

# BUILDING BRIDGES TO BETTER BONDS? BRIDGING AND BONDING CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ON-CAMPUS CLUB PARTICIPATION AMONG INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS

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## Abstract

Helping international students create meaningful on-campus connections is a major part of higher education's internationalization efforts. By focusing on the efforts made by both international and domestic students to develop a sense of belonging through on-campus organizations like clubs and sports, we have the opportunity to consider their active creation of bridging and bonding capital. Through structured interviews with 150 international Asian and domestic White and Asian students enrolled at one of the largest universities in Canada, this research demonstrates that ethnicity-based on-campus organizations play a key role in helping international students build bonding capital on campus. However, findings from this research also demonstrate that international and domestic student groups do not take part in the same on-campus organizations. Differences in participation and discriminatory attitudes held by domestic White students have the potential to inhibit bridging capital, limiting integration between student groups.

**Keywords:** higher education, internationalization, integration, bridging capital, bonding capital

## Résumé

Le travail des établissements postsecondaires visant à faciliter la création de liens significatifs parmi les étudiants internationaux est une composante essentielle de leurs efforts d'internationalisation. En nous concentrant sur les efforts faits par les étudiants canadiens et internationaux pour développer un sentiment d'appartenance à travers les organisations et les clubs associatifs et sportifs sur le campus, nous avons l'opportunité d'examiner leur processus de création active de capital social (*bridging capital* et *bonding capital*). L'analyse de 150 entrevues structurées incluant non seulement des étudiants internationaux d'origine asiatique, mais aussi des étudiants canadiens blancs et d'origine asiatique dans une des plus grandes universités canadiennes démontre que les organisations ethnoculturelles jouent un rôle clé afin d'aider les étudiants internationaux à développer du capital social (*bonding capital*). Cependant, nos résultats indiquent que les étudiants internationaux et canadiens ne participent pas aux mêmes organisations associatives. Les modalités de participation et les attitudes discriminatoires des étudiants canadiens blancs ont le potentiel d'inhiber le développement de capital social (*bridging capital*) entre ces différents groupes d'étudiants..

**Mots-clés :** enseignement supérieur, internationalisation, intégration, capital social (*bridging capital*, *bonding capital*)

## Introduction

An estimated 248,500 international Asian students (China, Korea, Japan, etc.) were enrolled in Canadian post-secondary education institutions in 2019 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2019). From 2000 to 2015, Canada experienced a 226% increase in the

number of international students enrolled at its colleges and universities (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2016). Canada is the fourth most popular destination for international students globally, with the majority of those students coming from Asian countries (Canadian Bureau for International Students, 2019). With increasing rates of international Asian students studying at Canadian post-secondary

institutions some campus administrators and academics remain apprehensive about the struggles they face in making meaningful connections at school (Harrison & Peacock, 2009; Knight, 2015).

One strategy students can use to meet people on campus is participating in student clubs (Rosenthal et al., 2007). University clubs and social organizations play a key role in terms of student socialization and the development of social networks. They provide both domestic and international students a space in which to explore new ideas, share academic resources and find emotional support from others (Glass & Gesing, 2018). They also help international students build social support systems that are often lacking as a result of their migration history (Rosenthal et al., 2007). This is especially true for ethnicity-based student clubs.

Ethnicity-based student clubs can give international and racialized students a space to connect with others of similar backgrounds that fit with their own personal experiences. They can also help those students develop a sense of identification and cohesion with others around them (Hausmann et al., 2009). In turn, this can help international students build bonding and bridging capital with students on campus. Bonding and bridging capital refer to the emotional supports provided by interpersonal relationships (bonding capital) and networks that span interpersonal social divisions (bridging capital) (Putnam, 2000). Much of the discourse around international Asian student settlement overlooks what those students do to create *bonding* and *bridging capital* through their on-campus extracurricular activities.

To better understand how students' participation in on-campus clubs influences their integration into campus life we analyzed 150 interviews with international Asian and domestic White and Asian students collected from 2006 to 2018 at a large university in western Canada. We used these interviews to address two questions: First, "How do Asian international, Asian domestic, and White domestic students engage in on-campus social activities?" Here, our intent is a descriptive counting exercise investigating whether levels of integration-through-participation differs between the three groups, both in terms of amount of participation and type of participation. Second, we asked a more analytic question, "How do students from different groups understand their own and each other's participation in those activities?" We use bridging and bonding capital as a framework to conceptualize the ways that students take part

in extracurricular activities and think about each other's participation. Our research demonstrates that each of these student groups actively takes part in on-campus social life in attempt to develop a sense of belonging and connection with others. However, we also find that each group engages in separate on-campus activities and that the ways domestic White students think about international Asian students has the potential to limit bridging capital across groups.

