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International Student Intersectionality in the Trump Era

Sarah Tolman

Loyola University Chicago, stolman@luc.edu

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE TRUMP ERA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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BY
SARAH TOLMAN
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Introduction

In November of 2016, the United States elected Donald Trump as president, a candidate who campaigned on populist and isolationist platforms, promoting an “America First” approach to foreign policy and immigration laws. Among many other focal points of his campaign, Trump advocated for building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border and restricting immigration from primarily Muslim countries. Once in office, the administration began efforts to implement these policies that supported this anti-immigrant sentiment.

As a global superpower, any significant political shift in the United States has an impact on the entire global community in innumerable aspects. Thus significant discussion and media coverage has emerged worldwide in response to President Trump’s controversial immigration policies and rhetoric. Many argue that the campaign and election of Donald Trump have contributed to an increase in hate crimes and a normalization of racism and xenophobia throughout the U.S. (Costello, 2016; Tai & Periyasamy, 2016; Iyer, 2017). Additionally, many have noted an uptick in activism and protests across the country in response to many of his administration’s policies (Moran, 2017).

While the political conversation today within this context tends to focus on immigrants and refugees, as well as minority populations in the United States, the international student population has received little public attention. More than one million international students were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions in the year 2016, constituting approximately 5% of the entire higher education student population (Project Atlas, 2016). With a diverse range of national, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds, the international student population represents

a unique intersection of identities. This is a vulnerable group in terms of the impact of the new administration's policies and rhetoric, due to their non-citizen status as well as other minority identities that they may hold.

The Trump administration has made several significant changes to immigration policies since the inauguration in early 2017. The Executive Order issued initially in January of 2017, titled "Executive Order Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States", halted all immigration from seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. According to the order, "these are countries that had already been identified as presenting heightened concerns about terrorism and travel to the United States" (Executive Order , no. 13769, 2017). This order has been the subject of multiple lawsuits, on the basis that it unconstitutionally discriminates against Muslims.

Additionally, in September of 2017, President Trump rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, also known as DACA. This Obama-Era Executive Order had previously allowed undocumented people who had come here as children to live free from fear of deportation. The lives of these approximately 800,000 undocumented immigrants are now in limbo due to this policy change. At the time of this writing, this issue is receiving much attention in the government and in the public eye, as congress debates a solution for these immigrants moving forward.

The president has proposed numerous other changes to visa regulations, many of which, if enacted, would have large effects on international populations within the U.S. These potential changes include a removal of certain designations of the J-1 visa program, which would most likely affect seasonal work and travel exchanges (Itkowitz, 2017). White House officials have also alluded to a possible revocation of extensions for H1B work visas, which would impact

those in pending status for permanent residency and green cards (Ordoñez, 2017). Since Trump took office there has been speculation that H4 visa holders, the spouses of H1B visa holders, may no longer be allowed to receive work authorization (Mullen, 2017). The administration is also rumored to be making changes to Optional Practical Training (OPT) regulations; these changes would most significantly impact STEM students and scholars and restrict their opportunities for temporary employment in the U.S. after finishing their academic programs (Appleman & Leiden LLP, 2017).

These various changes lead to concern across many populations and contexts, but within the realm of international education, the worry has largely been surrounding the impact on recruitment and enrollment of international students (see: Westervelt, 2017; Mrig, 2017). While the official 2017-2018 enrollment numbers have not yet been released, new enrollments of international students did decline slightly in the 2016-17 academic year (Project Atlas, 2016). Many predict that the numbers will continue to drop as international students see the changing climate in the U.S. and choose instead to study in countries with more flexible or welcoming immigration policies, such as Canada (Chiose, 2017). Notably, Canada's international student enrollment numbers increased by large a percentage in 2017; going up by 25 percent at some institutions (Chiose, 2017).

Those voicing these concerns often focus on the economic impact of lower enrollment numbers, as international student tuitions bring large financial benefits to institutions across the U.S. (Barta, Chen, Jou, McEarney & Fuller, 2018). Fewer studies and articles, however, focus on the actual experience of international students after they have enrolled. I argue that this perspective is crucial for many reasons, most simply because there is a significant population of

international students who are already enrolled, currently paying tuition dollars and studying in the U.S.; these students need support in this changing political climate.

With this in mind, this research examines the following questions:

- 1) To what extent and in what ways have international students studying in the U.S. perceived a change in the political, cultural and educational climate in the U.S. since the 2016 presidential election?
- 2) How do international students perceive the election of Donald Trump to have impacted both their individual identity and their experience on U.S. college campuses?

Framework

Literature Review

International student populations at U.S. institutions have grown substantially in recent decades; in the year 2016, the international student population in the U.S. topped 1 million for the first time in history (Project Atlas, 2016). While globalization in education has been discussed and debated for many years, only in recent decades has a significant amount of literature emerged on the topic of international students in the U.S.

The international student population began to receive increased attention in the early 2000's, in response to the first absolute decline in international student enrollment since 1971 (Lee & Rice, 2007). The decline is attributed to a number of factors, though it is most frequently connected to the post-September 11th climate in the U.S. and the resulting increase in national security, which made it more challenging for students to receive visas (Lee & Rice, 2007). Increased discrimination and hostility towards foreign students also contributed to this decline. As an example of this, hundreds of Middle Eastern students withdrew from their U.S. colleges

and universities after the September 11th attacks and returned home, due to fear of retaliation (Lee & Rice, 2007; McMurthie, 2001).

The decline in enrollment numbers began to capture the attention of a broader audience, largely due to the significant benefits that international student enrollments bring to the U.S. Not only do international students bring diversity to U.S. campuses, add to the intellectual capital of the country, and benefit foreign relations between countries (Lee & Rice, 2007), they also bring significant revenue to the U.S. economy (Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2016). In the 2014-2015 academic year it was estimated that international undergraduate and graduate students contributed more than \$30 billion to the U.S. economy (Barta, Chen, Jou, McEarney, Fuller, 2018). Due to this large financial benefit that international students bring to the country, much of the attention addressed toward the international education industry is through a neoliberal lens, focusing on student recruitment and enrollment numbers (Lee & Rice, 2007; Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2016).

Contemporary scholars argue that not enough attention is paid to the actual experiences of international students after they enroll and step foot on U.S. campuses (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2010; Marginson, 2014; Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2016). While this gap is significant, a handful of studies have emerged over the years examining various aspects of the international student experience, including discussions surrounding students' acculturation and adjustment processes (Marginson 2014; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Sodowski & Lai, 1997), the impact of race, nationality and religion on international student experiences (Halic, Greenberg & Paulus, 2009; Rich & Traudi, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010; Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Cole & Amahdi, 2003), and comparisons between

international and domestic student experiences (Paulus, Bichelmeyer, Malopinsky, Pereira & Rastogi, 2005; Poylrazli & Lopez, 2007).

International students cope with many of the same adjustment challenges as domestic students, including academic pressure, loneliness, and financial stress (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007). On top of this, international students typically face an additional set of challenges, such as culture shock, language barriers, loss of community support (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997), and perceived prejudices or discrimination (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). These difficulties are referred to as “acculturative stress” (Nwadiora & McAdoo, 1996), and can result in psychological distress and mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004).

Acknowledging international students’ acculturation issues is valuable and necessary as it brings to light common challenges that international students face. Some recent scholarship, however, is critical of the frameworks utilized in studies such as these, arguing that adjustment and acculturation paradigms place too much pressure on the student’s national identity as something that needs to be “broken down” in order to adapt to the host culture (Marginson, 2014, p. 8) According to this line of thought, expecting the student to adjust without support from the institution promotes a superiority of Western higher education as well as a cultural superiority on English language education systems (Marginson, 2014; Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2016). As a way to combat this, a more student-centered approach is suggested as a way to understand the struggles of international students and inform universities as to the best ways to support this population. (Marginson, 2014).

Limited research follows this student-centered, in-depth approach to examining the international student experience. In order to situate the present research project within this small

body of existing literature, the remainder of this section reviews significant scholarship on the issues of language, identity, homesickness, discrimination, and sociopolitical climate within the context of international student experiences.

Certain characteristics and experiences generally apply to the majority of international students in the U.S. For example, most international students are not native English speakers. Scholars explore the connection between language, culture and academic identity among international students, finding that language proficiency is significant in students' academic identity formation, specifically in students' self-esteem and confidence (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

Additional research compares the experiences of international students and domestic students, finding that international students report higher levels of homesickness and perceived discrimination than domestic students (Poylrazli & Lopez, 2007). This sets apart the international student experience as distinct from other student populations.

