ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "WHAT ARE WE?" A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE "TRICKINESS" OF IDENTITY FOR ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Asian Americans are a significant and growing population in U.S. higher education, yet their positionality within the U.S. racial landscape has often been unclear. Acknowledged as neither Black nor White, Asian Americans have occupied an often marginalized yet nonetheless racialized position, which has disguised much of their lived experience as racial beings. This study sought to understand how Asian American college students see themselves as racial beings by exploring the role and salience of race and its intersections with other social identities.

Using intersectionality as a theoretical framework, this narrative inquiry study was guided by the following research questions: (a) how do Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity; (b) in what ways, if any, do their other social identities, such as gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status, interact with the way Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their

racial identity; and (c) how do Asian American college students experience the intersections of their multiple social identities? Following in-depth interviews with four Asian American college students representing a range of identity backgrounds, individual narratives were written for each participant, telling the story of how they came to make meaning of their racial identity, other salient identities, and their intersections. A metanarrative was then generated based on the commonalities of participants' stories. Through these narratives, the lived experiences of Asian Americans as racial beings were centered. For these four participants, identifying as Asian American was a conscious choice whose meaning was created through reflection on experiences with race, often in conjunction with intersecting identities. Systems of power, oppression, and privilege acted upon those intersections and indelibly shaped the way participants made meaning of their identities, as illuminated by intersectional analysis.

The study's findings indicate paths for future research on Asian American identity development, particularly using critical theoretical perspectives that foreground the influence of systems of power and oppression. The findings also suggest implications for supporting Asian American students and for developing and integrating intersectional approaches in order to create more socially just and inclusive institutions.

"WHAT ARE WE?" A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE "TRICKINESS" OF
IDENTITY FOR ASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to James, for making this accomplishment and – more importantly – our rich, love-filled life together possible, and to Eleanor and Maggie, for your patience, encouragement, and sweet hugs. I cannot wait to spend lazy Saturdays and unstructured free time with the three of you.

I also dedicate this dissertation in honor of the memory of Dr. Marybeth Joy Drechsler Sharp (1978-2018), who was alongside me for every step of my doctoral journey, whether in person or in spirit.

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:22-23

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who
have been called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28

When I said, "My foot is slipping," your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When
anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.
Psalm 94:18-19

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I spoke with a friend who was considering applying to doctoral programs in higher education and student affairs and unexpectedly found myself confronting essential questions about identity, race, and research. As my friend thought about his research interests, he was drawn to questions about the experience of Asian American students and access to higher education for Asian Americans; however, he questioned whether this interest was a legitimate and worthy line of investigation in higher education research. We talked through his hesitations, and I shared the doubts that I had also encountered as a doctoral student interested in Asian American student issues. Were our interests of significance to the field, or could they be dismissed as merely self-interested "mesearch"? Did higher education researchers and policymakers care about Asian Americans, a population noted for high education attainment and college-going rates (Y. M. Kim, 2011)? Even in conversations about diversity in higher education, Asian Americans appeared to be nonentities or afterthoughts at best (Lee, 2006). And what did it mean that two Asian American student affairs educators, both of whom had worked in multicultural affairs units supporting Asian American students, questioned themselves and the legitimacy of their lines of work and research? Even though we both had firm grounding in knowledge and practice related to Asian American history, racial identity, Asian American community organizing, and social justice and diversity in higher education, we still grappled with whether the experience of Asian American college students was a valid and worthwhile subject for examination.

During the course of our conversation, my friend and I recognized that our self-doubt emerged from the internalization of the predominant discourse of race in

the United States, one usually defined by a Black and White polarity. We reminded ourselves that the seemingly rosy picture of Asian American educational success belied disparities revealed when data were disaggregated: that over 47% of Asian American and Pacific Islander college enrollment is in community colleges, that more than 50-65% of some Southeast Asian ethnic group subpopulations have not completed any postsecondary education, and that more than a third of Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong adults in the U.S. do not have a high school diploma or equivalent (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). In the end, we confirmed that our wrestling with these questions underscored the need for research about Asian Americans, and that if we believed that Asian Americans were an important part of the diversity conversation in higher education and American society, then we needed to turn toward, rather than away from, such lines of inquiry.

In this study, I examined the social structures that caused my friend and me to second-guess our research interests, the dynamics that simultaneously minoritize and de-minoritize Asian Americans, and how they influence the identity development of Asian American college students. In this chapter, I put forth the problem and research questions that undergird the present study, provide definitions for key terms, and discuss the study's significance.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The rationale for my study lies in the unique position Asian Americans occupy in U.S. racial dynamics. Asian Americans are a significant and growing population in the U.S. and in American higher education. According to the 2010

Census, the Asian population is the fastest growing racial group in the country, increasing 43% over the previous ten years, now numbering over 14.7 million and comprising 4.8% of the U.S. population (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012; Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). In 2010, out of almost 18.1 million undergraduate students enrolled in the U.S., over 1 million (5.7%) were Asian (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In fact, the American Council on Education reported that Asian Americans had the highest rate of college enrollment in 2009 among all racial/ethnic groups, with 63% of Asian Americans aged 18-24 enrolled (Y. M. Kim, 2011). Asian Americans also reported the highest percentage holding a bachelor's degree, compared to all racial/ethnic groups (Y. M. Kim, 2011). At the same time, significant disparities exist among Asian American subgroups, with more than half of Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian adults over age 25 reporting no postsecondary education participation (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011). According to these data, Asian Americans are a notable and growing presence in American society and on American college campuses by virtue of numbers, while opportunity still exists to improve access to higher education for several Asian American subpopulations.

