Article

Rethinking Race, Ethnicity, and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence in Higher Education

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Abstract: This qualitative study aims to explore the limitations of using a cultural assessment tool in higher education with the goal of preparing students to thrive in a highly demanding, diverse, and global community. Colleges and universities are potentially important sites of cross-cultural and cross-racial engagement and socialization, and cultural competence is arguably one of the critical skills that many higher education institutions are embracing to prepare students for our diverse, but increasingly polarized, global society. In particular, this study discusses the use of the intercultural development inventory (IDI), a cultural assessment tool that has not been validated in the U.S. for racial, ethnic, or social class differences, and which leaves out the role of structural inequalities in intercultural relationships. Findings reveal that interview data from black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) did not align with their IDI results and that the tool dismisses the complex experiences of BIPOC students. These findings jeopardize the tool's purpose and validity. Finally, this study reveals the importance of educating students about structural competence to improve empathy and understanding of a diverse student body.

Keywords: intercultural competence; structural competence; intercultural development inventory (IDI); the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity; higher education; BIPOC; structural inequality

1. Introduction

The increasing visibility of and protests by white supremacist groups illuminate the ongoing history of structural and sustained racism present in all our communities. Colleges and universities must continue their work to address generations of racism, inequity and injustice and seek "ways to approach one another with respect and [to build] communities that are truly safe, supportive and inclusive for all" [1]. Being able to effectively interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds is arguably one of the critical skills that many higher education institutions are embracing in response to our diverse global society that has become highly polarized. By 2045 it is expected that white, non-Hispanic Americans will be the numerical minority in the U.S. [2]. Reflecting racial shifts in the general population, from 1996 until 2016 the percentage of black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) undergraduate students grew nationally from 29.6 to 45.2 [3]. This demographic shift makes higher education institutions promising sites of cross-cultural engagement and socialization [4]. However, many students encounter unwelcoming campus environments, and BIPOC students report hostile racial climates more frequently than white students [5]. For much of the past two decades, to deal with and educate about persistent racial inequality, cultural competency has been the framework most often deployed in higher education institutions and in U.S. medical education [6].

While intercultural assessment tools have become popular in describing students' cultural competence in higher education, to date, not much research explores and questions the validity of intercultural assessment tools among varying populations. In fact, this

empirical study is the first one that we are aware of that addresses validity concerns of using the intercultural development inventory (IDI) for BIPOC students in the U.S. Specifically, this study aims to answer: What are the limitations of using the IDI in a university campus that aims to improve students' intercultural understanding and relationships? How do BIPOC and white students' discourses of cultural challenges and diversity align with the results of the intercultural development inventory (IDI)?

In the next sections of this paper, we describe the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) which is the cultural competence framework universities often use to improve students' intercultural competence. Then, we proceed to state the limitations of its assessment tool, the IDI. In the results section, through analyzing the discourses of students who scored in the lowest levels of intercultural competence, we provide evidence of the misalignment of BIPOC students' discussion on cultural experiences with their IDI results. Finally, in the analysis and implications section we question the validity of the IDI, state the importance of structural competency pedagogy and conclude with implications for using intercultural assessment tools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Competency

As we demonstrate in this paper, the concept of "cultural competency" and popular assessment tools have significant weaknesses, including that competency, in this formulation, suggests a training that culminates in full competence. There is no "hint at the possibility that a person might become less willing to empathize with or act tactfully towards members of particular cultures after many frustrating and disappointing experiences in communicating with them" [7]. Furthermore, cultural competence is often used interchangeably with intercultural competence or cross-cultural competence and, despite numerous definitions and frameworks, the concept of cultural competence remains ill-defined, overgeneralized, or assumed to be understood [8,9].

Framing differences and conflicts as being only about "intercultural" issues reduces problems to the individual level, with individual prejudice as the sole factor driving inequality [10]. In this framework, power is ignored, and with it, issues of institutional racism and structural inequality [11,12]. Such a myopic focus on culture, especially when combined with a colorblind orientation towards race, may undermine support for policies that seek to improve the experiences and success of BIPOC students [13]. In line with this focus on culture and away from issues of power and stratification, the literature on intercultural competency often omits the racist and prejudiced attitudes and behavior faced by BIPOC.

2.2. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

A number of theoretical models have been proposed with the aim to assess the cultural or intercultural competence of individuals [14]. One of the best-known approaches is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Bennett and others [15] and later revised by Hammer as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) [16–18].

The DMIS looks at individuals' orientation towards cultural difference as a progressive and developmental process. DMIS categorizes individuals' mindsets into 5 orientations: two ethnocentric orientations (Denial, Polarization), a transitional mindset (Minimization), and two ethnorelative orientations (Acceptance, and Adaptation); [19].

At the beginning of the continuum, a *Denial* orientation is often held by people who have limited direct experiences with those from other cultures, and therefore tend to hold stereotypes and generalizations about people from other cultures. Individuals in Denial may not express interest in learning about other cultures, their values and practices. Denial is often associated with those of a "dominant culture as well as members of non-dominant groups who are relatively isolated from mainstream society because both may have more opportunity to remain relatively isolated from cultural diversity" [19].

