

International Graduate Students' Positionality in a U.S. Critical Multicultural Education**Course**

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the experience of four international students after taking a class in critical multicultural education at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest, U.S. Utilizing narrative inquiry and narrative coding to analyze students' positionality papers, the researchers found two overarching themes: (1) Prior Experiences and (2) Perspectives on multicultural identities, with several sub-themes. The first overarching theme, prior experiences, has three sub-themes that reflect students' identities in relation to their sociocultural backgrounds: (a) origin and national identity (b) family background and exposure (c) education and sociocultural experiences. The second overarching theme, perspectives on multicultural identities has five sub-themes that emerged from students' personal learning and through socialization: (a) race and ethnicity (b) religion (c) gender and sexuality (d) class and privilege, and (e) culture shock. We conclude with

a discussion of the findings and implications for this work.

Keywords: critical multicultural education, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sociocultural identities

INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO, in 2016 the United States (U.S.) occupied the greatest number of international students studying abroad globally at 19.1% (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2019). Of course, after the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration's restrictive policies, we saw a decline in the percentage of international students coming to study in the U.S. (Anderson, 2019; Johnson, 2020). It is more important than ever that we continue to conduct research that will help us foster culturally relevant classrooms for our international students in the U.S., especially during these precarious times (e.g., xenophobic immigration policies, COVID-19 and anti-Asian racism, etc.). The research confirms that international students encounter a number of challenges when studying abroad, such as “culture shock, loneliness, anxiety and economic precariousness” (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2019, p. 4). We also know that these experiences can vary greatly depending upon the social positionality (i.e., race, language, and culture) that these students embody (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2019). There is a need for research that explores cultural issues shaping international students' experiences that also take into account country of origin (Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2019). Of interest to use as college teachers are how these experiences are reflected in coursework, specifically coursework pertaining to social identities, culture, and understandings of power, privilege, and oppression. For this research, we ask, *what are the experiences of international students in a U.S.-centric multicultural education course at a predominantly white institution (PWI)?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Students' Experiences from the Literature

There is much research that discusses international students' experiences across cultural differences at U.S. and Western universities. For example, in her research at a U.S. institution, Rose-Redwood (2010) found that international students believed that universities' international offices and diversity centers' efforts were just ceremonial and did not foster cross-cultural understanding among international students. Zhang and Zhou (2010) study also found that Chinese international students at a Canadian University had a difficult time adapting to local culture. They found friendship with local students helped them enhance their language and cultural experience which also enhanced their academic satisfaction. However, international students' academic satisfaction dropped when their perceived enacted identity gaps were created in the classroom. Further, they felt discriminated in the classroom when their expectations from classroom norms were violated (Zhang & Zhou, 2010). In addition, Townsend and Wan (2007) discussed that there is a relationship between multicultural experiences and cultural adoptions. They argue that it is both a big challenge and an opportunity for universities to acculturate incoming international students with diverse cultures and multicultural experiences. Students, especially from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, face severe challenges of acculturation in U.S. institutions. Many language barriers, academic challenges, sociocultural differences, and discrimination in classes and in jobs are common stressors that impact the social and psychological well-being for international students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Most of the universities in the U.S. tend to foster predominantly white populations with a majority of faculty, staff, and students identified racially as White American. Therefore, international students from Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, or Africa might have little

experience meeting and connecting with people of color. They have also pointed out that stereotypical attitudes might be formed from White predominant media sources and further perpetuated by White colleagues in universities (Mitchell et al., 2017; Rose-Redwood, 2010). According to Mitchell et al. (2017), many international students already have a developed stereotyped perception of African Americans based on media and peer experiences. They found, “among the participants’ reflections, many of the students discussed their learned perceptions about African Americans, and these perceptions were overwhelmingly negative, which is troubling” (p. 9). This finding illustrates the need for multicultural education as a necessary part of international student’s curriculum. Moreover, Lee (2010) reports that students from countries not esteemed with wealth (i.e., the Global South) experienced more unfair treatment from faculty, staff and fellow students as compared to students from more wealthy nations (i.e., Europe) at PWIs with culture and language differences being some of the salient issues. Another study by Sato and Hodge’s (2015) found that Japanese exchange students felt alienated, disappointed and unmotivated while engaging with U.S. American friends at college and felt marginalized in the classroom. Finally, Talley-Matthews et al.’s (2020) study regarding the experience Afro-Caribbean graduate student women at a PWI revealed that they felt like outsiders, lonely, unwelcomed, and racial and sex discrimination. Many Afro-Caribbean women also faced micro-aggressions such as everyday insults and indignities.