Exploring the diversity of international student populations, students' racial and religious identities are found to shape the way that international students navigate their experiences. Students from predominantly non-white regions of the world have significantly less positive experiences at the university than those from predominantly white regions (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). Some scholars label this as neoracism, defined as a rationalization of racism based on culture as opposed to biology (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010). Additionally, students with Muslim backgrounds are found to perceive greater amounts of prejudice than students of other religions, especially those who dress in a traditional way that more explicitly indicates their Muslim identities (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

These perceptions of prejudice, discrimination and racism have lasting negative effects on numerous aspects of the student experience, including self-confidence (Halic, Greenberg & Paulus, 2009) academic and social success (Halic, Greenberg & Paulus, 2009; Lee & Rice, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992) and career advancement (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Reynolds & Constantine, 2007).

The surrounding sociopolitical climate also influences international student experiences and identities. Rich and Troudi (2006) study the impact of Islamophobia following the September 11th attacks on Arab TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) students' experiences in the UK. This examination of the intersecting identities of non-white international students sheds light on how prejudiced discourses in a host country can cause students within certain racial, ethnic or religious identity groups to notice a shift in identity salience. In this case, Islamophobic sentiment caused Arab students to shift priority to the national, cultural, and religious aspects of their identities as a way to resist negative representations of Arabs and Muslims in the press. This highlights the potential influence that an international education experience, as well as a political event or shift in political climate, can have on international students and their identities.

Several of these projects point to inadequacies in the ways that institutions support their international student populations and make recommendations for improved support. This highlights the argument that international students come with a high level of motivation to learn and contribute to the classroom, and that the institutions bear significant responsibility to serve this population and support their needs (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Roberts & Dunworth, 2012)

Existing recommendations for universities include creating a climate that fosters collaboration and respects diversity in order to address the unique needs of non-native English speaking international students (Halic, Greenberg & Paulus, 2009). Lee & Rice (2010) suggest a deeper exploration of faculty and staff awareness of the challenges that international students face, and to better understand how international students are treated differently depending on their language fluency or their accent. Samayoa (2018) suggests that minority-serving institutions serve as a model for how to support international students, and that multicultural and diversity offices should be emulated and collaborated with in order to better support international student populations. Overall, these scholars generally agree that “more attention should be paid to the experiences of international students than on the actual numbers of international students at campuses as a marker of internationalization” (Lee & Rice, 2010, p. 405).

Though all of the aforementioned studies were conducted before the 2016 election, the student-centered approach and focus on the international student experience is just as applicable and crucial in the current political climate. Today, it is especially important to take into account the intersectional nature of international students’ identities; international students may identify with vulnerable racial, religious and ethnic minority groups in addition to identifying as international students.

Widespread concern for the safety and well being of many different groups continues to emerge in response to the administration’s rhetoric and policies. Some of the most prominent concerns arise surrounding the impact on Muslim, Latino, and other minority populations (Barba, 2017; Tai & Perisamy, 2016; Iyer, 2017), as well as on immigrant communities and immigration topics (Rosenberg, 2018).

Increasingly, a worrisome change can also be seen in the context of education. In the days following the election of Donald Trump, educators across the country noticed a significantly negative culture shift and outbursts of racially charged speech in their K-12 schools, with negative impacts especially noticed on students within underserved or targeted groups (Costello, 2016).

At the higher education level, international education professionals and enrollment managers highlight the potential negative impact that the Trump administration's policies and rhetoric may have on international student enrollments and on higher education as a whole (Westervelt, 2017; Mrig, 2017; Saul, 2017). One survey shows that 44% of international enrollment managers and international education professionals expect Trump's policies to have a high impact on their enrollment numbers from Muslim-majority nations as well as other international markets such as China, South Korea, and India (Mrig, 2017).

Other brief reports ask the students themselves to speculate about how various policies may affect their futures (Rhodes, 2017; Basu & Khosla, 2017). A growing number of news articles, surveys, and studies points to a need for increased attention to international student issues and a deeper look into the experiences of international students who are already here, from their own perspectives.

As these numerous articles and initial studies indicate, policy-makers and experts across the country are concerned with how to best respond to increases in reported anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, derogatory language, and hate crimes in schools and in society. It is clear that the 2016 election has had a notable impact on various aspects of U.S. society, leading, in the words of the Southern Poverty Law Center, to the idea of the "Trump Effect" (Costello, 2016).

As President Trump's words and actions are seen as a normalization of xenophobia and

prejudices towards many of the most vulnerable populations in the country, it is crucial that a stronger effort is put forth to support these groups.

The media and public discourse focus on discrimination towards immigrants and racial and religious minority groups, and it is crucial that international education is viewed through this lens as well. International students, a population made up of individuals from a wide array of races, religions, ethnicities, nationalities, and other identity groups, have the potential to face struggles similar to the ones that immigrant and domestic minority populations in the U.S. face today. This study prioritizes the international student population from a student-centered perspective, and examines the impact of the 2016 election on their experiences and identities. With this project, I aim to inform evolving research on how U.S. higher education institutions can best support international students in the contemporary political climate as well as throughout future political shifts.

Theoretical Framework

I have chosen to utilize the analytic lens of intersectionality as a framework for this research on international student identities and experiences. The concept of intersectionality comes out of a field of identity studies, which, while consisting of a range of diverse and complex theories, generally agrees that identity is shaped by one's experiences, which, in turn, are shaped by one's environment (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Coming from both constructivist and postmodern traditions, identity is viewed as socially constructed; societal changes are thus significant influences on how one views oneself and the identities of others (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). I approach the current study from a postmodern perspective, conceptualizing identity not as an "essentialistic, pre-existing construct that drives social

interaction,” but a “more fluid and hybrid construct” that can be transformed by a range of influences (Haugh, 2008, p. 207).

Intersectionality adds an additional layer of complexity to the study of identity. The term came about in the late 1980’s, aiming to focus on relationships between difference and sameness, within the context of antidiscrimination and other socio-political movements (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Exploration of the term has played an increasingly significant role in scholarship to include considerations of gender, race, and other power dynamics in a range of academic disciplines (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). The analytic lens of intersectionality acknowledges that “an individual’s lived experience is not grounded in only one social identity, but more so in the way in which these identities intersect (Jones, 1997; cited from Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 586). Additionally, intersectionality theorists maintain that “multiple identities must be connected to the larger social structures in which they are embedded.” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 587). It is necessary to study oppressed identities, but also to observe how minority and majority identities interact, and to highlight the fact that many people hold both privileged and oppressed identities (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

Applying these concepts to my study, I begin with the understanding, informed by prominent feminist and intersectionality scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1993), that delineating difference can be a source of social empowerment, and that a failure to recognize these differences has the potential to perpetuate social inequalities (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). I therefore work to recognize the differences between international students, in addition to considering the traits that bind them together. Much existing research on the international students refers to them as one distinct population, while in reality they are a diverse group with a magnitude of personal backgrounds and experiences (Koehne, 2005).

My choice to study international students within the context of the current political environment draws again from the idea within identity studies that one's surrounding environment affects individual identity formation and transformation. Dill and Zambrana (2009) argue that "individual identity exists within and draws from a web of socially defined statuses, some of which may be more salient than others in specific situations or at specific historical moments" (p. 4). The current study aims to understand the impact that this current, unique historical moment in U.S. politics has on international student identities, grounded in the understanding that these identities are fluid, malleable, complex, and diverse (Koehne, 2005).

Finally, I embrace the action-oriented mindset behind intersectionality studies; I hope that this study will inform a "transformation of practice to address inequalities and promote social change" (Torres, Jones, Renn, 2009, p. 588). Prominent scholars within the field of intersectionality studies view it as a communal project, one that must be approached from a variety of disciplines (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). One standardized methodology does not exist for this field; the field is viewed instead as a "gathering place for open-ended investigation of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and other inequalities" (Lykke, 2011; cited in Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 788). I aim to add to this communal project of literature, and work towards a dynamic and critical approach to supporting international students and their diverse, intersecting identities.

Methods

Setting

I conducted the following case study at a mid-sized, private university, located in a large, Midwestern city in the U.S. The university had approximately 16,400 students enrolled in the academic year of 2016-17 with 11,100 of those students as undergraduates. The institution

enrolled approximately 1,000 international F-1 visa students in the 2016-17 school year. This included approximately 400 undergraduate students, 400 graduate students, 30 students in the English Language Learning Program, and 170 students participating in their Optional Practical Training (OPT). The international student enrollment at the university increased 0.1% from 2015-16 to 2016-17. While the official numbers for the 2017-18 school year have not been released at the time of this writing, the international office estimates that they have seen a similar increase in this school year as seen in 2016-17.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 8 undergraduate students enrolled at the university on F-1 visas. The participants were all enrolled at the university prior to the 2016 election and were still enrolled when the data was collected, in the fall semester of 2017. The international student body at this university consists of 90 different nationalities, with the majority hailing from Asia (48%), Latin America (13%), Europe (12%), and the Middle East (8%). The study aimed to have each of these regions represented in the sample of students interviewed, and succeeded with the exception: the study lacked a European participant. The case study included one student from the Middle East, three students from Asia, one student from North America, and three students from Latin America. Participants came from a range of academic disciplines and represented diverse identities. The study expresses the perceptions of 8 students from a range of races, religious backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations.

