

RIS Audio Interviews

Episode 2: On Doctoral Dissertation Process & On Race and International Students with Dr. Shannon Hutcherson and Dr. Sarang Kim

Welcome to the RIS Audio Interviews, a reflective interview series where we have critical and caring conversations with our community members who research and work *with* international students. I'm your host, Asuka Ichikawa.

This program invites our community members to share how they are working to dismantle systemic issues that international students live with. At the same time, this program hopes to create a caring and healing space among researchers and practitioners who work on these tough topics because we are also human beings who need to rest and sustain ourselves to do the work we do.

As noted in the book *Research with International Students*, intersectionality of international students is essential to how we understand our experiences as international students, and why & how we might design our research with international students. While each element of intersectionality is inseparable from one another, in this episode we will have a deep dive into the topic of race and international students.

For this episode, I'm delighted to welcome two newly minted PhDs to our program.

First, we have Dr. Shannon Hutcherson, who just finished her PhD at McGill University at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. As an international student herself, she wanted to highlight their experiences in a way that demonstrates their heterogeneity and unique stories. She also privileges a critical lens that functions to highlight inequities embedded into international higher education practices, policies, and ideologies.

Her research has focused on policies that impact international students with a spotlight on Canada, how international students conceptualize inequity in respect to their international student status, and the importance of intersectional analysis in understanding the international student experience, particularly around the understanding of race.

Finally, she has highlighted important holes in the research, literature and service, around gender-based violence and its impact on international students. Shannon believes in balance, making time for family, friends, and herself. That usually looks like feeding everyone she cares about, ballet, and spending too much time thinking about and showing off her growing plant collection to anyone who will listen.

Next, we have Dr. Sarang Kim, who just defended her thesis in Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her research interests include international students' experiences with race and racism, critical internationalization of higher education, development of critical consciousness and social-justice leadership among diverse college students, and the transnational application of Critical Race Theory within the South Korean context. Her dissertation, titled "A Phenomenological Inquiry into International Students' Development of Critical Agency," utilizes a phenomenological approach to explore how international students in

the United States cultivate critical consciousness and agency to advocate for racial and social justice. Sarang is also a foodie and loves watching, reading, and talking about foods!

Asuka:

Thank you so much, Shannon and Sarang for being here. It's really great to have you on the program.

Shannon:

Thank you.

Sarang:

Thank you so much for having us.

Asuka:

Alright then, so I first wanted to congratulate both of you for completing your PhD and dissertation journey. And so, I was wondering if you could dive in from perhaps reflecting on that journey, although I realize this could take a program on its own -- But yes, how was sort of choosing your topic for your dissertation? Maybe if we could start with that and yes, please.

Shannon:

Sure, I'm happy to chime in. So, for my thesis, it's *International Students, Equity and Marginalization, Unpacking the Human Impact of Internationalization*. So, in my thesis or my dissertation, I'm really trying to center international students back and looking at some of those factors that have worked to marginalize us, whether that's systemic racism, whether that's policies, disproportionate access to resources. That's what I really like to do a deep dive into in my work. It was definitely a process, like landing on my topic. When I started my PhD, I was actually studying something entirely different.

But I think one of the biggest motivators for me for doing research with international students is my positionality as an international student. So, I'm from the United States, came to McGill University as an international student. My friends are international students. I was serving on committees with international students. So, I was definitely informed by my own experiences, but I really wanted to know more. And it's kind of a really unique position when you're an insider and outsider in the research that you do. So, when you belong to the community that you want to know more about, you know, dealing with the bureaucracy of being an international student firsthand.