## Campus Club Participation

Student clubs are generally defined as autonomous groups of students who meet regularly with the express aim of enhancing their personal learning and social connection around a given topic or theme (Pittaway et al., 2015). Club members can engage in a variety of activities—including networking opportunities, social gatherings, competitions and community service projects—that fall in line with their particular club's missions. Taking part in on-campus clubs is associated with significant social and academic benefits for students. Students who are part of clubs are more likely to have larger friend groups and report higher personal autonomy than those who are not part of on-campus clubs (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). Students who participate in sports clubs are also more likely to report higher grade-point averages than non-participants (Vasold et al., 2019). Beyond the general benefits of taking part in an on-campus club, ethnicity-based organizations also hold additional benefits for students.

There are a number of ways ethnicity-based clubs help support students. Students are more likely to feel welcomed in and connected to an institution when there is an environment that reflects their own personal experiences and promotes acceptance and tolerance (Doan, 2011). George Kuh's (2009) research at minority-serving institutions in American indicates that those types of schools provide ethnic and racialized students with nurturing environments where they feel connected to others, while students of similar backgrounds who attended predominantly White institutions do not have the same experience. Ethnicity-based student clubs similarly work to help minority students feel connected and accepted on campus (Simpson, 2019). Jenelle Simpon (2019) notes that these types of clubs help foster self-reflection and a connection to one's own cultural and ethnic background for students in predominantly White institutions. Research on ethnicity-based student clubs also shows

that they provide students with key opportunities to gain acceptance and academic assistance on campus (Bowman et al., 2015). They also support students who serve as advocates for change and help them promote cultural awareness among their peers (Museus, 2008). Despite the benefits ethnicity-based clubs provide students of different backgrounds, few studies investigate how international students use them to connect with others on-campus or the types of benefits they provide students in a Canadian context.

Ethnicity-based student clubs can provide students, both international and domestic, with a sense of belonging. Leslie Hausmann and colleagues (2009) define student belonging as “identification and affiliation with the campus community” (p. 650). A key part of belonging is sense of cohesion between students—“an individual’s sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her [sic their] feelings of morale associated with membership in the group” (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990, p. 482). All students have a need to make connections with others that help them feel important, valuable, supported, and affirmed on campus (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990, p. 527). For international students, finding those types of connections on campus can be hard without the structured support of student clubs. Previous research has already demonstrated that participation in on-campus student clubs bolsters students’ feelings of belonging outside of Canada (Gieg, 2016). However, the same has not been investigated in Canada or how it relates the development of different types of social capital among student groups.

One reason students who join clubs feel greater connections with others on campus might be the bonding capital they accrue through those relationships. According to Robert Putnam (2000), bonding capital refers to “inward looking [networks] that tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups” (p. 22). Bonding capital includes the close relationships individuals form with one another (e.g., family members, close friends) that provide them with social and emotional care. For international students, building these types of close connections with others on-campus is important for generating ontological support, a feeling of knowing who you are and a similar connection with others that is often lacking as a result of their migration (Rosenthal et al., 2007).

Another type of capital that students have the potential to accrue through on-campus clubs is bridging capital. Robert Putnam (2000) defines bridging capital as “open networks that are outward looking and encompass

people across diverse social cleavages” (p. 22). Here, bridging capital refers to the connections international students make with others on campus that do not reflect their personal cultural characteristics. While building cross cultural networks at school is helpful in a number of ways (Kim & Kim, 2017), participation in ethnicity-based on-campus clubs might limit the bridging capital international students have access to.

Overall, understanding integration through a lens of belonging is important because it places greater emphasis on perceived group interaction over individual efforts to fit in. It also places students’ feelings of connectedness with one another above individual efforts of assimilation to a dominant culture and the impact attitudes have on limiting that growth. Our research examines how international and domestic students participate in social organizations on-campus to develop a sense of belonging and discusses how those spaces foster some types of capital, but potentially limits others.

## Methods

Increased international enrolments contribute to the globalization aims of Canada (Cudmore, 2005; Viczko & Tascon, 2016). The world’s major economies seek highly skilled migrants from abroad as part of a perceived need to remain competitive in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world (Altbach, 2013). International students help nations develop their workforce and business connections abroad (Bremer, 2006; Crossman & Clark, 2010). A greater proportion of international students on-campus can also be used to promote foreign policy interests (Campbell, 2012; Frieden & Lake, 2015). International students contribute to international learning and an increased understanding of diversity and global interests for faculty, researchers, and students on campus (Acquah & Commins, 2018; Cuyjet et al., 2012). Each of these characteristics provides host institutions with opportunities to maintain competitive international standings while benefiting the education of both international and domestic students.