Despite the size of the population and its growth over the past several decades, the place of Asians in the American racial landscape has often been unclear, shifting at different points in history based on current events and fears. Almost from the time Asians first arrived on these shores (usually recruited to meet labor needs), American society seemed unsure of how these new immigrants fit in. Acknowledged as non-Black, but certainly not considered White, early Asian immigrants from different

countries – first from China, then Japan, India, and Korea – came with unique cultures and histories, yet were all similarly racialized as alien and inassimilable (Zia, 2000). Asian Americans were denied citizenship and rights accorded to citizens, such as the right to vote and own land, and also faced discrimination in access to housing and education, as well as outright violence (Takaki, 1998; Zia, 2000). Further, exclusionary immigration laws limited and later banned immigrants from Asian nations. Even Filipinos, who could enter the United States freely as residents of a U.S. territory, faced denial of citizenship and strict immigration limits once the U.S. granted the Philippines independence (Takaki, 1998; Zia, 2000). Asians were in America, but only begrudgingly so.

Two Supreme Court cases illuminated race as the dividing line between "Asian" and "American." Both historian Ronald Takaki (1998) and journalist Helen Zia (2000) described the watershed moments represented by these two cases. In the case of *Ozawa v. United States* in 1922, the court decided that Takao Ozawa was not eligible for naturalized citizenship, despite his rejection of all Japanese cultural and national affiliation and active embrace of American culture for himself and his family, because he was not Caucasian. The following year, in *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, the court ruled that Asian Indians were not eligible for naturalization either. Based on the ruling in the *Ozawa* case, Asian Indians believed that they could make a case for citizenship by arguing that they were in fact Caucasian. In their ruling, the Supreme Court clarified that only White persons were entitled to U.S. citizenship. As a result, not only were Indians no longer eligible for naturalization, but those Indians who had already been naturalized had their citizenship revoked retroactively. Claire

Jean Kim's (1999) summary of these two rulings highlights the changeable and convenient way in which race was defined for Asian Americans:

> In other words, the same Court barred Ozawa from citizenship because he was not Caucasian and therefore not White, while it barred Thind, a Caucasian, from citizenship because he was not White by common parlance. These jurisprudential contortions indicate that the courts were determined to use whatever arguments proved useful in maintaining the boundary between Whites and Asian immigrants, regardless of how inconsistent or illogical their decisions may have appeared. (pp. 114-115)

Both cases illustrate the shifting and subjective definitions of race throughout American history; as Omi and Winant (1994) wrote: "Indeed, the categories employed to differentiate among human groups along racial lines reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be at best imprecise, and at worst completely arbitrary" (p. 55). The racial categorization of Americans from Asian backgrounds has been particularly malleable. Omi and Winant coined the term "racial formation," meaning the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). Two enduring racial depictions that illustrate the racial formation of Asian Americans are the yellow peril and the model minority (Okihiro, 1994). Alternately demonized as one and valorized as the other, Asian Americans have been racialized in ways that preserve White dominance and hegemony. With the yellow peril image, Asian Americans were cast as perfidious invaders with loyalties abroad who would take over economic and educational opportunities rightfully deserved by White Americans (Okihiro, 1994). Yellow peril

fueled responses such as exclusion laws in the 1800s, Japanese American internment

during World War II (Takaki, 1998; Zia, 2000), and fears of Asian American

overrepresentation in U.S. colleges (Lee, 2006; Okihiro, 1994).

In juxtaposition, the model minority stereotype seems to portray a positive

image of Asian Americans, yet it, too, serves as a powerful mechanism for sustaining

the social order of White dominance. The image emerged in the popular press in the

1960s with reports of success among Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans,

highlighting educational achievements, increasing incomes, attainment of desirable

occupations, and low crime rates (Osajima, 2000). The writers attributed this success

to Asian cultural values related to family, hard work, and respect for authority (K. S.

Chan & Hune, 1995; Okihiro, 1994; Osajima, 2000). The model minority image is

problematic in several ways. First, it renders Asian Americans as a monolithically

successful population, disguising sharp within-group disparities in poverty levels and

education completion rates and the concomitant need for policies and services. In

addition to the gaps in educational attainment discussed earlier, census data indicate

that while Asian Pacific Islanders were more likely to have at least a college degree

than non-Hispanic Whites, they were also twice as likely to have less than a ninth-

grade education and more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic Whites (Reeves

& Bennett, 2003). For instance, 20% of Samoans and 38% of Hmong Americans

lived below the poverty line (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific

Islander Research in Education, 2011). In addition, this portrayal glosses over

historical and persistent racial discrimination against Asian Americans (Lee, 2006).

Further, the model minority stereotype pits Asian Americans against other people of color in such a way that perpetuates a social order that preserves Whites' privileged position. The portrayal of Asian American success emerged in response to the civil rights movement as a critique of African Americans as a group and of the Black Power Movement's contention that American social structures kept people of color subordinated (Osajima, 2000). Kim (1999) identified this dynamic as racial triangulation, which occurs via two types of simultaneous, linked processes: (a) processes of "relative valorization," whereby dominant group A (Whites) valorizes subordinate group B (Asian Americans) relative to subordinate group C (Blacks) on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter, and (b) processes of "civic ostracism," whereby dominant group A (Whites) constructs subordinate group B (Asian Americans) as immutably foreign and inassimilable with Whites on cultural and/or racial grounds in order to ostracize them from the mainstream and civic membership (p. 107). In effect, the model minority myth valorizes Asian Americans in comparison with Blacks, while still marginalizing Asian Americans for their foreignness.