I'm Black, African American, being a racialized international student, like also informed my experience. So, I would say like that positionality, the timeliness of it. So, I started my PhD like a little, like over seven years ago. And we had international students in the headlines, but there's just so much more momentum about our experiences right now, especially in the Canadian context. And I guess the other big motivator is just like problematizing the research. So, when I started like engaging in, you know, what does life look like for us? I found a lot of research that I just didn't resonate with me. I was like, whose stories are these? Who, what is this research that's being done, you know, focusing on like acculturation and acculturation stress? And I was

like, our experiences are so much more than that. Some of these like really prominent deficit discourses. So, when I saw that need for that research that highlights, you know, your experiences and not like centering us as the problem, but looking at some of the structural factors that impact our experience, like dealing with like rising tuition fees, dealing with encounters of discrimination in our host countries of study. I wanted to follow that like more systemic issues. So, I think just seeing that missing point, I thought I can do something with this.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. And Sarang, yes, please.

Sarang:

Yeah, thank you. So, my dissertation is titled *A Phenomenological Inquiry into International Students' Development of Critical Agency in US Higher Education*. And this research kind of focuses on how international students in US higher education develop agency to advocate for racial and social justice. And I chose this topic for two main reasons. As Shannon shared, the first factor relates to my own background experiences. So, I was born in the US, but I spent the majority of my life in South Korea. So, coming back to the US and attending public educational institutions, I encountered and learned about racism and racial dynamics, which was very eye-opening and also shaped my commitment to racial and social justice.

So, additionally, many of my social connections are with international and transnational individuals. So, I observed similar experiences and processes among them. At the same time, I noticed how international students are often excluded from racial discussions in US higher education settings, including their potential role as allies in racial and social justice movements. So, this really prompted me to explore a topic that highlights international students' agency and advocating for racial and social justice.

And then the second factor stems from a noticeable gap in existing literature concerning international students' agency and commitment to racial and social justice. While there has been some progress, deficit perspectives have traditionally dominated research on international students, also in the areas of their experiences with racism, which tend to focus on how they encounter systemic racism, rather than on their efforts to challenge and develop agency against it. So, I would say that these two factors heavily influenced the direction of my research and the decision-making process about the topic.

Asuka:

Thank you so much for the overview of your thesis topics, and now kind of chiming into the process sort of reflections, I was wondering if you could both share what was it really like to do your whole independent research for the thesis and also the writing process for those who may be going into this phase, or maybe thinking about this or somebody who may be in the middle of it. So, if you could perhaps share any of those reflections, that would be super great.

Sarang:

Yeah, thank you for asking. So, I do want to acknowledge that conducting and writing a dissertation of your own can be a very lonely, difficult, and confusing process. And when kind of looking back, I think there were three things that particularly helped me navigate this journey. I guess the first factor was my participants and the stories and experiences that they shared with me. I guess they were constant sources of strength and motivation for me, kind of encouraging me to persist in my writing and dissertating process.

And then the second factor involved kind of constantly reminding myself of the value and significance of my research. This was especially important because like a self-doubt is I think the natural part of conducting research and thesis writing.

And lastly, I would say that it was really important to be kind to myself and just unapologetically engage in self-care throughout the research and writing processes. So, for many graduate students conducting independent research is a new experience. And I think seeing it as kind of like a valuable learning process was really helpful. So, I think these three factors will really helped me navigate my thesis research and writing process.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. I see all of us nodding and yes, Shannon, please, yes.

Shannon:

Yeah, thank you. And I think so I'm like you brought up some really important points. I think the first thing you said was talking about how lonely of a process, you know, writing and working on your thesis and being, you know, you feel like you're an island party of one when you're writing. So, I think one of the best parts to help facilitate that writing and not to be too cheesy, but that sense of community and like finding our community.

So, one thing that was really special with the Research with International Students group is we have a bunch of like people who have seen that there are issues happening in research with international students. And we have something to say about it. So, just finding that group in and of itself was really helpful and inspiring for like making that progress towards my goals. And also, CISN, that Critical Internationalization Studies Network. And you also have a group of researchers who are doing a very critical take on internationalization and who is being marginalized within this sphere of neoliberal internationalization. So, I think, yeah, to start with community is probably the top part.

