

“It was just my name!”: A CRT/CRF Analysis of International Female Graduate Students’ Perceptions and Experiences Regarding Their Ethnic Name

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ABSTRACT

Although international female students accounted for 44% of the enrolled international students in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, 2020), their experiences regarding their ethnic name are relatively understudied in the onomastic literature. This study considers the experiences of eight international female graduate students of Color who are studying at a Midwestern predominantly White university. Utilizing critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF) as the theoretical and analytical lenses, this qualitative phenomenological study collected data through semistructured, in-depth interviews. We explore the meaning of ethnic names and their connection to participants’ multidimensional identities. The findings include experiences with microaggressions, discrimination, and racism among students in relation to their ethnic name and point to underlying factors. Finally, implications are offered for students, faculty members, and administrators to build authentically inclusive and equitable learning communities more effectively.

Keywords: international students, female graduate students of color, name and identity, racial microaggression, racial discrimination

International students refer to those “who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin” (UNESCO, 2012, p.67). International students are a crucial part of the student population in the U.S. higher education system, as their enrollment is considered as an important indicator of a university’s prestige (Lee, 2010). International students accounted for more than 20% of those newly enrolled in fall 2019; in STEM majors, this percentage was even higher among students majoring in mathematics and computer sciences or engineering, with more than

half being international students (Zhou et al., 2020). International students bring substantial economic benefits to the U.S. higher education system, given that 60% of their funding for tuition and living expenditure comes from international funding sources (Institute of International Education, 2020). Along with their family, they collectively contributed approximately 38.7 billion dollars annually to the U.S. economy and helped support 415,996 jobs (National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, 2020).

Apart from the enormous economic contribution to host institutions and countries, international students also contribute to raising the global awareness of domestic students, faculties, and the general public while making the curriculum more globalized and the ecology of higher education institutions more diverse (Abdullah et al., 2014). However, despite the recognized economic, cultural, and academic assets brought by international students, Abdullah et al. (2014) pointed to the relative invisibility of the “voice” of international students, who are often labeled and framed as a “problem”. Thus, the current study sought to disrupt this trend and challenge deficit-based and biased representations of international students.

In response to Abdullah and colleagues’ call (2014), the current study centers the marginalized voices and experiences of international female students, who occupy 44% of the total number of international students attending university in the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, 2020). More specifically, this research adds to the current literature investigating the perceptions of international female students regarding their ethnic names and their experiences (particularly negative experiences) of using ethnic names in the U.S. higher educational context. Drawing on critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF), we explore what is in a name and how this relates to and demonstrates the multidimensionality of one’s identities, as well as explicate possible factors underlying the racial microaggressions, discrimination, and racism experienced by international female students of Color. As a final outcome, we consider how participants’ experiences and perceptions can inform policies and practices with institutions of higher education to build more authentically inclusive and equitable environments for international students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Name and Identities

Names are more than just labels for referring to individuals; rather, they carry personal, family, social, and cultural meanings, serving as bridges connecting individuals with their family ancestors and cultural groups. Names also represent how people are perceived and communicate their race, age, gender, and other social information (Kasof, 1993; Zhao & Biernat, 2019), shaping the formation of one’s social identity through repetition (De Pina-Cabral, 2010). A child’s first name is usually given by parents or families and is loaded with the expectations and wishes from them, which could be regarded by this child as important components of self-identity (Longobardi, 2006; Zittoun, 2004). The experiences and feelings attached to the name are unique and idiosyncratic, although the given names of two individuals can be exactly the same (Kim, 2007). Surnames are typically hereditary and reflect the cross-generational connection and kinship among one’s ancestors, parents and children (Finch, 2008).