Contrary, there is a positive relationship between multicultural experiences and sociocultural adaptability (Townsend & Wan 2007). Mori, Inman, and Caskie (2009) also revealed in their research that instructors who exhibit more cultural competence and cultural discussion increase international students’ satisfaction in professional psychology courses. Due to globalization and an increasing number of international students studying abroad (albeit declining

at this current time), many scholars believe that institutions should reform their approaches and facilitate the use of effective multicultural knowledge in the classroom. In addition, students should be pushed to discuss multicultural issues across global contexts (Stohry et al., 2021) which aids in reducing misconceived notions and biases for all students (Wells, 2008).

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

Multicultural Education: Conceptual Framework and Purpose

Multicultural Education (MCE) shares a long history within Western countries such as the U.S., Australia, and Canada (May & Sleeter, 2010). Stemming from the Civil Rights and Ethnic studies movements in the 1960s and 70s, by the 1990s' advocacy for MCE to be common practice for teachers within schools was promising, however, nearly three decades later, advocates of MCE are still fighting for culturally relevant curriculum to be common practice in schools. What's more, the 90's version of MCE led to a "liberal multiculturalism" that *uncritically* celebrated diversity through a "holidays and heroes" approach (Nieto, 1995).

Ultimately, MCE became an attractive solution to the "problem" of racial and ethnic diversity in schools, but the focus on *getting along* or learning to *respect differences* does not address larger structural inequality or power relations. In response to the limits of a liberal MCE, critiques of MCE from scholars in antiracist education, critical race theory, and critical pedagogy emerged (May & Sleeter, 2010). All of these theoretical frameworks are important when considering how theory and practice, or praxis, are manifested in teaching. Thus, May and Sleeter (2010) offer critical multiculturalism as a way to combine these important theoretical traditions that give credence to the roots of MCE. While we acknowledge the important origins of multicultural education from foundational scholars such as James Bank, Geneva Gay, and Gloria

Ladson Billings, for this research we focus on the critical developments within multicultural education, or what is known as Critical multicultural education (CMCE).

Critical multicultural education (CMCE) “gives priority to structural analysis of unequal power relations, analyzing the role of institutionalized inequalities, including *but not necessarily limited to racism*” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10, *emphasis in original*). Simply put, naming and actually challenging racism and other forms of oppression is a key component of adapting an CMCE approach. CMCE includes challenging power relations by identifying the “material, political, and ideological underpinnings of inequality” (p. 10). Within a CMCE approach, culture is understood to be contextual in how inequality is lived out daily by groups of people. Furthermore, “culture and identity are understood here as multilayered, fluid, complex, and encompassing multiple social categories...” (p. 10). One final important component of CMCE that is important for this research is the addition of internationalism. Most U.S. commentary on MCE seldom encompasses global perspectives regarding debates on race or culture or religion (Aronson et al., 2016). CMCE encourages reconsidering how we think about race, culture, and other intersectional identities through a global lens. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of one cohort of international students in a U.S. multicultural education course that was co-taught by Amatullah and Aronson. Amatullah was born and raised in India and has diverse teaching experiences in Dubai, Qatar, and the U.S. She identifies as a female Muslim educator who teaches about diversity and foundations in education courses. She is passionate to study about issues of access and equity and finds ways to not only transform future educators’ practices but also constantly reflect and refine hers. Aronson was the primary instructor on record. She identifies as a U.S. born citizen who is racially white and ethnically Latina. She’s taught MCE for several years and is continuously looking for ways to improve her practice, especially in relation to globalization. Rind

is an international student from Pakistan, who is ethnically Asian-Pakistani, and Muslim. He is completing a PhD in Educational Leadership and interested in research related to MCE.