And also, extending that community beyond the research community is, you know, thinking of like who you're doing this research for. So, all of us have stake in the game as international students, but for me, it's been really helpful to share work with other international students. Because when you have a personal stake, it can be kind of overwhelming. You want to do everything like every conversation that you have. You're like, this is a personal topic, but also a research topic. And with humility you acknowledge that you can't do everything. But I think it's really helpful just to talk out some of those common problems and research issues to make sure that your research stays grounded for the people that it's intended for.

And also, I think when you share your research with the wider international student community, we also like to think we hold each other accountable too, you know, because no research is perfect. So, I think it's helpful to also share the ugly stuff, like share your questions that you think, okay, I'm not sure this might be a dumb question, but I'm going to throw it out there and get feedback. And because I think it's just a really insightful community as well.

Asuka:

Thank you. I would definitely echo that. I mean, all of us are working on thesis topics that's really where researcher positionality and reflexivity matter so much. I'm also just recognizing how much we can be so committed to the topic. But at the same time, we also need time to breathe, you know. So I'm hearing that as well. And with that, perhaps, I mean, you've just finished defending, so please do take all the rest however possible. But for those who might be, I guess, curious to what PhD experiences or the thesis experiences may lead to or could be

applied to. If you could share any sort of ideas about how you might want to apply this whole multi-year experience and whatever you may be doing.

Shannon:

Well, there was one thing that I was thinking of in terms of not being able to do it all. I'll start with that. We're all motivated people. We're all really excited about the research that we're doing. And it's exciting. It was a lot of synergy when we go to conferences and we're thinking of like all the topics that you want to do and everything that you want to address.

But I think sometimes there is power in pairing back and saying, no. And sometimes you have to say no to engagement. Sometimes you have to target your research and target your work more. So as I was reflecting on the questions that you had sent, I did want to highlight that power of saying no in the work that we do. Particularly around like Research with International Students, as we all know that that title was very aptly chosen. And sometimes when you're a representative from the international student community, you're asked to engage. You're often like an outside expert. So people often ask you, hey, can you serve on this panel? Can you do this? We need international students to do this. So I think in being able to focus your work a little bit, you're allowed to say no to certain engagements. Especially if certain engagements feel extractive. But this is not an experience that I've had with RIS to decontextualize. It's always been really warm and supportive.

But I think as I make it to the other side of my thesis and my dissertation, I think of just like limitations I have sometimes because sometimes you feel like you're a hamster in a wheel when you're doing your research. I'm going to use a few animal analogies here. Sometimes you're a hamster in a wheel or sometimes you have so many ideas that you feel like you're hurding cats. So I think if you do have those opportunities to like stay focused and like get to like the root of your work, which I think a lot of us are like getting to that criticism and those critical perspectives and internationalization. Just like finding that center in the midst of like all of your... What is the ultimate goal of what I hope to achieve here? I think at least for me, it's just to like highlight some of those injustices and some of those marginalizations in a meaningful way.

Sarang:

Thank you, Shannon, for sharing that. That really deeply resonated with me as well. Yeah, like I think the moving forward, I do envision myself like continuously engaging in research, teaching that critically examines internationalization of higher education and international students experiences. I do hope to, since I'm done with my dissertation for now, I do hope to take a step back and like Shannon said, I do want to take some time to really deeply reflect on the work that I'm doing. And I'll just give some break to myself as well, because I think doing a critical work can be exhausting. And it could be emotionally a lot too.

So I think for us to be also sustainable in the long term, I do hope to take some breaks and then come back from the break. When I'm ready to engage in work again. But I do appreciate Shannon saying that we also need to take care of ourselves as well when we're doing like critical work.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. And this was precisely one of the major themes that I was really hoping to talk to both of you because you've been through it. And so I think, yes, that sustainability part is important for ourselves and also for the field itself, because we feel burnout and you know,

that's not good for anybody or ourselves. So yes, for us to continue to do the work. So thank you so much for these candid reflections.

