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Living with Roommates from Different Cultures: A Qualitative Study of International Students' Experiences of Multicultural Living-Learning Communities

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES of multicultural living-learning communities were explored using consensual qualitative research. Fifteen female international students attending a university in the mid-Atlantic region were interviewed in five focus groups. Participants reported that the benefits of multicultural living-learning communities included cultural learning, language learning, social support, and monetary support. Challenges of multicultural living-learning communities included lifestyle and cultural differences, lack of respect, awareness of and openness to different individuals or cultures, differences and difficulties in communication, language concerns, and lack of opportunities to get closer with roommates. Participants reported that roommate relationships were facilitated by genuine respect for and interest in other cultures, motivation to enhance their adjustment, personalities, having interpersonal interactions, communication, having similarities in interest and culture, teaching and learning language, strategies/rules between roommates, and environmental features such as communal space in their residence halls. This study has implications for residence life professionals who coordinate multicultural living-learning communities and help international students adjust to living with roommates from different cultures.

Note: We are grateful to the judges who coded interview sessions: Ashley Dandridge, Sushma Kumble, and Christa Close. We also thank Elisa Castillo, Emily Rosenfield, and Justin Mason for providing their expertise about residence life.

International students seek to study in the United States for various reasons, including exploring and learning about U.S. culture, increasing their cultural knowledge, and learning different ways of thinking (Andrade, 2006; McClure, 2007). Due to institutions' requirements and lack of resources for off-campus housing, many international students live in university residence halls, which become their home in the U.S. (Yao, 2016). This is where many international students make their friends, and

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experiences in residence halls are an essential part of the overall collegiate experience that can lead to a sense of belonging to the university community (Lisack, 2014; Tolman, 2017). Students' sense of community, in turn, is associated with increased student persistence and a higher level of psychological energy to make new friends and participate in activities (Braxton et al., 2013).

In addition to the traditional role of residence life, colleges and universities have introduced living-learning communities, a residential program that incorporates academic themes such as international, multicultural, and STEM topics (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; Brower & Inkelas, 2010). In establishing international and multicultural living-learning communities, universities recognize the importance of a multicultural living environment in providing valuable opportunities for domestic students to interact with people from different cultures, expand their worldview, and receive peer training on diversity (Harwood et al., 2012; Tolman, 2017). Multicultural living environments can also provide ample opportunities for international students to learn about U.S. culture, practice English, receive additional support, and establish social networks, which can lead to positive and satisfying collegiate experiences (Tolman, 2017). However, there are few studies on international students' experience of multicultural living-learning communities. The present study examined their experiences as well as the perceived benefits and challenges of living with roommates from different cultures and the factors that facilitated positive relationships with their roommates.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF MULTICULTURAL LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Multicultural living-learning communities can provide several benefits for both international and domestic students. For example, living with roommates from different cultures can boost students' development of intercultural maturity (Antonio & Ofori-Dwumfuo, 2015). Furthermore, when international students formed a supportive relationship with their roommates, this social support facilitated their adjustment to U.S. culture (Baba & Hosoda, 2014), and social connections and friendship with their roommates helped them feel less lonely and homesick (Lisack, 2014). International students living with U.S. students were able to practice English with their roommates and learn informal spoken English such as slang, which is hard to learn in traditional academic settings (Sherry et al., 2009).

Multicultural living-learning communities also created some challenges for international students. Some felt that students from other cultures did not understand

their culture (Sherry et al., 2009). In their study on communication dynamics among international and U.S. students, Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015) suggested that international students in the global living-learning community reported challenges in communication, which led to conflicts with roommates due to cultural differences between their home countries and the United States. International students can also be exposed to discrimination and microaggressions, which make them feel inferior or marginalized and thus can exacerbate their feelings of being isolated, insecure, unsafe, or invalidated in their home away from home and negatively impact their psychological well-being (Koo, 2021; Yao, 2014).