More details on the backgrounds and identities of the participants are outlined in the table below. The table indicates each student's pseudonym, nationality, gender, and religion. Lastly, it includes the most salient identity of each student, according to what they reported in the interview. Through the lens of intersectionality, these particularities of each student, and how

they view themselves, are significant to take into consideration in the reporting and interpreting of the data.

Table 1. Participant Identity Details.

Pseudonym	National Origin	Gender	Religion	Salient identities
Yousef	Saudi Arabia	Male	Muslim	Religion
Alejandro	El Salvador	Male	Christian	Sexuality (homosexual), Culture (Latin American)
Lily	India	Female	Christian	Gender, National Origin
Jessica	Canada	Female	Christian	Ethnicity (Filipino), Religion
Veronica	Mexico	Female	Christian	National Origin, Culture (Latin American)
Arianna	Venezuela	Female	Christian	National Origin
Amy	Hong Kong	Female	Not mentioned	National Origin, Race/Ethnicity (Chinese), Gender
Yuan	China	Female	Not mentioned	National Origin, Gender

Instruments

I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the students, utilizing an interview guide approach. I framed each interview using the questions outlined in the interview protocol, allowing the student to fully describe their experiences. I added follow-up questions, unspecified in advance, with the intention of clarifying and validating the responses. Details of the interview protocol are shown in Appendix B.

Procedure

Recruitment. This research used a purposive, non-probability sampling technique (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Criterion-based selection ensured that the sample consisted of full-time, undergraduate international students, who were enrolled at the university within the specified time frame: before the 2016 presidential election and throughout the fall 2017 semester (as this is the time that the study took place). I also applied maximum variation sampling by selecting students from regions of the world that are commonly represented in the international student population at the university. By selecting students from a range of countries, the study sampled students who self-identify with a variety of races, religions, and ethnicities as well.

I sent out a request for participation via email to a list of 251 international students at the university, utilizing a de-identified list from the international student and scholar services department within the university's international office. The detailed recruitment letter can be found in Appendix A. This was completed with the approval and assistance of the international office executive director and associate director of international student and scholar services. The list was selected based off of students' visa status and I-20 start date, which signifies the date on which they started their academic career at Loyola. The request for participants listed the following participation criteria for eligibility: students must be full-time F-1 visa students who

were enrolled before the election and are still enrolled during the fall 2017 semester. After sending out this initial recruitment email, I received responses from 9 students who were interested in participating. One student cancelled the scheduled interview due to illness, leading to a total of 8 student interviews conducted throughout the fall 2017 semester.

The recruitment letter informed the students of the nature of the research project. In the letter, I assured participants that their information would be kept confidential but that, if selected for an interview, I would utilize their responses for my study. I received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the university (IRB project number) and utilized a consent form for all interviewees. The details of the consent form can be found in Appendix C. The participants' personal details were kept confidential and their names were changed in the reporting of the data.

Data Collection. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with every participant. As the interviewer, I aimed to create an informal, conversational atmosphere, allowing the participants to feel comfortable expressing themselves openly and without reservations. I utilized probing and clarifying follow-up questions intermittently in order to ensure full understanding of the answers and allow the participants to fully express their experiences. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes and were audio recorded.

Data Analysis. In the data analysis phase, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. I used the interview questions and research questions as an initial guide to segment and code the data, applying a constant comparative analysis technique after each interview. This allowed themes to naturally emerge from the data. For the first phase of analysis, I read the transcripts of the interviews and assigned general themes to the data, dividing up the themes into two broad categories. The first theme looked at the students' experiences and the second theme examined

the students' identities. This categorization allowed several subthemes to emerge. A second phase of analysis determined that it was more effective to divide the data into the categories of Impact on Community and Impact on Self, and to place the subthemes within those two categories. This data analysis method allowed me to best answer the two research questions, that is, the perceived impact of the Trump administration on both the external climate and on the individual student. By collecting and analyzing these rich narratives, I was able to illuminate existing patterns in the experiences and identity transformation of international students since the 2016 election.

Findings

According to the findings, the participants perceive the Trump administration's campaign, rhetoric, and policies to have impacted their lives in a variety of ways and at varying levels. Throughout the interviews, students expressed their beliefs that the current administration has impacted the sociocultural environment around them, including the climate of the campus, as well as the surrounding local and national communities. The students also believed that the administration had made an impact on themselves, on their lived experiences, their global and political views, and their sense of self. While not all participants said that they felt a large impact, externally or individually, every individual noted changes in their surroundings since the presidential election of 2016, and expressed personal, emotional responses to the changes in climate, ranging from fear, anger, empathy, detachment, and empowerment.

Several repeating themes and patterns arose when students discussed the administration's impact on the campus environment and surrounding society. According to the majority of the participants, the society around them generally felt more fearful; many students sensed that a culture of close-mindedness, racism, discrimination and violence had become more prevalent in

the U.S. since the 2016 election. Not all of the perceived changes were negative, however.

Students pointed out an increase in political awareness and involvement on campus and across communities; this was considered by the majority of the students to be a positive counter balance against the rhetoric and policies of the current administration. Additionally, student reported feeling supported by their institution and their surrounding communities, another positive pushback against the perceived negativity of the presidential administration.

On an individual level, the participants most frequently expressed themes related to immigration and visa issues; these issues had affected them directly and had impacted their peers, friends, or family members. Some participants reported personal experiences of racism, discrimination, or stereotyping, though these instances were not considered frequent occurrences and were often dismissed as inconsequential by the participants. A few of the students expressed a sense of detachment, either because they planned to return home after graduating and did not want to get involved in U.S. politics, or they did not feel that it was their place to have an opinion about the country's current political situation. However, many students also highlighted a sense of empowerment or motivation to counter the perceived negative impacts of the current administration. Significantly, every participant stated that they felt Donald Trump's campaign or presidency had impacted their sense of self in some way.

Perceived Impact on External Climate

Fear: "Everyone is worried about something." The research participants expressed a recurring theme of fear; many students believed that the current administration had created a fearful environment. Though not all students said they felt fearful themselves, they sensed that many around them were concerned about the influence and uncertainty of the Trump administration's policies, or, as was stated by one participant, Yousef, "everyone is worried

about something.” Some students were fearful of deportation, others worried about harassment or violence, and some were concerned about American society becoming more close-minded. The most intense examples of this fear came in the context of Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. As Veronica, from Mexico, stated, “my first thought is, we will have to wear like a patch, or something, that will identify me as Mexican. You know, like the Hitler thing with the stars?”

Veronica also spoke about her hesitation to speak Spanish in public after the election, she was fearful because she had read articles about students getting harassed by Trump supporters due to their Latin-American descent. She had also heard rumors of people who looked Muslim or Latino being stopped on the train and asked about their immigration or visa paperwork, causing her to be nervous about taking public transportation after the election.

While Arianna, from Venezuela, didn’t feel this intense fear herself, she conveyed a sense of empathy toward the Mexican population due to this intimidating environment. As Arianna stated, “the whole hatred rhetoric was directed toward Mexicans in particular. So they were pretty affected by it. And there was just like a general sad stage, like fear of what could happen to them, or their families, like I had a friend, whose parents’ paperwork for the residence was like undergoing investigation to be approved when Trump got in office. So she was like completely terrified that they were gonna be denied.”

Arianna’s experience and background as a Venezuelan also played into her concern about the potential negative impact of Trump’s rhetoric. She saw the long-term potential harm that Trump could cause: “I saw the populist speech of Trump, and it’s very relatable with the populist speech of Chavez and like other dictators. Not to say that Trump’s gonna be a dictator or anything... but it’s just like, I know how much hate can get into people and become their main focus and their main drive. So that’s what scared me.”

Many of the students told stories about racism, stereotyping or discrimination, stories that they had heard second-hand or witnessed towards others. Jessica felt defensive when she heard jokes about Muslims being terrorists, though she was not Muslim herself, but had spent several years living in a primarily Muslim country, and had friends who were Muslim. While Lily felt grateful that she had never experienced racism directly, she expressed her concern that “it could always happen to me,” and had heard about friends in other states who had racial slurs directed towards them; Lily thus felt indirectly impacted by racism, because she was aware of its effects on others across the country.

