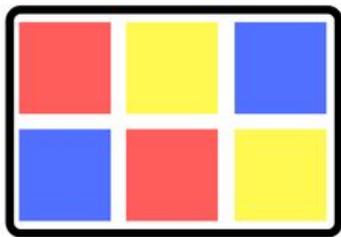
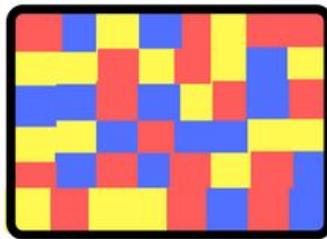


Communication Across Boundaries:
A Study of Cultural Integration on Cornell University's Campus
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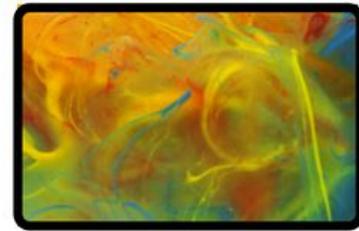
Cultural diversity is an important aspect of a society as it facilitates collaboration in various settings. In order to understand the dynamics of the multiplicity of cultures, it is important to unerringly define “culture”. According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at University of Minnesota, culture can be defined as the collective patterns of behavior and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These behaviors or the knowledge of different groups are expressed through language, religion, cuisine, social habits, and the arts. Also these patterns do not only identify the members of a cultural group but distinguish a group from another. These groups can be racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, gender, or anything pertaining to an important aspect of one’s identity (CARLA). With the knowledge of what constitutes culture, we can now explore cultural diversity and its importance.



Salad Bowl



Salsa



Melting Pot

Integration of culture has been explained in two ways: salad bowl or melting pot. The salad bowl concept suggests that different cultures coexist with one another whereas the melting pot concept explains the phenomenon of heterogenous cultures merging to form a homogenous one (Thornton). Based on our observation, we see a third, rather ideal, type, of integration-- the salsa. In this form of integration, each group is not contained to their own but they are closely connected to those who are different from them without losing their unique identity. The presence of any of these patterns affects society in different ways.

With the integration of cultures as its subject matter, this research paper analyzes cross cultural communication at the campus of a world-class higher educational institution. This study took a grounded theory approach to analyze the communications between different groups on Cornell University campus in Ithaca, New York. To conduct this investigation, we studied people’s behavior at a designated dining hall, particularly their choice of seat and conducted interviews centralized on diversity at Cornell. The input of our respondents did not only help us formulate our theory about the barriers in intercultural communication, but guided us to the milieus where observation would be worthwhile.

Motivation for Investigation

Even though centuries have passed since the colonial and slave era, discrimination based on race and ethnicity continues to be an issue in the United States. Although racial groups other than white Americans are not deprived of legally sanctioned rights, discrimination and

institutional racism continues to affect minority groups across the country. This unfortunate reality of this country presents itself through high number of Black victims of gun violence, unnecessary surveillance that invades privacy of Arab Americans, irrational accusations of Mexicans being rapists and welfare dependent. Discrimination is also experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community whose personal liberties have been destroyed by denying them the choice to use public restrooms. These are just a tip of the iceberg of acts of discriminations. These groups, along with plenty others we have not mentioned, have been the targets of most hate crimes in the United States because false perceptions of cultures have permeated this country.

While contemporary issues involving racial conflicts in the United States strongly influenced our interest, it was our personal experiences as students of minority groups at Cornell University and non-white citizens of the United States led us to take the initiative to study the barriers that impact the way different groups on campus interact with each other. Keeping our personal accounts in mind, we explored the issue of racial conflict in the United States which seemingly got more prominent with a historic Presidential election. Experts have attributed the exacerbation of tribalistic race relations to the hateful rhetoric of president-elect, Donald John Trump's campaign of 2016 (Lerner). After he won the Presidential election, there has been an increase in the reported instances of hate crimes in many parts of the United States (Jaeger). Although similar instances have not taken place on Cornell campus, students have admitted (including ourselves and others as we further discovered during our research) to experiencing passive discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation or other aspects of their identity. Acknowledging such political polarization affecting recent times in the United States and remembering personal experiences as students at Cornell University, we decided to observe how the members of different cultural groups mingle.

Cornell University: An Educational Institution Prizing Diversity

Cornell University, located in Ithaca, New York, has a reputation for being the most diverse Ivy League institution. Instead of a single chief diversity officer like most universities, Cornell uses multiple diversity officers to advance diversity and inclusion in a large campus (Johnson-Elie). Cornell has a unique history of promoting integration. Both its co-founders, Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White emphasized diversity and inclusion. Ezra Cornell stated in a letter on February 17, 1867 that he wanted both men and women to be educated at the university to ensure equal opportunities. Even at the disapproval of the enrolled students who were all white, in 1874, Andrew Dickson White insisted on accepting students of color. Throughout history, Cornell hit many milestones of promoting diversity through various subjects of study and establishing organizations that can support various types of groups. Through its multimedia, Cornell has expressed its value for diversity and inclusion by recognizing its importance in its operational pursuits (Diversity & Inclusion).