Scholars argue that name and identity are intertwined with each other, as name shapes how identity is formed (Aldrin, 2016; Alford, 1987; Longobardi, 2006; Neethling, 2007; Reisæter, 2012; Wikstrøm, 2012). For parents or name givers, the naming process of a child essentially reflects their effort to construct a unique and distinctive identity for the name bearer (Neethling, 2007); thus, identity is expressed through naming (Reisæter, 2012). Longobardi (2006) held that people incrementally internalize the characteristics of their name, making it part of their own personality. Alford (1987) and Wikstrøm (2012) believed that names can influence an individual's personal identity, while Aldrin (2016) further argued that one's first name, surname, and nicknames collectively demonstrate not only personal identity but also social and cultural identity. Neethling (2007) pointed out that "an imaginary identity" is often constructed based simply on an individual's name, and this, in South Africa, means making reasonable assumptions about the gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and linguistic backgrounds of the name bearer (p. 160). In sum, names not only symbolize who we are but also carry significant information regarding our personal, social, and cultural identities.

Minoritized Member Experiences of Using Ethnic Names

A line of onomastic literature focuses on examining the experiences of using ethnic names among members from minority groups, particularly immigrants' decision making regarding maintenance or adaptation of their own names or their children's names (e.g., Kim, 2007; Pennesi, 2016; Reisæter, 2012). For instance, Pennesi (2016) probed into how immigrants held accountable members from the majority group in the host country for learning the pronunciation, spelling, and meaning of ethnic names, which demonstrated their nonassimilationist stance to the dominant force of conformity and efforts to negotiate integration responsibilities distributed among majority and nonmajority groups. Studies that do look into such experiences among international students tend to focus more on their experiences related to adopting an English name (e.g., Chen, 2016; Zhao & Biernat, 2018) than experiences related to using their ethnic name, which leaves a persisting gap in the onomastic literature that the current study attempts to bridge.

Studies have also suggested that the phenomenon of mispronouncing ethnic names negatively affects name bearers (e.g., Ainciburu & Buttazzi, 2019; Aksholakova, 2014; Pennesi, 2016). Because names function to identify and differentiate an individual from others, mispronouncing or misspelling the name could consequently lead to distorting the identity or personality of this person (Aksholakova, 2014) or to causing certain types of humiliation (Ainciburu & Buttazzi, 2019). The immigrant participants in Pennesi's (2016) study expressed feelings of not belonging to the host community "when their names are mispronounced, misspelled, avoided, forgotten, or ridiculed" (p. 47). Similarly, Ainciburu and Buttazzi (2019) found a negative attitude among Peruvian participants toward mispronunciation of their names when the distortion connoted a negative meaning. While it may require future research to investigate the degree of harm caused by mispronunciation, Ainciburu and Buttazzi (2019) argue that it impacts one's personal identity and process of integrating into the host society.

Ethnic Names and Racial Microaggressions, Discrimination, Racism

Other studies highlight racial microaggressions, discrimination, and racism encountered by members from ethnic minorities regarding their ethnic name. In regard to K-12 education, Kohli and Solórzano (2012) argued that incidents in which teachers mispronounced the names of students of Color, whether deliberately or unconsciously, are essentially racial microaggressions, i.e., implicit forms of insults that students of Color have to grapple with on a daily basis, which might be “unconscious and unintentionally hurtful” (p. 448). The cumulative and long-term impacts of such racial microaggressions could harm students’ self-perception and well-being (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Some studies indicate that having a perceived “ethnic” name is often associated with incidents of being neglected and excluded in both daily and academic life, receiving fewer responses or/and less attention, for instance, from dating webpages and professors (Gebauer et al., 2012; Milkman et al., 2012). As such, ethnic minorities studying and living in other countries may choose to adopt Anglicized names, sometimes as a self-protection mechanism, to avoid exclusion or discrimination from majority group members.

The majority group members often struggle in pronouncing and remembering names of ethnic minority groups because of unfamiliarity with their names’ linguistic roots (Khosravi, 2012). This causes feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment and often contributes to stereotyping and disadvantaging minoritized members (Sue et al., 2007; Finch, 2008). Discriminatory practices targeting minority members based on ethnic names have continued to occur, impacting key aspects of their life, including employment (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004), legal decisions (e.g., Bielen et al., 2021), and housing (e.g., Feldman & Weseley, 2013).