International students with limited English can be afraid to speak the language, which hinders meaningful interaction with their roommates or can lead to miscommunications (Yao, 2014). The difficulty in communication and lack of meaningful interactions can make international students feel isolated, diminish their sense of belonging, and deteriorate their mental well-being (Koo et al., 2021; Yao, 2016). Furthermore, international students with limited English who also feel a cultural stigma about counseling may be reluctant to seek help from residence life or the counseling center when they experience problems with their roommates (Sim et al., 2021).

Although there is little research on what facilitates international students' positive roommate relationships, researchers have examined what promotes their adjustment and lowers their acculturative stress. Yakunina and colleagues (2013) suggested that those international students who strived to develop and improve themselves, to be optimistic and persistent, and to appreciate differences and similarities among different cultures were more likely to adjust well and have less acculturative stress. Further, higher levels of social support were associated with better cross-cultural adjustment for international students (Baba & Hosoda, 2014). Residence halls with many international students also contributed to positive adjustment experiences because these students could share the transition with each other (Lisack, 2014).

The current study explored international students' perceived benefits and challenges of multicultural living-learning communities and the factors that facilitated positive roommate relationships. We aimed to explore the following research questions: (a) What are female international students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of living with roommates from different cultural backgrounds in multicultural living-learning communities? (b) What facilitates female international students' establishment of positive relationships with roommates from different cultures in multicultural living-learning communities?

METHOD

We chose a qualitative design, consensual qualitative research (CQR; Hill, 2012), because there is little research in this area and we were interested in an inductive and in-depth approach to better understand international students' lived experiences (Sim et al., 2016). CQR is a comprehensive approach to qualitative research with

theoretically grounded guidelines for each step of the research process, from developing the interview protocol through data analysis. CQR is a descriptive qualitative methodology that allows themes to emerge from the data and uses a consensus process to develop categories and identify frequencies of categories (Hill, 2012).

We utilized focus groups for data collection. These groups were chosen for their ability to provide dynamic information through their interactions with one another as well as the support and empowerment that comes from group membership (Goldman, 1962; Morgan, 1988; Peters, 1993; Sim, 1998). Also, focus groups can be effective in discussing perceptions and thoughts because many participants feel that this forum is less threatening than one-on-one interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Thus, focus groups were ideal because participation in the study would not only give participants a voice, but would also provide them with some support.

We conducted five focus groups with two to four participants in each group. Via email and in person, residence life staff invited students who were enrolled in the multicultural living-learning program to participate in a 60-minute focus group interview. Focus group participants included 15 cisgender female international students from a small liberal arts university in the mid-Atlantic region. We only included female international university students because at the time of the data collection the university was not coeducational. All participants were living in residence halls designated as a multicultural living-learning community and shared a room with one or more students from a different culture. Participants' demographics are summarized in Table 1 (*see page 57*).

The interviewer who conducted all focus groups was an Asian American cisgender female faculty member with expertise in international students and qualitative research. The interviewer had experience living with roommates from a different culture during her study abroad as an international student. The judges who conducted CQR data analyses included one cisgender female faculty member, who was the interviewer, and three cisgender female graduate students in a counseling psychology program. Two were Asians with international backgrounds, one was Black/African American, and the other was White American. All had experiences of living with roommates, and two had experiences of living with roommates from different cultures. Finally, the auditor was a White cisgender female psychologist with expertise in qualitative research and in teaching multicultural counseling courses and providing counseling to college students; she did not have the experience of living with roommates from a different culture. The diversity of team members in terms of their international background allows for rich discussions based on diverse perspectives (Hill, 2012). We were aware of the potential biases and expectations based on the judges' own experiences as international students or domestic students in residence halls. Thus, as with other qualitative studies, the judges recorded and discussed their biases and expectations before the data collection and analysis began. They were asked to set aside (i.e., bracket) their biases and expectations, and they revisited and discussed the influence of their biases and expectations on data analysis as needed throughout the process (Hill, 2012).

