You & Me, Them & We: International Students Making Meaning(s) of Ethnic and Racial Identities at West Mountains College

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You & Me, Them & We:

International Students Making Meaning(s) of Ethnic and Racial Identity

at West Mountains College

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SIT Graduate Institute

PIM 75

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

November 26, 2017

Advisor: Dr. Alla Korzh
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Abstract

Arguing that higher education institutions (HEIs) and academia rely on racist and Western-centric narratives to inhibit international students from constructing their own complex meanings of identity, this study explores how 11 international students at West Mountains College made sense and created meanings of racial and ethnic identity during their sojourn in the United States. This study focuses on students’ experiences at the college and at the Washington State Students of Color Conference, whose workshops and student-centered approach encouraged participants to explore and interrogate their ethnic and racial identities and those of their peers. Investigating these critical experiences through a focus group, one-on-one interviews, and a public presentation, I find that participants construct racial and ethnic identities that conform to, contest, and/or transform the dominant Western narrative. Regardless of their orientation towards this narrative, participants’ sense of self and understanding of others deepened and diversified as a result of their sojourn. Developing interpersonal, intrapersonal, and intercultural skills along the way, participants offer new narratives of self and other that encourage self-determination and self-expression and allow for plural identities. I, along with my participants, suggest that HEIs must account for and celebrate these new narratives as a means of improving intercultural dialogue between international students and the campus at large. I see this dialogue as tantamount to the exchange of people, knowledge, and ideas that is the heart of international education.
Introduction

The democratization and globalization of higher education have enabled a larger and more diverse pool of students -- namely from the burgeoning global middle class -- to have access to educational opportunities abroad. As a result, international student mobility is at an all-time high, with over 5 million students studying outside their home countries in 2015 (ICEF Monitor, 2015). International students benefit their host institutions and communities economically (NAFSA, 2016; Universities UK, March 6, 2017). Other studies demonstrate that international students have a positive impact on their host students’ ability to lead, self-confidence, and exposure to and understanding of diverse cultures and ethnicities (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2015; McKenna, November 18, 2015; Ward, 2001). Higher education institutions (HEIs) respond to these demographic shifts by developing culturally relevant practices and innovative programming that support the experiences and needs of a growing population of international students (Hannasab, 2006).

Rather than feeling supported, international students report feeling marginalized and discriminated against by their host institutions, faculty, and students in research studies focused on HEIs in the US, UK, Australia, and Canada (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Brown & Jones, 2013). Discriminatory language and behavior towards international students stem from racist, xenophobic, and Western-centric understandings of the "foreign" person (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2010; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). This discrimination dislocates and disenfranchises international students as "others" with a documented negative effect on their wellbeing and academic success (Brown & Jones, 2013; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Liao, 2008). International students wrestle with this new
minority identity through a racist and xenophobic logic that they often have never encountered before (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Lee & Rice, 2007; Urban & Orbe, 2007). These research findings should encourage HEIs to engage in the self-reflective work necessary to create truly inclusive learning environments. Unfortunately, Western HEIs and academic literature continue to shift responsibility away from themselves and focus instead on how international students struggle to "fit into" discriminatory environments (Lee 2010; Lee and Rice, 2007; Marginson, 2014).

Arguing that this approach inhibits international students from constructing and embodying their own complex meanings of race, ethnicity, and identity, the research question that guides my study is: How do international students make sense and create meanings of racial and ethnic identity during their sojourn in the United States? Through this research question, I aim to learn how students' conceptions of race and ethnicity confront those of their host institutions, staff, and students. By documenting how these confrontations create potentially conflicting or hybridized meanings, I highlight how students construct racial and ethnic identities that may conform to, contest, or transform the dominant Western narrative embedded in international education practice and scholarship. In doing so, I aim to transnationalize how racial and ethnic identities can be constructed, moving them beyond their limited Western borders to include the diverse interpretations espoused by my participants. Within these identity constructions, I analyze how international students’ racist and xenophobic ideologies influence their understandings of themselves and the diverse peoples around them. Employing qualitative research methods that define meaning making as a dialogic and reflexive process, this research contends that international students and their hosts must be partners on the path towards intercultural empathy.
Arguing that this partnership is crucial to the vitality of international education, I also aim to uncover how HEIs encourage and inhibit international students in their learning about race and ethnicity in the United States. In doing so, I hope to provide HEIs in the US with suggestions on how to improve intercultural dialogue between their international students and the campus at large. I see this dialogue as tantamount to the exchange of people, knowledge, and ideas that is the heart of international education.

**Relevant Literature**

**Discriminatory Logic of International Education**

I situate my research first within literature that examines how international education operates through the discriminatory logic of what Stein and de Andreotti (2016) call our current "global imaginary". Channeled through Western supremacy, ethnocentrism, and racism, this imaginary strengthens economic, social, and political systems that favor global inequality. Evolving discriminatory systems have legitimized this inequality throughout our history, moving from colonization and slavery to development and globalization. While known by many names, our global imaginary has consistently objectified and differentiated people based on their race, ethnicity, and country of origin as a means of furthering its legitimacy (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016). Certain bodies receive the privileges of economic, political, and social mobility because they legitimize and reinforce the dominant narrative. Other bodies that don’t “fit into” this narrative are asked to either follow suit or risk further marginalization or subjugation.

International students are important subjects to study within our global imaginary precisely because its narrative dictates, limits, and contests their mobility. That mobility is first subject to immigration and admission processes that filter students as welcome or unwelcome,
preventing certain bodies from entering the country based on their country of origin and religious affiliations (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015). Upon arrival, students enter into a vulnerable contract in which as Marginson (2012) argues "they cannot exercise the full rights and entitlements of citizens in either the home country or the country of temporary residence" (p. 501). On campus, they are stamped as "international" and governed by institutional policies that differentiate them from domestic students in the ways they gain employment, pay tuition, and receive support services. As Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo (2015) contend, international education does not operate on an altruistic or "benign playing field but in a ruffled terrain replete with inequalities, immobilities, and differences" (p. 692).

This ruffled terrain gets its shape from the ethnocentric discourse of Western supremacy and non-Western deficiency. For Stein and de Andreotti (2016), this discourse understands the West "at the top of a global hierarchy of humanity and human knowledge production (equated with economic success), with the rest of the world trailing behind" (p. 235). Both Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo (2015) and Marginson (2012) describe how, through this discourse, the international student can so easily and readily act as an object of the Western development project. Much like the "savages" of our colonial past and the aid package recipients of our current neoliberal system, international students must first become "blank slates" to "become like us" and benefit from our education system. What these students must become are not the subjects of their own development but objects who are acted and inscribed upon by Western supremacist institutions, policies, and stakeholders.

How this Western supremacist system defines and acts upon international students is largely an outcome of historical shifts in the global flow of goods and people. Robertson (2011) in Australia and Brown and Jones (2013) and Madge et al. (2015) in the UK detail how
economic downturn increased xenophobic attitudes towards students as a predatory group, capable of taking jobs away from locals and taking advantage of government services. All three studies find a strong causal link between decreased economic opportunity and increased xenophobia and racism towards migrants and students. As "blank slates," international students carry the mixed messages of the dominant culture. Marginson (2012) understands these mixed messages as the "ambiguous meanings" of international students:

> International students are variously seen to offer revenues, research labour, international goodwill, and future human capital as citizens. On the other hand, international education triggers border anxiety, bureaucratic categorization and coercion. (p. 500)

Stein and de Andreotti (2016) echo Marginson’s research, delineating three tropes used most often to stereotype international students: cash, competition, and charity. As cash, students enhance the financial assets of the host country and institution. As competition, students compete with their hosts for perceived entitlements like acceptance into universities and jobs post-graduation and are viewed as taking away spots from domestic students. Finally, as charity, students need the aid of said hosts to develop into "successful" subjects. Both Stein and de Andreotti (2016) and Marginson (2012) note that these tropes are not mutually exclusive but instead are in a constant state of flux and overlap. Marginson (2012) argues that these flips in the discourse about international students are an attempt by national governments "to manage global flows of people they never fully control" (p. 500). Caught up in the very forces of globalization and neoliberalism that they profess to support, Western governments and their institutions oscillate between upholding migrants and international students as key to their success and scapegoating them as the source of their economic and sociopolitical woes.

**Discrimination of International Students**
Whether seen as cash, competition, or charity, international students face discrimination by their Western host communities, educational institutions, faculty, and fellow students. On campus, students report being criticized for their English accents, stereotyped based on their perceived country or culture of origin, and insulted by students and faculty alike (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). This verbal abuse is also widespread off campus (Brown, 2009; Marginson, 2012). International students have also experienced physical abuse and assault based on their alien or "other" status both on and off campus (Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013). These discriminatory practices demean international students and create a hostile environment that limits their ability to lead full, productive lives in the classroom and the community.

Discrimination against international students at Western HEIs is applied unevenly, targeting certain ethnic or racial groups over others. Multiple studies highlight how students from predominantly non-white regions, such as Africa, the Middle East, Asia, India and Latin America experience more discrimination than their fellow international students who are white (Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Studies focused on African and Middle Eastern students illustrate how the racist and xenophobic ideologies can define certain international students' experiences. African student athletes in the U.S. reported that their American counterparts described them as orphaned or destitute (Lee & Opio, 2011). Male athletes were also described as sexually or physically aggressive and associated with terrorists. Middle Eastern students were also repeatedly called out for being terrorists by their U.S. and U.K. counterparts (Urban & Orbe, 2007; Brown, 2009). These examples manifest Stein and de Andreotti's (2016) conceptualization of international students as "competitors" or "threats to domestic students' entitlements" (p. 230). Both these perceived threats and entitlements mirror
the racist and xenophobic logic that dominates discourse on citizenship and immigration in the Western world.

Racial and ethnic discrimination may also intersect with other forms of oppression to further marginalize certain international students, such as in Beoku-Betts (2004) study of African women pursuing graduate studies at Western universities. Professors and fellow students invoked post-colonial stereotypes of African women to describe the students as weakly, deficient, or doing well for a "Third World person" (p. 124). Here, Stein & de Andreotti's (2016) lens of international students as "charity" can be applied. Beoku-Betts' African subjects are in need of a kind "civilizing" development that only Western education can provide but will always be less than their Western academic counterparts.

Navigating Discrimination and Difference

A robust body of research details how international students navigate the discriminatory environments in which they study, work, and socialize. Multiple authors argue that we can equate international students' ability to adjust to and succeed in their host environment with their ability to "fit into" the Western and racist logic that explicitly and implicitly defines them. The strong verbiage these authors use to describe this process of "fitting in" is telling. The international students in Urban and Orbe's (2007) study experienced "constant pressure to alter their own cultural rules and norms" (p. 120). In Lee and Rice's (2007) study, students felt that negative images of foreigners and immigrants were "thrust upon them" and that they were "pushed into particular categories" of difference long before they understood their implications (p. 395). Bardhan and Zhang (2016) describe students having to "wrestle emotionally and ideologically" with the "entrenched race logic" of the United States long before they had the
knowledge to understand it truly (p. 5). All three studies illustrate how this racist and xenophobic logic presupposes the inferiority of international students. For many, this is the first time in their lives that they are outsiders or minorities. For others, it is the first time they become aware of their skin color and the set of inferior behaviors and abilities that this categorization inscribes upon them (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Urban & Orbe, 2007).

Relegated to outsider status, many international students experience a loss of their cultural or personal identity. Oftentimes, students encounter a disconnect between how they understand themselves and how their hosts perceive them based on discriminatory generalizations (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008; Urban & Orbe, 2007). For example, Beoku-Betts' (2004) study subjects are categorized as African rather than as their specific nationality. This othering process erases the rich cultural diversity that higher education institutions profess to prize in their international students. As one Ghanaian student shared in Brown and Jones' (2013) study: "What I realise is that they saw me not to be part of them. I don't belong with them. They didn't want to see me" (p. 1013).

Rather than feeling supported to be themselves, international students often bear the brunt of their host institution’s ignorance. The African athletes in Lee and Opio’s (2011) study struggled to correct the assumptions and fight the indifference American students expressed about African societies and cultures. Despite their scholarly success at home, the African female students in Beoku-Betts' (2004) research felt that they constantly had to prove themselves in their graduate departments, going so far as to attend remedial classes that were far below their academic ability to appease their white professors. Bearing the burden of others' ignorance is an exhausting experience for international students. Many end up finding it too difficult or worthwhile to help others understand their background (Lee & Opio, 2011) while others return
home because they are unable to cope (Beoku-Betts, 2004). These adverse outcomes are not a failure of the student but rather a failure of host institutions to recognize their implicit bias and educate their faculty and students about cultural difference.

International students regularly experience sadness, stress, and depression as they struggle to fit into the culturally insensitive environment of their host institution (Brown & Jones, 2013; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Liao, 2008). Both Wadsworth et al. (2008) and Wei et al. (2008) found that discriminatory attitudes towards international students are significant predictors of their levels of depression and stress. Studies also show that nonwhite or non-Western international students reported greater difficulty in social, personal, and emotional adjustment than international students who are white or from Western countries (Lee 2010; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012). Even more troublesome is that international students rarely use the on-campus counseling services that could provide them with a basis of support during this difficult adjustment period (Singaravelu & Pope, 2007; Wei et al., 2008).

Disconnected from their host communities and institutions, international students find solidarity and meaning by bonding with one another. For international students, this bonding is a necessary form of collective safety from or defensiveness against racial and ethnic discrimination (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). They find community with international students from all over the world who have also experienced racialization, cultural dislocation, and other forms of mistreatment (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Students also bond with other co-nationals as a means of preserving national identity and maintaining ties with their culture of origin (Ghosh & Wang,
Connections with co-nationals and other nationalities lead to higher self-esteem (Schmitt et al., 2003) and psychological well-being (Kashima & Loh, 2006).

While a positive force in the lives of international students, group bonding may also replicate many of the same negative behaviors that students experience from their host communities. On the defense, international students express their distrust of local people by isolating themselves and consistently scrutinizing their hosts’ behaviors for signs of discrimination (Brown, 2009). In this way, international student bonding is also a form of self-segregation, broadening the divide between international and domestic students. It is important to note that this segregation is not unique and mirrors other mechanisms of difference that already define life on campuses and in communities. Indeed, international students in Hanassab’s (2006) study noted the stereotypes and divisions amongst different ethnic, racial, and religious groups that existed in Los Angeles and at UCLA. One student summarized this by stating: "I think UCLA is the most diverse college in the U.S., but people from different cultures do not really interact" (p. 167).

While international students seem to defy this statement by forming relationships across countries and cultures, that does not mean they are free of divisive and discriminatory rhetoric and behavior themselves. In fact, discrimination experienced by international students can be brought on by other international students (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005). International students bring their own implicit biases about specific cultural groups to their abroad experience and manifest those biases in discriminatory practices. Research that explores the biases and discriminatory practices of international students is scant and must be analyzed in more detail if we are to truly transnationalize our understandings of race, racism, ethnicity, and xenophobia.
The reviewed literature demonstrates how discriminatory practices and environments have a profoundly adverse effect on international students. The international student experience, much like the logic of international education, is contradictory in nature. As Lee and Rice's study (2007) concludes, the pervasive and consistent practices of discrimination against international students "hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendship and obstruct intellectual growth, which should be the outcome of exchange" (p. 405). This conclusion should alarm educators and students alike. A reimagining of international education is in order - one that supports international students to lead full and productive lives and educates others to respect the varied identities that those students express.

### Countering Discrimination and Difference

A number of scholars reimagine international education by countering the narrative of discrimination and difference that supposedly dictates the lives of international students. At the institutional level, authors argue that HEIs must shift their focus from how international students don't "fit in" to how they can accommodate the diverse experiences of those students (Lee 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marginson, 2014). Host faculty, staff, and students should be encouraged to unpack their own rigid Western values and traits and question the prescriptive messaging they receive and transmit about who an international student is.

Similarly, authors also question the racist and Western logic that informs academic literature on international students. Lee and Rice (2007) call out how this literature "embodies the assumption that international students bear the responsibility to persist, overcome their discomfort, and integrate into the host society" (p. 388). Much of the literature referenced above offers little examination of how HEIs either contend with or combat the racist and xenophobic
treatment of international students. In this way, the academic literature follows the lead of the institutions themselves, replicating the discourse that international students will always be the objects of subjugation. Marginson (2014) contests this discourse by reimagining the international student as not "habitually weak or deficient" but rather as "a strong agent piloting the course of her/his life" (p. 12).

Uplifting these stories of empowerment is perhaps the most important way authors reimagine international education. Researchers demonstrate that international students are capable of constructing knowledge (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015), creating meaningful relationships, increasing their self-awareness, preserving their cultural heritage (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), and creating new identities that hybridize the host and home cultures (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Marginson, 2014). International students are actively and intentionally countering the narrative that they need to "fit in" to survive and thrive during their abroad experience. Instead, they offer a new narrative, one of self-determination and self-expression that allows for plural identities.