~ Transition music ~

Asuka:

With that, perhaps we could dive into the topic of this episode, which is on race and international students. And just wanted to make sure, as both of you highlight in your work as well, this episode dives into this topic because you're both experts on this topic. But at the same time, wanting to recognize that race is one aspect of the intersectional identities we hold. And I just wanted to be mindful in framing this so that it's not just race that we're dealing with here. It's its multitude of identities. So please do bring in any other intersecting identities that come into mind.

And with that, to set the groundwork for our conversation on race and international students, as an author of chapter nine of the RIS book titled "Calling Race into Research with International Students." Shannon, I was wondering if you could begin by sharing the sort of the essence of critical race theory for us and how this matters in the context of researching with international students.

Shannon:

Great. Thank you, Asuka. So I'll start with just highlighting that, as Sarang said before, that there's an erasure of talking about race in this subfield of research with international students. So oftentimes there's comfort in talking about diversity and the diversity that international students bring to institutions. And this is often in tandem of like really colourful, you know, national flags that highlight the rich, the rich culture that we bring at the institutions that we study.

But there is a fear and an avoidance of talking about race in a really meaningful way. And this is important because at least in the interviews that I had with international students for my thesis, race does matter and it has significance for students. And sometimes they say it as uniquely intertwined with their status. Like I cannot separate being an international student from my racialized identity in Canada.

So to go back to how we can understand critical race theory and how that fits into international student experiences, CRT basically offers an understanding of how race functions to impact international students. And a critical race theory also speaks to the everyday, ordinary nature of racism. This is from Delgado and Stefancic (2012), but this is not to minimize racism. It's just to highlight that it's something that's deeply embedded and entrenched in the societies that we navigate and that we engage with. And that we have to see how these different intersecting identities, international student identity, racialized identity, how those might interact to impact how you experience the world, but also how the world or the context that you're in engages with you.

So in my thesis, I found a few different things around race and international students. So first, that avoidance and discomfort that Sarang also talked about of talking about race, the diversity dance and leading more into diversity because it's more palatable. But also this marginalization of international students. And the students that I interviewed, they talked about this formative experience of learning about racism in a new context.

So what happens if you're going from a context or a country where you're in a majority and then all of a sudden you come to Canada or the United States or elsewhere and all of a sudden you're racialized and you're like, okay, this is my identity. And I'm Black as we know. And one of the students I interviewed is Nigerian and he said it was really strange for him to move to Canada and to have people call him Black. He's like, I'm not Black. I'm Nigerian. And so even talking about race requires even deeper nuance. So we have two students who are racialized as Black, but myself as an African American and a student in Wally as an Nigerian international student. Our experiences are like widely different. Black is my identity and I've been socialized to have that racial consciousness. You know, I'm Black and for him, he had this experience like as an adult. And like, what does that mean having this this attached to my identity when I didn't choose it? But someone kind of projected it onto me.

And another student had said that she was talking about a microaggression that she had encountered that she had experienced. And as she was reflecting on the microaggression, she was like, oh, but maybe I'm conflating my international student status with being racialized. She was Sri Lankan. So it shows how you can't separate those those identities and how we need to meaningfully name it because students are naming it. Students are experiencing it. So why why should we avoid it in our research?

Asuka:

Thank you so much, Shannon. And I'll make sure to put the link to both of your publications so that people can look into it further as well. And as Shannon just mentioned, this racial consciousness -- this concept -- so in relation to the CRT theory, Sarang, I was wondering if I could now pass the mic to you. And as an author of an article, [*A Critical Oversight: International Students' Racial Consciousness and Agency in US Higher Education*], I was wondering if you could talk about what exactly is racial consciousness and how might this apply to the context of international students?

Sarang:

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for asking, Asuka. So in this work and my dissertation, I operationalized racial consciousness as an awareness of the ways in which systemic racism and White supremacy has operated to exclude marginalized communities in the US society and how international students who come from different national and cultural contexts develop such awareness.

