

Domestic Residents' and Resident Advisors' Narratives of Disputes with International  
Roommates and Residents

by

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### **Abstract**

A prevalent issue on U.S. college campuses is the complex relationships between international and domestic student roommates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how domestic dorm residents and resident advisors narrate disputes they have with their international roommates or residents. The communication practice of narration served as evidence of sense-making. Data was collected through in-person interviews and from online discussion boards. In the narratives, domestic students discussed their discomfort and the impossibility to live with difference in lifestyle. For resident advisors, conflict came from language barriers or a lack of communication between international and domestic roommates. This study claims that accountability assignment is complex, disputes are not always presented in narratives as clashes of cultures, and while domestic students find communication to be an antidote for conflict, they don't often act on that belief. The implications for this study are for international student services and those who create RA training to take my claims into account when creating orientations for domestic first-year students. Representation of international students to the domestic population should be taken into account as well in order to create a more inclusive and diverse space.

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## Chapter 1: Literature Review and Rationale

### Introduction

While studying abroad in South Africa last year, I came across an interesting sensation that never would have befallen me had I not decided to go abroad for a semester: I felt weird, even uncomfortable at times, being an outsider living in a foreign country and culture. My program was unlike others in that I never attended a university and I spent a majority of my time with other Americans, but upon going out for meals or going to the local club block downtown, I constantly felt uncomfortable not knowing South African cultural norms and I couldn't help but make myself stand out with my own American norms including speech, phrases, and what artifacts we use (I got a lot of comments on all Americans carry water bottles).

When I had an advising session for my honors topic, I was immediately drawn to understanding international student relationships in the United States. As I was interested in how South Africans understood their relationships with me as an international student, I wanted to further understand how domestic students in the United States understand their relationships with international students at home. My decision to bring my thesis focus to international-domestic relationships was also impacted by my interest in how universities manage diversity and inclusion through their involvement in international-domestic relationships.

According to [migrationpolicy.org](http://migrationpolicy.org) (Zong & Batalova, 2016), the United States is the number one destination for the 4.1 million students who choose to study internationally every year. The United States itself hosts around 975,000 international students, that number being 23% of the global international student population. U.S. universities have been making an increasing effort in recent decades to “internationalize” their student populations and their

universities as a whole. With this “internationalization” comes the question of housing for incoming international students, with whom, and how roommate situations will progress.

International students play an important role in creating diversity in large universities, a concept which has been shown to be an important part of a successful learning process (Brown, 2004). However, international students have unfortunately gone largely unappreciated and are sometimes even discriminated against for simply being from another country by their domestic counterparts (Hanassab, 2006). According to Hanassab, the more hegemonic identities (white, male, upper class) the domestic students hold, the harder time they have empathizing and relating to international students, which can contribute to making international students feel welcome and included on campus. Sometimes disputes, conflicts, and arguments can stem from cultural differences between international and domestic students that cannot be solved or taken care of, at least not easily. This can be a problem for universities like the University of Colorado, where the administration is placing a considerable emphasis on the socio-cultural integration of international students and the process of internationalizing the campus.

This project aims to look at how domestic student residents and RAs narrate experiences of disputes with international students in their residence halls. Narratives serve as important sites of sense-making for the narrators because telling narratives gives them opportunities to turn their complex past into a clear sequence of events, to attach an evaluation to those events, and to present the sequence and the evaluation for the purpose of persuading an audience to accept their version of the past. I argue that for this study, narratives provide substantial insight into the thought processes of domestic students and may be able to tell us more about how those thoughts may be influenced by bigger factors such as the university they attend or their American

nationality. Not only can I get more insight, but sense-making through narratives can have real-world social and material consequences, especially if narratives involve discrimination or biases.

Throughout this chapter, I lay out the communicative problem and social issue of roommate relationships in general as well as relationships between international and domestic students. Next, I discuss RAs' many important roles in the residence halls and how their roles play into the relationships between international and domestic residents. Finally, I conclude by discussing how institutional narratives are an important lens in which to view these relationships and how these kinds of narratives serve as evidence for institutional discourse.

### **Communicative Problem and Social Issue**

In this section, I will begin by reviewing scholarship on roommate relationships, problematic social situations that arise within the roommate relationships, and how culture and background can serve as a main player in these problematic social situations. From there, I will discuss the relationships and lack thereof between domestic students and international students on campus to lay groundwork for how their relationships as roommates may potentially be problematic. I will then address why it is important to look at cross-cultural relationships from the domestic student point of view. I will finish by introducing how RAs play important roles in the residence halls, especially in managing relationships between their residents.

**Roommate relationships.** Roommate relationships and situations can be difficult, even if the two people are siblings or best friends and get along great. Because the people living together are different people, conflicts may arise that are out of the control of everyone involved. The way that roommates make sense of or manage the conflict individually can have a considerable impact on how the roommate relationship and conflict plays out. In this section, I will review



previous literature that has focused on roommate relationships, with the roommate combinations varying in order to understand roommate relationships in different situations.

In an early study on roommate conflict and communication, Sillars (1980) used a questionnaire to analyze how conflict broke out between American college roommates living in the dorms, how the participants talked about the conflict with an outsider (assigned accountability), and strategies used for resolution. The study found that roommates who had some kind of conflict used different management strategies based on their personality and their personal interpretation of the severity of the situation. Some of the different strategies included avoiding the issue, letting the issue resolve itself, demanding, threat-aversion, and problem-solving. Though the study attributes chosen strategy more to personality and the kind of conflict, this study can still be used to understand how roommates make sense of their conflicts with roommates, thus aiding in the understanding of accountability assignment and narration style to outsiders.

Emerson (2008) conducted a qualitative study on interview and written accounts of disputes from 184 college roommates at a large public American university, without taking nationality, race and ethnicity into account. The study aimed to understand the narratives of how the students reacted during disputes with their roommates. It looked at how a roommate dealt with the discontent and animosity that he or she was feeling, which resulted in three different reactions: managerial (trying to ignore, then maintaining communication in the relationship), complaining (talking with the roommate(s) in question to get them to change their behavior), and extreme responses (extreme and mostly passive-aggressive responses). This study aids in understanding different approaches roommates take to resolve (or perpetuate) disputes with their

roommates, which helps to better understand how domestic students may feel and tell stories about their international student roommates under similar circumstances.

One study done at a private university in Southern Nigeria found that roommate relationships can in fact have an impact on university students' academic as well as other parts of their lives including social engagement and emotional well-being (Ojo, Chibuzor, Ugochukwu, Chuwukelue, & Abidemi, 2015). This study gives powerful insight into how roommate relations can impact a university student's well-being overall, and it can provide an understanding for the importance placed on roommate relationships.

A study about the effects of race in roommate and RA relations showed that race similarity in either resident or RA impacts the residents' willingness to approach RA or hall director about roommate disputes, because of how comfortable the resident was and how much they felt that they culturally related to the RA or Hall Director (HD) (Bresnahan, Guan, Shearman, & Donohue, 2009). People who identify more closely with whomever is in charge based on race or ethnicity (RA or HD) will be more likely to ask them for help when they have conflicts with roommates. Those who do not identify as closely racially or ethnically with the person in charge will tend to not seek out any help. This article provides powerful insight into how cross-cultural (international and domestic) residents may seek help, advice, or how they may frame stories to those above them.

Chakravarti, Menon, and Winship (2014) also did a study on interracial roommates, in which they looked at random roommate pairings at Harvard University to see whether the interracial dyads and triads would persist (or not) when the students were able to choose who they wanted to live with their second year. Their study found that most interracial roommate

dyads and triads tended to stay together when there was not a white majority, but in groups that had one East-Asian roommate with two white roommates, the triad dissolved.

Kaushal & Kwantes (2006) conducted a study on 109 Canadian students to understand what their conflict styles were and how those styles related to their cultures and personalities. The majority of the participants self-identified as Caucasian while the rest (in descending order) identified as English Canadian, French Canadian, and East Asian. The study found that cultural values and beliefs both played significant roles in how a person would manage conflict, whether it be in a family setting, a roommate/friend setting, or school/work setting. Culture can play a significant role in a roommate conflict situation, how each party manages the conflict, and it helps us to understand that depending on the culture, each party may have interpreted the conflict differently.

Another study, conducted by Burgos-Cienfuegos, Vasquez-Salgado, Ruedas-Gracia, & Greenfield (2015) looked at how first-generation Latino students managed conflict coming from primarily collectivist cultures to living with American students at a large Western American university. In a group interview with written responses, the majority of the participants reported having peer-to-peer conflict with their roommate (roommates were mostly Asian or Asian-American, with Latinx and European-American following respectively) and having trouble resolving the conflict because the participant used their own collectivist style to resolve it, and the peer used a more individualistic style to resolve. The majority of the participants also reported using implicit responses to the situations. This study is important in understanding that previous experiences and cultural norms play a significant role in not only how the situation is dealt with, but also how the person narrating their side interprets what is going on.

**Relationships between international and domestic students are problematic.** Going to college is a challenge for most students. Regardless of what background one has, most first-year students must learn how to study for a college-paced environment, learn how to live without parental guidance, learn how to socialize in an adult-environment, and must learn how to do everyday chores and errands, all the while possibly trying to live with someone they've never lived with before. International students must take all of that stress of being a first-year student, and on top of that may need to learn a new language, learn a new culture, and try to make friends and socialize in an environment and culture they are not used to. This stress, along with confusion and lack of familiarity with the culture can lead to rocky relationships between international students and their domestic counterparts.

Literature suggests that because of the cultural differences between international students and domestic students, there will be many times when international and domestic students will not get along. Urban and Orbe (2007) studied essay accounts of international students at American universities published on the internet in 2006 to the prompt "Describe your feelings as you experienced the high points, low points, pleasant surprises, disappointments, confusing situations, frustrating encounters, and encouraging interactions you have had during your time in our community." The study aimed to understand how international students described their communicative experiences within foreign cultures and how they negotiate their foreign statuses. These essays showed the international students' lack of familiarity with the United States individualism and the isolation they felt from American students. Cultural norms also played a role in making intercultural friendships. One account went as follows:

At times my fellow classmates wondered why I would not smile at them. They were worried that I was sad, homesick, and even that I was not friendly and open

for conversations... I was simply not used to greet[ing] everybody, and smile every time I have a small greeting-type conversation with someone. Therefore, in order not to offend my classmates, I explained them different way of salutation in Russian tradition... [this] brought the beginning to small cultural exchange conversations we now have during lunches (p. 132).

International students are not the only ones that have been known to have problems with the internationalization of campuses. In one study by Williams and Johnson (2011), less than half of domestic students at an American university claimed to have even one international student friend. Another study, conducted in New Zealand, interviewed domestic students about their perceptions of international students at their university (Bird & Holmes, 2005). Many of the negative accounts from domestic students centered around perceived language limitations of international students and their reluctance to participate in conversations or class discussions. One domestic student reflected on stereotyping: "There was a Korean student...and he didn't want to know about our culture. He kept saying, 'You do this and it's so stupid.' I think it was just him, but you get the connotations of one person, and then you tend to judge everyone else" (p. 9).

In an auto-ethnographic book about college life as a freshman, Nathan (2005) interviewed international students to try understanding their perspective of their relationships with Americans and their role in the American higher education system. She found that international students have trouble with American students' lack of knowledge about the world, and they expressed frustration with American ignorance of far-away places. Nathan also found that international students had very different relationships with their domestic roommates than they had expected, sometimes beneficial to the international student, other times hurtful. Two

international students were interviewed in this chapter, and both of their roommates were uninvolved in their lives and didn't talk to them very much. One international student was upset by this and felt alone and isolated when she expected she'd be making a friend. The other international student was happy that she didn't have to entertain her roommate and spend a lot of time with her. Other international students she interviewed said that they felt uncomfortable with the individualism and separateness they experienced from domestic students, that they were superficially friendly, but didn't develop deep relationships from their international points of view, which especially came up in confusion with cultural scripts such as "how are you" or "see you soon." This chapter on international students provides an important impetus for this study, because it gives a powerful insight into relationships between domestic and international students, but focuses more on narratives from the international rather than domestic student side.

A study done at two English universities looked at how domestic students managed their cultural distance and how xenophobia in host country nationals played into the bigger picture of perceptions of international students, as well as how host students perceived it as affecting their education (Harrison & Peacock, 2009). The data was collected through focus groups for 60 students and interviews for 40. The participants reported that while they understood that they cohabited their respective university with international students that they did not go out of their way to cross paths with them. In fact, the participants said that when there were social encounters that they were typically accidental and by coincidence. The participants also reported being close-knit with their own peer groups, of which did not typically include international students. In the end, it was identified that although there was not outright prejudice or hostility toward the international students in discussion, that the participants were threatened and anxious about their education and sharing the same spaces with the international students. While this study was done

in England, it lays important groundwork that although domestic or host students may not outright say something hostile or prejudiced to one another, narratives of relations with international students could still feature such attitudes.

Extensive literature has shown how becoming friends with host domestic students can help international students acculturate more smoothly and feel more accepted into their host culture (Arasaratnam, 2011; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Zimmermann, 1995). The issues of cross-cultural discrepancies, language barriers, and general interpersonal conflict in roommate relationships are important concepts to focus on because they can affect an international students' desire to interact with domestic students and how they will do that. These factors can also impact how domestic students understand and view other cultures interacting in their American universities.

A prevalent issue in the realm of higher education is international students' management of relationships with domestic students. Bardhan and Zhang (2017) conducted a qualitative survey on global south international students at a Midwestern American university. The aim of the study was to understand how these international students understand their racial identity for the first time, how they trans-nationalize themselves after their experience in a White-settler, global north country, and how they struggle with the United States race label and come to a positive self-identity. The study found that people of color from post- or de-colonized countries and cultures struggled to make sense of race and the centrality of it in the United States, but what stood out to me was the international students' justifications for interacting with other international students rather than trying to reach out to domestic students. One participant wrote "I am more comfortable when communicating with other international students because we understand each other easily, and more often there is no race factor when talking" (Bardhan &

Zhang, 2017, p. 297). Another participant wrote “With few exceptions, I feel more comfortable relating to international students. I feel like they are more considerate and honest. They care less about color than about peoples’ character” (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017, p. 297). These accounts show that international students may feel uncomfortable conversing and trying to relate to American domestic students because they are treated differently based on their race, something that many of these students have not dealt with before.

Kobayashi and Viswat (2010) showed that Japanese students studying in the United States who had to express disagreement with American native-English speakers had a hard time getting their point across and often got frustrated with how their messages of disagreement were interpreted. In multiple instances, Japanese students would “disagree” with Americans by using the word “yes” in their responses, thereby leading the American students to believe that they were agreeing with them. This study showed that not only is disagreement dependent on culture, it can also affect relationships between international and domestic students because of misconstrued messages and misinterpretations.

