experience of immigrant mothers with D/HH children and argue that the intersection of race, immigrant status, hearing status, and disability can result in a unique experience. At times, some of the variables of the individual or their child—such as immigrant status, race, and being D/HH—can be objects of discrimination; therefore, it is important to examine how the intersection would impact the individual. These two lenses, community cultural wealth (CWW; Yosso, 2005) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), enabled the researchers to meet the purpose of the study: to explore, document, and describe the experiences of US immigrant families with D/HH children. The central research question was, “What are the experiences of immigrant mothers of D/HH children?” Specifically, the researchers explored the experiences of immigrant parents of D/HH children regarding their language and culture differences, their children's educational and special needs services, barriers, and resilience. In addition, the study explored the shared narrative of the parents' experiences and their actions upon arrival in the US to seek and receive services for their D/HH child. Also, the study examined their methods for identifying and accessing the available services, the barriers and challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used to overcome those challenges.

Methodology

Research Design

The current study adopted a narrative inquiry design, focusing on “events experienced by an individual over time and the settings, actions, contexts, and people involved in these events” (Creswell & Clark, 2010, p. 237). The participants' stories are used as data to describe their lives and discuss the meaning of those experiences (Creswell & Clark, 2010; Patton, 2002). Additionally, the stories in a narrative inquiry project are collected from individuals or small groups who are invited via interview to share their experiences on various issues related to the research (Creswell & Clark, 2010). For example, the current study used the narrative inquiry method to collect stories of mothers who immigrated to the United States accompanied by a D/HH child.

Participants Sampling Procedure

The current study involved three immigrant mothers with D/HH children. According to Guetterman (2015), the minimum sample size for a narrative research study in education ranged from 1 to 24; due to the difficulty in finding this population, three mothers were recruited for the study. The sampling procedures included purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive

sampling was used to identify and select information-rich cases—i.e., individuals or groups that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Clark, 2010; Patton, 2002). Additionally, the procedure was used to select participants who could communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Spradley, 1979) and were available and willing to participate (Bernard, 2002).

The second sampling technique, snowball sampling, is used when potential participants are hard to find (Spreen, 1992). In the current study, finding immigrant mothers with D/HH children was difficult. Hence, one participant assists the researchers by providing the name of another participant, who in turn provided the name of a third, allowing the sample to grow like a rolling snowball (Patton, 2002).

Participant Profiles

This study only looks at mothers because none of the participants we found through our snowballing were fathers. Hence, the participants were three mothers, each with a deaf daughter. The names of these mothers are anonymous and chosen by the researchers to match the mothers' ethnic and cultural identities. The first mother, Margarita, is a hearing Hispanic woman from Mexico who moved to the United States with her six-year-old named Maria. At the time of this study, Margarita was 45 years old. Although she did not know the cause of her daughter's hearing loss, Margarita knew that her husband's family included three people who were D/HH. Margarita had limited education and no high school diploma. The second mother, Isabela, is a hard-of-hearing Hispanic woman from Argentina. Her daughter Sofia was two years old and deaf. At the time of this study, Isabela was above 45 years old. Isabela had become hard of hearing at the age of 39 because of an illness, but she did not know anyone in her family who was D/HH. Her highest level of education was high school. The final mother is Chu Hua, a hearing Chinese mother of an eight-year-old deaf named Mei Xing. Chu Hua was above 45 years old, and her highest level of education was a graduate degree.

Data Collection

Data collection involved individual online interviews. Creswell (2013) noted individual or group interviews as the most common mode of collecting story data. Because the data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted through online platforms like WhatsApp, Skype, and Zoom, selected depending on accessibility to the participants.

Data Analysis

Narrative data analysis began during data collection. There are four types of narrative data analysis: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual narrative analysis (Parcell & Baker, 2017; Riessman, 2007). The current study adopted thematic analysis, which focuses on the content of the stories. The researchers followed the five steps of the thematic analysis process proposed by Butina (2015). First, the video data was transcribed into scripts, which were then assigned anonymous names for each participant. Because narrative data analysis involves data interpretation, any unrelated side conversation was deleted during transcription, after which the researchers began examining any emerging patterns and themes.

For instance, the researchers noted recurring words, phrases, or ideas while reading. The next stage involved reading the scripts to obtain a general sense of the collected information.

The third step was the coding process. During initial coding, the researchers remained open to other directions and combinations of the data indicated by the reading of the data (Charmaz, 2006). Next, the researchers developed a code list to code the data and establish intercoder reliability between the two coders. Any new codes added at this stage followed discussion and agreement. During the next step, the data analysis, done through axial coding, the researchers categorized the data into themes (Bengtsson, 2016). Finally, in the fifth stage, the researchers examined the five themes that emerged and interpreted their meaning from the data.

Research Rigor

Like other qualitative research approaches, narrative inquiry is challenged regarding objectivity and truth. To address these issues and ensure trustworthiness, qualitative researchers attend to four elements: truth-value (credibility), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability), and neutrality (confirmability) (Munn et al., 2014; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). There are various techniques for establishing these elements. The techniques employed in the current study included member check, peer debriefer, thick description, inquiry audit, audit trail, and reflexivity.

For member checks, the researchers consulted with each participant and shared her video script to get feedback on its accuracy and clarify shared and/or missing information (Birt et al., 2016). To conduct peer debriefing, the researchers consulted with other qualified peer researchers to assess the transcripts and examine the codes and emerging themes (Janesick, 2007). Next, the research included thick descriptions of the various research components, such as the methodology, sampling procedures, data collection and data analysis procedures, and discussion and interpretation of the findings. The goal was to provide in-depth details so readers could understand the study's findings significant, complex, and unique meanings (Crabtree et al., 2007). Next, for the inquiry audit, the researchers invited external researchers to examine the processes of data collection and data analysis and the research study results to confirm the accuracy of the findings as a way to ensure the collected data supported those findings. The process of inquiry audit was made possible by the researchers' audit trail, a clear presentation of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the reporting of findings (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The last technique used was reflexivity, in which the researchers, as part of the research, recognized their own beliefs, judgments, and practices and self-examined them during the study by developing memos to assess how their background experience could influence the research (Dowling, 2006).

Findings

Five themes emerged from the stories of the three mothers: mothers' reactions to diagnosis, pre-migration intervention, decision to migrate, immigrant challenges, and strategies for resilience. A discussion of each theme is presented below:

1. Mothers' Reaction to Diagnosis

Two mothers (Margarita and Chu Hua) received their children's hearing loss diagnosis while still in their native countries. In contrast, one mother (Isabela) suspected hearing loss but received the diagnosis six months after arriving in America. Irrespective of where and when they received the diagnosis, these mothers expressed sadness and grief and struggled to accept their daughters' hearing loss diagnosis. The three mothers shared their first experience as follows:

Margarita: The first reaction that I felt after finding out that my daughter was D/HH was feeling shocked and scared. What would her future look like? Will she be okay?

Isabela: I was sad and cried a lot.

Chu Hua: I was shocked, felt guilty, and couldn't accept my daughter as D/HH. I talked to doctors about what would be best to do, and they recommended that my daughter should get cochlear implants.

The painful emotions of the diagnosis did not improve with time, so as two of the mothers immigrated to the US, they still held on to them. They reported grief and grief-related anxiety, resulting from their perceptions of their children being deaf, concerns about their future, and considerable stigma associated with disabilities from their communities and families in their native countries.

2. Pre-Migration Intervention

Although the mothers reported going through a period of grief, anxiety, sadness, shock, and denial of the diagnosis, they also acknowledged that their children depended on them for help. The mothers shared their experiences and the interventions they sought before immigrating. They all said they had acknowledged their roles as mothers, realizing they could no longer cry but needed to act. They understood that, despite their emotional states, they were expected to make significant decisions regarding their children's early intervention.

Margarita shared that before leaving Mexico, she started thinking of how she could help her daughter. There was no formal early intervention available for her, so she decided on the nature of the early intervention needed for her daughter. She said,

I didn't want her to think she couldn't do anything just because she had a disability. I started to show her how to do various things so she could be independent.

Chu Hua struggled with accepting her daughter as deaf and sought early intervention for her daughter to hear and talk. Her search led her to migrate from China to another country before migrating to the US. She said:

After being diagnosed deaf, I took my daughter to many different doctors and looked for resources to try to help her gain hearing. The family moved to Australia, where Mei Xing enrolled in regular school and started speech therapy and auditory.

Isabela did not know of or provide early intervention to her daughter while they lived in her native country. As a result, her daughter was deaf for two years without diagnosis until six months after arriving in America. The child began early intervention at 2 ½ years old.

3. Decision to Migrate to the US

Many consider the US their best destination for fulfilling their and their family's dreams. The three mothers held the same view when deciding to migrate to the US in search of better opportunities for themselves and their deaf children.

Margarita said:

I was very worried about my daughter's future because, in my country, we lived in a small town with limited educational opportunities. My husband and I wanted what was best for our children, especially my deaf daughter. We moved to America for better opportunities, especially education. Mexico wouldn't provide the kind of education such as D/HH programs, interpreters, etc. [...] That was when I knew we needed to do something. We decided to migrate to the US.

Although Chu Hua migrated first to Australia, she said she believed, like many other immigrants, that the US was a better choice, particularly for her D/HH daughter. She said,

...we moved to seek educational opportunities for my deaf daughter to maintain her academic and social skills.

Although Isabella's daughter was not diagnosed as deaf until they arrived in the US, her daughter had demonstrated speech problems while still in Argentina. Isabella saw the move to the US as an opportunity to discover what was happening with her daughter. Isabella said,

I moved to the US because life is better here than in my country. If one comes from another country and does not know why their children do not speak, they must talk with the doctor and find out why...

The three mothers shared their decision to move to America and the necessary sacrifices they undertook to follow through with this decision.

Margarita shared her sacrifice:

It was a huge sacrifice, but I knew that moving to the United States was the best decision I could make... It was so hard to leave my family, my house, and everything.

Chu Hua echoed Margarita's comment about leaving family members:

I moved away from my immediate family, making sure I made the right decision. A lot of people suggested a lot of things, but I was very careful to ensure my daughter received what she needed to thrive.

Isabela discussed how she had to sacrifice her community and language she grew up knowing and using. Instead, she found herself needing to depend on interpreters to communicate. She said:

I knew and always spoke Spanish. I did not speak English and had to meet the doctor and the ear specialist. I had people interpret for me. It is not easy to have to go through all this, but for my daughter, I give everything.

4. Challenges of Immigrant Mothers with a Deaf Child

For most immigrants in the US, their home language is not English; hence, language tends to be the greatest challenge for most immigrants to overcome. In the case of families with D/HH children, for over 90 percent of the D/HH children, their parents are hearing with no previous experience with ASL or the D/HH community. Therefore, it was not surprising that the

immigrant mothers in the study expressed that language was a key barrier because they lacked skills in two languages in their host country: English and ASL.

Sharing her challenges as an immigrant mother with a D/HH child, Margarita said:

My first barrier was language. I didn't know English or sign language at the time. My first language is Spanish. [...] Also, at the time, I had to learn American Sign Language as well because I was told that learning American Sign Language was the way to communicate with my daughter. It was very hard to learn two languages at the same time.

Similarly, Isabela echoed Margarita's words, saying,

I only spoke Spanish. Lack of the English language made it very difficult for me to know, find, and ask for the appropriate resources for my deaf daughter.

Isabela and Margarita shared how the language barrier hindered their children's access to information on special education services because the helpful documents were in English. Additionally, because of the language barrier, they both experienced challenges when meeting with professionals serving their children.

Chu Hua did not report any language barriers because she had moved to Australia, where she learned English; therefore, unlike Margarita and Isabella, knowledge of English was not a challenge for her when she came to the US. Also, because Chu Hua had enrolled her daughter in an oral program, she did not need ASL for communication.