In 2011, Cornell established the Center for Intercultural Dialogue which holds programs that provide a space for students of different backgrounds to communicate. This center also houses the offices of Cornell Intercultural Programs, the Asian and Asian American Center, the African, Latino, Asian, Native American Students Programming Board, the Alumni-Student Mentoring Program, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Center (Center for Intercultural Dialogue). Despite having such strong pursuits at promoting diversity, various accounts from students have indicated that such initiatives may have slower progress than expected. In our paper we provide not just an overview of these statements but analyze the factors contributing to this particular issue.

Cornell's most recent step towards promoting diversity and inclusion was the planning initiative of 2012, called the "Toward New Destinations". This plan has four core principles composition (the demographic make up), engagement (one's personal, social and professional commitment to this institution's goals), inclusion (interpersonal relations), and achievement (levels of attainment for underrepresented individuals or groups). These compositions are aimed at expanding the enrollment of students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in education, conduct needs assessments to expand programming and support for students, conduct analysis of factors that affects student achievement to provide professional development and academic support, and improve academic and social life for students. Also adopted in the same year was the Intergroup Dialogue Project which is a peer-facilitated course with the objective to raise awareness of social justice issues (OADI).

The diversity initiatives are not only aimed at improving student experience but other members of Cornell community as well. However, for this study, we focus on student experience. It is obvious that students have interactions with each other, regardless of their background, in classroom or other academic settings with the absence of any type of outward and intolerable discrimination. However, our conversations with respondents open the curtains for student life that is not under the supervision of university administration. These accounts have not only indicated the ways these diversity initiatives lack success, but they also provided insights into the factors that affect the way students communicate with each other.

Methodology

We took a grounded theory approach to our study. Most of our interviewees were students since this study focuses on student experience at this institution. Alongside interviews, we gathered data from observations of a setting that are popular to students and the behavior of those students in that setting. Going into the field, we had a set of subquestions regarding their views on diversity at Cornell and we attempted to lead the conversation in a way that answer these questions. Then we analyzed all these voices to identify a common theme.

We chose a designated dining hall that operates on weekdays and serves lunch and dinner and noticed where people situated themselves for meals. We attempted to obtain valid reasons for the choice of their seats and voice their opinion on diversity at Cornell. We found our

conversations with these respondents worthwhile because they were the most obvious insights into how their identity or background shape their experience here as students. Their input really helped us distinguish social life from academics as these stories were deep and personal. In addition to student perspectives, we also decided to interview some leading staff who have witnessed the evolution of intergroup relations on campus. This issue's history and progress are important for our context as they determine the magnitude of the current situation in comparison to that of the past. Comparing the insight of a staff member allowed us to confirm if the perspective of current students aligned with administrative level perception.

Our methodology was appropriate because taking note of seating choices in the dining helped shape our assumptions about a person making the decision to interact with another person based on visible factors such as physical features unique to their origin or manner of fashion or action. A dining hall is vastly different from a seminar or lecture hall where students do not have the same range of choices of seats or association with people. In a class, a student may have to engage in discussions and with people who are different from them. Usually, no amount of reluctance to do these things is as high as the student's aspiration to receive a passing grade or avoid any form of confrontation. This condition is not present in a dining hall where a student can choose to interact with whomever they want, and to an extent, however they want. This is why observing people in the dining hall was important to our investigation. We could see what drove them to mingle with each other and what drove them apart. Furthermore, our interviews with chosen students and staff members were patently the most informative.

Even though our method was suitable to our research, we encountered some pronounced difficulties. Advancement of technology in the twenty-first century has accompanied higher usability of portable devices such as smartphones or laptops. As we noticed during field observations, these portable devices have an immense amount of power to preoccupy people's attention, hence, become an obstacle in interaction among people. It became troublesome to decide whether to attribute the lack of interaction to people's preconceived bias or the presence of a distraction such as technology.

Another unaccommodating circumstance for us was the seemingly sensitivity of our topic. We attempted to get information from as many students as possible, but several students we approached seemed to possess the belief that conversations about difference were a taboo, especially when they concerned race, gender, religion, etc. When we had attempted to speak with people at Okenshields Dining Hall, some of our potential interviewees would agree to answer a few questions for us but would disappear from sight as soon as we turned our backs. We approached a table with an interesting arrangement with the notion that they would be willing to talk to us but were proven wrong. We were definitely barred from obtaining information we sought so we had reevaluate our approach to develop a relationship with potential respondents. With an unsuccessful rate of exchange, we turned our attention to gatekeepers who had access to groups with which we did not take part. This was deemed ineffective since opinions about group differences are not surface topics. We needed to develop trust with the interviewees before we

could reach this deeper layer of information. Since we were constrained by time which kept us from reaching such depth, we relied heavily on the collection of observational field notes, which textualized what we observed.