Second, *Polarization* characterizes cultural differences in terms of us versus them. Polarization can have a *Defense* or *Reversal* orientation. Whereas a Defense orientation sees differences as inferior and threatening, a Reversal mindset idealizes other cultural practices and denigrates one's own. Third, *Minimization* tends to overemphasize commonalities rather than cultural differences. Fourth, *Acceptance* recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural differences and, finally, a mindset in *Adaptation* is capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways [19]. As we will see next, the IDI, a 50-question tool that assesses these orientations toward cultural differences, has several weaknesses.

2.3. The IDI and BIPOC

BIPOC face racist and prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, thus making their experience of interacting across cultural boundaries substantially different than from white individuals. It would be tempting to believe that race and racism are no longer important issues, but its presence in our communities is uncontestable [20,21]. When theories and assessments of cultural competence do not address issues of racial privilege, inequality, and power, they embody a white Eurocentric focus that results in a hierarchical view of the "rightness" of the dominant culture [8].

For example, BIPOC students' experiences in higher education differ significantly from white students, particularly at predominantly white institutions. Significant bodies of research point to vastly different experiences that affect BIPOC student success, including: campus climate [22–24], sense of belonging [25–28], and microaggressions [29,30], resulting in racial battle fatigue [31], and requiring students to adopt a variety of strategies for survival on campus [32–35]. Yet, other research provides hopeful pathways forward: BIPOC students at historically black colleges and universities show significantly fewer challenges with respect to these issues than BIPOC students at predominantly white institutions [36], as do those students who share a common background with faculty, staff, and peers [5,33]. Campus environments with meaningful cross-cultural engagement are associated with higher levels of self-confidence and sense of belonging for both white and BIPOC students [5,37,38]. Warikoo and Deckman [12] state that BIPOC students gain a sense of community and a critical perspective on their own socially situated experience in institutions that explicitly support BIPOC students through diversity infrastructure (like affirmative action practices) and resource allocation. Unfortunately, many white students and some BIPOC students may experience racial resentment and frustration if they do not perceive a personal benefit from such practices and policies. Critical to the success of these policies and practices are the ways that cross-cultural and cross-racial interaction are supported [12,39], and our paper calls into question the ability of the IDI to support this interaction.

A careful reading of the literature reveals that the IDI has been validated considering age, gender, education, and social desirability, but not race, social class, or ethnicity [17,40]. Affirming the challenges of applying the IDI beyond white Americans, Greenholtz [41] found problems in the IDI's cross-cultural transferability when he attempted to translate the tool from English into Japanese. Greenholtz [41] and others [9,42] have subsequently posed a variety of important questions with respect to the validity of the IDI. Validity is the sum of a comprehensive process "encompassing all sources of evidence supporting specific interpretations of a score from a measure, as well as actions based on such interpretations" (p. 7) [43]. Validity is, as Messick [44] argues, "not a property of the test or assessment as such, but rather the *meaning* of the test scores" (p. 741) (emphasis added). This meaning cannot be derived solely from a statistical test but is an ongoing process that should utilize a variety of evidence and rationales, which might include coherence with robust theory, interviews, observations, consistency over time, or triangulation with similar measures [44]. The IDI has not been validated specifically for BIPOC in a way that considers statistical principles or triangulation of results with interviews. This weakness alone throws into question the IDI results, and what we can conclude from those results, for BIPOC. In

addition, studies using IDI pre- and post-tests to assess intercultural training efficacy have provided mixed results [45,46].

In sum, that the IDI has not been validated for BIPOC in the U.S. means that the experiences of BIPOC with racial inequality are not factored into the assessment, which potentially results in a white- or Eurocentric bias that downplays the role of racism in the daily lives of these individuals. Furthermore, any such validation would need to take into account that "BIPOC" is not a single, homogenous group, but instead require a solid process of validation for each racial and/or ethnic group. This paper adds to the literature by providing evidence questioning the validity of the IDI for BIPOC students.

2.4. The IDI and Linear, Stage-Based Thinking

Caution needs to be taken when viewing the development of intercultural or cultural competence in stage-based terms. Linear, stage-based theories cannot address the complexity of human development, unique situational influences, and the diversity of developmental outcomes among individuals [47]. Culture is fluid; predominant representations of culture often hide the fluidity, heterogeneity, and evolving construct of a culture. Culture, in cultural competence models, is portrayed as fixed, knowable, certain, monolithic and homogeneous. This linear, fixed, and progressive theoretical continuum is based on an assumption delineated by Hammer et al. [18]: "as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's potential competence in intercultural relations increases" (p. 423) Furthermore, these models portray all cultures as having equal status and the same access to power and privilege in society [8].

Concerns about this linear way of thinking intersect with concerns about the lack of validity of the IDI for BIPOC. The underlying premise of linearity assumes intercultural relationships happen in contexts free of bias, social stratification, oppression or privilege. It does not recognize how individuals of color may experience cultural difference through bias, oppression, and discrimination; and consequently, while their intercultural relationships may increase, these relationships could be based on hostile intercultural experiences that may challenge the expectations of progress within the IDI continuum. In fact, cultural competence and the intercultural development continuum tends to focus on how "white students grow and learn about other cultures while leaving unanswered the larger questions of what it means for students from underrepresented backgrounds on predominantly white campuses who may face assimilation pressures or pressures to conform to the dominant culture" (p. 9) [8]. This study adds to the literature by exploring the limitations of using a cultural competence assessment tool in higher education that ignores the role of structural inequalities in intercultural relationships and understanding.