Besides language, the second challenge that the mothers experienced related to their educational level, which influenced their ability to seek or understand information. Two mothers, Margarita and Isabela, did not have a college education. Isabela had a high school diploma, but Margarita did not even have that much formal education. On the other hand, Chu Hua had a graduate-level college education. Education influenced how the mothers participated in the most critical tasks for all parents of a child with a disability which is taking an active role as a member of the Individual Education Program (IEP) team. Unfortunately, due to their educational level, Margarita and Isabela felt they could not understand all the information in the IEP documents to advocate for their children as they would have wanted adequately. On the other hand, Chu Hua talked about how she did intensive independent research on every piece of information she received before attending any meeting. She spoke about how her independent research helped her decide between her child using sign language or having a cochlear implant and speech and auditory training.

5. Strategies for Resilience

The immigrant mothers expressed resilience as they navigated resources and services for their D/HH children. They shared strategies for building the kinds of resilience that can reduce the effects of grief upon an initial diagnosis, counteract the frustration of lacking knowledge about D/HH individuals, and help overcome the challenges of adjusting to a new culture and language in a foreign country.

Intentionality

Resilience is all about intentionality. The first strategy the mothers demonstrated was their intentionality to access information on education, social services, and health service providers for their deaf children. The mothers struggled to deal with the unprecedented changes they faced while trying to adapt to their new US home and find new ways to meet their children's needs while battling to support themselves and their families. They demonstrated intentionality in balancing their time, communicating, and connecting with professionals to get their children's necessary information and services.

In her story, Margarita shared:

I was not sure where to start, such as finding a school for my deaf daughter, Maria. I worked to find more information about deaf education because the school told me they didn't provide services for deaf students. I was later referred to a different elementary school with a D/HH program. Since I did not receive any welfare services, I had to work at the same time to find information and resources for her daughter, which took some time.

Professional Collaboration

Immigrant mothers with D/HH children must mentally and emotionally adapt to challenging life experiences and adjust to external and internal demands. To be resilient, these mothers need supportive relationships with families and professionals to share ideas, vent frustrations, obtain support and plan to tackle their challenges. New US immigrant parents of D/HH children need a support system that includes family, friends, colleagues, or school. Margarita discussed her collaboration with those involved in D/HH education, such as teachers and sign language models, who assisted her directly and indirectly by supporting her daughter. Margarita said,

Always ask for help if you are not sure about what to do. And get support from your family, friends, colleagues, or school. My ASL teacher assisted me in navigating the system and helped me to find the resources I needed for my daughter. Maria's first-grade teacher was a pillar to my daughter, and together they were able to support my daughter in meeting her educational needs.

Isabela also commented on the support she received from professionals:

I found the school for the D/HH through my doctor, and when I went to see it, it seemed very good. They also had people who helped them translate. I had a gratifying experience, and as I shared the first months with my baby, I was pleased with the teachers. They were all outstanding, and I am very grateful to all of them because my baby learned to speak and sign. I am very proud of my daughter.

Similarly, Chu Hua noted how contacting others was important when searching for information. She said,

I researched and got information for educational and welfare services for my D/HH daughter from doctors, welfare offices, and information from other families who had D/HH children.

Research for Knowledge

We are not born with resilient qualities, but one can develop these strengths by researching the information that allows one to examine a challenging situation and attend to its problems. Knowledge and information are crucial, as they empower individuals and increase resilience. For example, all the mothers expressed how raising a deaf child was new for them. Being an immigrant created a double challenge because they needed information both about deafness and about their host country's systems and how to navigate them as an immigrant. Hence, conducting research enabled immigrant mothers to build greater resilience and develop a deeper understanding of their deaf children's educational and service needs. This knowledge empowered them to participate in decision-making processes during Individual Educational Planning meetings, which can be very daunting for a parent who is not prepared.

For example, Chu Hua said,

I researched to make sure I was making the right decisions for my deaf daughter. Through my research, my daughter received support from speech therapy, received hearing aids, school itinerary support, sign language interpreters, and FM systems for the classroom.

Her suggestion for new parents was to

Meet people with similar experiences so that one can use their experiences to help raise a child to the fullest success. Talk to the educators and parents of other D/HH children at school. Ask about their experiences with resources they used for their D/HH child.

Margarita believed immigrant mothers needed to be aggressive and assertive in their search for interaction and support.

Margarita recommended,

New parents should not give up because of the challenges they experience as immigrant parents. Parents need to be assertive in asking questions and getting what they need for their children. Always ask for help if you are not sure about what to do. It worked for me.

Discussion

The immigrant mothers' experiences were not so unique regarding their reactions to their children's diagnoses. Most (90%) of the hearing parents of D/HH children first go through similar experiences of shock, sadness, and grief (King, 2006; Marshall, 2018; Porter et al., 2018; Scarinci et al., 2018). Additionally, "these first-time parents" of a D/HH child have no experience with deafness or hearing loss and may have no knowledge of how to communicate or support their children in acquiring and developing language (Lederberg et al., 2013; Weaver, 2011). Most of them report being overwhelmed with the information from the professionals and decisions they must make, which can lead to stress (Porter et al., 2018; Scarinci et al., 2018).

Despite their reaction to the diagnosis, the immigrant mothers in this study determined that the US would meet their children's language and literacy needs because of the more accessible resources and services (Batamula, 2016; Rodriguez & Allen, 2020). Having a clear goal of what they needed for their children and immigrating to the US strengthened these

parents' resilience because it increased their hopes for their children's future. However, their resilience to go on supporting their children was tested by various challenges, such as language and communication barriers (Adsera & Pytlikova, 2016), which affected their assimilation and better job opportunities because they had to forego better job opportunities in order to focus their energy on solving the educational puzzles of special needs education in a new country.

The experiences and resilience of the immigrant mothers of deaf children in this study align with the community cultural wealth (CCW) theoretical framework developed by Yosso (2005). Despite the uniqueness of each parent's story, the emerging themes showed how the parents demonstrated all six tenets of the CCW theory: aspirational, linguistic, family, social, navigational, and resistance capital. The parents' aspirational capital was demonstrated in their motivation to continue despite the challenges. The linguistic capital was evident in how the mothers tried to learn and navigate all the languages—i.e., native languages, ASL, and English—to access the information needed to support their children. Familial capital included people who supported them emotionally, such as new family members in the host country, people from their native country living in the US, friends, and coworkers in their host country. The immigrant mothers networked with others, such as doctors, social workers, audiologists, and speech therapists. These networks formed the social capital that the parents needed to be familiar with the host country's laws surrounding accessing the services for their children. Navigational capital refers to the immigrant mothers' skills and abilities to navigate the medical and educational systems even when they lack support or experienced conflicts with their beliefs and culture. Navigational capital was employed in how they chose to interact with medical professionals, educators, and service providers to access what they needed for their children. Finally, resistance capital was in their experiences as immigrants seeking, demanding, and accessing equal rights to the resources and services stipulated by the law in the host country's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Resistance capital also involved immigrant mothers engaging in social justice talks and activities regarding equitable health and educational resources and services for their D/HH children.

Conclusion

Throughout the current study, the experiences of US immigrant mothers of deaf children indicated their resilience. The study also showcased the array of various individuals who supported the mothers in their journey—e.g., pediatricians; early intervention and early childhood education professionals; educators; administrators in school programs for D/HH; and clinicians, such as audiologists and speech therapists, who continue to work with the children and the families. Providing prior knowledge about immigrant mothers' experiences of D/HH children would better prepare similar individuals who, alongside their professional responsibilities, serve as the capital that helps immigrant parents navigate the system more easily.

Additionally, the current study's findings can provide other immigrant parents of children with disabilities, particularly deafness, a sense of familiarity with their experiences in navigating

their and their children's lives. Finally, the information from this narrative could provide other immigrant parents with strategies for navigating their own resilience in a host country.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study is limited to a sample of participants. The study participants are three immigrant mothers with deaf children. There is a need for additional research with a larger sample size that includes immigrant parents of children with disabilities, including fathers. More data will better inform this issue of immigrant parents of children with disabilities in the United States.

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Learning Across Borders through Immersive Virtual Technologies

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Abstract

Due to the impact of COVID-19 in 2020, higher education institutions swiftly shifted to online education and canceled all university sponsored travel, including field experiences and study abroad programs. Faculty transitioned to virtual activities to provide students essential access to international engagement. Immersive learning experiences promote cognitive gains and enhance student motivation. Using immersive learning to create virtual international experiences, students receive meaningful educational opportunities that further develop their global mindfulness levels and skills necessary for international marketability. Because immersive virtual experiences can provide international engagement to a wider range of students, this literature review explores how institutions incorporated them into their in-person curricula.

Keywords: international education, experiential learning, virtual technologies, global mindedness, intercultural competence

This literature review explores how faculty tackled planned study abroad programs through immersive virtual technologies during the COVID-19 global pandemic beginning in the Spring of 2020. This review will ask questions about the importance of global engagement during the unforeseen pandemic as well as what technologies were used to support faculty and students as they were required to immediately transition from in-person study abroad travel to virtual experiences. Articles will be reviewed to inquire about the value and effectiveness of virtual study abroad trips during the pandemic and in the future. Additionally, current literature will be analyzed through a global lens as well as through a lens of effective technology integration into teaching and learning.

Students develop insights that broaden their content knowledge and worldviews when given access to countries beyond their geographical locations. Educational institutions are progressively integrating global perspectives into their mission statements to “prepare students for a world that is becoming ever more connected...thus expanding opportunities for students to engage in global learning experiences” (King et al., 2021, p. 790). Kuh (2008) referred to these essential experiences as “high-impact educational practices” (HIP), noting that global learning allows students to explore cultures, worldviews, and life experiences different than their own, thus developing a more knowledgeable and well-rounded sense of world concerns. HIP focuses on diversity, and global learning allows students to explore difficult subjects, including racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, as well as the struggle for human rights, power, and freedom (Kuh, 2008), through the leadership and guidance of a knowledgeable and supportive faculty member. Research indicates that high-impact practices develop a student’s critical thinking skills in

addition to their intercultural effectiveness (Kilgo et al., 2014). Furthermore, while the benefits of HIP are demonstrated for students, universities also benefit. Including HIP within a discipline's curriculum, such as a study abroad or field experience, positively correlates with student retention and engagement in their degree programs (Kilgo et al., 2014).

However, while interesting to many, travel across the globe is only sometimes a realistic possibility for students. Even outside of the global pandemic, students may question the need for international travel during the pursuit of an academic degree. Travel costs, work obligations, caregiving roles, and the time commitment for in-country study abroad trips present potential limitations for students who might otherwise be interested in and likely to benefit from these immersive experiences (King et al., 2021). Only 5.3% of students study abroad during their undergraduate degree programs. Additionally, in the 2019-2020 academic year, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 1,075,496 students traveled to America to study abroad, which is approximately 5.5% of the total higher education population in the United States. Further, only 0.9% of students studied abroad during the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year, creating a 99% decrease in participation from the previous year (Open Doors, 2021). Therefore, higher education institutions seek alternative methods to present opportunities for global engagement to their students and thus see an increase in the demand and development of virtual experience programs.

To address financial, time, and physical concerns, the literature explored in this review indicates the possibilities for learning through virtual travel studies. Virtual experiences provide a broader range of students access to international education, resulting in an opportunity for contextualized learning through simulated authentic environments. Immersive interactions further promote student curiosity and understanding of diverse cultural, educational, and political structures. Student interactions with virtual technologies have demonstrated increased learning gains and content interest (Markowitz et al., 2018; Mead et al., 2019; Radianti et al., 2020; Wallgrun et al., 2022). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, increased excitement in exploring immersive experiences resulted when international travel halted and presented challenges for global learning exchanges (Liu & Thomas, 2021; King et al., 2021). Liu and Thomas (2021) expressed that international learning activities were particularly impacted because of the challenges, restrictions, and limitations that resulted from the global pandemic.

The literature consistently demonstrates that students gain insight into the importance of global citizenship and increase their knowledge of how their discipline is applied in diverse geographic locations through engagement in international contexts. By becoming global citizens, students demonstrate respect for diversity and make an effort to advance society toward peace and prosperity (Byker & Putman, 2018). However, having a vision for creating innovative curricula and learning experiences is vital in determining the instructional approaches and strategies needed to achieve it (Ferguson, 2019). Cross-cultural experiential learning is not a new concept for educators since schools have become more diverse, and greater emphasis has been placed on the value of global education (Lee, 2011).