In addition to external obstacles, we had the most prominent internal one--- our bias. However, being conscious of our biases as members of minority groups made managing such partiality less difficult. The preconceived notions we had include, but not limited to, the awareness of “white privilege”, the knowledge and understanding of historical oppression of non-white races in the United States, knowledge of current events, and our own understanding of different cultures formulated from our experiences and educational backgrounds. Being mindful of these biases helped us sense that we had an unconscious preference in selecting who to interview, who to observe in the dining halls, and what words we chose when interviewing people. Eliminating all bias is unattainable, but we attempted to limit our biases to the best of our ability.

Outcomes, Analysis, and Interpretations

Data Source Inventory:

We had several respondents with different degrees of insights. Additionally, observation without interaction was useful. Below, we have organized all the responses and observations by highlighting the main idea of their response or of our observations.

Type	Who/What	Setting	Intention	Main Idea
Interview	Dr. John Forester - Professor of Urban and Regional Studies	Sibley Hall	Understand Race and Governmental Participation	Upbringing plays a role in the perspectives you have as an adult.
Interview	Dr. Renee Alexander- Dean of Students	626 Thurston	To understand the inner working of the intergroup dialogue project	Cornell still has a lot of work to do in terms of making this campus inclusive.
Interview	Shareef Hussam - undergraduate student	In front of Cascadilla Residential Hall, Collegetown	Opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Cornell’s attempt to diversify has failed because people are vastly segregated based on culture and socioeconomic class.
Interview	Nethan Reddy-	West Campus	Opinion on diversity	People at Cornell tend to

	undergraduate student		and inclusion and student life	stay in their own groups and don't really venture out.
Interview	John Andrew Elliot-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	A lot of people have difficulty mixing with others because they were not previously exposed.
Interview	Dmitri - undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Didn't experience discrimination on campus. Wasn't willing to talk about this issue.
Interview	Deeban-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	He choice his seat because he wanted to be alone because he was busy.
Interview	Isay-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Saw away from people because he did not want to disturb others. He was also in a hurry.
Interview	Gideon-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Sitting with his Indian friend, Mahashri, who he made plans to meet up with before. Unwilling to participate.
Interview	Mahashri-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Sitting with his white friend, Gideon, who he made plans to meet up with before. Unwilling to participate.
Interview	Ashab Alamgir-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Cornell's cross cultural communication is like a salad bowl.

Interview	Khanza-undergraduate student	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Reason for choice of seat and opinion on diversity and inclusion and student life	Cornell's diversity promotion is very superficial and people are segregated. Even though such separation can be attributed to race, it is mostly based on socioeconomic status.
Silent Observation #1	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Understand the behavior of Cornell students and their interactions with others	Students are mostly on their phones or laptops and tend to not interact much during the busy time of the day. However, those who do interact very rarely are the groups are mixed with whites and non-whites
Silent Observation #2	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Oakenshields Dining Hall	Understand the behaviors of Cornell students when they select who to sit with.	Students select where to sit based on physical features and mix when they are required to
Article	"Why I Don't Mix My Group of Friends" by Colette deVille	Internet Article	To understand the logic behind not mixing groups of friends	People do not mix in fear of discomfort.

Obtaining a variety of information allowed us to best capture the current state of different cultural groups and campus and their modes of communication. After processing the information from data collection we coded and categorized the data as such:

Coding and Categories:

Codes

- Experiences
- Family History
- De Facto Reasons
- Logical Reasons
- Unawareness
- Background information
- Opinion on different groups
- Classifying oneself and others
- Human nature of tribalism
- Proper way to promote diversity
- Feeling of Not Belonging
- Feelings of Power and Privilege
- Exposure and Understanding
- Qualities Needed to Cultivate Integration and Inclusion
- Suggestions

These codes spawned from our reflection of two matters: the way we developed our worldview and some trends in the data. We, then, classified our codes in the following categories. These categories reflect the way the participants, especially the students, responded. They all described their background, recounted their experience, provided their assessment of different groups and diversity on campus and suggestion for improvement.

Categories

- **Reasons for Separation**
 - De Facto Reasons
 - Logical Reasons
 - Unawareness
 - Human nature of tribalism
 - Social conformity
- **Effects**
 - Feeling of Not Belonging
 - Feelings of Power and Privilege
- **Reasons for Integration and Inclusion**
 - Exposure and Understanding
- **Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)**
 - Experiences
 - Family History
- **Opinions about Current State of Interactions Among Different Groups**
 - Opinion about different groups
 - Classifying groups
 - Classifying themselves
- **Solutions**
 - Qualities Needed to Cultivate Integration and Inclusion
 - Require study abroad
 - Suggestions

Data Separation and Analysis:

Below are the categories with direct quotes from our data. We also included the assigned codes.

Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)

Code: Experiences	Data Source: Shareef Hussam
Category: Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)	
<p>Quote: “I have seen firsthand how poor the cross-cultural communication amongst Cornellians is even at the most basic level. On a recent field trip in a class comprised primarily of graduate students, I saw how much the tribal instincts of humans came into play. In the group there were eight white American students, two Indian students, three Chinese students, myself, and another Asian-American. The Chinese were always together in one group while the Indians and Asian-American stuck with the white Americans. In a class of 15 students, the only ones to talk with both the white Americans and the Chinese were myself and another ‘third culture kid’--- a half American and half German woman. We were the only two to even make any effort to get to know our fellow classmates and we even delved into substantive issues such as trying to increase participation from the international Asian students.”</p>	

Code: Experiences	Data Source: Nethan Reddy
Category: Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)	
Quote: “It is clear that Casey has an inner circle of white students: Angelica, Kristy, Alex, Matt Indimine, Jamie, Kathleen, that are closer to her much more than anyone else and it is clear that it is impossible for someone like me to join this group”	

Code: Experiences	Data Source: John Andrew Elliot
Category: Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)	
Quote: “He told me about a time he walked into a party where there were mostly Koreans. Once he walked in, a guy yelled, ‘Who let this white motherfucker in?’ Andrew’s friend who invited him apologized and said the guy was drunk.”	

Code: Family History	Data Source: John Forester Interview
Category: Recounting (childhood and previous experiences)	
Quote: “But I’m saying in this family growing up in the sixties and in the sixties the atmosphere was not so much that anything goes, but that anything is possible. I mean if... after months after the war and a strong middle class...there was the cultural community. That you really could make, better. You could deal with poverty and deal with racism. We could deal with ... Gender issues came a little later. So that there was this attitude for a while. Cultural moment where we really can take care of us. And I was right there... I mean this is my generation of people - right in the middle of that.”	

Synthesizing Category “Recounting”:

All four of our respondents here told us their compelling first hand accounts of discrimination. John Forester’s story did not take place at Cornell campus, but he provided a notion of optimism around defeating discrimination. Nethan, John, and Shareef are current students who experienced discrimination because of their race by members of different races. From these stories, we can confirm the existence of discrimination based on one’s background on campus.

Reasons for Separation

Code: Human nature of tribalism	Data Source: Silent Observation #2
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “When looking at the composition of who was sitting at the different tables, I realized that race/skin color/culture defined who would be sitting together. All of the Latino looking people sat together, all of the black looking students sat together, all of the white looking students sat together, and the same goes for the Asian students. I hardly witnessed any mixing of the groups.”	

Code: Human nature of tribalism	Data Source: Silent Observation #2
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “I wondered if people felt more comfortable sitting with people who are similar to them given that dinner is the you socialize and recap what happened throughout the day. This is my experience with dinner and it makes sense to sit with people who are going to be able to relate to your experiences.”	

Code: Unawareness	Data Source: Dr. Renee Alexander - Dean of Students
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “One of his responsibilities is to evaluate what is doing what's happening and how we can connect all of this and expand on what it is that it's a big job because you're really trying to change people's behaviors. Not everybody thinks it's necessary. Not everyone. Is ready to confront the fact that they have unconscious bias.”	

Code: Human nature of tribalism	Data Source: Nethan Reddy
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “the barriers are tendencies to stick with things and people that are familiar because they’re more relatable”	

Code: Social Conformity	Data Source: Nethan Reddy
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “It’s more socially acceptable to stay in a group and follow its norms than try to branch out, and there’s also a notion that learning and interacting with other cultures disrespects your own.”	

Code: Unawareness	Data Source: Shareef Hussam
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quote: “In analyzing the root cause of this problem both sides are to blame. Some international students are very cliquy but at the same time white Americans lack the international exposure to even begin to bridge cultural boundaries.”	

Code: Logical Reasoning	Data Source: Why I Don’t Mix My Group of Friends by Colette deVille
Category: Reasons for Separation	
Quotes: “Why waste time with people I don’t genuinely enjoy being with—life’s too short and I’m no longer in college.” “The catch is, my close friends hail from disparate social circles and in my social calendar they simply don’t mix.”	