Past research shows that international students may have disputes with domestic students because of the stress cultural distance puts on most other aspects of their lives. According to Shupe’s (2007) intercultural as stressor model, intercultural conflicts and cultural distance contribute to the satisfaction international students report and experience in university. Because of this, these factors impact an international student’s relationship with co-workers and other students. Shupe (2007) claimed these conflicts add to the already stressful university life students typically experience (work satisfaction, psychological well-being, health conditions, and sociocultural distress). The internal tension of intercultural conflicts and cultural distance contributes to the conflicts that can be most commonly seen with domestic students. Domestic



students experience similar stresses including intercultural conflicts and distance from home (regardless how far away). Both of these internal stresses contribute to the conflicts that international students face in terms of a new culture, new people, and an even larger distance from home, all of which are more intense for international students, which may lead to more conflicts.

**Justification for studying domestic students.** Although much of the relevant research on international students focuses on their experience of integration into U.S. universities and aims to produce cultural explanations for conflict between domestic and international students I aim to study problematic social situations (including conflict) from the perspective of domestic students through communicative and narrative processes. I study disputes from the perspective of domestic students because I would like to fill the gap in existing scholarship that does not pay adequate attention to domestic students' perspectives on problematic social situations involving domestic students and international students. I stop short of making cultural (or-cross-cultural) claims in order to stay grounded in U.S. students' and RAs' sense-making which, as I have found, systematically avoids cultural explanations. Nevertheless, based on the literature I reviewed above I have reason to believe that differences in the ways domestic and international students make sense of such problematic situations has a role to play in conflict. A better understanding of domestic students' "version" of such situations sets the stage for future studies targeting U.S. cultural explanations of conflict, can help us explain how such situations may get out of hand, and can help universities come up with strategies for mitigating such situations. I would like to find out more about university administration that deals with the international student population as well, and see if I may be able to better understand how the university can play a role in making international students' lives on campus easier. I believe that through

understanding how domestic residents and RAs narrate a situation with an international student, I may find out more about the institutional aspect of how international students are treated and valued on campus.

Another reason for my focus on domestic students derives from a methodological consideration: I will be able to understand domestic students' perspectives better than I would be able to understand that of a diverse group of international students. First, I want to be as confident as I can be in interpreting what my participants tell me. Language Convergence/Meaning Divergence (Dougherty, Mobley, & Smith, 2010) theory states that although two people may be speaking the same language, the meaning and interpretations of what they say may not be the same. This often happens across culture lines, and my concern with the possibility of studying international students is whether or not I would correctly interpret what they were saying and what they wanted to get across, and I feel that it would negatively impact my findings. Dougherty, Mobley, and Smith state that the goal of interpretive research is to achieve a deep understanding of meanings. By studying the domestic student point of view, I can develop a more valid interpretation of narratives about experiences with international students. Lofland and Lofland (2006) suggest that the best way to start research is by starting where you are. "Starting where you are means that you initially orient your research to aspects of your personal biography" (p. 9). Even though everyone has their own perspective and point of view, since I'm an American domestic student, I will be able to better understand the cultural context of an American domestic student who is living in the dorms. In addition, my existing relationships with domestic RAs and former RAs at my research site allowed me to get a better inside view into the work life of domestic resident assistants, especially in dealing with conflicts between international and domestic residents.

Finally, my original research design, which included interviewing domestic students at CU Boulder, intended to create a situation that was less face-threatening for participants. My expectation was that students would be able to talk to another domestic student about conflict or relations with their international residents or roommates. I was concerned that I would not get honest answers to certain questions about disputes about domestic students from certain groups of international students because in other cultures, it may be seen as offensive for an international student to talk negatively about someone of my culture and from my country, and therefore may answer dishonestly about their true experiences with their roommate. Zhang, Ting-Toomey, Oetzel and Zhang (2015) said that face-threats can differ across culture lines, and that a face threat can be insults, lies, disrespect, contempt, and rudeness which not only means the loss of face, but also that of power, dignity and status.

#### **Importance of Resident Advisors (RAs) in residence halls and conflict management.**

RAs play an integral part in keeping hall residents safe and happy, and they are typically the first go-to when anything happens with a resident or in the residence halls. RAs go through intense training to prepare them to handle many different situations, including conflicts between roommates. RAs are almost always involved in conflicts, relationships, and sticky situations and, in most cases, are involved far before the Hall Director (HD) has to be brought into the situation.

Existing scholarship has discussed the struggle that RAs deal with in managing a role/identity conflict with their residents (Everett & Loftus, 2011). In particular, RAs are so integral to residents' lives that they must manage when they can be a friend to them, and when they must put on another hat of rule enforcer. Manata, DeAngelis, Paik, and Miller (2017) show that the important roles of RAs to residents include role models, conflict mediators, counselors, security officers, and as of most recently, resident socializers. In terms of international and

domestic residents, RAs must make sure that all residents are adapting well to college life, making friends, and at least getting along.

Despite the important role RAs play in intercultural roommate conflicts, the scholarly literature has not looked at RAs' role in mediating conflict between domestic and international students in on-campus residence halls. Given the importance of RAs listed above, the role of mediator, acculturator, and socializer should be looked at more closely when dealing with these two groups. An ethnography (Nathan, 2005) followed an anthropologist's "freshman year" at AnyU where she examined the different roles of individuals that lived in the residence halls and specifically noted RAs' relationships with their residents. In an effort to be friends and be the "cool" RAs, they told the residents who showed up to the first hall meeting that they weren't there to bust them. Nathan went on to explain that bad RAs enforced the letter of the law, and that good RAs enforced what the residents believed to be good spirit. RAs were also described extensively as socializers and mediators. This ethnography gave a peek into the life of a freshman student living in the residence halls, and in doing so examined the many roles of RAs and how they function for the residents as friends, but as authority figures as well. This is important to note for this study to understand how RAs will frame their stories, how they will position themselves in those stories, and how they affect what happens in the residence halls.

I will be studying RAs because they are an important reflection of what is being done in the administration for international students. RAs are trained in specific ways to deal with a wide range of different situations through training that is created by the university. The way that RAs are trained to deal with certain situations may be a direct reflection of how the administration views the importance of international students, the role that international students should be

playing in the university, and how international students fit into the university at large, starting in the residence halls.

### **How do Narratives Serve as Evidence of Sense-Making?**

**Functions of narratives.** Fisher (1987) is one of the scholars who has supported a view of narratives as important for understanding society, by describing them as an essential part of understanding communication and rationality in communication. In discussing the narrative paradigm, he asked “How do people come to believe and act on the basis of communicative experiences?” and “What is the nature of reason and rationality in these experiences?” (p. xi). These questions formed the basis for my research and analysis of narratives from domestic residents and RAs of their international residents or roommates.

Studying narratives is an effective way of finding out more about a person through the way that they talk about a situation that happened, and where they place themselves in that situation. According to Tracy & Robles (2013), oral narratives are told to serve personal and relational information. Narratives can serve as a way for the narrator to make sense of what has happened and hear themselves talk through the situation (Atkinson, 1997). Atkinson also proposed that narrative analysis can show the interior self in a way that other data collection could not. In-depth interviews hold the presence of the respondent, which can help the conversation and interview be probed into more personal and private aspects of experience that can be rendered visible through dialogue, tools that would not necessarily be easily used in quantitative methods such as surveys (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Narrative analysis is a useful way to understand a socially problematic situation by listening to and understanding the way that people tell their stories and how they frame the

situation and participants in the stories, including themselves. Bamberg (1997) claimed that identities are created through “positioning” on 3 different levels:

1. Positioning in a story world: how the narrator is represented as a character vis-à-vis others’ characters
2. Narrators position themselves vis-à-vis their interlocutors in ongoing interaction and in turn are positioned by them
3. Narrators are positioned and position themselves in personhood that circulates

One of the main functions of narratives that can help us understand the narrator’s position on the story and their deep feelings about it is narratives as argument making. Argument making through narratives, according to Tracy & Robles (2013) makes the story a way for the narrator to persuade the listener to think a certain way. This could be through defense from another story, or asking the listener to take a side based on their account.

The study of narratives is not only a useful tool for understanding a person’s identity and how they position themselves in stories, but narratives can serve as speech acts as a function of narratives. This means that in some situations, narratives are created or passed through generations in order to act as a warning to the listener to be used for the future. This speech act still shows the narrator’s stance and where they are assigning accountability, but they can also serve as memorable stories that can be used in several different situations for several different purposes. The narrative also helps the narrator perform a speech act that could be sensitive and difficult to do in a way that may not be straightforward and could make it easier to do.

Another function of narratives, and one that was found in this study, is the self-presentational device. Through the positioning that the narrators use, we have found out more about how they see themselves in relation to the situation, through context clues in their

narratives: the stance they take in relation to the other participants in their story as well as how they assign accountability to themselves or the other participants in the story. The context of the narrative is so important to understanding why the person takes the position they do. This leads into the next important function of ‘relational work’ that I focused on for not only analyzing how domestic residents and RAs narrate disputes with international students, but also how they fit themselves into the story and describe the relationship they have with the international student, recognizing that this dispute is not a vacuum with only the international student in it. According to Gordon (2007), relational work is how people create their own identities by interacting with other people and interacting with the culture. Narrators construct their own identities and views by using different kinds of discourse and using the others in the event to construct their identities indirectly.

**Assigning accountability and stance-taking.** Tracy and Robles (2013) also talk about the importance that stance-taking and the assignment of accountability play in a narrative and how they can help the narrator present identities and their positionality to the other characters in the narrative. Evaluation in particular, what Tracy and Robles say is the third criterion of what makes a narrative, is how feelings are portrayed and is often-times left up to the listener or audience to determine how the narrator feels about the situation. In order to create an evaluation of the event, the narrator must take a stance, which requires more than just saying which side they are on. The narrator takes a stance (directly or indirectly) through the language that they use, through the unmarked forms which show what the speaker believes is typical or usual, as well as through marked forms where the speaker makes clear what they think is unusual and atypical. A useful way to look at stance is through Du Bois’ proposed ‘Stance Triangle’. In this model, Du Bois (2010) proposes that there are three acts that take place in a single act of stance-

taking: evaluation (as discussed above); positioning, where the speaker indicates where his or her stance lies in the situation; and alignment, which is where the speaker establishes their relationship between two or more stances. In other words, as Damari (2010) puts it, who is taking what stance in response to what other social actor(s).

Damari used Du Bois' stance triangle when she performed a discourse and narrative analysis of a binational couple and how they take stances in talking with or about one another. In her conclusion, she said that an "examination of an interaction between two participants who know each other well reveals a few ways speakers can attribute stance to themselves and to each other through interactions with past stances." (Damari, 2010, p. 626) This observation of her data helps us to understand how to analyze narratives that may have happened in the past, between people who know each other well, and how they take stances in relation to one another.

I identified the narratives in my interviews and in my online narrative collection by using the two main criteria that Labov & Waletzky (1967) said makes a narrative: told through a temporal sequence, and whether it is newsworthy. Clear narrative clauses also help to identify narratives and include phrases that establish that the speaker will be holding the floor for an extended amount of time, such as "that makes me think of this story" or "I can actually tell you about a time that this happened to me". I also analyzed why the person decided to tell this story and why it is significant to whichever point they make.

I used my narratives to find similar discourse across different people, and to also answer my research question about accountability assigning and help understand how stance positionality of the narrator impacts style of narration and accountability assignment in their narrative. I was able to identify the narrators' assignment of accountability by identifying the pronouns that they used, the words and names that they emphasized, and the kind of language



they used surrounding the dispute as well as the kind of language they use surrounding themselves or the other participants in the story.

**Narratives in institutions.** Narratives serve as a way for participants in institutions to relate to each other and make sense of large scale issues in a more general context. Institutional narratives are particularly important because they can show how administration in institutions set boundaries for what is talked about, and the norms start to surface, as well as the atypical (marked) forms in narratives and conversation. Linde (2003) discusses the importance of narratives in analyzing how institutions run and how members of the institution act within the institution itself. In this situation, the university and the residence halls are the two institutions that I will be analyzing. Linde argues that narratives help institutions do their “daily work” through working together in various contexts as well as sharing stories for the reasons listed in the functions subsection.

Freed (2015) also reflected on how institutional discourse is important for understanding how the institution runs through the talk of those who are involved in the institution, what their goals are in the institution, and how that determines what they say and how they say it. This is useful for understanding how students at a university will talk about their roommates (who were given to them by the university), their experience at the university, and how resident advisors narrate their roles and how they were trained.

Mumby (2015) discussed how organizations imply a power in the institution, and under that power there are always people that follow the power and what it dictates to be able to stay in. While Mumby’s essay mostly focused on organizations, this can be translated to universities, too. He goes on to discuss how in large institutions, human behavior is governed by rules and regulations set forward. I would argue that human behavior is also governed by the taught

practices of those who work for those in the institution who are being served. The institutional power in the university is the administration: those who train the staff (resident advisors and hall directors in particular) how to respond to certain situations, how to deal with certain issues, and how to work with the students under their watch. Because of this institutional power, resident advisors may be trained to treat international students and situations that they are put in differently (especially at the expense of their deployment). However, I would like to understand better how the institution of the university has communicated to domestic students in classes, orientations, or other large social gatherings about international students. I am interested how the domestic students, whether RAs or residents, narrate institutional stories that they have been taught or conditioned to know. This is relevant to understanding institutional narratives because it helps us to understand who creates the institutions, who benefits from the institutional power, and how it affects those that are not necessarily considered part of the greater institution, but still have to act within it. By looking at narratives from this point of view, we can come to a better understanding for why domestic students may say certain things and where those ideas and sense-making strategies may come from.

### **Research Questions**

Because of the key sense-making function of narratives, and because of the lack of literature on domestic students' perspectives on their roommate relationships with international counterparts, I am interested in understanding how they tell narratives to make sense of their relationships with their international roommates. In the light of the above, my research questions are as follows:

*RQ1: How do domestic student resident advisors (RAs) and domestic student residents narrate disputes and conflict between international and domestic resident roommates?*

Understanding and unveiling how narratives and accountability assignment in particular are important to understanding how problematic social situations are talked about and made sense of. The relationship between narrative and accountability can show how domestic students view their relationships with international students and how they view their positions in relation to their international counterparts. Related to my first question, I am also curious how international students are framed in these disputes and how, individually, residents and RAs may look at the situations between cross-cultural and cross-national roommates, which leads me to my other question:

*RQ2: How do domestic student RAs and residents assign accountability to the participants of these disputes?*

## **Chapter 2: Methods**

The participants in my research project were domestic college students who are either resident advisors (RAs) who oversee international student residents, or domestic students who have international student roommates or international students in their hall. As I explain below, I had to shift my data collection strategy from interviews with domestic students to collecting data from online users who posted in public forums. In addition, I conducted in-person interviews with domestic RAs and one freshman resident.

### **Data Collection**

According to my original research design, interviews served as my primary data. I designed separate interview guides for domestic students and RAs (see Appendix C) and planned to identify interviewees through snowball sampling.