RESEARCH METHOD

To illuminate international students' experiences in a PWI and understanding of their own positionalities, this study employs an interpretivist discourse of research (Benton & Craib, 2010). Utilizing narrative inquiry, the authors explore stories of international students to “understand(ing) experience” through the telling of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit, “narrative is both the phenomenon and method of the social sciences” (p. 18). Hence, narrative inquiry is addressed as a “phenomenon” with regards to the methodology exploring the lived experiences of international students, responding to the “what” of the research purpose, whereas as a “method” narrative inquiry answers the “how” of this specific research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 125-127). We do not claim subjectivity in our analysis here as we are positioned as critical scholars. Our positionalities matter just as much as our participants' do. Thus, the very nature of “interpreting” data involves our subjectivity. We continuously have reflected on our analysis throughout the process.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) validate that “...experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of [studying] narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (p. 19). This study explores the narratives of four international students (out of 16 students) enrolled in a graduate level critical multicultural course during fall 2015 semester. These four international students reflected differing social identities including race, gender, religion, and national origin. All of the participants in this study were informed of this research and consented through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. See Participant Demographics in Table 1.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Major/ Degree Seeking	Race/Ethnicity/ National Origin	Gender Identity	Religion	Career
Ming Yang (MY)	Masters of Teaching	Chinese	Female	Christian	Teacher
Josh Victor (JV)	Masters of Education in Transformative Education	Croatian (White)	Male	Catholic	Basketball Player
Akio Fukui (AF)	Masters of Teaching	Japanese	Female	Christian/Buddhist	College Instructor
Ally Benson (AB)	Masters of Education in Transformative Education	Canadian (White)	Female	Not disclosed	Teacher

As a part of the course requirements, students were required to write a positionality paper as their final project in the class within CMCE and other social justice scholarship. To analyze these narratives, we took up Saldana's (2012) narrative method of coding to make meaning of their positionalities. First, the positionality papers were analyzed based on Saldana's first cycle of narrative coding that included initial codes analyzing elemental methods, literary methods, and language methods. Then, the papers were analyzed using second cycle methods that integrated "analytic skills such as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building" (p. 58). Ultimately, this analysis helped frame our cross-case analysis themes as discussed in the following section.

RESULTS

Findings: Positionality Narratives' Themes

In this section, we will share the common themes that emerged from positionality narratives of four international students. Ally Benson, Akio Fukui, Josh Victor, and Ming Yang wrote from an auto-ethnographic perspective after taking a critical multicultural education course. Each of these students have their unique personal background and point of view on race, ethnicity, culture, social status, and language differences, but common themes also emerged from their background and discussion as students studying in the U.S.

During the cross-section analysis of the four stories, several themes emerged. Rather than analyzing each theme in isolation, we developed two overarching themes (1) Prior Experiences and (2) Perspectives on multicultural identities. Each broader theme has several sub-themes that are discussed below. It is to be noted that most of these themes are interrelated as one's identity is intersectional and fluid. Furthermore, some students provided a detailed account of their positionalities whereas some students were brief, hence the themes are presented accordingly.

Prior Experiences

In this theme, personal identity of students and their reflections are drawn from students' exposure to the world, their upbringing, their country of origin, their sociocultural experiences, as well as their privileges. These sub-themes entail how students have been nurtured to view the world and people of different races and cultures. We will discuss each sub-themes of participants separately in the following sections.

Subtheme 1: Origin and National identity

Origin country/birth country influences one's perspectives and how one views the world as evidenced within this theme. Ally's auto-ethnography positionality shed light on the differences to being born in an upper/middle class, English speaking, white western culture. She was born in a prestigious White English-speaking Canadian culture. She acknowledged her whiteness how this had privileged her in addition to her familial support, being able-bodied, and attractive. She further explained, "Unlike other People who are visible minorities, I do not have to prove my ability, integrity, and motive every time" (AB, p. 13).