Synthesizing Category “Reason for Separation”:

We were previously aware of the segregated social life on campus and were proven correct by our fieldwork. Our respondents and non-interacting observations have given us the barriers affecting cross cultural communication. Two of our respondents attributed the reason for separation for tribalism. We witnessed how people associated with people who are like them as we saw black students socializing with black students or white students associating with white students. This leads to the understanding that this instinctive human nature of tribalism is a main reason why students of various backgrounds do not mix at a deeper level, deeming the diversity initiatives ineffective. Furthermore, students tend to be unaware of this bias, as generalized by Dr. Alexander. The unconsciousness of the behavior is another factor contributing to this issue.

Reasons for Integration

Code: Exposure and Understanding	Data Source: Silent Observation #2
Category: Reasons for Integration	
Quote: “The argument against this is that at Cornell, as leaders of the worlds, we need to communicate across differences and not to do so is a disservice to ourselves and world progress.”	

Synthesizing Category “Reason for Integration”:

As students of this institution, we know that other students come from various parts of the world. We also know of notable alumni which proves that this institution is unique in the sense that it educates potential leaders of the world. Having exposure and deep understanding are two important factors constituting a good leader which is why cultural integration on this campus is vital.

Effects

Code: Feelings of Power and Privilege	Data Source: Dr. Renee Alexander- Dean of Students
Category: Effects	
<p>Quote: “But the majority of white students are not innocent. And I'm not singling them out because it's not like you can have biases or preconceived notions of course you do but you do not have the power dynamic. To your advantage. Okay. And that's what a lot of students of color experience here is. The tension in the campus climate because they're our preconceived notions about students that look like you. And the white students have perpetrated that may not even be. Completely conscious of their deeply ingrained bias.”</p>	

Code: Feelings of Not Belonging	Data Source: Dr. Renee Alexander- Dean of Students
Category: Effects	
<p>Quote: Within a couple of weeks she was saying to me you know because I'm not so sure if I belong here I'm in the college of arts and sciences and I want to major in economics ... She said like my parents--I had a job my parents depended on my income so she's from a very modest income family. ... she was saying my parents came over break over the break but over the parents' weekend. She said they stayed in the room with me to save money. So she said I took them to our RPCC for dinner. So my dad who was born in the Dominican Republic partly speaks with an accent. Dark brown skin man A table with just 2 chairs so he goes and asks these 2 white girls if he could take chairs from their table and they said yeah but she says that he takes the chair and as he is wheeling the chair over there one of them just sticks her tongue out. And the father he didn't see it but the mother saw The mother was really upset. ... So you know she said to me she said you know Renee ... It makes me feel like I Don't belong here. I don't belong.”</p>	

Synthesizing Category “Feeling of Not Belonging”

None of our student respondents outwardly admitted how much the lack of proper cultural integration affected their psyche. This is why the viewpoint of a faculty member with the position to observe the effects of discrimination on students has been worthwhile. Dr. Alexander's observation shows the power dynamics among students and the advantages a white student (as opposed to a non-white student) has. She also served as voice of students who are overwhelmed because they feel that they do not belong here.

Opinions About the Current State of Interactions Among Different Groups

Code: Classifying Groups	Data Source: Shareef Hussam
Category: Opinions About the Current State of Interactions Among Different Groups	
Quote: “At cornell, this results in several types of groups...the wealthy Whites and Greeks mixed groups of “middle-class” whites and Asians from wealthy suburbia...groups based on major or extracurricular activity and everyone else. In my view 50 to 70 percent fall into groups first two groups whites and greeks and the mixed groups of middle class.”	

Code: Opinion About Different Groups	Data Source: Shareef Hussam
Category: Opinions About the Current State of Interactions Among Different Groups	
Quote: “This monolith is largely in its own world on campus privileged, unaware of the struggles of their peers and generally so self-absorbed that trying to educate them with roundtable discussions is a frivolous exercise.”	

Synthesizing Category “Opinion About Different Groups”:

Students on campus feel that the student populations on campus are unaware of the struggles of their peers from lower SES status who do not fall into the category of “white, Greek, and middle class”. This opinion can divide the Cornell population and create a feeling of otherness.

Solutions

Code: Suggestions	Data Source: Silent Observation #2
Category: Solutions	
Quote: “After this observation, I realized that people chose to be with people who are similar to them and in places where there is a standard behavior choosing who to be with does not matter. In order to mitigate the low level of intercultural integration Okenshields can bring in large circular tables.”	

Code: Qualities Needed to Cultivate Diversity and Inclusion	Data Source: Dr. Renee Alexander- Dean of Students
Category: Solutions	
Quote: “But very important of the what underpins the course is discourse. Civility. Listening. And. Knowing	

how to talk and engage with people who think differently and come from different backgrounds.”