I ended up interviewing only one domestic student because the snowball sampling method from RAs didn't work. I think that RAs may have felt uncomfortable giving out contact information for their domestic residents, and there may have been an issue with giving out their resident's contact information in accordance with their privacy policies. I asked Hall Directors to send my recruitment letter out as well, but only ended up hearing back from one domestic student. I think the reason that this method didn't work is because first year (especially domestic) students at CU Boulder are notorious for not checking their email, so a mass email from a Hall Director may have been either ineffective or not sound interesting enough to participate in. As I explain below, I used my secondary data (online narratives) to replace domestic student interviews I had not been able to collect.

I used a digital audio recorder to record interviews. All interviews took place on campus, either at the dorms or at the University Memorial Center. I recruited my interview participants by

reaching out to Hall Directors of dorms that I knew had a high international student population and asked them if I could talk to their RAs about my study. I asked each interviewee if they knew of any residents or resident advisors that would be willing to talk to me. I only got one resident participant in my recruiting process and her interview data ended up not being useful for my study's purposes, meaning that she didn't give any narratives of conflict she had had with her international roommate nor any of her other international student friends, so I don't include any of her interview in my findings section. I think that this interviewee ended up not giving me the information I needed (narratives of conflicts with international students) in an effort to not come off as xenophobic or negatively biased.

In my interviews, I identified narratives which I then transcribed manually on my personal computer. My transcriptions are verbatim including "ums," "uhs," and "ahs." Although I asked directly how they assign blame and accountability to participants in such problematic social situations, I also conducted narrative analysis to study how accountability is assigned in these situations. I gave hypothetical situations and asked how they would handle problematic situations differently if they happened again, or how they would give advice to someone who would go through the same thing.

The questions for my RA participants were slightly different because I wanted to learn how they are trained to work with international students through their RA training, and how they mediate or see the conflicts from outside of the immediate conflict situation. I asked similar questions about accountability and blame assignment, and collected narratives, as in the resident interviews, but also asked how the RA intervened in disputes or helped solve them.

To supplement the interviews, I gathered from my primary data, I also collected 28 narratives found online. These narratives were collected from open websites (that do not need to

be signed into in order to collect the data) and forums. This secondary data helps to further justify the information from the interviews I collect. These online narratives also provide further insight into domestic/international student situations that happen outside of the University of Colorado Boulder residence halls, and the different context (online) helps, too.

### **Analysis**

For analysis, I will first define what a narrative is and what kind of narrative I'm looking for. Labov and Waletzky (1967) define a narrative as minimally consisting of a sequence of two or more narrative clauses that report events that actually happened, and an evaluation of their newsworthiness. The model says that the evaluation stage is what truly makes a story a narrative and what gives a text its significance by establishing the point of the narrative. The evaluation stage is what lies between the complication and the resolution of the story, what keeps the audience on their toes and what keeps the story interesting and going. The evaluation stage is what keeps the complication and resolution stages separate and makes both stages important and helps them relate to each other.

In this study, I used 6 metacodes to analyze the narratives in this study: active agent; acted upon person; moral evaluation; who gets the blame; who is the hero; and how is the storyteller positioned. I developed these metacodes by looking back to my research questions and figuring out what kind of patterns I would need to find in order to answer them. According to Ryan & Bernard (2003) "Metacoding examines the relationship among a priori themes to discover potentially new themes and overarching metathemes." In this way, I used the codes I had come up with and used and saw themes in patterns I found from what was said.

**Sample analysis.** Below, I use a narrative that I didn't use as evidence in this chapter to demonstrate how I analyzed the rest of the narratives in this study.

((WhoYouCallinTurkey, January 29, 2013, reddit.com))

1 My roommate freshman year was quite interesting. My roommate was  
 2 an international student from India. Ok, I have friends from there. All  
 3 good, right? Well, there was some weirdness that went down.  
 4 Firstly, he insisted on not switching to the US time zone. This meant  
 5 he slept most of all day, besides some classes, and stayed up all night.  
 6 He would watch TV on his computer all night with the brightness all  
 7 up, balancing a PILLOW on his head. I kid you not. AND he ate chips  
 8 all the time, very loudly.  
 9 In addition to this, he showered maybe 3-5 times during the entirety  
 10 of the semester and did not wash clothes, nor change them. There was  
 11 a permanent stench that permeated from our room. I bought 2 air  
 12 fresheners and blasted his side of the dorm with Febreze when he  
 13 was gone, but it just made it worse. Somebody on the floor literally  
 14 put up a sign that said, "You room smells like crap, made it better or  
 15 well poop outside your room."  
 16 Lastly, he did not understand that certain foods needed to be  
 17 refrigerated. I woke up one morning to a horrible smell of rotten milk  
 18 and discovered 4 bottles of milk bulging, and one broken open  
 19 spilling it's rotten contents on the floor. I almost puked. I told he  
 20 multiple times about what needed to be refrigerated, but he didn't  
 21 listen.  
 22 **TL;DR:** Shared a dorm room with a smelly, rotten milk loving,  
 23 roommate who wouldn't change his sleep patterns.

In the very beginning in line 3, I coded this narrative as direct because the narrator used the word "weirdness" as their moral evaluation of the situation in regard to their roommate, as well as an ironic rhetorical question in reference to how the experience should have gone with "All good, right?" This narrative is direct because the teller reveals their evaluation of narrated events at the outset, as opposed to saving the evaluation to the end and requiring the listener / reader to make inferences about the teller's evaluation. In line 3, I also identified the word "weirdness" as the narrator's assignment of blame to the international student, but not revealing how they may have any blame to take themselves, at least in this one word. Next, I coded all of

line 5 to be assignment of blame, as well as lines 9 and 10, again only assigning blame to the international student. In lines 6 and 7 as well as 7 and 8, I identified the phrases “brightness all up” and “AND he ate his chips all the time, very loudly” as moral evaluations of his roommate. The difference between blame and moral evaluation was that blame was the explicit naming of why the person being accused did something wrong and caused conflict, whereas moral evaluations were how the domestic (usually negatively) discussed the situation and how they judge that situation out loud. For me, moral evaluations are more descriptive and use more adverbs and adjectives to explain why a distaste or certain evaluative stance is there. I also found moral evaluation in line 11 with the phrase “permanent stench” as well in lines 14 and 15 (“you room smells like crap, made it better or well poop outside your room”), lines 16 and 17 (“he did not understand that certain foods need to be refrigerated”), and finally line 19 (“I almost puked”). In lines 11, 12, and half of 13, I identified the quote “There was a permanent stench that permeated from our room. I bought 2 air fresheners and blasted his side of the dorm with Febreeze when he was gone, but it just made it worse” as the narrator pointing out and making clear the active agent (the international student). In turn, in line 17, I identified the quote “I woke up one morning to a horrible smell of rotten milk” as the narrator pointing out and making clear the acted upon in the situation. I also found that the narrator acted as a “hero” (tried to fix the situation themselves) in lines 20 and 21 by saying “I told he multiple times about what needed to be refrigerated.” Finally, in the last two lines labelled TL;DR, I found that the narrator used this whole section to show the stance they took and how they position themselves in the story.

### **Interpretation**

This project matters because international students are such an important part of American universities by creating diversity and giving American students who may decide not to



study abroad the opportunity to be exposed to other cultures by introducing the way that different minds work in classes and on projects. By understanding how international students are understood and discussed through relational discourse that I obtain about resident advisor training, I have been able to better understand how international students are presented through the administration of the university. Through analysis of how complex situations are accounted for, how they would be handled if it happened again, or how students would give advice about these situations, I have learned more about the American student body as a whole. My findings are also important for future studies of the cultural dimension of problematic situations between domestic and international students, a line of research I recognize as important but do not intend to pursue in this thesis.

Through this project, I have gained new insight into domestic students' relationships and narratives about international students, how certain conflicts are intractable and cannot be fixed regardless how hard those involved may try, and how, indirectly, international students may be impacted by the narratives that domestic students give about their relationships or lack of relationships with international students. According to my findings, the conflicts that break out between domestic and international students are largely interpreted as intractable, and thus cannot be easily fixed or cannot be fixed at all. My study was able to show, however, how domestic students may assign blame to certain aspects of situations between themselves and international students, such as lifestyle differences, nationality attributions, and communication difficulties. Because of these important findings and more that I discuss in the next chapter, I will be able to contribute to previous literature with domestic students' points of view of problematic social situations with international students, RA roles and points of view in conflicts between

international and domestic residents, and how communication and cultural fluency has a role to play in international-domestic relationships.

### **Chapter Three: Analysis and Findings**

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing my analytic strategy. Next, I will demonstrate how I performed data analysis on a sample narrative with the analytic categories I used throughout my coding and analysis phase. I will then go on to explain how I interpreted the data that I have sorted into analytic categories. Finally, I'll discuss my themes as the outcome of my interpretation. The themes that I have found in this chapter also answer my research questions with how domestic students narrate their experiences with their international counterparts as well as how they assign accountability in those narratives.

My analysis yielded six main themes of ways that domestic residents and RAs narrated their conflicts and assigned accountability with international students. I found these themes by noticing patterns of how narrators evaluated the conflicts and assigned accountability by using metacoding, as discussed in the methods chapter. By using metacoding in the collected narratives, I was able to identify the answers to my research questions and gain a better understanding of the sense-making strategies the narrators used.

The results were not even across the two bodies of data I used (in-person interviews and online narrative collection). There was one theme that pertains only to the in-person interview data and the rest pertained to both. The first that I found in both media is that some domestic students find difference in lifestyles impossible or uncomfortable to live with. Another theme that I identified through patterns in my coding and assignment of directness and indirectness is that people were direct, indirect, and contradictory when they narrated. I identified these methods of (in)directness by adjectives and adverbs used, how early in the narrative they gave their stance regarding the international student, and if what they were saying in the narratives were similar or different to the position or moral evaluation they had taken in the beginning. The next theme I

found through patterns in my coded data, found only in interview narratives, is that some narrated disputes between international and domestic students come from a lack of communication. I also found patterns across both bodies of data that domestic students sometimes showed race and nationality biases in accountability assignment and justification for conflicts in their narratives. Finally, domestic students may assign accountability for the dispute or argument depending on how they position themselves in regards to the international student: if the domestic student positions themselves against the international student, the accountability will fall on the international student, but if the domestic student positions themselves with the international student, they will find other domestic students to assign the accountability to rather than to take accountability upon themselves.

### **Finding 1: Directness, indirectness, and contradictions**

Directness, indirectness, and contradictions are important for analyzing how domestic students narrate their disputes with international students because they can tell us what stance the domestic student takes in relation to the international student, and they can point to moral evaluations that the domestic student has toward the international roommate or dispute between international and domestic roommates. Tracy & Robles (2013) discuss the use of and individual definitions of directness and indirectness, and that those definitions and uses vary from culture to culture. Drawing on their work, I identified directness as stating an evaluation of the person(s) in question at the beginning with words with certain connotations or by clearly stating his or her stance. I also identified directness through the narrator's use of upgraders (curse words or adverbs and adjectives that intensify what the person is trying to say). I identified indirectness as either being avoidant in stating the narrator's evaluation, or stating it at the end. I identified

contradictions as when the narrator changed their stance from one part of the narrative to a different stance in another.

Throughout this study, I have been interested in how domestic students narrate their difficult social experiences with their international student counterparts. Foremost, I identified directness through how early in the narrative the storyteller established an evaluative stance toward the person they are assigning accountability to. Directness is also done through the use of morally evaluative adverbs and adjectives. I identified indirectness through the lateness or lack of opinion establishment, as well as the lack of moral evaluative adverbs and adjectives used. By looking at directness and indirectness in my collected narratives, I am able to answer my first research question “How do domestic students narrate disputes with international students?”

In all of the data, there is a noticeable difference in the frequency of directness used in online and in-person interview narratives. In the online narratives, directness was used in 17 instances and indirectness used in 8, out of the 25 total online narratives collected. However, the frequencies of directness versus indirectness is switched in the in-person interviews where there were 21 instances of indirectness and 9 instances of directness out of a total number of 30 in-person narratives.

Looking at contradictions also helps to answer this question by seeing where evaluations and blame assignments may have changed throughout the narratives, showing how domestic students narrate their disputes. Contradictions show how a domestic student narrating a story can change their stance and sometimes in that change of stance, can change who they assign accountability to.

Now, let us turn to examining examples of the use of directness and indirectness in narration. Nick, the pseudonym of one of my participants, is an RA I had an in-person interview

with. In his interview, Nick showed indirectness in his narrative describing a conflict between two of his residents:

((Interview 2, “Nick,” February 8, 2018))

- 1 Yes, I had one this year. Um, it was mostly over cleanliness, I think.
- 2 The domestic student what I gathered from it, had much higher levels
- 3 of cleanliness than the international student. I don't think it was more
- 4 a cultural thing, 'cause he also had much higher standards of
- 5 cleanliness than I do um but his roommate who was from China
- 6 who's very quiet, very reserved, and would mostly just hang out over
- 7 at his desk doing his homework, occasionally playing games or
- 8 talking to his friends online or through phone. Um, usually not in
- 9 English. So, I did a little bit of mediation there, um I later learned that
- 10 the international resident also had some issues with his domestic
- 11 roommate about noise levels.

In this excerpt from our interview, Nick explicitly states that the issue between his domestic and international resident was “not a cultural thing,” which means that he treated the situation not as an issue of culture, but of something else. In lines 2 through 5, Nick attempts to remain unbiased (and thus professional) by not talking badly about one of his residents, by using phrases like “The domestic student... had much higher levels of cleanliness than the international student,” “I don’t think it was more a cultural thing,” and “he also had much higher standards of cleanliness than I do.” In these quotes, Nick doesn’t use any adjectives or adverbs that would show animosity toward either of the residents. He remains more professional rather than acting as a friend or confidante that takes a side by using indirect stance in the narrative, by not talking badly about either of the residents. Had he taken sides with one of his residents over another, his position as an RA (where he is meant to help all his residents, regardless of his opinion toward them), would be compromised. In this situation, I identify professionalism in an RA’s sense as not talking badly about a client in an argument or conflict situation to an external party, and thus maintaining a more professional relationship than if he were to align his views

with one or the other and use that opportunity to talk badly about the one he doesn't align with. On ResLife.net, in a section labeled *Resolving Roommate Conflicts*, the website lays out that RA shouldn't show biases in their mediations between roommates, and that even an agreement on the issue with one of them can make this a possibility (Clark, n.d.).

When residents approach you about a roommate conflict, listen to their concerns and issues about the other roommates. Avoid agreeing or commenting about their concerns or issues with their roommates. Stating your opinion on the matter indirectly displays that you are supporting their frustrations and thoughts. You want to remain unbiased when speaking to all parties involved in the roommate conflict.

This isn't to say that RAs can't be friends with their residents, I am just making the argument that RAs are trained to remain indirect in conflicts between their residents and are merely there to help facilitate, mediate, and resolve any tensions that may arise. However, not all RA narratives were indirect, there were some that I interviewed that took stances with one of their residents.