## Western Canadian University

Data for this study were collected from interviews with undergraduate students at a large publicly funded university in Western Canada (hereafter referred to with the pseudonym Western Canadian University to protect

the confidentiality of students participating in the study). This institution is one of the largest publicly funded universities in Canada and ranks among some of the top in the country in terms of research. There are more than 62,000 students enrolled from 140 different countries at this school and the university claims to actively maintain a commitment to global connectedness.

## Student Interviews

Interviews for this research come from the Study of International Student Integration at Western Canadian University. The study began in 2006 to provide interviewing experience to sociology undergraduate and graduate students in qualitative methods courses. The study has generated a qualitative database that contains a total of 428 interviews conducted with international and domestic students at the university between 2006 and 2018. For this study, we randomly sampled a total of 150 interviews from undergraduate students (50 international Asian students, 50 domestic Asian students and 50 domestic White students) across all years of study, using a random number generator to select the same number of interviews from each group of students. However, the number of domestic Asian students participating in the survey varied by year and equal numbers were not available for each. To make up for the difference, more or less domestic Asian students were selected to participate in each year. Although the sample is not representative of international and domestic student populations at the university, it allows us the opportunity to examine and compare their experiences and processes underlying on-campus participation.

Interviews conducted for this research, spanning from 2006–2018, represent student opinions during a shift in geo-political climates, policies, and social attitudes toward international students. Social cohesion

among domestic and international students is not only dependent on motivation, skills, and opportunities afforded to students by their schools, but also the willingness of the receiving community to facilitate integration. Some geo-political changes during the time of the interviews, that have the potential to impact international Asian student experiences on-campus in Canada, include the increase in Pacific migration to Canada during that time. Over the past 20 years Canada has experienced a shift in the number of immigrants coming from China and other Asian countries. Toronto and Vancouver have become the urban capitals of Pacific Canada (Yu, 2009). The rising number of Pacific migrants and Asian international students in Canada has been met with some public backlash. In 2013, Maclean's magazine published an article titled "Too Asian?"<sup>1</sup> questioning if Asian international students were negatively impacting the campus experience for White domestic students (Findlay & Köhler, 2010). Sanjay Maru (2018), for the *CBC News*, also questioned if international Asian students have been effectively prepared for university life in Canada and how many is "too many" international students for a school. Shifts in migration patterns have influenced public responses to increased international representations on campus, which have the potential to impact the ways international students interact and engage with others in those spaces.

Asian international students were eligible to be interviewed for the study if they were not Canadian citizens or permanent residents, if they were planning to get their degree from Western Canadian University, and if they did not complete all of their secondary education in Canada. Domestic students were eligible if they were a Canadian citizen or permanent resident and if they were planning to get their degree from Western Canadian University. In the first two years of the study, only undergraduate students were interviewed who were in

**Table 1**

*Number of Student Participants by Year*

Race/Ethnic Identity	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013	2014
International Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	8	5	7	9	7	6	8
Domestic Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	6	3	8	5	8	10	9
Domestic White ( <i>n</i> = 50)	8	5	7	9	7	6	8

their first year at Western Canadian University. In later years, undergraduate students in any year of study were eligible to participate. Respondents were primarily recruited through different student interviewers' social networks, as well as flyers on campus and announcements in large lecture classes. Our international student sample included 50 students who self-identified as their racial/ethnic identity as Asian. In addition to identifying their racial/ethnic identity as Asian, students also gave their country of origin in their interviews. Some of the more common countries of origin for our international sample included China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Thailand. Our domestic student sample included 50 students who self-identified as White. It also included 50 students who identified as Asian Canadian. The majority of our respondents, both domestic and international, were female and in their first year of study. There were also more arts majors represented in our sample than science and engineering majors. Our sample sizes were chosen to allow sufficient numbers of international and domestic Asian students and domestic White students to illuminate patterns in their experiences in the analysis.

## Data Analysis

Before analyzing the interviews, we developed deductive codes that identified key descriptive variables, such as self-identified ethnicity, academic difficulties, social involvement, and university settlement/integration. Using the data analysis software NVivo 9, we applied these codes and developed inductive codes that related to observed patterns in the data. The inductive codes included off-campus socialization and sorority/fraternity participation. During the coding process, we also created analytic memos as provisional assessments of the relevant patterns and relations in the data. These analytic memos were used to develop theoretical ideas and explore patterns. For the analysis, we identified all passages with particular codes and systematically compared the responses of international and domestic students, White, Asian and Asian Canadian (Miles & Huberman 1994).