African and Arabic names received fewer positive responses from landlords than White names in housing inquiries (e.g., Feldman & Weseley, 2013). Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) suggested that employers tended to hold negative perceptions of applicants with African last names, while this did not happen to those with Anglo names, even though the resumé/curriculum vitae remained the same. The study conducted by Bielen et al. (2021) in Belgium indicated a similar pattern among judges, some of whom formed presumptions of the ethno-religious identity of the defendants based on their name, which then shaped judicial decision making, leading to a higher probability of facing conviction for those with a perceived Islamic name than for those with Belgian names.

The review of the onomastic literature points to the necessity of utilizing relevant theoretic frameworks to interrogate the issues of microaggression, discrimination, and racism associated with one’s ethnic name. Critical race theory and its offshoots are considered important theoretical lenses for us to understand racial/social inequities, injustices and oppression and honor the lived experiences of people of Color (Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). However, few onomastic studies have grounded their research inquiry on these frameworks or utilized them to tease out the impacts of the issues noted above on people of Color. For all these reasons, the current study intentionally used critical race theory and critical race feminism (Berry, 2009) as the theoretical frameworks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical race theory (CRT), as a theoretical framework, originated from the 1970s' legal movement, in which "activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). CRT not only helps us understand how U.S. society operates on differential racialization and hierarchies but also challenges the cornerstones of the current social order that perpetuate systemic racism and oppression against people of Color while preserving privileges and status for the dominant group (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT has embraced both radical and activist components, aiming to not merely change the current status quo but eventually "transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). CRT has five central tenets or propositions: a) that racism is ordinary and pervasive in the life of people of Color; b) that racism serves and advances the converging interests of the dominant group; c) that race is a social construct created and manipulated by the dominant group to racialize and oppress minoritized and marginalized groups; d) that a person's identity is intersected, multidimensional, and fluid; and e) that the voices, storytelling, and lived experiences of people of Color are powerful (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

CRT, however, has been critiqued in the past as being limited for its Black–White binaries (Lynn & Parker, 2006) and overemphasizing the experiences of Black males (while excluding voices of women of Color) (Wing, 1997; Berry, 2009; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Therefore, under the umbrella of CRT, various subdisciplines have been developed, including Critical Race Feminism (CRF). As an offshoot of CRT, CRF follows the five core tenets of CRT as elaborated above but simultaneously serves as "a feminist intervention within CRT" (Wing, 2000, p. 7), as it strives to disrupt the social and political marginalization imposed on women of Color by centering their raced-gendered perspectives and experiences and acknowledging them as different from their White women counterparts and from men of Color (Berry, 2009; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing, 2015).

CRF views the identities of women of Color as multidimensional and intersectional and calls for both theoretical grounding and its practical applications in addressing the issues faced by women from marginalized communities (Berry, 2009; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). A major goal of CRF thus remains constructing "a counternarrative that illuminates the voice of women of Color and the impact of the intersections of their multiplicative identities on their experiences" (Clark & Saleh, 2019, p. 162). As researchers, perspectives and knowledge drawn from women of Color inform our work so that strategies of practicality and comprehensiveness can be created in response to the needs of the marginalized communities of focus (Wing & Willis, 1999). The current study, therefore, draws on CRT and CRF as theoretical frameworks and critical lenses to gain an in-depth understanding of female international graduate students' perspectives and experiences in relation to their ethnic name.

METHOD

The current phenomenological study examines the perceptions and experiences of eight female international students of Color regarding their ethnic names at a

predominantly White university. Specifically, the research questions that guided our work were as follows:

- RQ 1: How do female international students studying at a predominantly White U.S. university perceive their ethnic name? In what ways does it shape their identities?
- RQ 2: What kind of experiences did/do they have in relation to their ethnic name while studying and living in the United States, and what are possible underlying factors?

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at this Midwestern University, we sent an email that included details of the study, a recruitment script and informed consent to the international students' listserv. It is through purposeful sampling that those who were most likely to bring perspectives and insights to help fulfill the objectives of the study were selected (Henry, 2008). To be eligible for participation in the study, the potential participant needed to be a) a female international graduate student of at least 19 years of age and b) currently enrolled and studying at the Midwestern University for at least one academic year. We then scheduled an individual Zoom interview with each participant who indicated an interest in participating in the study. Difficulties with recruitment and attrition occurred for various reasons, including the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the participation of eight international students was secured.