The yellow peril and model minority constructs have served as key parts of the racial formation of Asian Americans. Although they may appear to be oppositional at first glance, the foundation and effect of both images are similar: both hinge on the idea of Asian Americans' perpetual foreignness and inability to be truly American, and their usage helps sustain social structures of White privilege and dominance. Okihiro (1994) observed that in fact, the two images are not opposite

poles of representation, but rather, they have a circular connection in which each can evolve into the other:

> Moving in one direction along the circle, the model minority mitigates the alleged danger of the yellow peril, whereas reversing direction, the model minority, if taken too far, can become the yellow peril. In either swing along the arc, white supremacy is maintained and justified. (p. 142)

In the realm of higher education, these racial depictions have had implications for Asian Americans by contributing to the invisibility and under-examination of their unique experiences and needs. Because prevailing notions of minority student issues in higher education have focused on academic preparation and access, and because the pervasive model minority construct indicates that Asian Americans as an aggregate have succeeded on these counts, higher education has tended to overlook the particular needs and issues facing Asian American college students (Osajima, 1995). Osajima (1995) further elaborated that higher education administrators and faculty have "selective visibility" when it comes to Asian Americans, "because their vision has been narrowed by stereotypes of Asian Americans and by dominant tendencies to define racial problems in binary black/white terms" (p. 41). Lee (2006) contended that both images have "predominated the discourse of Asian American college students" such that they have "effectively de-minoritized Asian Americans and marginalized them from both majority and minority communities" (p. 1). The National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE) (2011) has led the recent call for a critical examination of enrollment, access, and support issues for Asian American college students, starting by disaggregating

data to reveal disparities. However, it seems that the persistent positioning of Asian

Americans on the margins of national and campus discourse about race has disguised

much of the lived experience of Asian Americans as racial beings.

Indeed, questions remain regarding how Asian American students see

themselves in terms of race. Given the social construction of race and the changing

nature of what race means for Asian Americans, what does identifying as "Asian

American" mean today? The construct of Asian American emerged in the late 1960s

with student activist movements that were outgrowths of the civil rights movement, in

rejection of the use of "Oriental," which held connotations of dehumanizing,

Western-centric colonization (K. S. Chan & Hune, 1995). Asian American has little

intrinsic meaning, but was given significance based on shared historical experiences

with racism:

> There are no Asians in Asia, only people with national identities, such as
>
> Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese and Filipino. But on this side
>
> of the Pacific there are Asian Americans. This broader identity was forged in
>
> the crucible of racial discrimination and exclusion: their national origins did
>
> not matter as much as their race. Thus, out of "necessity," theirs became a
>
> community rooted in the struggle against racism. (Takaki, 1998, p. 502)

Today, the racial category of Asian American encompasses more than two dozen

ethnic groups with varying languages, cultural practices, and religions (Chen,

LePhuoc, Guzman, Rude, & Dodd, 2006), but the term seems to have lost much of

the resonance from when it was originally claimed. In a study of Asian American

college students' choices of racial and ethnic identity labels, Kodama and Abreo

(2009) found that only 21% of respondents self-identified with the Asian American label. The Pew Research Center (2012) similarly found that only about one in five Asian American adults in their survey said they most often describe themselves as Asian American or Asian. The Pew study partially attributes this to the large numbers of recent immigrants who identify with their home countries more strongly, citing the 2010 Census finding that 74% of U.S. Asians are foreign-born. The "second wave" of Asian immigration to the U.S. commenced after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished nation-of-origin quotas and favored educated professionals (Takaki, 1998). During her work as an Asian American community organizer and activist in the wake of the racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin, Helen Zia (2000) noticed the lack of awareness of the U.S. civil rights movement among recent Asian immigrants in the early 1980s. Although that may partially explain the low rates of identification with the Asian American label, Kodama and Abreo postulated that perhaps the term itself is "too amorphous" (p. 168) to hold much meaning for Asian Americans in college currently, who may have only encountered the term upon coming to college.

The cumulative effects of a history of constantly evolving social constructions of race, combined with U.S. racial dynamics, have cast Asian Americans as non-players or outsiders. Asian American students seem to have accepted the Black/White binary of race relations, serving to marginalize themselves. Osajima (1991) noted that Asian American "students' awareness of their racial difference raised internal doubts and questions about whether and where they belonged in American society" (p. 125). In her research about attitudes toward affirmative action,

Inkelas (2003) discovered that Asian American undergraduates sensed that they occupied a "quasi no-man's land in the social order" (p. 635) when it came to U.S. racial dynamics:

> [O]n one hand, they do not benefit by the historical advantages afforded to children of alumni in the admissions process, and on the other hand, they do not profit by governmental mandates (such as affirmative action) that favor underrepresented minorities in the same process. Thus … they are "threatened" from both sides of the social spectrum: the dominant *and* the subordinate positions. (pp. 635-636)

By viewing diversity through a lens defined by the Black-White binary, Asian American students are relegated to the sidelines, and as a result, may believe they are not legitimate participants in the discourse about race in the United States. The model minority construct may further encourage Asian Americans not to identify as an oppressed group; by buying into the myth of being an "exceptional" minority group, they may be able to access privileges otherwise unavailable to them (Chen, 2009, p. 175). In a way, Asian Americans may have internalized this racial invisibility.

U.S. social structures related to race have rendered Asian Americans either invisible or on the margins. This study seeks to uncover how being cast as invisible, race-less, or de-minoritized may influence the way Asian Americans see themselves as racial beings. Further, I sought to understand how the positioning of Asian Americans in U.S. racial discourse influences the way Asian Americans see themselves as racial beings and how other social identities intersect with race.

The purpose of this study was to explore the role and salience of race to Asian American college students' identities and to explore the intersections of race with other social identities. The following three research questions guided the study:

1. How do Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

2. In what ways, if any, do their other social identities, such as gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status, interact with the way Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

3. How do Asian American college students experience the intersections of their multiple social identities?

These research questions drew from the work of Abes (2003), who centered her study of lesbian college students on their sexual orientation identity, while also considering the influence of other social identities. In a parallel way, I focused my study of Asian American college students on racial identity, while also exploring intersections with other social identities.