**Table 2**

*Table of Inductive and Deductive Codes*

Name	Code Type	Definition	Example
Self-Identified Ethnicity	Deductive Code	Personal definition/interpretation of own race/ethnicity/ancestry	I think China is my home. I am Chinese and being in Canada is like a long vacation to learn something.
Academic Difficulties	Deductive Code	Academic difficulties experienced while studying at Western Canadian University	My biggest challenge is that I always have to check my textbooks for the definitions of terms. Sometimes these are very hard for me because I speak English as a second language.
Social Involvement	Deductive Code	How students spent most of their free time on or off campus in the last week.	Last week, I was busy studying because I had a lot of midterms. When I have free time I like to take part in some of the clubs I'm a member of.
Settlement On-Campus	Deductive Code	Challenges students faced when they first arrived on campus.	Um, there have been times I've felt really lost. And by really lost I mean I had no idea where to go or where I am kinda of lost. But overall just great, I'm so happy I came here.

Name	Code Type	Definition	Example
Off-Campus Socialization	Inductive Code	How students spent their free time exclusively off campus.	I hung out at my parent's home and with some friends at night. We went shopping downtown and to the movies.
Campus Club and Organization Participation	Inductive Code	Discussion about the clubs, teams or on-campus student lead organization the interviewee is part of.	I joined some student clubs. I do club stuff for the international student society and joined the biology student society.
Sorority or Fraternity Participation	Inductive Code	Conversations about interviewee fraternity or sorority participation.	Yah, I'm a member of Alpha Delta Pi.
Sports Club Participation	Inductive Code	The interviewee's on-campus sports club or varsity sports team participation	I play ultimate Frisbee and intramural soccer.
No club participation	Inductive Code	Interviewee's comment about not taking part in any social activities, on or off campus.	I just watched movies or played video games in my room. Not much.
Feelings Toward Other Students	Inductive Code	Students' comments about other student groups on campus	So many kids are so disconnected or live so far away, or are international or -- I don't know. I wonder, what is that Chinese Varsity Club like? Like, what's THAT like?! [laughs] That's what I want to know. Yeah [laughs], I don't know, do I have to be Chinese to be a part of that group? I wish it was a more united student body.

## Findings

### On-Campus Participation

To better understand the ways that students engage in campus-life, we first investigated the types of clubs they were part of (see Tables 3 and 4). No particular group has an overall higher rate of participation than the other. All student groups interviewed make some effort toward taking part in their campus space. However, there are some differences between groups in terms of the types of activities that they engage in.

International Asian students described taking part in more ethnicity-focused clubs (a club that aims to foster understanding about a country, culture, or ethnicity) than did other groups (see Table 3). They were more likely to take part in ethnicity-focused campus clubs than do-

mestic White respondents, at 38% versus 8%. They also had greater participation in ethnicity-focused clubs than did their domestic Asian peers, at 18%. Thinking about Yao's (2015) argument that research on international student integration should focus on belonging, Asian international students' rates of ethnicity-based club participation demonstrate a commitment to taking part in campus life. It not only shows that they are trying to make connections on campus, but also how important bonds with others of the same racial or ethnic backgrounds are.

We next examined on-campus participation outside of formal student clubs and no social activity (see Table 4). The main finding from this analysis is that international Asian students were more involved in non-club activity. They demonstrated higher rates of informal socializing on campus (52%) and a smaller proportion than domestic students mentioned that they took part

**Table 3**

*On-Campus Club Participation by Student Group*

Race/Ethnic Identity	Ethnicity-Based Campus Club	Non-Ethnicity-Based Campus Club
International Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	19 (38%)	23 (46%)
Domestic Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	9 (18%)	16 (32%)
Domestic White ( <i>n</i> = 50)	4 (8%)	26 (52%)

in no social activities on campus (6%). However, international Asian students were less likely to take part in sports (26%), fraternities and sororities (2%), and drinking activities (4%) than their domestic White peers. Although international Asian students are more likely to participate in on-campus activities overall, differences in participation by activity might be attributed to a sense of affiliation with certain clubs over others. Up until very recently, Canadian universities were primarily White, not only in terms of demographics but also in terms of Eurocentric curriculums and policies (Samuel & Wane, 2005; Schick, 2000). For ethnic minority students, living and studying in these types of environments might be difficult because much of the cultural practices embedded in those spaces do not reflect their own experiences (e.g., holidays, in-class examples, teaching styles). Engaging in formal spaces that mirror their own cultural and social backgrounds can provide both international and domestic Asian students a space to build meaningful relationships with others that are comfortable and familiar. Domestic White students might also be less likely to take part in ethnicity-based groups because they are unfamiliar with the feeling of being a minority in an on-campus environment. To sum up, international Asian students

demonstrate greater likelihood of taking part in ethnicity-based clubs than their White peers, demonstrating a commitment to on-campus involvement and building bonds with others of similar backgrounds. However, domestic White students are less likely to be involved in those types of organizations, potentially limiting connections between the two groups of students.