Grounded in phenomenology, we used the qualitative phenomenological interview as the data-collection method, with the aim of gaining first-person accounts of a certain "specified domain of experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p.138, as cited in deMarrais & Lapan, 2003) – in this case, female international students' experiences with and perception of their ethnic name. The interview protocol used was semistructured in nature because it provided both the researchers and interviewees with space for engagement in dialogs and space for the researchers to modify the flow of the interview based on participants' responses. During the interviewing process, the researchers were mindful to intentionally shift the power to the participants, taking a learner role and allowing the participants to assume an expert role, as they described their experiences freely with the researchers (deMarrais & Lapan, 2003). Through these collaboratively constructed dialogs, rich, in-depth narratives emerged (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Collected over one semester (approximately four months), the interviews each lasted 40 to 75 minutes and were recorded and automatically transcribed by Zoom. The researchers then went through the transcripts as they watched the recorded interviews, proofreading the content and making corrections. To enhance the accuracy of transcription, they used the member-checking strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018), sending all sentences or expressions that they felt uncertain about to the participants for clarification and finalization.

Participants

To protect their identity and privacy, each of the eight participants was assigned a pseudonym. Table 1 below provides the demographics of the participants. All eight participants were female-identifying, international graduate students of Color currently studying at a Midwestern predominantly White university. Given that none of the participants identified as gender-fluid or nonbinary, we use she/her/hers pronouns hereafter. Participants differ from each other in terms of their nationality, length of stay in the United States, and the roles they undertake in addition to being a graduate student.

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants (N = 8)

Name	Country of Origin	Length of Stay	Role
Ziqi	China	3	public school Chinese teacher
Yanyan	China	4	university teaching assistant
Salome	Colombia	6	university research assistant
Adewonuola	Nigeria	5	university teaching assistant
Jaslene	Philippines	16	public school English teacher
Xinyi	China	5	university research assistant
Zoila	Ecuador	4	university teaching assistant
Hui Ting	Malaysia	5	university graduate assistant

Researcher Positionality

As noted by Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2017), researcher positionality significantly impacts studies of international students, such as the trust level between researcher and international student participants. As international female graduate students, we (first & second author) were fully aware that the shared learning environment and identities we embody may have enabled us to gain an emic perspective on participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As researchers, we also acknowledge that the potential assumptions, beliefs, and biases we hold may serve as a hindrance to interpreting these experiences in an objective way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, it cannot be discounted that qualitative researchers draw from their own lived experiences, perspectives, and positionality as they make sense of their participants' experiences and their interpretation of a certain phenomenon or the world they live in (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, we acknowledge and embrace this complexity. Because of our shared identities with the participants, we believe they were likely more willing to open up and share richer, more in-depth accounts than they would have with someone less similar. Furthermore, having this reflexive awareness potentially aided our interpretation of the data as well.

Data Analysis

The transcripts of the semistructured interviews were compiled into a Word document, which was first coded by each of us independently using MAXQDA (Version 20.4.0). After an initial round of engagement with the transcripts, we identified a set of codes and segments, with salient points marked and analytical memos written beside the codes added to the transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). Then, we shared and discussed with each other what we initially found before similar codes were merged and the most salient codes identified. Through several rounds of engaging and re-engaging with the qualitative data, we identified four themes from the interviews that are further elaborated on below.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

What's in a Name and the Multidimensionality of Identities

The first theme that we identified as salient among the qualitative interview data is concerned with participants' perception of their ethnic name and how it demonstrates the multidimensionality of their identities. Consistent with Zittoun's (2004) findings, the majority of the eight participants acknowledged that their ethnic name conveys their parents' hopes and blessings for them, as they shared stories and explained the meaning of their name and the positivity it connotes. In addition, names reflect their personal (Wikström, 2012) and group identities (Quaglia et al., 2016). For example, Xinyi stressed that her name remains part of what defines who she is as a person, while Ziqi believed that using her ethnic name demonstrates Chinese culture and her identity as a Chinese person. Some participants noted the complexities of their identities by arguing that name is a part of one's ethnic identity, as Reisæter (2012) asserts, but that identity is collectively shaped by name, culture, beliefs, and values, among other components.