I addressed these questions by using intersectionality as a framework and narrative inquiry as a methodology. Telling the stories of Asian American college students related to race and identity provides a counter-narrative to the yellow peril and model minority images and other stories that rely on monolithic depictions of Asian Americans. The experiences of Asian Americans are unique, complicated, and contradictory. My hope was that these individual stories would come together to help fill in part of the larger story of what it means to be Asian in America – that is, in the

United States. To provide a foundation for my study, I define key terms and discuss the significance of this research.

Definitions

For this study, I established a set of definitions for key terms. I expand on many of these concepts in Chapter 2, but by putting forth these initial definitions, I begin providing the context for my study. These definitions may also serve as delimitations for the study, indicating what I will and will not address.

Asian American

In this study, I use the term Asian American to refer to an immigrant or U.S.-born descendant of immigrants from Asia (including Southeast and South Asia), with the explicit acknowledgment that this population is richly heterogeneous along lines of ethnicity, social class, religion, and reasons for immigration, while also encompassing differences within sub-groups. I also draw from the Office of Management and Budget's definition of Asian, which refers to a "person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (Hoeffel et al., 2012, p. 2). At the same time, the term Asian American not only refers to a racial category, but also connotes a political construct that was claimed as a redefinition of racial identity and a panethnic coalition (K. S. Chan & Hune, 1995).

Higher education scholars have written variously about Asians, Asian Americans, Asian Pacific Americans (APAs), Asian Pacific Islanders (APIs), and Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). The unique experiences of Native

Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have been found to be distinct from Asian Americans as a whole, yet their distinctiveness has been disguised when they have been aggregated with Asian Americans in one category (Office of Management and Budget, 1997). With this in mind, my usage of the term Asian American in this study excludes Pacific Islanders, unless I reference other authors, in which case I utilize their terminology.

Identity

Identity refers to a sense of self that is informed by "a process of simultaneous reflection and observation" (Erikson, 1968, p. 22) to create meaning about one's place in the context of one's social world. Identity is always changing and evolving, while still maintaining continuity (Erikson, 1968; Josselson, 2005). Josselson (2005) captures the process of meaning making and the interplay between the internal and the external that are key to defining identity: "Identity is what integrates our own diversity, gives meaning to the disparate parts of ourselves, and relates them to one another. Identity is how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in our world" (p. 192).

Social Identity

Social identity is the part of a person's sense of self that is related to a role or membership in a social group (Deaux, 1993; Tajfel, 1978). For the purposes of this study, I focus on social identities related to membership in categories defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status. Nearly all of these social identities have been meaningful due to being targeted as oppressed or subordinate identities (Tatum,

2002). Although Tatum (2002) did not identify immigrant generation status as a targeted social identity in her work, this identity may have particular relevance for Asian Americans (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997).

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are terms that are often used interchangeably, particularly in reference to Asian Americans. Johnston-Guerrero (2016) described the frequent conflation of the concepts of race and ethnicity as messy and called for clarifying the terms, while simultaneously "embracing the messiness" (p. 44) – that is, delving into the intersections between the two. As Johnston-Guerrero did, I distinguish between race and ethnicity for the purposes of this study, while also planning to explore their intersections. To define race for this study, I rely on Omi and Winant's (1994) approach to understanding that race has constantly evolving meanings attributed to a set of physical, phenotypic features informed by the sociohistorical context:

> *race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies* [italics in original]. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called "phenotypes"), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial significance is always and necessarily a social and historical process. (p. 55)

The social and historical process by which meaning is given to physical differences is inherently shaded by systems of power and privilege. As Kibria (2002) noted, "The word *race* generally refers to a system of power, one in which the dominant group draws on physical differences to construct and give meaning to racial hierarchies and

boundaries" (p. 5). Helms and Cook (1999) similarly saw race as a social construct

that defines who should have access to resources.

In contrast, I see ethnicity as "a social categorization based on the culture of

an individual's ancestors' national or heritage group, who are seen by others and

themselves as having a clearly defined sociocultural history and distinct cultural

features that are transmitted across generations" (Chang & Kwan, 2009, p. 115).

When describing ethnicity, Helms and Cook (1999) refer to the customs, rituals, and

traditions handed down from one's earliest known ancestors. With these distinctions

in mind, I see Asian American as a race and racial category; Chinese American,

Pakistani American, and Filipino American are examples of Asian American

ethnicities or ethnic groups.

Racial Identity and Ethnic Identity

Just as I differentiate between race and ethnicity, I also distinguish racial

identity from ethnic identity. Racial identity refers to the internal, psychological

construct that reflects how people experience racial categorization and identify with

their socially defined racial category (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Chen et al., 2006); in

other words, racial identity signifies how race relates to one's self-concept. Racial

identity development highlights the process by which individuals overcome

internalized racism and achieve a healthy self-conception in terms of one's race

(Chang & Kwan, 2009; Helms & Cook, 1999).

In a corresponding way, ethnic identity refers to the way that ethnicity relates

to one's sense of self and how one identifies as a member of an ethnic group (Chang

& Kwan, 2009; Chen et al., 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Phinney and Ong (2007)

further noted that ethnic identity is dynamic, changing over time and with context, and multidimensional; they also pointed out that as an internal, psychological construct, ethnic identity is distinct from ethnic behaviors or practices. Phinney and Ong saw some parallels between racial identity and ethnic identity; dissimilarities included racial identity's premise on experiences with internalized racism and ethnic identity's focus on sense of belonging to an ethnic group.