Contrary to Ally, Akio, Josh, and Ming all had different perspectives based on their origin and national identity. Josh comes from a lower socioeconomic state in a very "Caucasian" society of Split Croatia. He was brought up in Catholic surroundings. He never felt there is a benefit of being "White" as given that through his perspective dominance in Croatia is based on family connections with the mafia and other types of corruption. Ming on the other hand has a complex identity given that she was born in China and later moved to Kenya when she was ten years old. Ming identifies as a non-White, middle class, heterosexual, Christian, cisgender woman. She highlights the traditional question international students are asked based on their looks, "where do you come from?" (MY, p. 2). When she tells people that she grew up in Africa, it shocks people until she elaborates that her origin was in China (her ethnicity) and that she was raised in Africa (geographic location). Such questions are what perplexes her to express her identity. Finally, the fourth student Akio Fukui was born in Japan, which she shared is considered a rationally homogenous nation that has 98% Japanese race. Unlike in the U.S. and other countries, Akio believed most of the people in Japan are middle class. She shared that in her previous experience she never felt privileged or underprivileged while living in in Japan, however, began to categorize herself into middle-class after moving to the States.

Subtheme 2: Family background and exposure

Like origin and national identity, family background also has a vital role in developing one's identity. Undoubtedly, it influences one's choices and perspectives about the world based on how one is raised, their socioeconomic status (SES) connected to privilege. A privileged family is in a position to offer a wide array of opportunities for their children that could support educational endeavors. Ally was reflexive about her family background and identified her class privilege. She believed her identity development and experiences were shaped mostly by the way her parents and grandparents who raised her. She also acknowledged she had the privilege of using the same Standard English Language taught in the classroom that she spoke at home. Her parents were supportive of her and her brother and she shared she was a “lucky girl.” Akio had similar class privilege and a supportive family background. She remarked, “I was aware that there were people whose standard of living was lower than mine, and that my family was a little more privileged financially compared to most families” (AF, p. 3). She was surprised by the class categorization in the U.S. where some people live luxuriously with privilege, while others were extremely poor given her beliefs that Japan is uniformly made of middle-class families from her perspective.

The family background and exposure of Josh and Ming were different from Ally and Akio. In Josh's case, his maternal family was very well off before the war as his parents owned farmable land, cattle, sheep, a butchery, and a local inn. Despite these assets, since his parents belonged to a big family and they had many siblings, he clearly felt like his parents started from nothing. He felt pride in his Croatian ancestry and the Catholic religion was a big part of his upbringing. In Ming's case, she shared that she was born in China, where the communist party was dominant, so religion was “not allowed.” Later her family converted to Christianity when they moved to Kenya. She shared that she was reborn in Kenya.

Subtheme 3: Educational and Sociocultural experiences

Educational and sociocultural experiences contribute or rather primarily shapes one's worldview and identity. Ally believed her Cultural Studies' class during her bachelor's program from a university in Canada offered her the opportunity to examine her positionality and identity. Interestingly, within her paper, she included her parents' and grandparents' identities as part of her formation. In addition, her role as a teacher, mother, and migrating to the U.S. significantly changed her perception of identity. She learned how her English-speaking family and Canadian born white identity did not experience as much difficulty in the U.S. as she confronted her skin color and language as privileges. Due to these courses, Ally was reflexive and acknowledged that structural dominances and privileges usually come at the expense of others' which goes unnoticed. Ming received her early education in Kenya during Catholic Church school. White skin color always mesmerized her partly because of the Chinese cultural beliefs that being white-skinned is associated with higher class rather than just race as evidenced in the U.S. Akio's educational and sociocultural experiences were episodic as she believed she had two lives: one childhood life in Japan and other adulthood while living in the U.S. She believed her positionality changed tremendously due to the contexts she was in that shaped her experiences. While Josh identified himself as a "White-like" Americans, he became aware of the little things that made a difference throughout his college career. He shared one outstanding realization that he had as a basketball player at our university: "my black teammates were 'randomly' drug testes quite frequently, while my name was never pulled out of a hat" (JV, p. 2). Even as an international student from Croatia, when in the U.S. his skin color granted him the privilege of not being suspicious of consuming drugs.

Perspectives on Multicultural Identities

The second overarching theme includes sub-themes based on students' understanding and perspectives on their multicultural identities, such as race and ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, class and privilege, and culture shock.