As seen in the literature, participants indicated that one's name contributes to social identity formation when one is named after relatives or based on their family's cultural backgrounds (Finch, 2008) and religious affiliation (Edwards & Caballero, 2008). This is evidenced by Jaslene, whose middle name is the first name of one of the family friends, demonstrating a continuity of family relationships (Finch, 2008), while her first name was chosen based on the religion practiced by her family. Furthermore, using one's ethnic name gives students from previously colonized countries a sense of self-pride and empowerment, as noted by Adewonuola (from Nigeria):

I think it is a matter of personal pride. And also, coming from a country that was colonized by the British, direct colonization, three generations away from me...as we became independent and this new national self-awareness came. People stopped giving them English names... I've never had an English name, nor am I going to have one.

In sum, our findings demonstrate that there is a clear relationship between the participants' names and their multidimensional identities. An individual's name not only symbolizes who he/she/they are as a person but also provides significant information about that person's ethnic, cultural, and social identity and religious affiliation.

Racial Microaggressions, Discrimination, and Racism

We acknowledge that the participants shared both positive (33%) and negative (67%) experiences related to their ethnic name. Although not the focus of this paper, positive experiences shared by participants mainly include people making efforts to learn the meaning and correct pronunciation of their name and addressing them correspondingly. All eight participants admitted having either directly encountered or heard about their international peers' experiences of racial microaggressions, discrimination, or/and racism related to their ethnic name, which is consistent with the literature (e.g., Sue et al., 2007; Finch, 2008). According to participant narratives, their negative experiences were more attributable to the intersecting impacts of race, ethnicity, language, and the sociopolitical climate than to their length of stay in the United States, as seen in the excerpts below.

Zoila felt tired of the whole "Where are you from?" conversation after American people saw her name. Salome revealed her feelings of discomfort toward the facial expressions of those who heard her name, as if she did something wrong when speaking it. Other participants indicated similar microaggressive encounters, where their names were deemed "inferior, strange, difficult, or esoteric and therefore modified" (Payne et al., 2018, p. 570). For example, Salome stated, "there are always looks, the way that people look at you... I'm not doing something wrong and it was just my name. I feel uncomfortable." Salome's experiences pointed to the compounding impacts of ethnic name, language, ethnicity and race, as her name, the way she speaks, and potentially her phenotypic traits collectively contributed to negative encounters and instances of being Othered.

Some participants' names were deliberately mispronounced or overlooked both on and off campus, resulting in feelings of isolation and exclusion. Salome shared a video of a White man who was responsible for announcing her as an award winner at an event, but he had difficulty pronouncing her last name and said "whatever" to skip it, which also happened to several other international award winners. The White man made zero effort to learn the correct pronunciation of these names and minimized their significance by neglect and dismissal. In doing so, he potentially caused negative self-perceptions of their home culture, as well as internalized oppression and racism among the name-bearers (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Racial microaggressions such as these could have enduring impacts on participants' self-perception and worldviews (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012).

The four participants from Asian countries noted their own or their friends' particular suffering and discrimination based on their names and ethnicity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chirikov and Soria (2020) showed that both international undergraduates (17%) and graduate students (12%) personally suffered from hostile, hateful, or aggressive behaviors during the pandemic based on their country of origin. Their study also found that this percentage almost doubled when it came to those from China, Vietnam, and South Korea. Our study confirms the above findings, as participants' experiences indicate the inextricable connection between their ethnic name and identity and how ethnicity and race intersect, causing them to become easy and frequent targets of discriminatory and racist encounters. Hui Ting admitted having suffered from harassment resulting from her ethnic name and her identity of being an Asian, while Yanyan confided that she had to deliberately hide her ethnic name and identity by adopting an English name during the pandemic to avoid discrimination and to stay safe. Ethnic name is often a clear social marker for marginalization amidst the current sociopolitical climate:

Hui Ting:...it also just shows people what your marginalized identities are. I would talk to people, especially in the beginning of COVID, and then they would look at my name. And I would just say 'yeah, obviously I've had some harassment too, like being the Asian.'