Code: Qualities Needed to Cultivate Diversity and Inclusion	Data Source: Dr. Renee Alexander- Dean of Students
Category: Solutions	
Quote: “Being a very good listener. Learning how to. reserve judgment. Okay being non-judgmental. Really understanding. The importance of dialogue respecting. What other people's opinions are. And not judging a person. Because they think. Differently or have different experiences. To really be a mature and open mind individual. “	

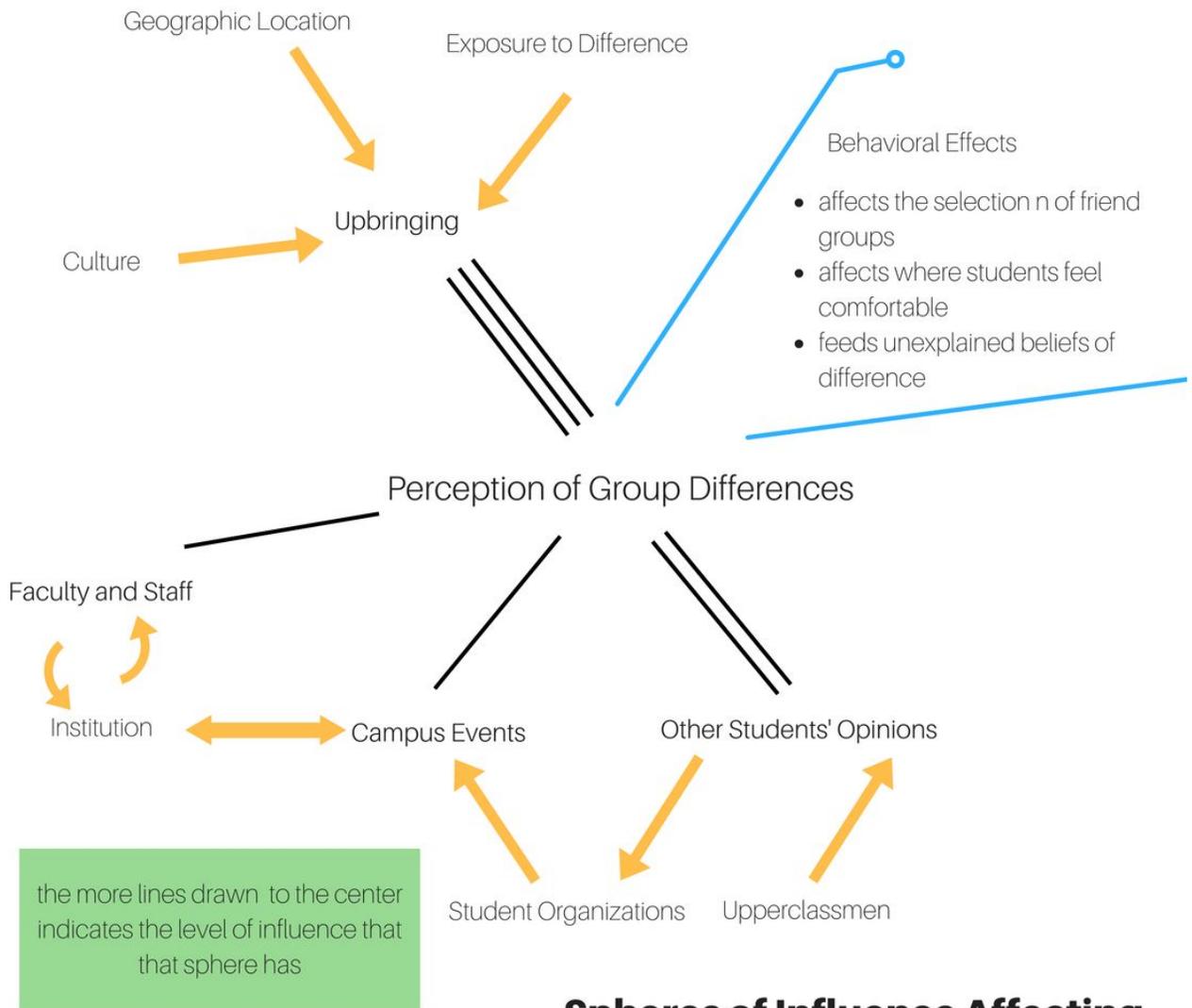
Code: Suggestion	Data Source: Shareef Hussam
Category: Solutions	
Quote: “The only way to truly foster cross-cultural communication is to require study abroad to a country significantly different than the West.”	

Synthesizing Category “Solutions”:

Even though there is a sorrowful awareness of the lack of integration on campus, some of our respondents showed optimism that may improve the situation. The Dean of Students, Dr. Alexander has provided a way for students to take actions themselves by reserving judgement and sustaining an open mind. Shareef suggested that domestic students be required to participate in study abroad programs where they are exposed to a culture that is significantly different from theirs. Both of these respondents have indicated that increasing exposure will foster healthy cross cultural relationships on campus.