Experiential learning encompasses activities in which students learn by doing and reflect on their experiences. Mainly, experiential learning consists of critical reflection, observation, pragmatic, active experimentation, and contextually rich concrete experiences (Morris, 2019). Access to other cultures through direct observation provides students with unique opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and values focused on expanding their worldviews. Since faculty and students do not always have the means to travel to different contexts, cutting-edge technologies deliver unique access for students to develop their learning beyond their classrooms. Insight into other countries promotes cultural sensitivity development and encourages commitment to understanding and appreciating cultural differences. Universities that were forced to become creative in their international initiatives are now using immersive learning to continue providing students with impactful global studies. These educational programs offer students who would not have been able to study abroad a new access to experimental learning, resulting in increased cultural competence and content knowledge (Liu & Thomas, 2021).

International Education

This literature review also uncovered the value of international education through the development of cross-cultural curricula and learning outcomes. Literature indicates that universities often pride themselves on developing commitments to diversity and global consciousness (Matheus & Gaugler, 2020). These learning outcomes and goals are generally integrated throughout university initiatives, including international education, research projects, and curricula updates. Many universities offer immersive activities focused on exploring other cultures to provide students with direct engagement in international experiences. Short term immersive international studies are perceived as valuable and beneficial in expanding students' worldviews (Coker et al., 2018). Engaging in international experiences provides students with additional opportunities to develop global awareness, which is integral in preparing them to develop diverse perspectives of the world and understand complicated issues that impact individuals across the globe. Global education addresses real-life problems and focuses on academic areas linked to global citizenship (Matheus & Gaugler, 2020). Through active engagement in global education, students develop skills in interacting effectively with global peers and begin to act as citizens of the world. Global awareness can be defined as possessing knowledge of global issues and having functional knowledge of how to interact in other cultures (DeLoach et al., 2019). Although learners can acquire some of this knowledge through traditional classroom lectures, Leung et al. (2021) found that the inclusion of interactive technologies in educational environments further fosters students' development of global perspectives.

In recent years, there has been an increase in many institutions' offerings of short-term international programs (Medora et al., 2022; Shimmi & Ota, 2018). Universities are innovative in extending these opportunities to ensure a broader audience can participate. For example, higher education institutions often integrate in-person and virtual global engagements and include diversity and social justice outcomes throughout their curricula. Participation in these

learning engagements often provides learners with the most powerful and meaningful experiences. For instance, field experiences and study abroad activities integrate experiential learning. This teaching approach seeks to engage learners through direct experience to increase students' skills, values, and capacity to contribute to their communities (Gavillet, 2019). Specifically, experiential learning helps achieve the institutional goals of guiding students to become culturally competent practitioners. Another positive outcome of experiential learning is that students often experience higher levels of success in job attainment (Coker et al., 2018).

Career Outcomes

While study abroad experiences are often personally enjoyable for students, this review sought to uncover the long-term benefits of these experiences and further the necessity of continuing these experiences during a global pandemic. Research indicates that international engagement and learning experiences positively impact students' marketability and career prospects. The Institute of International Education (2017) found that students who partook in international experiences developed a broad range of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills; expanded their career opportunities; developed enhanced levels of self-awareness and problem-solving skills; and established a tolerance for ambiguity. Through his editorial work with the American Institute for Foreign Study, Tillman (n.d.) expressed that "we live in a challenging era with increased pressures on our workforce due to globalization and the demands of political, social, and economic forces" (p. 7). Particularly, students are preparing to enter a perpetually changing workforce that encapsulates global differences. The increasingly integrated nature of our global economies also highlights the importance of academic study to professional work connections (Easki-Smith, 2021). Involvement in global learning presents students with opportunities to develop the expertise necessary to work in a global network and interact effectively with colleagues worldwide.

Research has also demonstrated that immersion in a university's international experiences results in numerous learner benefits. For example, NAFSA (n.d.) shared that student engagement in study abroad results in improved grade point averages and language acquisition, builds enlightened nationalism, which NAFSA defines as allowing for more effective collaborative work experiences between individuals of other countries, expands understandings of complex global issues, and results in greater intercultural learning, and increases employability and career skills. International electives are perceived as providing high-impact practices for many degree programs, including healthcare (Imafuku et al., 2021), entrepreneurship (Han et al., 2020), and technology (Payne et al., 2020). HIPs show significant relationships with degree attainment (Dinh & Zhang, 2020). These types of practices are integrated into study abroad learning (Johnson & Stage, 2018), resulting in increased engagement and successful learning for students across diverse backgrounds.

In today's interconnected world, there is a demand for university students to obtain high levels of intercultural competence. Acquisition of these competencies allows students to stand out in a competitive marketplace and become interculturally sensitive leaders. Cultural sensitivity is described as one's emotional involvement in other cultures and the ability to

effectively interact with people of other cultures (Bennett, 1993). Ruth et al. (2018) also discovered that student involvement in study abroad presents additional benefits, including professional connections and enhanced worldviews, particularly for female students. Notably, researchers have found that female students experience greater gains in global competency and intercultural development and express more confidence in working in culturally diverse teams compared to males who study abroad (Petrie-Wyman et al., 2020; Vande Berg et al., 2012). Reasons for these findings could stem from more females selecting courses focusing on languages and culture (Cordua & Netz, 2022).

Virtual Field Experiences

This literature review also sought to explore the value of virtual field experiences during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the future. Recent literature indicates that virtual field experiences provide students with opportunities to practice learning for situations that may be too expensive, dangerous, or impractical to encounter in the real world (Makransky & Mayer, 2022). One example is that students can travel to destinations that may be perceived as unsafe due to political unrest, natural disasters, or health related conditions. Online immersive learning can also be more practical and cost efficient for students who are unable to travel. Because international travel can be costly and problematic due to professional and personal responsibilities, students may desire to partake but find it difficult to commit. Still, virtual experiences allow students to travel across the globe without departing from their classrooms. Through virtual engagement, students interact in learning situations that allow adaptive feedback and authentic experiences that enhance exploration, analysis, and discovery of new locations (Mead et al., 2019). Further, Wallgrun et al. (2022) discovered that immersive virtual experiences increased spatial awareness, motivation, and interest.

Utilizing advanced technologies in university curricula allows for access to immersive learning and overcoming physical limitations in visiting specific destinations (e.g., other countries and historical landmarks). Immersive technologies additionally provide place-based learning by mimicking natural interactions and allowing for beyond-reality experiences by integrating contextual information. Makransky and Mayer (2022) described immersion as involving objective features of instructional technology, which allows for a vivid virtual environment.

Benefits of Global Mindedness

The faculty member's role on a field experience trip involves more than simply accompanying the students overseas. Rather, to provide a rich learning environment for students, faculty should serve as "cultural informants" by providing "context and answer[ing] questions accurately and appropriately in the moment" (King et al., 2021, p. 791). The faculty members' role, both abroad and virtually, is crucial in garnering the full benefits of the field experience program, including the development of global mindedness of their students. Global mindedness provides individuals with the knowledge of how to work harmoniously with others located across the world and promotes respect and compassion throughout interactions. Matheus and

Gaugler (2020) described global mindedness as encompassing one's desire to "demonstrate civic engagement, take responsibility for the good of people and the environment on a global level, and develop a sense of self-awareness by empathetically understanding how individuals contribute to the world" (p. 160). Involvement in classroom activities focused on fostering global connections augments global competencies that include self-efficacy, adaptability, openness to differences, and positive attitudes (Boudreau, 2020).

By engaging with virtual reality, students can receive many of the same positive learning effects of active engagement in an in-person immersion situation (Markowitz et al., 2018). Interacting with others globally through any medium allows students to deepen their content knowledge. In addition, virtual student experiences can motivate students to acquire new knowledge and dispel misconceptions. Indeed, Compton and Davis (2010) found that virtual field components positively impacted learners, clarified prior misconceptions, and increased their interest in the topic. However, for these experiences to be successful, they shared that certain key elements are integral, including increasing awareness through external and internal informational methods (e.g., information provided by faculty, stakeholders, international partners), self-paced and guided observations, and experiential learning activities. More recently, Liu and Thomas (2021) discovered that virtual cultural exchanges enhance students' levels of intercultural competence and provide meaningful access to course topics. Further, Vu and Fisher (2021) revealed in their study that students completing virtual field components experienced similar academic performance gains as their peers in face-to-face experiences.

Technology Mediated Learning

Technology-mediated learning is an impactful tool that has transformed teaching and learning. Bower (2019) explained that technology-mediated learning highlights how information is conveyed and how individuals are linked. This learning environment emphasizes a holistic framework for "developing and analyzing situations where technology mediates learning" (Oliveira et al., 2021, p. 1361). Söllner et al. (2018) also described this learning environment as activities that are inclusive of interactions that occur among students and/or with their teachers through advanced technologies. Student exchanges with technology-mediated interactions provide educators with crucial feedback that informs their consequent pedagogical actions (Bower, 2019). Esaki-Smith (2021) expressed that student skill development of computer expertise is portrayed as important soft skills given the ever-increasing technology-based workplace approaches.

Educators' integration of technology-mediated learning is a major trend in academia. Experiential learning allows interactive learning that aligns with students' career goals and provides value-added skills that permit overseas experiences and employment (Tillman, n.d.). Researchers have found that technology-supported experiential learning systems further promote students' problem-solving competencies, academic outcomes, attitudes, and collective efficacy (Cheng et al., 2019). Additionally, technology-mediated learning environments result in effective

student-content interactions (Owusu-Agyeman et al., 2018) and improvement in cognitive skills, educational practices, and the classroom atmosphere (Yat Wa Liu et al., 2020).

Innovative Technologies

Ferguson (2019) proclaimed that many pedagogy innovations are rooted in technology. Specifically, the integration of trending technologies supports and enables effective pedagogical approaches. As a result, many new technologies are being used for instructional and learning processes. These technologies provide benefits to students (e.g., increase motivation, result in higher academic gains) and faculty (e.g., greater access to resources, increased collaborations) and complement teaching activities (Pérez-delHoyo et al., 2020). McSurley et al. (2022) noted that technological innovations will have a key role in shaping and expanding global engagement options and providing greater access to a variety of international opportunities. Further, they shared that utilizing technology-based global programming is likely a powerful tool for expanding internationalization efforts (McSurley et al., 2022).

Applications

Faculty members who offer students international and global experiences need to consider how to develop content that is memorable, meaningful, exciting, and intellectually stimulating (Medora et al., 2022). In traditional in-person international exchanges, Medora et al. (2022) cautioned that faculty often consider the target country most practical to visit. However, with the advent of newer technologies, locations for international focus are unbounded, allowing for visits to places otherwise not practical for university planning. Many technologies are available for faculty to create robust virtual field exchanges. For example, live streaming options allow students to watch real-time events occurring in another location. In addition, students can participate in video visits recorded and narrated by a host. Scheduled and guided visits can also be conducted at other schools, historical sites, or museums. Likewise, faculty can arrange virtual sessions through video conferencing platforms.

Innovative technologies such as virtual reality provide immersive life-like exposure to other cities and countries. Interactions in virtual spaces often mimic how individuals respond in natural environments (Markowitz et al., 2018). Particularly, virtual simulations allow learners to experience content visually, similar to how they would within the real world. Students are granted safe spaces to make mistakes and augment skill sets within these virtual environments. Researchers suggest that students feel more comfortable and less pressured when performing in virtual settings (Binfet et al., 2022; Fitch et al., 2016; Hanson et al., 2020; Lanzieri et al., 2021; Lara, 2020; Li et al., 2022). Virtual immersion provides abundant benefits, including reducing cognitive dissonance, improving reflection skills, bridging theory and practice, and creating positive learning conditions (Vu & Fisher, 2021).