This new narrative contests the racist and Western logic that international students face daily. Authors elaborate on how international students overcome discrimination through such skills as camaraderie and self-confidence (Beoku-Betts, 2004), persistence and determination (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011), and taking on the role of the cultural ambassador (Batterton & Horner, 2016). Rather than being defeated by these challenging experiences, international students often describe them as essential to their growth as individuals (Marginson, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). In being “othered,” they develop a stronger sense of themselves and their purpose.
Examining the benefits of this "othering" process for international students is integral to my research agenda. Multiple authors describe how students confronted the racist and xenophobic stereotypes embedded in their home cultures (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Batterton & Horner, 2016; Moores & Popadiuk; 2011). Through this confrontation, students developed a stronger sense of cultural relativism and flexibility and an ability to "step outside" their culture (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Marginson, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Outside they faced a new reality: that their culture was not as fixed as others believed just as much as the cultures they discriminated. Bardhan and Zhang (2016) eloquently describe this process as leading "to an intense embodied realization of the arbitrary nature of all identity categories" that produces "a form of empathy for the Other that is likely not possible without actually becoming the Other oneself" (p. 15). In being marginalized themselves, students develop a greater compassion and intercultural empathy for all those who are marginalized. In doing so, they unpack the logic that racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds ought to fall along an inferior-superior spectrum. Instead, they see their struggles as linked and recognize, as Batterton and Horner’s (2016) international student subjects do, "the universality of power struggles that cause all people to engage in harmful acts" (p. 477). Under the right circumstances and with the proper support, these students have led and will lead institutions towards greater intercultural understanding and compassion for all.

This process of cultivating empathy should be at the heart of international education if practitioners and scholars are to dismantle the racist and Western logic that underlies much of the work that we do. International students are vital voices in this dialogue, not only because they can share their experiences firsthand but also because they have much to learn. In this sense, international students and their hosts are partners on the path towards intercultural empathy. As
international education moves bodies across national/cultural contexts through even more transactional and monetized mechanisms, academic institutions must work even harder to keep this path towards empathy open. They must foster dialogue on differing ideologies and ideas and support practices that challenge their own biased assumptions.

Situating My International Student Participants Within Identity Development Theory

This research study opens up this path by being a witness to how 11 international students make sense and create meanings of racial and ethnic identity in the United States. For researchers and student services practitioners, international student identity development can be understood at the intersection of student development theory, intercultural development theory, and racial and ethnic identity development theory. These theories delineate how people move through development by framing the process in stages or models. Theorists understand that many individuals find themselves in the grayer areas of these stages. As such, I briefly describe these theories below and refer to them throughout my paper not to pigeonhole my participants into specific categories but rather to understand their identity formation as a relational process between the overlapping spheres of their lives.

According to Baxter Magolda (2009), students learn in three domains: cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Their learning in these domains develops across four major temporal stages, making up their developmental journey. In their late teens and early twenties, my students most closely align with the first two stages in Baxter Magolda’s model (2009):

- **External Formulas (Childhood):** Get ideas from others, who influence our decision-making. Where to go, what to think, etc. Authorities impact us.
- **Crossroads (18-20 years old):** Recognize that you want something else but unclear about what that is. How do I know? Who am I? What types of relationships do I want to have? A sense of dissonance.
These two stages demonstrate that my participants are at the beginning stages of understanding their identities outside of the influence of school and home. The internal voices that guide their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are just taking shape. As beings in process, my participants are still learning what it means to be who they are and know what they know. As Merriam and Kim (2008) suggest, it is important for researchers and practitioners to illustrate how ways of knowing and being do, in fact, differ around the world and from the dominant Western narrative.

These globally varied ways of knowing and being are at the heart of intercultural development theory. Paige (1993) articulates intercultural development as a process that requires both direct experience with and reflection on cultural difference. Through this reflective learning process, individuals and groups explore alternative ways of knowing what they know, effectively “learning how to learn” through different sociocultural lenses (p. 3). The American Association of American College and Universities’ (AAC&U) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (2009) can be used to measure “our capacity to identify our own cultural patterns, compare and contrast them with others, and adapt empathically and flexibly to unfamiliar ways of being” (p. 1). This rubric measures a student’s intercultural knowledge and competence in the following areas: cultural self-awareness, knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks, empathy, verbal and non-verbal communication, curiosity, and openness.

Intercultural development pedagogy must also incorporate racial and ethnic identity development theory if its aim is to cultivate the whole person. Sue and Sue’s (2015) Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID) Model is particularly helpful in illustrating how these identities evolve across time and space and “in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures” (p. 296). Used to describe identity development amongst U.S. minority communities, the R/CID model was an interesting
framework through which I understood my participants’ culturally-specific minority identities, and how they found themselves in and moved between four of the five stages in the (R/CID) model:

- **Dissonance Stage**
  - Self-concept is challenged by new information and experiences
  - Growing sense of comradeship with other oppressed groups is felt
  - First time person begins to associate positive attributes with their minority culture (p. 300)

- **Resistance and Immersion Stage**
  - Self-discovery of one’s own history and culture
  - Anger directed outwardly towards oppression and racism
  - Self-definition reactive against White racism
  - A feeling of connectedness with other members of racial/ethnic group (p. 301)

- **Introspection Stage**
  - Defining self proactively, not reactively
  - Feeling that one has forfeited personal autonomy in order to follow minority group views and notions
  - Desire to stand for personal values, beliefs, and outlooks (p. 303)

- **Integrative Awareness Stage**
  - Inner sense of security in self: can appreciate unique aspects of their culture as well as those in U.S. culture
  - Commitment to eliminate all forms of oppression
  - Reaching out towards other minority groups in order to understand their cultural values and ways of life (p. 304)

In grappling with their experiences in the U.S. both individually and in groups, international students illustrate many of the qualities associated with these stages of the R/CID model. As Kim (2012) contends, “racial and ethnic identity models are particularly applicable to international students” as they are raised in environments “where issues of race and ethnicity might be less prominent than in the U.S.” and as “matters of race and ethnicity can rise to the surface after their arrival to the U.S.” (p. 102). This research addresses the lack of student-centered scholarship focused on racial and ethnic identity formation amongst international students.
This study understands that international students come to their host institution with an abundance of intellectual, cultural, and intra/interpersonal skills, and highlights how they utilize those skills to create new, complex identities. Specifically, I ask my student participants to reflect on explicit circumstances of intercultural diversity and difference so that they may develop a more holistic understanding of who they are and the diverse identities of their peers. I situate this inquiry in qualitative methods that aim to uphold student voice and to transmit that voice to decision makers in the HEI setting. In doing so, I follow the work of other researchers who elicited the self-perceptions of international students as a means of combating the essentialist narrative espoused by such diverse stakeholders as HEIs, national governments, and local citizens (Koehne, 2005, 2006; Marginson 2012, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

Design & Methodology

Methodology Choice and Rationale

Constructivist Paradigm

In order to understand how international students make sense and create meanings of racial and ethnic identity during their sojourn in the United States, I centered my research in a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm supposes that my participants have multiple and conflicting constructions of racial and ethnic identities. I investigated how my participants’ identity constructions influence and are influenced by their environments, with a particular focus on the transition from their home environment to the U.S. college campus. Aligning with constructivism’s dialectical approach to research, I agree with Guba and Lincoln (2004) that participants’ identity constructions “can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among” myself and my participants (p. 27). Through our co-creation of findings, I aim to
build a “consensus construction” (p. 27) which may help international students understand and navigate their racial and ethnic identities with more clarity and further research focused on international student agency and identity development in HEI settings. As the researcher who guided and added to this consensus construction, I recognize that what participants said was influenced by the structure of the focus group and interviews, the presence of my co-facilitator and myself, and by the other study participants. In doing so, I aim to dispel the assumption that what international students said can be straightforwardly equated with their identities (Haugh, 2008).

**Qualitative Methodology**

I employed a qualitative methodology to investigate how international students analyze and create meanings of racial and ethnic identity during their sojourn in the United States. This methodology allows student voices to take center stage, highlighting how they create, contest, and make sense of their lived experience. Identifying with the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), I aim to piece together students’ meaning-making into a quilt of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs so that other international students and HEI educators and administrators may appraise and reflect on it. At the same time, qualitative methodology allows me to bring an analytical sensibility to this work, placing students’ experiences within the broader sociopolitical and economic framework discussed in the relevant literature. In doing so, I fully embrace the inherent tensions of qualitative research, agreeing with Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) that it can bring “both critical and humanistic perspectives to bear” (p. 4).

**Site and Participant Description and Sampling**
This research focuses on the experiences of international students at West Mountains College (WMC) in Washington State. WMC serves over 19,000 students in a growing and rapidly diversifying region of the Seattle metropolitan area. The city of West Mountains has grown from 40314 inhabitants in 2000 to 70180 in 2010, a 74.1% increase. While the white population decreased by 48.1% during that same time period, the population of Asian, black, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander residents, and residents of Hispanic origin doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). According to TIME Magazine, West Mountains College diversified more than any other college in the United States, its white population dropping from 91% in 1990 to just 42% in 2014 (Johnson, December 8, 2015). Currently, the student population is 36% white and 39% non-white, with Asian students (17%) and Hispanic/Latino students (9%) representing the largest non-white groups. International students represent roughly 16% of the total student population (West Mountains College, 2016). These rapid increases in diversity at both the city and institutional level represent a unique context in which to study racial and ethnic identity formation.

WMC is seen as an international education innovator for its unique programming and services (Mae Ross, 2016). At the same time, local residents and college staff argue that WMC has shifted from a “public good” education focused on local residents to a commoditized, service-oriented education catered to international students (Redden, 2016). As an International Student Advisor at the college, I have observed how that tension manifests in the same racialized and ethnocentric rhetoric toward international students that is discussed in the relevant literature. The college is, thus, an ideal “real-life context” in which to study how international students make sense of and create meanings of race and ethnicity (Yin, 2009).
The college has a large international student population, ranking eighth amongst Associates institutions in the United States and third amongst all institutions in the State of Washington (Institute for International Education, 2017). The international student body is very active on campus, participating in and leading numerous student clubs. The International Programs and Extended Learning (IPEL) Department at WMC supports international student engagement through various programming and funding mechanisms and solicits student feedback through both qualitative and quantitative methods. By creating such a strong culture of participation and presence, WMC international students are ideal participants for this research project. I have seen firsthand how they come to the table with an understanding that their opinions and ideas matter and with an ability to engage with challenging subject matter. Representing 64 countries (Stewart, 2016), the international student body will also have diverse cultural perspectives on racial and ethnic identity from which to draw from.

In order to best understand how this student body makes sense of racial and ethnic identities in a U.S. context, I constructed my research as case study of the experiences of eleven WMC international students who attended the Washington State Students of Color Conference (SOCC). The case study approach allows me to explore and interrogate the phenomenon central to my research question – racial and ethnic identity formation of international students, in this case – by asking participants to reflect on their experiences at the SOCC (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Held annually in Yakima, Washington, the SOCC’s goal is “to support Washington State students to become more active proponents of their own education and life choices, and expand the opportunities and possibilities for students to become agents of change” (Multicultural Student Services Director’s Council, 2016). The SOCC is guided by five main themes:

- **Identity Development**: introduce students to concepts and structures that will strengthen their ethnic and/or racial identity;
- **Awareness of Others**: these workshops are designed to increase students’ awareness, knowledge, and understanding related to race, ethnicity, and other differences of groups other than their own;
- **Skill Development**: students build and learn skills that they can use to achieve their full potential;
- **Social Justice/Social Activism**: these workshops will introduce and/or advance students’ understanding of the importance of becoming social agents of change;
- **Personal Development**: students learn the importance of health and wellness issues related to the mind, body, and soul. (Multicultural Student Services Director’s Council, 2016)

Students at the SOCC investigate each of these five themes in workshops that focus on interactive and student-centered activities. For a schedule of events at this year’s SOCC, please see Appendix A. I framed the SOCC as the central “critical incident” of my case study; its workshops and student-centered approach encouraged my participants to explore and interrogate their ethnic and racial identities from their own perspective (Stark & Torrance, 2005). They also engaged with other identity groups – such as Asian and Pacific Islander American, black/African American, Latino/a, and Native American/Alaskan Native students. Through their shared experiences, my participants gained valuable insight into racial and ethnic identities that define the United States and were able to compare them to those of their home countries. The SOCC was, thus, an ideal “information-oriented case” as it represents a rich space of inquiry that maximizes the utility of information from a small sample of participants and limited research time (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 426).

My colleague and I utilized a theoretical sampling strategy to select the eleven international students who participated in this year’s SOCC and who, in tandem, participated in my research. As defined by Mason (1996), theoretical sampling means selecting groups to study on the basis of their relevance to the research question. Such a sampling strategy allowed us to find participants who are most invested in and prepared for the SOCC and who also are most
willing and able to talk about my research topic. Interested students filled out a separate application, which can be found in Appendix B, answering three questions:

- Why is attending the Student of Color Conference important to you?
- What does: social justice, diversity, equity & inclusion mean to you? OR what is your experience and how have you demonstrated: social justice, diversity, equity & inclusion in your personal and/or professional development?
- Please describe your perception of the racial diversity climate on the West Mountains campus and how it could be improved.

My colleague and I reviewed the applications submitted by international students and selected 11 participants based on the strength of their answers. Strong answers indicated a willingness and clear vision for attending the conference, a thorough understanding of concepts related to ethnic and racial identity, and a personal assessment of how these identities play out in the student’s lived experience. A short synopsis of their identities will be described in the findings.

Minors are included in this sample group because roughly 40% of the international student population at West Mountains College is of high school age and is completing our high school completion program. Having their voices included in this research is important because they represent a major part of the international student community at WMC.

Methods of Data Collection

My case study is an “all-encompassing method” that incorporated multiple data collection techniques to ensure the richest description of my participants’ lived experiences (Yin, 2009, p. 18). I used observations gathered at an initial workshop and the SOCC to inform a focus group-style workshop and individual interviews that investigated how international
students make sense of and create meanings of racial and ethnic identity during their sojourn in the United States. The data collection period took place between April-June 2017.

**Observations: Pre-Conference Workshop and Students of Color Conference**

The pre-conference workshop, which I co-led with my colleague, took place on April 5, 2017 and introduced WMC international student participants to the structure and goals of the conference. We led students through a short series of interactive activities that explored students’ identities and their understandings of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Students used poster paper to detail how specific identities related to race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, disability, etc. are constructed in their home countries. We concluded the workshop by answering any lingering questions the students may have about the SOCC or any of the subjects we discussed. I audio recorded this workshop so that I would have a detailed record of what students discussed.

The SOCC took place between April 6-8, 2017. As a participant-observer at the SOCC, I took field notes on the subjects covered at each of the five themed workshops (please see Appendix A) and the public commentary that is made by and about international students. I paid special attention to comments made by my participants during our nightly Individual School Meetings and at mealtimes.

**Focus Group: Post-Conference Debrief**

I co-lead the post-conference workshop with my colleague on April 17, 2017. This gave students ample time to process their experiences at the SOCC and gave my colleague and me time to fine-tune the activities used for the debrief workshop. Understanding the SOCC as the
“critical incident” in my case study, the debrief focused on how students grappled with their identities at the conference, what they learned about other groups’ identities, and how they may apply what they learned to how they navigate and analyze the social and academic environment at WMC. Given the potentially sensitive nature of this content, I felt that a focus group-style workshop would be, as Macnaghten and Myers (2004) suggest, “best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don’t” (p. 64). It also provided prompts for participants to respond to, contest, and agree with one another, centering the conversation on the students. Notes taken at the pre-conference workshop and SOCC grounded this conversation in what students previously said and observed so that they may then reflect upon how their understanding and analysis of identities change over time. To see a list of questions used at the workshop, please see Appendix C.

**Individual Interviews**

Following the post-conference workshop, I conducted individual interviews with the student participants over the course of five weeks. These semi-structured interviews focused on how a particular student’s racial and ethnic identity developed over their lives and how experiences in the United States inform that development. As Macnaghten and Myers (2004) understand that “issues of status, conflict and self-presentation” (p. 65) could inhibit open talk in the debrief workshop, I wanted to provide a more private space for participants to speak away from their peers. I structured the interview guide with Rapley’s (2004) goal in mind of “producing retrospective (and perspective) accounts or versions of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts” related to ethnic and racial identity (p. 16). To see a guide of interview questions for students, please see Appendix D.
**Student Presentations**

As part of their agreement to participate in the SOCC, students were required to present to the college campus about what they learned at the SOCC at an hour-long forum on May 24. Unlike the workshop and interviews, this presentation was entirely student designed. As such, it is integral to my data collection because it comes directly from my participants’ perspectives (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Participants first led the public in a privilege walk in which they had to take a step forward if they were ever afforded a certain privilege in life and take a step backward if they were marginalized in a certain way. Participants then shared to the group what they learned and loved most about the SOCC.

**Ethics of Research**

**Code of Ethics**

Following Christian’s (2008) four guidelines for a code of ethics in research, I: 1) ensured that my participants are informed about and voluntarily participate in my research; 2) provided those participants with clear information about the purpose, goals, and objectives of my study that is free of deception; 3) guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality of my participants; 4) shared findings that are accurate and representative of my participants’ experiences.

Given that students were required to attend the pre-conference workshop, SOCC, and post-conference workshop when they signed up for the SOCC, their consent/assent to voluntarily participate was given. As my findings come from the post-conference workshop and interviews, I provided my participants with an informed consent/assent letter that explained the purpose of my research, what the focus group and individual interview would entail, their rights as
participants, and my responsibility to ensure participants’ and data confidentiality. Participants consented/assented to the following:

a. The audio recording and use of the post-conference workshop in my research
b. Participate in a one-on-one interview
c. The audio recording and use of the one-on-one interview in my research

The letter also detailed how I would ensure their confidentiality as explained in the Data Management and Analysis section below. I shared this letter with participants during the pre-conference workshop, clarifying that students would be agreeing to being recorded during the post-conference workshop and interviewed separately and that the information shared during these experiences would be included in my research. I also explained that participants could agree to being recorded during the workshop, interviewed, none, or both. They could also discontinue their participation at any time during the study.