In her in-person interview, Hannah (RA, pseudonym) used directness in how she narrated when international students smoked in her hall:

((Interview 1, "Hannah," February 7, 2018))

1 Yeah and that's where it becomes a problem because it permeates the  
2 entire hall. There's no way to pretend you're not doing that. Um I  
3 actually have a resident - two residents in fact - they were two incidents  
4 away from being kicked out of the halls because every time I went in  
5 there and I was like "you can't smoke" and they're like "oh okay sorry"  
6 and there's nothing I can do about it other than tell them to stop and I  
7 write my reports but they never went to their conduct meetings because  
8 they didn't read their emails so it's just like... it wasn't a good situation  
9 and no one was happy but it stopped finally.

On line 1, we can see where Hannah directly makes a negative evaluation of the smoking that occurs in the hall by using the word “problem” in relation to cigarette smoke, a term which have a negative connotation, and “permeate” to indicate the pervasiveness of the “problem.” Throughout the rest of her narrative, she continues using directness about international residents that smoke in the residence halls when she says, “there’s nothing I can do about it other than tell them to stop and write my reports” in lines 5 and 6. She also uses directness in her negative moral evaluation of her residents not understanding that they couldn’t smoke inside in line 3, where she describes that her residents were two incidents away from getting kicked out of the halls.

Another prime example of directness in a narrative is shown by an online user in the narrative titled *The one that let the room to rot*.

((Anonymous, posted August 16, 2017, thetab.com))

1 My sophomore year roommate and suitemate were randomly assigned, both  
2 international students from China, and both collectively made my sophomore  
3 living situation an actual nightmare. My roommate had super long, thick  
4 black hair that got everywhere – and I mean EVERYWHERE – even  
5 clogging up our vacuum. Neither of them cleaned anything, ever, so I had to  
6 clean our gross bathroom by myself. My other roommate had this adhesive  
6 butt pad thing for our toilet seat that she stuck on there and left for about a  
7 month. It got to the point where there were period blood stains on the seat and  
8 I had to confront her and make her throw it away.  
9 Also, my suitemate would eat a ton of food in her room, let it sit and mold for  
10 a week or so, and then dump out her rotting food into our toilet AND sink.  
11 There was constantly food in our drain. Our bathroom smelled like rotting  
12 food constantly, it was horrendous.

This user immediately gave a negative moral evaluation of their international roommates at the outset of their narrative by saying “My sophomore year roommate and suitemate were randomly assigned, both international students from China, and both collectively made my sophomore living situation an actual nightmare” (lines 1-3). In this immediate misalignment, I



consider this narrative more direct because the user establishes their stance right off. Here, the anonymous user made clear that they did not enjoy living with their international roommates by using the term “actual nightmare” in the first sentence. The word “nightmare” is a direct expression of dislike toward her roommates, and the adverb “actual” is used as an upgrader that intensifies their directness of negativity toward the international roommates, as does “and I mean EVERYWHERE” on line 4.

In the narrative that follows, the user was instead indirect in their moral evaluation and accountability assignment of the international student.

((waceyhawpuh, Septemeber 8, 2018, reddit.com))

1 My friend had a foreign roommate her freshman year who appeared to be the best  
 2 roommate one could ask for. She was quiet, clean, and rarely there. She also baked  
 3 on occasion. First semester goes by smoothly, my friend is loving life. College  
 4 rocks.  
 (9 lines omitted)  
 13 Weeks go by without incident, until one day my friend returns home from a class  
 14 that got cancelled early. She walks into her room to literally catch her roommate  
 15 red-handed. There she is, on my friend's side of the room with the little package in  
 16 her hand. My roommate doesn't have much of a temper but obviously has no  
 17 choice but to confront her then and there. Her roommate breaks down in tears and  
 18 tells her...  
 19 That she got PREGNANT over spring break and is trying to get rid of the baby by  
 20 taking birth control after the fact.  
 21 My roommate is stunned and horrified. She ends up contacting the RA, who  
 22 contacts the roommate's parents, who pull her out of school. No idea what  
 23 happened to her after that. People are crazy.  
 (15 lines omitted)  
 38 All parents were involved in the aforementioned drama because the students  
 39 associated decided to involve them. No one "snitched." No RAs called home. Stop  
 40 judging students' choices or the chain of command. Parents were involved because  
 41 their children told them what was going on. Chill.

In this narrative, the user is indirect because moral evaluation is not established until lines 16 and 17 by saying: “She walks into her room to literally catch her roommate red-handed.” The term “red-handed” is how the user expresses a negative moral evaluation about catching

their friend's roommate stealing pills. This evaluation is indirect, though, because in all of the paragraphs prior the storyteller doesn't use any explicit terms to establish an opinion toward the international student, but does use terms like "it's not always there" referring to their friend's birth control, pointing suspicion to someone other than her friend, but not pointing it toward anyone in particular. In lines 23 through 25, this quote establishes the user's negative evaluation of the situation, though this stance-taking doesn't happen until the very last paragraph (before the edits were made) in lines 40 through 43, which shows that the storyteller contradicts themselves in their negative evaluation and blame on the international student, but then completely defying what they had just said and giving a negative moral evaluation of the people on Reddit replying to the narrative.

This narrative also brought up another category that was only identified in the online narratives: contradictions in evaluations and blame assignment. I identified contradictions as the storyteller taking a stance and/or making an evaluation about a person and then changing their stance at the end of the narrative or in the edits, or reframes their evaluation to make it sound more positive than they had said before. In all data that showed contradictions, the international student was the one who was being referred to as the actor and person who was assigned blame.

The storyteller in this instance contradicts themselves in the edits in lines 40 through 43. While this instance could be read as a clarification, in lines 23 through 25, the storyteller says that the domestic friend contacted the RA and that the RA then contacted the parents who "pulled her out of school," implying that the international roommate left school not on her own choice by that of her parents. The storyteller makes the contradiction in lines 40 through 43 by saying "No one 'snitched', No RAs called home," which directly contradicts what was said in lines 23 through 25 "She ends up contacting the RA, who contacted the roommate's parents..."

This contradiction is important to note not only because we can see the author possibly changing their stance, but also because it can give insight into their opinion of those reading by using contradiction as a face-saving technique. I identify this as being a face-saving technique because she only changes her moral evaluations in the part that she labels as an edit, presumably after people said negative things about the situation in the comments.

Being direct or indirect in the moral evaluations, assignments of blame, or stances the storytellers took answers my first research question “How do domestic student resident advisors (RAs) and domestic students residents narrate disputes between international and domestic student roommates?” with either being direct or indirect and, in some instances, by using contradictions to save face.

Based on my analysis it is difficult to explain why online narratives tend to be more direct but this does seem to be a clear pattern. I will speculate that in online narratives, when the storyteller is hidden behind a screen and a username, they tend to be a lot more direct about their evaluations and assignment of blame toward international student roommates. I also speculate that in order to save face and not come off as being biased, since their jobs require professionalism and lack of bias in mediating arguments, RAs tended to be less direct about their evaluations and blame assignment in their narratives.

### **Finding 2: Domestic students negatively evaluate and assign blame according to differences in lifestyles**

In response to my first research question, I have found that domestic residents and resident advisors narrate the conflicts they’ve had with international roommates, residents, or floormates by discussing how difficult social situations can break out over difference in lifestyles. The analytic categories that helped me arrive to this particular theme is how domestic

students used moral evaluation, blame assignment, and/or identifying the international student as the acting agent all in response to how their lifestyles are different. In the data analyzed, differences in lifestyles meant such things as sleeping schedules, expectations of cleanliness, and throwing parties in their shared room. I identified these recurring themes as I analyzed narratives using the blame, active agent, and moral evaluation codes. In the online narrative accounts, there were 17 accounts about difference in lifestyle while in the in-person narratives there were 11 accounts.

The most frequent conflict over differences in lifestyle was cleanliness, exemplified in the online narrative *The one with the fish heads* from The Tab.

((Anonymous, October 20, 2016, thetab.com))

1 Last year I lived on campus with an international student from China.  
2 At first we got along ok, or as ok as the cultural barrier allowed.  
3 Things slowly started going downhill after I realized that we were on  
4 a completely different page when it came to cleanliness and security.  
5 Once I came home to find that she had left the front door unlocked  
6 for the entire weekend.  
7 With all of the campus robberies that happen, I was incredibly  
8 surprised that it hadn't happened to me. Then came the wrath of the  
9 fruit fly infestation. She would cut up meat, fruits, vegetables,  
10 basically anything that was incredibly perishable and throw it in the  
11 trash can. Have you ever heard of a garbage disposal? I lost it when I  
12 came home to a fish head in my sink. The fish head that she refused  
13 to throw out for over a week. A week. My other roommate and I went  
14 to our community assistant for help. She wrapped her fish heads in  
15 paper towels and threw them in the trash can for the rest of the year.

In this quote, the storyteller evaluates the situation as turning negative in line 3 with the phrase “things started slowly going downhill” as she and her roommate were having problems. They hint at the relevance of a “cultural barrier” on line 2. The rest of the narrative develops being “on a completely different page” about security (lines 5-8) and cleanliness (lines 8-15).

In his interview, Nick told of a similar situation that he had noticed between two of his residents:

((Interview 2, "Nick," February 8, 2018))

1 Um, it was mostly over cleanliness I think. The domestic student what I  
2 gathered from it, had much higher levels of cleanliness than the  
3 international student. I don't think it was more a cultural thing, 'cause he  
4 also had much higher standards of cleanliness than I do um but his  
5 roommate who was from China who's very quiet, very reserved, and would  
6 mostly just hangout over at his desk doing his homework, occasionally  
7 playing games or talking to his friends online or through phone. Um,  
8 usually not in English. So, I did a little bit of mediation there, um I later  
9 learned that the international resident also had some issues with his  
10 domestic roommate about noise levels.

Here, through his moral evaluation of the disagreement in cleanliness, Nick identified that the main reason his two residents weren't getting along was because their levels and expectations for cleanliness weren't compatible. Nick also recounts how the domestic student assigned blame to the international student for not being clean enough for his standards in lines 1 through 4. Though Nick doesn't take a stance toward one resident or the other, he still evaluated that the domestic student had high standards for cleanliness (in lines 1 through 3) and that the disagreement came from the international student not meeting those standards.

Finally, in an in-person interview, Mandy told a narrative about a room she had on her floor as an RA that was a suite with two international students and two domestic students. She talked about how one night the international students threw a party, and that caused a conflict with the roommate dynamics:

((Interview 4, "Mandy," February 14, 2018))

1 The first thing that comes to mind there is we there was a... I don't know  
2 what nationality they were, they were international students, but they  
3 threw a really, really big party and everybody that was at this party got  
4 very, very sick. And got alcohol poisoning and they had to call the cops or

5 we had to call the cops and send them to detox and all sorts of things. One  
6 of them went to the hospital, a couple of them went to detox but their  
7 roommates were domestic students. And basically what happened was  
8 after this party, and before this party, there was a bunch of issues with the  
9 roommates not being able to communicate with them and um not being  
10 able to communicate with them and tell them like “we don’t want these  
11 people in our room, we don't feel safe, we don't want to be partying” and  
12 stuff like that and it never got physical or anything, but it definitely came  
13 to the point where they weren't talking because they couldn't  
14 communicate and they we had to sit them down.

In this excerpt from Mandy’s interview, Mandy negatively evaluated the party and its after effects in lines 3 through 6. The narrative also showed through accountability assignment and the domestic students discomfort with the party that the international roommates’ party habits were a major issue that caused conflict between the international and domestic roommates (lines 7-11). Not only were the different lifestyle choices of wanting to party and not wanting to party issues that angered the domestic roommates (lines 7 through 11), but a bigger issue was that Mandy evaluated the difficulty in communication between the international and domestic roommates, whether by language barrier or with awkwardness of not wanting to communicate their feelings of contention.

### **Finding 3: Conflicts come from poor communication**

In narrating the arguments that domestic students had with their international counterparts, a third theme I identified posited a causal relationship between either lack of communication with an international roommate or floor-mate, or the inability to communicate with them, and conflict. In response to my first research question, this theme represents how domestic RAs assign accountability for the conflict and attributing the reason for the argument to communication problems or lack of communication between domestic and international students. In this theme, there were 10 instances of no or little communication being described as the issue

or the impetus of the numerous conflicts between international and domestic students, which showed how accountability was assigned and how the domestic students narrated the conflicts. All 10 of these instances were told in the in-person interview narratives with RAs, the online narratives did not yield any results in this theme. In this theme, the two major reasons why communication became a problem and led to conflict was either that the international and domestic students could not communicate because of a language barrier and general lack of understanding, or because the two students did not communicate their issues to each other.

Domestic students evaluated that their conflicts with international students was due to no or little communication, and communication problems was sometimes the reason blame was assigned to one of the parties. Shannon (RA, pseudonym) works in a residence hall with a high population of international students. She described her experience trying to form relationships with them as difficult because of the language barrier. She explained this in the following excerpt

((Interview 3, "Shannon," February 9, 2018))

- 1 So I feel like on the outside they're really nice and sweet, but I could never
- 2 like, I could never like get to know them through like it's very hard to get
- 3 like through them because they kinda put this shield on themselves because
- 4 I don't speak their language but I'm bilingual myself and I always address
- 5 that like "hey, I'm- I get it. I get you, like I've been there I know that this is
- 6 difficult, English wasn't my first language." So I try to open them up but I
- 7 feel like they're very [exclusive].

Because she and many other domestic students don't speak the same language as some of the international students, she evaluated that it can be hard to create relationships with them and interact on a daily basis. Shannon gave a moral evaluation of her international residents' unwillingness to talk to her and get to know her because of what she evaluates as not being able to speak English well. She also assigns blame to her residents because of the barrier they put up (lines 3 and 4) and because she could "never get to know them" or "get through to them" (lines 2

and 3). In line 7, Shannon originally used the word “inclusive” referring to not being able to get her international students to open up to her, but based on the context of the narrative, I presume that she meant to say “exclusive.”

Mandy explained that not being able to communicate with neighbors or roommates can exacerbate situations. In Mandy’s case, the inability to communicate exacerbated the earlier mentioned party dilemma. In the following excerpt, Mandy explains that the inability to communicate with neighbors can be to blame for conflicts.

((Interview 4, “Mandy,” February 14, 2018))

- 1 So, international students in Stearns East tend to live with other
- 2 international students  
(3 lines omitted)
- 6 So, you have all these rooms filled with international students that don't
- 7 talk to anybody else and then get in to really big conflicts with their
- 8 hallmates, not their roommates necessarily, but their hallmates. So, I've
- 9 mediated quite a few conflicts with situations like that where either they're
- 10 being too loud and the people next to them couldn't communicate that
- 11 with them or vice versa or sometimes they like threw raging parties

In this excerpt, Mandy assigned blame to the international students by explaining that they don’t talk to their hallmates and may not even be able to speak the same language (lines 6-7, 10), which can lead to further conflict with domestic students in the hall because one set of residents wasn’t able to tell their neighbors that they’re being too loud (line 10). Sometimes issues with communication aren’t any of the residents’ fault, but instead due to the inability to communicate, which is where blame can fall in some of the situations where communication is a root of the conflict. In this situation, and many others, a language barrier and an unclear understanding of conversations are used by narrators to make sense of why conflicts can break out.