Significance

This narrative study of Asian American college students' racial identity and intersecting identities contributes to an understanding of racial dynamics in higher education and American society, as well as of Asian American college students' identity development. First, through this study, I add to the literature on Asian American college students, and thereby promote their visibility to higher education administrators and policymakers to whom they may have only been selectively visible. Indeed, this population remains relatively under-examined in higher education research (Maramba & Kodama, 2017; Museus, 2009; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2011); this study provides a new perspective into the lived experience of Asian American students' racial identity and intersecting identities. Rather than being ignored or sidelined, Asian American college students' experiences with race are centered in this study, showing how Asian Americans have been shaped by and how they can be active stakeholders in the discourse related to race and diversity in higher education and American society. The very process of identifying as Asian American today reflects the tensions that have arisen from a history of racial formation, where the category of

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"Asian American" and its meaning have shifted throughout American history (Lee, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994).

By exploring the dynamics of racial identification and negotiation of multiple, intersecting identities for Asian Americans, this study also promotes a deeper understanding of their identity development. Using a narrative inquiry approach highlights the particulars and nuances of the participants' lived experience with race, which helps provide a more fluid picture of identity development that can complement stage-oriented models (Chen, 2005). Further, by also exploring the interactions of racial identity with other social identities with an intersectional lens, this study helps illustrate the influence of power structures on identity development.

Summary

Asian Americans have occupied a problematic, if not invisible, position in American racial discourse. Regardless of nationality and cultural differences, immigrants from various Asian countries came to America and experienced being racialized in similar ways as foreign and intrinsically inassimilable. These racialized depictions of Asian Americans have evolved into the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes and have cumulatively served to keep Asian Americans on the margins in conversations about race. Through this study, I bring into view Asian American college students' stories related to race and identity. From these individual stories, I then create a larger shared story, seen through the analytic prism of intersectionality, about how social structures shape and pattern the way Asian Americans see themselves as racial beings. In this way, I broaden the discourse about race in higher education and America to include Asian Americans as active participants,

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stakeholders, and agents for advancing social justice. To lay the theoretical

foundations for my study, in the next chapter I delve into existing research and

theories related to identity development for Asian Americans.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I ground this study of Asian American college students' racial identity and experience with multiple, intersecting identities in the extant literature and research related to these topics. I begin with a brief overview of social identities and identity development before specifically reviewing the literature about Asian American identity development, which will comprise the majority of this chapter. I preface that section with a consideration the interrelated nature of race, ethnicity, and panethnicity for Asian Americans in an effort to provide context for the existing scholarship on racial and ethnic identity development with this population. I then summarize the relevant research and theories about identity development related to single social identities (including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, and ability) and multiple identities for Asian Americans. The final section of the chapter describes intersectionality, the theoretical framework that guided the analysis of this study.

Overview of Social Identities and Identity Development

In this section I provide a brief overview of social identity theory and identity development. Identity development theory arises from the work of Erik Erikson (1968). In his view, identity development was an ongoing, ever evolving process. This internal, reflective process did not occur within a vacuum; rather, identity development involved making meaning of interactions with other individuals and with the broader social context [use of masculine pronouns in the original]:

> [I]dentity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the

way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology

significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of

how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have

become relevant to him. (pp. 22-23)

In this way, identity development involved a dynamic interchange between the

interpersonal/social (or external) and the intrapersonal (or internal).

A particularly influential element of Erikson's (1968) work on identity

development was the "epigenetic principle" (p. 93), which indicated that "anything

that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each

part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a

functioning whole" (p. 92). Erikson's proposal of a developmental theory with

sequential stages that progress from simple to more complex set the basic framework

for many developmental theorists who followed (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

Theorists studying social identity also highlighted the dynamic interplay

between the internal and external. According to Tajfel (1978), social identity was

that part of an individual's sense of self that was related to membership in a social

group(s) and the emotional meaning and value attributed to it. Social identity could

be distinguished from personal identity, as Brewer (2001) noted, "*Personal identity* is

the individuated self—those characteristics that differentiate one individual from

others within a given social context. *Social identities* are categorizations of the self

into more inclusive social units that *depersonalize* the self-concept, where *I* becomes

we" (p. 246). Although considering the differences between personal identity and

social identity may provide helpful insights, another social identity scholar, Kay

Deaux (1993), cautioned against seeing them as two completely separate notions:

> I see the distinction between personal and social as somewhat arbitrary and
> misleading. Rather than being cleanly separable, social and personal identity
> are fundamentally interrelated. Personal identity is defined, at least in part, by
> group memberships, and social categories are infused with personal meaning.
> (p. 5)

Personal identity and social identity could be considered separately for the sake of

analysis, Deaux noted, but the meaning of each was integrally connected to the other.

Building upon Tajfel's (1978) work, Deaux (1991, 1993) examined social

identity with acknowledgment of the notions that individuals had a multiplicity of

identities and that social identities were socially constructed. Tajfel noted that among

multiple group memberships, some might be more meaningful to an individual than

other memberships, and that some memberships might vary in salience over time or

based on the social context. Focusing on the notion of salience, Deaux (1991)

suggested a number of external factors, such as the number of interactions one has

that are related to that identity, specific situations and contexts, demographics, and

actions of others, could influence the relative importance and meaning attributed to a

social identity (or identities). Relatedly, shifts in context would necessitate continued

identity work and could affect identity definition. Amid the buffets of changing

environments, Deaux (1993) saw social identities as relatively stable and permanent,

although their expression might vary based on the situation and some changes might

occur "precipitated either by a reshuffling of internal priorities or by alterations in the external environment" (p. 11).

Subjective experience plays an integral role in shaping the meaning and significance of social identities for an individual. Deaux (1991) wrote, "Even when a stated identity is the same, two people may differ widely in the meaning that they associate with that category" (p. 83). The differences perceived between social groups and the meaning connoted with those differences contribute to the definition of a social group (Tajfel, 1978). Indeed, an individual's social identity "can only be defined through the effects of social categorizations segmenting an individual's social environment into his [*sic*] own group and others" (p. 67). Deaux (1991) described three interrelated processes related to social identity construction: "(1) self-definition in terms of group membership; (2) the acquisition of relevant information about group characteristics; and (3) public proclamation of belonging to the group" (p. 90).