And then my intention was not to enforce the idea that international students must unilaterally conform to the US-centered racial dynamics and system, but also just as a way of emphasizing the importance of understanding this reality as individuals living in the US, especially when we consider the colonialism racism underlying internationalization of higher education and international student mobility. So that was kind of like how, that was like how I kind of defined and operationalized racial consciousness.

Asuka:

Particularly with regard to Anglo-American contexts, could you share any insights as to why international students may be prone to being misunderstood as not having enough knowledge or experiences regarding issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, when in fact, when you mentioned in your article that there is actually a potential for international students to be "transnational agents in anti-racism and social justice movements." So I was wondering if you could expand on that bit too, please.

Sarang:

Yeah, thank you so much. So I can briefly talk about three main factors. So first, I think while it is changing, I think the deficit perspectives where international students are, you know, have been prevalent in both research and popular discourse. So in general, they're considered to lack in knowledge and experiences and skills to adjust in a host society. So this sort of like deficit perspective is one of the reasons why they are kind of like being misunderstood as not having enough knowledge to understand diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

And I think the second potential reason might be that, you know, racial discourse and conversations in the US, this diversity conversation are very much US-centered. They kind of lack in global dimensions and international students tend to be excluded from those discourse and conversation, despite, like I said before, colonialism and racism underlying the history of internationalization of higher educations and international students' mobility.

And lastly, the last potential reason might be that when we think of international students, there is so much emphasis on their economic contributions, their economic privilege. And there tends to be kind of lack of attention to their intersectional identities, like Shannon mentioned before. So this sort of like the over emphasis on their economic contribution could be one of the reasons why we are not paying attention to their experiences when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. So I think these are the three reasons that I can think of for now.

Asuka:

Thank you so much, Sarang. Would you like to add anything to that, Shannon?

Shannon:

Sure. Yeah, it's just you've got up so many great points that just had me reflecting on the research as well, especially on this like on deficit discourses, because that does have a really racialized element as well. You talked about like White normativity and looking at like who was also seen as international as well. So like some of my peers, they speak English as a first language. They're an international student, but are also perceived as White in some cases. And when we have that, like looking at like some of those like disparate experiences that we have, like one of my interviewees talked about, you know, it's not to international students who are in our department who are struggling with finding employment. So that was her experience of like looking around and like thinking, you know what, I think it is because of these deficit discourses when faculty look at who can do what. And this this seeing White as a baseline of this White normativity and seeing these really disparate experiences with like funding, but also with employment. So seeing how that deficit and White normativity play off of each other is really interesting. Thank you for your contribution, Sarang.

Sarang:

Thank you.

Asuka:

Right. I also noticed in your chapter, Shannon, that you mentioned sort of this administrative factor that universities do, for example, for local students, the race or ethnic backgrounds may be identified in the data. But when it comes to international students, sometimes we or they are lumped into international students and homogenized. So yes, I thought that was also a very critical insight into how institutions may be able to collect more intersectional data.

With that, yes, Dr. Hutcherson and Dr. Kim, now that you've defended your dissertations, is there anything that you wanted to add in terms of any highlights from your dissertation that

you'd like to share with the audience? Or something that's surprising even that you might have not expected when beginning this journey?

Shannon:

Yeah, I think looking back, so just for more context, like my research question for my thesis was, what are the ways in which international students in Canada have been Othered, marginalized and impacted by their non-citizen status and other intersecting identities? And how is this marginalization mediated by policy and equity and practices in higher education? So I did the manuscript-based thesis, which meant I had three separate manuscripts, three opportunities to address this question.

So in the first manuscript, I looked at policy during COVID-19 and how that impacted international students. The second manuscript, I asked students themselves how they conceptualize an equity as mediated by their status as an international student. So that was, you know, centering their voices. And then the third manuscript, which is our publication in research with international students, so international students and race and some of those factors that have been omitted from research. So three really unique perspectives, but one piece that I had kind of been looking for in the literature and hadn't seen it as much. I had seen, you know, illusions to it.