3. Materials & Methods

3.1. Institutional Profile

We conducted this research on a small campus that is part of a large, publicly funded, multi-campus university system. The campus is located in a small metropolitan city in a rural part of a state in the upper Midwest. The student population of this campus is primarily traditional-aged, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled in a program that confers a Bachelor of Sciences in the Health Sciences. When interviews were conducted, approximately 475 undergraduate students were enrolled on campus. The institution's official enrollment statistics indicate that almost 30% of the student population were BIPOC (self-reported as being Asian, Black, Hispanic, American Indian, or Hawaiian), 75% were women, and 83% came from within the state.

The campus houses three Living Learning Communities (LLCs), which are cohorts of students who live together, and share a common interest or background. We assigned the pseudonym PURSUE to the first of these LLCs, which is open to underrepresented students: BIPOC, first generation students, and/or Pell-eligible students. PURSUE does not have space to accommodate all students on campus who meet one or more of these criteria. This LLC provides students with: a 4 year scholarship that approximately covers

housing; activities that help students learn and share about each other's cultures and build community; activities to connect students with medical professionals from diverse backgrounds; and opportunities to volunteer in underserved communities. Two other LLCs also exist on campus, including the International Connections Community (ICC) and the Wellbeing Learning Community (WLC)—which are pseudonyms. The ICC's explicit goal is, through intentional activities, to develop students' intercultural competence and global citizenship. The WLC is focused on helping students sustain healthy lifestyles. The first-year students who joined these LLCs arrived on campus two weeks before the rest of students and participated on a bridge program to build community and get acculturated to the institution.

This institution uses the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as a pedagogical and assessment tool with the goal of enhancing students' intercultural competence and sensitivity. It assesses all students' intercultural competence during their first semester on campus, as well as during their junior and senior year. After the completion of a survey, faculty or staff who are *qualified administrators* debrief the results individually. In order to become qualified to debrief students about the results of their individual IDI assessment, faculty and staff must participate in a three-day workshop on the intercultural development continuum. First author Punti is an IDI qualified administrator.

3.2. Sample

We interviewed 34 students in the second semester of their first year on campus. These students were recruited from a required course in the major taken by nearly all first-year students. We also recruited students from the three LLCs on campus. These students were first given a survey asking about basic demographic information and their sense of belonging on campus. Students were also asked about their willingness to be interviewed. All research was completed with approval from our institution's IRB.

About 84% of all first-year students on campus returned this survey. About 46% of those who completed surveys, 76 total students, indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. From these 76 students, we oversampled to ensure adequate input from diverse students, including students who: are underrepresented by race, ethnicity, or religion; are first generation college students; or identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Sixteen of 34 students interviewed belonged to one of the three LLCs and 10 of them belonged to PURSUE.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted 34 semi-structured interviews in the spring of 2018 with students who had just completed their first semester on campus. Interviews lasted around 30 to 60 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In the interviews, we explored five main theme areas drawn from the literature [48–50]: students' background, social integration, academic integration, academic performance, and barriers to success. Some of the interview questions were "Do you face challenges here? Cultural challenges? Social challenges? Academic challenges? When people talk about diversity at this institution, what does that mean to you? What specific groups do you think about? (see Appendix A). We de-identified all transcripts and assigned pseudonyms to each case. Each author independently read each interview to identify themes using both the questions asked as a guide, but also seeking themes that might organically emerge. Though Tinto's frameworks were used to write initial interview questions, coding incorporated critiques of Tinto [51,52]. Each interview was independently coded by the two authors, and discrepancies discussed until consensus was reached. For this paper, the codes "Cultural Challenges," and "Diversity," used any time students discussed cultural matters, were further analyzed.

We collected the IDI results of the 34 first-year students interviewed who completed the IDI survey at the end of their first semester on campus. There was a difference of a couple of months between when the students completed the IDI survey and when they were interviewed. These students' IDI results fell within the range of Denial to Acceptance

and the qualitative data from the interviews was compared with the definitions of the five IDI orientations. The focus of analysis was centered on those students whose results of the IDI survey fell within the ethnocentric category—the lowest categories of the spectrum: Denial and Polarization. The reason to focus on the ethnocentric categories is because, based on the IDI tool, it is the least culturally sensitive one individual's mindset can be. We wanted to better understand how the IDI aligned with the way these students discussed cultural challenges and diversity. Furthermore, within each IDI orientation, we compared white students' interview comments with those from BIPOC students to better understand how their perceptions on cultural diversity and cultural experiences aligned or differed.

4. Results

The IDI results from the 34 first year students interviewed are the following:

- Three students' orientations were in Denial. Two of them were BIPOC who belonged to the PURSUE LLC.
- Eight students' orientations were in Polarization and all were in the sub-category of Reversal. Two were BIPOC (Latinx), one of whom is in PURSUE. The other six students were white, three of whom belonged to either the ICC or WLC.
- Nineteen students' orientations were in Minimization. 10 of these were BIPOC students and four belonged to PURSUE.
- Four students' orientations were in Acceptance. All of them were BIPOC and three of them belonged to PURSUE.

We first analyzed the qualitative data on diversity and cultural challenges from those students who fell in Denial. Second, we examined the interview comments from those students who were in Polarization, putting particular attention on the role of race and ethnicity and the type of comments made.