Gillian explains in the following excerpt that she noticed this year more than previous years that her residents don't think to talk to each other about their issues.

((Interview 5, "Gillian," February 16, 2018))

- 1 Like especially this year; last year it wasn't that big of a problem but this
- 2 year it seems like residents in general don't know how to talk to each
- 3 other. So, they like see a problem but they don't talk about it and they
- 4 wait until it's a big problem and they come to the RA and they say "hey
- 5 this person I can't live with them anymore." And that's the first time
- 6 you've heard about the problem and you're like "how has it gone from
- 7 it's a problem to I have to move out?"

In this excerpt, Gillian evaluates her residents' poor communication skills with their roommates, regardless of their nationality. In this situation, Gillian doesn't assign the blame to the communication barrier, but instead assigns it to her residents because they can't talk to each other about their problems. In this narrative, she is the acted upon victim because she has to deal with situations that happen between her residents that could have been worked out earlier (lines 3 and 4). In the next excerpt, Gillian evaluates the lack of communication about issues also comes from not wanting to hurt each other's feelings.

((Interview 5, "Gillian," February 16, 2018))

- 1 You live with them, but they're still your friends. But it's a sense of "I
- 2 don't want to get them in trouble." And "I don't want them to know that
- 3 I said something." That's always the biggest thing is that like if they
- 4 come to you and tell you something they say, "please don't tell them that
- 5 I told you..." So, I've had this one room, another room, that also had
- 6 two international people in it and it was also dishes, I don't know.
- 7 Dishes is a big problem I think. But the domestic students came to me
- 8 and said that the two international people don't do the dishes and they
- 9 told me about the problem and they told me that I should just say that
- 10 "there's a smell that I smell" and that I should just educate them about
- 11 doing the dishes. And not tell them that it was the other two residents in
- 12 the room that told me. And then also I feel like I always say "let's sit
- 13 together, let's talk about this. Like all four with me and then I, like,
- 14 navigate the conversation" but that's they're like "No! No, I don't want
- 15 that cause then they might think that I don't like them" and then that

16 makes it really hard to like solve the problem if you can't communicate  
17 with both sides and you can't do something that one person doesn't feel  
18 comfortable with.

In this narrative, Gillian negatively evaluates that the domestic students didn't want her to tell the international students that they had said something about them not doing the dishes by saying in lines 16 through 18 by saying "it's really hard to solve the problem if you can't communicate with both sides." The same lines also assign blame to the domestic students because the teller positions domestic students as the ones making it harder for her to help them solve the issue.

The narratives suggest that not only can communication issues exacerbate little issues into big conflicts, but if some issues that need to be communicated like dietary restrictions or medical conditions are not communicated or understood clearly, it can lead to physically dangerous situations. Mandy discussed how poor communication skills between two of her residents turned a "dangerous situation into a hostile one":

((Interview 4, "Mandy," February 14, 2018))

1 One particular one that comes to mind is a student who was allergic to  
2 peanut butter. And there was a couple of different conflicts where she  
3 was so allergic to peanut butter that it couldn't be in the room at all, it  
4 couldn't be in the air, it couldn't be on the things she touched but the  
5 international student roommate didn't understand that so there was a  
6 couple times back and forth where they would talk about it back and  
7 forth with me and talk about the consequences of doing this and trying  
8 to come to a conclusion of you know don't have peanut butter in the  
9 room, blah blah blah. And one time the roommate that was allergic to  
10 peanut butter came into the room and they had baked something with  
11 peanut butter and so she immediately had to go to the hospital... with  
12 that kind of situation where it kind of seems like the students  
13 sometimes the language barrier gets in the way of misunderstanding  
14 and it can turn into either a dangerous situation or a really hostile  
15 situation.

In this narrative, Mandy describes another situation where lack of understanding and a language barrier is the cause of the conflict between the two roommates. This narrative presents the view that, through no fault of either roommate, conflicts and negative social situations can still break out due to circumstances that no one can control. In lines 12 and 13, Mandy describes how the language barrier is what could be considered the villain in this situation, and though a lack of fluency in the English language can seem like the blame falls on the international student, I argue that the blame actually falls on the inability to talk to each other.

Another conflict that arose in narrations being told and assigning blame because of miscommunication was the confusion international students felt when domestic students would ask them how they were. In the following narrative, Gillian shares a conversation she's had to have with a lot of her international students about how asking "how are you?" is an American greeting custom, not a genuine inquiry.

((Interview 5, "Gillian," February 16, 2018))

1 Another thing, I have noticed with my international residents... but that's a  
2 cultural thing, but like in America we say like "hey, what's up?" but we  
3 don't expect an answer to that and international students don't understand  
4 that. I've talked to some of my international students and they're like "why  
5 do they ask me how I feel but don't care about my answer?" and if  
6 someone asks, "Hey what's up? hey how are you? or hey how's it going?"  
7 it's just like a way to say hi and to acknowledge people but that's a very  
8 American thing and that can hurt international people a lot. And then  
9 they're like "why would I think of them as a friend if they don't actually  
10 want to know how I feel? Like even if they asked hey what's up how are  
11 you and I say I'm having a rough day or I'm homesick or whatever, they  
12 wouldn't ask another question. They'd say I'm sorry" and keep walking.

In this narrative, Gillian describes how different cultural scripts and misunderstanding of cultural norms can be confuse international students and make them feel not cared about. In lines 4-5 and 10-12, Gillian describes how international students express that they don't feel cared for

or like Americans are their true friends because they don't really care about how they feel.

Gillian narrates this miscommunication and interaction by evaluating the isolation international students feel and blames the miscommunication for creating indirect tense situations because the international student doesn't feel valued or respected. International students were confused and hurt because the domestic students would say "hi, how are you?" and not stay engaged in the conversation when they told the domestic students the answer. Because of the misunderstanding between international and American greeting norms, in this narrative, Gillian assigns blame to the miscommunication that happens between international and domestic students that can potentially create conflict.

Hannah recounted a similar conversation having to explain the "hi, how are you" custom to international students as well in the following excerpt.

((Interview 1, "Hannah," February 7, 2018))

- 1 It's just little things they don't... like one of my residents remarked to me
- 2 'cause I always say like "hi how are you" in the hall and he's like "I've
- 3 noticed American people when they say how are you they aren't really
- 4 looking for an answer" and I'm like (laughs) sometimes that's kind of true
- 5 people just say it as a greeting and just like little I mean I don't understand
- 6 the language so that wouldn't help very much but stuff like that.

Hannah never narrated the situation as harmful to international students like Gillian did, but in lines 5 and 6 narrated how the phrase would be confusing for people who don't understand the function of the language for greeting, especially in a language that isn't their first. For international students who don't understand the American greeting custom of "hi, how are you?", the phrase can be confusing and may cause further misunderstanding in a relationship between an international and domestic student. In this case, blame isn't assigned to any person in particular, but instead to the concept of misunderstanding and disconnect from the culture.

**Finding 4: Nationality as the cause of conflict**

In many of the narratives, whether online or in-person, the aspect of race or nationality as a contributor to or reason for conflict came up enough that it became a pattern, five times in person and six times online. In-person, the RAs noticed that some conflicts came up because domestic residents would project stereotypes onto their international roommates, or in one instance avoid a floor because they knew that it was the floor for international students. In the online narratives, the students making the posts were the ones who would attribute negative aspects and assign accountability for any conflicts to their international roommates, attributing the reason for the conflict to their nationality. This theme answers both research questions by answering how domestic students narrated their conflicts with international students and also how they assign accountability or blame in these situations. Through my analysis, I've come to the conclusion that the conflicts that fall under the race or nationality bias is an intractable conflict, or one that cannot be easily solved. The narratives presented these conflicts as intractable by pointing to essential differences resulting from national or cultural membership, and casting the conflict as the clashing of cultures.

Hannah, who is an RA with a predominately international resident floor described how she heard about domestic students on different floors in her building stereotyping her floor because of the high population of international residents.

((Interview 1, "Hannah," February 7, 2018))

- 1 I don't know if this is like a direct conflict, but um someone from like the
- 2 third floor which is right above me cause I'm like the second floor. Um I
- 3 heard thru one of the RAs that someone had been calling my floor China
- 4 Town just because I have so many international residents and I'm like it
- 5 just it's just the kind of connotation that it has like "oh that's like the
- 6 Chinese floor like we don't go down there that's where like they bel-..."
- 7 like I don't know how to phrase it but it really pissed me off. Yeah and
- 8 that's how like I think it is. It's not like direct conflict, it's not even dislike

9 it's just they don't communicate and they don't make an effort to  
10 communicate.

In this narrative, Hannah negatively evaluates the domestic students who nicknamed her floor China Town in line 7 when she said, “it really pissed me off.” From Hannah’s perspective, the blame is assigned to the domestic students and their discrimination against her floor as well as the stereotypes they assign to it with the nickname “China Town” (lines 3 and 4). However, looking deeper in the narrative, the domestic residents’ moral evaluations of the international students on Hannah’s floor is negative, which can be seen in how Hannah recounts how they refer to her floor in lines 3-6 with “...calling my floor China Town just because I have so many international residents and I'm like it just it's just the kind of connotation that it has like “oh that’s like the Chinese floor like we don’t go down there.”” In this recollection, Hannah shows how domestic students negatively evaluate her floor and avoid it because of stereotypes they have assigned and discrimination based on that. These are all present in lines 3 through 6, particularly when she is paraphrasing what domestic students say in lines 5 and 6. In this excerpt, Hannah narrates her perspective of a conflict between international and domestic students. Her assignment of accountability to domestic students rest on how domestic students negatively evaluate her floor and the international residents living there based on their nationality (whether accurate or not).

In the following excerpt, an online user assigns blame to the international roommate by using nationality as a justification for why she and her roommate don’t get along.

((novacaineandlaughter, 2012, weddingbee.com))

1 My college roommate was from China so she was up all night making  
2 international phone calls to China in the room almost every day, even  
3 while I was sleeping! She could have easily just gone to the lounge on  
4

5 either floor or onto the deck but she chose to sit on her bed and yap at full  
6 volume.  
7 She was also a huge procrastinator and would be up until all ours of the  
8 night doing papers with the lights on, she also chewed with her mouth  
9 open which drove me insane. At the end of the semester she got an RA to  
10 come to our room and mediate because she had told her I was the bad  
11 roommate, I was shaking so hard with anger. I seriously could have throttled  
her.

By using the word “so” after saying that her roommate was from China (line 1), the storyteller uses the roommate’s nationality to explain why she was to blame. She also gave an explicit moral evaluation in lines 3 through 5 when she said, “she could have easily just gone to the lounge on either floor or onto the deck but she chose to sit on her bed and yap at full volume.” By stating an “easy” alternative, the narrator makes a negative moral evaluation about the Chinese roommate’s choice in staying in the room. In lines 6 and 7, the user gave further negative moral evaluation toward the roommate’s choice of when to do her work by saying “she was also a huge procrastinator and would be up until all ours of the night doing papers with the lights on.” In this quote, the storyteller also assigns blame toward the international roommate’s sleeping schedule by noting that late at night she would still have the lights on. This was analyzed through negative discourse in words such as “huge procrastinator” and “all hours of the night” which have negative connotations. The user assigns accountability and moral evaluation in this narrative not only through difference in living styles, but in the first line by saying “so” shows the justification for the blame to the roommate’s Chinese nationality.

In the following excerpt, Gillian narrates how her domestic residents came to her with problems about international roommates before they come to her about problems with other domestic roommates.

((Interview 5, “Gillian,” February 16, 2018))

1 And also, if a domestic person comes to me with a roommate conflict  
2 with an international person, it's always like I let them talk first and tell  
3 me their story and there's always a part of it where they say "I think it's  
4 because they're international" not because "I think they're human" if that  
5 makes sense? They tend to, like, connect it back to their international  
6 heritage and not to their like... they don't think about like I could have  
7 the same problem with a domestic person. They always relate it back to  
8 being international.

In this narrative, Gillian gives a negative moral evaluation of the domestic students assigning blame to her international residents and attributing that blame to the fact that they're international, which we can see in lines 3-6 with "...there's always a part of it where they say, 'I think it's because they're international' not because 'I think they're human' if that makes sense? They tend to connect it back to their heritage." From her own perspective, Gillian assigns blame to the domestic residents for attributing their own blame to their international roommates for being whatever nationality they identify as, or simply for being international. She also explains that these problems that her domestic residents come to her about regarding their international roommates can be the same kind of problem that just happens with roommates, regardless of nationality in lines 6 and 7 "...they don't think about like I could have the same problem with a domestic person." In Gillian's narrative, she tells of how her domestic residents narrate their stories to her by using the difference in culture and country of origin as the reason why they think their roommate conflicts arise, evident in lines 5 and 6 with "They tend to, like, connect it back to their international heritage..." and in lines 7 and 8 with "They always relate it back to being international."

Gillian also narrated how parents can unknowingly be contributors to international/domestic roommate conflicts. Gillian explains this dilemma in the excerpt below.

((Interview 5, "Gillian," February 16, 2018))



1 Move-in day. So, people like international people always come from the  
2 airport and move in alone. But then domestic people come with like mom,  
3 dad, sister, boyfriend, everyone, their whole family. And then, since I have  
4 an apartment floor this year, I've moved in a lot of domestic students into  
5 the apartments and every time, I'd say 8 times out of 10, parents of  
6 domestic students that found out that their son or daughter was living with  
7 an international student would come up and be like, "So I heard that  
8 international students tend to not be clean" and ask if that's a problem. Like  
9 8 out of 10 parents ask me that. So, I feel like domestic residents hear that  
10 from their parents so they just adapt it and be like "oh, he's gonna be messy  
11 cause he's from China."

Here, Gillian assigns blame to the domestic students' parents for intentionally or unintentionally projecting their worries about their children living with international students. In lines 9 through 11, Gillian negatively evaluates how her domestic residents hear comments about cleanliness from their parents and adopt this idea as their own, and she says that they then think that their international roommates are going to be messy because that's what they heard from their parents. She also puts the blame of the root of the conflict on the parents in lines 5 through 8.

In the following excerpt, Gillian narrates that she has had domestic students coming to her with issues early in the first semester, before she tends to get complaints about roommate issues with other domestic students.