Category Synthesis Compilation and Theory:

This diagram illustrates the dynamics shaping cultural integration at Cornell University.



Spheres of Influence Affecting Group Perceptions on Campus

Based on our observations of Okenshields and dialogue with our respondents, we have a set of key factors that, we believe, precisely reflect the social behaviors of students at Cornell University.

1. *Background plays one of the most dominant roles in shaping the behavior of students.* This can be racial or ethnic background or socioeconomic status of a student. These factors greatly determine a person's upbringing and conditions a person's preconceived notion about the people they encounter when they attend this institution.
2. *Among students at Cornell, there is a tendency of reluctance to step out of familiar environments.* Stepping out of comfort zone can be a source of stress so it becomes logical to stay within one's social circle that is comfortable or rather an outlet to destress. Perhaps this can be attributed to the rigorous standard of academics which can be a major source of stress for students. When there is one major source of pressure that one has limited control over, it seems more logical to eliminate the one that is tractable. It becomes logical to be friends with people who happen to be the same ethnicity or of the same socioeconomic class. Furthermore, In seeking comfort, people avoid make others uncomfortable in social situations. This leads us to the perpetual disintegration between different groups and the increased idea that different people cannot work together.
3. *Division between different groups of students are causes of both awareness of certain factors and unawareness of other ones.* For example, some students are not aware of the certain biases they have which leads them to only associating with familiarity. Also, some people, even with the enthusiasm to mingle with people different from them, choose aloofness because they do not know how to approach. On the other hand, some people are aware of their status and type of power they have in a community which also determines with whom they would associate.
4. *While the diversity and inclusion initiatives have been able to promote integration in certain areas, it has not been effective in promoting integration to its full potential.* Many of the programs sponsored by the institution can promote integration of cultures but students are not required to participate. This may be one reason why there seems to be segregation in social life on campus.
5. *While there are opportunities for students to find their own kind on campus, facing patent discrimination impacts many students.* People who experienced microaggression, discrimination, oppression tend to lose the sense of belongingness. This results in low self-esteem and inferiority complex which can greatly impact a student's personal growth while they try to pursue their degrees.
6. *Increasing exposure to differences has a high potential to foster the ideal cross cultural communication at this institution, thereby diminish the segregation students face in social life..* The keys to bringing different groups together are engagement and open mindedness. The Dean of students, Dr. Renee Alexander, has expressed the need for respecting one another's opinion in a matured and sensible manner. An undergraduate

student, Shareef Hussam, acknowledged his personal growth from a study abroad program and suggested that his peers can highly benefit from similar experience. Exposure can facilitate engagement and open mindedness. While it is not financially practical for all students to study abroad, the presence of diverse student body creates an environment for sufficient exposure. The only thing missing is engagement with each other.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the study, we had the similar research topic but it somewhat varied from the actual research question on which we ended up focusing most of our attention. We up focusing on the barriers that impact cross cultural communication on campus. Our methodology of observing and choosing respondents from a dining hall were purposeful since we gained insight into student experiences off the administrative radar. Communicating with a more experienced member of the Cornell community helped us confirm the reality of these experiences. Our sincerity of respondents have helped us deeply explore an important issue that does not only affect people on this campus but the entire society.

This study did not only confirm some of the notions we had, but led us to discover new factors shaping cultural integration at Cornell. While we were aware that one's background shapes the way they interact with others, our investigation gave us a deeper understanding of the extent this factor shapes people's ability to interact with others. Curiosity, a type of spirit that takes one out of their comfort zone, may have brought us (the students) to Cornell, a place we chose to fulfill our academic pursuits. However, during this study, we found that it was the unwillingness to step out of comfort zone keeping deep interactions among highly different groups. Other factors affecting such interactions, as we found, are unconscious bias stemming from upbringing and degree of exposure and consciousness of power and privileges. Ultimately, it was obvious that phenotypic features played a role before people bonded over similarities in personality. Cornell's value of diversity is an aspect of this institution that we greatly cherished as undergraduate students. During our research, we were able to further explore the opportunities that came with this university's actions to promote diversity on campus and create an inclusive environment for students. As we wondered why social segregation was evident in spite of tremendous advocacy for diversity, we encountered opinions that emphasized the failure of diversity and inclusion initiatives. We also learned about the devastating impact this issue has on students, especially those who are not part of the upper-class and/or white groups. Observations and conversations showed the potential benefits of exposure regarding this issue. Nevertheless, even in the face of such unfortunate reality on campus and the outside world, there seems to be some optimism among students especially in the period of globalization.