Another notable finding from our club-participation analysis is that a larger percentage of domestic Asian (16%) and White students (16%) did not take part in any social activities, when compared to their international Asian peers (6%). These findings are also important because they run counter to the argument that international Asian students are not socially active on-campus (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Maru, 2018). Asian international students took part in a variety of on-campus social activities and were more likely to take part in campus life than some domestic students. This finding demonstrates that if we focus on what international students are doing to fit in, we will see a commitment to campus involvement, rather than an assimilationist approach that continually highlights their deficits (Yao, 2015). International Asian students do take part in campus life and are more likely to do so than their domestic counterparts.

**Table 4**

*On-Campus Non-Club Participation by Student Group*

Race/Ethnic Identity	Sports	Fraternity/ Sorority	Informal Socializing	Drinking	No Social Activity
International Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	13 (26%)	1 (2%)	26 (52%)	2 (4%)	3 (6%)
Domestic Asian ( <i>n</i> = 50)	12 (24%)	1 (2%)	27 (54%)	3 (6%)	8 (16%)
Domestic White ( <i>n</i> = 50)	20 (40%)	3 (6%)	18 (36%)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)

**Table 5**

*On-Campus Participation by Asian and White Students*

Race/Ethnic Identity	Ethnicity-Based Campus Club	Non-Ethnicity-Based Campus Club	Sports	Fraternity/Sorority	Informal Socializing	Drinking	No Social Activity
Asian ( <i>n</i> = 100)	28 (19%)	39 (26%)	25 (17%)	2 (1%)	53 (35%)	5 (3%)	11 (7%)
White ( <i>n</i> = 50)	4 (8%)	26 (52%)	20 (40%)	3 (6%)	18 (36%)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)

However, there are differences in the ways international and domestic students engage with campus life that have the potential to limit interaction between students and therefore to inhibit bridging capital. Since Asian (international and domestic) students are more likely to take part in ethnicity-based clubs than their White domestic peers (see Table 4), and White domestic students are more likely to take part in non-ethnicity-based clubs (52%), or no social activity at all (16%), connections between these students seem limited. This means that a situation in which bridging capital between student groups is supported is unlikely to occur.

**Student Attitudes**

The following section outlines students' opinions about using extracurricular programming to make social connects on campus. It also highlights students' attitudes toward one another, and how those feelings have the potential to limit bridging capital among students.

**International Asian Students**

After examining the types of on-campus organizations students engage in, we next investigated how those students built relationships with each other, relating to bridging and bonding capital. First, we analyzed interviews from international Asian students to better understand how on-campus club participation impacts their connections with others.

Almost all of the international Asian students interviewed for this research commented that taking part in on-campus clubs was useful for making friends. Carol (pseudonyms for student names are used throughout) (21 years old, China) commented "The club is good because it gave me people to talk to... because if you don't go out you just won't make friends." Joey, a 21-year-old

student from the Philippines, joined an ethnicity-based club in his first year at Western Canadian University. Similarly, Trevor, a 20-year-old student from Thailand who joined student clubs in his first year at school, also commented on the usefulness of these spaces for meeting people. He said,

I've found it is very helpful. First, students in Western Canadian University are friendly to begin with. So, it's easy to make friends with them. And, second the clubs give us lots of opportunities to meet people. I find it was helpful being part of a lot of clubs. (Trevor, 20 years old, Thailand).

In these cases, taking part in on-campus clubs helped international students meet people and make friends on campus. These interviews also demonstrated that international Asian students are committed to on-campus integration and making connections with others.

Interviews with international Asian students also demonstrate how bonding capital is accrued through their relationships with other international students in campus clubs. Rebecca (19 years old, China) noted that "the clubs are good because I can celebrate the holidays and things we have back home. In Canada, we don't do these things, and it makes me feel homesick sometimes." Being part of ethnicity-based clubs helped some international students feel more connected to their cultures while studying in a place that sometimes made them feel disconnected from those identities. Some students also commented that being part of these groups helped them feel more at home at school. Stacey, a 19-year-old student from China, noted "Campus clubs helped me make friends here. When I miss people back home, I talk to them. I know they know what that feels like. We go through the same things." In addition to helping students feel better connected to their cultural

backgrounds, ethnicity-based clubs also helped international Asian students build the emotional support with others, an integral part of bonding capital. Moving to a new country or school can be difficult in terms of disconnection from family and customs. Being involved in ethnicity-based clubs seemed to help those students find an environment to connect with others who understood their experiences and provided support for them when they felt homesick.

However, participation in these groups might not relate to bridging capital development. When we asked international students what proportion of their friends were other international or domestic students, it was common for them to say that most of their friends were not Canadian. For example, when we asked Joey (21 years old, Philippines), he said “The majority. The majority are from other countries, not Canada.” And when Carol (21 years old, China) said she was part of the Chinese Students Association, she also commented that almost 80% of her friends were other international students. Our interviews with international Asian students not only demonstrated that they had a commitment to making friends through on-campus clubs, but also how those clubs contributed to greater relationship development with other international students. In this way, on-campus club participation seems to positively impact international students’ feelings of belonging and bonding with other students, but not for bridging social networks with domestic students.