Subtheme 1: Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity were two terms that are often used alternatively and are thought to be the same. However, we distinguished the difference in our class. Ally clearly differentiated the two and explained that ethnicity covers the historical aspects of culture and society, while race is based on skin color. Ally's understanding of race drastically changed from her studies in Canada to her studies in the US. She clarified that:

While using the term 'racism' was absolutely necessary to be able to address issues of inequity, that using the term 'race' served to perpetuate a dangerous and discredited idea (Satzewich, 1989). Accordingly, individuals or groups were described as 'people with white skin' or 'people with black skin; rather than shorthanded to traditional racial categories by using person-first language. (AB, p. 5)

Initially, in the U.S., she was hesitant and careful in using the word race which she felt highly discussed in the states. She also felt nervous to ask a question on the issue. When asked by a fellow student whether "racism is actually discussed about in Canada or if it just flies below the radar" (AB, p. 7), Ally was reflexive about her identity as a woman with the white skin she inhabits and the privilege of obliviousness it can facilitate. She further thought, "while it is an easier question to ask than answer, what I concluded is that racism is talked a little, but probably should be talked about more" (p. 7). She now discusses race more in order to acknowledge and support people of color.

Josh's point of view and understanding of racism was interesting. In his words,

In our media [Croatia], United States is a country well-presented with an extraordinary image of the melting pot of all cultures and a place where racism goes to die... a country where people took refuge and ran from discrimination towards safety and equality, land of the free, home of the brave. (JV, p. 1)

However, after a few years of living and studying in the U.S., he learned the dominance of whiteness and grew to understand how he benefited from the system because of his white skin.

For Ming, whiteness based on skin color was related more to class rather than class. Her stay in different geographic locations (moving from China to Kenya) changed her complexion. She was socialized into believing whiter skin was more beautiful and shared she even used foundation creams and sun creams to keep her skin whiter. However, she believed her view about race, class, and gender changed over a period of time due to her experiences in different contexts. The experience of Akio was different from all other international students as she claims she's never experienced the issue of racism in Japan. So racial bias and stereotypes were not common in her experience. Nevertheless, during her time living in the States, she experienced racial "otherness." She doesn't believe it was oppressive in nature, but her difference was noticed. She clearly held onto a belief that Japan is an "advanced" country in its thinking on race and class that gave her a privileged stand and she never felt any racial oppression. She remarked, "If I did not grow up in a dominant group or if I were from a less-developed country, people might have interacted with me differently" (AF, p. 3). Further, her positionality paper did not show any concern for people who are oppressed due to racism.

Subtheme 2: Religion

While we have seen shifts in discussing sensitive topics such as race, gender, class etc., in U.S. society, religion is still a taboo topic that is less spoken about (Aronson et al., 2016).

Interestingly, despite the many other social identities shared, Ally did not share her religious identity. However, Josh, Akio, and Ming explicitly reflected on their religious beliefs as part of their identities. Josh was raised in a Catholic church and religion was always an important part of his family. Based on his experiences, Josh validated this notion on religion being an important part of Croatian families and stressed “that almost 90% of Croatian families with children over 20 years can say the same thing about their race and religion” (p. 2). Ming believed because she was born in China, as her parents belonged to the Communist Party; they were not allowed to have any religion. However, after her move to Kenya she and her family were baptized into the Protestant faith. She strongly believed that religion is as fluid as other identities. She argues that “we should talk about religion in the classroom because it is nothing too personal or controversial. Religion enters the school doors as it is embodied in us” (p. 4). For Akio, religion is perceived as a co-existing phenomenon, and they are “far from the ‘all or nothing’ stance” (p. 2). She explains:

Japanese people practice these religions depending on occasions. For example, when a baby was born, his/her family goes to a shrine and a Shinto priest prays for the baby’s good life. In Christmas, some people go to churches for Mass. When someone dies, a Buddhist monk holds a ceremony and chants for the deceased. (AF, p. 2)

Ultimately, she identified herself as a Buddhist, heterosexual and cisgender woman in Japan but she has experienced and interacted with shifts in her identity in the U.S.