When we started our research, our personal experiences gave us somewhat of a head start because life experiences as members of culturally minority groups, we were aware of the challenges that many non-white students face in Cornell University. While this was an

advantage, it may have also impacted our methodology because our preconceived notion may have impacted the way we approached this investigation. We mentioned the formal definition of culture and the types of integrations which we thought were important background knowledge for our research. We would like to point out that throughout our study, our focus did not adhere to all the aspects of culture. We focused on the race of our respondents, but did not really take all aspects of culture into account. Despite our findings, we would like to emphasize that the way students communicate and the factors that shape such integration is very complex and that our methodologies were simultaneously fruitful and flawed. While the purpose of our research was to gain important skills in our field of study, the main drive came from the alacrity to explore an issue that personally affected us. With hope that our study and presentation of this issue serve as a model, we advocate further research into this matter as it is vital element of this institution's operational goals as a world-class university.

Reflections:

Najila Ahsan's Reflection:

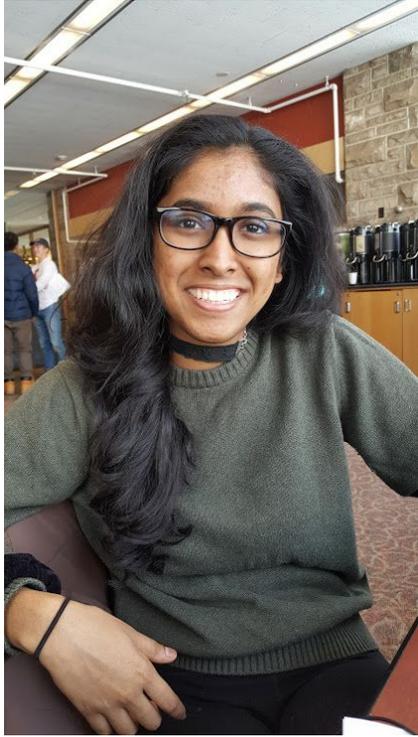
This research was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as an undergraduate student and taught me, perhaps one of, if not the most, important skills as I pursue my goal of becoming an urban planner. Before taking this course, my notion of qualitative research was very limited. Observing and recounting is simple until you become conscious of your own biases or step out of your comfort zone. Qualitative research is not just a fancy way of storytelling, but a systematic method for identifying, addressing, and dealing with social phenomena.

The topic of our research made my experience even more interesting. Telling my friends about this class and the type of work I was doing led them to talk about things they've never talked about before. Growing up as an immigrant in the United States, the topic of race seemed to dominate dinner conversations at home, but it seemed to be effortfully avoided when I socialized with my friends. Mentioning my research seemed to get my friends, especially the non-white ones, to open up, but the advent of the presidential election seemed to motivate people to recount their experiences of discrimination and admit how much they are impacted.

As I talked about my research, people asked what my motivation was for this topic and I stated that it was my personal experience. However, as I kept working on it, I realized that the story I mentioned in my proposal was not powerful enough of an experience to keep me from disregarding my research. In fact, I have not, even as a South-Asian Muslim woman, experienced aggression to the extent to many women like me have. I realized as I was writing this paper, besides the slight unwillingness to conform to what's normal, my drive actually came from the willingness to learn how to address sensitive topics. After taking this course, qualitative research seems to be a great way to approach and explore topics that make people uncomfortable and will prove to be an important skill as an urban planner.

Isaiah Murray's Reflection:

From this experience, I have discovered that there is really no end to researching a topic. Any researcher may think they have reached the point of obtaining no new information, but something is always bound to make you question all of the research you had done from the beginning. This happened for me.



While Najila and I were sitting in Libe Cafe writing this paper, two friends came over and began talking to us. (Gayathri is pictured below.) “What are you working on?” Gayathri asked. I explained to her what we were working on. Her other friend Adri listened in. After explaining, Gayathri said, “I think our friend group is very diverse. Like we just are. In Puerto Rico, I was the only Indian girl in the entire school and I was made fun of for that, but now I see the value in it. From a young age, I learned to communicate with people who were different from me. I lived in the Puerto Rican culture and the Indian culture also. I basically was bicultural.” This began a conversation about people who are of mixed heritage and how we are given the tools from a very young age to navigate different worlds, a skill that is such a blessing.

As I move forward with this question of intergroup communications, I will have to pay more attention to the invisible experiences that make people have the cultural capital to navigate different worlds, race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. are all identifying factors, but the intersectionality of them all creates complex individuals who interact in very different ways with the people around them.

From this class I have deduced that qualitative research is a fancy way of finding things out about people and presenting it. Research was far more intimidating before this class. Now I see that it is a presentation of data in a way that you can justify its truth. Research is a trust building exercise with yourself. You have to be truthful when you think you are imposing bias. You have to be truthful when you are telling a story and not tell it in a way that supports your claim. Being a researcher is a point of power and should not be taken lightly; people read what you publish and attach value. In the end, I am very glad I took this course and appreciate what I have learned - a new way to investigate the world.

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