International Asian students also commented that although they found domestic White students easy to talk to generally, they had more in common with international students and that that made those relationships easier to build. Lily, a 21-year-old student from China, said “I find you will make friends with international students more quickly, especially some exchange students, because they may be really new to here, they don’t have many friends. We also have more in common.” When asked if it was difficult to make friends with Canadian students, Tina (19 years old) from Vietnam commented “It’s not really difficult, but there will be a distance, compared to [making friends with] international students.” International Asian students commented on feeling accepted and having more commonalities between themselves and other international students that took part in on-campus clubs. Forming an association with others from the same social and ethnic backgrounds can provide students with ontological security that allows them

to feel sufficiently safe in their campus environment (Yeh & Edwards, 2017). As expressed by Mary (20 years old, China),

I think they’re [Canadians] welcoming...because it’s a multicultural society. So, it’s definitely welcoming. Everyone is from somewhere else... So, it’s welcoming in that sense, but I just feel like a lot of the time it’s really hard to find something you have in common with them. That’s not the same with international students.

Comments like these demonstrate the difficulty international Asian students find in building connections with domestic students, compared to their international peers, and the potential limits they experience in building bridging capital with them.

### ***Domestic Asian Students***

Interviews with domestic Asian students were different from the conversations with international Asian students. Most of the domestic Asian students we interviewed were members of clubs but were not actively involved in them. Alexia, a 22-year-old domestic Asian student, commented that “I’m in two clubs...but because I’m still adjusting to the schedule, I haven’t been very committed to them. I do a lot of stuff off campus.” When asked how many of her friends were international students, she said “None.” Similarly, when we asked Stacy, a 21-year-old domestic Asian student, about her participation in clubs on campus she said “I’m in the Business Club and the Chinese Varsity Club and that’s it.” When we asked her about what kinds of things she does with those clubs she said “Well, I haven’t been to any of the events, so I don’t know.” She also commented that she did not have any friends at Western Canadian University who were international students. Jacob, a 20-year-old domestic Asian student, also said that he was part of an ethnicity-based club on campus, however he noted that he only rarely took part in their activities and that none of his friends were international students. Although domestic Asian students are enrolling in on-campus clubs, their commitment to taking part in these social activities seemed much lower than international Asian students’ participation. Additionally, almost all of the domestic Asian students interviewed commented that they had developed few friendships with international Asian through these clubs.

One reason for the difference in on-campus club

participation between international and domestic Asian students is that most domestic Asian students we interviewed tended to come to campus with pre-existing friend groups. When asked what proportion of their friends they knew before coming to Western Canadian University, Dan (18 years old, Canada) responded: "Quite a bit, maybe 80. I have a lot of friends from high school that I still keep in contact with." When asked the same question, another domestic Asian student commented "I'd say all of them are. I knew them before university. So, I'd say all of them are" (Mark, 20 years old, Canada). Tracy (22 years old, Canada) also responded to that question by saying "Uh, most of them." Unlike international Asian students, many domestic Asian students come to campus with social networks already established. The bonding capital that they gain from their social relationships seems to be maintained through pre-existing groups and not through connections with new students on campus. Because those students already have friends to rely on for emotional and social support, they also may be less likely to interact with others on campus, deteriorating the potential for building bridging capital between themselves and others.

Like international Asian students, domestic Asian students also commented that it was sometimes hard to make friends with domestic White students on campus. When asked what their biggest social challenge at Western Canadian University has been, Jane (18 years old, Canada) commented "Like getting involved in diverse clubs and, um, getting close to Caucasians. Yeah." Another domestic Asian student also mentioned that it was easy to talk to other students in class, but outside of coursework they saw little opportunity to get to know others. Rose (18 years old, Canada) said,

I mean in classes where I don't have any friends I still thought that it was easy to meet new people, but then actually outside of class there is not any new friendships being made. I guess if I hadn't come to school with my friends from high school maybe I'd find it hard.

Although these students have friend groups that provide bonding capital, emotional and social support within groups, our conversations with students demonstrated a potential limit to bridging capital across groups, much like international Asian students.