TABLE 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant number	Focus group	Age	Country of origin	Months in USA	Roommates' country of origin	Previous abroad experiences	Experiences of living with roommates
1	A	20	Japan	6	USA	N	N
2	A	21	Japan	7	USA, China, & Japan	Y	N
3	B	24	Jordan	60	India	Y	Y
4	B	21	Ecuador	2	USA	Y	N
5	B	20	Japan	18	USA & Japan	Y	Y
6	B	19	Japan	6	USA	Y	N
7	C	22	Japan	8	USA, Nepal, & Uganda	No answer	N
8	C	24	Japan	2	USA	Y	Y
9	C	21	Japan	8	USA, Germany, & Uganda	Y	N
10	D	21	Korea	2	USA & Japan	Y	N
11	D	25	Korea	2	USA & Japan	Y	Y
12	D	20	Korea	2	USA & Japan	N	Y
13	E	22	Korea	10	USA	Y	N
14	E	20	Germany	9	USA, Japan, & Uganda	Y	N
15	E	21	Korea	9	China	N	Y

... when international students formed a supportive relationship with their roommates, this social support facilitated their adjustment to U.S. culture, and social connections and friendship with their roommates helped them feel less lonely and homesick.

In accordance with CQR recommendations, the focus group questions were developed based on the existing literature on international students, a mock interview to test the interview questions, and feedback from the auditor. The interview questions included the following:

- (1) *How was your experience of living with roommates from different cultural backgrounds?*
- (2) *What are the benefits of living with roommates from different cultures?*
- (3) *What are the challenges of living with roommates from different cultures?*
- (4) *What helped your adjustment to living with roommates from different cultures?*

The authors used a semi-structured interview format for in-person focus groups, and each focus group lasted about 60 minutes. All the participants had to answer all the questions, and, when relevant, they also shared their reactions to other participants' statements. The interviewer also asked follow-up questions as needed to facilitate more in-depth exploration. The focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed by the research team.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research assistants transcribed the audio-taped focus group sessions verbatim, and judges analyzed them using CQR (Hill, 2012). First, the judges independently read the interview questions and the first focus group session transcript and developed a list of tentative topic areas (e.g., benefits), which are called *domains* in CQR. The judges discussed and came to consensus about the names for each of the domains and then sent the domain list to the auditor and revised them based on the auditor's feedback (Hill, 2012).

After all the judges and the auditor reached consensus on a domain list, the judges read the transcripts together and used the consensus process (discussed until all were in agreement) to decide on a thought unit (sentences or phrases containing the same idea) and assign each thought unit to a domain (Hill, 2012). Simultaneously, they used the consensus process to create a core idea, which is a concise yet comprehensive summary of the participant's statement that stays as close as possible to the participant's own words. Once domains and core ideas were complete for an entire focus group transcript, they were sent to the auditor, who reviewed them and gave suggested revisions. Domains and core ideas were then revised based on the auditor's suggestions (Hill, 2012).

After the domains and core ideas for all transcripts had been audited and revised, each judge independently read all core ideas across all five focus group sessions and created a list of categories and subcategories for each of the domains. Then the judges discussed these categories until they reached consensus on a final list of categories, which was sent to the auditor and revised based on the auditor's feedback (Hill, 2012).

Participants typically talked about lifestyle and cultural differences as a challenge in living with roommates from different cultures. While some of the lifestyle differences could come up in any roommate situation (cleanliness and noise levels), others were more directly related to culture (different religious practices or orientation to time).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 (see page 60) lists the frequencies for the domains, categories, and subcategories that emerged from the data. Frequencies in the table are reported both at the group level and the participant level because all individual participants were part of focus groups, which may have influenced their statements (e.g., if agreeing with other focus group members). The text below focuses on frequencies at the individual level. Frequencies are labeled according to CQR conventions, where *general* (G) refers to categories that applied to all or all but one of the groups/participants (discussed in all 5 groups/discussed by 14 or 15 participants), *typical* (T) refers to categories that more than half of the groups/participants reported (3 or 4 groups/8 to 13 participants), and *variant* (V) refers to categories that less than half of the groups/participants discussed (2 groups/2 to 7 participants). Three domains emerged from the data: the benefits and challenges of multicultural living-learning communities and the factors that facilitated international students' establishment of positive roommate relationships.