I also explained the risks and benefits of the study. I mentioned that the sensitive nature of some of the questions asked may cause discomfort or evoke other strong emotions in participants. If participants felt uncomfortable with these questions, they could decline to answer. I provided participants with the contact information for the West Mountains College Counseling Department in case they wanted to discuss their experience in this study privately and confidentially with a trained professional. While no financial remuneration was offered to participants, I explained that their participation in this study was invaluable in understanding international students’ experiences with racial and ethnic identity at West Mountains College so that the college may better support its international student body.

Given that some of my participants were under the age of 18, youth participants asked for consent from their parents or legal guardians and then assented on their own. The signed parental consent form was sent directly from the parent to me by e-mail. I was also available to
both parents and student participants via e-mail and phone if they had any questions about the study. To see the consent/assent letters, please see Appendices E, F, and G.

I shared my findings with participants before publishing in order to ensure their accuracy. I reached out to participants who noted any discrepancies or doubts in the data, scheduling one-on-one conversations with them as needed.

**Building Trust**

Qualitative research’s interpersonal nature requires the building of trust between myself and my participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mason, 1996). In order to co-create meaning through the research process, I aimed to ensure that participants felt comfortable speaking about their experiences to one another and to me. To that end, I asked participants to come up with community standards that guided the pre-conference and post-conference experience. As a workshop facilitator, one of my roles was to gently remind participants of these standards (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004). I also made sure to conduct myself according to these standards and checked in with students to make sure that this was the case.

As a participant-chaperone at the SOCC, I not only checked in with participants about their experiences but also shared in those experiences and related my own thoughts and feelings about them during our Nightly Meetings and mealtimes. I hoped that I at least partially broke down the student-chaperone dynamic by being an active participant at the SOCC and highlighting how we were all learning together at the conference.

I considered the building of trust especially when conducting interviews, which were more intimate encounters than the workshops or SOCC. I scheduled these interviews at the end of the data collection period so that I had ample time to build up trust with participants over the
course of the workshops and SOCC. At the interviews, I began by conveying that the participant’s views are valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), not only to their self-learning but also to furthering the conversation about racial and ethnic identity expression amongst international students. Given that my participants come from a diverse set of cultural backgrounds – with their own lexicons, beliefs, and feelings about race and ethnicity – I followed Barbour and Schostak’s (2005) advice to “adopt the pose of the listener in a way that parallels the language and manners of the interviewee” (p. 42). I also used basic attending skills (as defined by Ivey, Packard, & Ivey, 2015) so as to approach the interview process from a place of empathy that honored and respected my interviewee’s worldview.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

According to Sue and Sue (2015), understanding my “own reactions to issues of diversity, multiculturalism, oppression, race, gender, and sexual orientation” is tantamount to understanding the differing worldviews of my participants (p. 6). As part of my training in multicultural counseling at the School for International Training, I examined how my racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and class identities developed throughout my life in a personal narrative paper. I reflected on this narrative before beginning my research, positioning myself within Sue and Sue’s (2015) Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model. I returned to this model as a means of navigating how this research affected my own journey towards cultural competence and how that compares to the journeys of my participants.

I also remained aware of how I communicate specific messages of social position, power, and value through my identities and how these messages influenced my participants (Barbour & Schostak, 2005). As a white man, I form part of a dominant social group that routinely harasses
and marginalizes international students, especially those of color. At the same time, I also represent an aspirational identity for many international students – the American citizen – and all the stereotyped characteristics attached to it. As a result, my participants might have felt uncomfortable or distrustful when sharing feelings about their identities and the struggles they have faced creating those identities. I built trust with these participants by opening up about my own struggles to construct an identity and providing them with a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of being American.

As an adult and employee of the college, I transmitted a certain level of authority and expertise to my student participants. I aimed to level the playing field by reminding my participants that they were the experts of their own lives, that their perspectives would inform scholarship in the field, and that the information they shared was completely confidential.

**Data Management**

I recorded field notes during the pre-conference workshop and SOCC on my personal laptop, which is password protected and locked in my private residence. I created a pseudonym for the college and for each participants’ names to protect their individual identities. This list was saved separately from the observational notes and subsequent transcriptions described below. These pseudonyms were used in those notes and transcriptions, along with this document.

The post-conference workshop was audio recorded on my personal cell phone and saved on the hard drive of my personal laptop. Individual interviews were audio recorded on my personal cell phone and saved on my personal laptop. These recordings were saved under pseudonyms on my hard drive and a backup drive. Audio from these recordings were
transcribed and then saved under corresponding pseudonyms. The students’ final presentation was also audio recorded and saved on my hard drive and a backup drive. Finally, I deleted the data following the completion of the capstone project making it impossible to access it, and it will be accessible to no one and will not be used for future projects.

**Data Analysis**

I used an inductive-deductive approach to data analysis. I first analyzed field notes taken during the pre-conference workshop and the SOCC using Richards’ (2005) approach of “taking off from the data” (pp. 70-72). I read the notes and annotated them with any particular contextual clues, like body language or tone, that enriched the account. I then “[wrote] myself into the account” (p. 51) and recorded what I did, how I felt, and any influence I think I might have had. As I “took off” from the data inductively, I discovered common themes that I wanted to discuss further with participants during the focus group and individual interviews. I referred to this list of themes while asking participants the standardized questions of the focus group and individual interview. These themes were temporal devices that helped students see the before, during, and after of their SOCC experience. I made note of how participants’ thoughts and opinions connected to these themes.

I input the audio files and transcriptions of the post-conference focus group, individual interviews, and final presentation within the Dedoose data management software. Information stored on this software was password protected. Much like with my field notes, I analyzed the transcriptions inductively through the Dedoose interface, reviewing and coding each transcription for emergent and conceptual categories, recording patterns, and then developing common themes. The interface allowed me to quantify and visualize the number of transcription
excerpts within each theme, the number of excerpts per participant, and the interrelatedness of themes, amongst other functions. Through these powerful analytic tools, I developed a list of parent codes for the major themes and child codes for the themes’ associated concepts. The major themes were very much connected to the questions asked during the focus group and individual interviews, while the associated concepts emerged from the participants’ common interpretations and experiences highlighted in those themes.

Four major themes emerged after transcribing and coding the focus group, individual interviews, and final presentation. These themes, and their associated concepts, are presented from the perspective of the participants. The use of “we” and “ourselves” does not explicitly denote that my perspective is included. However, aligning with constructivism’s dialectical approach to research, I posit that participants’ identity constructions “can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among” myself and my participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 27). Through deductive analysis, I connect these findings to relevant literature. The themes, and their associated concepts, are described in the table on the following page:
Table 1.1: Major Themes and Associated Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHO WE ARE</th>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Associated Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Ourselves</strong></td>
<td>Participants discuss how they understand and/or define their own racial and/or ethnic identities and how those identities have evolved over time, especially since arriving to the United States and studying at West Mountains College.</td>
<td>Defining racial and ethnic identity, early lessons on personal identity, the impact of the U.S. sojourn on racial and ethnic identity development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Others</strong></td>
<td>Participants discuss how they understand and/or define others’ racial and/or ethnic identities and how their understandings of others have evolved over time, especially since arriving to the United States and studying at West Mountains College.</td>
<td>Early lessons on others’ identities, conjuring America and Americans, the impact of the U.S. sojourn on intercultural understanding and empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The West Mountains College Experience</strong></td>
<td>Participants illustrate what diversity means to them at West Mountains College, appraise the college’s level of support for diversity, and suggest ways to improve diversity and inclusion on campus.</td>
<td>Meaning(s) of diversity on campus, centers of diversity on campus, divides and divisions on campus, promoting diversity and inclusion on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The SOCC Experience</strong></td>
<td>Participants detail how the Students of Color Conference impacted their sense of self, ability to make connections with others, and analysis of racial dynamics in the United States.</td>
<td>Personal empowerment, making connections and developing empathy, racial dynamics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of this study included its timeframe and the age makeup of my participants. The Student of Color Conference took place in early April 2017, with the pre-conference workshop occurring one day prior to the Conference. Given that some of my participants were under the age of 18, I had to schedule enough time for those students to ask for parental consent to participate in the study. To create that time, I decided to not include content gathered at the pre-conference workshop nor at the SOCC in my research findings. Instead, my
findings focus on data generated at the post-conference workshop, individual interviews, and final presentation, which all took place between mid-April and mid-June. All student participants, whether they were underage or not, elected to be included in these particular findings. Thankfully, all parents also provided consent in time.

I chose to purposefully delimit this sample size to comprise only international students who attended the Students of Color Conference for three reasons. First, I felt that soliciting data from a much larger pool of participants would not capture the nuances and fluxes in a student’s identity as well as from a small sample size, given my limited research time. Second, the predetermined SOCC application, selection, and participation process meant that students would have a vested interest in the research subject matter and would be required to participate in all days of the conference, the pre- and post-conference workshops, and the final presentations. Finally, international students at WMC have participated in the SOCC for a number of years and so have a general understanding of its content, risks, and benefits. As such, I knew that I would have an easier time recruiting participants for my research by focusing on those who participated in the SOCC rather than the international student population as a whole through snowball sampling.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

I conceptualize the themes mentioned above as centered on how participants discuss who they and others are (Who We Are) and as situated in the real-life contexts (Yin, 2009) of West Mountains College and the Students of Color Conference (Where We Are). Agreeing with social scientists who posit that identities are changeable in response to context and settings, I investigate how my participants’ identity constructions influence and are influenced by the self
and others and in the environment in which those interactions occur (Evans, 2011; Fincher, 2011; Kim 2012; Torres, 2011). I end on the SOCC as it is the central “critical incident” of my case study; its workshops and student-centered approach pushed participants to explore and interrogate their ethnic and racial identities and those of others in powerful new ways (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Through deductive analysis, I illustrate how participants’ thoughts and experiences about who and where they are confirm or contest relevant research.

Throughout this analysis, I allow student voices to take center stage, highlighting how participants created, contested, and made sense of their lived experience. Below, I provide some basic contextual information for each of the 11 participants of this study. All participants’ names have been changed.

**Aarav**. 19-year-old male student from India.

**Alice**. 16-year-old female student from Hong Kong.

**Annisa**. 18-year-old female student from Indonesia.

**Beydaan**. 21-year-old female student originally from Somalia.

**Bo**. 21-year-old male student majoring in International Relations.

**Chinara**. 20-year-old female student from Nigeria.

**Dakshi**. 19-year-old male student from India.

**Irfan**. 17-year-old male student from Indonesia.

**Parvesh**. 19-year-old male student from Nepal.

**Sahra**. 19-year-old female student originally from Somalia.

**Shu-chen**. 17-year old female student from Taiwan.

**Understanding Ourselves**
Participants made sense and created meanings of their own racial and ethnic identities through connections to their country/culture of origin and through new discoveries about who they were in the context of the United States and West Mountains College. While racial and/or ethnic identifications did not play a significant role in participants’ early lives, they all felt that these identity markers greatly influenced their lives in the US. Participants shared how navigating new social practices, school policies, classroom dynamics, and relationships at West Mountains College caused them to reflect upon and adjust their racial and ethnic identities.

I draw upon Sue and Sue’s (2015) Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model to illustrate how these identities evolve across time and space and “in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures” (p. 296). I also connect participants’ understandings of themselves with the AAC&U’s Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (2009). Cognizant that my sociopolitical reality (and that of my Western readers) defines race and ethnicity in very particular and charged ways, I agree with Bardhan & Zhang (2016) in arguing that participants’ self-identifications “resist the imposition of U.S. race ideology” (p. 12) and begin the process of transnationalizing our concepts of race and ethnicity. This transnationalization process must recognize that many of my participants “have not directly experienced the White/non-White racial binary their entire lives” (p. 10) and, therefore, I aim to bear witness to how they self-identify in ways we may find controversial or confusing.

**Defining Ethnic and Racial Identity**

All 11 participants defined their racial and ethnic identity through regional, national, or historic ethnic identities. In explaining these identities to me, they illustrated the fluidity,
interchangeability, and cultural specificity of using terms like race and ethnicity to define ourselves. Bo, for example, described both his ethnicity and race as Han Chinese (Personal communication, May 18, 2017). Parvesh felt that he belonged to the “Aryan race,” harkening back to its original definition of ancient Indo-Iranians rather than to its complicated usage today in the United States and Europe (Personal communication, May 19, 2017). For a full list of the descriptions participants used when asked to define their ethnic and racial identity, please see below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Racial and Ethnic Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aarav</td>
<td>South Asian, Subcontinental Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annisa</td>
<td>Javanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beydaan</td>
<td>Somali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>Han Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinara</td>
<td>West African, Nigerian, Igbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakshi</td>
<td>Mostly Indian, less of Zambian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irfan</td>
<td>Bataknesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parvesh</td>
<td>Aryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahra</td>
<td>Somali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu-chen</td>
<td>Chinese, Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants refer back to these identities while explaining their early lessons on their personal identity and how that shifted as a result of their experience in the United States and at WMC.

**Early Lessons on Personal Identity**

Racial and ethnic identity did not play a huge role in participants’ early understandings of self. Many shared that they either didn’t use or didn’t know about racial and ethnic identity back home. Aarav, for example, did not know what the words race or ethnicity meant before coming to the United States (Personal communication, May 15, 2017). Four participants felt that the racial and/or ethnic homogeneity of their home communities meant that those identities were not relevant to their daily lives. Tribal, religious, regional, or caste markers were often more
important determiners of identity and difference. Participants connected these markers to deeper roots in their culture and history. Parvesh detailed the origins of his Brahmin caste identity while Irfan discussed the differences between his regional Batakinese identity and the Javanese majority identity in Indonesia. For some, these markers were a point of pride, while others expressed ambivalence and skepticism about them.

At the same time, certain participants recounted impactful experiences in which they navigated ethnic and racial identity difference. Many lived as minorities at some point in their lives, learning valuable lessons about being different at an early age. Dakshi faced discrimination as one of the only Indian nationals at his school in Zambia, sharing that “from both sides I didn’t get along with the people, with the Indian people nor the people from Zambia” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Annisa attended schools in which she was one of a handful of Javanese Indonesians amongst a Chinese Indonesian majority, a group that has faced discrimination throughout Indonesia’s history. Annisa learned about the impact her dominant identity group had on the lives of her classmates:

But most Chinese Indonesians, they still think that we are racist, just like white people and people of color in America. Just like how that work. But I, myself, I’ve been growing up in that community long enough so I don’t really feel the tension. (Personal communication, May 5, 2017)

Annisa’s unique schooling experience developed in her the anthropological ability to see and reflect upon her own identity as both an insider and outsider. Within the AAC&U’s VALUE Rubric (2009), Annisa learned the complexity of elements important to members of another culture, participated in cultural differences, and began to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences (p. 2). Beydaan and Sahra also developed this anthropological skill set as Somali refugees in the Norwegian school system. Sahra described her transition to Norway as jarring, being defined almost immediately as “we’re black and we’re Somalis and we’re
different” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Like other black international students before her (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Urban & Orbe, 2007), Sahra first became aware of her skin color and the set of inferior behaviors and abilities that this categorization inscribes upon her when she moved to Norway. Because of the discrimination that she and her sister faced, Beydaan labelled the first years in Norway as “us versus them” between Muslim refugees and the Norwegian majority. As she grew older, Beydaan recalled:

After a while with schools and sports and whatnot that’s when I started interacting with more native Norwegians [...] But at the same time there’s always that sense feeling like not as comfortable as when I am with my other Somali girls. It feels like we have different cultures and the way we were raised or the way that we are. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Beydaan illustrates Sue and Sue’s (2015) Dissonance Stage of Racial/Cultural Identity Development, her “growing sense of comradeship with other oppressed groups” (p. 300), namely with her fellow Somali and Muslim refugees, coupled with her sense of dissonance with the dominant culture. Much like Annisa, Beydaan developed an outsider-insider mentality to assess her own culture and the dominant culture, moving from a more combative “us vs. them” worldview to one of critical acceptance. This mentality became even more necessary as participants moved to the United States and were subject to a new dominant culture’s definition of identity.

The Impact of the U.S. Sojourn on Racial and Ethnic Identity Development

Coming to the U.S. and studying at West Mountains College had a profound impact on how participants understood their racial and ethnic identities. Six respondents agreed that differentiation based on identity traits was much more prevalent in the United States than in their home environments. Participants shared how navigating new social practices, school policies,
classroom dynamics, and relationships caused them to reflect upon and adjust their identities. Sometimes they felt that this differentiation was forced upon them, echoing student experiences in other studies (Bardhan and Zhang, 2016; Lee and Rice 2007). Others felt that they were finally able to freely choose who they could be, or, as Marginson (2014) states, fashion “their own changing identities, albeit under social circumstances largely beyond their control” (p. 6). Still others rejected racial and ethnic differentiation entirely, critiquing it as irrelevant to their lived experience and returning to the identities of their upbringing. The fact that some participants felt all of these feelings exemplifies the complex, and oftentimes contradictory, development of one’s own identity.