4.1. Denial: Gladys (Black), Ayaan (Black), and Lauren (White)

4.1.1. Gladys

Gladys is an extroverted African woman who came to the United States as a pre-teen from an African country. She attended a mostly white junior and high school before joining the university and explained how she never had issues making friends. She was part of PURSUE and lived on campus with female students from different ethnic backgrounds: other African countries, and African American. Her IDI orientation indicated that she was in Denial of cultural differences. As a reminder, Hammer et al. [18] and the Intercultural Development Inventory website states how Denial of cultural difference is "characteristic of individuals who have limited experience with other cultural groups . . . those at Denial may also maintain a distance from other cultural groups and express little interest in learning about the cultural values and practices" [19]. In the interview, Gladys' comments did not reflect a denial of cultural differences. She provided evidence of embracing cultural differences with her PURSUE roommates who she had been living with since she arrived on campus.

> I know we all come from different backgrounds, all have different stories to tell, but when we first came here, there's like four different backgrounds in my household. . . . We all have different types of foods we eat, the way we talk, the way we dress. So coming in, we all had to get acclimated to each other 'cause there's some certain things we can't do around my friend who's [Muslim]. She can't eat certain foods or do certain stuff, so when we cook, we try to keep pork or anything related to pork away from her dishes and stuff. That's one thing we had to learn how to do real quick. She can't take her hijab off around other guys, so whenever we're having guests over, we are sure to let her know three days ahead of time . . . .I speak a different language and [roommate 1] speaks a different language. [roommate 2] speaks a different language, so we all—I remember I was talking on the phone one time with my mom and they're all looking at me like, what? They try to imitate me. They hear different things

> than what I'm saying, so it was really interesting to see what other people hear when I'm speaking and how they perceive it 'cause they're like, "Why are you talking so aggressively?" I'm like, "No, it's just the way it comes out. I'm not being aggressive." It's just amazing to see all the different cultures we all bring in . . . We're actually really culturally diverse, so I like how it is and we learn different things about each other, so it's pretty amazing. (Gladys)

In the above excerpt, rather than showing denial of cultural differences, Gladys reveals not just acceptance of other cultures but an adaptation to other cultural needs. Living with a Muslim student made her learn and adapt to not eating pork and not inviting male students in their dorm without letting her know ahead of time.

There is no evidence of denial of cultures in her discussion of cultural differences she experiences at her dorm and university. Nevertheless, her attitude towards some cultural groups might be affected by a critical experience.

> I've had a teacher who told me once—she asked me what I wanted to be. I remember it was back in sixth grade. It was not long before I moved into the US and she asked me what I wanted to be—the teacher. I said, "Well, I wanna work in the healthcare field, specifically being a nurse." I remember she looked at me and she laughed. She was like, "Oh, really? Well, good luck with that. Usually, people like you work at McDonalds." I still remember that up to this day. (Gladys)

The comment from her own teacher reveals how racist views and stereotypes are present in our communities, also in the minds of our teachers. While it is unclear how this experience or other potential experiences of stigmatization influenced the results of Gladys' IDI assessment tool, societal bias impacts our BIPOC students. BIPOC students may experience positive cultural experiences, but many of them also struggle with oppressive and discriminatory encounters on a regular basis that can influence their perception of others and themselves.

4.1.2. Ayaan

Ayaan, a Somali-American student who grew up in the U.S. and attended a majority white high school also scored in Denial and belonged to PURSUE. Ayaan showed awareness of her own cultural background and how it differs from the majority white Christian students on campus. She is aware of how the practices of some students did not align to her family values. Below, she reflects on the use of snapchats by some of her friends:

> If I see someone acting weird or whatever, it's like, hmm, I never saw that before. Then I'll think back to my parents. They're just like, "Don't do that" . . . but then I stop myself. I'm just like oh, wait, they're a different culture. They probably have different morals than me maybe. It's like okay, Ayaan, calm down. I don't know. I just feel like sometimes I catch myself feeling offended, but then I have to think that I'm from Somalia and mostly a more conservative culture, and that other people are from different cultures, and what seems okay to them might not seem okay to me, so. (Ayaan)

Ayaan shows understanding of different values cultural groups have. She is able to recognize the behavior of some students as an *okay* behavior in their cultural practice but not for her culture. She did not address many cultural challenges, but described how at the beginning of the semester it was challenging to interact with some first-year white students:

> There's some kids, especially at the beginning of the year, they weren't familiar with different backgrounds because they came from a smaller community. Let's just say, example, for like white communities. Then when we were doing the one-week orientation, it was hard to, I don't know, build relationships with them; cuz they weren't trying to be rude, but [they were] . . . they were trying to find a way to interact with other people from different cultures. (Ayaan)

Gladys and Ayaan did not deny cultural differences in their discussions on cultural experiences and challenges, but rather reflected on them and adapted to cultural differences. While the data from the interviews cannot provide a holistic picture of their cultural sensitivity and understanding of others, it provides more context and concrete cultural situations than the generic IDI results. These two IDI results suggest that some BIPOC students may interpret the IDI survey questions differently than white students. The IDI's classification of Gladys' and Ayaan's mindset in Denial is not consistent with their interview data, which instead reveal daily cultural encounters and perception of cultural differences.