Every participant mentioned Trump’s travel ban executive order, and expressed empathy for the Muslim population in response to this. As Yuan from China stated, “if I’m Muslim and I’m just like normal people, who want to, like, study in America, I would be angry.”

Amy, from Hong Kong, mentioned the nationalist rally in Charlottesville and the overt sexist incidents and violence that, in her view, were “energized by a lot of the things that Trump personally has said.” She mentioned concerns about Trump’s actions “to take away the DREAM Act, to build a wall, to cut the taxes for wealthier people,” and felt that these actions “really made the whole nation less safe and also less open minded.”

Awareness: “I’m hoping that would be like a wake-up call.” Though every participant had experienced some level of negative effects of the Trump administration, they all also noted an increase in political awareness and involvement around them since the 2016 election. This ranged from an increase in political conversations on campus, to more people and organizations actually getting involved in politics or activism.

An overwhelming theme throughout the interviews was the idea of a “wake-up call,” as Arianna articulated. Students noticed more motivation among their peers and communities to pay

attention, get involved and make change. As Lily put it, “you’d think it [Trump’s agenda] would put people down, but people just grew more powerful and confident in what they thought and their values.”

Since the election, the majority of the participants noted more conversations about politics in their classrooms, with their professors and among their peers on campus. Alejandro mentioned friends who had never been interested in politics before, who had participated in protests after the election. Students noticed increasing attention to issues of immigration, health care, transgender rights, and sexual assault. As Alejandro passionately elaborated, “things we thought were things of the past, are still lingering, and I think it’s very important and I am motivated to see people coming to terms with the idea that no, we still have a long way to go.”

Support: “I feel like it’s... the privilege of studying at an institution like [this one]... that really has gone out of their way to protect my identity.” Another overarching theme was the outpouring of support that students felt, both from their university and their surrounding communities, in response to the perceived negativity of the political environment. As Alejandro said, “I feel like it’s again the privilege of studying at an institution like [this one]... that really has gone out of their way to protect my identity.”

Six out of the eight participants mentioned the university’s letter-signing event, which took place to resist Trump’s rescinding of DACA, and reportedly resulted in about 7,000 letters sent to congress people. The participants interpreted this as a sign of the university’s compassion for students in a disadvantaged position, and a sign that the university had “stepped up a bit more to focus on this race issue,” as stated by Amy.

Several students mentioned feeling supported by their professors; they described this through stories of small interactions and conversations with professors. They also noticed more

overt signs of activism from the faculty; for example, students saw their instructors participate in protests or noticed political signs in professors' offices. Students also noted specific departments or staff on campus that had provided support throughout the period following the election, such as the wellness center for mental health counseling, and the international office for immigration advice.

Additionally, many participants referred to student organizations; through which they had met friends and felt comfortable discussing issues of politics, identity, culture, and more. These ranged from cultural organizations to religious ones, and some related to leadership or student government. All had provided a space for students to feel supported and understood.

Off campus, participants felt supported as well, largely due to protests that took place after the election. Yousef, as a Muslim, said he had heard about people of different religions and races who went to the airport the day that the travel ban was announced; he did not attend the protest but said he "felt good" when he heard about all of the people who went in protest.

Veronica attended anti-Trump protests the day after the election, and stated that "the community I was afraid... was lost, was just right there in my eyes." Amy attended the Women's March following Trump's inauguration, expressing that, "it was a really heartwarming experience, I think for the first time that I felt, I didn't have to look at myself as a Chinese person, or as an immigrant, but rather as just a woman."

Amy articulated this feeling of community and support as a direct response to the policies and rhetoric coming out of the White House: "Most people are being alarmed by what's happening in the political system, and also in the social sector... well I think people, they're good people, they feel more empathetic. And they try to help a little bit more, just because of how overbearing the government is."

Perceived Impact on Self

Immigration Concerns: “I guess I came to the U.S. to have doors open, and a lot of them are closing in front of me.” Perhaps the most prevalent theme across all interviews was the perception of President Trump’s negative impact on immigration and visa issues. Every participant was worried at some level about their or their family’s visa paperwork, about their ability to find a job and sponsorship after graduation, or both. Students felt that, due to the anti-immigrant sentiment expressed by the government, as well as the uncertainty of proposed immigration policies, their options and opportunities were limited. Since the election, their immigration status had come more to the forefront of their mind.

For some, immigration concerns were affecting their current experience. Yousef was concerned that it would take longer or be more challenging for his wife to receive her visa to come to the U.S. while he was finishing his degree. Veronica had to cancel enrollment in a study abroad program to China the following semester; due to the heightened strictness at the border, especially for Mexican citizens, Veronica’s international advisor was concerned that she would not be allowed back into the U.S. after finishing her study abroad program. She saw this as a direct impact of Trump’s actions on her experience as a student.

The students who intended to stay in the U.S. after graduating were generally more engaged and expressed stronger emotions about the political environment than those who planned to go back to their home countries post-graduation. Arianna felt that she had less of a choice in terms of where she would be after graduation. Amy, Yuan, and Lily acknowledged that while they initially had their hearts and minds set on staying in the U.S. after graduating, they were now coming to terms that this may not be possible. As Yuan put it, “before [the election] I

would say I was thinking about, dreaming about actually, like have a job here, and then work for several years, and then go back to China, but now, I'm not so sure.”

As Veronica articulated, “I guess I came to the U.S. to have doors open, and a lot of them are closing in front of me, you know? And with this president in power, it kind of adds up to the fear and the stress, cause it's a lot of uncertainty, you don't know if one day to another they're gonna change the requisite to get visas, or, if suddenly you have to do more to get a visa, and I don't know if I want to stay here, but if I do, can you imagine how hard it's gonna get?”

Many participants expressed strong emotional responses to immigration policies, both in consideration of their identities and the impact that these policies may have on them. As a Muslim, Yousef was angered by the travel ban, which blocked immigrants from primarily Muslim countries from entering the U.S. Jessica expressed concern about her family in Saudi Arabia and her Muslim friends, with increasing anti-Muslim sentiment from the U.S. In response to Trump's removal of DACA, Latin-American students Alejandro, Veronica and Arianna were angry on behalf of their Latino peers. As Veronica voiced, “the U.S. is missing new minds, they're missing new perspectives, just because of this, they're shutting down the doors that should welcome many people.”

Both Veronica and Arianna felt that the anti-immigrant sentiment from the government had an impact on the way they viewed themselves, with their immigration status becoming an increasingly salient part of their identity. As Veronica explained, “second semester, the way I introduced myself [when applying for jobs] I was like ‘hi, my name is [Veronica], I'm Mexican and I'm not a resident here.” And it was so sad, cause you exclude everything from your story cause that's the only important things, you know?” Arianna echoed this sentiment: “It made me confront the reality that I am an immigrant and that whether I like it or not, and whether I think I

have like, really good grades and have a really good resume, it's still not up to me, what I end up doing, which is really kind of like, shocking.” She based this concern on stories about friends who had already been rejected from job opportunities after telling potential employers that they would need visa sponsorship.

Racism, Discrimination, Stereotypes, and Violence: “eye-rolling moments.” A few of the students reported direct experiences with racism, discrimination and stereotyping since the election. Yousef had an encounter with racism in his own apartment building near campus. He recounted that a fellow resident had told him to “go back to your country!” As he interpreted it, “he just saw my face, and maybe my dress, because I used to dress my culture... so he saw ‘oh, this represent Islam or represent Arab.’”

Veronica felt that the Trump administration promoted a stereotype about all Mexicans in the U.S. being undocumented immigrants. She said, “being Mexican... you know what really bothered me after Trump won? That for the first time people started asking me if I was legal. Cause now everyone talks about being legal or illegal... so yeah, that's something that Trump has caused a lot of, just like, you've automatically made every Mexican fall into a category that we do not belong.”

Amy, a female from Hong Kong, explained that she had been approached at the train stop the same morning as our interview, by a man who proceeded to ask her questions about eyelids and about Buddha, which she interpreted as him referring to her Asian ethnicity. She called moments like this, “micro-aggressions” and “eye-rolling moments,” and said that she felt much more uncomfortable regarding comments about her race than she did about comments on her gender. Later in the interview, however, Amy commented on the impact of discrimination and danger of violence against women: “when I was a little girl, my parents would tell me to be safe,

to do these things to protect myself. And then in secondary school or so, people would tell me, don't share a drink with people, or like, if you left, don't drink that drink again. So these things have always been there, but after the election, well during the campaign, fast-forward to now, I just have become more aware of the horrors that can happen and these things become more in the front of my mind, rather in the back of my mind. But I don't think it has made me feel that being a woman sucks, it's just to be more careful than before."