Three participants moved from granular descriptions of identity to broader ones depending on the social environment. Irfan felt that he had to simplify his identity to Indonesian or Southeast Asian because he found his Chinese-Indonesian “background very complicated for people to understand”. After the first weeks of school, explaining this Chinese-Indonesian became “too much to say” because his new friends “didn’t know the different ethnics in Indonesia” (Personal communication, May 1, 2017). Beydaan also went through a simplification of identity, growing tired of the reactions she received when sharing that she was from Norway but was actually Somali (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Much like the African students in Lee & Opio’s (2011) study, both Beydaan and Irfan decided it wasn’t worthwhile to help others understand their complex backgrounds. And yet, both found that this decision brought about positive change in their lives. For Irfan, losing specificity facilitated the connections he made with the diverse people around him. When people asked Beydaan to clarify her Somali identity, she realized she didn’t know a lot about where she came from:

I realized that I have been ignoring it, just putting it off, or not knowing much about it. It’s kind of embarrassing when people ask you and you don’t know basically your
own culture. How would you expect people to learn about it and be more understanding of it if you yourself are not willing to learn about it? [...] And then with the...you know coming here everyone was so busy with trying to want to know exactly where they’re from or their history and all of that, I guess, there’s a lot of empathy and...like a lot of wanting to know about it...that it kind of got me “maybe I should learn about my own culture, too. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Being in a diverse community of people curious about others’ identities, Beydaan exemplified Sue and Sue’s (2015) Resistance and Immersion Stage of their Racial and Cultural Identity Model, “oriented toward self-discovery of [her] own history and culture” (p. 301). By joining the African Union Club, the Somali Club and speaking with other Somali nationals, Beydaan felt that she moved from not belonging to “one specific place” to being “more part of the community” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). In her Somali and African identities, Beydaan developed solidarity with others (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016; Brown, 2009; Brown & Jones, 2013; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), stronger ties with her culture of origin (Ghosh & Wang, 2003), and enhanced her sense of identity and worth (Sue & Sue, 2015).

Conversely, three participants moved from broad conceptualizations of ethnic identity to more specific ones. Aarav, for example, considered himself an Asian person before coming to the United States:

And then after I came here, then all the forms I had to fill out for West Mountains then after seeing all the diversity and all the ADA statements, you know, all the different procedures here I had to follow that specifically focus on the ethnicity, that time I realized that it’s kind of an important thing and I should know more about myself. (Personal communication, May 15, 2017)

Echoing the statements of other participants, Aarav felt that the United States’ focus on ethnicity pushed him to discover more about his identity. When Aarav selected “Asian” on these forms, some international students told him “no, you’re not Asian, I mean, you don’t look Asian” (Personal communication, May 15, 2017). Multiple participants mentioned how “looking like” a particular race or ethnicity was discussed amongst international students, suggesting that
international students perform discriminatory microaggressions against other international students (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005). Aarav, however, did not experience the sense of loss that other authors described their study participants feeling when they encountered a disconnect between how they understood themselves and how others perceived them (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008; Urban & Orbe, 2007). Instead, Aarav was inspired to learn more about his South Asian identity for the first time and draw connections to people in that region. Newly situated within a multiplicity of Asian identities, Aarav felt that specifying his Asian identity as South or “subcontinental Asian” described his physical and cultural traits best while in the United States (Personal communication, May 15, 2017). Within the AAC&U VALUE Rubric (2009), Aarav’s cultural self-awareness is becoming comfortable with the complexities that new perspectives offer (p. 2).

Perhaps Aarav was also motivated to specify his identity because of the specific connotations that “Asian” has in the context of the United States and at West Mountains College. Shu-chen, for example, felt “more in [her] head” about being Asian at West Mountains:

It’s only that when I came here I became very aware that “oh, I’m Asian.” I’m like “oh, people are going to think this about me and that about me” because of the fact that diversity is here and, because of that, stereotypes and bias come around. (Personal communication, May 24, 2017)

In moving from her homogenous country of Taiwan to a heterogenous environment, Shu-chen is confronted with all the implications that being Asian means in the United States. She recalled one incident in which she and her friend were called “Asian bitches” by a group of young white men driving by in the parking lot of a nearby Walmart:

Because people of color are so often sexualized and they are calling on us. Basically, it was like a cat call with like our racial identity. (Personal communication, May 24, 2017)
Here Shu-chen identifies herself as a person of color and connects her experience to those of people of color in the United States. While the discrimination she experienced is deplorable, it does bring Shu-chen to a new empathetic understanding of the collection of identities (“people of color”) which she is a part of in the U.S. This analysis of self exemplifies Marginson’s (2014) work on international student self-formation, Shu-chen rising above beliefs that place her in deficit. Her Asian identity is not hidden, like in Taiwan, but one which she understands as part of bigger social forces in the United States that motivate her to act on as a result. Her self-definition is reactive against White racism and also proactive (Sue & Sue, 2015), enabling her to participate in various social justice activities on campus. Within AAC&U’s VALUE Rubric, Shu-chen is developing her empathy skills, recognizing intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview (Asian, international, person of color) and sometimes using more than one worldview in her interactions (p. 2).

Sahra also found that her identity was charged with meanings in the United States, bringing her to a similar understanding that she was part of a bigger movement. Back in Norway, “there was no dialogue going on about social issues and racial issues”:

And then when I came here, it was how much race plays a role in American society was very big for me. I was shocked. [...] I realized “Wow, I am literally a black, Muslim person,” you know, and that means something for other people. That’s how they see me. [...] And then I was reading books about the African Americans and the slavery. I read Jim Crow and that gave me an insight on why things are the way they are now and the racial differences and everything. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Experiencing a similar feeling of identity shock with the White/non-White racial binary, Sahra felt it her duty to learn more about what her identities meant in the U.S. context. In learning about the African American experience in her classes and in clubs, Sahra came to associate with a black identity that she never felt a personal connection with in Kenya or Norway. By incorporating this blackness into her Somali and Muslim identities, Sahra created a new
hybridized identity (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Marginson, 2014). This hybridized identity germinated in Sarah’s early experiences with the Black Student Union and African Union Club:

> When I first came here and they had those different clubs, I was like “Wait, is that not basically the same thing?” Why do you guys have different clubs? You guys are the same people.” And then they had to explain to me: “no, you know being black, this is how they feel and this is who they identify as.” [...] And I was like “Oh, OK, we are actually different. Africans and African Americans.” Because they also do have their own culture and they also do have their own ways of living. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Through her participation in these clubs, Sahra developed the sense openness regarded in the AAC&U VALUE Rubric (2009), demonstrating an ability to suspend judgement in valuing her interactions with cultural different others (p. 2). Sahra’s empathy for the African American experience expanded but she also learned to differentiate it from her own experiences as a black Somali. Exemplifying Sue and Sue’s (2015) Integrative Awareness stage of racial and ethnic identity development, Sahra’s growing “inner sense of security” allows her to “own and appreciate unique aspects of [her] culture as well as those in U.S. culture” (Sue & Sue, 2015, p. 304). Sahra moved from being “just a regular person” in her refugee community in Kenya to culturally Somali and racially black at West Mountains College (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). This blackness brought her closer to her African American brothers and sisters at West Mountains, enabling her to see connections between their struggles and her own as a refugee.

In contrast, Chinara firmly stated that she did “not identify as a black person” because she saw racialization as divisive:

> Whenever I saw the news when there was a shooting or something, I was like “why are they killing each other?” So when I was in America, it turned into “why is the white man killing the black man?” It made no sense to me. Are they not both men? So that it brought some level of cognitive dissonance for me because it caused me a lot of stress to kind of process and, until today, I still find difficult assimilating to the knowledge of it. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)
Chinara’s negative experience of racialization mirrors that of Bardhan & Zhang’s (2016) “participants from sub-Saharan African and/or mainly Black countries who struggle[d] with ‘becoming’ Black in the United States” (p. 10). Much like those participants, Chinara centered her sense of self in her national/cultural heritage and felt that blackness jeopardized this self:

I am aware of the presence and the history that I hold in America but I just refuse to adapt to it in the sense that it would then mean that I would have to let go of what I believe from my culture. And then assimilate into this. But then again the reason why I came here is not necessarily to adapt to being these people but just learn and then come back. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

In rejecting black identity, Chinara is resisting U.S. conceptions of race that would merge her Nigerian identity incorrectly into blackness. She felt that this race logic forced her to assimilate into “being these people” rather than just being herself. While a U.S.-centric race perspective may label Chinara’s antagonism towards black Americans as a sign of internalized racism, I would argue the sense of self she explores is far more complicated:

I’ve listened to a lot of arguments and people are like, especially from the black people themselves, they’d be like “if you go outside then whatever discrimination or segregation we’re facing is just going to be all of us”. And I’m like “yeah, it’s going to all of us” but by the time we open our mouth and everybody starts to tell their own part of the story then you would know there is a difference between you and I. And that is one thing, it’s not necessarily that I am trying to cause a separation of some kind. [...] It’s just appreciating the differences and making sure that we work together for the basic sake of humanity because that’s all that matters. If we did what are they calling to race, it’s almost like...I really don’t get it. [...] I still find it disappointing that they’d hold onto it. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Coming from a culture outside the White/non-White binary, Chinara exemplifies Bardhan & Zhang’s (2016) assertions that non-U.S. persons can see differences as cultural and think of race in terms of the human race. Indeed, Chinara mentioned the human race and humanity throughout her interview when describing her moral compass (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Her commentary is emblematic of the Introspection Stage of Sue and Sue’s (2015) R/CID Model. She feels increasing resentment towards black Americans who wish to pressure
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Her into “making decision that may be inconsistent with [her] values, beliefs, and outlooks” (p. 303). Her discursive distance from black Americans may be better understood as emblematic of the distance with which the African community of nations and African diasporas have placed between themselves and the negative stereotypes typically associated with black Americans (Bailey, 2017; Habecker, 2012; Lee & Opio, 2011).

Rather than moving towards blackness as Sahra had done, Chinara moved closer to her Nigerian and Igbo heritage, claiming that studying at West Mountains College helped her “want to go back to learn the things [her] parents made [her] learn as a child. [...] Like how to do where you’re from. How to introduce yourself” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Her self-formation underscores that international students do not need to sacrifice their cultural identity (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011) but rather can create identities that blend home, host, and other cultural options (Marginson, 2014) These identity options and the ways in which they are projected may confound the Western-centric researcher. As such, we may initially understand Chinara’s perceptions of herself and the black community as caught in the early stages of the AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (2009). She still seems to respond to situations with her own worldview and is aware that misunderstandings can occur with black Americans but is still unable to negotiate a shared understanding with them (p. 2). I would argue, however, that Chinara was also trying to reframe the conversation, contending that she can be separated from others while still working with them towards a mutual goal. As researchers and practitioners, we must bear witness to these identity choices as a means of transnationalizing our sense of racial and ethnic identity.

The stories behind these identity choices are oftentimes complicated and emotional, both traumatic and triumphant. These stories both confirm and contest dominant narratives about
racial and ethnic identity that originate in the U.S. and around the globe. One particularly evocative story came as Chinara spoke about how she felt about her skin color:

I remember my Mom would always compliment Caucasian people and how beautiful they were. [...] That they were so beautiful, that they were just light-skinned. That they don’t have any issues with their skin. But us we have rashes and decolorizations and acne and all of this. So it made me feel a bit incompetent about the way I looked when I first got to West Mountains. [...] I never really had a problem with my color. It was mostly how things just appeared on it. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Colorism, and its gospel of white beauty, was brought up by multiple participants, affecting the way they saw themselves and others. In coming to the United States, Chinara confronted and overcame this colorism -- and her insecurities surrounding it -- when she stopped wearing makeup, concluding that:

The heavens did not break, the ground did not open and I didn’t sink. It was when I began to realize that everything that I ever overemphasized is always in my head and not in the heads of other people. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Perhaps overcoming this internal overemphasis on difference is connected to critiquing the United States’ external overemphasis on difference that Chinara expressed when negating her black identity. And yet it was during her sojourn at West Mountains College where Chinara learned to address these challenges and contradictions head on. As we have seen, the U.S. sojourn served as a catalyst for internal change for many participants, leading them to more nuanced and self-defined understandings of their diverse racial and ethnic identities.

**Understanding Others**

Participants’ ability to make sense and create meanings of others’ racial and ethnic identities evolved as a result of their sojourn in the United States. Stereotypes and generalizations dominated their early understandings of different ethnic/racial identities in their home country and in the United States. It was telling from the interviews and a focus group that
U.S. media greatly influenced how participants constructed American identities before arrival, with more than half of respondents describing Americans within a white/black binary of stereotypes. Participants’ understandings of American racial/ethnic diversity, and that of the broader international student community, however, expanded and diversified as a result of the classes, clubs, and friendships they participated in at West Mountains College. For many, WMC enabled participants to make connections with and exhibit empathy for those who were different from them.

*Early Lessons on Others’ Identities*

Mirroring their early understandings of themselves, nine participants received messages about others’ identities based on tribal, religious, or caste differences. Participants described these messages using terms like “generalization” and “stereotype” and phrases like “they are known to be” and “it’s assumed that”. These messages centered on a particular group’s behavioral traits. In Nigeria, Chinara learned that the Yoruba man “would rather be poor and let his family gain” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017); Parvesh learned in Nepal that the Newar caste is “good with money” (Personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Four participants mentioned messages they received about racial and ethnic identities and tensions. These messages closely resembled those shared and reified in the United States. Alice, for example, learned in Hong Kong that Middle Eastern people were “dangerous” while white people were looked up to since they were “here for tourism or they [were] going to teach in school” (Personal communication, May 17, 2017). Bo spoke about how Malay and Indian people were portrayed as criminals in Singapore much like “how in the United States most criminals in the media are portrayed by Mexican and black” people (Personal communication,
May 18, 2017). Drawing a connection between the race riots in the United States and Indonesia, Annisa recounted:

> When there is political tension and usually when those riots happen, the racist majority would, even though it’s not related to what the riots are actually fighting for, they would discriminate against the Chinese Indonesians. (Personal communication, May 5, 2017)

These examples demonstrate that participants had an early understanding of racism and ethnocentrism existing in their home country/society and an ability to make strong connections between this understanding and the racist and ethnocentric discourse of the United States.

*Conjuring America and Americans*

When asked to describe who they thought a “typical American” was before coming to the United States, all 11 participants easily conjured up who they would see upon arrival. The copious messages they received about America and Americans back home informed their detailed responses. Perhaps unsurprisingly, little of this messaging came from accurate and nuanced portrayals of America’s diversity. Instead, every single respondent brought up how the media (most often, the American media) typecast the “typical American” in their minds. In describing this typecasting, participants called upon, lauded, poked fun at, and critiqued Western-centric and racist narratives of who Americans are. In doing so, they revealed how powerful these narratives are around the world in communicating who is valued and devalued in American society and the globe.

More than half of all respondents described a typical American as a white person. For some, this white identity conjured up positive images. White people had blonde hair and blue eyes; they were gentle, polite, and smart. They stood out as “celebrities” in some participants’ ethnically and/or racially homogenous home countries, worthy of getting their photo taken by
strangers. Aarav shared that most Indians thought Americans were “super rich” and “very progressive” (Personal communication, May 15, 2017). The media played a strong role in painting white Americans as beyond compare. This stood in stark comparison to what participants actually experienced once they arrived at West Mountains College. In describing how her image of white people changed, Sahra recounted:

> When I saw the media and the TV, they were all this “Oh my god! So beautiful people! They’re different than others!” They’re all so different and so nice and all these positive connotations with them, right? [...] But then coming here, I was like “Wow, they’re just regular people. There’s nothing special about them, right?” And I didn’t think that white people were even in the poverty range. And to me that was also another shock. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Much like Chinara, Sahra understood white people to be almost too beautiful to describe. In portraying them as “different than others,” Sahra suggests that white Americans’ superiority was assumed before arrival, echoing Sue and Sue’s (2015) description of the Conformity Stage of the R/CID Model in which “white cultural, social, and institutional standards are superior” and “members of the dominant group are admired, respected, and emulated” (p. 299). They are brought down to Earth as “regular people” once Sahra sees some in poverty. Dakshi’s Hollywood image of Americans faced a similar reality check:

> Dakshi: I always thought of it as people being, you know, all famous. Like, for example, Kim Kardashian. I thought many people like most of the girls and everyone would look like her. ‘Cause I heard that so many people tried to copy her and because now there’s people trying to copy everything like what famous people do. [...]  

> Andrew: So you would say you would imagine to be more famous...

> D: Yeah.

> A: ...like more connected to trends.

> D: Yeah, or I thought I would meet celeb--I don’t why I thought that -- like I thought I would meet celebrities like, you know [laughs].

> A: OK.

> D: Like while I’ll be grocery shopping, I’ll be like I see Kim Kardashian in the food market but that wasn’t the case at all. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)
This Hollywoodization of the United States not only portrayed white Americans as beautiful and famous but America as a place of harmony and freedom. Beydaan imagined it as a “great place where everyone you know is the same, equal and all of that” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017) while for Dakshi “people were able to be themselves and claim their rights” in the U.S. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Indeed, five respondents described how TV shows, movies, and the news portrayed the U.S. as a place of diversity that welcomed immigrants and international students alike.