4.1.3. Lauren

The third student in Denial was Lauren, a self-identified white, female, gay student who is $\frac{1}{4}$ Asian descent and did not belong to an LLC group. Throughout the interview she did not focus on ethnic and racial differences when addressing diversity or cultural challenges on campus; her focus was instead on gender and sexual diversity, which is understandable based on her sexual orientation. Based on Lauren's interview data and the IDI results, both could illustrate some blind spots when discussing diversity, since she did not mention racial or ethnic diversity at any point during the interview. However, she provided examples that revealed awareness of gender and sexual diversity.

> I think that being a female is definitely changing my [cultural] experience, because I'll be hanging out with a group of friends. Be like, "Oh, we're gonna go walk around and do this." It's like, "Well, it's 12:30 at night. I'm a small woman. I don't wanna do that. I'm scared." [Laughter] I don't have my keys. I don't have anything. I don't wanna go walk outside. That definitely changes, I think, my perspective of things. (Lauren)

While the IDI website indicates that the IDI can be used to assess "orientations toward a wide range of 'other culture' groups, including nationality, ethnicity, gender and other diversity categories", it is unclear how the IDI could be transferable to all types of diversity. Student responses depend on what "other culture groups" they are thinking of when taking the survey. Based on Punti's experience as an IDI qualified administrator, during the debriefs students often do not recall what "other culture" group they were thinking about while taking the IDI. In Lauren's case, while she might dismiss ethnic and racial diversity in some parts of her thinking (which would fit the Denial category), she does not dismiss gender and sexual orientations. Therefore, the IDI result did not seem to provide a holistic picture of Lauren's mindset of cultural differences.

While Lauren's comments challenge the generalizability of the IDI results to a plurality of cultural differences, Ayaan's and Gladys' qualitative data challenge the validity of the IDI. As Lantz-Deaton [42] reminds us "The DMIS and IDI were both developed in a Western country and thus may not be appropriate for use across other cultures" (p. 546). Greenholtz [41] raised questions about the validity of the model in individuals from cultures other than the US. Based on this case study, we raise questions about the validity of the tool for BIPOC US residents.

4.2. Polarization: Gerardo, Isabella, Ethan, Emma, Amy, Madison, Matilda, Mia

Hammer et al. [18] described the concept of polarization as a mindset whose "world is organized into 'us' and 'them,' where one's own culture is superior and other cultures are inferior. People of dominant cultures are likely to experience Defense as an attack on their values (often perceived by others as privileges). People of non-dominant cultures are more likely to experience Defense as discovering and solidifying a separate cultural identity in contrast to the dominant group" (p. 424). On the other hand, Reversal, within Polarization is a mindset that "values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one's own culture group. Reversal may support the 'cause' of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the 'cause' means to people from the oppressed community" [19].

In the interviews, the way the two Latinx students in polarization discussed diversity and cultural challenges on campus was quite different from the six white students in polarization. Nevertheless, all of them scored in Reversal. Matilda and Amy, both white students, stated their lack of experience of ethnic and racial diversity prior to college. Amy, who joined the living learning community ICC to learn about other cultural groups, said how "I never had much experience with people from other cultures" and Matilda stated:

> At first it was difficult, because back home there wasn't really much diversity so to speak in my high school. Coming here I was just a, "Yep, there is a lot more culture here and this is gonna take something to get used to" but I'm used to it now and it's just another thing that you just don't notice.

Matilda shows a lack of experience with BIPOC students and colorblindness. Ethan and Emma (white students) made some comments that revealed stereotyping, generalizing, and polarizing views towards BIPOC students. Ethan stated:

> I've learned their experiences and compared their cultures to our cultures. There's some challenges with that, obviously. There's a language barrier. . . . I just like to know their story. They wanna learn about America. They wanna learn about how we do things here beneath the surface. They're here to learn. They're here to engage, and they keep to themselves as well, but they also branch out . . . I think that they're really brave for doing that because it's kinda scary coming into a new situation. It's really good.

When later asked whether he had experienced any cultural challenges, he said:

> Yeah. Like I said, the language barrier is tough. Different foods are—I'm not gonna lie, sometimes they smell bad to us, but they don't [laughing] to them. I know some of our foods smell bad to them. (Ethan)

Emma made similarly polarizing statements:

> It's not really a challenge, but I know some of my classmates are from—I think she's from [African country]. She was sharing in class—and I just have a hard time. Their accents are a little bit difficult for me, but it's not necessarily a clash of culture. It's just hard to find out what they're saying.

Both Emma and Ethan discussed cultural challenges and diversity under the Polarization stage described by Hammer et al. [18]. The comments do not sound "idealizing' of the other culture as their Reversal mindset would indicate, but they are not Defensive either. Ethan takes a patronizing approach believing he is fully competent on the "other" students' cultural experiences: "I've learned their experiences and compared their cultures to our cultures." And while he (and Emma) did not state which cultures are "better," there is a clear "us" and "them" approach when describing diversity on campus. They both refer to others as "they" and describe them in stereotypical ways: they eat food that smells bad and have accents that are difficult to understand. Ethan also shows a lack of knowledge on these students' cultural backgrounds as he makes broad and vague generalizations: "they wanna learn about America. They want to learn about how we do things here."

The two BIPOC students whose results fell into Polarization and Reversal were Gerardo and Isabella—both Latinx. Gerardo is an extroverted young adult from the South, and Isabella is a very shy student who lived off-campus. Isabella did not say much about diversity or cultural challenges during the interview, just that "I mean, my culture isn't really shown, because there's not many of us [Latinx] here [on campus]." She then, added "I know one of my friends, she's Muslim. I feel like she thinks that—yeah, like her too. There's not that many of her ethnicity."