And I know I had definitely lived it and experienced it as an international student is just the bureaucracy and the paperwork of being an international student. Like that that conditionality of status, meaning that nothing is a given. So your ability to be an international student is contingent on so many factors, like having your student visa, making sure it's valid, making sure you meet all the criteria for being a student, making sure you're meeting the work obligations. And I know in some countries that you've been stuck there like in some countries, like if you move residences, you have to update immigration. Right. So there's this all these strings attached to your student experience. And as I was interviewing students, you're realizing that just in the spirit of intersectionality that there's like widely different experiences with this conditionality of status. So I'm an American international student. I am able to validate my study permit at the border . So between the US Canadian border, I can validate. But then I interviewed one student who had one of the weakest passports in the world from Afghanistan. And her study permit process is very different. Right.

So understanding that passport power, socioeconomic status, and so many other factors in addition to race, like seeing how all those factors interplay really gave me a deeper and more nuanced understanding of student experiences because I think so often we just have, we've heard it in the literature, like the monolith of international students. And we're getting more momentum of, okay, we need to look at those intersectional experiences. But that actually like pulling those apart and pulling the threads and seeing, you know, how many times we can slice it to see those different facets of experience. Like another student I had interviewed, actually interviewed two students with Indian passports. And their experiences were also different because one student had reflections on caste. And so globally, like maybe scholars are writing about international students, they might say, you know, here Indian international student experiences, but no, we can slice that more because now we have these elements of caste. Because her family has been from a historically oppressed caste in India. And she was talking about how it's not just something that happens over there. The system, because of the diaspora and we have a lot of students from India, those systems get replicated here. So I think I've gotten just really, really important considerations for like how we can look at intersectionality more closely.

Asuka:

Thank you, Shannon. Sarang, would you like to go?

Sarang:

Yeah, thank you. So I can't build off of the Shannon's insights and comments because I think I do have some similar takeaways from my dissertation as well. So I do want to highlight maybe three things about the main findings of my research. So the first thing to highlight as Shannon mentioned, international students are incredibly diverse groups. And I think it's really important to avoid homogenizing the group. In my dissertation, like although my research employed phenomenology and focused on participants' shared experiences of development critical agency, there were so many, I guess, like differences in nuances in participants' experiences based on their national cultural backgrounds and their other identities such as gender sexual orientations, religious backgrounds. So I think that's like one thing that I want to highlight.

And then another thing I want to highlight is that my participants kind of like leveraged their transnational knowledge, wisdom and experiences toward developing their critical agency. This is important to highlight because as I mentioned before, research tends to kind of focus on, tended to focus on what they're lacking in host institutions and set up kind of challenges that they experience like reinforcing deficit perspectives. So I think it is equally important to pay attention to what they bring and how they leverage them toward developing their agency and other learning outcomes associated with like transnational mobility.

And I think that lastly, so my research also highlighted that international students can serve as important allies of racial and social justice movements in the US, their home countries and global community. This is because how my participants highlighted how their development of critical racial consciousness kind of prompted them to think about other forms of systems of oppressions within their home countries and other contexts. So this sort of kind of highlights how learning about one form of systemic oppression can transfer to thinking about other forms of oppression. So I think this is another thing that I wanted to highlight.

And lastly, I think as a qualitative, primarily qualitative researcher, I was really excited to see really the power of qualitative research because it really allowed me to center the voices and live the experiences of international students, which I was, which I think was really effective and challenging a lot of like assumptions and deficit perspectives for the population. So, you know, I think that like moving forward, like I was thinking about, oh, like, what if I use a different qualitative researchers, you know, towards similar topics or this topic or other similar topics. So I think those are some of the things that I want to highlight from my dissertations.

Asuka:

Thank you so much to both of you for these insights and empowering conversations on not just the topic itself, but also perhaps methodology wise, like what qualitative research can do, especially in the age we live in today. Also being mindful of time, I was wondering if we could let's look into the last two questions.