Yanyan:...especially when the pandemic [broke] out in America, so I think it's kind of for safety, so you don't want people judging you because you're from China right? I'm not saying that I tried to hide that information, but I think it is safer for me to sometimes not tell them."

Discriminatory and racist incidents, as noted above, pose a threat to the safety of international students and can have detrimental impacts on their psychological wellness (Anandavalli et al., 2021).

Blatant discrimination and racism are also evident in other aspects of life, affecting not just international students of Color but people of Color in general. For instance, Adewonuola was advised to shorten her ethnic name in the job application process because it is "too long" and "too ethnic" for people to pronounce it correctly. She also pointed to the discriminatory practices of some companies, such as screening out CVs with non-Anglo names during the hiring process. Such hiring discrimination based on ethnic names resonated with the findings of several studies (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Derous et al., 2009). For example, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that using the same CV, African American names received $\frac{1}{3}$ fewer interview callbacks than White/Anglicized names. In addition, a negative correlation exists between African names and how potential employers perceive these applicants, whereas applicants do not have this concern when they have a White/Anglicized name, as indicated by these authors. Consistent with the literature, our analysis shows that multilayered racial microaggressions, discrimination, and racism (in regard to their names) are faced by international female students of Color, which could consequently cause harm and leave scars, i.e., mental, spiritual, and cultural impacts on the receivers (Wing & Smith, 2005).

Linguicism, Ethnocentrism, and Internalized Racism

Participants in this study also helped shed light upon specific factors for the negative experiences regarding their ethnic name. For example, when the consonant composition of participants' names seems to deviate from standard English, they are more likely to experience negative encounters. Ziqi was asked by the secretary at her school for "a preferred name or another name", right after she introduced her ethnic name, which begins with letter Z. Salome was constantly questioned about the way her parents named her, which, according to the White people she met in the United States, clearly missed a letter/syllable (e.g., why Tiffni not Tiffany?), and they suggested she use an Anglicized name they considered similar to her ethnic name instead. Linguicism, i.e., "a social process in which differences are used to create and reinforce a hierarchy of power and dominance" (Cho, 2017, p. 668), is at play in both cases. Linguicism normalizes dominant, in this case, Anglicized ways of naming while discrediting and delegitimizing ways of naming within different languages/cultures.

The narratives noted above are also discursive expressions of ethnocentrism, a belief held by members of the majority group that "their unique interpretations and perceptions

of the world and human nature are the best and most correct ones” (Neuliep et al., 2001, p. 138). It is therefore quite common to see Anglo-Americans using Anglicized ways or criteria of naming to judge and evaluate the validity of ethnic names of those from other cultures, leading to stereotypes and racial microaggressions. Ethnocentrism as such can disguise explicit forms of racism by safeguarding traditional moral values while developing resentful and hostile attitudes toward others (Alaminos-Fernández & Alaminos-Fernández, 2020).

In addition, the participant Hui Ting teased out the complexities of discrimination and racism resulting from their ethnic name by pointing out that members from minoritized groups sometimes internalize White traditions, beliefs, and values, thus perpetuating White supremacy. When she came to the United States, Hui Ting made the decision to use her Anglo-sounding last name as her preferred way to be addressed rather than her first name, which is how her family and friends call her. Reflecting upon her decision making, Hui Ting believed that the media reinforces White supremacy, which explains why Anglo names are popular in her home country Malaysia, which then drives her to favor her Anglo-sounding last name. In such cases, internalized racism, i.e., “internalization of the beliefs, values, and worldviews of the dominant culture” (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 448), plays out in adding more layers and dimensions of oppression and discrimination against people of Color, in this case international graduate students with ethnic names.