Moving beyond the Hollywood veil, participants encountered, read, and learned about social realities in the U.S. that revealed the falseness of this American Dream. For some, this realization was shocking:

I had no idea about all of these issues or you know racial and, you know, the blacks and the Native Americans and all of those people. I had no idea that Native Americans even owned this land before all of that. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

For Beydaan, these realities were not learned until taking courses at West Mountains College. For Annisa and Shu-chen, who had connections to alternative and social justice-centric media outlets before arrival, the American Dream was never a reality:

I learned English and started reading news and all that, I learned the American Dream is not real immediately. [...] So it’s like a very shocking concept when people say they believe in the American Dream and I say “well, look around you!” But, yeah, after that it was pretty clear that there are people who are fighting for diversity and this country is diverse, it’s just how we treat them is just not exactly ideal. (Shu-chen, personal communication, May 24, 2017)

I’m quite informed about it since I, myself, I like to look up social happenings not only at a global scale but also in the United States since most of those human rights websites are American-centric. At some point, I feel this whole race thing in an American lens ‘cause there are little to no blog posts or writings about that in an Indonesian perspective. So actually I am quite informed. So I am aware of the Black Lives Matter. (Annisa, personal communication, May 5, 2017)
Annisa and Shu-chen’s own curiosity and concern about issues of social justice and human rights led them to break through fissures in the Hollywood image of the U.S. and discover more nuanced analyses of American identity politics. I would argue that the proliferation of these news outlets will increasingly cross borders, enabling international students to develop a more critical analysis of their sojourn abroad and, perhaps, of the social dynamics in their own countries and around the world. As Annisa mentioned, however, these outlets are often “American-centric” with “little to no” analysis from another perspective. While one may argue that American or Western media platforms, especially social media, have enabled previously censored populations to express their opinions and organize, Annisa’s commentary suggests the potential pitfalls of broadcasting only Western-centric notions of racism, equality, justice and freedom.

The media also motivated five participants to describe white America and Americans in sardonic and critical terms. White people were delineated as nationalistic overweight males who like football and eat fast food. Two respondents equated a typical American as a southern American, with one respondent following up with the term “redneck”. Gun ownership and shopping at Walmart were also mentioned. Their derisive comments, often shared in laughter, relied upon the very same stereotypes of the rural white poor that are reified in the United States. This rural white poor person (read: male) has been at the center of debates about the outcome of our presidential election and the state of our political present (Glasser & Thrush, September/October 2016; Tyson & Maniam, November 9, 2016). The rural white male stands in stark opposition to the white people participants described as beautiful and successful. This gradient of whiteness – the very same one that colors our current political debate about which Americans are valuable and which are not – is communicated across borders, teaching foreigners
about the supposedly important differences between someone who is a ‘redneck’ and someone who is a Kardashian.

Derogatory stereotyping was also used to describe how the media portrayed black Americans to respondents. This stereotyping followed the racist narrative about black people that is communicated and reified in the United States and that defines the Conformity Stage of Sue and Sue’s (2015) R/CID Model. While only two respondents mentioned black Americans, their commentary encapsulated many elements of this narrative:

So I would say the different thing is that if I were to explain a black person, it would be more of what I saw in the media and stuff like that. So it would be for the guys, it would be saggy pants and the caps and the gangster image that I have seen in the social media and TV and stuff like that. (Sahra, personal communication, June 8, 2017)

I knew there were black people. Black people were painted to us as thugs. “Y’kna what I mean?” kind of people with tattoos. We just knew that they were unserious people. That was the picture I had of them. I knew that a white or Caucasian is on better standing, not necessarily that...they were just on better standing and they kind of had their life together better. (Chinara, personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Here we see Chinara and Sahra centering blackness on the black male, a dangerous, thug-like character who does not have his “life together better”. It goes without saying that this racist conceptualization of blackness continues to hold court in the United States, influencing right-leaning discussions about Black Lives Matter, police shootings, and the mass incarceration of black males. What is more alarming is how this racist thought holds influence thousands of miles away, insinuating itself into the perspective of two young women of African descent learning about black people in the United States. This reduction of American society is a disservice to our students and we must open a pathway towards more complex discussions about the social realities that they will face and take part in during their sojourn in the United States.

The Impact of the U.S. Sojourn on Intercultural Understanding and Empathy
The experience of living and breathing these social realities on a day-to-day basis at West Mountains College had a profound impact on participants’ ability to make connections with and exhibit empathy for those who were different from them. Six participants developed relationships with people they previously held stereotypes about or never imagined they would meet. These relationships often centered on international-to-international student connections. Dakshi, for example, felt that through friendships with people from all over the world he overcame his “stereotypical view of those people” (Personal communication, May 24, 2017). Similarly, Irfan became friends with people from Malaysia, who are stereotyped as thieves who stole the culture of his home country of Indonesia. Through these friendships, Irfan realized that this stereotype was untrue and that, in fact, Malaysians and Indonesians come from “similar origins”. He even discovered batik, an Indonesian art form, is “not truly from Indonesia, either, because it’s influenced by different cultures...from Chinese culture, Indian culture” (Personal communication, May 1, 2017). This newfound cultural flexibility enabled Irfan to look at his own culture from the outside in. His commentary illustrates the AAC&U VALUE Rubric’s (2009) highest form of cultural self-awareness; he is aware of how his experiences have shaped his cultural biases and responds to them in kind. Beydaan’s perspective about her Muslim identity was similarly broadened when she befriended other female Muslim students at West Mountains College. Beydaan was most surprised to learn of the similarities between herself and female Muslims from the United States:

I’ve seen people who were born here but come from another cultural place, for example, and how their experiences is. Even though we are from different experiences, at the same time, we have a lot of similarities together. [...] We talk about something and in the conversation comes “that’s how it is” or “that’s how we say things in that way” or “that’s how we express that in our culture” and they go like “that’s the way that we express that in our culture, too”. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)
Building intercultural bridges and understanding one’s culture from multiple points of view was highlighted by Dakshi, Irfan, and Beydaan as an important, if difficult, lesson of their experience abroad, echoing the work of previous studies (Batterton & Horner, 2016; Marginson, 2014; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Similarly, participants found honoring others’ identities a challenging but ultimately rewarding experience. After incorrectly calling a Taiwanese person Chinese, Aarav learned a valuable lesson:

I took it for granted that, I mean OK, I might make a mistake and recognize that I didn’t intend to do it. But some people don’t realize that. They’re like, “how can you do that? That’s racist.” And all that. Even though you don’t actually mean it. So that’s one thing I’ve realized that you need to be careful. (Personal communication, May 15, 2017)

Alice also elaborated on this need to be more careful when asking others about where they are from, a default question posed and answered by international students:

One of my friend he live in lots of countries and his parents are from different countries but these few years, he grew up in U.S. So when people ask where are you from, he don’t know how to explain, like, I used to live in here, my parents are from here, and then I am living in U.S. right now. So I try to not ask where specific places you are from until I think our relationship is closer or one of them mention like where they are from or I will say “I’m from Hong Kong. I’m an international student”. So if the person want to talk about it, he will continue the culture or country thing instead of directly ask you where are you from. (Personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Both Aarav and Alice learned that accepting others for who they are requires that you remain reflexive and humble, willing to acknowledge your mistakes, take no identity for granted, and follow the other’s lead. Other participants meditated on this theme, offering similar suggestions. After making friends with people “from all races” at West Mountains College, Annisa recognized that people “are real people. They are not stories. And those issues are a serious thing that affects them right now so it’s really important” (Personal communication, May 5, 2017). Sahra recommended that others “have dialogues and try to understand where they’re
coming from and why they’re saying what they’re saying”. This became particularly clear when Sahra became frustrated with her Muslim friends for always critiquing white people:

So I’m like “can we just chill out a little minute and just not talk about all these racial things going on and just stop being like ‘oh that person is white, this person is black’ or whatever, whatever”, you know? But then again I think for them, they have different experiences than me [...] they have been bullied maybe because of their skin color, because of their religion, which I haven’t so I think their experience is different from me. So I can’t exactly judge them either and say “oh, why do you guys always say that” because they have definitely encountered things that have hurt them or have made them feel the way they feel that I haven’t felt. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Here Sahra achieves the difficult and admirable task of calling out her own bias. In doing so, she recognizes her privileged position in relation to her friends and empathizes with their struggles. This level of intercultural understanding and empathy takes into account multiple realities, that of her upbringing as a Somali refugee in Norway, the experience of other Muslim people in other countries, and the discrimination of Muslim people in the United States. She exemplifies the highest form of empathy on the AAC&U’s VALUE Rubric (2009), “interpreting intercultural experience from the perspective of own and more than worldview” and “demonstrating an ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group” (p. 2). Sahra and thousands of international students like her are not trapped by cultural conflict (Marginson, 2014). Much like Moores & Popadiuk’s (2011) study participants, this cultural conflict is not described as “harmful and maladaptive” by Sahra and others but rather as “an integral part of their transition and development” (p. 302). The deftness with which participants analyzed their intercultural encounters highlights their considerable inter- and intrapersonal resources and their desire to adapt to and learn what Marginson (2014) calls new “conversational idioms” (p. 12) about identity. Participants learned how to converse in these new idioms most directly from the encounters they had with other students in and out of the classroom. International educators must take note of this and, as Madge, Raghuram, and
Noxolo (2015) argue, recognize “that knowledge formations are brought together not only through academic mobility but also through the circulation, mobility, agency and resistance of international students” (p. 688). International students are not here to just learn from the host but are, in fact, co-constructors of knowledge with or without the institution’s help. As participants illustrated time and time again, they contest, connect, and create knowledges about themselves and others through social interaction. These more complex or hybridized knowledges about identity are in direct opposition to the simplified (and often damaging) messages participants received about Americans and the American Dream back home.

The West Mountains College Experience

Participants actualized their understandings of racial and ethnic identities in the United States while studying, living, and enjoying West Mountains College, localizing diversity in specific clubs, events, and departments on campus. These centers of diversity expanded participants’ understandings of who international and American students could be. At the same time, participants also noted that divides between international students, international and domestic students, and students and staff inhibited that diversity from fully flourishing. Their suggestions to bridge these divides focused heavily on improving event promotion and encouraging faculty and administration to practice what they preach when supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion work on campus.

Meaning(s) of Diversity on Campus

Participants elucidated different meanings of the words “diverse” and “diversity” when describing the West Mountains College campus. Six participants noted that WMC was the most diverse place they had ever experienced and that its level of diversity surprised them. This
diversity often centered on the campus’ international population, with some participants even listing off the countries where their friends were from. Interacting with other nationalities encouraged students to question their stereotypes about and diversify their understandings of different regions of the world. Where once Chinara only recognized “Asian,” she found at WMC that “there were Pacific Islanders. There were Filipinos. There is Taiwan. There is Korea. There is North Korea. There is China. There is Japan. There is Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

West Mountains College also diversified participants’ understanding of Americans. While Shu-chen expected American college to “be mostly, like, white,” she was surprised by the number of Asians, people of color, and African immigrants who all considered themselves American (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Similarly, Alice was surprised by how many of her Asian friends were Americans and that “they would identify as Americans but not that specific place, that Asian place” (Personal communication, May 17, 2017). Beydaan’s concept of the American “melting pot” expanded from African American and white to include “the Mexicans, the African Americans, and then you have the Native Americans, and you have those who migrated from Europe” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Seven participants mentioned that they learned about a specific ethnic or cultural group through friendships or coursework. Participants were most surprised to learn about the history and present-day experiences of Native Americans in the United States. Annisa described her Religion and Culture class as “opening [her] mind about Native Americans and how basically colonization is actually killing these cultures” (Personal communication, May 5, 2017). Before arriving to the United States, Sahra “didn’t even know that Native Americans were still
alive”. After taking a course taught by a Native American professor who spoke about his experiences, Sahra realized:

I was like “so they are the real Americans then, you know?” Americans are not the average people that we see on the social media and the news. So they are this other group of people that I didn’t know about who actually were the indigenous American people. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Attending West Mountains College problematized participants’ conjuring of the “typical American.” They began to question the media’s portrayal of the United States -- the very one they hung onto before arrival -- as misguided and racist, leaving out huge holes of the American social fabric. Through their experiences at WMC, many of these holes were mended and people that were once invisible were made visible.

Centers of Diversity on Campus

Participants localized diversity in specific clubs, events, and departments on campus. Four participants mentioned the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) as both a symbol and champion of diversity, a place that Sahra explains “accepts everyone in their open arms” and is “very inclusive with everybody regardless of race, religion, sex, everything” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Three respondents shared that their participation in a two-day leadership program called Sustained Dialogue opened them up to new understandings of racial and ethnic diversity. Others shared how they learned about themselves and others by attending identity-based clubs and events. Attending the Black Student Union, Pacific Islander Club, and Taiwanese Club, Chinara discovered that “their cultures and backgrounds [were] evolving into the assimilation of the Western world” and that they were going through the same challenges as a result (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Annisa participated in the Sisterhood Club to learn about women’s rights issues from an American and global perspective
It was at these club meetings and events that participants most easily made friends with people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, bonding over similar life experiences and interests. International students develop their intercultural skills not only through formal education but also through informal education and spontaneous social interaction.

Formal education does provide ample opportunities for international students to learn about racial and ethnic identity in their own lives and the lives of others. Two participants described how instructors facilitated this type of learning. Irfan shared that his Civics & Government instructor would ask students to “describe an example of political views in our nationalities, in our nations” (Personal communication, May 1, 2017). Dakshi felt that his instructors made students feel welcome even during troubling times:

> Like even when Trump won the election, some instructors came and talked to the students and “Oh, don’t worry about it, West Mountains is a safe space” and “If anything happens, you can always talk to us if you want”. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Certain classes also facilitated this learning. Four participants mentioned how their American Minority and Ethnic Studies course greatly influenced how they understood U.S. racial and ethnic relations. The course revealed to them the complicated and often hidden history of those relations. Chinara, for example, learned “whose land were taken away” and “all the costs of slavery”. These costs of history impacted the way participants saw the world today.

> Before I used to just think “who are you?” But then now when I meet people, I think: “who are your ancestors? Where were they from? How did you get here? What is your story to the point that you are currently?” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

In asking these new questions to herself, Chinara highlighted but one way that participants developed empathy for others while at WMC. Understanding that history greatly impacted the current lives of Mexican, Native Americans, Hawaiians and others, Chinara now saw how our
identities are inextricably linked to our histories, both those that are privileged and those that are marginalized. This development of empathy occurred across all centers of diversity mentioned by participants.

**Divisions on Campus: International-International, International-Domestic, Student-Staff**

While students greatly appreciated and learned from the diversity on campus, every single participant discussed how “even though there’s a lot of diversity, people are not very together. Everyone is with people who are from their culture. There isn’t a lot of talk” (Beydaan, personal communication, April 17, 2017). Participants used words like “grouped” and “segregated” and phrases like “in their own little corner” and “getting stuck” to describe how different groups separated themselves from others, mirroring the findings of both Brown (2009) and Hanassab (2006). Two common divisions on campus emerged from these comments: those amongst international students and those between international and domestic students. Participants shared both their understanding of and disgruntlement with these divisions, weaving nuanced analyses of segregation on campus.

Eight of the 11 participants were perturbed with how certain people only spent time with people from their same country. Some felt that this practice was specific to certain nationalities, especially the Chinese and Japanese. Others were more empathetic, understanding that students grouped with other co-nationals as a means of support and preserving ties with their culture of origin, as is also posited by the work of Ghosh & Wang (2003). Interestingly, four participants pointed out that student clubs based on nationality, ethnicity or culture kept international students separated rather than bringing them together. Beydaan, for example, brought up how most
International Program activities were focused on Asian students and there was very little for African students like her:

I’ve always heard about the Lunar New Year, the Global Teas are always about the Vietnamese and the Japanese, China and all of that. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

If diversity and inclusion are truly goals of our International Programs and Extended Learning Department – and those of all HEIs – then we must heed Beydaan’s advice to represent all of our internationals students in programming, not just the Asian majority. Beydaan’s analysis of “these specified clubs just for one culture” highlights the difficult nature of supporting both individual identities and a plurality of identities:

I don’t know how that problem would be solved because we need to have those kind of conversation, but we need to be able to be, you know, welcoming to other people and I don’t know, it’s just very very grouped. Everyone is grouped into their own culture, their own ways with their own problems. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Students from the same identity group need the opportunity to bond over “their own culture”, perform “their own ways” and discuss “their own problems”. As research suggests, connections with co-nationals and other nationalities lead to higher self-esteem (Schmitt et al., 2003) and psychological well-being (Kashima & Loh, 2006). At the same time, HEIs need to provide these groups with the education and resources to reach across cultural and national boundaries. As study participants have exemplified in their own lives at WMC, bridging those boundaries and making connections with others is a major part of their college lives.

All 11 participants had a similar nuanced analysis of the divisions between international and domestic students. Some felt it was on the onus of American students to reach out to international students. Parvesh thought that most American students “don’t really care” about getting to know about other cultures (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Others noted that they could only meet Americans in classes because they were otherwise absent from campus.
life. Many understood that Americans were absent because they studied part-time, worked, and had established social and family lives apart from WMC. Aarav disagreed with these comments; he knew plenty of Americans in campus clubs but that those clubs were focused more on interests and less on identities:

We don’t live here that’s why we have to form a social group but they already have their social group then why would they come to a club that’s focused on forming a social group? (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Irfan discerned that there were some domestic students connected to campus life but that they were full-time students who worked in the Student Life office or ODEI (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Still others felt that American students were not involved because they either didn’t know about events or felt that they were only for international students even though they were open to all. Beydaan described how she interpreted events sponsored by the International Programs office to her American friends:

Sometimes when I come to the Global Teas and all the stuff the international students does and I tell some of my friends who are like in here but they are not international students and they’re like “oh is that just for the international students?” And then I say “I think so, yeah” because that’s how I think it is, you know, the Global Tea. And those kind of events. I think it should be not just for the international student, not just for these culture but for everyone to come and be a part of it. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Beydaan was not the only one to misinterpret International Programs events as international student-only events, suggesting that our own department needs to improve how we communicate to the rest of campus. In our effort to be more inclusive, we need to let all students know that they are welcome, not just the international students with whom we work.