In this study, my primary focus was issues of group membership related to race, as conceptualized by racial identity, for Asian Americans. However, I was also attentive to dynamics related to other, often subordinated, social identities, such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status. These social identity categories, with the exception of immigrant generation status, have been noted as targets of systematic oppression (Tatum, 2002). As I discuss in more depth later, individuals often experience these social identities in concert with one another (Collins, 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Shields, 2008). Next, I review the current literature focusing on the development of social identities among Asian Americans.

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Research on Identity Development among Asian Americans

Building off Erikson's (1968) foundational scholarship about identity, theorists began describing developmental pathways for specific, targeted social identities, particularly for diverse populations (Jones & Stewart, 2016). Much of the research focused on Asian American identity development falls within this tradition, often characterized by linear, stage-based trajectories. In this section, I provide an overview of the extant literature, beginning with research and theories addressing Asian American racial and ethnic identity development, including ethnicity-specific models. I then review studies that investigated a specific social identity of Asian Americans, as well as research that focused on multiple identities. A look at the most recent scholarship calling for more integrated and critical approaches to identity development concludes this section.

The Interrelated Nature of Race, Ethnicity, and Panethnicity for Asian Americans

Before addressing the theories and research on identity development among Asian Americans, it is important to unpack the complexities of race for this group and acknowledge the tensions that arise when considering how individuals identify racially and ethnically. Much of the research on identity development focused on Asian Americans has been concerned with race and ethnicity, and these two concepts have often been used interchangeably. As described in Chapter 1, in this study I use each term distinctly, unless I am following the usage of a particular author. Race is a continually evolving, socially constructed concept that reflects a social and historical process where physical differences are the basis for creating categories and

hierarchies of differential power and privilege (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Helms & Cook, 1999; Kibria, 2002; Omi & Winant, 1994). Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a social categorization based on the culture of one's ancestors' national or heritage group signified by customs, ritual, and traditions that have been passed down (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Helms & Cook, 1999). Relatedly, racial identity and ethnic identity refer to two different yet parallel concepts. Racial identity refers to how an individual makes meaning of one's race and experiences with racism and how it relates to one's sense of self (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Chen et al., 2006; Helms & Cook, 1999). Ethnic identity, however, refers to how individuals relate their sense of self to their ethnic group membership (Chang & Kwan, 2009; Chen et al., 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). For Asian Americans, the notion of race – and relatedly, racial identity – has been particularly thorny. When discussing racial identity for Asian Americans, one must address what the term "Asian American" means, as well as the related notions of panethnicity that make understanding racial identity particularly complex for this group.

In Chapter 1, I provided a brief sketch of the racial history of Asian Americans and how Asian Americans have been positioned within racial discourse in the United States. Asian American, then, is a socially constructed racial category that comprises several dozen diverse ethnic groups (Chen et al., 2006), a category that did not exist as such prior to the 1960s (K. S. Chan & Hune, 1995). It was also a panethnic identity claimed by college student activists of Asian descent in the 1960s and 1970s in a sign of political solidarity with one another across ethnic lines (Espiritu, 1992). Collapsing so many disparate cultural groups under a single, pan-

ethnic category came with both benefits and costs. Benefits included the potential for more political recognition and power, but costs included the masking of heterogeneity of individual ethnic groups, as well as heterogeneity of socioeconomic class, immigration status, and more (Lowe, 1991), and the tensions of wondering who is included and excluded (J. Chan, 2017; Espiritu, 1992; Kibria, 1996).

Asian American panethnicity, racial identity, and ethnic identity are inextricably linked. Writers have addressed this connection between the interpersonal (panethnicity) and the intrapersonal (identity) (K. S. Chan & Hune, 1995; Chang & Kwan, 2009; Kibria, 1996). Espiritu (1992) broached this notion by indicating that the "construction of pan-Asian ethnicity involves the creation of a common Asian American heritage out of diverse histories" (p. 17). Building on commonalities engendered a sense of panethnic consciousness, which in turn served as a precursor to panethnic unity (Kibria, 1996). In the end, the "Asian American construct" that emerged was "both a racial formation and a panethnic coalition to support and further political and social goals." (K. S. Chan & Hune, pp. 216-217). Chang and Kwan (2009) similarly described the interplay between the interpersonal and intrapersonal with panethnicity and racial identity: "When Asian Americans define for themselves what it means to be members of their group, the term Asian American no longer denotes just an externally defined category – a race – but it engenders an internally defined identity as well" (p. 115). In this way, the notion of panethnicity connects with racial identity. In fact, this is what happened historically in the 1960s, as Asian Americans claimed the term "Asian American" as an expression of solidarity based on common histories and experiences of discrimination and exclusion; in this way,

"Asian American" became a "social and political identity – a racial identity – to fight racism" (p. 115). Since the term's origin and after the influx of immigrants after the Immigration Act of 1965, much of the collective meaning and political history of "Asian American" has been lost. By choosing to focus on racial identity in this study, I sought to examine how Asian American college students currently make meaning of "Asian American" as a racial construct and as a panethnic collective in terms of how they see themselves and others of Asian descent.