Jessica, Lily, and Arianna had experiences with micro-aggressions and stereotypes as well. Jessica, upon telling a classmate that she had lived in Saudi Arabia, was jokingly asked if she was a terrorist. A peer told Lily that he had heard all Indians smell bad. Friends of Arianna's boyfriend made jokes about Arianna getting deported once Trump was in power. All of these students, however, dismissed these comments as jokes simply brushed them off. As Lily put it, "I have better things to worry about."

Arianna made a point to take into account that her appearance may have made her less of a target, expressing empathy for others who may fit less into the American norm. As she stated, "I do have to acknowledge that I look pretty American, I'm just white, brown hair... I don't have an accent this much, so I get passed by American a lot of times, so I think that can also make me appear like less of a target... like I'm pretty sure if you asked any other international student from any of the countries that have been banned from the U.S., their reaction would be 100% different. Because ironically enough, he's [Trump] been benefiting me in a way, meanwhile they're all being completely screwed over..."

Detachment: "I'm just here with an F-1 visa, I'm still a student, not really a part of this country." Though the participants mentioned numerous changes in the climate, and many had strong emotions towards these changes, some also indicated feelings of detachment or an

outsider positionality, in terms of their political views. Particularly, those who did not plan to stay in the U.S. long term expressed fewer concerns about the political situation. For example, in regard to his American peers, Yousef recounted, “for them it’s more, they care about what’s happening a lot. For me, I just stay here two years and three years and then I will go.”

Additionally, Yuan mentioned that she felt the political situation didn’t affect her much, “because I’m not applying to like green card or immigration.”

In many circumstances, students implied that they did not feel it was their place to have an opinion on the political situation in the U.S., because they were not U.S. citizens, or they had not spent enough time in the country. As Yuan stated, “I’m not American citizen, so definitely like my view of politics is different than you guys... it’s kind of like I’m the outsider view.” According to Jessica, “I guess I’m not American so I wouldn’t really understanding the feeling. Amy echoed this: “I guess I’ve felt more like an outsider, not in a negative way, an outsider to the whole thing that’s happening. Cause in the back of my head I’m like, ‘I mean, I’m just here with an F-1 visa, I’m still a student, not really a part of this country’... I just felt like I didn’t have enough knowledge and experience about the U.S. and everything.”

For Amy, staying out of politics was a conscious decision, perhaps a form of self-preservation. As she said, “I would say now that I may be more avoidant to the news stories, I may also be a bit more disinterested in a lot of these organizing or activism, so not sure if I want to be more involved, I just right now am trying to stay in my bubble and just serve people in my work as another human being.”

Empowerment and Responsibility: “It’s empowered me to stand up for my values.”

In contrast to some of the students’ feelings of detachment, many participants emphasized that the 2016 presidential election had resulted in an increased interest in politics and feelings of

empowerment and responsibility to get involved in making change. The students highlighted this within the context of the larger campus and community, as mentioned previously, but it came up frequently within students' individual and personal contexts as well.

Alejandro was perhaps the most concretely impacted in this way, as he decided to change his major after Trump won the election. Alejandro was initially declared as a business major, but after the change in political climate decided that he wanted to choose a career path with which he could make a bigger impact on society, so he switched to economics and sociology. As he said, "It's empowered me to stand up for my values. I do believe [Trump] has affected me because, yeah, again, it's a call for what do I do in my life, what future do you see society having... It's changed me and the idea of what is possible, like what are still the things that we need to work on."

Amy and Lily also noticed that they had become more interested in politics since the election, reading more about America's history and about the struggles of various populations within the U.S. According to Lily, "I would definitely say it's empowered me a lot... and it's definitely helped me take into consideration other people's perspectives and how they might've felt." And as Amy stated, "I never saw myself as someone interested in politics until that moment [after the election]."

Lily and Veronica's gender identity salience came forth in their feelings of empowerment; Lily, from India, stated "I guess coming from a developing country, you hear catcalls all the time and it's really normal and you just walk past it, but I think [this university] has really taught me to stand up and be like, hey, that's not cool, you can't say that about women... I think definitely cause of that I've really reevaluated my worth as a female-gender too. "

Similarly, Veronica and Yousef referred to their identities in the context of empowerment and responsibility. Veronica stated, “after the protests, after I saw everyone embracing who they are, I was like, ‘I am [Veronica]. And I am Mexican. And I am studying in America but that will not change who I am.’” In response to anti-Muslim sentiment, Yousef expressed that he felt more responsibility to represent Islam in a positive light. As he said, “people see Islam through you. So it’s more responsibility, I have to be ethical, moral, I have to be more... more gentle even.”

Global Perspective: “Whatever happens in the U.S. has an impact everywhere.” The participants discussed aspects of their political views or views of the world that had changed since the election. Many mentioned their perception that America as a nation has a large influence across the globe. Jessica, for example, stated, “When I think about political stance, I would want to see it as a world view, more than just a nation view. Because it affects everyone, cause you know like America is one of the top nations in the world... it has so much connections around the world, like everything is revolved around them in a sense. So if America were like to fall down, everything would fall down,” and as echoed by Veronica, “whatever happens in the U.S. has an impact everywhere.”

Several students highlighted that they paid specific attention to the ways in which Trump’s presidency had the potential to impact their own countries. Yuan said, “[In China] most people like Trump, because he’s business man, so definitely he knows nothing about politics compared to Hillary, and then it makes us more safer and also he got our business going.”

Arianna formed her opinion of Trump partially around the way he talked about her home country of Venezuela: “It’s just curious how he keeps talking about how he’s gonna get justice for us, and he does care about the people in Venezuela, which just doesn’t correlate with

anything else that he's saying about the rest of the world... I guess one of the main reasons that I don't, like, hate him to death... as long as someone is talking about it, I'm happy. Because honestly, we have no media coverage, we have no way."

Some participants, such as Veronica, referred to biases from their home country without explicitly acknowledging them. Veronica felt defensive of her home country, Mexico, when she learned of all of the undocumented Mexican immigrants in the U.S. who did not want to be sent back to Mexico. She said, "Mexico has given me a lot. And I was like, 'that's not fair, you cannot judge a country that you don't know of.'"

Participants outwardly took into account their own identities when referring to certain policies or comments from the government. Yousef reflected on his interest in learning more about his own religion, Islam, but within the context in America. He noted with frustration that Trump's anti-Muslim sentiment was not only aimed at the Muslim community internationally, but also Muslim American citizens, who are "teachers, doctors," and who "want to contribute to society."

Lily expressed that within the context of her home country, India, people "don't have as much of a voice" but in response to Trump's campaign and comments, she stated that "I think I've really learned that, hey, I can stand up for this issue that I'm not happy about."

Sense of Self: "So it's changed me, the way I see myself." All but one student interviewed said that the Trump campaign, election, and/or presidency had impacted their own identity in some way. Amy from Hong Kong and Arianna from Venezuela both emphasized that their identity as international students had come more to the forefront of their minds because of the Trump administration. Amy elaborated, "I think immediately after the election, there were more feelings of hurt and lower self-esteem. That being because the government as a whole, it

does not really care for immigrants. Actually not only does it not care for immigrants, it does not want immigrants. So that abhorrence really does chip away a person's sense of self."

This identity awareness was not expressed solely in a negative way, however. Amy learned to adjust and cope, and decided: "because there may be a possibility that I don't get to stay here, so after the election, to me I just thought, from now on, I'm going to do everything with my best, because I may not get to do that again. So having that thought in mind really prepared me to step out of the comfort zone, to do more, to be more kind, and to be more intentional in what I do." Alejandro noted that the political situation in the U.S. has "changed me, the way I see myself. And I realize my own privilege and how I can put that to the service."

Lily and Arianna both saw their experience at the university to have played a large role in their identity formation, noting that the election was also a factor in this process. According to Arianna, "I'm less closed about the fact that I'm Venezuelan. Like it's not just that I'm Venezuelan, I'm also an international student, I'm also an alum [of this university], once I graduate, and like... I'm a mixture of a lot of things. And that has definitely changed throughout my experience here."

Lily expressed a similar sentiment, stating that, due to the political climate, she was more "confident in all those aspects of culture, religion, nationality and everything else... before, everyone just, you went on with life. But now it's a conversation that you're involved in pretty much every day. Just cause ...you hear it on the national news all the time."