Benefits of Multicultural Living-Learning Communities

All participants discussed having gained cultural learning from living with roommates of different cultures. Within this category, participants generally discussed having gained an increase in multicultural competency such as learning how to be open-minded, gaining knowledge about different cultures, and learning how to communicate with others from a different culture. For example, Participant 14 said,

I think that this living and learning community is a great way to start in a small group to learn how to deal with different cultures and to see how difficult it is... how important it is to be more open-minded to show respect, to get respect, and what it takes to live with other cultures.

The participants typically discussed cultural learning as it relates to sharing cultural traditions, customs, and activities (such as sharing food and celebrating holidays). Participant 2 stated that her roommate "gave me a lot of information about America... she invite[d] us to Thanksgiving Day or Christmas. So, I learned a lot [about] American culture." It seems that sharing a living space with roommates from other cultures promoted the development of participants' intercultural maturity and cultural competency, as reported by Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015).

Typically, participants discussed learning and teaching language as a benefit of multicultural living-learning communities, reporting that they learned grammar, idioms, and slang from their roommates. Participants referred to both learning English and

TABLE 2

Benefits and Challenges of Multicultural Living-Learning Communities and Facilitators of International Students' Establishment of Positive Relationships with Roommates from Different Cultures

DOMAINS, CATEGORIES, AND SUBCATEGORIES	GROUPS	INDIVIDUAL
<i>Benefits</i>		
Cultural learning	G (5)	G (15)
Increase in multicultural competency	G (5)	G (14)
Sharing cultural traditions, customs, and activities	G (5)	T (12)
Learning and teaching language	T (4)	T (11)
Receiving support	T (4)	T (8)
<i>Challenges</i>		
Lifestyle and cultural differences	G (5)	T (13)
Lack of respect for, awareness of, and openness to different individuals or cultures	G (5)	T (11)
Differences and difficulties in communication	T (4)	V (7)
Language concerns	T (3)	V (6)
Lack of opportunities to get closer with one another	T (3)	V (4)
<i>Facilitators of positive relationships with roommates</i>		
Individual characteristics	G (5)	T (9)
Genuine respect for and interest in other cultures	T (4)	V (5)
Motivation to enhance adjustment	T (3)	V (3)
Personality	T (3)	V (3)
Interpersonal and relational characteristics	G (5)	T (13)
Interpersonal interactions	G (5)	T (11)
Communication	T (4)	V (7)
Similarities in interest and culture	T (4)	V (6)
Teaching and learning language	T (3)	V (4)
Strategies/rules used between roommates	V (2)	V (3)
Environmental features	V (2)	V (5)

Note. N = 5 groups, 15 participants. G = general (5 groups/14 or 15 participants),
T = typical (3 or 4 groups/ 8 to 13 participants), V = variant (2 groups/ 2 to 7 participants).

learning each other's native non-English languages. For example, Participant 9 said, "My roommates, two of them are from foreign countries . . . and their English is very good. So, it's a kind of motivation for me . . . I want to be like them." Residence halls provide a unique and important venue for practicing language because they allow international students to learn language in a casual and unstructured setting, which is an essential part of language learning (Bahrani et al., 2014; Rogers, 2004).

Finally, participants also typically discussed receiving support as a benefit of living with roommates from a different culture. Within this category, they discussed getting social support, such as help with homesickness, from their roommates and assistance with everyday activities such as using credit cards. Participant 3 said, "We were both away from home, and we were very understanding [of] one another's psychological needs when it comes to homesickness." Receiving support from roommates may be especially helpful for international students, who are likely to experience problems related to cultural adjustment and cultural shock and to feel frustrated, confused, and helpless (Sim et al., 2010; Winkelman, 1994).

Challenges of Multicultural Living-Learning Communities

Participants typically talked about lifestyle and cultural differences as a challenge in living with roommates from different cultures. While some of the lifestyle differences could come up in any roommate situation (cleanliness and noise levels), others were more directly related to culture (different religious practices or orientation to time). For example, Participant 9 said,

These days we always fight and argue about temperature . . . one girl is from Africa . . . is very sensitive for cold . . . she wants to turn on the heater always, but the other two girls don't like the hotness so we . . . they always . . . said [to] turn off.

Lifestyles including energy consumption behavior vary across different countries, influenced by factors such as sociocultural norms and policies in different countries (Lenzen et al., 2006).