Considerations in the Development of Virtual Field Experiences

Radianti et al. (2020) indicated that there is an influx of interest in virtual reality integration in higher education environments. Virtual reality has made advancements in

education, but Markowitz et al. (2018) cautioned that it is underutilized due to financial constraints and implementation challenges such as scheduling conflicts (Bueno-Alastuey & Kleban, 2016; Mead et al., 2019; Seymour et al., 2018), time zone concerns (Lee & Markey, 2014; Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020), and comfort levels associated with using new technologies (Juarez & Critchfield, 2021; Lee & Markey, 2014; Mead et al., 2019). In their own experiences of creating a virtual field experience between students in the United States and India, Krishnan et al. (2021) noted that the ten-hour time difference was a challenge, and the ability to send text messages to international student partners was also problematic. Therefore, they found that video chats were much more successful. Recent publications on the topic indicate the need for faculty to be creative, flexible, and open to serving as problem-solvers during the immersive virtual field experience.

In addition to being mindful of technology concerns, curriculum designers must include academic rigor and consider cultural competencies and meaning. Instructors' curriculum design approaches should "focus on topics that [can] be reflected in the interactional experience with effective assignments aligned to course outcomes that are authentic, scaffolded, varied, and achievable within the time frame" (King et al., 2021, p. 791). Reflecting on their experiences transitioning from in-country to virtual field experience, Lugger and Koonmen (2022) noted the importance of replicating as much of the originally planned short-term immersion experience as possible, as well as mapping assignments to the course objectives.

There are a variety of learning assignments that instructors can consider when developing an immersive virtual field study. Based on a review of recently published literature, case studies are a popular approach for virtual study abroad (King et al., 2021; Krishnan et al., 2021; Lugger & Koonmen, 2022). Case studies can be completed through either an asynchronous or synchronous reading and discussion or a presentation focused assignment using PowerPoint, Prezi, Canva, or other related platforms. Further, King et al. (2021) noted the value of utilizing case studies with a student-centered approach, such as think-pair-share, role-plays, concept mapping, and project-based learning. Case study based assignments allow students to explore cultures through the lens of specific individuals, events, or situations and analyze experienced or potential outcomes.

Developers should assess the use of reflective learning activities in their coursework and the benefit to students of reflecting on their learning throughout the course (Krishnan et al., 2021). Reflection activities allow students to apply what they have learned about a new culture or geographical area to their settings, personal beliefs and habits, and professional goals. Another beneficial option is the inclusion of service-learning projects. These, even in virtual field experiences, allow the learner to give back their own time and resources to the community they are learning from, thus creating a more profound sense of connection and appreciation for the culture being studied (King et al., 2021; Lugger & Koonmen, 2022). An additional design consideration is a recommendation that, due to the need to, as well as the often difficult nature of building community in the online setting, active participation in all course activities, including any live sessions, should be considered as part of the student's grade in the course (Lugger &

Koonmen, 2022). In summary, King et al. (2021) proclaimed that equivalent to an in-country experience, faculty members tasked with leading a virtual field exchange:

take responsibility for pre-immersion, immersion, and post-immersion activities...[and] to prevent cultural dominance and promote broad learning experiences; faculty must be mindful that instructional materials and lectures should emanate from, and be reflective of, each culture group taking part in the experience (p. 792).

Thus, faculty should consult with in-country partners, university instructional designers, and seek student feedback to ensure that cultural concerns are addressed, technology is integrated effectively, and student learning interests and goals are also considered.

Concluding Thoughts

Researchers have long recommended engagement in global immersive educational programming (Cushner, 2007; Ferrillo & Watson, 2019; Getz, 2020; Hellmich, 2018; Lee, 2011; Smith-Miller et al., 2010; Willard-Holt, 2001). The development of global competencies consistently correlates with not only a student's personal growth but also their lifelong success (King et al., 2021). Institutions of higher education can leverage innovative technologies through immersive learning spaces. Engagement in meaningful, creative, and structured activities results in improved learning outcomes (Oliveira et al., 2021). As higher education in today's world focuses extensively on preparing students to enter an ever-evolving workplace (Van Mol et al., 2021), institutions are pressured to demonstrate employment outcomes (Esaki-Smith, 2021). Through international education, students develop transferrable skillsets and positive employment gains (Institute of International Education, 2017).

Boudreau (2020) recommended integrating contextualized learning activities and providing opportunities for students to become curious about other cultures and diverse perspectives. Learning is also impacted by one's emotions, both positive (e.g., enjoyment, excitement) and negative (e.g., frustration, stress), influencing cognitive processing, engagement, and learning outcomes (Lanzieri et al., 2021). Student engagement in international experiences results in positive impacts leading to more opportunities in education and career pathways, language development and proficiency, and personal growth (Bluth, 2018; Garbati & Rothschild, 2016; Harper, 2018; Iskhakova et al., 2022; Lee, 2011; Matheus & Gaugler, 2020; McDowell et al., 2012; Stebleton et al., 2013). Further, students hone skills associated with linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural differences and develop strategies for meaning-focused coping, communication management, relationship building, and management of learning opportunities (Imafuku et al., 2021).

While the spread of COVID-19 may have been the catalyst for creating the current demand for immersive virtual field experiences (King et al., 2021; Lugger & Koonmen, 2022), the buildout of these programs can continue to meet the needs of students well beyond the days of the pandemic. This literature review indicates that the development of both creative and rigorous immersive virtual field experiences brings the world to students who may be unable to experience a traditional study abroad course. In addition, research published throughout the

pandemic demonstrates that students who are unable or uncomfortable traveling due to finances, medical concerns, caregiver roles, or work responsibilities can now participate in international learning with their peers, thus developing the much-needed global competencies and critical thinking skills needed to be successful in modern institutions and workplaces.

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Race, Negative Acculturation, and The Black International Student: A Study of Afro-Caribbean and African-Born Students in U.S. Colleges

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Abstract

Black students originating from African and Caribbean nations are well represented in the ranks of international students attending U.S. colleges, at over 51,000 annually (Institute of International Education, 2021). In addition to contributing heavily to the overall economic impact of the universities they attend (NAFSA, 2021), Black foreign-born students play a critically important role in adding diversity of thought and perspective to these academic communities. However, because of the additional socio-political challenges they face in a racially polarized United States, these students must navigate a more difficult pathway to acculturation and desirable academic outcomes than their non-Black peers. This qualitative study examines the phenomenological experiences of 15 foreign-born Black students from the sub-Saharan African and Caribbean regions – lived experiences found at the intersection of immigration, race, and higher education. The findings suggest that the interpolations of race salience, racism, and racial microaggressions all contribute to negative acculturation postures whereby the students are more likely to reject rather than accept the host country's cultural norms. This aversive positionality leads to increased acculturative stressors and a higher likelihood of self-construed feelings of marginalization or separation.

Keywords: acculturation theory, Black international students, critical race theory, ethno-transnationalism, negative acculturation.

This study explores negative acculturative experiences of foreign-born Black international students who currently attend or previously attended a predominantly white institution (PWI) of higher education in the United States. The study explores the extent to which reported instances of racism encountered by these students, whether on campus or off campus, played a role in how they negatively acculturated to life in the U.S. Using Berry's Acculturation Model (1997) and critical race theory (CRT) as guiding frameworks, two approaches to acculturation that can be described as *negative acculturation* (i.e., marginalization and separation) were isolated and applied. *Marginalization* in this sample population happens when a student reports feelings of being distinctively left out from or not invited to be a part of the within-group social circles of their U.S. peers. Additionally, *separation* in this group occurs when students intentionally decide to disengage from or reject overtures to be a part of within-group social circles of their U.S. peers. Both marginalization and separation can adversely impact Black foreign-born students' acculturative experiences. This study explores the degree to which racism may play a part in these two acculturative strategies.

To address these issues, three distinct research questions were proposed. The research questions are:

1. What is the relationship (if any) between racism and perceived negative acculturation trends in students of Afro-Caribbean or sub-Saharan African backgrounds in higher education?
2. Are there any differences in negative acculturation trends between Black international students from sub-Saharan Africa versus Caribbean nations?
3. What might universities do to address any negative acculturation trends seen in the Black international student population?

Background

Much has been written about the Black student experience on college campuses in the United States to chronicle the negative racial experiences and mental trauma that these students have historically faced because of the color of their skin (Solorzano et al., 2000; Williams-Witherspoon, 2020; Williams et al., 2021). Historically, Black students attending college in the U.S. have faced challenges, unlike their peers of other races. This includes racial microaggressions, racial biases, and in many cases, overt racism.

This issue is compounded for Black immigrant students who, upon arrival, automatically inherit the fallout of the American political climate on issues pertinent to race while simultaneously contending with issues inherent to separation from their home country (Jung et al., 2007). This phenomenon of having to contend with the political realities of the host nation may be startling for many international students of color, who largely do not get a choice to be passive observers and may feel disinclined to participate or take sides in a charged political discourse surrounding race. In many cases, if this discourse proves too difficult to contend with, students may choose or be forced into a path of negative acculturation. Negative acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs where immigrants may experience acute acculturation stressors that cause them increased levels of distress and may lead them to embrace anti-social behaviors such as actively separating themselves from the host culture (Atterya, 2021) or feeling marginalized from the host culture (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008).

Black Students in U.S. Colleges

The *color line*, as referenced in Solorzano et al. (2000), highlights a distinct, socially constructed differentiation phenomenon based on skin color that is present on many U.S. college campuses and pervasive in the wider society. This color line highlights the racial dominance of one group over another and is more commonly referred to as racism. Solórzano, referencing previous groundbreaking studies on racism by Lorde (1987) and Marable (1992), defined racism as being typically comprised of three distinct features: 1) the idea that one race is inherently superior to another; 2) the group that has the belief of superiority having bestowed power that enables them to carry out acts of racism against others; and 3) race-motivated discrimination and abuse may be perpetrated against members of multiple ethnic and racial groups by the dominant group.

Several studies have pointed to the trauma experienced by students of color when faced with the constant reality of lived racial microaggressions in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) of higher education (Sabbagh & Ben-Menachem, 2021; Williams et al., 2021; Williams-Witherspoon, 2021). Many Black students on U.S. college campuses must necessarily deal with processes, structures, and discourses in the college environment that disfavor them politically (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Review of Literature

Sub-Saharan African Students

About 40,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa attend U.S. colleges each year (Institute of International Education, 2021). Some data also shows that when asked about their perceptions of being perceived as Black in the U.S., many sub-Saharan African students felt that the idea of U.S. Blackness—where race is seen as central to Black identity—had a negative connotation and was a posture they as expatriates did not readily assume (Delaloue-King Francis, 2014). Consequently, negative immersion in the host U.S. culture by their race, such as that which some Black African students experience, tends to lead to more acculturative stress (Hansen et al., 2018).

Other research shows that African students in the U.S. are often insufficiently aware of the pervasive and ugly history of racism in the United States. As a result, when exposed to it in conversations with host country peers, they will try to avoid these discussions (Manguvo, 2013). Unfortunately, this avoidance strategy may sometimes cause negative interactions, particularly with their U.S.-born Black counterparts, who may interpret this as a refusal to engage with or help to combat racism. These negative interactions may cause more acculturative stress, leading to more distress for these international students (Macharia-Lowe, 2017).

Mandishona (2018) identifies several strategies that university officials and policymakers may use to mitigate the acculturative stressors in Black international students, as follows: 1) evaluate their pre-arrival knowledge and perceptions of race by having frank and honest conversations with them hosted by trusted host country peers, advisors, or mentors; 2) quantify their race salience quotient, meaning the extent to which they believe race is impactful in their everyday living; 3) assess how much have they learned about the U.S. cultural environment since arrival; 4) consider what their interpersonal encounters have been like since their arrival; 5) explore if there are any meaningful inter-group friendships with host country peers, as a baseline to determine what barriers, if any, the lack of intercultural friendships may pose to acculturation; and, 6) offer institutional support that takes into consideration all these other factors (p. 78-79).

Afro-Caribbean Students

The research of Edwards-Joseph and Baker (2012) found that Black students from the Caribbean—like their sub-Saharan African counterparts—often experience feelings of not fitting in, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and value system differences.