Subtheme 3: Gender & Sexuality

As a woman, Ally had varied experiences at different points in her life. Her parents did not believe in gender norms. In her autobiography she reflects that due to her strong academic background, her ability protected her from sexism as she was never told that as a girl she could not succeed academically. However, down the road gender played a role in her career decisions. She

explained that her dream to become a physician subsided due to limited financial means, the amount of post-secondary study required, and that these long years come at the expense of motherhood period for many young women. Ally also narrated that gender intersected with her immigration status in the U.S. after migrating with her family. She elaborated:

While I moved with full knowledge that it would likely be two years before I could work outside the home, I underestimated the effect that this would have on my life and identity. When I moved, I became introduced to others always with reference to someone else, as “Ally’s wife,” or as “John and Mary’s mother.” I felt a sense of loss, both of the actual work of teaching, which I loved, and of my autonomy, as I now had very limited access to environments in which I functioned as an independent person, rather than as a support of others in my family, who themselves had the benefit of also occupying independent spheres through work or school. Despite the knowledge that we had chosen this, the isolation weighed on me. (AB, p. 24)

Akio’s did believe that gender oppression was still prevalent in Japan and although changes have been made it was still salient. She felt entirely different in the U.S. as she witnessed men and women were employed and shared household chores irrespective of gender. She also explained that she has never seen LGBTQA people in Japan around her except in movies. However, in the U.S. she was more exposed to LGBTQA people in real and believes to have different layers of oppression. While she respects LGBTQA community, she admits that the life of straight person is much easier.

In Ming’s reflection on gender and sexuality, she explained her views originated from Chinese Confucious culture, which is patriarchal and unequal; but also recognizes Chairman’s Mao’s communist theory that established gender equality and elevated women’s status. She

expressed her concern for LGBTQA oppression in the U.S. based on sexuality and believed in order to eradicate this issue there should be LGBTQA education from early years in school. Of importance, the only male-identified student in our study, Josh did not discuss his perspectives on gender and sexuality in his autobiography.

Subtheme 4: Class and Privilege

As discussed in the experiences section, Ally clearly identified her privileges in her autobiography while expressing her intersectional identity. Being in the middle class, she has the resources to travel, obtain a better education and other cultural enrichment activities. In addition, she met with people from other countries and experienced their way of life and thinking. She further added access to finances and cognitive resources together shape one's life. She argues that class is often equated with "physical capital" rather than "symbolic capital" (AB, p. 15), and that her parents focused on the latter by providing necessary skills that enable oneself to function effectively in a middle-class community. Like Ally, Akio also felt privileged herself. She noticed class oppression in the U.S. when her children started schooling. She learned about additional support that U.S. schools offer for lower SES families with free/reduced meal plan and/or other scholarship programs to support their educational expenses.

Josh narrated his experiences that most variance if not all in the student population he witnessed were based on the socio-economic status of a certain family. The post-war era in Croatia resulted in most families living in low or lower-middle-class standards. He identifies his intersectional identity of Whiteness and SES, further acknowledging his privilege. He remarks, "even though my family would be considered poor in the U.S., I am still raking in the benefits and privileges that come with my skin color whether I like it or not" (JV, p. 6). For Ming, whiteness was associated with class more than race as people with dark skin were perceived as poor due to

their outdoor work in the fields rather than upper class people who did prestigious indoor jobs. She acknowledged her middle-class status and that she never had to worry about her survival.

Subtheme 5: Culture Shock

Similar to trends in the literature, often international students experience culture shock when they move to the U.S. (Wu et al., 2015). Ally's detailed autobiography also addressed the culture shock she experienced despite being a White Canadian in the U.S. context. She wrestled with her preliminary thoughts that U.S. and Canada were not really that different and demystified this notion. She expressed, "I had unconsciously generalized my single experience so far, and so was caught off guard when, in my new role as a Canadian student discussing education and multiculturalism in the United States, I felt more alien than I had ever before" (AB, p. 4). Given Ming's previous experiences of moving, she learned how to adjust to new cultures and felt ready to deal with cultural shock. Her tri-cultural background and bilingual skills helped her assimilate into the U.S. context more quickly. However, she felt she took on different identities when she communicated in different languages [English and Chinese]. Yet, the struggle to acquire a social identity always remained. For Akio, the cultural shock was when she learned about the class system in U.S. unlike Japan where she believed all belong to one middle-class. The class system shocked her the most when she realized that many people were less privileged than her in an advanced country like the U.S.