### **Domestic White Students**

After investigating international and domestic Asian students' on-campus participation and how they built connections with others, we next investigated how domestic White students viewed on-campus club participation and friendship development. Like other groups, domestic White students discussed using on-campus clubs to support their social life. Mike, a 20-year-old domestic White student mentioned that he spent most of his free time playing sports on-campus. When asked what groups he is a part of he said "Um, I'm the captain of a hockey team, not the Western Canadian University varsity one, a rec one. I'm also the captain of a rec Frisbee team, and I'm floor rep for a house council." Tanya, a 21-year-old domestic White student, also mentioned spending a lot of her free time using clubs to socialize on campus. She spent most of her free time at the Western Canadian University agricultural club and participating in activities with the Western Canadian University outdoors club: "I've been out to the farm a lot and I've been working with the honey bees there, and the outdoors club. I go on trips with them most weekends, so that's kind of nice." When we asked students how helpful these organizations were for making friends, domestic White students, like domestic Asian students, commented that they came to campus with a lot of their social relationships already intact. For example, Jeremy (19 years old, Canada) commented, "Oh, a lot of my friends here are from high school." When asked how helpful on-campus clubs were for making friends, Sylvia (21 years old, Canada) also noted, "They're good for that. I mean, most of my friends that are part of the clubs are people I knew before. But, it's nice to have them there with me." However, there were some domestic White students who indicated that they used clubs to develop new friendships. Tory, a 21-year-old White domestic student, also commented, "I am a member of the Player's Club, which is like the theatre club at Western Canadian University. It's good. I've made some really good friends there." Like international Asian students, on-campus clubs seem to provide domestic White students with opportunities to make meaningful connections on campus, but also support existing relationships.

We also asked domestic White students why they took part in on-campus clubs. Even though many domestic White students had existing friend groups to draw on for emotional support, they noted that on-campus clubs

were good for helping navigate school related issues. John (19 years old, Canada) said, "Intramurals [on-campus sports club] are good because some of the other people there are in my program. I can ask them for help on assignments or see if they're having the same issues I'm having." Similarly, Claire (22 years old, Canada), a member of the campus outdoors club, commented,

Sometimes school stuff is really stressful. It's nice to be with people who get that and want to get away from school sometimes. We can talk about our problems when we are away from school, and it helps me get a good idea about how to deal with it when I come back.

From these conversations, bonding capital between domestic White students seems to have developed. Like international Asian students, domestic White students draw on the relationships in on-campus clubs to solve personal problems and find emotional support.

Next, we investigated how useful on-campus clubs were for helping domestic White students make connections with international students. When asked what proportion of his friends were international, Mike (20 years old, Canada) commented that most of his friends were Canadian and clarified that he meant White. When we similarly asked Tanya (20 years old, Canada) what proportion of her friends were international students, she said "One of my really good friends is Indian, but most of them are Canadian...or, yeah White." When asked what proportion of her friends from that club were international, she said half her friends were White Canadians, but that the other proportion was American. Although domestic White students expressed a commitment to the clubs they signed up for, and seemed to use these clubs to build bonding capital with others, it did not seem to help them build relationships with many international students.

A key difference between the narratives of the domestic White students and those of the international and domestic Asian students was domestic White students' opinions of international Asian students. Although none of the international or domestic Asian students commented on the social deficiencies of their domestic White peers, this was mentioned by a few of the domestic White interviewees. Some of the domestic White students viewed international Asian students as being un-involved and responsible for their own social exclu-

sion on campus. Kathy (18 years old, Canada), for example, complained:

I have a lot of Asian people on my floor. And they actually won't talk to me. I say hi, and they won't even say hi back. We have had floor meetings and they totally don't come. We have had a couple floor functions... They don't come...they don't talk to us.

For Kathy, the lack of involvement in residence activities by international Asian students who live in her building demonstrates, to her, an unwillingness to participate in campus life. Her observation also highlights the notion that some domestic White students see their Asian peers as being culturally deficient within their campus space, that international Asian students do not know how to take part in campus life or are unwilling to interact with domestic students.

Domestic White respondents also viewed ethnicity-focused campus clubs as a type of social exclusion rather than a form of campus integration. For example, when asked if there was anything about Western Canadian University that could be changed for the better, Jason (21 years old, Canada) stated that:

So many kids are so disconnected or live so far away, or are international or -- I don't know. I wonder, what is that Chinese Varsity Club like? Like, what's THAT like?! [*laughs*] That's what I want to know. Yeah [*laughs*], I don't know, do I have to be Chinese to be a part of that group? I wish it was a more united student body.

Domestic students interviewed did not see ethnicity-based clubs as being open to their participation. Although all on-campus clubs are open to anyone, domestic White students see these organisations as not being inclusive. Mark (18 years old, Canada), also commented:

You know when you are walking past the SUB [Student Union Building] they've always got the Asian societies, like Chinese or Korean societies. They are always handing out flyers. But they won't even look at you, they just won't look at you. I don't know maybe, they don't want to merge into our culture or something like that.

Ethnicity-based student groups provide social support

networks for many students groups on campus. However, some White domestic students do not recognize Asian students' participation in ethnicity-based clubs and organizations as attempts to take part in a formal campus space.