Isabella's main focus was the lack of representation of Latinx or Muslim students on campus. In fact, there are very few Latinx students. As Gerardo indicated:

> When everyone moved in, there was a lot of—it was just a lotta white people. It was really overwhelming. It was weird. It was a weird experience. 'Cuz at least where I'm from, there's a lotta diversity, . . . , it was the first time I felt like a

minority. . . . There's not many Hispanics here. I've noticed, I think right now, two other ones. If there are Hispanics, then I have already met them . . . .I can probably count on my hands how many black male students are here, or black females, or Muslims. It might feel like a lot just 'cuz it's a small school, but it feels weird.

Both Isabella and Gerardo discussed cultural challenges in a "us" vs. "them" approach, too; "us" being not just Latinx students, but BIPOC in general. There was no sense of Reversal in their discussions but a need of support and camaraderie from more BIPOC. They both indicated feeling out of place because of the lack of representation of Latinx students and other racial and ethnic groups on campus.

When Gerardo was asked how his background influenced his experiences on campus he stated:

There's just a few students, not many though. Usually the bad ones stick out. They're not mean, or anything, but just sounds like, I wanna say jealous, but they sound upset that PURSUE [students] get scholarships for being an under representative community when it doesn't have to be about race. It can be about social class, or first-generation college student. It feels like people are upset about not being able to afford college, or it being expensive, and they take it out on the easiest target. It's just as a group, not individually . . . .It's a pretty easy audience . . . . "They gotta scholarship 'cuz they're Mexican, or they're black." . . . I think it was one, or two of them [students who led orientation] that—I guess they just didn't like PURSUE, or something. They misinformed them [incoming students] . . . "They just got $8000 for being uhh." . . . .it's more they're just being a little bit ignorant on it. It's not that they just don't like us. (Gerardo)

The perception of BIPOC students, in particular those who belong to PURSUE, as undeserving of the scholarship and of being in college was not uniquely stated by Gerardo but was a common topic of discussion in several interviews–especially by students belonging to the PURSUE living learning community. This will be addressed more in the next section.

Gerardo's experience of being stigmatized for receiving resources "unfairly" and facing a cultural shock—due to seeing himself outnumbered in a mostly white city and institution—could explain his Polarizing orientation. But it did not explain his Reversal orientation. He did not show admiration for other cultures or any signs of denigrating his own culture, on the contrary, he wanted more Latinx representation on campus. The fact that Isabella, Gerardo, Matilda, Amy, Emma, and Nathan were all classified under the same umbrella of cultural sensitivity (Polarization/Reversal), shows the lack of information the IDI provides and the danger of using this tool as a pedagogical resource to understand students' cultural needs for growth in cultural development. Homogenizing their cultural mindsets reveals the IDI as a colorblind tool that ignores the racism that BIPOC face.

While Matilda and Amy are in a majority white campus feeling discomfort around BIPOC, Gerardo and Isabella experience being clearly outnumbered by white students and not finding students who look like them. Research shows that African Americans and Latinos feel more engaged in school when greater proportions of their own race or ethnicity are present [4,5,53,54]. Having a community of students with the same race or ethnicity enhances their sense of belonging as well as their academic engagement [5,32,33,54]. In addition, perceiving a hostile, prejudiced, and discriminatory campus environment affects students' academic outcomes [55].

While Nathan and Emma discussed cultural challenges by stigmatizing the "other" BIPOC, whose food "smells bad" and whose accents are difficult to understand, Gerardo feels stigmatized for getting a scholarship for BIPOC, first generation college students, and Pell grant recipients; he perceives that white students around him think that he does not deserve this financial support. The cultural experience and needs for cultural growth of these students are vastly different. Nevertheless, the IDI assessment tool categorizes them into a singular mindset of ethnocentrism with poor intercultural sensitivity. Consequently,

the tool dismisses stigmatization experienced by BIPOC and favors those students who can embrace cultural differences regardless of the hierarchical and oppressive nature of their experiences.

The following section reveals how cultural differences are never experienced in a vacuum but in a context of historical and structural tensions. PURSUE became a campus structure created to value underserved students and mitigate the educational disparities present in the US. However, the fact that PURSUE students received a scholarship and resources impacted the intercultural relationships on campus. This intercultural tension was influenced by a common lack of knowledge of the systemic racism and educational disparities that affect BIPOC. The *ignorance* (as Gerardo put it) at the root of educational disparities that affect intercultural relationships is a tension that can persist if not addressed through pedagogical practices. The developmental model of cultural sensitivity does not address structural inequalities and system racism and thus cannot ease such intercultural tension.

4.3. The IDI and Racial Tension on Campus

To provide a concrete example of how the IDI fails to solve issues of racial tension within an institution, we now explore one aspect of racial tension on this campus: the benefits and membership of PURSUE. Gerardo was not the only student to state how some students were upset that "PURSUE [students] get scholarships for being an underrepresented community." Three other BIPOC students who belonged to PURSUE (two of them in Minimization and one of them in Acceptance) heard comments about being favored due to their race. A white student (Amy, ICC) and an Asian American student (Olivia, no LCC), both directly presented such sentiments of unfairness in the interviews (Amy in Polarization and Olivia in Minimization).