As with sub-Saharan African students studying in college in the U.S., many Afro-Caribbean students prefer to use their national origin as their primary lens of self-construal. These Caribbean international students may reject the monolithic *Black* or *African American*

label used in the U.S. and tend to reject this amalgamation of the host and home cultures. The idea of this forced or abnormal assimilation of different ideologies around Blackness may be antithetical to the strong sense of nationalism that many Caribbean students feel toward their home nations and cultures. (Waters, 1994). Afro-Caribbean students studying in the U.S. overwhelmingly favor nationalism and ethnicity over race, so their sense of Blackness tends to be more nuanced (Waters, 1994; Joseph et al., 2013). Research from Taylor et al. (2019) notes that “in the Caribbean context, race itself is defined along a continuum that includes other factors such as education, wealth, occupation, and family standing, all of which assume more prominent roles in defining social status” (p. 465). In many of these countries in the English-speaking Caribbean, peoples of racial and ethnic minorities, as defined in the U.S., comprise a majority of the population. Therefore, upon arrival in the U.S., Afro-Caribbean students tend to arrive with lower levels of internalized racism than their American-born Black counterparts (Mouzon & McClean, 2017).

Additionally, there is a factor of commonalities in language. The fact that students from the Afro-Caribbean region share English as a common/first language with the vast population of the U.S. tends to remove the barrier of language discrimination. The language insufficiency barrier, used as a pretext for racial slights, is mainly seen in the experiences of Black students from sub-Saharan Africa (Mitchell & Bryan, 2007).

Nonetheless, despite any advantages gained from language commonalities, many Afro-Caribbean international students still believe they may incur negatively unfavorable or unbeneficial consequences if they wholly embrace the Black American culture (Joseph et al., 2013), and so they are hesitant to engage. Afro-Caribbean students are also highly cognizant of how the larger society may see their engagement with the broader African American culture and thus may be more inclined to pursue a strategy of separation or marginalization from the host culture and have only practical (the minimum that is required) immersion in any parts of the American culture.

Despite taking such measures, Afro-Caribbean students in higher education cannot outrun the pervasiveness of racial animus commonly found in U.S. interpersonal interactions. And studies have shown that these students, too, experience discrimination and racism in college that flows along a continuum from low discrimination and microaggressions to disrespect and condescension, from general discrimination that may be intermittent or singular to outright, chronic, and relentless discrimination (Clark et al., 2015; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014).

These unchecked racial attitudes toward these students may lead them to negative acculturation. They feel marginalized and lose any incentive to engage inter-culturally with their U.S. counterparts (Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014). Research by Malcolm and Mendoza (2014) shows that Afro-Caribbean international students often felt that their needs were left unexamined or unmet by university administrators and that any such institutionalized programmatic efforts were often too general and not sufficiently reflective of their actual needs.

Conceptual Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

This study examines U.S. campus racial and political environment via the theoretical lens of critical race theory (CRT), which lays out the parameters for an inquisitive multidisciplinary scholarly discourse on race relations and ethno-transnational racism in higher education. CRT grounds racism as the basis to analyze societal inequities and challenge historically racially oppressive institutions, such as the system of American jurisprudence, education, and housing (Donnor, 2016; Taylor, 1998), and as such, is an appropriate framework for this study.

Racism is widely considered a social construct (Gannon, 2016; Morning, 2007). As such, it must be subjected to a radical deconstructive shift via a strong counter-narrative, which is evident when utilizing a CRT lens to address inequities in U.S. education.

Berry's Acculturation Model (BAM)

Berry's Acculturation Model (1990, 1997) is the second framework under which this research study was conducted. Under Berry's theory, immigrants to a new country or culture do not simply follow a linear path of assimilation with the host or dominant group. Instead, individuals can choose how to interact or relate to the host culture by employing a distinct acculturation attitude. This acculturation attitude manifests itself in two main choice dimensions: (a) the individual's choice of adopting or rejecting the host culture and (b) their choice of retaining or rejecting the home culture (Worthy, Lavigne & Romero, 2020). From these two dimensions, four distinct strategies or attitudinal postures are manifested: 1) *assimilation* – which is blending in fully with the host culture and letting go of the home culture; 2) *integration* – which is when the host culture is adopted while fully maintaining and preserving the home culture; 3) *separation* – which is a rejection of the host culture and full retention of the home culture; and, 4) *marginalization* – which is a 'no-man's land' attitudinal posture where the host culture is rejected, but there is an element of loss or letting go of the home culture as well (Berry, 1990, 1997). This study focuses on the separation and marginalization strategies – that is, the negative interactions manifested by a rejection of the host culture, rejection of the home culture, or rejection of both.

Several other researchers have also built on Berry's model over the years (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Kotic, 2002; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008; Ward & Kus, 2012), and BAM continues to be a useful and relevant framework through which to explore the acculturative attitudes of immigrants. In addition, some researchers have done studies specifically on the acculturative attitudes of international students (Araujo, 2011; Boafa-Arthur, 2013; Tadmor et al., 2009), and this study seeks to expand the findings of those works to look at the acculturative attitudes of Black international students in the U.S.

Research Design/Methods

The qualitative design approach of this study is underpinned by a phenomenological research lens that seeks to make meaning of the shared experiences of the sample population. Phenomenology as a philosophical framework is a complex theory that deals with the human

consciousness from a point-of-view experience and the feelings and emotions through which the consciousness is shaped by those experiences (Balls, 2009; Connelly, 2010). As a research method, phenomenology is mainly used to describe the essence or underlying structure of a lived experience. That essence is developed from a composite analysis of collecting qualitative data from the individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

Selection

A sample size of 15 foreign-born Black students was chosen for this study. Nine students are from the Sub-Saharan African region, and six are from the Afro-Caribbean region. The target population from which the samples were drawn are college students attending or having previously attended institutions in a Mid-Atlantic, Western, Southern, or Midwestern U.S. college. The sample frame was limited to graduate, undergraduate, or recently graduated students who met the following criteria: foreign-born students from anglophone Afro-Caribbean or Sub-Saharan African nations; students of Black or mixed ethnicity (Black plus another race or ethnicity); and students who otherwise identify as being ethnically Black. Data collection followed a purposive sampling strategy where participants were randomly selected from the population of students who met the specific inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling was also used after the initial outreach efforts to recruit other participants who fit the research inclusion criteria.

Description of Participants

The participants ranged in age from 20-49 years old, with five identifying as female and ten identifying as male. There was an almost even split between those currently enrolled and those who had previously graduated from these colleges. There needed to be more parity in the regional representation of the sample, as there were nine participants from the sub-Saharan African region and only six from the Caribbean. Additionally, one of the Caribbean participants identified as Afro-Panamanian and was born in the country of Panama. Panama is geographically a part of Central America and is culturally most often considered to be one of the Latin American countries. However, Panama has a rich history of socio-geographical affiliation with the Caribbean region. Its inhabitants share many cultural traits with their counterparts in the various island nations of the Caribbean Sea basin, as many Caribbean nationals settled there as migrant workers helping to build the Panama Canal. The Panamanian participant also reported growing up in a household that was rich in Caribbean history, culture, and practices, as both her grandparents were from Caribbean nations (Barbados and Jamaica).

The participants attended predominantly white colleges and universities that ranged from mid-sized urban campuses in high population cities to large sprawling suburban campuses in the traditional college towns found throughout the U.S. Some were smaller, standalone colleges with a single campus, and others were part of large, statewide university systems.

The participants also reported varying levels of financial sufficiency to pay for their college education in the U.S. and associated living and educational expenses. For example, eight participants reported personal funds or family finances as their source of funding, a few listed

personal loans or student loans, one had grants and scholarships, another had athletic scholarships only, and several had a combination of loans and grants/scholarships.

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview technique. Using the Bearman (2019) approach, several questions were prepared for the participant interviews, each addressing one of the research questions being investigated in this study.

Data Analysis

Following the best coding practices outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018) and Saldaña (2016), the interview data collected for this study were coded following a data analysis spiral method. First, the data were securely stored and organized per research participant, followed by an initial coding cycle to reveal emergent or salient ideas, followed by a second cycle where identified codes were classified into major themes; finally, interpretations of the themes were developed and assessed to address the research questions. The data were then visualized and represented manually in a color-coded Excel spreadsheet, and from this spreadsheet, an account of the research findings was drawn.

The process of coding employed in this study followed an iterative, multiple-cycle *pattern coding* method that saw each cycle of interaction with the data seeking to draw out a salient portion of the empirical data, such as a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph, and then labeling it with a researcher-generated universal word or phrase that creates a relationship with similar datum from elsewhere in the dataset (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, a strategy of *member checking* was employed whereby four participants were asked to check for congruency in the quality and accuracy of the data extrapolated from their interviews. Creating a vector between researcher, participant, and data helped triangulate the accuracy of the concepts and theories that underlay meaning-making from the empirical data.

The study has some limitations that were out of the researcher's control. First, as noted above, the study employed a snowball method of finding participants beginning with direct outreach via online recruitment. Therefore, the sampling strategy introduced some unpredictability in the response rate based on the strength of the relationships of the first few participants within their peer groups. Secondly, there were some concerns with establishing trust with the participants, as the research data collection relied primarily on cold calls, direct, unsolicited contact, Internet recruitment, and other online outreach via social media.

Findings

Six main themes emerged from the data related to one or more research questions. These themes all supported the idea that there are indeed some discernable patterns across the experiences of the students that give credence to the idea of ethno-transnational racism practices (i.e., racism across international cultures and ethnicities) found in and around the campuses of predominantly white college institutions in the U.S. A resultant negative acculturation posture was observed in the data taken from Black foreign-born students at the center of this phenomenon.

The major themes that emerged from the data are: 1) Initial Attitude Towards Race in the U.S.; 2) Race Salience: Accepting U.S. Racial Status; 3) Impact of Race on Sense of Isolation; 4) Impact of Cultural Synergies; 5) Individual and Group Racial Advantages; and 6) College Administrators' Impact on Racism.

Research Question #1

What is the relationship (if any) between racism and perceived negative acculturation trends in students of Afro-Caribbean or sub-Saharan African-born backgrounds in higher education?

The findings indicate that initial attitude towards race in the U.S. (IATR), or the race salience (RS) – that is, understanding and accepting of the students' racial status within the U.S. and impact of racial status on their sense of isolation (RSI) -- was related to how the participants acculturated to life in the U.S.

Research Question #2

Are there any differences in negative acculturation trends between Black international students from sub-Saharan Africa versus Caribbean nations?

The findings from the second research question suggest that the impact of cultural synergies (ICS) and some individual and group differences play a role in whether Black international students assumed a negative acculturative posture. For example, U.S. college students from the Caribbean region may have a slight acculturation advantage stemming from English being their first language or from the ease of English language written or spoken proficiency. There was also some evidence to show that the proximity of the Caribbean region with a shorter distance of travel to the U.S. may create more cultural similarities between home and host country as opposed to the students from African nations with a more considerable distance between home and the host nation.

Research Question # 3

What might universities do to address any negative acculturation trends seen in the Black international student population?

A major theme espoused by participants was that many designated school officials (DSOs) were not fully aware of the cultural nuances involved in providing support to Black international students or of their significance in being a bulwark against campus racism. The data collected in this study also shows that many Black international students believe the level of support provided by administrators differs significantly from that provided to international students from other, non-Black groups with a larger economic footprint in the university. They also believe this is an area where the university may have the most impact in helping their Black foreign-born students to acculturate more positively.

John Berry (1990, 1997) has studied extensively how immigrants, upon arrival to another country, go through an identity fluidity period of sorts, during which several major variables impact how well they adjust to life in the new environment. Other researchers have built on Berry's Acculturation Model with research that is specific to international students and which shows that any number of the variables mentioned in Berry's research may become a source of

disruptive acculturative stress to international students (Atteraya, 2021; Rajab, 2014) and may prohibit these students from achieving their desired favorable acculturation or educational outcomes.

Those disruptive stressors may manifest themselves in what Berry (1997) describes as the acculturative postures of *marginalization* or *separation* sometimes seen in the population of immigrant students attending school in the U.S. This separation or marginalization, sometimes referred to as “otherizing,” usually manifests in the form of power dynamics, and for Black international students, more pointedly as racial power dynamics, as described by George-Mwangi (2016). Therefore, from the data collected in this study, we see how these six major emergent themes align and interplay with the acculturative postures of marginalization and separation for the participants and how race and racism are the common underpinnings of each.