Some domestic students also criticized international students' language abilities and blamed them for not doing more to integrate into their host society. Stephanie, an 18-year-old White domestic student, expressed this sentiment:

It's common courtesy, you know when you come into another society, another culture. You try and immerse yourself a little bit more...they don't even try. Well obviously they are here for school but they don't even try to speak English well. I don't even know how they pass their LPI [Language Proficiency Index]. I really don't know.

Stephanie's comment shows frustration about the perception of international Asian students' lack of involvement in campus life: that they are not trying hard enough to understand the dominant culture of their new home or that they are not making connections with others. Her comment about passing LPI tests also demonstrates scepticism about the worthiness of international Asian students' admissions to Western Canadian University. Like other domestic White students, Stephanie does not see the efforts international Asian students put into being part of their campus community.

Domestic White students' attitudes about international Asian students have the potential to limit bridging capital. Bridging capital involves the development of social networks that encompass people from diverse social and racial/ethnic backgrounds (Putnam, 2000). This type of capital seems to be inhibited by domestic White students in two ways. First, domestic students' feelings that ethnicity-based clubs were not for them reduces the likelihood that they would participate as members. Second, their feelings that those clubs are not legitimate forms of social interaction on campus have an othering effect on international Asian students. A common theme among domestic White students was that international Asian students are not the typical university student and that they need to do more to fit in, creating boundaries between student groups (Kruse & Kroneberg, 2019). This is exemplified in by Jason and Mark's comments that they do not know what the purpose of ethnicity-based clubs

are and that taking part in those organizations demonstrates international Asian students' unwillingness to "merge into" Canadian culture. Coupled with variations in the types of on-campus organizations both groups participate in, these attitudes have the potential to limit connections between students and therefore stifle bridging capital development.

## Conclusion

With increasing rates of international students studying at Canadian post-secondary institutions, some campus administrators and academics remain apprehensive about the struggles new students face in making meaningful connections at school. One option international students have to build social connections is to join on-campus extracurricular programming. In this study, we found that on-campus clubs and activities give international students the opportunity to build bridges to better social bonds in their host-country. On-campus clubs provide students with a space to build collective feelings of belonging among groups and transmit much needed capital across members. When we investigated undergraduate student participation in on-campus clubs and social organizations, we noted that all student groups (both domestic and international) make some effort to take part in their on-campus space. Despite popular opinion on the social deficit of international Asian students (Findlay & Köhler, 2010; Maru, 2018), this student group has a high on-campus club participation rate. We also note that their participation and feelings toward one another demonstrates a commitment to developing bonding capital with peers through their engagement with on-campus clubs. However, our work also indicates possible limitations to bridging capital development across student groups.

One way that bridging capital is limited among students is through their rates of participation in different on-campus activities. International Asian students participated in on-campus ethnicity-based clubs in greater proportions than other student groups and relied heavily on those activities for building friendships. Domestic Asian students were less involved in on-campus clubs generally and mentioned that most of their friend groups came from pre-university relationships. Domestic White students took part in clubs, but they tended to be non-ethnicity-based. Although all student groups do participate

in on-campus activities, the different rates of participation in those activities have the potential to limit interaction, and therefore bridging capital, between them.

Another factor shaping the development of bridging capital between students is their attitudes toward one another. International Asian students that we interviewed mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to build relationships with domestic White and Asian students because there was a distance between themselves and their Canadian peers. International Asian students did not always feel that domestic White students understood the challenges faced in coming to school in Canada. Domestic White students also made negative assumptions and derogatory comments about international Asian students, demonstrating that they really did not understand the experiences of those students or that they had no interest in building relationships with them. While the attitudes of both groups demonstrate concern for relationship building across backgrounds, the sentiments they expressed by domestic White students make it unlikely that interaction will be effectively facilitated between them.

Student relationships come with the benefit of not only boosting overall academic achievement, but also student emotional and social well-being. One avenue for student relationship development is on-campus clubs. Meaningful relationships between undergraduate students, across national and racial lines, remain important priorities for Canadian universities. However, if integration between student groups is the goal, understanding not only what students do to be a part of campus life, but also how they feel about their peers is important for aiding effective relationship building strategies. Future research could strengthen this body of work by investigating how international and domestic undergraduate students feel about other aspects of on-campus participation, such as collaborative academic programming, volunteering, or residence-life activities. More work also needs to be done specifically unpacking the distance international students feel when trying to build relationships with domestic students. Investigation into these aspects of student understanding could help dismantle barriers that exist between student groups and make Canadian campus spaces more inclusive.

## Author Note

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## Notes

- 1 The original title for this article was "Too Asian?" published in 2010. It has since been changed to "The Enrollment Controversy" by *Maclean's* magazine.