And first, in terms of researcher reflexivity, how has it been for both of you to do your research in your respective contexts? And so if you could share reflections on that, as well as any resources that you may have looked into or wish they existed for you to do this research processes and kind of keeping your wellbeing in check and prevent if possible or recover from any emotional sort of taxation or exhaustion that you've kind of alluded to earlier. I know that's like a loaded question, so feel free to, you know, take it in chunks or however you like to word it.

Shannon:

You know, I think just like focusing on some of Sarang's last comments had me thinking, like, particularly about that part of international student agency. So when you're focusing on like a lot of this critical work and you're looking at systems that are problematic that have been replicated, it is like really hopeful to look at the agency of students. Because I've spent a lot of time looking at, you know, here are the structural problems here and they're not working. And sometimes it can be discouraging, but using and looking at student agency as a counter is really helpful. So sometimes I just like to go back to like what's happening on the ground. I like looking at, you know, the progress and the work of some of those activist communities, like Migrant Students United here and One Voice and looking at international students of war and looking at like, you know, they have a voice and have something to say and are just doing incredible and amazing things. I think we're all in our community. We're all cheering for each other. So I like looking out for those other successes as well. And just seeing the progress that people are really doing on the ground to advance the cause and are looking at international student looking at international student equity.

And I think I can also like circle back to again, there is a lot of power in saying no. And just being aware of, you know, of that meaning to maintain that balance. So like looking to our community when we need it, but also sometimes just taking a break when one that's required again, because it just feels really high stakes when you're, when you have that identity and you're doing research with other people who have a shared identity or have shared stock in our outcomes and what's happening to us.

Sarang:

Thank you, Shannon, for sharing that. If I could share a little bit about my experiences as well. So I think reflexivity has been a really critical aspect of our research journey, especially as someone who is doing research with international students as someone who is not an international student, I guess, in a legal sense. So I think throughout my research processes, I try to make a concerted effort to be transparent and mindful about the differences between myself and my participants.

And I think I also try to move away from very rigid insider and outsider perspectives and sort of try to instead leverage my positionality to conduct meaningful work while prioritizing ethics and morality and transparency.

So I think throughout this whole process, I have greatly benefited from literature on transnational reflexivity, intersectionality, as well as mentorship from like the peers and social networks. And just looking ahead, I think that participating in like peer support networks kind of dedicated to discussing this, the emotional challenges associated with researcher reflexivity would be very, very beneficial.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. And anything you'd like to add in terms of any other intersectional identities that you've noticed becoming salient during the process or expected to be salient or anything, for example, in terms of gender or nationality or anything that popped out to you during the process?

Shannon:

I can talk about gender and its importance in my work. I didn't have as much space to get into it during my thesis, but I have been on a project that looks at gender-based violence in university context. And as a part of that project, we were looking at, we were reviewing sexual violence

policies for institutions. And we started noticing this trend that some institutions would just have this kind of like throwaway sentence about international students, like it would just say, oh, and international students might be more vulnerable, or there might be like an asterisk or something like that. And we're just like, why, you know, what is that? What is that throwaway comment? So we started to unpack that more and just look at how policies and systems might work to impact international students differently. So we, the sexual violence policies are relevant to everyone, like regardless of whether an international student or not. But one thing is that we started to look at, you know, okay, this does impact racialized identities more, international students more.

What happens when you have both of those identities, you know, from an intersectional perspective. So like on one hand, so like racialized survivors of gender based violence or sexual violence are less likely to be believed in the justice system. And in our research, we also found that international students who were survivors at times, sometimes their disclosure would be dismissed as like a cultural misunderstanding. Oh, maybe you're not from here. Maybe you misunderstood the situation. So we started reviewing court cases involving international students.

And we found that like with inference that a lot of these survivors who are female also racialized. But again, that required inference because oftentimes when we have these cases, race is just a fact of a case, but they don't really talk about like why race might be relevant in a situation, particularly in some cases we found some students were being like female international students and graduate students were being like exoticized by their supervisors and also by their perpetrators. So it is really key to unpack some of those like gendered nuances, those gendered experiences, and how that might interplay with race, particularly with survivors who have been exoticized as well.