((Interview 5, "Gillian," February 16, 2018))

1 Domestic on international is a problem way, way earlier than domestic  
2 on domestic. So, let's say there are two rooms. One with two domestic  
3 students and one with one domestic and one international. They have  
4 the exact same problem, exact same frequency of the problem, the  
5 international room is gonna be my problem before the domestic, like I  
6 hear about that problem way earlier than the domestic on domestic.  
7 Yeah, so the first half of the semester I tend to have way more  
8 problems, problems is a bad word. I have way more work, let's call it  
9 work, I have way more work with my international rooms than with my  
10 domestic rooms.

In this narrative, Gillian negatively evaluates the conflicts in international and domestic roommate rooms as becoming “work” sooner than the all-domestic roommate dorms. This evaluation of the international/domestic roommate conflict relationship is evident in lines 3 through 6. Gillian explains and negatively evaluates that “the international room is gonna be my problem before the domestic, like I hear about that problem way earlier than the domestic on domestic.” In these lines, I analyzed that Gillian assigns blame to the domestic students with international roommates for coming to her earlier than the time that domestic students with domestic roommates come to her.

A user on College Confidential explained a similar story with her Chinese international roommate in the following narrative.

((janel89, July 21, 2006, collegeconfidential.com))

1 I had a roommate from China my freshman year....and she honestly  
2 drove me absolutely crazy. For the most part, she just drove me  
3 crazy because she was a manic-depressive person who never went  
4 to class, made any friends, showered, or ever went out -- not  
5 because she was Chinese. But a few things were irritating to cope  
6 with. She ALWAYS played Cantonese music; talked on the phone  
7 with her family in Hong Kong like every day, never stepped out of  
8 the room once (if you've ever heard this language, it's very high-  
9 pitched and not easy on the ears); and she would cook this really  
10 weird food in the microwave that left a smell which honestly forced  
11 me to open my windows to prevent myself from gagging. Plus, in  
12 her culture, it's expected that everyone share what they have with  
13 each other without having to ask -- consequently, she would eat  
14 loads of my food and use my computer all the time without asking.  
15 I could never get over seeing this as rude. She just felt no interest  
16 whatsoever in learning about the American way of life, or making  
17 friends here; all she did was talk about how she missed home and  
18 hated Massachusetts.

While the Reddit user attributed using things without asking more to ignorance about American sharing culture, the College Confidential user explained they “could never get over

seeing this as rude” (line 15). Throughout the rest of her narrative, the user talked negatively of the international roommate and their unspoken dispute over personal property customs (lines 9 through 13).

Treating international students as essentially different due to their nationality from domestic roommates or hallmates is justification for the assignment of blame for the conflict. This orientation to international students renders conflicts intractable and extremely hard, if not impossible, to manage. Furthermore, the international student is put at a disadvantage being held accountable for their actions simply because they are not nationals of the country they are attending university in, and because they have different ways of living than Americans. I speculate that this gives domestic students an upper hand by being able to hand the blame of the conflicts off to the international student simply because they are not yet accustomed to the American way of life, because they want to talk to their family and friends in their home country on a time schedule when they would be awake, or because they have different norms than domestic students who have lived their whole life and are attending university in the country they were raised in.

It is possible that nationality masks the racial bias and discrimination in the domestic students’ narratives. In Hannah’s case, the domestic students didn’t even know if all of the students living on her floor were Chinese, and the label “China Town” showed a racial bias being labeled only as Chinese rather than what could have been a floor of more than just students from China. I also found that in the in-person interviews, unless the narrator was talking about other domestic students being discriminatory, the narrator would be very careful about the wording they used and how they made biased comments in relation to international students.

This, I surmise, may be done for the purpose of preempting the charge of racial bias, a highly sensitive issue to U.S. students and RAs.

**Finding 5: Domestic students' alignment with international students shapes accountability**

In the narratives told either online or in-person, part of the narrative is that at some point the person talking about the conflict assigns accountability for the dispute or conflict to someone in the situation, whether it be the international student or another domestic student in the situation. I found through coding and analysis of my data that in the online narratives, the domestic student telling the story assigned accountability to the international person 21 out of 25 times. In the in-person interview narratives, the numbers were almost opposite: the domestic RA telling the narrative assigned accountability to another domestic student involved or domestic students in general 13 out of 30 times with the domestic RAs only blaming the international students 8 out of 30 times.

In a previously mentioned online narrative, which follows, the domestic roommate assigns the accountability of the situation to the international roommate and doesn't take accountability for the conflict.

((novacaineandlaughter, 2012, weddingbee.com))

- 1 My college roommate was from China so she was up all night making
- 2 international phone calls to China in the room almost every day, even
- 3 while I was sleeping! She could have easily just gone to the lounge on
- 4 either floor or onto the deck but she chose to sit on her bed and yap at full
- 5 volume.
- 6 She was also a huge procrastinator and would be up until all ours of the
- 7 night doing papers with the lights on, she also chewed with her mouth
- 8 open which drove me insane. At the end of the semester she got an RA to
- 9 come to our room and mediate because she had told her **I** was the bad
- 10 roommate, I was shaking so hard with anger. I seriously could have throttled
- 11 her.

In lines 8 through 10, the narrator evaluates a situation where the international student called the RA in on her and avoids assignment of accountability for the conflict when saying "... and mediate because she had told her **I** was the bad roommate." In this line, by bolding the letter I (line 9), the user implies that they are not the one to blame in any of the conflicts between the two of them, and implied that the international student was the only one in the situation who could be held accountable for any conflict breaking out. Thus, the domestic student doesn't accept any blame that the international student put on her. Instead, she narrated getting angry and further evaluated that she wasn't a bad roommate and shouldn't have been assigned any accountability for being one.

Shannon also gave an in-person account where the accountability of the conflict was assigned to the international students in her hall who were smoking cigarettes. She remained blameless in the narrative and even took a heroic stance by trying to explain to international students why they couldn't smoke in the residence halls, which happens in the excerpt that follows.

((Interview 3, "Shannon," February 9, 2018))

1 Well we have put up like "no smoking" signs like literally everywhere  
2 and sometimes they just smell like it and you can't do anything about  
3 it. They just, they might have and sometimes literally the parking lot's  
4 right there and they'll just be outside the door and I'm like "you guys  
5 can you go like 30 feet away? Like it's not that hard" like but then  
6 sometimes we'll knock on a door when we're on duty and be like "hey  
7 your room kind of smells like smoke is there something in here?" and  
8 they're like "nope" and it dead just like smells like smoke and they  
9 just straight up lie.

In this excerpt, Shannon negatively evaluates the situation with the international students in her hall disobeying the smoking rules in the hall and on campus in lines 4 and 5 by saying how easy it is to go to the parking lot and farther away from the building. She assigns blame to the

international students who smoke, despite seeing the no smoking signs, and for lying to her and other RAs about smoking. In this narrative, she puts herself in a position of power telling the international students not to smoke while also helping the domestic students who are bothered by the smell. In this narrative while assigning blame to the international students, Shannon also aligns herself with the domestic students that are bothered by the smoke.

Following, in one of the two online narratives that aligned with the international student, an RA also gave their account of one of their international students who was being mistreated by her domestic roommate. (RAs' online narratives were rare in my data.)

((legendofhidtemp, January 29, 2013, reddit.com))

1 I'm a resident assistant and some of the shit that I've seen people put up  
 2 with is unreal. Just this past semester, one of my international students  
 3 was placed with the most controlling, loud mouth I've ever met. The poor  
 4 girl was being interrogated every time she tried to leave the room. Not  
 5 only would that suck for any person, but imagine being fucked with in  
 6 your second language. Not cool. Anyway, we tried to get a new room for  
 7 my international student as soon as possible, unfortunately that still  
 8 meant that she was there all semester.

In this narrative, the domestic RA giving the narrative is positioned with the international student and assigned accountability of the conflict between the roommates to the domestic student, evident in lines 2 and 3 when she negatively evaluates the domestic student as “the most controlling, loud mouth I’ve ever met.” According to this RA’s online narrative, instead of any blame falling on the international student, the blame falls on the domestic resident.

The second of online narratives that positioned with the international student in the story was from Jezebel.com and was titled *Murderous Gnomes*. In the following excerpts, the domestic student narrates how the whole conflict went down:

((Anonymous, November 10, 2010, jezebel.com))

1 it was 4 of us' friends' in a 4bedroom apartment. drunken gnome and the  
2 slutty shy girl on one side, myself and the crazy foreign student on the  
3 other side of the apartment. drunken gnome started dating a ghetto gnome  
4 and these 2 often fucked loudly over her desk (which was next to my wall).  
5 He practically lived with us, eating our food, hogging the remote and  
6 inviting his buds over. we had a halloween party and some of his fellow  
7 gangbangers showed up (no really, these guys had shown up to a frat party  
8 with a gun few weeks prior) and my foreign roommate had kindly told  
9 them they werent allowed on our housing complex premises (letters were  
10 sent to everyone). The gangbangers got pissy and seeked out their fellow  
11 ghetto gnome. who in turn, grabbed my foreign roomie by the throat, threw  
12 her against the door and told her tough shit.  
13 i swooped in and told him to back the fuck off. he then raised his 5'4 arm  
14 to me as if ready to hit me, and i grabbed a knife from the counter. he  
15 backed off.his girlfriend (drunken gnome) didnt. so for 7 mos. drunken  
16 gnome and slutty shy harassed the shit our of myself and crazy foreign  
17 roomie. bleach in our laundry. turning the stove to high and burning our  
18 food. ghetto gnome basically moved in and bullied us out of our living  
19 room. we complained to management to change us to another apt. she told  
20 us, "too bad, just stick it out".  
21 i wake up one morning puking blood. rushed to the ER and hospitalized for  
22 3 weeks. My gallbladder had been cut and no one knew why. crazy foreign  
23 roomie soon was hospitalized for stomach pain a week after.

In line 8 and lines 11 through 15, the narrator assigns accountability to the “drunken gnome’s” boyfriend, siding with the international roommate. The narrator was also positioned against the other domestic roommates, who received accountability and blame in lines 16 through 18. In this case, because the domestic student was aligned with the international roommate, they took a very strong position against the other domestic students in the story. This worse-case scenario narrative exemplifies that when if the domestic student telling the story sides with the international student in a roommate conflict, the blame will fall on other domestic students involved rather than the narrator taking the blame.

In the online accounts, domestic students told their horror stories about freshman roommates or gave cautionary tales to incoming freshman who just found out that they got randomly paired with an international student. This being the case, I speculate that they tended to

take a more extreme stance and give the best story they can to entertain, get feelings out, and/or warn others of the worst-case scenario.

Within this theme I found that if domestic students who are telling the stories align themselves with their international roommate or resident rather than against, they are more likely to assign the accountability of the conflict or dispute to another involved domestic student rather than take the blame themselves or assign it to another international student. This accountability assignment appeared 13 times in a total of 30 in-person interview narratives while it only appeared twice out of 25 online narratives.

### **Finding 6: Domestic Students Do Not Take Blame in Narratives**

Throughout the narratives I've collected, I have found that while the domestic narrators may or may not assign blame to the international students in their stories, the domestic students never take accountability for the conflict in the narrative, instead either assigning it to another domestic student or an international student, but never themselves.

The narrative I collected that gets closest to assigning accountability to herself is Hannah's narrative about how she sees international students being mistreated and misrepresented on campus by their domestic student counterparts in the following narrative. Hannah narrates how she has found that international students are misrepresented on campus because domestic students don't take the time to get to know them or even talk to them in the following excerpt.

((Interview 1, "Hannah," February 7, 2018))

- 1 I didn't know like any international students my freshman year and now
- 2 that I get to know some of them so well they just often really
- 3 misrepresented and they're people and they're really, really smart and
- 4 they're going to be like economics majors or computer science, one of
- 5 mine wants to study philosophy, but it's just like, sometimes and I don't
- 6 know the word that I'm trying to use, but people don't necessarily treat



7 them as well just because and I think it's just the language issue, if they  
8 spoke the same language like they'd be on equal footing but it's just, it's  
9 just kind of hard to watch sometimes.

In this excerpt, Hannah assigns blame to domestic students as a whole that they (and she herself included when she was a freshman) “don’t treat them as well” (lines 6 and 7). Hannah is not only assigning blame to the domestic student body, but she also aligns herself with international students. Although she puts some blame on her freshman self, she no longer blames herself in present and actually avoids the assignment of blame to her present self by switching it over to the rest of the domestic student population. She instead puts her past self in the domestic student group that she blames, but keeps her present self free of blame. She also evaluates her new appreciation for international students because she has gotten close to them as an RA in lines 2 and 3, where she also evaluates how international students are misrepresented by those who are not international.

Another narrative from an online user showed that not only did the narrator not give any ways that the conflict may have been attributed to themselves, but the narrator also takes a position of being a blameless victim by his international roommate. The narrative follows.

((LoveableCoward, December 29, 2012, reddit.com))

1 Yep. Freshman year I had a Chinese International student from an uber-  
2 rich family as a roommate. Bought a giant six inch blade, a butterfly  
3 knife and a set of throwing knives that he insisted he use inside our tiny  
4 10X14 ft room. Blades bouncing all over the place. Playing World of  
5 Tanks at 3 in the morning shouting in [Mandarin]. When I asked him  
6 nicely to keep it down, he would only say, "Shut up." Cut his hair in our  
7 bathroom, wouldn't clean it up for three weeks. My suitemates and I had  
8 to go to the RA to make him pick up after days of asking politely failed.  
9 Now, I'm a polite guy, would ask people how their day went and what  
10 they learned. When I asked him what he learned in engineering, he  
11 would go, "Oh, you wouldn't understand, you're too stupid."

In this narrative, the narrator negatively evaluated his international roommate by making himself the polite victim of the international roommate's acts. These victimizations are present in lines 5 and 6 by saying "When I asked him nicely to keep it down, he would only say, 'Shut up.'" The user also made himself an innocent victim in lines 9 -11 with "Now, I'm a polite guy, would ask people how their day went and what they learned. When I asked him what he learned in engineering, he would go, 'Oh you wouldn't understand, you're too stupid.'" In this narrative, we only get one point of view of the conflict, so we cannot see if anything else happened from the international students' perspective, or if he honestly was just rude. What we can see is how the narrator presents himself as a blameless victim against the rude acts of the international roommate throughout their experience living together. The word Mandarin was also misspelled in line 5 as Mandrian, so I rewrote it for clarification.

In the following online narrative, the user showed that the international roommate assigned blame to him or her, but the user never takes that assigned accountability, and even defends themselves against what the international roommate was accusing them of.

((Anonymous, March 6, 2017, hercampus.com))

- 1 My roommate would sometimes listen to loud talk shows in the room
- 2 in her native language. When I had work to do, I would ask her to
- 3 wear headphones because it was very distracting. Instead of just
- 4 putting on headphones like any normal person, she refused and instead
- 5 accused me of hating her native language! Obviously that wasn't the
- 6 reason, but she still took it personally and wouldn't put in headphones.