Conversely, six participants felt that international students did not try hard enough to get to know American students. Mirroring Aarav’s commentary, Annisa felt that international students were only involved in activities popular amongst international students but were absent
from ODEI clubs, which tended to focus more on social issues and were mainly comprised of American students (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Others connected international students’ disinterest in making friends with American students to their shyness, anxiety about their accents, and desire to stay within their same national or cultural group.

Irfan summarized this international-domestic division as a matter of differing goals. International students were “not just here for the education but also to get exposed to the culture, get to know their surroundings”. Meanwhile, Irfan felt that local students focused on their education. As a result, he felt that “getting an understanding of other people’s ethnic or racial backgrounds depends on what the people have for their priorities list” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Irfan’s theory certainly holds true in many instances at West Mountains College and at colleges and universities across the United States. At the same time, study participants represent a specific kind of international student interested in questions of ethnic and racial identity as they all opted into participating in the Students of Color Conference. Further study of other international students and especially American students at WMC would certainly interrogate Irfan’s assertion that domestic and international students have differing goals in their education.

Interestingly, Aarav was the only participant to detail an experience in which American and international students interacted outside the classroom, collaborating on an engineering competition. As a result of that project, Aarav became friends with many Americans and one of them became his roommate (Personal communication, May 15, 2017). International-domestic student engagement does flourish, contrary to student opinion. HEIs and international educators alike need to pay special attention to both the formal and informal settings in which this engagement can occur and focus resources accordingly. As Lee and Rice (2007) argue, this
work also involves removing any barriers that “hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendship and obstruct intellectual growth, which should be the outcome of exchange” (p. 405).

Focusing on superficial encouragement of cross-cultural learning, however, is not enough for HEIs to create the “global citizens” they want to see in the world. Marketing buzzwords and diversity course graduation requirements cannot make up for the lack of true intercultural interaction. Indeed, Irfan and Chinara poked holes in WMC’s messaging of diversity when they described the realities of campus life. Both were disappointed that students put in the effort to make WMC a diverse place while school administrators did very little and still rested on their laurels. Chinara felt that WMC proclaimed itself “one of the most diverse campuses in the United States” but that there was “poor support from the major hands of campus” when it came to actually promoting said diversity:

When it’s time for graduation, that’s when we see the deans and the presidents come out. But when it comes to the little things like “Oh, we are going to have a potluck for the end of quarter, we are going to have a diversity, the ODEI, the CAP Graduation” you barely see anybody. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

In order to make up for administrators’ lack of participation, students were taking what Chinara called “time and effort and energy, sweat and blood to make sure that other students get to know that they are not alone” (Personal communication, June 8, 2017). Diversity work should not rest solely on the shoulders of students. Indeed, multiple authors highlight how exhausting that can be for international students (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Lee & Opio, 2011). Rather, HEIs need to practice what they preach and make it known to all that they are there to support, protect, and encourage people from all walks of life. While most participants felt that WMC did a good job of this, there were some glaring exceptions:

I know a friend of mine when Trump became President she was almost beat up in the car park and the guy said “Oh fuck you, Trump is president” that kind of thing. And none of that was heard. It was just heard between friends and they cried. But let’s think about the
general concept, the school is not making...not the school as in the individuals in it but the school as the people in power are not making any effort whatsoever to make these things known to people. Because not that people are not willing to know, it’s that they are not giving it to them to see. (Chinara, personal communication, June 8, 2017)

The silencing of this student’s experience on campus is unsettling to say the least. Is WMC the “safe space” that Dakshi imagined? As Chinara suggests, WMC administrators are not publicly acknowledging discrimination at a time when students have the right and desire to know how safe and supported they are. HEIs like WMC must shift their focus from how international students don’t "fit in" to how they can accommodate the diverse experiences of those students (Lee 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Marginson, 2014). True Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work should not solely be celebratory. It must also be accountable to the divides and divisions on campus by providing time, space, and resources for discussion and mediation.

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion on Campus

Participants shared a number of ideas to address the divides and divisions on the West Mountains College campus. Recounting how little advertising they saw for clubs and events, more than half suggested improvements to the promotion of activities on and off campus. While Alice saw bulletin boards full of advertisements for classes, she “seldom” saw any about ethnic or cultural clubs. She suggested:

It would be really cool if they have some flyers and sticking on the board like “Do you want to know more about your background? Your history? Or your friend’s history?” I think it can attract people. (Personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Shu-chen discussed the difficulties of getting the word out about the Queers & Allies club she led, noting that that they did “not have a budget for that particular thing” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). In other interactions with students and in my own club advisor positions, I have seen the laborious and time-consuming work of getting activities and
subsequent advertisements approved by Student Life. Many circumvent this process by creating Facebook invites, which do not need pre-approval but reach a much smaller audience. Making this approval process more efficient and providing more funding would empower students to get the word out more frequently and have more of a public presence on campus.

Both Chinara and Shu-chen recommended that WMC provide technological support for student clubs and activities. Chinara suggested a dedicated website where “all of the clubs are in this site and you click on it and see what’s up” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Chinara and Shu-chen hoped that student clubs could have easier access to e-mail listservs so that they could advertise electronically.

Two participants suggested how specific populations on campus should promote activities and clubs. Bo proposed that faculty should incentivize participation through giving students extra credit (Personal communication, May 18, 2017). Indeed, many instructors already do this and there is an online training module for faculty on how to incorporate this into their curriculum. Annisa mentioned that International Program’s Peer Mentors and Peer Volunteers should be trained on how to promote diversity-related activities and clubs to international students rather than just “country student associations” and bigger campus events. I agree with Annisa’s assertion that “the gateway to knowing about clubs and organizations to international students are the Peer Volunteers and the Peer Mentors” (Personal communication, May 5, 2017). Making sure that Peer Volunteers and Mentors are aware of the wide diversity of programming on campus is essential.

As a researcher and student advisor, I found it interesting that most students felt that West Mountains College could improve ethnic and racial understanding on campus solely through better advertising. Perhaps these suggestions reveal that the college needs to get back to basics
when it comes to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work; perhaps it reveals that social events are
at the forefront of a college student’s life. Regardless, very few participants suggested other,
deeper ways of improving ethnic and racial understanding on campus. Both Shu-chen and Sahra
urged WMC to hire more faculty of color, noting that the majority of their instructors were
white. Dakshi reimagined International Program’s Foundations for Success (FFS) course, which
provides first-quarter international students support in adapting to U.S. culture and developing
personal skills:

    I thought because my English wasn’t good enough I wouldn’t be friends with certain
    people. But I think it would be a good idea for FFS -- if we would combine people like
    new domestic students and international students who are beginning together to meet
    each other. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Inviting domestic students into the FFS classroom would be a positive first step in ameliorating
the noted international-domestic student divide. Both groups of students could learn from each
other as they develop the social and academic skills to succeed in college and beyond.

    Sahra also suggested that WMC could bridge the divide between different identity groups
on campus by having clubs come together as one big group. She imagined the conversation
would go something like this:

    And the other person telling the other one “this is how I feel about you and this how I
think you guys treat me” or whatever. And they just start to having a dialogue and
talking about the issues I think would be very helpful. (Personal communication, June 8,
2017)

This cross-cultural dialogue, whether between international and domestic students, or across
identity groups, is integral to the development of true global citizens. As Sahra intimates, this
dialogue would encourage students to see their struggles as linked and recognize, as Batterton
and Horner’s (2016) study participants do, "the universality of power struggles that cause all
people to engage in harmful acts" (p. 477). Under the right circumstances and with the proper
support, study participants have shown that they are capable of engaging in this dialogue and moving institutions like WMC towards greater intercultural understanding and compassion for all. WMC and HEIs like it must follow students’ lead, moving beyond the brand of “diversity” to ensure that the conditions for intercultural understanding exist within all spheres of the institution.

**Students of Color Conference**

As the central “critical incident” of my case study, the Students of Color Conference workshops and student-centered approach prompted participants to explore and interrogate their ethnic and racial identities and those of others in powerful new ways (Stark & Torrance, 2005). During their three days at the SOCC, they investigated each of the conference’s five major themes of identity development, personal development, awareness of others, skills development, and social justice/social activism (Multicultural Student Services Director’s Council, 2016). Participants emerged from the SOCC with an empowered sense of self, a more nuanced understanding of their racial and ethnic identities and those of others, and stronger connections to both domestic and international students from diverse walks of life. They described the SOCC as an environment that encouraged intercultural empathy and inspired action, building a collective “we” that differed from the social dynamics they saw at school. At the same time, they spoke at length about situations of racial animosity that occurred at the SOCC and threatened its overall message of collective strength. It was through these discussions that participants engaged in the very same complicated work of discussing identity, race, privilege, and oppression that they felt both succeeded and failed at the SOCC.
Personal Empowerment

Six participants described their experience at the SOCC as one of empowerment, noting how workshops and speakers encouraged them to overcome adversity and find inner strength. Some cultivated this inner strength by connecting with the people and experiences of like identity groups. An identity caucus solely for international students enabled participants to express how they challenged stereotypes and adapted to and succeeded in an American learning/living environment. Hearing stories of how others in those same identity groups worked through and succeeded in discriminatory environments comforted them, as Beydaan noted, to realize “Oh, everything is going to be alright” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Many also left with a sense of pride in their identities. Sahra, for example, was particularly moved by Rohina Malik, a Muslim playwright who presented excerpts from her one-woman show “Unveiled” which focuses on the experiences of four different Muslim women around the world. After attending the show, Sahra expressed:

I feel like it made me more proud before I am in my religion because she opened a new door for people to see a different side of my religion and not what they normally see in the media or in the news. (Personal communication, June 8, 2017)

Others found inner strength in seeing connections between themselves and the trials and triumphs of different identity groups, from Muslims to Mexicans to LGBTQ people. A number of participants were uplifted by the stories of keynote speakers, workshop facilitators, and fellow students who persevered through hardship towards personal success. The group sharing and reflection embedded into certain workshops allowed participants to appreciate themselves for their accomplishments. In one workshop titled “Me, Myself, & I”, students of different identities wrote and shared letters about overcoming personal challenges and, as Beydaan described, “telling ourselves thank you for always being there for ourselves cause we never realize that
everything we’re going through the first person who is there for us is us” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Self-care in the face of adversity bubbled up in a number of the workshops I attended.

As a whole, the SOCC led participants to a newfound confidence and comfortableness in their own skin. Irfan felt that after openly sharing so much of himself with others at SOCC, he cared less about what others think of him and felt comfortable talking with anyone. He also realized that “if there is discomfort or something” in an interaction then “that’s their own problem or issue” (Personal communication, May 1, 2017). Irfan’s developing self-confidence illustrates Marginson’s (2014) assertion that international students are “robust persons” whose sense of self is strong enough to adapt to ethnocentric or discriminatory practices (p. 18).

With their inner fires lit by the SOCC, participants clearly saw how they could make an impact on the world. Attending a Q&A session with Rohina Malik, Annisa recounted:

It made me aware that as an artist, that my racial and ethnic identity can really make a change. Cause I have this power to create works of art so why not use that power to represent people of color? (Personal communication, May 5, 2017)

Much like Sahra, Annisa saw in Ms. Malik’s one-woman show an opportunity to counter dominant xenophobic narratives by showcasing people previously unseen and stories previously unheard. As an artist herself, Annisa hopes to take that same approach in her filmmaking, placing the experiences of people of color front and center. Others felt a similar urgency to uphold and honor the lived experiences of diverse peoples. At SOCC, Chinara learned to turn her sadness into anger about the state of the world, noting:

I’ve been in a position that whenever I learn something new about people or how they got to where they were, I would always just cry and be like “why? Why does this happen?” But I’ve realized to stop asking “why” and now ask “how do we?” How are we going to make integration? How do we set the boundary? How do we avoid this form? How do we? How do we? How do we? And what will we do? It’s very interesting, the Student
of Color Conference kind of just made that more pronounced to me at every identity level. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Here Chinara moves beyond marginalized communities’ common struggle to their common resistance, engaging in hypothetical actions steps towards activism. Irfan felt similarly after attending a “Fight the Power” workshop, learning that “we have a voice [...] that could really influence in society and in making us more united” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Both see themselves as part of a greater movement that coalesces the collective “we” to enact change.

Making Connections and Developing Empathy

What does this collective “we” look like to study participants? During their presentation to campus, five participants highlighted meeting new people and making friends as one of their favorite aspects of the SOCC. Participants noted that they made friends with people from all over the world and “all walks of life.” Two participants tried to sell the event to other students as an opportunity to connect with domestic students not only from West Mountains College but from all over Washington State (Personal communication, May 24, 2017). Interest from international student audience members notably perked during this part of the public presentation, echoing the desire to improve connections between international and domestic students that study participants shared in their individual interviews.

During these interviews and the SOCC debrief focus group, participants described more deeply how SOCC connections impacted their understanding of themselves, their communities, and the diversity that surrounds them on a daily basis. For three participants, making connections with people from their same identity group brought them closer together. Annisa was surprised to find a large group of international students that also felt that media was
whitewashed and that more people of color from all over the world need to be represented in films (Personal communication, May 5, 2017). At the “Islam 101” workshop, Beydaan connected with Muslims from different national origins who shared similar experiences of cultural adjustment as her, noting that “it was really helpful to hear that I was not the only person that was going through that. There were a lot of people that were going through that, too” (Personal communication, May 9, 2017). Participants often saw themselves reflected in others of their same identity category, others that they, perhaps, did not recognize before. As a result, identities like Muslim, African, and international took on new meanings for study participants, becoming more complex and richer. This broadening of perspective about a student’s own cultural/ethnic background mirrors the findings of Batterton & Horner (2016) and Moores & Popadiuk (2011), the SOCC providing an opportunity for study participants to look at their culture from the outside in.

Similarly, five participants drew new conclusions about identities outside themselves, becoming more empathetic to others’ experiences and feeling united with people who were previously “different”. Irfan found many similarities between his Indonesian identity and that of Pacific Islanders, especially the mutual struggles they faced. After learning about Pacific Islanders’ contact with colonial powers, Irfan wondered “how were Indonesians seen when the Dutch came and if they were also seen as the same thing?” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Irfan’s question is emblematic of the empathic inquiry that participants dove into at the SOCC. Throughout many of the workshops I attended, students consistently demonstrated verbal and nonverbal signs of agreement when others described how they struggled with discrimination in their homes, schools, and communities. For many of my study participants, this was the first time they heard such stories shared so openly amongst such a diverse group of
people. They eagerly shared and reflected on these stories with other group members at group meals and meeting times, drawing parallels between their own histories and those of the people they met. This story sharing made participants feel less alone and more interconnected with and emboldened by people from diverse walks of life. In doing so, they demonstrated the highest form of curiosity on the AAC&U VALUE Rubric (2009), asking complex questions about other cultures and seeking out and articulating answers to these questions in ways that reflect multiple cultural perspectives (p. 2).

Two keynote presentations particularly moved participants to new understandings of identities outside themselves. The event most mentioned by participants was Rohina Malik’s one-woman show, which exposed them to the more complex realities of Muslim female identity. Alice, for example, thought that people wore the hijab in her home country of Hong Kong because they were from the same country. Malik’s show inspired Alice to speak with other SOCC participants about religious roots and learn that “the hijab is for God, like, their God and it’s not that everyone has to wear it but it’s just for if you really believe, you have to wear it” (personal communication, May 17, 2017). Here Alice demonstrates the attitude of openness that is part of the AAC&U Value Rubric, initiating interactions with cultural different others. Luis Ortega’s keynote address about his life as an undocumented person moved Shuchen to question the validity of words like “immigrant” and Beydaan to draw connections between her experience as a refugee and the life of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (personal communication, April 17, 2017).

In developing a greater empathy for their own identity groups and those of others, participants also learned valuable lessons about respecting differences and reducing biased behaviors. The very structure of SOCC -- with its variety of identity-based caucuses and
workshops -- illuminated the important role identity plays in our everyday lives and how we
must, as Parvesh shared, “acknowledge each other’s differences and get to know about each
other’s cultures from there” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). This acknowledgement
looked different for different participants. For four participants, it was about seeing people less
as labels and understanding, as Irfan suggested, “that ‘oh, they’re just another person’ but not
specifically racializing where they’re from or what they identify as” (Personal communication,
May 1, 2017). Recounting the emotional reaction she had to many people’s stories of struggle,
Shu-chen realized that “every identity is interchangeable, it’s really about how we view it”
(Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Irfan and Shu-chen’s realizations germinated from
sharing and listening to the very same experiences of being minoritized similar to Bardhan &
Zhang’s (2016) participants, leading them to understand the “arbitrary nature of all identity
categories” (p. 15). After the SOCC, participants saw such identity categories as both necessary
for empowerment and community and as tool used by others to divide and discriminate.