Discussion

The results of this study simultaneously exemplify the diversity within the international student population and highlight the similarities across their experiences. It is useful to study the international students' common experiences, most notably those related to immigration and visa

concerns, in order to acknowledge these struggles that they all face, and to better support them as a group. It is equally crucial, however, to name the differences within this population, in order to consider the connections that certain groups within the international student population may find with various domestic student groups as well.

These findings support the claims of intersectionality research, which places priority on the relationship between difference and sameness within and across groups (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013), and also acknowledge the influence of the surrounding environment on individual identity formation (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). The significance of international students' intersecting identities is apparent throughout the findings of this research. The traits and affinity groups into which the students categorize themselves, in terms of race, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and otherwise, shape the varying ways in which the students navigate their experiences within today's political climate. Concurrently, the findings indicate that the political climate, and the changing environment on campus and in the students' surrounding communities, have an effect on the students' fluid, ever-transforming identities.

As discussed in the previous section, the similarities that arose across the group of participants largely pertained to immigration and visa concerns, political awareness, and empathy. As F-1 visa status was one of the few criteria utilized in the participant recruitment for this study, it is unsurprising that the topic of immigration and visa status bound the students together. Concerns about the impact of the current administration's immigration policies on their visa status and future employment opportunities were relevant to all participants and at the forefront of most of their minds.

A more surprising result, however, was the positive feeling of political empowerment that often overshadowed the students' negative perceptions of the political situation. Some students simply noticed more political awareness and political conversations around them, claiming that the election had been a wake-up call for U.S. society, while others felt increasingly empowered themselves to get involved in politics and make a difference. This is an angle of the "Trump Effect" that has been noted in other contexts (see: Moran, 2017), but the fact that this was a more common emotional response for international students than one of fear, and was experienced more often than racism or discrimination, was an unexpected finding of this study.

The final notable commonality across participant responses was empathy. While all participants felt impacted by the political changes on a personal level, they all also mentioned some level of detachment or appreciation for not being the main targets of the negative rhetoric, and expressed more concern for others than they did for themselves. These responses created some dissonance in the data analysis stage; in one breath, a student said that they didn't think they had personally been impacted, and in the next breath they gave a concrete example of how their experience had shifted since the election. The results show that students felt the administration had made an impact on their own experience, but often they expressed more empathy for others than concern for themselves. This dissonance presents one of the challenges of utilizing self-reported data within this context.

While these similarities are significant, the differences among the participants' reactions and responses are worth noting as well. The identities claimed by the participants seemed to interact with each other in diverse ways; these students fall into both privileged and oppressed identity groups, depending on which identity and which context is considered.

Yousef, for example, felt his Muslim identity to be the most salient; his values and goals were centered on the principles of Islam. In his home country, this was the dominant religion, but he was keenly aware that Islam was a marginalized religion in the U.S., especially in this political climate. Yousef had experienced discrimination towards his Muslim and Arab identities and expressed feelings of defensiveness and heightened loyalty to the Muslim community in response to this. He experienced this oppressed aspect of his identity while also connecting with the majority culture of his home country. Unlike the female participants that were interviewed, however, Yousef's gender identity never explicitly came up in conversation, though some aspects of the gender dynamics of his culture could be identified when he discussed his wife and the uncertainty as to whether she would join him in the U.S. His oppressed identity in the U.S., his religion, was at the forefront of his mind, while his privileged identity, his gender, was less salient.

The majority of the female participants vocalized that they had become more aware of their female identities within the context of today's political climate, though this was expressed in different ways from each student. Lily juxtaposed the more passive Indian female culture with her newfound sense of feminism and empowerment, crediting this change to her involvement with the student diversity organization as well as in response to the sexist remarks of the current U.S. president. Amy and Yuan noted a need to be careful and aware of their surroundings due to their gender, a concern that had become more prominent since the election. Veronica mentioned the machismo culture of her home in Mexico, and perceived that these tendencies were becoming increasingly apparent in U.S. culture as well. The oppressed nature of the female identity had become more salient for these participants since the election, albeit in different ways.

Intersectionality theory tells us that “multiple identities must be connected to the larger social structures in which they are embedded” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 587). These connections to larger social structures can be seen in responses from Alejandro and Veronica. Alejandro’s identity as a gay male is particularly complex due to the patriarchal and heteronormative culture of his home country, El Salvador. He described a conservative upbringing that had made it difficult for him to come out. The empowerment he had gained from his experience as a student at this university in the U.S., and the inspiration gleaned from the policies of Trump’s opposing candidate, Hillary Clinton, had facilitated a large shift in the way he viewed himself; he understood now that he could value both his gay identity and his Salvadoran cultural identity simultaneously. Trump’s election had empowered him to help others come to similar realizations and feel safe in their own identities.

Veronica expressed numerous times the increased salience of her Mexican identity in response to anti-Mexican sentiment within the U.S. While this led to feelings of being oppressed or marginalized, her status as an F-1 visa holder added to a complex dynamic between her own identity and other Mexicans or Mexican-Americans in the U.S., especially those who were undocumented. While this privilege was not explicitly acknowledged, Veronica’s sense of national pride and her immigration status intersected uniquely with her feelings of fear and marginalization as a Mexican woman in the U.S.

Other students acknowledged their privileged identities more directly. Veronica noted that her light skin, light brown hair, and subtle accent helped her to fit into U.S. norms. She acknowledged that this made her less of a target for discrimination. Alejandro acknowledged his privilege that had allowed him to learn English and attend college in the United States. Overall,

the students were insightful and cognizant of the roles that their various identities played in the current U.S. context.

Conclusion

Research practice within the relatively new field of intersectionality “mirrors the complexity of social life” (McCall, 2005, p. 1772), and the diversity in the data collected for this study illustrates this complexity. With this in mind, I argue that a few general conclusions can be drawn to answer the research questions outlined at the beginning of this project. The questions I aimed to answer were as follows:

1) To what extent and in what ways have international students studying in the U.S. perceived a change in the political, cultural and educational climate in the U.S. since the 2016 presidential election?

2) How do international students perceive the election of Donald Trump to have impacted both their individual identity and their experience on U.S. college campuses?

The findings of the present study indicate that the 2016 presidential election, and the Trump administration’s rhetoric and policies, have influenced international student experiences and identities in significant ways. The anti-immigrant sentiment coming from the White House, paired with the uncertainty of future immigration policies, has brought to light the volatility of the international students’ status within the U.S. and led to increased salience of students’ identities as non-U.S. citizens.

In general, students perceive the statements and actions of the current government to have shifted their perspectives and their sense of self. The results of this are varied, as these changes are perceived in both positive and negative ways. Students’ note a range of changes in their environments, their experiences, and decisions for their future. While each student’s reaction

differs from the next, depending on the web of intersecting identities making up each student's sense of self, overall the findings indicate that this administration has made a notable impact on the international student population.

These findings add to existing scholarship in a number of ways. By delving into the international student experience, the study builds on literature from past decades that have explored various facets of this topic. Most significantly, the results of the current study support arguments made in past scholarship regarding the significance of race, ethnicity, and religion in shaping the international student experience (Cole & Amahdi, 2003; Rich & Traudi, 2006; Halic, Lee & Rice, 2007; Greenberg & Paulus, 2009; Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2010).

Contemporaneously, the study supports existing theories within the fields of international education and intersectionality, by maintaining that the sociopolitical climate has a significant impact on students' experiences and identity developments (Rich & Traudi, 2006; Dill & Zambrana, 2009).

Past international education professionals and scholars have recommended increased research on the actual experiences of international students on U.S. campuses to combat the current neoliberal emphasis on recruitment and enrollment (Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2010; Marginson, 2014; Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2016). The inclusion of rich, personal stories in this study responds to this gap in the literature. Pushing back against this more common neoliberal narrative, the study avoids monetizing international students. Instead, the research promotes each international student's individual, human value by illustrating his or her complexity as well as simultaneously highlighting the diversity of the international student population as a whole.

This project utilizes a student-centered approach. According to various scholars in the field, this approach helps to elevate the student perspective and thus places more responsibility on institutions to improve international student retention (Halic, Greenberg & Paulus, 2009; Marginson, 2014). The act of listening to students' narratives gives students the space to voice their concerns; in fact, several participants noted in their interviews, that upon receiving the initial recruitment email, they had been pleased to see that someone was interested in researching this topic and listening to their stories. This once again emphasizes the need for their voices to be heard. By documenting the students' perceptions, experiences, and identities in this current political climate, the study encourages researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers to consider how existing problems may be addressed and resolved.