In lines 2 and 3, the user described how they would "ask her [roommate] to wear headphones because it was very distracting," where we can see that the user is already implying that they were being innocent in just asking to wear headphones. Clearly, as shown in lines 4 and 5, the roommate is upset by this in the excerpt "she refused and instead accused me of hating her

native language!” This chunk of text gives us an insight into there clearly being a conflict around noise between the roommates, and already we are starting to see hints of the narrator coming off as blameless and becoming a victim with the chunk “accused me of hating her native language!” (lines 4 and 5). Finally, the user defends themselves against what the international roommate was saying and took the blamelessness further in the last two lines with “Obviously that wasn’t the reason, but she still took it personally and wouldn’t put in headphones.” In this last sentence, the user attempts to show that they aren’t against the roommate’s language with the word “obviously.” The user takes it a step further by negatively evaluating that the roommate “took it personally” and even assigned blame, making the user the acted upon victim by concluding that the roommate “wouldn’t put in headphones.”

Finally, in trying to resolve a conflict between international and domestic students, Shannon tells a narrative about how the blame was placed on her by her boss, but she avoided accepting accountability by assigning the blame and responsibility to the roommates in question. Shannon’s narrative follows.

((Interview 3, “Shannon,” February 9, 2018))

1 Yeah, and it was a very- like it had to do with like common  
 2 roommate things like sleeping and stuff basically. One person sleeps  
 3 later than the other and disrupts the other. So, I say okay well how-  
 4 and he's like "oh, but it's okay right now" I said "okay, well talk to  
 5 me when it's currently happening so I can do something about it. Or  
 6 if it repeats." So, I go I-I just do my thing and suddenly I get you  
 7 know an email from Linda [pseudonym for Hall Director]. She's like  
 8 "hey, can we talk?" And she basically tells me that his advisor called  
 9 her saying that he's having a lot of you know sleep issues and his RA  
 10 won't do anything about it. So, I was like okay. I don't know if he's  
 11 telling double stories or if she's overreacting. So, then I felt really  
 12 weird and I was like you know what fine, I'll take initiative,  
 13 whatever. And I met up with him and I was like "hey, I got your  
 14 message well my like boss got your advisors message so let's solve  
 15 this now." So, he basically talks to me and tells me everything that's  
 16 happened. I go in there and they both are just staring at me and I don't

17 know what to do. I'm like "okay well let's just talk about this  
18 conflict" and he's like "oh I've already solved it" and the other guy's  
19 like "yeah" and I'm like "okay, well how do you expect me to solve  
20 this? Like I was really frustrated because I didn't know what to do.  
21 Like you know, I get it, I'm here to help you solve your issues, but  
22 HELP you, but you have to be willing to help you have to take the  
23 initiative, I can't do it by myself.

In this narrative, Shannon narrates how she doesn't believe that the conflict and how it was dealt with was her fault, even though the advisor and hall director assigned blame to her, which is evident in lines 7-10. In lines 9 and 10 in particular, we can see where the international student's advisor really assigns blame to Shannon with "his RA won't do anything about it." However, in lines \_\_ Shannon defends herself and rather than taking responsibility she gives the resident responsibility to tell her at another time and partially removes herself from the situation, by saying "Okay well talk to me when it's currently happening so I can do something about it" (lines 4 and 5). Later on, in lines 11 and 12, she said "So, then I felt really weird and I was like you know what fine, I'll take initiative" Shannon takes responsibility for the situation, but only after she got in trouble for it, and still doesn't take blame for it throughout the rest of the narrative. Finally, in lines 19-23, we can see Shannon's frustration with the situation and how she removes herself from having responsibility in it, particularly in lines 21-23 where she says "Like you know, I get it, I'm here to help you solve your issues, but HELP you, but you have to be willing to help you have to take the initiative, I can't do it by myself." In this sentence, Shannon doesn't take blame for the situation and instead switches the blame over to the roommates for expecting her to do it by herself.

The above narratives illustrate some of the ways in which domestic students (and RAs?) didn't take responsibility or blame in conflicts they were involved in, and the fact that the point of view is only from the domestic students' means that other details from other peoples' points of

view that could show the domestic student had blame have been left out. The domestic student also tends to assign blame away from themselves and in some situations, would defend themselves in the narrative when they felt that they had been assigned blame, further drawing blame away from themselves.

This study yielded 6 themes that I found to be most important to answering my research questions. The first theme answered my first research question of how domestic students narrate conflict with international roommates or residents (or hallmates) with either directly, indirectly, or with contradictions. These helps us to understand how domestic students narrate regarding their relationship to the international student, and how they decide to position themselves and tell the story to a stranger. My second theme answered both my first and second research questions of how domestic students narrate conflict with international students and how they assign blame in their narratives of conflict. The answer was by negatively evaluating differences in lifestyles and then assigning blame to the situation because of those differences in lifestyles. This theme helps us to understand how domestic students talk through their differences in lifestyles with their roommates, and how they involve other people or deal with it themselves, while also answering where the blame in the situation falls. My third theme answered my first research question by showing that domestic students narrate conflict based on inability to communicate or lack of communication (whether this mean not talking through situations or not being able to communicate due to language barriers). This theme helps us understand how domestic students may identify the root of conflict, and how they evaluate the cause of the conflict in reference to their international counterpart. My fourth theme answered both my research questions by showing that domestic students may use the nationalities or race of their roommates to narrate their situation, and that they may also assign blame to their international roommate based on

nationality or race. This can help us understand a root of the conflict issue with mixed nationality roommates in general. The fifth theme answered my second research question by showing that depending on how the domestic student does or doesn't align themselves with their international student counterpart may depend on who in the narrative they assign accountability or blame. This can help us understand how domestic students see their relationships with their international counterparts and can also help us understand an accountability assignment dynamic in stories. Finally, the sixth theme showed that none of the domestic narrators in my study took accountability for any conflicts that happened and, going off of the fifth theme, would blame someone else, either the international student or another domestic student, and this theme shows that the storyteller tries to direct blame away from themselves rather than take any responsibility for the conflict.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Rationale for Study**

My desire to conduct this research came from my experience studying abroad and my desire to understand more about international students' experiences studying abroad in my home country, the United States. I turned to studying domestic students in order to gain a better understanding of interactions with international students and how stressful or complex social situations play out from a domestic resident and resident advisor point of view. This being said, throughout this study I have attempted to understand how domestic students evaluate and assign blame in conflicts they have with international students through their personal narratives of these conflicts.

As past literature has shown, research has been conducted in the context of how domestic students perceive their international counterparts at their universities, how international students make sense of their experiences being foreign at their host universities, and how international students may have trouble managing relationships and communicating with their domestic counterparts (Williams & Johnson, 2011; Bird & Holmes, 2005; Harrison & Peacock, 2009; Urban & Orbe, 2007; Bardhan & Zhang, 2017; Kobayashi & Viswat, 2010; Zimmerman, 1995). With my study, I wanted to take this research a step further to understand how domestic students narrate conflicts they have with international students to strangers, thus helping me understand how some domestic students understand their own relationships and conflicts with their international counterparts. Studying narratives is a rich source of insight because narratives are a way for those who are telling them to make sense of their situations and show their relationships with those in their narratives.

In this chapter, I discuss how my study contributes to the scholarly conversation about international students. Next, I discuss limitations to my study. Finally, I make suggestions for future research based on the findings and lack of findings in this study, and then give a brief summary of this study's findings.

### **Claims Connected to Previous Literature**

This section looks at previous research and connects it to important themes I found in this study. I lay out main themes of interest from this study and subsequently relate each back to the literature from my literature review and rationale chapter.

**Accountability assignment is complex and situation-dependent.** Across my findings, I found that accountability and blame don't always fall on international students, but in fact can also fall on domestic students and can even fall on non-human actors like cultural norms and miscommunication. In my research, I found that accountability varies from situation to situation, and can be far more complicated than being able to assign all blame for a conflict to one actor.

In previous research, I found that conflicts can spring up in any roommate situation and that roommates deal with conflict, disputes, or difficult social situations in different ways, dependent on the situation that arose and the reactions that were narrated. My study supports this claim by showing that accountability assignment for disputes is not dependent on any one factors, but can vary based on situation and issue. This study also includes domestic-domestic roommate situations to prove that conflicts and disputes don't only arise between international and domestic roommates, but happen in roommate relationships regardless of the combination.

In this study, I also found repetition and pattern surrounding RAs and residents who explained that conflict arose from a difference in lifestyles between international and domestic students. This finding relates back to prior research that talks about how international students



have trouble managing their relationships with their domestic counterparts in universities.

Bardhan and Zhang (2017) looked at how international students from decolonized countries felt less comfortable making friends with domestic students because of the immense cultural difference, particularly with American race relations. My findings expand on Bardhan and Zhang's study by noting how difference in lifestyles and nationalities can affect how international and domestic students get along. My study is different, though, in that it looks at the study from the domestic roommate point of view, rather than from the international point of view.

Another important factor in how conflicts may arise is through miscommunication or misunderstanding. By using the Language-Convergence, Meaning-Divergence theory (Dougherty, Kramer, Klatzke, & Rogers, 2009), we can better understand how miscommunication and misunderstanding in terms of communication and language can contribute to conflicts and disputes by looking at how even though two people may be speaking the same language, what they are meaning to say or trying to communicate can be different according to their cultural backgrounds. This view is reflected in a number of narratives from my data collection, especially in situations where my participants talked about how international students don't understand the function of language as it is used (e.g., greetings such as "how are you?").

**Disputes are not always presented in narratives as clash of cultures.** In this study, I also found that although culture may be seen as a large contributor to disputes in international-domestic roommate relationships, the clash of these different norms is not always seen as the root of the conflict. In fact, there are many other contributors to international-domestic

relationship disputes such as nationality and race biases, differences in lifestyles, linguistic aptitude, and attitudes toward international students.

Previous literature briefly looked at nationality and race biases from international students' perspectives. In Urban and Orbe's (2007) qualitative study, they found that international students explained their experiences being international in the United States and how they felt distant from their domestic student counterparts because they did things differently based on their home cultures, and they also discussed sometimes feeling isolated and would find solace in developing relationships with other international students. Bardhan and Zhang (2017) had similar findings in terms of how international students from decolonized cultures perceived their relationships with American students, especially in regard to their race, a concept many had never dealt with before. Finally, a study done in two universities in England (Harrison & Peacock, 2009) showed that domestic students at those universities would show xenophobic tendencies and discussed cultural distance from their international counterparts when discussing their perceptions of international students at their schools. This study found that though no explicit prejudice or hostility was shown toward international students in discussion, participants reported feeling threatened and anxious about their education and sharing the same spaces with international students. For the most part, my findings support this scholarship by showing how domestic students not only express their feelings toward international students, but make sense of those relationships by making nationality biases toward them and attributing the cause of the disputes to their roommates' international status. However, my study expands on this previous scholarship by showing that, as far as narrators are concerned, culture isn't always the reason for disputes, but can be tied back to many differences between the international and domestic roommates.

My findings also support the claim that healthy roommate relationships mean more than being content in the room. In a study done on roommates at a private university in Nigeria, research found that roommate relationships can impact many different areas of life, including social, emotional, academic and even spiritual well-being. (Ojo et al., 2015).

I also find the concept of nationality as an important factor in international-domestic student conflict, and that nationality and domestic attitudes toward international students has a major part to play in how domestic students narrate their conflicts with international students, as well as how conflicts arise or may play out. The previously mentioned study done in England had similar findings that domestic students don't go out of their ways to become friends with international students, and that their relationships with international students were seen as surface-level and merely for cohabitation (Harrison & Peacock, 2009). This supportively relates back to my study where RAs saw disparities between their international and domestic residents, as well as when domestic students would attribute blame based on different ways of life, sometimes based on nationalities.

Most of the previous literature focusing on international-domestic relationships does look at culture as a main contributor to conflict, and that clashing cultures can be a huge influencer for misunderstanding of norms which may in turn create conflict (Burgos-Cienfuegos et al., 2015; Chakravarti et al., 2014; Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006; Zhang et al., 2015). This previous literature focused on how cultural differences have a huge part to play in how relationships are maintained by those involved, which my study contradicts by showing that many other factors than culture play into domestic students' sense-making of conflicts.

**Domestic students believe that communication is an antidote for conflict but sometimes cannot act on that belief.** In my study, I found that a lot of domestic students,

particularly RAs, considered communication the ultimate solution to problematic social situations involving international student roommates. In my analysis of the narratives in this study I noticed that though domestic students say this, there is a mismatch between their belief in the power and effectiveness of communication in solving their own problems. This is evident in the data that showed how some domestic students would refuse to talk to their roommates, would leave notes, or would try to get the RA to talk to their roommates without naming them (domestic students) as the ones who requested they be talked to.

Urban and Orbe (2007) conducted a study that looked at how international students wrote essay accounts of their perceptions with domestic students at their American universities. In this study, international students initiated communication and cultural concerns before and sometimes more than their domestic counterparts in order to help them understand why they may not smile in greeting, for example, but that they as international students were making more of an effort to use communication to dissolve or avoid conflicts than their domestic counterparts were. In Bird and Holmes' study (2005), domestic students in New Zealand were studied on their perceptions of international students on campus, and their findings showed that the domestic students that were studied also put communication and ability to communicate as a priority and were upset by international students not communicating effectively (here meaning that there were language barriers or they didn't have a desire to interact), but the domestic students didn't reach out to their international counterparts, either. This concept is present in this study: Throughout the narratives and analyses, domestic students get frustrated with the lack of communication between themselves and their international counterparts, but when it comes down to it, the domestic students don't communicate as much or as effectively as they preach.

Kobayashi and Viswat's study (2010) showed that communication and cultural norms guiding communication can be confusing for international students who are not versed in American communication customs. In the study, Japanese international students tried to communicate disagreement, but were not being understood correctly by domestic students. The study also showed that the domestic students didn't communicate more to try to understand the Japanese students, which supports my claim that domestic students may not practice what they preach in using communication to understand and avoid conflicts with international students.

My study has shown that American universities (domestic students and university administration through domestic students) tend to treat international students as outsiders, even universities that consider themselves global or internationalized. I found this concept throughout my study in the narratives that domestic students gave. Through their assignment of accountability and moral evaluation toward international students over dispute that could easily happen with domestic students as well, domestic students in my study showed their treatment of international students as outsiders and not in the same group as domestic students. I also found through nationality attribution toward disputes that international students are still considered "other" rather than part of the "regular" student body. American universities' institutional narratives show how administrations, and in some instances culture of an institution, set boundaries for what is talked about and how. This concept helps provide a deeper understanding for why domestic students treat their international counterparts as outsiders: because the university administration hasn't yet set a value for creating a more inclusive space for international students through domestic students.

I find that the American university institutions place high value on communication and easy solutions for problems (thinking of blame as an easy fix, not looking into how complex and

situation dependent it is), but that the administration doesn't teach domestic students as actors within institutional narratives how to personally implement institutional narratives and thus norms within institutions that are affixed but not taught. By changing norms and institutional narratives, particularly by accepting international students into the student body and making them part of the university culture more than they have been in the past, domestic students may make sense of their relationships with international students differently and personally take more blame than has been shown in my narrative analysis. What this comes down to is that universities should do more than pay lip service to the importance of communication (a belief supported by my narratives and by U.S. culture at large), and administration should take action to start to teach domestic students how to communicate more effectively and find ways through domestic students to better include international students as part of the university's institutional narrative.