Although I have sought to distinguish between racial identity and ethnic identity for the purposes of this study, I also recognize that such efforts to distinguish between them may be unnecessary in a practical sense. Although words hold power and convey meaning, an individual may not be aware of the histories and meanings that lie behind terms. The meanings that an individual associates with a term may vary widely based on one's understandings of the words or concepts. On a conceptual level, however, the interrelated aspect of racial identity and ethnic identity must be noted; much is still not known about how both racial and ethnic identity develop. Chang and Kwan (2009) noted that for first-generation immigrants in particular,

> Theoretically, ethnic and racial identities develop side by side, but what is not
> clear is whether one tends to precede the other as well as the extent to which
> they influence one another. ... For Asian Americans, ethnic or cultural aspects
> of identity may develop first, followed by the sense of oneself as a racial
> being. (p. 124)

The authors posited that this sequence of identity development might also apply to many U.S.-born Asian Americans. They addressed the role of experiences with racism and discrimination and their attendant confusing messages about race which "may further contribute to racial identity taking a backseat to ethnic and cultural identity for many Asian Americans" (p. 124). Other influences on racial and ethnic identity development are thought to include one's status as a minority or majority, a sense of one's cultural heritage, and historical factors. Ultimately, the relationship between racial and ethnic identities appears to be complex and is not fully understood, and their relative salience may change over time, depending on one's identity developmental stage, as well as the situational context.

Kodama and Abreo (2009) noted the particular difficulties of unraveling racial identity and ethnic identity for Asian Americans when examining how they choose to identify when given different ethnic and racial options. In their study exploring how Asian American college students identified among different ethnic and racial categories, including specific ethnicity (e.g., Filipino), specific ethnicity American (e.g., Chinese American), pan-Asian American, or other (American or have not thought about it), Kodama and Abreo (2009) found few differences in attitudes and behaviors (including participation in Asian American-focused activities) among the groups and could identify few patterns that suggested what meanings students associated with the identifications. They surmised that there did appear to be a difference in attitudes between those who identified with an ethnicity American group and those who identified with a specific ethnicity, but could not hypothesize further on what their results meant. They observed that for those who chose the Asian

American label, no clear pattern emerged from their responses, leaving the authors to wonder, "Perhaps Asian American is too amorphous of a term to mean much, a 'catch-all' category that contains a variety of people for different reasons rather than those who share a common perspective" (p. 168). Unfortunately, it was impossible to know from this study the meaning that individual students attributed to each of the racial/ethnic category options and the meaning they made in the process of choosing one with which to identify.

Given Kodama and Abreo's (2009) research and the work of other scholars with regard to Asian American identity, strong evidence exists that racial and ethnic identification is complex. By outlining the interrelated and sometimes muddled nature of racial and ethnic identity for Asian Americans, I hoped to provide a contextual caveat for reviewing research on both constructs. In the following section, I describe the current understandings of Asian American racial identity development, as placed in context of broader racial identity development theory.

Racial Identity Development

Research and theory on racial identity development for Asian Americans has been grounded primarily in the work of Helms (1995) and Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1998). Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity Development model was premised on the assumption that different racial groups had different levels of power and privilege and that a key developmental task for people of color was to overcome internalized racism. According to this model, people of color developed their racial identity through the following statuses: Conformity, Dissonance, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Integrative Awareness (see also Helms &

Cook, 1999). People of color typically begin with an unexamined racial identity and an unquestioned acceptance of White values in the Conformity status. In the Dissonance status, individuals encounter ambivalence and confusion regarding their racial identity. In the Immersion/Emersion status, people of color idealize their racial group, socializing primarily with other racial group members. Individuals move to Internalization, characterized by a positive commitment to one's own racial group while considering the dominant group objectively, and then to Integrative Awareness, where people of color value their own collective identities and are able to empathize with other oppressed groups.

Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1998) Minority Identity Development model, later renamed the Racial/Cultural Identity Development model (R/CID) (2003), follows a similar trajectory as Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity Development model. The R/CID aims to provide a framework for counselors in understanding their clients' attitudes toward themselves, others, and the dominant culture (Sue & Sue, 2003). In the first stage, Conformity, individuals are self-depreciating or neutral toward themselves and group-depreciating or neutral to others due to low race salience and have accepted and prefer the dominant group's values and standards. Conflict emerges in the second stage, called Dissonance and Appreciating, as individuals question and challenge the attitudes and beliefs of the Conformity stage. In the third stage, Resistance and Immersion, individuals reject White values and standards and often experience guilt and shame over their past lack of group identification and anger at oppression and racism. In the fourth stage, Introspection, individuals move toward a proactive sense of positive self-definition.

At the final stage of Integrative Awareness, individuals have resolved many of the previous conflicts and are committed to eliminating all forms of oppression. The People of Color Racial Identity Development model and Racial/Cultural Identity Development model share similar pathways and together provide the theoretical foundation for much of the existing research on Asian American racial identity development.

Kim's Asian American Identity Development theory. One of the most widely referenced theories regarding the development of racial identity for Asian Americans as a whole is Jean Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development (AAID) theory. Based on her dissertation study of ten third-generation Japanese American women (J. Kim, 1981), the AAID theory outlines five sequential stages of the process toward "acquiring a positive Asian American identity" (J. Kim, 2001, p. 72) and is premised on the thought that Asian Americans' collectivist orientation caused their racial identity to be particularly sensitive to racism in the social sphere. With that in mind, Kim described three underlying assumptions for the theory: (a) White racism cannot be separated from Asian American identity development, due to the strong influence of the social environment on their senses of self; (b) Asian Americans must make a conscious decision to rid themselves of their negative racial identity; and (c) Asian Americans' psychological well-being depends on their ability to "transform the negative racial identity they experience as a result of identity conflict and to acquire a positive racial identity" (p. 71). As Kim noted, these assumptions are similar to those underlying Helms' (1995) model.