Themes

Initial Attitude Towards Race and Racism

The data collected shows that initial attitudes towards race and racism in the U.S. influenced how the participants eventually situated themselves in the college ecosystem. Some participants were already very aware of the ubiquity of racialized interactions experienced by Black people in the United States before they arrived. This may have been from having friends or family already in the U.S., as in the case of P6, who noted he understood the racial environment because “I have a couple of friends who were here before I got here.” While others were quite apathetic at the idea of personalized racism directed towards them, having had little experience with this phenomenon previously (Said P11, “that's something that I did not even worry about where I'm from, everybody around me was Black”). Some reported being perplexed at the prospect of and questioned the necessity to interpret some of their interactions through the lens of race, as with P3 (“I don't see it as a racial issue, but obviously it's taken as such.”). Others were hypersensitive to the idea of racism directed towards them and braced themselves (“My friends and I were waiting for the racism,” P7).

Race Salience

Whatever their initial attitude towards race, they all invariably got to a point where they understood the salience of their race and racial status as integral to their continued existence in the U.S. college environment, a phenomenon also reported in previous research by Mandishona (2018). As much as many of the students would have preferred to blend in and remain incognito, they reported having constantly been reminded of their outsider status as they stood at the intersection of race and immigration. For example, P10 pointed out that, in terms of class classification and social status, he did not fully realize he was culturally and socio-politically Black or the implication of this position until he got to college in the U. S. and experienced the phenomenon of race-related *otherness*. There came a moment when most of the participants realized that understanding and acknowledging their racial status in the U.S. was inescapable. For several participants, this happened when they were faced with circumstances of subtle microaggressions; for others, it was overt racism.

P 8 explained her experiences trying to find housing when she arrived in the U.S. and some of the challenges she faced because of her race:

Honestly, this is my very first time coming in very close contact with racism. All the time, it's like reading about it or maybe hearing about it. Then coming in here for these past months, I have seen it. I felt it. From the point of looking for accommodations, it was heavy. The first contact of it is when someone is hearing your voice and feeling that you have an accent and puts you in a box somewhere. So, it is something that is very, very strong.

P 11 relayed an incident that happened to him where he went to a produce store to get fresh produce for preparing a meal. After getting his produce, he stopped at a local corner deli close to his campus to get a can of soda. He had a backpack full of fresh produce when he entered the corner store and was ultimately confronted by the deli clerk, who asked him to empty his backpack to prove he had not stolen any items from the store.

In another incident, P6 recalled how he was reported to the police as a suspicious looking person while he was walking in the park near his apartments to find a quiet spot to pray one night.

P6 said he had to explain to the officers that he lived there in the complex and was not trying to break into any vehicles but was simply trying to find a good place to pray outside on a nice night, in accordance with his religious beliefs.

Upon realizing their race salience status, most participants fully accepted the need to navigate around the resulting sense of isolation that this outsider status brought upon them. At first, many reported having very little knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of their U.S. racial status and reported that they felt alone, unheard, and unseen in some cases.

Impact of Race on Sense of Isolation

Participants described themselves as feeling alone, frequently unaware of or uninvited to social gatherings, and separated from within-group norms of their U.S.-born peers, both White and Black.

“There was a distinct separation with my classmates in a sense; there was definitely the view of I am the ‘other,’ kind of thing,” noted P14.

P10 mentioned that being one of few Black students in many of his classes, he had uncomfortable experiences that made him wonder if race is a factor. He mentioned that classmates didn't overtly tell him he didn't belong in a certain social, project, friendship, or class group. However, he always felt isolated when groups organically formed, mostly leaving him as an outsider. There were times, he said, when he would encounter White classmates in the lobby or the elevator, and they wouldn't speak to or acknowledge him even though they frequently see each other in class. He also mentioned that he often felt left out when groups were needed for class projects. Even when part of the group, he felt as if he wasn't readily welcomed and had to work hard to earn within-group status, even if temporarily. “I don't think I was really welcome

because the collaboration, cohabitation if I should use the word, it was really weird (P10, explained), because they are very uncommon racial experiences that I couldn't believe that exist”.

This is congruent with findings from Tadmor et al. (2009), which speak to the outsider-within status of many international students of color in higher education settings. But, again, this is where 'integrative complexity,' or cultural differentiation, may cast a shadow on whether some international students are welcomed within-group with their U.S. counterparts.

Impact of Cultural Synergies

In some cases, there were sliding scales of inherent advantages and disadvantages based on various socio-political factors. For example, some students could navigate their outsider status within the paradigm of strength in numbers, while others could not. Those cultural synergies formed with others from their home nations helped to situate some students better environmentally as they acculturated to life in the U.S. As such, many Black international students were at a disadvantage due to the lack of other students who shared their national origin on their college campuses. For example, students from prime international student pipeline countries such as China (~300,000 students to the U.S. per year) and other traditionally represented countries such as India (~160,000 students to the U.S. per year), which expatriates some of the largest numbers of foreign-born students to U.S. colleges annually (NAFSA, 2021), seemed to have an easier time settling in.

The students well represented in numbers have a built-in advantage, as often it is easier for those described in U.S. colleges as a nation-bloc to navigate the intricacies and challenges of life as a foreign national in a U.S. higher education together. However, as reported by NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2021), except for Nigeria (~12,000 to the U.S. per year), very few countries in the sub-Saharan region of the African continent even approached the threshold of 5000 represented students annually in U.S. colleges. For example, Ghana sent approximately 4500 students, and Kenya about 3500 in total, by NAFSA's estimates.

The numbers for Afro-Caribbean nations are even more infinitesimal relative to their Asian counterparts. Approximately 2300 total students from the Bahamas and 2700 from Jamaica were reported enrolled in U.S. colleges for the 2020-21 academic school year—and these are the largest two international student pipeline countries from that region. Therefore, the data collected in this survey shows that national origin synergies are an important factor in how some international students acculturate. The students from majority Black countries appeared to be at a distinct disadvantage in this regard.

In terms of additional cultural synergies, other findings emerging from this data showed that similarities between the U.S. culture and some of these students' home countries also play a key role in how they reacted to race and racism in the United States. Some students, particularly those from Caribbean nations, benefited from close cultural ties with the U.S. These close cultural ties made it easier for them to contextualize race and racism when presented with those situations. As P7 noted, “coming from islands in the Caribbean, sometimes value systems align” with life and living in the U.S. as there are, in some instances, support systems from other

Caribbean students and organizations, as well as expatriate Caribbean populations in and around most large U.S. cities. Many North Americans also have a sense of familiarity with Caribbean culture as they frequently vacation at Caribbean destinations and have had exposure to those cultures. He said that sense of alignment allowed him to “lower his shoulders a little bit” and not have to be always so tense and guarded.

Individual and Group Advantages

Inherited ethnocentric racial disadvantages experienced by native-born Blacks in the U.S. were another factor found in this data to be a major inhibitor to positive acculturation by foreign-born Black students. As noted earlier in this study, racism generally encountered by Black students and faculty in higher education has been widely documented (Tatum, 2019; Williams, 2021; Williams-Witherspoon, 2020). Upon arrival in the U.S., these Black foreign-born students report being thrown into a smoldering race-conscious national environment that none of them desire. No differentiation or accommodations, the data shows, are made for their national origin as a mitigating factor against racism, as race and skin color are the primary defining variables in racial encounters.

While some of the participants reported that they were not as socially negatively impacted by the color of their skin as some of their Black international student peers, there was a well-coalesced theme that emerged indicating that White European, Asian, or White-Hispanic international students had a much easier time acculturating than did the Black foreign-born students. As P12 explained, referring to a White international student friend from Germany, “his acculturation to the United States was completely different to mine. I did not have as much of a warm welcome in terms of people broadly inviting me in.”

Several reasons were given for this, including that White Americans in and around the college environs tended to be more open to acceptance of White international students; that White international students seemed to have more social outlets; and that, in many cases, it appeared that White international students were more likely to be relieved of their outsider status and welcome within-group, in a racial context, than were their Black international counterparts.

College Administrators’ Impact on Racism

The final major theme that emerged from the data is that college administrators, such as the designated school official (DSO) charged with managing the onboarding of international students, play an integral role in how well Black foreign-born students acculturate to life on campus. Many participants reported feeling abandoned and overlooked by the school officials in charge of their transition from home nations to life on campus. One participant remarked that she felt like the college “just took my money and did not care afterward.” Another participant noted that some administrators may pay more attention to Asian or Indian students than Black international students because “an economic factor” is at play.

It is the perception of many of these Black international students that the efforts and attention paid by university officials to non-Black internationals, who may number more,

have the unintended effect of leaving Black immigrant students with insufficient resources and support to navigate the challenges unique to them found at the intersection of immigration and race.

While designated school officials play an important role in helping to bridge cultural gaps between host and home countries for these students, they may not always be the most knowledgeable about the idiosyncratic cultural behaviors of specific nations. This is where expatriate communities may play an important role. Several participants mentioned having family or friends who came to the U.S. ahead of them. However, many participants had no natural support system outside the few other international students from their home nation they may have run into on campus if they matriculated at a large enough institution.

Campus student social clubs and organizations certainly give a leg up to those students with large populations from their country or global region. For example, several colleges referenced in this study have chartered African student unions or Caribbean student organizations on campus. These on-campus expatriate social communities can be a source of strength for many of these students, as they may be able to liaise with others from their region of the world, even if not from their own countries.

However, as the Black global diaspora is culturally non-homogenous, many country-specific entertainment, political, gastronomic, educational, socialization, and national familial factors are missing when students are isolated from others who share their specific national homogeneity. Along these lines, local community-based expatriate groups may play a key role in filling that gap and complementing the work of the DSOs. It behooves the DSOs to be aware of their limitations in creating nation-specific cultural bridges and to know when to reach out to and foster relationships with local external expatriate groups in the community that may help these students to reengage with a slice of their home culture. Joint workshops that bring in members of local expatriate community groups may go a long way in furthering the cause of equity-focused leadership as it pertains to Black foreign-born students.

Conclusions

Universities and colleges in the United States may be deleteriously impacted in terms of institutional reputation, shrinking enrollment numbers, and the associated economic impact of both if more care is not taken as to the unique needs of international students coming from various parts of the world. New data from a recent study shows that many European nations, which some consider to be more low-cost, budget-friendly destinations than the U.S., appeal to more study-abroad students (PIE News, 2022). PIE News reports that Italy, Portugal, and Poland are seeing the most growth in study abroad interest from students worldwide. With enrollment numbers and reputation as an impetus, U.S. universities must pay particular care to the needs of their constituent student bodies for their own sake. However, building a more diverse student body and creating an educational environment where all students feel welcome is just as important.

The participants in this study, in general, agree that steps must be taken to mitigate the impact of ethno-transnational racism on predominantly White college campuses. And while most participants in this study hinted at various levels of cultural integration as perhaps the most useful strategy, they believe that acculturative integration can be a two-way street. An example of such symbiosis would be the implementation of affinity programs such as African or Caribbean cultural exchange clubs where international students can share a little bit about their culture while learning more from their peers about the U.S. culture. While Black students' Greek letter organizations have long existed at many U.S. universities, some Black international students indicated an unwillingness to join these organizations, as they believe, as one participant mentioned, the perception is that much of the focus of these groups is on racial issues. P14, for example, said he didn't feel a need to prove he was Black enough and therefore resisted joining an all-Black fraternity.