### **Implications for Practice**

Throughout this study, I have found claims and themes that give insight into how universities can be more intentional about helping domestic students better manage their relationships with international students, which can be mutually beneficial to the university and students in attendance. My suggestions for how universities can do this is by holding trainings before and during students' time at university which would teach and guide students toward five main concepts: learning how disputes unfold, learning how communication or differences in lifestyle can contribute to the emergence of conflict, learn whose side participants tend to take and why that's important and consequential, learn the implications of using nationality to explain problematic conduct, and learn how and when to take blame. In doing this, universities may be able to provide students with a more well-rounded and accepting point of view, which could

potentially create a more comfortable environment for all students to thrive in, rather than only domestic students. If universities use this practice and are able to instill these skills and knowledge into their students, universities may notice a more diverse and inclusive environment, as well as a more global and international approach to learning, particularly from the domestic student side.

By understanding and analyzing narratives from domestic students, I have gained a better understanding for how domestic students make sense of their relationships with their international roommates, hallmates, or residents through their moral evaluations and accountability assignment in their narratives. By making the claim that accountability assignment is complex and situation dependent, there is a better understanding that there isn't a formula for why or how accountability is assigned, or even to who or what. Accountability assignment truly depends on many different factors that may not even be obviously at play. This claim helps us to better understand relationships between international and domestic students, and it can also provide a different approach to understanding and analyzing disputes in general, regardless of who is involved. This insight can better inform RAs' and HDs' understanding by showing that many factors contribute to accountability assignment and that there may be even more factors from someone else's point of view of the situation. Through different training, the university may be able to teach RAs how to help students sort out their own disputes by helping RAs learn how disputes unfold and why participants' sides in disputes are consequential to how the disputes will be narrated and how to get more than one side of the dispute.

By looking at all these different factors, there may be a better understanding for why the domestic student may be narrating the story the way that he or she is. This claim is important for RAs and HDs in particular because it is in their best interest to make sure that their residents are

comfortable in the residence halls, in order to contribute to better retention rates at universities. By understanding domestic students' perspectives on dispute narratives, the RAs and HDs can better mediate arguments and try to understand the arguments, disputes, or conflicts from many different points of view. Different approaches and points of view may help the RAs and HDs be successful at their jobs of keeping their residents comfortable and in turn may be able to help with retention rates.

The claim that disputes are not always presented as clashing of cultures is also particularly important to understand. As many of the narratives showed, disputes between roommates can happen regardless of cultural background or nationality, but may also be based on difference of lifestyles, language proficiency, and the roommates' attitudes and approaches to the situation. While culture clashes happen, it is important to note that they are not the only reason that roommates have problems, especially international and domestic roommates, and sometimes two people who are simply different in other ways have trouble living together. By understanding that culture isn't the main reason for conflict between international and domestic students, university administration can use this information to train domestic students before and during their time in university that using nationality to explain accountability assignment in disputes is problematic and can be harmful to international students. Domestic students can also benefit from learning how poor communication or differences in lifestyle can contribute more to emergence of conflict than culture or nationality differences can.

Finally, my last claim that domestic students depend on communication as a cure for conflict, but may not always practice it shows that even if there is a grounded belief that something works and can help a situation, domestic students don't always use it. There is a widespread belief in the United States, especially for those in leadership positions such as RAs, that



communication can solve anything and that talking to others about feelings and expectations can help, but Americans don't always practice this. In my findings, there are many places where communication problems may have created or exacerbated a conflict. This separation between belief and practice provides a solid foundation for looking at communication to resolve disputes, conflicts, or otherwise uncomfortable social situations in different sectors and how practicing what those believe communication to be for can change a situation, for better or for worse. This study has helped me understand that the disconnect between praise and practice of communication through narratives, while it may be able to be fixed, would have to be changed by those in charge through action and teaching communication as problem-solver rather than just talking about it. The previously mentioned training for domestic students could also teach them how to communicate effectively with those that may not have the same understanding of words or phrases that they do, and try to help those who don't to understand. Domestic students may also benefit from learning how and when to take blame in disputes and arguments with roommates or hallmates, and how that responsibility of accountability can help those who are there to help (RAs and HDs) to better understand the situation from a more impartial role.

From the beginning in orientation, domestic students should be taught how they will be interacting with students from all over the world throughout their college experience. Domestic students should also be taught how to be more accepting and open-minded to what international students bring to the table, and how those different aspects may impact relationships and create disputes. I think that since there is currently no orientation or training for domestic residents (and very little for RAs), domestic students don't know how to properly interact or communicate with international students, and thus have trouble including and accepting them.

### **Limitations**

The biggest limitation for this study was the fact that I only had one domestic student living in the residence halls with an international roommate respond to my recruitment emails for in-person interviews. When I met with her, despite my coaxing interview guide questions, she never gave any narratives about conflict with her roommate or anyone else in her hall (she lives in a residence hall with high international student population). In fact, she strayed from mentioning anything that may come off as discriminatory about international students and mentioned several times in the interview how she doesn't consider them different from Americans because we are all human. This proved to be a difficult limitation because I wasn't able to collect in-person interviews outside of the RA position, and it could have helped me gather more diverse information and further understand the difference between interview narratives and online narratives from residents.

A second limitation to this study was the fact that the in-person interviews were collected at a single large, primarily white, public university in the United States in the Western Region. This could have affected the way that domestic students positioned themselves in relation to their international counterparts and also could have affected the way that participants answered the interview guide questions. It also could have affected the way that moral evaluation is given and how accountability is assigned compared to a private university, a university in a different region, or a more racially diverse university.

A third limitation was that in the online narratives, people who contributed submissions could be a specific population, and most of the prompts were those such as "What is your best roommate horror story?" or "Who has had an international roommate? Stories?" These kinds of prompts produce narratives that are one-sided and have more complex or scary stories than would be given if everyone who ever had an international roommate posted them. Also, I

speculate that those who did give narratives online tended to be harsher in their narratives because they were using Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). Because they were somewhat anonymous, they may have felt that they could be as discriminatory as they wanted, especially since they didn't give their own names or those of their roommates.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

In future research, it would also be important to focus on power in institutions and how those powers affect narratives from those who act within the institutions. While most institutional discourse discusses power play and how narratives act as evidence of power (Mayr, 2008; Mumby, 1987; Thornborrow, 2002) and how power plays through the stories people tell in those institutions, future research could focus more on how institutions may influence those who act within them, but not necessarily with them (how domestic students are conditioned to think about international students). This could help us understand how assignment of blame and accountability in stories may be influenced by domestic students' background and influence from the university's institution. This being said, it would be interesting to conduct future research with Hall Directors as well as Resident Advisors, to see where their narratives come from and how they fall in this conversation. Hall Director narratives may provide a more institutional and administrative perspective on how conflicts involving international students are dealt with on a higher career level in residence life.

Other research could also look at how international students narrate their conflicts with domestic students to get a better look at both sides of the equation and better understand how international students may find discrepancies in how they feel administration handles their conflicts, how they may or may not experience discrimination in conflicts, and possibly how their conflicts with American students shape their perceptions of the United States. By

conducting a study on international students using the same study, just flipped, or by interviewing based on their feelings toward the administrative side of their American university, I think there could be powerful insight from another point of view of a similar situation.

Finally, my last suggestion for future research would be to look at how domestic students from a variety of universities in the United States with different cultures (my suggestion would be in different regions) would narrate conflicts with their international roommates, and how that differs or stays the same from region to region. I am curious what a study under this premise would pan out and if it would produce different findings to what I have developed in my own study.

### **Conclusion**

For as long as they have been attending American universities, international students seem to be something of an anomaly that domestic students have tried but continuously fail to understand. The purpose of this project was to understand how domestic residents and resident advisors narrate and assign blame in narrations about international students in their residence halls. It has given insight into how domestic students communicate their understandings of the conflicts, of why the conflict happened, and who was to blame. The more we come to understand how international students are involved on college campuses, and how domestic students understand their relationships with their international counterparts, the better we can find ways to make university life in the United States more comfortable for international students.

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**Appendix A**



Office of Research Integrity  
 UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

**Institutional Review Board**  
 563 UCB  
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 Phone: 303.735.3702  
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**APPROVAL**

23-Jan-2018

Dear Candace McMurrey,

On **23-Jan-2018** the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Submission:	Initial Application
Review Category:	Exempt - Category 2
Title:	Domestic Residents and Resident Advisors' Narratives of Disputes with International Students in Residence Halls
Investigator:	McMurrey, Candace
Protocol #:	17-0655
Funding:	None
Documents Approved:	17-0655 Protocol (23Jan18); Resident Advisor Recruitment Letter; Recruitment Letter; Interview Guide; 17-0655 Consent Form (23Jan18);
Documents Reviewed:	Protocol; Consent Form; HRP-211: FORM - Initial Application v8;

The IRB approved the protocol on **23-Jan-2018**.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: [Summary Page](#) Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the [INVESTIGATOR MANUAL \(HRP-103\)](#).

Sincerely,  
 Douglas Grafel  
 IRB Admin Review Coordinator  
 Institutional Review Board

**Appendix B**



Office of Research Integrity  
 UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

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**APPROVAL**

09-Feb-2018

Dear Candace McMurrey,  
 On **09-Feb-2018** the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Submission:	Amendment
Review Category:	Exempt
Title:	Domestic Residents and Resident Advisors' Narratives of Disputes with International Students in Residence Halls
Investigator:	McMurrey, Candace
Protocol #:	17-0655
Funding:	None
Documents Approved:	17-0655 Protocol (9Feb18);
Documents Reviewed:	HRP-213 Amendment-v2;
Description:	- Protocol updated to include collection of online narratives. Note, as this information is publicly available and not generated for research purposes, its collection does not constitute research involving human subjects. The collection and analysis of this data does not require IRB Approval.
Notes:	- You have not used the current, IRB-Approved version of the Protocol document to make the change outlined in the Amendment. Although the differences between the submitted document and the Approved version are limited to version information and formatting, you are reminded that you are required to use the IRB-Approved version of all documents in research activities, including during contact with subjects, and in submissions to the IRB. Current, IRB-approved documents can be found by clicking on Approved Docs in your study in eRA in the black bar at the top of the protocol window or following the link in Approval Letters.

The IRB approved the protocol on **23-Jan-2018**.

Click the link to find the approved documents for this protocol: [Summary Page](#) Use copies of these documents to conduct your research.

In conducting this protocol you must follow the requirements listed in the [INVESTIGATOR MANUAL \(HRP-103\)](#).

Sincerely,  
 Douglas Grafel

**Appendix C**

Interview Guide for ‘Domestic Residents and Resident Advisors’ Narratives of Disputes with International Students in the Residence Halls’

[For Residents]

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Where are you from?
2. What residence hall do you live in?
3. What major are you?
4. How long have you lived in your residence hall?
5. How do you like CU so far?
6. How do you like living in the residence halls?
7. How are you liking Colorado?
8. How do you like the Boulder area?

**MAIN QUESTIONS**

9. How well do you get along with international students in your residence hall?
10. How well do you get along with your international student roommate?
11. Could you describe your relationship with your international roommate (if you have one)?
12. Do you ever get into any arguments or disputes with your international student roommate or international students in your hall?
13. Do you know anyone from your hall or friend group who has had an argument with an international student?

14. Can you recall a time that you or someone else had a dispute [use word that they use to characterize incident] with an international student?
  - a. Can you tell me what happened?
  - b. Where did this [dispute] stem from?
  - c. Who was at fault in this [dispute]?
15. What did you know about international students before meeting your roommate?
  - a. Do you think differently about international students now that you've lived with them?
16. Have you heard any bad international student roommate stories circulating your hall or campus?
  - a. Could you share that with me?
17. Have you ever been to the country that your roommate is from?
  - a. What was that like?
  - b. Do you think your roommate is a typical [country of origin] person?
18. Was a dispute with an international student that you were involved in resolved?
  - a. How would you handle that same situation differently now after having already dealt with it?
  - b. How could that dispute have gone differently?
19. I have heard this story from someone else. Have you heard it, too?
  - a. Do you think it's typical or out of the ordinary?
  - b. Do you think the participants/university acted appropriately?

#### EXIT QUESTIONS

20. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to an international student trying to resolve a [dispute] with a domestic student in their hall?
21. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to a domestic student trying to resolve a [dispute] with an international student in their hall?
22. Was there anything else you wanted to mention before we conclude this interview?
23. Could you refer me to another student or RA I could interview?

[For RAs]

### INTRODUCTION

1. Where are you from?
2. What residence hall do you live in?
3. What major are you?
4. How long have you worked as an RA in your residence hall?
5. How are you liking CU so far?
6. How do you like living in the residence halls?
7. How are you liking Colorado?
8. How do you like the Boulder area?

### MAIN QUESTIONS

9. How well do you get along with international students in your residence hall?
10. How well do you get along with your international student residents?
11. Could you describe your relationship with your international resident?
12. Have you ever been brought into a dispute [use word they use to characterize the incident] between international student and domestic student roommates?

13. Do you know anyone from your hall or friend group who has had an argument with an international student?
14. Can you recall a time that someone had a dispute [use word they use to characterize incident] with an international student?
  - a. Can you tell me what happened?
  - b. Where did this [dispute] stem from?
  - c. Who was at fault in this [dispute]?
15. What did you know about international students before meeting your resident?
  - a. Do you think differently about international students now that you've lived with them?
16. Have you heard any bad international student roommate stories circulating your hall or campus?
  - a. Could you share that with me?
17. Have you ever been to the country that your resident is from?
  - a. What was that like?
  - b. Do you think your resident is a typical [country of origin] person?
18. What kind of training are you given to work with international students in your hall?
  - a. Were you given specific instructions on how to handle [disputes] between international and domestic students?
19. Were you told any stories or cautionary tales about international students versus domestic students before becoming an RA?
  - a. Were you told any stories or cautionary tales about how to work with international students versus domestic students before becoming an RA?



20. Did you ever find yourself in a position where you had to intervene between an international student and a domestic student?
- How did that go?
21. Was a dispute that you were involved in resolved?
- How would you handle that same situation differently now after having already dealt with it?
  - How could that dispute have gone differently?
22. I have heard this story from someone else. Have you heard it, too?
- Do you think it's pretty typical or out of the ordinary?
  - Do you think the participants/university acted appropriately?

#### EXIT QUESTIONS

23. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to an international student trying to resolve a [dispute] with a domestic student in their hall?
24. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to a domestic student trying to resolve a [dispute] with an international student in their hall?
25. Was there anything else you wanted to mention before we conclude this interview?
26. Could you refer me to another student or RA I could interview?