Aligned with research by Sherry and colleagues (2009), it was also typical for participants to discuss the challenge of lack of respect, awareness of, and openness to different individuals or cultures. In this regard, their responses focused on such behavior as being asked intrusive questions or having to tolerate unwelcome guests in their rooms. For example, Participant 15 affirmed,

It's just sometimes her boyfriend is in [our] room . . . one day he just wore underwear and just went around my room. That made me a little annoyed. I could hear the sounds. I could not sleep that day. . . . I talked to my roommate the other day . . . she said like "Oh, why does it matter?"

. . . higher levels of social support were associated with better cross-cultural adjustment for international students.

... having more chances to interact seemed to enhance interpersonal relationships across different cultures, and programs that facilitated spontaneous interactions such as a cultural dinner seemed to be effective ways to increase interactions among domestic and international students.

The cultural differences regarding etiquette and acceptable behaviors among roommates seemed to contribute to participants feeling misunderstood and disrespected (Sherry et al., 2009).

Another challenge that was discussed variantly was the differences and difficulties in communication. Consistent with the findings of Antonio and Ofori-Dwumfuo (2015), the participants discussed aspects such as cultural norms related to expression of emotion, differences regarding direct communication, and feeling uncomfortable with discussing behaviors that go against one's cultural norms. As Participant 3 explained,

Sometimes with verbal and nonverbal behaviors, we wouldn't understand [them]. They are very emotional and [when] she is speaking her voice goes up and down, up and down. So, when she has talked to her parents . . . I wouldn't know if she was fighting or . . . I would tell her "I'm sorry it seemed like you were fighting." And, she would be like "No, I was just talking."

Communication differences seemed to include nonverbal communications as well as verbal communications; nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice vary a great deal depending on culture, which can create cultural misunderstanding (Matsumoto et al., 2013).

Participants also variantly discussed language concerns related to proficiency in English (such as feeling nervous and confused and being unfamiliar with slang). For example, Participant 11 said, "Sometimes it's hard to understand English when they speak fast. And I have to ask, could you say again? . . . But even though sometimes . . . they say it again, I couldn't understand." This finding highlights how international students' difficulty articulating their thoughts in English may interfere with communication and interaction with their roommates (Yao, 2014); even though living with a native speaker roommate can facilitate international students learning English, it can also be a source of stress.

Finally, the participants discussed the challenge of a lack of opportunities to get closer with one another, such as not seeing each other because of different schedules. For example, Participant 7 said, "Our plans and schedules are different . . . when I sleep, they get up. And when I get up, they are sleeping, so . . . we don't have enough time to talk." It is difficult to feel interpersonal attraction and to form interpersonal relationships if interactions with roommates are limited (i.e., mere exposure effect; Zajonc, 1968, p. 1). The positive relationship between exposure and interpersonal attraction and relationships has been found across different cultures (Heine & Renshaw, 2002).

Facilitators of International Students' Establishment of Positive Roommate Relationships

In discussing what facilitated positive roommate relationships, the participants typically mentioned individual characteristics such as personality qualities and traits. Within the category of individual characteristics, they variantly discussed having a genuine respect for and interest in other cultures. As Participant 11 noted, "They're really open to embrace different culture . . . they're willing to embrace everything, difference. Or they are willing to know about us." This finding is consistent with research indicating that international students who strive to appreciate cultural differences tend to adjust well and have less acculturative stress (Yakunina et al., 2013).

The participants also variantly discussed their motivation to enhance adjustment as a facilitating factor in their multicultural living. For example, Participant 7 said,

I think the motivation makes me easy to live with [the roommates] . . . sometimes I don't want to talk with them anymore. But sometimes I have a good motivation to talk with them. . . . the important thing is to keep the motivation to stay with them very [close] and friendly.

Motivation helps international students keep seeking opportunities to spend more time with their roommates and other U.S. students to enhance their learning, and those with higher self-determined motivation tend to adapt to new cultures better than those without it (Chirkov et al., 2007).