To that end, participants urged others to not stereotype and judge others based on these
arbitrary identity differences but instead to get to know one another by learning each other’s
stories. Dakshi’s shared that his biggest lesson from the SOCC was learning to call out
stereotypes for what they are: biased behaviors that come from filters like “our family, our
culture, and our gender” (Personal communication, May 24, 2017). Dakshi’s recommendation
embodies the AAC&U Value Rubric (2009)’s definition of cultural self-awareness as being
aware of how one’s experiences influence cultural biases. Bo beautifully captured this lesson
when he suggested that people “listen to understand and not to reply” during the final
presentation:

Because oftentimes we are too quick to judge and give a reply to someone. We pay no
attention to what their true intention of telling us the things they are going to tell us. We
are too quick to judge on their actions through our own values, through our own
definition of what is normal, through our own definition of what is socially acceptable or
whatnot. By listening to understand and not listening to reply, we can make our
community a better place and have bigger and stronger relationships. (Personal
communication, May 24, 2017).

In listening to understand and not to reply, Bo was suggesting that we place others’ definitions of
themselves first. Honoring those identities begins the process of community
building. Participants found empowerment and connection in sharing, critiquing, and
overcoming their minoritized identities collectively at the SOCC. These transformations led to
what Bardhan and Zhang call (2016) “the production of self-reflexivity, compassion, and
intercultural empathy for those who are marginalized” (p. 18) across a variety of identities.

Recognizing and building this stronger community at the SOCC was at the heart of many
participants’ experiences. After the SOCC, Chinara realized that “there was a bigger army
fighting so many other things than I thought. The sexuality, the gender level, society, politics
and everything” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Participants met and connected with
students who represented and fought for the full rainbow of intersectional identities. For Bo, this
army was strengthened by a common struggle and fueled by hope:

We all have problems, we all have issues, we all have something that the society hold
against us but we all have hope. We all want to make a change in our community, we all
want to give back to our community and make it a better place for everyone. (Personal
communication, May 24, 2017).

Here we return to Chinara’s sense of the collective “we” as a source of both personal and global
empowerment. Participants’ experiences at the SOCC represent a microcosm of the collective
“we” they want to see out in the world. Transformational experiences like the SOCC empower
students to build intercultural connections and act out a truly diverse global community in real
time. Over time, these experiences could lead both international and domestic students to
broader social and racial justice efforts on their campuses and across their communities (Bardhan & Zhang, 2016).

**Racial Dynamics**

The meaning of this collective “we” was put to the test during three SOCC incidents that participants felt highlighted racial tensions. All participants spent a good amount of time analyzing these incidents during the debrief workshop, their positions illustrating the complex and often polarizing task of unpacking race relations, especially from an international context. During the final presentations of the conference, a young black American man shared his feelings about the SOCC, asking all the white people in the audience: what are you trying to prove by being here? Parvesh expressed his disapproval about the man’s question, arguing that “that comment was like telling white people to go out”:

> I was so angry at that time. People are there to be culturally aware, you know, make things better. And he’s just taking that a step back and kind of destroy the purpose of the whole thing of people being together. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Others in the group interpreted Parvesh’s commentary as both a laudable desire to bridge divides and an example of the ignorance we hold about the experiences of people of color in the United States. For Sahra, international students don’t always understand the complex history of race relations in the U.S.:

> So just as people from the outside I think it’s different for us because we just see them as “oh, that’s a white person. Why should we treat them like that?” But again, if you go back to the history and see what happened and see why people feel the way they feel, I think then you will have a better understanding of why some people say what they say. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Here Sahra exemplifies one of the lessons participants learned about reducing biased behavior, arguing that we must first learn people’s history before jumping to any conclusions about their
current actions or behaviors. Shu-chen clarified that history when she shared that the reason “stereotypes for people of color are more serious than for white people is that there is so much historical background that hurts them” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Both are arguing for Parvesh and others to analyze this issue from the point of view of American people of color, placing other people’s definitions of themselves first. For both, this point of view was elucidated in the classroom at West Mountains, providing them with a more empathetic understanding of race relations in the U.S.

Who is allowed to show that empathy and the power dynamics behind it were at the center of another controversial incident involving a white German female who tried to express sadness about what her race had done to others. According to Irfan:

She was trying to feel sympathy and empathy but they were not letting her to do that. Because you know “you don’t know how it feels” and stuff but like she’s like “you’re not letting me feel how you feel.” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Irfan’s reaction to the event shows how empathy is not only given by one party but also must be allowed or received by the other. Sharing the feelings of another is a vulnerable and difficult balancing act, and not always welcome, especially given the power dynamics embedded in race relations. Sympathetic to her experience and the experience of “generations of Caucasian whites,” Irfan wondered how white people would ever be able to express empathy when they were not even welcome into the conversation:

So it’s like, in a sense, I get their point of view, too, and I start to feel sorry for them. They’re sometimes judged and sometimes we use the race card to get what we want, too. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

In bringing out the race card, Irfan was trying to balance out the role both white people and people of color play in oppression. The overwhelmingly negative reaction to Irfan’s race card comment by the rest of the room highlights the complications of placing blame on and being
empathetic to certain groups in situations of oppression. How are we to hear out each other’s stories, as participants suggest is the path of empathy, if we come to these conversations with our embedded biases? How do we privilege all voices, even those with privilege?

These issues of voice and representation were brought into focus during a workshop titled “Changing the Script for Queer People.” As Dakshi recounted, a Native American woman asked a white trans man to leave at the beginning of the workshop because she was “done with white people taking over her space” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Much like the young black man’s speech, some participants felt that the woman’s comment had the opposite effect of SOCC’s message of equality, continuing a cycle of discrimination and division. Rather than being allowed to learn about others who were different from him, the white trans man was forced to leave the room, effectively ending what was supposed to be “an open session for all,” according to Dakshi (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Remembering the incident again in his personal interview, Dakshi put himself in the place of the white trans man:

Maybe in the future he’ll have the image of a person of color doing that to him so he will go and do that to a person of color and then the cycle [...] the circle would keep continuing except of just having peace and everything. (Personal communication, May 9, 2017)

Dakshi sees the cycle of discrimination as a domino effect with the Native American woman to blame. Chinara interpreted the incident differently, evoking the “eye for an eye, tooth for tooth” bible verse when she argued that you can’t blame the woman for her words:

Some of their views of equality and equity would be let them have their own years of scrutiny, too. Let them be discriminated against, let them see what it felt like. If I hit you in one eye, and you hit me in one eye, then we’re cool. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

In justifying her words, Chinara showed others that the cycle of discrimination did not begin with the woman but rather “the Caucasian man” as an archetype “who has obviously been the
dominant race and sex for majority of years” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Much like Sahra and Shu-chen argued in favor of the black man in the previous incident, Chinara is showing solidarity with the Native American woman and her desire to have her critical voice heard when it is so often silenced or co-opted.

Paradoxically, the other individual’s trans identity was not valued in this equation of justice, which is troubling when we consider that the workshop was titled “Changing the Script for Queer People”. How are we to change this script when marginalized (and often intersectional) identities continued to be ranked and siloed? Aarav commented on this paradox when analyzing the incident in his individual interview:

So even though they have suffered that thing on themselves, I don’t think that people still realize that doing it to someone else is still...even though you might consider yourself a minority but that doesn’t mean a person who is not from the minority cannot understand that. People when they are in a similar environment that everyone else is like them, they think that they have a kind of a power with themselves. And I think that was one thing that people still need to work on. (Personal communication, May 15, 2017)

Aarav was, in a sense, discussing how internalized oppression works. He was wondering why LGBTQ people of color, who have suffered similar oppressions, would not be empathetic but rather antagonistic towards the trans white man in the workshop. While other participants understood that finding power and solidarity within specific identity groups is important, Aarav was warning that using this power to then discriminate causes the same deleterious effects. How do we confront issues of privilege and oppression without hurting others? Or as my fellow co-facilitator asked: “how do we engage in that and not say like ‘get out the room’ as well? That’s hard” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). In many ways, this is what study participants engaged in when discussing these three incidents: calling people out and calling people into this complicated and, oftentimes, paradoxical dance of accountability.
A number of participants chewed on this paradox in summarizing the SOCC. While Chinara empathized with the Native American woman, she also shared:

Yes, there are races that have been superior to other races and the community in the Students of Color Conference...the majority of them just wanted to be surrounded by those people who were below the bar of race, who were the “minority” in quotes. I think it’s still about the mentality, honestly. They still want to be in that minority mentality when all it is honestly is a mentality and not a reality. They kind of walk out of it and change many ways but they decide -- which I don’t blame them -- they decide to still stay in that box. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

Much like Irfan’s “race card” comment, Chinara expressed disappointment from her perception that “minority” populations play to their deficits in order to move their agenda forward. While she doesn’t blame them for this minority mentality (as she also doesn’t blame the Native American woman for calling out the trans man), she does discredit their woes as a mentality and not a reality. Compare this to Chinara’s appraisal of the SOCC as a “bigger army fighting so many other things than I thought” (Personal communication, April 17, 2017). Her paradoxical relationship to SOCC participants -- finding them both empowering and limiting -- exhibits the hard job of engaging with the overlapping layers of privilege and oppression.

One way to reconcile those layers is not to feel sorry for or blame others, as many participants alluded to, but rather as Shu-chen suggested, to recognize the privileges we all have and hold others accountable to “what they do with it or what they don’t do with it”:

We have all sorts of struggles, too, than just having privilege. So I think it’s fair because the world is getting critical and you have to check your privilege and what you’re doing with it. (Personal communication, April 17, 2017)

For many study participants, the world definitely seemed more critical after attending the Students of Color Conference. Divisions, discrimination, power dynamics and opposing views all rose to the surface. At the same time, the world became a much more united place under SOCC banners, with participants finding common ground with others who were like them and
those who weren’t. In the process, participants became much more aware of the nuances of identity that affect and are affected by their worldview and the views of those around them. As they expounded on the positive and negative experiences of the SOCC, their views and privileges were checked by others in the room. During no moment was there universal agreement or disagreement with an opinion. Study participants engaged in the very same complicated work of discussing identity, race, privilege, and oppression during the debrief and individual interviews that they felt both succeeded and failed at the SOCC. This work is never finished and it is never easy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The process of making sense and creating meanings of racial and ethnic identity while in the United States was complicated but important work for my international student participants. International students are not passive, ambivalent, or weak participants in this process but rather what Marginson (2012) calls “strong agents engaged in a process of complex self-formation through education and global mobility” (p. 497). Indeed, my study participants constructed multifaceted racial and ethnic identities that conformed to, contested, and/or transformed dominant Western identity narratives.

Regardless of their orientation towards these narratives, participants’ sense of self and understanding of others deepened and diversified as a result of their sojourn in the United States. Developing inter-, intra-, and intercultural skills along the way, participants offer HEIs new narratives of self and other that encourage self-determination and self-expression and allow for plural identities. In bearing witness to how participants conceive of these complicated (and sometimes contradictory) narratives, I aim to transnationalize Western-centric concepts of race, racism, ethnicity, and xenophobia used by HEIs to delimit the international student experience.
As participants shared, the power and control that the West has in communicating messages of who is valued and who is not is as strong as ever. Sharing the stories of those that are unseen and unheard was an educational and transformative experience for my participants, bringing them closer to marginalized populations in the United States and around the world and toward a collective “we” centered in social change.

Following the lead of my participants, I argue that HEIs must account for and celebrate this collective “we” as a means of improving intercultural dialogue and understanding between international students and the campus at large. Opportunities like the Students of Color Conference are a means of engaging in this dialogue, bringing students from diverse walks of life to a deeper and empowered understandings of themselves and others. As invaluable and transformative as the SOCC was for my participants, it was an isolated event, a blip in the fast-paced school year. HEIs like West Mountain College should incorporate SOCC’s student-centered approaches to identity development, personal development, awareness of others, and social activism into their pedagogy and programming. Study participants valued coursework, clubs, and social activities at WMC that mirrored these approaches. HEIs should follow Marginson’s (2014) advice to “extend beyond the notion of the student as consumer” and reconceptualize education as “self-formation,” accounting for and supporting a “larger set of behaviors of self-cultivation and self-improvement” in their students (p. 12). Hodge, Baxter Magolda, and Haynes (2009) operationalize this in their engaged learning philosophy, recommending that HEIs “revise policies and practices to move away from a focus on customer satisfaction, checklists, and formulas toward authentic reflection, development, and learning” (p. 23).
Unfortunately, many criticized WMC administration for preaching diversity and inclusion but not practicing it, relying on certain students to carry the torch. In particular, the lack of international-domestic student interaction is a missed opportunity for all WMC students to develop their intercultural knowledge and competence. Both sides are missing out: international students leave WMC not fully understanding the rich complexity of our diverse domestic student population and American students recount superficial relationships with internationals in their classes. It would behoove WMC and the IPEL Department to think more conscientiously about how to achieve its strategic directions of intercultural understanding, global education, and community engagement in the years to come. My participants were deeply aware of the ways in which WMC failed to meet its mission and values; as such, their opinions and suggestions to improve cross-cultural relations should be at the center of discussion.

One way IPEL could frame students’ intercultural development on campus is through the American Association of American College and Universities’ (AAC&U) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (2009). I found this rubric incredibly helpful in describing how my participants demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for intercultural competence. I firmly believe that WMC would benefit from incorporating this rubric into curricular and co-curricular planning. How can course content and assignments move students from a partial to a sophisticated “understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices” (p. 2)? How might regularly scheduled intercultural events encourage students to ask complex questions about other cultures and seek out and articulate these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives (AAC&U, 2009)?
Answering these questions would lead to fruitful discussion about how to practice intercultural education in and out of the classroom.

I believe that intercultural development pedagogy must also incorporate racial and ethnic identity development theory if its aim is to cultivate the whole person. Much like the AAC&U’s Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric, racial and ethnic identity development models like the R/CID model could be used in curricular and co-curricular planning at the college. Too often invisible in discussions of race and ethnicity, white identity development must also be incorporated into this planning. To that end, faculty members, student life administrators, and executive staff could review both Sue and Sue’s (2015) R/CID model and White Identity Development model when making decisions about how to educate students about diversity. These types of discussions are especially important if WMC is to remain relevant to a rapidly diversifying student body in a rapidly diversifying region.

This education must articulate how oppression impacts both the oppressor and the oppressed, centering racial and ethnic identity development as a journey that we are all on. Students’ voices are central to understanding and improving this journey on campus. My study participants demonstrated an ability and eagerness to understand and develop their identities collectively, even when it led to difficult conversations. As Hodge, Baxter Magolda, and Haynes (2009) suggest, educators can facilitate this process by moving “away from giving answers to and exercising authority over students and toward encouraging questions from and sharing authority with students” (p. 19). Any campus discussions centered on intercultural, racial, and ethnic identity development must focus on administrators and faculty co-constructing knowledge, awareness, and skills together with students. The collective “we” that participants
illuminated must incorporate all campus stakeholders in order to move away from institutionalized oppression and toward social justice that benefits all.

This oppression is alive and well on the WMC campus. In November 2017, there were two racial bias incidents involving flyers either being removed or written on and another incident of graffiti in a bathroom. Our College President relayed these incidents to staff in an e-mail, concluding that “our mission is about supporting equity, inclusion, equality of opportunity for all people, and ensuring opportunity and inclusion is available for all, not just a select few” (Personal communication, November 17, 2017). I argue that this support must be more intentional and embedded across all spheres of the college. Giving our students consistent opportunities to work and talk through their various identities and the identities of their peers is key to our campus equity and inclusion work.

International students and other diverse leaders on campus are already leading the way in this discussion. This past year, they participated in a Sustained Dialogue training. The Sustained Dialogue Institute (2017) “helps people to transform conflictual relationships and design change processes around the world.” They define dialogue as “listening deeply enough to be changed by what you learn.” Student leaders are now leading Sustained Dialogue workshops for the campus community. In November 2017, international student leaders facilitated a workshop with this important message:

Mental health, racial issues, stereotypes, sexism, transphobia and intercultural competency are the most common dilemmas that afflict college campuses across the United States including West Mountains College. The reason such dilemmas occur is that there is lack of “effective” communication between people. (Personal communication, November 19, 2017)

As an international educator committed to understanding the diverse identities of my campus community, I look forward to continuing to learn from students during these types of dialogues.
My 11 study participants underscored the importance of understanding and dialoguing with others in the path towards understanding oneself. Engaging in and advocating for this dialogue must be central to the work that I and my colleagues in IPEL do daily for our students. I see this dialogue as tantamount to the exchange of people, knowledge, and ideas that is the heart of international education.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: West Mountains College Student of Color Conference Application

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**2017 Students of Color Conference Application (SOCC)**

Complete this application form to participate in the Students of Color Conference from April 6-8 in Yakima, WA. This is an all-inclusive trip (conference fee, hotel stay, and travel included). Most meals are provided by the conference, however, students attending should plan to take a small amount of cash for traveling pit stops and snacks.