A deluge of news articles, surveys, and research studies continues to emerge daily, discussing and debating the impact of the Trump administration on various aspects of society. This paper strengthens the argument that the political climate is currently affecting the U.S. educational system in significant ways (Costello, 2016; Mrig, 2017). Specifically, the study adds a voice and perspective to the conversation that was previously missing. Existing texts acknowledge the impact of the current administration on minorities (Barba, 2017; Tai & Perisamy, 2016; Iyer, 2017; Rosenberg, 2018), K-12 students and teachers (Costello, 2016), and international student enrollment numbers (Westervelt, 2017; Mrig, 2017; Saul, 2017). Only a small number of brief articles mention the perspectives of international students currently enrolled in U.S. institutions (Rhodes, 2017; Basu & Khosla, 2017).

By adding international student viewpoints to the discussion, this study fills an important void. We learn, through in-depth, personal narratives, that these students are impacted by the current administration in ways that are often similar to other groups of students, especially

domestic minority and immigrant groups. The international students' stories also indicate unique ways that set them apart due to their status as non-U.S. citizens. Both the differences as well as the similarities are worth noting and attending to.

Lastly, the results of this research alter the narrative slightly of student experiences in response to the Trump administration. While the findings do elucidate significant negative student perceptions of the impact of the Trump administration, this study sheds light on several positive perceptions as well. This more optimistic outcome has not been adequately explored in the literature or in the media. The students articulate increased empowerment, identity salience, activism, and political awareness since Trump has taken office. Though not detracting from the severity of this administration's detrimental impact on students, these findings certainly complicate the largely negative narrative that has been documented thus far throughout the news and scholarship on this topic.

Limitations

This study is small in scale and therefore I cannot claim that the results are generalizable to the entire international student population at the university or in the U.S. higher education system. However, by interviewing a group of students representing a range of national, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, the study has gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the experiences of diverse students. By utilizing these narratives and observations, the conclusions drawn from this small-scale exploration add to the literature on the broader international student population and to the field of intersectionality studies.

It is worth noting, however, that certain regions of the world were not represented in this study; most significantly, the voices of students from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean are

missing from the sample. Additional interviews with students from these regions would have better met the maximum variation goals of the study.

In conducting this research, I relied on retroactive self-reporting of students' perceptions before and after the election. I did not collect data on the students' experiences before the election, as the conceptualization of the study began only after the election had already taken place. This may be seen as a limitation of the study as well, though the interviews were conducted just one year after the election, allowing the students to remember and report their experiences and perceptions more accurately than if the study were conducted further into the future.

A final limitation of the study pertains to the potential self-selecting nature of the sampling. The group of over 200 students who met the criteria and received the recruitment letter had the choice of whether to participate in the study or not. It is possible that the students who chose to participate already had an interest in the topic, and therefore it was possible that the participants would not represent a typical sample of international students (Lavrakas, 2008). However, according to the collected data, the interest and knowledge of the research topic varied largely from one participant to the next; this thus raises little concern for the severity of self-selection bias within the data.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, I recognize that my decision to study this topic is influenced by my identity as a White, female, Jewish, American citizen, as well as by my role as a graduate student and international educator. My experience of coming to terms with these identities in response to the 2016 presidential election contributes to my current perspective as well.

Throughout the interview design and data collection processes, I took account of my own position and acknowledged that there was a potential for a power imbalance to occur, as there is in most interview settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I tried to limit the potential for bias in a variety of ways.

I consulted with advisors and peers, including international students, throughout the data collection and analysis process, to ensure that the research questions were fair and the interview questions were accessible to non-native English speakers between the ages of 18 and 22. Due to time constraints, I was not able to set up follow-up interviews with the participants. This extra step would have further limited the potential for researcher bias.

While working to limit bias, I also acknowledge certain benefits of my insider-outsider positionality in relation to the participants. I myself have gone through challenges while living abroad at a young age, and could thus relate to the experiences of the students in many ways. Additionally, as a graduate assistant within the international office at the university, with several years of experience working with international students, my familiarity with visa regulations allowed me to better relate to the students as they recounted their challenges and fears with immigration issues.

I aimed to find these commonalities in other ways as well, with the goal of creating a safe and comfortable space for the students to share their stories. When the female participants brought up their gender identity, I indicated to them that I had felt similar emotional reactions to the political environment due to my own female gender identity. As Alejandro opened up about his sexual orientation, I made an effort to indicate to him that I was an ally. After students mentioned that they had attended marches or protests, I added that I had gone to a few rallies as well.

I utilized this interview style to convey a non-judgmental, respectful, yet informal stance. This contributed to my action-oriented approach to the research as well, as I aimed to validate and empower the participants while simultaneously collecting the data (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Recommendations

The participants' narratives and the overall findings of the study inspire several recommendations for future researchers and international education practitioners. My suggestions for future research, upon which I will expand in this section, include more culturally specific research on international student groups, comparative projects between international and domestic students, and larger-scale studies of international students on campuses across the country. I also recommend strategies for practitioners to improve international student support and retention, including increased funding to allow international offices to provide more culturally responsive programming and proactive immigration advising. I also suggest expanded collaborative efforts across campus organizations to better include international students in retention programs.

With a deeper understanding of the intersecting, diverse identities and perspectives that exist within the international student body, future research should promote this diversity and avoid generalizations about this population. It is my hope that researchers in the field find the in-depth student narratives in this study informative, especially regarding the varying ways in which international students feel both threatened and supported in the current environment. Future research might consider more individualized and culturally specific approaches to studying the diverse international student population.

In documenting these narratives, I also hope to show the potential for connection between international students and the larger domestic student body. The problems, transformations, and

revelations that these international students have encountered due to their race, religion, ethnicity, and gender are likely problems that domestic students with the same identities face as well, especially in this political era. Future research could thus compare international student experiences in this political climate with domestic student experiences from various identity groups. A study in this direction would further improve support for the intersecting identities of all students, including international students, especially those who fall into vulnerable or marginalized identity groups.

Another potential for future research may involve looking at the experiences of international students on a number of different campuses. The university involved in this study has a social justice oriented mission and is located in a large, liberal city. It is possible that the experiences of international students on a more conservative campus, in a rural or more conservative part of the U.S., may differ greatly from those of the students interviewed for this project.

This study aims to underscore the value that the international student population brings to the campus community. The unique challenges and experiences of these students deserve attention, especially if universities hope to continue receiving the revenue and intellect that international students bring to their campuses. From both an economic and a social justice perspective, it is crucial that concerted efforts go into the continued support of this student body.

For practitioners, educators, and policy makers, this effort begins with listening to the students' stories, valuing their voices, and noting where their needs lie at this time of tension and uncertainty. The current study aims to do just that. I argue that the next steps involve developing more culturally responsive programs to support the specific needs of international students. The findings of this research show that international students could especially use more proactive

support and guidance regarding visa and immigration concerns, throughout these uncertain times. Additionally, institutions and educators could explore ways to encourage increased political engagement for international students; empowering students to develop critical thinking skills regarding their own identities will help them understand how they fit into the current environment and better enable their success.

These more proactive approaches to international student support would surely require an increase in funding for international advising offices, which today are typically understaffed. Decreasing advisors' case loads would allow international education professionals more flexibility, which would allow them to implement the programming needed to retain and empower international students in the ways that I argue are necessary in this climate. To appeal only briefly to the over-emphasized recruitment perspective, these retention efforts are crucial if universities want to continue to attract international populations to enroll.

International offices would also do well to form collaborative partnerships with other offices across campus to support their students with a wide range of intersecting identities. I previously suggested that future research further explore the sameness between international student and domestic student populations; future practice should also focus on this by forming campus coalitions to support these connections. I envision this playing out in student organizations that are more proactively inclusive towards international students, and administrative offices across campus combining the ideas of diversity, multiculturalism, and internationalism in a more meaningful way.

Several students in their interviews mentioned their involvement with student organizations as a source of support. The organizations were largely cultural, including the diversity and multicultural student organization, a Filipino student group, and a Spanish-

speaking religious group. Others were focused on leadership, such as student government. These organizations were helpful in connecting students with similar identities, values, and interests, from both international and domestic populations. Institutions would do well to continue creating spaces like these, and ensure that international students feel welcome to participate in these organizations across campus. Because international students often come from places where this type of campus involvement is not typical, universities should make sure that international students are aware of these organizations and involvement opportunities early on in their academic career.

On a similar note, it is necessary for discussions of diversity on campus to include international student perspectives. As Samayoa (2018) states, there is a “critical need for coalitions that include those of us whose identities are under scrutiny in these political times. In building such coalitions, institutions can cultivate the kind of hope that we need to persevere.” Coalitions between departments serving minority populations and international offices should be more frequently formed, and programming serving both of these populations together would help to create a supportive environment for this diverse group of students.