Building an Authentically Inclusive and Diverse Environment

The final theme that we identified as salient is action oriented, meaning what can be done to build an authentically inclusive and diverse environment for international students. Rather than placing the responsibilities solely on the name bearers, our participants offered valuable insights into what their White counterparts, faculties, and administrators can do collectively when interacting with someone from a different cultural background. For example, participants suggested being respectful and open-minded to one’s ethnic name and making efforts to learn the correct pronunciation. Rather than using a White, ethnocentric/ethnolinguistic lens to judge one’s ethnic name, people in the host country need to be open-minded, acknowledging that there are diverse ways of naming and knowing and to “take time to appreciate the diversity around you” (Jaslene). Teachers, professors, and educators are advised to learn from international students of Color their preferred way of being addressed, giving their students respect, choice, and agency. Name bearers can also proactively contribute by turning uncomfortable encounters into teachable opportunities, helping those from the host country become more culturally responsive and inclusive, as indicated by one participant (Zolia). She further pointed out that “it requires time to invite people to be willing to teach others, like seeing the way they mispronounce the name as a teachable moment”.

Our analysis suggests that these international female students of Color were not only critically aware of the uncomfortable ethnic or racial encounters in their daily life related to their ethnic name but also problematized discriminatory incidents and actively provided their own perspectives and constructive feedback for addressing these issues by negotiating and redistributing responsibilities among stakeholders. Instead of taking an assimilationist approach, i.e., adapting to White/Anglo norms and traditions, as advised by studies on

international students (e.g., Sherry et al., 2010), our participants chose to maintain and continue using their ethnic names while navigating their studies, life, and work in a predominantly White Midwestern environment. Furthermore, they tried to hold stakeholders accountable for contributing to the inequity and discrimination they faced.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In response to our first research question, our study indicates the meaningfulness of ethnic names to international female graduate students and the significance of learning the correct pronunciation of ethnic names because when one's name is altered, a piece of their identity is altered or taken away (Rabow et al., 2016). All stakeholders, students, faculties, and administrators need to be open-minded and culturally responsive when interacting with students from other cultural backgrounds to help avoid enduring impacts of racial microaggressions. To answer our second research question, the results also indicate common experiences with multilayered discrimination and racism related to their ethnic names. Using a CRT/CRF lens, administrators and leaders need to consider international female students of Color in all their roles – student, teacher, job-seeker, leader, mother, etc. – and establish programs with comprehensive support and various resources that speak to their multidimensional identities and address discrimination and racism (Wing, 1997). For future research, studies can explore how international female students of Color disrupt White normativity, choosing to privilege and celebrate the beauty of their ethnic names and the factors shaping them to become transformative forces.

Our study has several implications. First, CRT and CRF are powerful frameworks for mapping out the multidimensionality of the identities of international female graduate students of Color by examining their experiences related to their ethnic name and how these identities intersect to cause discrimination and racism. Using CRT and CRF lenses, we center those typically marginalized voices, stories, and lived experiences, following the call of Abdullah et al. (2014) and critical race feminist scholars (Berry, 2009; Wing, 1997/2000). Second, we demonstrate how CRT and CRF can be applied to help address real-life issues faced by marginalized communities by drawing from them a synthesis of knowledge and insights. Only when we listen to marginalized voices and act on the wisdom they share can we potentially enact authentic and meaningful changes in education (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010).

Third, we build on and extend Wing's (1997) remarks on Black females by stressing that our international female students of Color need to be seen each as a "multiplicative, multilayered, indivisible whole" (p. 32) and that despite common experiences with discrimination and oppression, they were able to leverage their own critical consciousness and potential to become transformative forces in fighting inequity and social injustice. Finally, we conclude that to create a truly inclusive and diverse environment on our college campuses, it is crucial that faculties, administrators, staff, and decision/policy makers a) interact with international students of Color meaningfully and authentically, b) recognize their international students of Color as important contributors to intercultural exchange and diplomacy, c) work to educate themselves and their predominantly White student bodies on these aspects, and d) never again expect or imply that international students with ethnic names change their name to appease White, English speaking, and majoritarian comforts (Lee, 2010).

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