In closing, the auto-ethnography of four participants showed that each student has a unique personal background and perspectives on multicultural identities. The student's country of origin, language, family orientation and exposure play a vital role in shaping perspectives about multiculturalism. Overall, from these four autobiographies, it is evident that in the U.S.,

international students maneuver their educational journeys based on their positionalities that shape their experiences.

DISCUSSION

Given what we have learned from these four participants, it's important to consider how educators discuss (C)MCE in a U.S. context with international students. Just as our domestic, U.S. born students learn to navigate understandings of differences around issues related to race or class from their own experiences, so too do international students navigate this through the transnational experiences they bring with them. This begs the question that when teaching about CMCE, are we meeting the needs of the international students in our classes who might conceptualize issues around "race" differently than American students because of the ways that "race" is taken up differently in different contexts? What the U.S. typically considers issues of "race" in one context, might be conceptualized as issues pertaining to empire, nation, or tribe in another global context (L. Weems, personal communication, Nov. 2019).

This was clearly evident in much of Akio's analysis of her own lived experience in Japan suggesting that there were no issues of racism or classism in her home country. Even though much of the conversations around racism in our class were situated in a U.S. context, we importantly missed an opportunity to teach about the globalization of white supremacy (Allen, 2005) and specifically the way this impacts Asian cultures (Stohry et al., 2021). There is a legacy of Japanese imperialism and discrimination across Asian ethnicities such as ethnic Koreans (Fujitani, 2007). Akio was basing her understanding of race solely on her own experiences and not connecting this to a larger body of historical knowledge. This might be similar to the way many white U.S. students believe that we live in a "post-racial" society after the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Akio

was only able to think about a racial hierarchy in relation to discrimination when she came to the U.S. and experienced “othering” for the first time.

As a Chinese woman, Ming on the other hand was able to recognize racial skin privilege after relocating from China to Africa. Her analysis of whiteness was intensified from her lived experiences that directly contrasted with Akio’s lived experience. Given this example, we recommend an CMCE curriculum built upon the experiences of the students in the class. Having taught CMCE for several years, Author 2 often works with several foundational readings that are important to understand CMCE as a field, but we believe there should be a part of the curriculum left open that would cater to the students in the classroom. This is not meant to single out international students, but rather create a more culturally relevant curriculum that makes connections across students in the classroom.

Additionally, we also learned from our students that the media had influenced their perceptions about race in the U.S. This provides another implication within the CMCE classroom that should encourage instructors to be prepared for the misconceptions that international students might bring with them related to racial classifications in the U.S., including stereotypes of different racial groups. Joanou (2017) discusses the role critical media literacy can play to foster a critical approach among students in understanding multicultural dimensions like race, class, gender, and sexuality within and outside of the classroom. Often popular media culture romanticizes dominant groups and conveys the deleterious message about minority groups in the U.S. However, using a critical media approach might encourage students to critique the stereotypes they hold. We suggest using current media in the classroom and incorporate activities that encourage critical analysis of popular culture such as the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Earp,

2006), which we used to unpack the representation of Arab peoples in film and the misconception that all Arabs are Muslim and vice-versa.

Ally was the only participant who was able to address her multiple intersecting identities and did this in such a way that recognized her privileges. This is especially important when considering the role that nationality and ethnicity hold across global contexts. Had Victor been able to think about himself through an intersecting lens, perhaps this would help him to consider a gendered analysis that he left blank. He did acknowledge the privilege of his white skin in relation to the Black basketball players' treatment on his team, but he did not recognize other ways that his gender might have privileged him in his geographic context of Croatia. This might have provided him a more well-rounded understanding of how privilege and oppression work so that he could find ways to use his privilege to promote social change.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In closing, this study illuminates international students' experiences in a PWI from their own positionalities utilizing narrative inquiry. The cross-section analysis of four international students' positionalities reveals two overarching themes (1) Prior Experiences and (2) Perspectives on multicultural identities and several sub-themes such as origin and national identity, family background and exposure, education and sociocultural experiences, race and ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, class and privilege, and culture shock. The discussion of the findings and implications for this work emphasizes that it is not only important for students to understand the need to discuss their identities through an intersectional lens but also how educators discuss CMCE issues in the U.S. context with international students.

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