Olivia stated:

So PURSUE is mostly African American. I feel like PURSUE gets more opportunities just because they're in that group. I feel like those opportunities should be spanned out across everyone . . . . PURSUE this, PURSUE that, oh PURSUE got to do this, PURSUE got to do that. It's like okay, I wanna be a part of that.

Ibrahim, Aisha, and Camila were three BIPOC students who heard the same type of complaint Olivia presented. The three of them belong to PURSUE. Ibrahim heard other students say:

"I wish I were a part of PURSUE, or something," and I'd ask them why, and they'd be like, "I don't know, you're all just a whole buncha . . . cuz it's the colored who get money," or whatever. I'd be like, "No, that's not it." . . . .They'll look at us like, I guess how people look at—in society, how people have Section 8, or housing aid, or stuff like that. They're like, "They don't deserve it." . . . I've heard that's the only reason why we got into [the university], cuz "The colored, oh, they need more kids for PURSUE," . . . That kinda pisses me off, sometimes . . . A lot of them, they're great students, great friends, but some students just need to be taught, or need to learn what these LLCs are, and what they're for, and what they do, I guess.

And Aisha also shared:

They'll be nice to you, but then it's like, "Why are you talking to me?" Then they start questioning, "How did you even get to this school?" They start questioning the whole PURSUE group. "Why are you guys even a thing? Why are you guys here? You guys don't deserve it," or something like that. . . . in the beginning [of the year] the minority [PURSUE] . . . watch(ed) a video about how to treat minorities. I was like, "Well, why didn't you make the rest of the students watch it?"

Based on these students' comments, there is a critical issue that is not a consequence of their cultural mindset (being in an ethnocentric stage), but on their lived experiences of prejudice and the lack of understanding many white students have about educational

equity and the opportunity gap. While cultural competence can help individuals manage some cultural differences, it does not help them gain knowledge of structural inequality. Higher education institutions should not take the easy (but expensive) way out by simply assessing all the students on a 50-question survey but should embrace educating their students on both cultural competence and structural racism. Understanding structural inequality can help all students understand why PURSUE exists and why it is fair; reducing racial differences to culture alone does not reveal why PURSUE should exist. As Aisha stated, PURUSE students discussed issues of discrimination and white privilege as part of their LLC program, but this structured anti-racist learning was not offered to other students.

5. Discussion

Focusing on and assessing cultural competence at universities and colleges has become a common strategy to respond to the increased diversity in our campuses, workplaces, and communities [6,8,56]. Using the DMIS can help one discuss cultural differences and mindsets about other cultural groups. Terms like Polarization, Minimization, and Acceptance can help students, staff, and faculty analyze their cultural practices and those of others. This conceptualization can be meaningful as an educational approach if it is combined with concepts of cultural imperialism, structural racism, and stigma. However, using the DMIS as a pedagogical tool is quite different from using the IDI as an assessment tool that places individuals' mindsets in fixed categories, while not providing the survey questions or students' responses to discuss during the debrief. Cultural competence assessment tools, such as the IDI, embrace color-blindness and dismiss implications of inequalities, power, and privilege present among our communities [6–8]. While the IDI celebrates and affirms difference, it dismisses students' unique cultural experiences and mindsets, and homogenizes them into five fixed and decontextualized categories regardless of the vastly different cultural encounters they have had and their positions within cultural and structural privileges. Students (such as Ethan or Amy in Polarization) who embrace white fragility and/or cultural privileges, demonstrate a lack of understanding of other ethnic/racial groups, and stereotype BIPOC students, are classified as having a higher developmental cultural mindset than black students in Denial (Gladys and Ayaan), who explained adapting to other cultural groups and of being stigmatized due to their skin color. In this paper, we have added to the literature on the IDI by demonstrating that such discrepancies exist, and how these fracture the tool's validity and its purpose.

The IDI has not been validated in reference to race, social class, or ethnicity. Greenholtz [41] found a limitation in the tool's cross-cultural transferability for those not from the US; our study provides data undermining the validity of the IDI for BIPOC in the US. Furthermore, our results affirm that more work is needed to assess both the validity of the IDI and whether the DMIS is a theoretically sound way to describe the development of cultural awareness within social hierarchies, especially for those who face racism from the dominant culture. Any measure of cultural competence should consider the impact of lived discriminatory experiences of BIPOC, as well as how these experiences may influence their interpretation of the survey questions [11]. Hammer's et al. [18] assumption that the more complex and sophisticated one's cultural experiences are the more culturally competent one becomes ignores that the quality and context of the interaction matters [57].

While the IDI might provide a snapshot of white students' growth on cultural differences (based on race and ethnicity, it is unclear if it reveals students' understandings of other cultural differences such as gender and sexuality), our study suggests that it may not accurately place BIPOC within the categories laid out by the DMIS, perhaps because these students may feel pressure to conform to the (white) dominant culture or are stigmatized for belonging to a living learning community (PURSUE). It is critical to differentiate students' experiences of interaction across race and culture: while Amy and Matilda felt uncomfortable when they arrived on campus by the presence of BIPOC, the BIPOC students felt outnumbered and stigmatized. As Carter [4] reminds us, black students in white-dominant schools report problems of cultural alienation, racial discrimination, and

consequently of social and academic engagement. Therefore, the cultural challenges of white and non-white students may result in different academic outcomes.