The most salient theme that emerged from this study was university officials' impact on the acculturation of Black students on these predominantly white U.S. college campuses—or the lack thereof resulting from their low involvement. It is evident from the data that the designated school officials should be more aware of the cultural idiosyncrasies and nuances that make the needs of Black international students unique. DSOs may benefit from participating in cultural sensitivity training specific to students from majority-Black nations. This may help to create safe spaces (physical or figurative) where meaningful cultural exchange can happen to contextualize the intersectionality of immigration and race. While many U.S. universities now boast diversity offices, and some even have Chief Diversity Officers or other high ranking university officials in charge of diversity, better usage must be made of these existing resources to inform a more robust cosmopolitan campus perspective. Consequently, more synergies should be created between International Student Offices and Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on U.S. college campuses. This will ensure sufficient equity focus on the unique needs of international students of color who sit at the confluence of race, higher education, and globalization.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines many of the duties of a designated school official (DSO) programmatically and purely in terms of practicality: helping students with social security numbers and driver's licenses, helps with their majors or programs, transferring to a new school, program extensions, etc. (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022). However, there is little, if any, guidance or best common practice on addressing the cultural nuances and unique needs of students from majority-Black countries coming to school in the U.S. and the challenges inherent in the ubiquity of racial and ethnic microaggressions they must face.

International students are very vulnerable, explained P5, and so “they need to be prepared for the reality that's on the ground.” In this spirit of guardianship, many of the participants see the DSOs as their acculturative lifelines and gatekeepers to, or providers of, safe places while they are away from home and family.

Future Research

This research builds on the work of several higher education researchers, such as the prolific Dr. Chrystal George-Mwangi, but it does have some limitations. There is a sizeable gap in published research in this area of race and immigration when juxtaposed with the scholarship on international students in general. With the lack of quality antecedent data, this study may do more to describe than explain the phenomenon. In the coming years, I hope to see more research done in the ethno-transnational space in higher education. One avenue for future research may be to look at the acculturative experiences of Black international students from wealthier nations versus those Black students attending from lower GDP nations. Another important area of study may be to look at pre-admissions attitudes towards racism of high school students from majority-Black nations and whether there are any correlations with U.S. college acceptance rates and or matriculation from these regions.

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About the Author

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(Neo)-Racism among International Students

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Abstract

Experiences with neo-racism, i.e., discrimination based on the combination of conceptualizations around race, culture, and nationality, towards international students on U.S. campuses have been well documented. In recent years, more research has been conducted extrapolating how instances of neo-racism affect different groups of international students in terms of their racial identity. However, there is a dearth of research looking at international students' awareness of how these neo-racist instances towards international students play out differently based on international students' racial identity. This critical autoethnography of a white international student from Germany offers an initial insight into this gap through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) infused with the concept of neo-racism.

Keywords: International Students; Neo-racism; Critical Race Theory

Many have criticized that scholarship on international students in the United States usually regards them as a homogenous group with little stratification in terms of their various intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and religious views, among many others (Heng, 2019). Specifically, the concepts of race, racism, and neo-racism influence different groups of international students differently as they become racialized in the context of American society. This racialized identity might differ or be altogether new for international students (Fries-Britt et al., 2014). In recent years, there have been more efforts to stratify research on the racial experiences of international students with a special focus on the discrimination that international students of color experience (e.g., Fries-Britt et al., 2014, George Mwangi, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2017; Onyenekwu, 2017). This body of scholarship takes into account the concept of neo-racism, i.e., discrimination not only based on race but also on culture (Lee & Rice, 2007), which is a type of discrimination that international students commonly face. What has rarely been researched, however, is how international students themselves perceive race and instances of racism and neo-racism and how these instances might affect them differently in terms of their racial identity, notably when comparing international students of color to white international students. This autoethnography offers an initial insight into how the awareness of the lived experiences with race, racism, and neo-racism of international students of color differ from a white international graduate student from Germany.

Review of the Literature

International Students in the U.S.

In the academic year 2021-2022, there were 948,519 international students enrolled at higher education institutions in the United States. Of these international students, 35% of

students came from China, 18% came from India, and 4% came from South Korea, as the top three sending nations (IIE Open Doors, 2022). In the context of American society, students from these top sending nations can become racialized and considered people of color when they enter the United States. Students from predominantly European countries, who can become racialized as white in American society, make up less than 1% of international students in the U.S.

These numbers are important when it comes to researching international students, for they are often viewed as one homogenous group with little stratification within this alleged monolith (Heng, 2019). The lived experiences of international students in the U.S., however, can be largely different when considering their multitude of intersecting identities. For example, the overall lived experience of a white international student from Germany can be vastly different from the lived experiences of an Asian international student from China. In terms of racial identity, taking into account the home countries and cultures and how their conceptions of race shape international students' identities are therefore important to consider when researching neo-racist experiences among international students.

(Lack of) Conceptions of Race

In general, the concept of race is a social construct that was invented by dominant groups with settler-colonial ideologies during colonial times to justify the established hierarchies between themselves and the oppressed groups, who were usually people of color (Boulila, 2019). Today, there is a noticeable lack of discussion around race and racism in certain countries when compared to the United States. Discourses around discrimination in Europe are usually closely linked with the topic of immigration rather than race (Erel, 2009). For example, in a 2014 report, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) highlighted that “the notion of racism is often interpreted too narrowly in Germany and is linked to organized groups. The racist, and particularly xenophobic, character of some public discourse is still not established clearly enough in public debates” (p. 10). Balibar (2007) discusses his observation of a new kind of racism in France, which deliberately does not speak of race and racism but of immigration:

The functioning of the category of immigration as a substitute for the notion of race and a solvent of “class consciousness” provides us with a first clue. Quite clearly, we are not simply dealing with a camouflaging operation, made necessary by the disrepute into which the term “race” and its derivatives have fallen, nor solely with a consequence of the transformations of French society. Collectivities of immigrant workers have for many years suffered discrimination and xenophobic violence in which racist stereotyping has played an essential role (p.84).

Resulting from this lack of discussions around race, or the lack of discussion about race altogether, the argument can be made that many international students do not share a similar conceptual understanding of race and racism with their American peers because race is not conceptualized the same way, or even talked about at all, in their home country (Fries-Britt et al., 2014). Mitchell et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study among international students to explore how international college students learn about race and racism and found that,

while some participants were oblivious, others, who were primarily participants of color, carried a racial awareness - often muddled by nationality, ethnicity, and confusion about what type of discrimination they were facing when things happened to them or other international students of color (p.7).

We can infer from this quote that the international students who are labeled as oblivious of racial issues are probably considered white in the context of U.S. society, while international students of color showed a racial awareness because they seemed to be largely targeted because of it. These types of discrimination were then further complicated by other concepts, such as culture, nationality, and ethnicity, which turns the experiences of these participants into neo-racism.

Neo-racism

Spears (1999) defines neo-racism as follows:

Neo-racism rationalises the subordination of people of colour on the basis of culture, which is, of course, acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group, while traditional racism rationalises it fundamentally in terms of biology. Neo-racism is still racism in that it functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression (p. 12-13).

Neo-racism does not, therefore, replace racism based on race as “a social construction based on physical characteristics, particularly skin color” (Mitchell & Maloff, 2016, p. 22), but builds onto it by adding cultural and national attributes of the minoritized group (Barker, 1981). Balibar (2007) states that “culture can also function like nature, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin” (p 85). The phenomenon of neo-racism is thus also called “cultural racism” or “racism of cultural difference.” With these conceptions and definitions in mind, it makes sense that international students might not necessarily connect their experienced discrimination with race but rather with culture (Mitchell et al., 2017), which can be referred to as neo-racism.

Neo-Racism and International Students

At American institutions of higher education, there is an interpersonal pattern of neo-racism in negative interactions with faculty, students, and staff, in addition to structural patterns in occurrences such as admissions policies, academic evaluations, and scholarships (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Interpersonal level

There are various accounts of international students experiencing neo-racism during their time at an American college (Chen & Zhou, 2019). It is important to note that this form of discrimination is experienced through interactions with American students, faculty, and university staff, as well as the local community (Hanassab, 2006). This discrimination includes name-calling, complaining about the cooking of traditional foods, and suggesting that international students should only hang out with their national peers (Perry, 2016). Other forms of discrimination mostly relate to language and culture and the lack of perceived support from host country nationals (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Lee & Rice, 2007). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, reports of discrimination against international students, especially those from

Islamic, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, increased significantly (Williams & Johnson, 2011). Another study found that Asian students in the U.S. displayed feelings of distress more frequently than students from North America or Europe (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Structural level

Neo-racism can also occur on a more structural, political level, either through explicitly neo-racist policies or the absence of policy altogether (Unangst, 2021). Current immigration and visa policies favor white, Western European students over students from Asia, for example, as can be seen by the Visas Mantis and Visas Condor programs (Lu, 2009). Visa Mantis background checks are tied to the Technology Alert List, a system established in the Cold War to detect foreign danger. The fact that students from China and Pakistan tend to have to undergo a Mantis check more often than students from the UK and Canada shows the obvious links to racism and neo-racism. Visas Condor, on the other hand, requires all male visa applicants from certain countries to undergo a background check in terms of their military service and experience with potential weapons. Certain visas also only allow students to enter the country one or two times, forcing students who must leave the country for any reason to reapply and potentially get rejected (Baas, 2006). In addition, if international students would like to stay in the U.S. and work after completing their studies, the work visa program only allows 7% of each country's citizens to obtain a Green Card through a work permit. This alleged diversity and equality-oriented percentage heavily backlog countries with bigger populations, for example, China and India, the top two sending nations of international students (Bier, 2019). In more recent years, the Trump administration put an additional strain on international students with intense visa restrictions and the travel ban from predominantly Muslim countries (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017). The link to neo-racism in these policies cannot be ignored and needs to be examined further in order to better understand how these policies affect international students differently depending on their national origin and cultural ties—hopefully, more equitable policies can then take their place.

Purpose of the Study

There is a lack of research looking at how international students are aware of neo-racism and specifically how the experiences with neo-racism for white international students differ from those of international students of color. It is important to highlight here that the purpose of this autoethnography and other related research is not to re-center whiteness, as is often done. The author conducted this research in order to name and dismantle whiteness. This can only be done effectively, however, if whiteness is properly researched and understood first in order to then be able to deduce successful ways of disrupting it (Foste & Tevis, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this autoethnography is an initial insight into the awareness of neo-racism among international students and the differences in the experiences between white international students and international students of color. The research question is as follows: How does the awareness of race, racism, and neo-racism influence the lived experiences of international students in the U.S.,

specifically when comparing the experiences of white international students to the experiences of international students of color?

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the United States in the field of legal studies in the 1970s. Activists and scholars noticed an absence of recognition of the intersection of race, racism, and power in U.S. law; then introduced CRT to the field of education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Delgado et al. (2017), explain the underlying core tenets of CRT as follows:

- a) *Racism is ordinary*: The fact that racism is not aberrational but the everyday experience of people of color in the United States.
- b) *Material determinism or Interest Convergence*: Racism advances white interests, and there are times in history when the advances for people of color briefly overlap with the interests of white people, which is why certain decisions in favor of people of color have been made; not because of genuine altruistic convictions of white people.
- c) *Social constructionism*: The fact that race is a social construct and not a biological fact. Race is a “product of social thoughts and relations” (p.7).
- d) *Differential racialization*: The fact that dominant groups have racialized different minoritized identities throughout history to serve the dominant’s group purpose and justify reasons for oppression.
- e) *Intersectionality and anti-essentialism*: The fact that no one person has merely one identity. There are many intersecting identities within one person, some of which might be systematically oppressed, whereas others are more privileged.
- f) *Unique voice of color*: The notion that because someone is a member of a minority group, it allows them to speak on race and racism.

While CRT is mostly used to analyze systems of oppression against people of color in the United States, I concur with Yao et al. (2019) that CRT can and should be applied to the international student experience within the United States based on these students’ various intersecting identities, including race. CRT is hence a useful theory through which we can explore the various intersecting identities of international students and the resulting issues. Specifically, in terms of international student research, the following tenets of CRT have been identified:

the permanence and endemic nature of race and racism in US society; sharing the experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling that people of Color experience every day; interest convergence theory, which occurs when the dominant culture tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its own personal interest; and intersectionality, which situates experiences within the context of multiple, interlocking

systems of oppression that are interrelated and shaped by one another (Yao et al., 2019, p.8).

CRT functions as the basis of my theoretical framework, as it lays the groundwork for how race is central among the issues characterizing the lived experiences of international students in the U.S.