Asuka:

Definitely. Thank you for that insight. Sarang, would you like to add anything?

Sarang:

I can maybe briefly touch upon how like I think in my dissertation, the students national and cultural backgrounds emerge, saliently in my findings and how they shape their experiences differently. So I think one of the insights that I gained from my research is that moving forward, it'd be really important to kind of really look at their historical, the backgrounds and the relationship between the US and their home countries and how they also shape their relationships. And how they also shape their experiences as well. So I think that's one way how the intersectionality kind of played a role in my dissertation.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. With that, let's dive into one last question. Could you share any messages for researchers and practitioners who may identify as international students or not, and for practitioners and researchers who are interested in applying the lens of race in their work and how might they do this in an ethical way as both of you have been doing?

Shannon:

I think just as a starting point, this is something like very simple, but very effective question is just to ask like, how is racism operating here (Jones, 2018, p. 233)? Just asking that and any research that you engage with, there's a really meaningful opportunity to stop and just ask like, how is racism operating here? Is it operating here? And then moving on, moving on from there because I think there are sometimes surprising ways that aren't always anticipated and always confronted because that question isn't asked first.

And then if you are someone who already does engage with like race in your research, ask yourself why and what is the intent? Because I think we've all made the argument that we do need to have conceptualizations of race in our work and racism in our work. However, sometimes those investigations of race are like not always intentionally, but sometimes those reasons are more nefarious and sometimes that's to confirm stereotypes or to like lean into some of the deficit discourses that Sarang has already been talking about.

So I think it is important to like ask those two questions. Like if there's an absence of race, why? But if I am talking about it, how am I doing it and in what way and am I being responsible with how I include this? And also, yeah, just going further, just like making sure that there's a distinction between like deficit discourses and understanding structures that perpetuate inequity. So I've seen like research that's focusing on like, I'm sure you've seen this all like that can some international students think critically? And I've seen this a lot centered on Asian international students. So here are a group of researchers who are targeting race, but for what reasons? Why? So I think those are some of my biggest pieces of feedback to leave with.

Asuka:

Thank you so much, Shannon. Sarang, please. Yes.

Sarang:

Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that, Shannon. I think I have two messages to share also, which are also very much related to Shannon's comments as well. I think the first point relates to my own intellectual journey, which has been profoundly influenced by scholars who critically examine the history of internationalization of higher education, rooted in colonialism, systemic racism and global White supremacy. So I do want to highlight the importance of deeply engaging with this history and structure as a crucial kind of step in understanding and ethically approaching international students experiences with race and racism.

And then the second point I want to highlight is the importance of also kind of a similar to what Shannon shared, clearly kind of operationalizing race and racism in your work, particularly depending on the context and specific international student population you're studying. So it's kind of relating back to Shannon's points, being mindful and reflective about the work that you're doing and like asking why. So I think these are the two messages I can leave the petitioner researchers with for future directions.

Asuka:

Thank you so much. Well, thank you so much again, Dr. Hutcherson and Dr. Kim. It's been a phenomenal conversation. Thank you so much for this very insightful, critical and ethical considerations and conversations to really kick off the RIS Audio Interview series. It's episode two, but it's officially like the start of the episode. So thank you so much for your thoughts and all the work that you do. Please, please do take care and yes, especially after the milestone. So thank you so much.

Sarang:

Thank you so much for having us and it was so nice to be in this space with you all.

Shannon:

Thank you so much. Thank you for organizing this. Like, thank you for both of your amazing contributions. It's really nice to reconnect with the RIS community like outside of the conference. So thank you.

Asuka:

Thank you.

That was Dr. Shannon Hutcherson and Dr. Sarang Kim on race and international students.

Please see the episode description for the links their publications mentioned in this interview, as well as the links to their recorded presentations during the RIS conference hosted at the University of Manchester in December last year.

Thank you for tuning in, please take care and see you next time.