The last individual characteristic that the participants variantly discussed was related to personality (in this case, optimism). Participant 6 said, "She is so kind and thinks about what I might want and so she helps me to live a good life." This echoes the suggestion that international students who are optimistic and able to appreciate differences between different cultures are more likely to adjust well (Yakunina et al., 2013).

The second typical variable participants discussed as facilitating positive roommate relationships was the interpersonal and relational characteristics. Within this category, the participants typically talked about interpersonal interactions such as greeting one another and eating or having fun together. For example, Participant 2 stated,

It was very good when we ate different cultural food and listened to different cultural music . . . food is the way to get close . . . one of the foreigners . . . her face is so always angry, but she ate the okonomiyaki, and [then] her face is so smiley. And she'll talk to you "What's that?" so it's so nice to talk with her.

As mentioned earlier, having more chances to interact seemed to enhance interpersonal relationships across different cultures (Heine & Renshaw, 2002), and programs that facilitated spontaneous interactions such as a cultural dinner seemed to be effective ways to increase interactions among domestic and international students.

Motivation helps international students keep seeking opportunities to spend more time with their roommates and other U.S. students to enhance their learning, and those with higher self-determined motivation tend to adapt to new cultures better than those without it.

The participants discussed communication as a facilitating factor (i.e., being honest and straightforward with one another and apologizing when needed). For example, Participant 9 said, "Sometimes, my roommates bring their boyfriends, but we talk to each other whether we allow the boyfriends to stay all night or no." This type of communication can be even more important with roommates from different cultures because cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal behaviors can increase the likelihood of misunderstanding each other; international students from high-context cultures (such as Asia) may communicate less explicitly than people in Western cultures (Hall, 1976).

Participants reported that similar cultural backgrounds or shared interests in such things as music or majors facilitated their adjustment to living with roommates from a different culture. For example, Participant 5 said, "What I can think about is . . . sharing common things . . . like TV shows, what we like, or watching [a football team's name] games . . . so that helps, being together and watching TV, having fun." Having similarities in interest and culture would help any roommate situation, regardless of culture, which is in line with theories on interpersonal relationships. People tend to be more attracted to those who are like them (i.e., the similarity effect; Byrne, 1971).

On the other hand, some interpersonal characteristics that helped international students' roommate relationships are unique to multicultural living conditions, such as teaching and learning language, which the participants variantly discussed as something that helped them build relationships with one another. As Participant 12 affirmed, "I also teach one Japanese girl Korean, and I think especially we can get along with Japanese friends because our language has many similarities so that helps us to get close with Japanese friends." Language learning was not only a benefit of living with roommates from different cultures; it also promoted positive roommate relationships and an overall positive residential experience. Indeed, it seems that a cooperative learning environment where students teach each other's language enhances relationship and social development function (Burton, 1987; Cohen, 1984; Tsay & Brady, 2010).

Establishing room and house rules or strategies, such as having schedules for cleaning common areas or using common spaces if others are sleeping, was also variantly discussed in terms of interpersonal and relational characteristics. Participant 4 reported,

We kind of did some rules around the house so we can be living and respecting each other's areas and things . . . We have schedules to clean different areas like the common ones, and we have to respect them every time.

Given that international students from high-context cultures may not be familiar with explicitly communicating their expectations with roommates (Hall, 1976), establishing clear rules at the beginning of the relationship may be helpful.

Finally, the participants variantly discussed environmental features of their residence halls that facilitated their adjustment to multicultural living, such as having a common area in the hall or having larger rooms. Participant 2 described the residence hall as being "really cozy and nice. I have my own closet, and it's like a house. We're a little community . . . so that helps the good environment." A shared space to build a community and mingle with others and a building structure that promotes more

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interactions, such as rooms clustered in pods, provide students more opportunities to build a sense of community, which will promote learning each other's culture and reduce biases toward each other (Devlin et al., 2008).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study has implications for residence life professionals who coordinate multicultural living-learning communities and help international students adjust to living with roommates from different cultures. It would be beneficial for residence life professionals and resident assistants to receive training on the cultural challenges of international students and culturally competent ways to address cultural issues. For example, training can include a discussion of international students' challenges in multicultural living-learning communities. Given the cultural differences in communication, it would be helpful to train residence life professionals and resident assistants on cross-cultural communication and team building so they can learn more about culturally sensitive ways of helping international students communicate and mediate with their roommates when conflicts arise. Collaboration with offices for international students on such training would also be useful given their expertise in the specific needs of these students. In addition to training for residence life staff, it would also be important to recruit culturally diverse resident assistants, including international students, so that residents perceive RAs as being approachable, which would lower their anxiety about bringing roommate issues up with RAs.