**Requirements:** (Please check to make sure you meet all the requirements before turning in your application.)
- Be able to attend all three days of the conference (Thursday, April 6—Saturday, April 8)
- Green River student (6+ credits) enrolled for both Winter and Spring quarters
- In good academic standing with a GPA of 2.0 or higher
- Be willing to present to different groups on campus about your experience at SOCC
- Complete this application and submit it by the deadline

Please submit your application to ODEI, 2nd floor SU building by February 24, at 4:30 PM.
For questions, contact: Benjamin Lealofi, [Contact Information]

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**PERSONAL DATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)</th>
<th>GRC Student ID Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferred Name:</td>
<td>Phone Number:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Yes □ No (if you are selected, we must obtain a parent/guardian signature)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**OPTIONAL INFORMATION**

What race do you self-identify as? (Check all that apply.)
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- African-American/Black
- East Asian
- South Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Other: ______________________

Have you previously attended the Students of Color Conference?
- □ Yes
- □ No

Do you identify as LGBTQ+?
- □ Yes
- □ No

Please write which faith you identify as (faith based sessions will be at the conference): ______________________

What is your t-shirt size? ______________________

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**CONFERENCE INFORMATION**

| GRCC Hotel policy is to have four students per room. Who would you prefer to stay with? |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| □ Female Identified □ Male Identified □ No Preference |

Needs and Accommodations:
- □ Vegetarian
- □ Vegan
- □ Need an ASL interpreter
- □ Other: ______________________
- □ Wheelchair access
- □ Travel with service animal
- □ Food allergies/dietary restrictions: ______________________
## Essay Questions

(Please limit responses to the space provided.)

Why is attending the Students of Color Conference important to you?

What does social justice, diversity, equity & inclusion mean to you? **OR** what is your experience and how have you demonstrated social justice, diversity, equity & inclusion in your personal and/or professional development?

Please describe your perception of the racial diversity climate on the **campus** and how could it be improved.
Appendix B: Student of Color Conference 2017 Schedule

STUDENTS OF COLOR CONFERENCE - 2017
AGENDA AT A GLANCE (TENTATIVE)

April 6th – 8th, 2017
Yakima, Washington “Cultivate OUR Truth with Unity & Resilience”

Thursday, April 6th, 2017
12:00 – 2:00 p.m. Check in
2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Welcome/Conference Opening/Rhonda Coats Award/Yakima Blessing/Roll Call
3:00 – 4:00 p.m. OPENING KEYNOTE:
4:15 – 5:15 p.m. Advisor/Chaperone Meeting
Identity Development Workshops
• Women’s
• Men’s
• LGBTQ
• Muslim
• Students with Disabilities
• DREAMers

5:30 – 6:00 p.m. Individual School Meetings
6:00 – 7:00 p.m. Light Buffet Dinner w/ Entertainment
7:15 - 9:15 p.m. Concurrent Session 1 – Racial/Ethnic Identity Groups
9:30 – 11:30 p.m. Open Mic

Friday, April 7th, 2017
8:00 – 9:00 a.m. Full Breakfast/Announcements
9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Concurrent Session 2 – 101 Workshops
10:30 – 10:45 a.m. Transition Time
10:45 – 11:45 am MORNING KEYNOTE
11:45 – 12:00 pm Transition time
12:00 – 1:30 pm Concurrent Session 3 – Skill Development
1:30 – 2:30 p.m. LUNCH
2:30 – 4:00 p.m. Concurrent Session 4 – Social Justice/Social Activism
4:00 – 4:15 pm Transition time
4:15 – 4:45 p.m. Individual School Meetings
4:45 – 6:30 p.m. Student Networking
6:30 – 7:30 p.m. Dinner
7:30 – 8:30 p.m. EVENING KEYNOTE:
8:30 – 10:00 p.m. Film Presentation:
10:00 – 1:00 a.m. Social Event

Saturday, April 8th, 2017
8:00 – 9:00 a.m. Full Breakfast/Announcements
9:00 – 10:30 a.m. Concurrent Session 5 – Personal Development
10:45 – 11:45 a.m. Student Reflection
11:45 – 12:30 p.m. Closing activities
Appendix C: Post-Conference Workshop Focus Group Guide

Title: International Students’ Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States

Facilitators:
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA, International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

Andaiye Qaasim
PhD, Ethnomusicology, University of Pennsylvania

Purpose:
The purpose of this Processing Questions Guide is to help students reflect on their experience at the Student of Color Conference.

1. Think back on the identities discussed at the Student of Color Conference. How would you describe your ethnic and racial identity today?
   a. How does that confirm or differ from how you described yourself at the pre-conference workshop?
   b. What experiences at the conference led you to new understandings about your ethnic and racial identity?

2. Can you describe what you learned about identities that are different from your own?
   a. What experiences at the conference led you to learn these things?
   b. How did what you learn change the way you think about certain groups of people?

3. How do your experiences with students at the SOCC compare and your contrast with your experiences with students at West Mountains College?
   a. Did you feel more or less comfortable? Why?
   b. Did you feel more or less understood? Why?

4. Knowing what you know now, how might you approach people who are different from you on campus?
   a. Back in your home country?

5. Knowing what you know now, what suggestions would you make to improve racial, ethnic, and cultural understanding on the West Mountains College campus?
Appendix D: Interview Guide

Title: International Students’ Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States

Interviewer:
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

Purpose:
The purpose of interviews with West Mountains College students who attend the Student of Color Conference is to better understand individual student’s racial and ethnic identity development over time and how experiences in the United States inform that development.

1. Can you tell me about your background? Where did you grow up and who did you grow up with?
2. Thinking back on the identities discussed at the Students of Color Conference, how would you describe your ethnic and racial background?
3. What did you learn about your ethnic and racial background from your family?
   a. From your school?
   b. From society as a whole?
4. What lessons did you learn from your family or school about people who were different from you?
5. Before arriving to West Mountains College, what did you know about the ethnic and racial makeup of the United States?
   a. Where and from whom did you learn that information?
   b. From that information, describe to me what you thought a typical American looked like.
6. How has your experience at West Mountains College changed the way you understand your ethnic and racial identity, if at all?
   a. Can you describe any particular incidents that illustrate these changes?
7. Do you feel that West Mountains College, its faculty, staff, and students are supportive of people from your ethnic and/or racial identity?
   a. If so, how?
   b. If not, why not?
8. How has your experience at West Mountains College changed the way you understand other ethnic and racial identities, either in the U.S. or elsewhere?
   a. Can you describe any particular incidents that illustrate these changes?
9. Do you feel that West Mountains College, its faculty, staff, and students are supportive of people from other ethnic and/or racial identities?
   a. If so, how?
   b. If not, why not?
10. Can you describe any lessons you’ve learned about racial and ethnic identity at West Mountains College, perhaps in your classes, from staff members, or fellow students?
11. Thinking back on your experience at the Students of Color Conference, what personal insights about racial and ethnic identity did you gain from the workshops?
12. With those insights in mind, how might you understand your identity and the identity of others differently?
13. Knowing what you know now, what suggestions could you make to improve racial and ethnic understanding on the West Mountains College campus?
Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter for Participants over 18

Title: International Students’ Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States

Principal Investigator and Contact Information:
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute
2029B S Main Street
Seattle, WA 98144
Phone: 802-735-7125
Email: aturgeon@greenriver.edu

Sponsoring Institutions and Contact Information:
West Mountains College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness
12401 SE 320th Street, Auburn, WA 98092
Phone Number: [Redacted]

SIT Graduate Institute – Institutional Review Board
1 Kipling Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301
irb@sit.edu

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to better understand how international students understand racial and ethnic identities while studying in the United States. This study will focus on the experiences of West Mountains College international students who attend the Students of Color Conference (SOCC) in Yakima, Washington. This study will help you reflect on your experience at the SOCC and at West Mountains College and strengthen your understanding of your ethnic and racial identity and those of your peers. Findings from this study will be shared with leadership in the International Programs & Extended Learning (IPEL) Department and West Mountains College so that they may better understand the experiences and needs of the diverse international student body. Your analysis and suggestions may impact the policies and programs that the IPEL Department implements.

This project is part of a degree requirement for my MA in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute. Findings will be published in SIT’s Digital Collections.

Procedures:
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be audio recorded during the post-conference workshop. This workshop will focus on what you learned about your identities at the Students of Color Conference, what you learned about other groups’ identities, and how you may apply what you learned to your life at West Mountains College and beyond. This workshop will last 1.5 hours.

You will also be asked to complete a one-hour individual interview with me about your ethnic and racial identity, your understanding of other ethnic and racial identities, and your experiences with ethnic and racial identities at West Mountains College.
This study involves the audio recording of the workshop and your interview with me. Only I will be able to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by me and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of the workshop and your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

**Confidentiality:**
All the information you provide will be strictly confidential, and your name will not appear on transcripts of the post-conference workshop or the interview or in the presentation of findings. Instead, you will be assigned a pseudonym that is only known by the principal investigator of this study.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:**
Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any or all parts of the study or may discontinue your participation at any time during the any part of the study.

**Risk and Benefits**
The sensitive nature of the questions asked may cause discomfort or evoke other strong emotions in you. If you feel uncomfortable with these questions, you may decline to answer. I will provide you with the contact information for the West Mountains College Counseling Department in case you want to discuss your experience in this study privately and confidentially with a trained professional. Along with other participants, you will collectively create a set of community standards to follow during the post-conference workshop. These standards will ensure that all participants feel welcome to share and respected in their opinions and beliefs.

While I cannot offer you financial payment, your participation in this study will be invaluable in understanding international students’ experiences with racial and ethnic identity at West Mountains College so that the college may better support its international student body.

**Information about This Study:**
You will have the opportunity to ask, and to have answered, all your questions about this research in person at the time of the workshop, interview or by emailing or calling me any time before or after. Contact information for the principal investigator is on the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential. If you would prefer not discussing your question or concern with the investigator, please contact the sponsoring institutions listed above.

I will share the findings of this study with you before it is published publicly in order to ensure the accuracy of the information presented.

**Participant’s Agreement:**
If you agree to participate in my study, I would appreciate if you could sign your name and date on this form and present it at the time the post-conference workshop.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Andrew Turgeon, Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute
I have read the information provided above. I understand the nature and extent of my participation in this project and the possible risks involved or arising from it. I understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any time without penalty of any kind. By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to (check all that apply):

☐ The recording and use of the post-conference workshop in the research findings

☐ Participate in an individual interview

☐ The recording and use of the individual interview in the research findings

________________________________________  _________________________
Name                                      Date
Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter for Parents of Participants Under 18

Title: International Students’ Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States

Principal Investigator and Contact Information:
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute
2029B S Main Street
Seattle, WA 98144
Phone: 802-735-7125
Email: aturgeon@greenriver.edu

Sponsoring Institutions and Contact Information:
West Mountains College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness
12401 SE 320th Street, Auburn, WA 98002
Phone Number
SIT Graduate Institute – Institutional Review Board
1 Kipling Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301
irb@sit.edu

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to better understand how international students understand racial and ethnic identities while studying in the United States. This study will focus on the experiences of West Mountains College international students who attend the Students of Color Conference (SOCC) in Yakima, Washington. This study will help your child reflect on his/her experience at the SOCC and at West Mountains College and strengthen his/her understanding of his/her ethnic and racial identity and those of his/her peers. Findings from this study will be shared with leadership in the International Programs & Extended Learning (IPEL) Department and West Mountains College so that they may better understand the experiences and needs of the diverse international student body. Your analysis and suggestions may impact the policies and programs that the IPEL Department implements.

This project is part of a degree requirement for my MA in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute. Findings will be published in SIT’s Digital Collections.

Procedures:
If you consent to your child taking part in this study, your child will be audio recorded during a post-conference workshop. This workshop will focus on what he/she learned about his/her identities at the Students of Color Conference, what he/she learned about other groups’ identities, and how he/she may apply what you learned to his/her life at West Mountains College and beyond. This workshop will last 1.5 hours.

Your child will also be asked to complete a one-hour individual interview with me about his/her ethnic and racial identity, his/her understanding of other ethnic and racial identities, and his/her experiences with ethnic and racial identities at West Mountains College.
This study involves the audio recording of the workshop and your child’s interview with me. Only I will be able to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by me and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of the workshop and your child’s interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your child’s name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

 Confidentiality:
All the information your child provides will be strictly confidential, and his/her name will not appear on transcripts of the post-conference workshop or the interview or in the presentation of findings. Instead, he/she will be assigned a pseudonym that is only known by the principal investigator of this study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:
Your child’s participation is voluntary. He/she may refuse to participate in any or all parts of the study or may discontinue his/her participation at any time during any part of the study.

Risk and Benefits
The sensitive nature of the questions asked may cause discomfort or evoke other strong emotions in your child. If your child feels uncomfortable with these questions, he/she may decline to answer. I will provide him/her with the contact information for the West Mountains College Counseling Department in case he/she wants to discuss his/her experience in this study privately and confidentially with a trained professional. Along with other participants, he/she will collectively create a set of community standards to follow during the post-conference workshop. These standards will ensure that all participants feel welcome to share and respected in their opinions and beliefs.

While I cannot offer your child financial payment, his/her participation in this study will be invaluable in understanding international students’ experiences with racial and ethnic identity at West Mountains College so that the college may better support its international student body.

Information about This Study:
You will have the opportunity to ask, and to have answered, all your questions about this research in person at the time of the workshop, interview or by emailing or calling the principal investigator any time before or after. Contact information for the principal investigator is on the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential. If you would prefer not discussing your question or concern with the investigator, please contact contact the sponsoring institutions listed above.

I will share the findings of this study with your child before it is published publicly in order to ensure the accuracy of the information presented.

Participant’s Agreement:
If you agree to consent to your child participating in this study, I would appreciate if you could sign your name and date on this form and e-mail or post-mail it back to me at the e-mail address listed above. You may also call me and provide verbal consent.
Thank you for your time.

Andrew Turgeon  
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

I have read the information provided above. I understand the nature and extent of my child’s participation in this project and the possible risks involved or arising from it. I understand that my child may withdraw his/her participation from this project at any time without penalty of any kind. By signing this form, I voluntarily consent for my child to: (check all that apply):

☐ The recording and use of the post-conference workshop in the research findings

☐ Participate in an individual interview

☐ The recording and use of the individual interview in the research findings

__________________________________________________________________________  ____________

Parent/Guardian Name  Date
Appendix G: Informed Assent for Participants Under 18

Title: International Students’ Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States

Principal Investigator and Contact Information:
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute
2029B S Main Street
Seattle, WA 98144
Phone: 802-735-7125
Email: aturgeon@greenriver.edu

Sponsoring Institutions and Contact Information:
West Mountains College – Office of Institutional Effectiveness
12401 SE 320th Street
Auburn, WA 98092
Phone Number (253) 833-9111, ext. 2684.

SIT Graduate Institute – Institutional Review Board
1 Kipling Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301
irb@sit.edu

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this study is to better understand how international students understand racial and ethnic identities while studying in the United States. This study will focus on the experiences of West Mountains College international students who attend the Students of Color Conference (SOCC) in Yakima, Washington. This study will help you reflect on your experience at the SOCC and at West Mountains College and strengthen your understanding of your ethnic and racial identity and those of your peers. Findings from this study will be shared with leadership in the International Programs & Extended Learning (IPEL) Department and West Mountains College so that they may better understand the experiences and needs of the diverse international student body. Your analysis and suggestions may impact the policies and programs that the IPEL Department implements.

This project is part of a degree requirement for my MA in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute. Findings will be published in SIT’s Digital Collections.

Procedures:
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be audio recorded during the post-conference workshop. This workshop will focus on what you learned about your identities at the Students of Color Conference, what you learned about other groups’ identities, and how you may apply what you learned to your life at West Mountains College and beyond. This workshop will last 1.5 hours.

You will also be asked to complete a one-hour individual interview with me about your ethnic and racial identity, your understanding of other ethnic and racial identities, and your experiences with ethnic and racial identities at West Mountains College.
This study involves the audio recording of the workshop and your interview with me. Only I will be able to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be transcribed by me and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of the workshop and your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Confidentiality:
All the information you provide will be strictly confidential, and your name will not appear on transcripts of the post-conference workshop or the interview or in the presentation of findings. Instead, you will be assigned a pseudonym that is only known by the principal investigator of this study.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:
Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in any or all parts of the study or may discontinue your participation at any time during the any part of the study.

Risk and Benefits
The sensitive nature of the questions asked may cause discomfort or evoke other strong emotions in you. If you feel uncomfortable with these questions, you may decline to answer. I will provide you with the contact information for the West Mountains College Counseling Department in case you want to discuss your experience in this study privately and confidentially with a trained professional. Along with other participants, you will collectively create a set of community standards to follow during the post-conference workshop. These standards will ensure that all participants feel welcome to share and respected in their opinions and beliefs.

While I cannot offer you financial payment, your participation in this study will be invaluable in understanding international students’ experiences with racial and ethnic identity at West Mountains College so that the college may better support its international student body.

Information about This Study:
You will have the opportunity to ask, and to have answered, all your questions about this research in person at the time of the workshop, interview or by emailing or calling the principal investigator any time before or after. Contact information for the principal investigator is on the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential. If you would prefer not discussing your question or concern with the investigator, please contact the sponsoring institutions listed above.

I will share the findings of this study with you before it is published publicly in order to ensure the accuracy of the information presented.

Participant’s Agreement:
If you assent to participate in my study, I would appreciate if you could sign your name and date on this form and present it at the time the post-conference workshop. You must also ask for parental consent from your parent or guardian.

Thank you for your time and participation.
Andrew Turgeon
Candidate – MA in International Education, SIT Graduate Institute

I have read the information provided above. I understand the nature and extent of my participation in this project and the possible risks involved or arising from it. I understand that I may withdraw my participation from this project at any time without penalty of any kind. By signing this form, I voluntarily assent to:

☐ The recording and use of the post-conference workshop in the research findings

☐ Participate in an individual interview

☐ The recording and use of the individual interview in the research findings

_________________________________________  _________________________
Name  Date