In addition to research and institutional programs in support of international student populations, individual “noble everyday acts” make a large impact on student experiences (Samayoa, 2018). As student affairs practitioners, advisors, educators or other community members, it is our responsibility to ensure that these students are given the resources and support needed to thrive on campus. I hope that this study will act as a catalyst for individuals and institutions to explore further actions to support these populations in this time of tension and uncertainty.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT LETTER

The following message is being sent on behalf of graduate student and Office for International Programs Graduate Assistant, Sarah Tolman. All inquiries should be directed to Sarah Tolman the subject line "RE: Research Study Opportunity - International Student Perspectives and Experiences."

Hello,

I am a graduate student within Loyola's Cultural and Educational Policy Studies program (in the School of Education) and am working on research for my master's thesis. For my thesis, I am interested in learning about international student perspectives and experiences. Specifically, my study aims to understand the impact of the current U.S. President and administration's policies and rhetoric on international student experiences and identities at the university.

I am reaching out to you because I am hoping to interview 8-10 undergraduate international students at the university. I am looking for students who were enrolled at the university before the U.S. Presidential election on November 8th, 2016, and who are still enrolled this semester. I am looking for degree-seeking students on F-1 visas, with a variety of nationalities and academic majors.

Would you be interested in participating in this study? If you are interested, I would hope to conduct an interview with you in November or December of 2017, at a time that is convenient for you. We would meet somewhere on campus in a reserved classroom or study room, to ensure privacy. The interview will last between 45 and 90 minutes. I have some questions prepared, but the interview will not be completely structured, and I hope that you will feel comfortable to talk freely about your experiences and perceptions. You will have no obligation to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. All of the information that you provide to me will be kept confidential, and your name will be changed when I write my thesis.

Of course, you have no obligation to participate in this study. However, if you are interested in participating in an interview, I would truly appreciate it; your perspective would be an extremely valuable addition to my study.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you are interested in participating in an interview. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions as well. You can contact me by email (stolman@luc.edu) or by phone (612-810-9238).

Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

All the best,
Sarah Tolman

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Basic information

Date of interview:

Interviewee information

Name:

Nationality:

Date of enrollment:

Academic standing (junior, senior, etc.):

Major/Department:

II. Instructions

Overview

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you so much for coming and participating in this interview. I will be asking you a series of questions about your experience as an international student here at this university. Some questions will be more general about your overall experience, and some will be more specifically related to your experience following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The purpose of the interview is to understand your perceptions of the impact of President Trump's administration on your experience and your identity. Please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. I want you to feel comfortable and to honestly tell me how you really feel. If at any point, you feel uncomfortable answering a question, please let me know. If you do not understand a question or would like me to rephrase, repeat, or explain it, please let me know as well.

Audio-Recording Instructions

If it is okay with you, I will be recording our conversation on my phone. The purpose of this is so that I can get all of the details but at the same time be able to pay attention to our conversation without writing everything down. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be transcribing the interview and eventually compiling the information from this interview and several other interviews into my master's thesis. I will change all individual names for the final report, you will not be identifiable.

Consent Form Instructions

Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read and sign this consent form. Please let me know if you have any questions.

(After student signs form, begin audio recording)

II. Questions

Introductory

1. Why did you choose to study at this university?
 - a. Overall, how would you describe your experience here at Loyola?
2. All of us identify with a number of different backgrounds, or see ourselves in many different ways. We may feel like one or more aspects of our identity are the most central to what makes us who we are. For example, religion may be most important to one person's identity, and for another, racial identity may be more significant. With this in mind, which component(s) of your identity do you feel are/is the most important to who you are, and why?
 - a. You can choose between the following options: nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, culture, or "other."
 - i. If the option is "other," please explain.
 - b. Please remember that if you are not comfortable answering this question, you are not required to.
3. In your opinion or experience, has there been a change in the political, cultural and educational climate of the U.S. since the 2016 presidential election? To what extent and in what ways?
4. Please describe any thoughts, emotions, and reactions that you have experienced in response to Donald Trump's campaign, election and presidency thus far.
 - a. More specifically, can you please describe any emotions and reactions that you may have had in response to the announcement of the travel ban, the wall on the border between the U.S. and Mexico, or any other specific policies that have been proposed or implemented thus far?

Challenges

5. Did you experience any cultural misunderstandings or challenges as an international student in the U.S. before the November 2016 election? If so, please describe them.
6. What about after the election? Have you experienced any cultural challenges or misunderstandings since November 2016? If so, please describe this.
 - a. Were there any particular events that made you think about the way you saw yourself? How did this affect you? How did you cope?
7. Have you experienced discrimination in your time as an international student at this university? To what extent and in what ways?
 - a. Have you heard about experiences of discrimination among your social networks (friends, classmates, etc) either before the election? Please tell me more about that.

- i. What about after the election? Please tell me about any experiences you have heard about from your social networks that took place after the election.
- b. If you have experienced discrimination, please describe how this affected you.
 - i. Did this experience impact the way that you saw yourself? If so, please explain.

Institution-Specific

- 8. In your opinion, has there been a change in the cultural or educational climate at your university? To what extent and in what ways?
- 9. Think about any of the challenges or experiences of discrimination that you mentioned earlier in our conversation. After those experiences, did you notify anyone at the university about this experience?
 - a. Did you receive any support from any specific person, office, or community within the university?
 - b. If so, please explain how this did or did not help you cope with the experience.

Impact

- 10. Do you think that President Trump's administration has influenced or shaped your experience as an international student here? To what extent and in what ways?
- 11. Do you think that this election and/or new administration has affected your view of yourself as a *[insert national/racial/ethnic/religious identities here, according to answer from identity question from question 2]* and/or as an international student? To what extent and in what ways?

III. Debrief

Do you have any questions for me before we wrap up the interview?

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me. Your stories and narratives are very important and helpful for me in my research. I will be conducting interviews like this with several other international students to gain a variety of different perspectives on these issues. As mentioned previously, I will use the stories and information from your interview in my Master's Thesis, but I will be sure to change your name so that your identity remains confidential. I am happy to keep in touch with you with more information about the study if you are interested in reading the final thesis once it is complete!

APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The “Trump Effect” on International Post-Secondary Students in U.S. Higher Education

Researcher(s): Sarah Tolman

Faculty Sponsor: Noah Sobe

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Sarah Tolman for a Master’s Thesis under the supervision of Dr. Noah Sobe in the Department of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies.

You are being asked to participate in this interview because you are an international student at the university on an F-1 visa. This study aims to understand the experiences of international students who have been enrolled at the university both before and after the 2016 presidential elections. Thus in order to take part in the study, you must have been enrolled at the university before November 8th, 2016 and must still be enrolled at the time that the interview is taking place. You must be on an F-1 visa and you must be an undergraduate student.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the Trump administration’s policies and rhetoric on international student experiences and perceptions of identity.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. In the interview, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your experience and identity as an international student at Loyola, your perceptions of the political climate in the U.S., and perceptions of how the political climate has impacted your identity and your experience. The interview will last between 45 and 90 minutes and will be held on campus in a reserved classroom or meeting space. The interview will be audio-recorded and this recording will be transcribed for the researcher to use the data.

Risks/Benefits:

1. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. You may find some of the questions or topics discussed as emotional or stressful to think about. If you do not feel comfortable discussing any of the topics addressed, please state this to the interviewer. More information about the voluntary nature of your participation is included below.
2. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but in conducting this research, the researcher aims to increase visibility and understanding about international student experiences. It is the hope of the researcher that international student advisors, other staff in international student services, and policy-makers within U.S. higher education can

utilize this knowledge to better support the international student body in today's political climate and beyond.

Confidentiality:

The information collected in the interview will be kept confidential and only the researcher will have access to the data. The interviews will be audio-recorded on the researcher's password-protected cell phone and downloaded to a password-protected flash drive. The interviews will then be transcribed by the researcher and stored on the same flash drive and the researcher's password-protected laptop. When analyzed and included in the research report, all participants' names and any other identifying information will be changed so that the participants will not be identifiable. The audio-recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Sarah Tolman, at stolman@luc.edu, or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Noah Sobe, at nsobe@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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VITA

Sarah Tolman was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, she attended University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in German and Italian, in 2013.

Sarah spent two years of her schooling as an international student in Europe: one year of middle school in Munich, Germany, and one year of university in Bologna, Italy. From 2013-2014, Sarah served as an English Teaching Assistant in Oberhausen, Germany, through the Fulbright Program.

While in graduate school at Loyola University Chicago, Sarah worked as a Graduate Assistant within the Office for International Programs, developing and facilitating programming for the international student population. She plans to continue her career in the field of international higher education in Chicago.