It would be helpful to include residential programs that specifically address mediation, conflict resolution, and healthy relationships and boundaries based on a multicultural approach. In other words, rather than imposing U.S. conflict resolution styles on international students, it would be helpful for both international and domestic students to discuss culturally sensitive ways of addressing potential conflicts so that they can find a way that works for both parties. Given that some participants reported not having enough opportunities to spend time with their domestic roommates, social programming to encourage peer interactions (such as ice breakers, a cultural potluck dinner, and day trips where domestic students can share U.S. culture with international students) may be helpful. Partnering with other campus offices such as the counseling center (to develop skills related to effective communication) and student activities offices (to promote social programming opportunities) would help support residence life staff in these endeavors.

Given the importance that participants attributed to communication, it might also be helpful to pay careful attention to establishing roommate agreements that clarify expectations and utilize strategies to negotiate any challenges. RAs can facilitate roommate agreements and help roommates discuss a range of typical challenges, including

cultural conflicts. This process could provide opportunities for international and domestic students to understand each other's culture and proactively discuss potential barriers they may experience; the agreement would also be helpful for discussion and management of their cultural differences when conflicts arise in the future. RAs or international student offices could also provide drop-in hours so that students can seek additional support.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Like other qualitative studies, this study had a small sample size. All the participants in focus group sessions were cisgender female traditional-age international students in one mid-Atlantic private institution. We caution against generalizing these findings to other populations. In addition, participants were self-selected and thus might have been more motivated and eager to adjust to the U.S. college experience than those who did not participate, and the perspectives of the participants in this study may not represent all international students. In addition, although the judges set aside their own biases before the coding started and discussed the influence of their biases throughout the process, their own housing experiences may still have influenced how they interpreted the participants' statements and created domains, core ideas, and categories—and they may have paid more attention to the data that confirmed their biases and expectations. Lastly, in focus groups, some participants might not have shared their thoughts as readily as they might have in an individual interview, and their statements may have been influenced by other participants.

In terms of future research, it would be interesting to replicate this study with a more diverse international student body. Additionally, formal program evaluation of multicultural living-learning community programs would be beneficial to assess how well they are accomplishing intended goals. A mixed-methods approach would be particularly useful to assess outcomes quantitatively, as well as giving residents a voice about what is working and how the program could be improved. It would also be interesting to examine the perspectives of domestic students who participate in such programs to examine how this participation impacts their cultural awareness and maturity, cultural knowledge, and cross-cultural communication skills.

CONCLUSION

The present study adds to the limited literature on international students' experiences of multicultural living-learning communities. By reviewing their unique experiences in these communities, including the benefits and challenges of such an environment and what facilitated international students' positive roommate relationships, residence life professionals can develop culturally sensitive multicultural living-learning community programs that will better meet international students' needs. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your campus doing to train your student staff on the challenges of students living with roommates from different cultures? If nothing, what needs to be implemented?
2. What suggestions made by the researchers feel applicable to your current housing program? Is there a role you can play in your day-to-day interactions with international students and their motivation?
3. What partnerships do you have in place with the Office of International Students? How successful are these partnerships? If none are in place, what collaborative activities could be implemented to enhance the housing experience for students living with roommates from a different culture?
4. What activities are in place to build community at all levels for these students: roommates, floor, building, and community?
5. As these findings represent research completed on cisgender female international students due to their location restrictions, how could the implication of the data and conversation shift based on the participants' gender identity? Might findings be different for other identities?
6. How might these experiences be the same or different for students living with roommates from a different culture who are not living in a multicultural living-learning community?

Discussion questions developed by Zachary Bevis, Florida Gulf Coast University, and Tony W. Cawthon, Clemson University