Neo-Racism Theory

To research neo-racist experiences of international students in the U.S., Lee and Rice (2007) used a conceptual framework called Neo-Racism Theory in order to “situate any discrimination that international students encounter” (p. 389). According to Neo-Racism Theory, the dominant group is able to justify their feelings of superiority and discrimination against others who are culturally and nationally different rather than just basing these feelings on physical appearance alone, thereby giving way to restrictions and discrimination at both a personal and a systematic level. In the context of research on international students, The author infuses the concept of neo-racism into CRT in order to better understand prevalent neo-racist experiences in particular and how they affect white international students and international students of color differently.

Methodology

Critical Autoethnography

According to the work of Adams et al. (2015), the methodology of Critical Autoethnography includes six tenets. First, critical autoethnography “uses a researcher’s personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences” (p.2). In keeping with this research format, from this point forward, the author will use the first person. With this autoethnography, I looked at instances of awareness about neo-racism experienced by me and other international students to critique my cultural beliefs and practices, which are rooted in whiteness as a white international student in the U.S. Second, Critical Autoethnography “acknowledges and values a researcher’s relationships with others” (p.2). My relationship with my fellow international students might be a part of my research agenda, while at the same time, I am committed to appreciating the time I am spending with them as a researcher and in any other role I employ. Third, Critical Autoethnography “uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as ‘reflexivity’—to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political” (p.2). In this research, I engage in reflexivity in order to interrogate the intersections of myself and society concerning my whiteness and neo-racism, both of which are deeply personal as well as politically intertwined. To do so, I included a more detailed reflexivity statement. Fourth, Critical Autoethnography “shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles” (p.2). As I engage more deeply with my various identities intersecting with my most prominent one, that of being an international student, I reflect on what it means to walk the line between being perceived as white and, therefore, a member of the privileged group in the U.S. and the discrimination I face as an international student. As a fifth point, Critical

Autoethnography “balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity” (p.2). This research is deeply personal and emotionally upsetting. At the same time, I am hoping to produce significant research to help create a better world for international students in the U.S. Lastly, Critical Autoethnography “strives for social justice and to make life better” (p.2), which is closely linked to my previous point. By researching international students’ lived experiences, I am committed to the fight for social justice for all, and this includes international students, specifically those with minoritized identities.

Reflexivity Statement

I grew up in Germany, where the term “race,” as the way it is conceptualized as a social category in the U.S., was hardly ever mentioned when I was growing up. In German society, discussions around it are rare and do not go into much depth. This appears to be a lingering taboo as the concept of the Aryan race was so heinously used in the Third Reich to justify the commitment of atrocities against humankind. Race is not used as an official category in any kind of form like it is in the U.S. There is no box to indicate your race on official forms; however, there is always a box in which you have to indicate the name of the place you were born, which is a way of determining someone’s national background. While race and racism are not much talked about, notions of national superiority over others and general xenophobia are very common discussion topics and are big issues in German society. I was always very much aware of national and personal rhetoric around the term “foreigners” and the ensuing xenophobia, but I hardly ever made the connection to race. One of my first memories that can be vaguely described as racial awareness was in the Social Security Office during my first study abroad experience in the U.S. in August 2014. I had to apply for a Social Security Number to get paid since this was my first time residing in the U.S. My former supervisor was kind enough to drive me to the office and wait for me to get everything sorted out. I remember sitting in the office and filling out the paperwork when I came upon the category of race. My supervisor was sitting next to me while I was filling out the paperwork, and I remember asking her: “What’s my race?” She looked at me with profound shock in her eye and was at a loss for words. I did not understand; for me, it was a legitimate question at the time. I knew I was not Black or Asian, but I had never heard of the term “Caucasian” before, and based on the word, I assumed it also had something to do with Asians. Therefore, none of the given categories on there made sense to me, and I had to ask for help. She said: “You’re Caucasian.” I remember being very confused, but I ticked the box next to “Caucasian,” nonetheless. When I got home, I looked up the term Caucasian and learned about its association with the Caucasus and that another term for it was “white.” That was the first time I ever became conscious of my race, at the age of 22 while studying abroad in the U.S. However, I only became aware of its existence as a descriptive category; I did not engage in any meaningful discussions to interrogate it any further, neither in the U.S. at the time nor in Germany. I never really had to either because the university I studied abroad at, and the place where I had grown up and lived in Germany were largely white, so I never felt out of place.

Now, as an international graduate student at another predominantly white institution (PWI) in the Midwest, I walk a strange line between being perceived as a member of the privileged white racial group in the U.S. while also experiencing the disadvantages and discrimination that come with being an international student. This includes not being able to vote, not working more than 20 hours a week (a limitation that bars me from access to higher wages and benefits), and, especially under the previous administration, a constant fear of deportation by not being able to qualify for the ever-changing and increasingly hostile requirements to be able to maintain valid visa status. At the same time, as a white student at a PWI, I hardly ever feel out of place on campus, and neither do I when I walk the streets of the city I live in. This is the privilege I receive by being perceived as white.

I am consistently in the process of learning and unlearning notions about race and racism. I am still learning so much because I have only started moving from my previous convictions that I was raceless and colorblind (and therefore a “good white”) to racial awareness and racism awareness, a process that began as recently as when I moved here in August of 2020. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and other social justice-focused movements have opened my eyes to how this serves the inherent racist tendencies of systems in the U.S., such as higher education, where people of color are consistently marginalized (Patton, 2016). While I suffer from certain discriminations as an international student, my international peers of color suffer from these in addition to discrimination based on their race.

Data collection

The three incidents that I chose to analyze stemmed from interactions with international students of color during the coursework phase of my Ph.D. program. The first quote was uttered in the context of presenting my research agenda on “racism and neo-racism and international students” to my fellow classmates, all of whom were international students of color. When I asked if there were any questions left, one of my international peers asked the following: “You sound like a native speaker. You said it yourself--you identify as white. You are not like us. Have you ever even experienced racism?”

The second quote I would like to analyze was uttered to me when I shared my experience of being invited to participate in a panel on diversity, equity, and inclusion with others, where I was asked to represent the experiences of international students in terms of their career development in the U.S.: “Of course, they invited you. You’re the accessible international student. Your English is great. And you’re white.”

The third instance that I would like to analyze was said to me when I talked about my dissertation topic to a new international student whom I met at a social gathering. “You study neo-racism? Why? You’re white – what do you even know about racism?”

Discussion

Instance 1: “You sound like a native speaker. You said it yourself--you identify as white. You are not like us. Have you ever even experienced racism?”

One tenet of CRT is that racism is permanent and endemic in U.S. society. This quote exemplifies how my lived experience in the U.S. is different from international students of color because of my perceived whiteness. For them, forms of racism and neo-racism have become a part of their everyday life here which is not necessarily the case for me as a white international student. White people do not necessarily experience racism or neo-racism on an ordinary basis, which is evident in the question of whether I have ever experienced racism. Additionally, the ordinariness of racism and neo-racism in their lives sets me apart from international students of color by pointing out that I am not like them.

Another tenet of CRT talks about differential racialization. Evidently, I am being racialized differently than my international peers because of my whiteness. In this case, I am being grouped in with white Americans here, even though I myself have previously never identified as “white” in Germany. However, because whiteness is rooted in Eurocentrism and European heritage, my typical European appearance, as well as my American pronunciation of the English language, lets me be grouped in with white people in the U.S. This grouping is shown in the quote in both myself identifying as white and by being identified as white by my international peers.

In terms of CRT’s tenet on intersectionality, all international students display liminal, i.e., in-between identities as international students and racialized people in the U.S. (among many other identities). However, the difference lies in the real-life consequences of these multiple systems of oppression. The consequences of racism and neo-racism against white people are vastly different from their real-life consequences for people of color and international students of color, who suffer harm through personal as well as institutionalized racism and neo-racism much more than any white international student does. This is exemplified through the question about racism, showing that their experiences with racism and neo-racism in the U.S. are vastly different from my experiences with racism and neo-racism, if they can be categorized as racism or neo-racism at all.

Instance 2: “Of course, they invited you. You’re the accessible international student. Your English is great. And you’re white.”

In terms of the tenet of CRT saying that racism is permanent and endemic, this is again shown in this quote in how it acknowledges that my perceived whiteness offers me opportunities that may not generally be available to international students of color. In this case, the term “accessible” indicates how the ordinariness of whiteness allowed me to participate in an opportunity that was closed off to my international peers of color. This is also shown in the comments on my perceived English skills and my race. Whiteness is the perceived norm in terms of looks, language, and experiences in the U.S. (Foste et al., 2022), which shows an underlying favorable bias toward whiteness and hence ordinary racism.

Another tenet of CRT is Interest Convergence, i.e., the phenomenon of attempts to advance minoritized racial identities only being fruitful when they advance the interests of whiteness. In this case, having an international student on a panel seemingly shows commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives; however, making that representative a white international student allows many of the racial and neo-racial issues in DEI initiatives to continue to not be

addressed as I am not experiencing the same forms of racism and neo-racisms that my international peers of color have to endure.

Lastly, this quote showcases again how I am being differentially racialized from my international peers of color by my peer directly stating that I am white, as well as making note of the intersectional identities of being perceived as white in the context of American society while being an international student, as discussed above.

Instance 3: “You study neo-racism? Why? You’re white – what do you even know about racism?”

Through the first tenet of CRT, that racism is permanent and endemic, this quote again exemplifies how racism and neo-racism are a normal part of everyday life for international students of color, yet not necessarily for white people and white international students. This ordinariness is shown in the rhetorical question about what I know about racism.

Closely related to the tenet of permanent and endemic racism, in this case, is differential racialization. Again, it is apparent that I am being differentially racialized in the context of U.S. society than my international peers of color. Being perceived as white by my international peers groups me in with white Americans who are not necessarily exposed to racism in the U.S., prompting questions about the purpose of my research agenda.

The first two questions could then also be analyzed through the tenet of interest convergence, where my research overall could be viewed as advancing my own personal interests through researching race and racism in international students. This is highlighted by the questioning of the point of my research and questioning the motivation for a white person to study racism and neo-racism.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations to this type of work. Autoethnographies have largely been criticized as self-centered showboating rather than a serious research method (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999). I argue, however, that to do this type of research, one needs to first think about one’s own identities and how they influence the way we do research. I believe that no form of research can ever be truly objective because we cannot separate our own biases from the research we conduct. By critically reflecting on my own experiences, I am able to address underlying biases in my research and therefore have a better understanding of how it influences every aspect of my research.

Another limitation of autoethnography is the lack of generalization in terms of empirical research (Walford, 2004). By conducting this research, I am by no means claiming that these instances can be generalized to the experiences of other international students, white or of color. It is merely one example within the bigger system that is white supremacy and how it plays out in my personal life. One of the aims that Bochner and Ellis (1996) pointed out “is to allow another person’s world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own” (p. 22). Researching my own experiences allows for a starting point to conduct more research to find out whether there are similarities and differences in the collective experience.

Implications

In general, more research is needed on white international students and how their experiences differ from international students of color both in terms of policy and interpersonal interactions. The aim of this research, however, is not to put focus on white international students but to help them cope with their white identity and the ensuing consequences rooted in whiteness. Additionally, more stratified research needs to look at policies in place that treat international students differently based on underlying biases rooted in neo-racism. Further research is also needed in terms of how international students not only interact with their American peers, faculty, and staff but also how international students interact with each other. Analyzing these interactions through the lens of Critical Race Theory and neo-racism can help reduce the harm done to international students of color.

Conclusion

This critical autoethnography offers an initial insight into how international students are aware of instances of racism and neo-racism towards them and how they affect different groups of international students differently. By viewing these three incidents in my life as a white international student through the lens of Critical Race Theory and the concept of neo-racism, I am able to highlight the fine line I walk between being an international student - and all the restrictions that come with that - and being perceived as a white person in the U.S. - and all the privileges, perceived or not, that come with that. It is important to highlight this difference in experiences, with the goal being not to re-center whiteness but to name it in order to be able to disrupt it.

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