Understanding our students' cultural experiences on campus should be a priority. Our research adds to the literature by calling into question the benefit of using the IDI to improve the racial climate on campuses. The IDI results did not provide insight on the intercultural tension surrounding the PURSUE living learning community. Interview narratives provided evidence of the stigma and prejudice towards BIPOC in this living learning community. Such tension requires work beyond accepting other cultural practices and views (the IDI approach), it requires structural knowledge of historical racism and stigma [6].

The use of campus resources to support diversity, such as PURUSE or affirmative action practices, may lead to sentiments of "reverse discrimination." Students who showed racial resentment towards PURSUE find it unfair to base preferential policies on race, especially when they perceive those policies to harm rather than to benefit themselves [13]. This racial tension must be addressed by university curricular and co-curricular programming. It demands teaching on structural racism and not simply embracing celebratory and cultural conceptualizations of race [13] or intercultural competence models.

A living learning community that aims to provide resources to first-generation college students, BIPOC students, and Pell-grant recipients is fair, especially in the context of the educational and racial disparities in the upper Midwest [58]. Instead of focusing on culture alone, students need to be informed about structural racism, like the historical impact of segregation [59]; employment discrimination [60]; K-12 funding inequalities; institutional racism in schools' educational tracks (honors courses) and English-language courses [61,62]; and racial disparities in school discipline [63,64]. This learning is essential for undergraduate students' understanding of PURSUE, which aims to offset such realities. While teaching about structural competence is critical, studies have shown that "social forces such as discrimination, racism, and inequality permeate the school's social context and countervail students' racial boundary crossing" (Wells et al., 2009, cited in [4]). Racism prevails even among students who have interracial relationships and who may become knowledgeable on structural inequalities. Nevertheless, to minimize such reality, and facilitate true "cultural competence," students must be educated on structural competence. Such knowledge is essential in offsetting intercultural misunderstandings, improving empathy, and building honest relationships with diverse students and/or diverse community members.

6. Conclusions

This study's limitations reveal areas for further study. The qualitative portrait of students' intercultural experiences, perceptions, and challenges was based on one interview with each of 34 students. Future research could use a series of interviews or ethnographic methods to provide a robust picture of the students to contrast with the IDI results. In addition, though a sample of 34 students is enough to cast doubt on the validity of the IDI for BIPOC students, more work, both qualitative and quantitative, should be done with other samples to confirm generalizability. Future research should also focus on better understanding BIPOC students' interpretation and experience of intercultural competence, assessment concepts, and intercultural competence training.

This study used qualitative interview data to align students' discourses of intercultural experiences and challenges with their individual IDI results. The findings revealed the lack of validity of the IDI for BIPOC students. Furthermore, these findings affirm the need to incorporate the concept of structural inequality in university programing, since a sense of "reverse discrimination" was present among students who perceived PURUSE as unfairly supporting BIPOC students. Administering a quick, simple (and expensive) survey like the IDI neither addressed this racial tension on campus nor accurately depicted the cultural competence of BIPOC students. Administrating the IDI can help check a box on intercultural work done at an institution but neither reveals nor solves the intercultural challenges faced within the institution. It is a colorblind tool that ignores cultural and

structural privileges, and asks our BIPOC students to dismiss their experiences of racism and oppression in order to become "more" interculturally competent. Our research suggests that institutions cannot and should not rely on the IDI to improve racial understanding, or accurately provide information about where BIPOC are on the DMIS scale.

Our research affirms that as more BIPOC students are and will be enrolled in higher education institutions, intercultural competence frameworks must address concepts of privilege and racial inequalities. Intercultural assessment tools must be validated by social class and racial groups. If intercultural competency is to remain in the forefront of intercultural work and diversity in higher education, new theoretical underpinnings must be developed that incorporate the hierarchical and racist experiences of BIPOC. Faculty and staff who focus on this work must explore the different interpretations and definitions of intercultural competence, include structural inequality issues, and adopt a multimethod and multiperspective focus [9]. If the goal is to develop a process of assessment, it should be done in dialogue with key stakeholders, including students, to determine what critical aspects of intercultural and structural competence should be highlighted in particular institutions or programs.

Appendix A. Interview Guide

Background:

- Why did you choose to go to college, and why this university?

Social integration:

- Do you feel a sense of belonging here at this university? Can you explain why/why not? [If student does not feel like they belong]: What would it look like to belong to this community?
- Do you find it difficult to make friends at this university?

Challenges:

- What challenges do you face here at the university? Academic challenges? Social challenges? [What have your interactions with other students (LLC and non-LLC) been like?] Cultural challenges?
- Do you wish the student body were different in any way?
- Do you wish the faculty were different in any way? Is there something they could do differently that would help you?
- Is there anything the university could do differently that would help you?

Diversity:

- When people talk about "diversity" at the university, what does that mean to you? What specific groups do you think about?
- Do you think your background—your family, race, gender, religion, etc.—affects your experience here?

- Do you think other people who are of different races or religion have different types of experiences here? They fit in better/not as well?

  Academic integration:

- What has been your experience in the classroom here at the university?
- How often do you interact with faculty inside/outside of the classroom? How satisfied with these interactions have you been?
- Are you doing as well in school as you thought you would? Why do you think that is? Do you feel like anything prevents you from living up to your own expectations for yourself?

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