The stages follow a similar path as Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity model. The first stage, Ethnic Awareness, is noted for Asian ethnic experiences and lasts until Asian Americans increase their contact with the dominant White society, which usually happens as they enter the school system. As Kim (2001) wrote, "Greater exposure to Asian ethnic experiences at this stage leads to a positive self-concept and clearer ego identity while less exposure is related to a neutral self-concept and confused ego identity" (pp. 72-73). In the second stage, White Identification, Asian Americans feel a sense of being different and experience painful encounters related to race. Kim explained that given the collectivist orientation of many Asian cultures, which values being attentive to others' reactions and fitting in, Asian Americans often internalize White societal standards and values. This leads to alienation from themselves and other Asian Americans, negative evaluations of self as an Asian American, and denials that racism exists. In the third stage, Awakening to Social Political Consciousness, Asian Americans recognize that their negative encounters related to race arose due to societal factors, no longer feel inferior to Whites, and relate to the experiences of other racial minorities. Kim observed that her study's participants experienced a paradigm shift that resulted from their involvement in the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Asian Americans then experience an immersion in the Asian American experience in the fourth stage, Redirection to an Asian American Consciousness, feeling racial pride, positive self-concept, and a sense of anger toward Whites. The final stage, Incorporation, is noted for a sense of confidence in one's identity as an Asian American and a resolution of racial identity conflict.

Kim's (2001) theory possesses strengths and limitations. First, the grounding of the AAID theory in empirical research is an asset. In addition, her focus on the primacy of race in the identity development of Asian Americans acknowledges the influence of sociohistorical factors on the construction of sense of self. She also highlighted the importance of claiming one's Asian heritage and the role of involvement in political movements in Asian American identity development. With her sample of Japanese American women who came of age during the civil rights and other movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it is understandable that their involvement in such movements were critical experiences in their identity development. However, the implications for her assertion remain unclear for more recent generations of Asian Americans, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants, who lack such a history of political involvement.

The ambiguous applicability of Kim's (2001) model to Asian Americans who differ from her original study's sample point to the limitations of her theory. Kim acknowledged the limitations due to her sample, which consisted entirely of Japanese American women. She noted that although she has received much anecdotal confirmation that her theory applies to the experiences of Asian Americans of different ethnic backgrounds, her model has not been tested among different Asian ethnic groups. In her original study, her participants experienced the shift to Stage Three: Awakening to Social Political Consciousness via their involvement in the political movements in of the 1960s and 1970s. Kim recognized that the political climate has changed significantly since and shared that her more recent interactions with college students indicated "the shifting of their paradigm during the third stage is

much more subtle and at times hard to distinguish from the fourth stage" (p. 83).

Generational status may also matter. In her study, the participants were second-,

third-, and fourth-generation Japanese Americans; the applicability of her model to

the increased number of first-generation (i.e., immigrant generation) Asian Americans

post-1965 is undocumented.

Beyond issues related to her sample, other questions emerge related to her

conceptualization of Asian American racial identity. Kim (2001) posited that a racial

identity development theory is salient for Asian Americans because "[i]t is their racial

membership, not their ethnic membership, that impacts how Asian Americans feel

about themselves in this country" (p. 82). Although history seems to support Kim's

point (i.e., as evidenced by *Ozawi* and *Bhagat Singh Thind* cases), she did not

acknowledge the tensions related to panethnicity where some Asian Americans, such

as those from South Asian and Filipino backgrounds, have been excluded from the

pan-Asian American group or do not consider themselves as Asian American.

Relatedly, in her description of Stage 5, Incorporation, Kim did not delve into what

"being Asian American" means to individuals in this stage. Neither did she directly

address the social construction of race and the term "Asian American," and how one's

ethnicity may have more personal salience or meaning. Given Lowe's (1991)

contention that any approach to Asian American identity or pan-Asian American

community must proactively embrace and acknowledge heterogeneity, the AAID's

omission of these considerations is a notable limitation.

Application of Helms' People of Color model to Asian Americans.

Alvarez and Helms (2001) used Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity model

to study the relationship of racial identity to racial adjustment with Asian Americans, which was operationalized as collective self-esteem and awareness of racism. The authors used symbolic interaction theory as a conceptual framework for their study, which allowed them to examine the influence of reflected appraisals (beliefs about how one is perceived by others) on self-concept. They hypothesized that messages from others about what it means to be Asian American would be related to how individuals valued their Asian American identity.

In their study, Alvarez and Helms (2001) found that both racial identity statuses and reflective racial appraisals significantly predicted collective self-esteem. The role of reflected racial appraisals was notable in that they found that the perceived racial evaluations of other Asian Americans were significantly related to collective self-esteem, although the perceived evaluations of White Americans were not found to be significantly related. That is, perceiving validation of one's racial identity from other Asian Americans seemed to contribute to a positive sense of racial self-esteem. On the other hand, hearing negative messages about Asian Americans from other Asian Americans seemed to lead to devaluing one's racial identity. These findings regarding the influence of reflected racial appraisals on Asian Americans' racial identity are consistent with Kim's (1981, 2001) belief that the collectivistic orientation of Asian Americans would make others' perceptions of identity development particularly important, yet in Helms and Alvarez's study, the perceptions and attitudes of other Asian Americans were more influential than those of White Americans.

In addition to the role of reflected racial appraisals, Alvarez and Helms (2001) concluded that the People of Color Racial Identity theory could be applied to understanding Asian Americans' awareness of racism. In particular, they found that the Immersion/Emersion stage had a significant positive relationship with awareness of interpersonal and institutional racism, and that the Dissonance schema was negatively related to awareness of interpersonal racism. These findings were consistent with the theory, given that the Immersion status is characterized by increased awareness of racism and ensuing hostility toward Whites and White culture, while the Dissonance status is noted for confused awareness of race and racism. However, contrary to what the theory would have predicted, they also found that the Integrative Awareness status was negatively related to awareness of interpersonal racism. They had anticipated that those at the Integrative Awareness status would have higher awareness of interpersonal racism, since this status is associated with a complex understanding of the environment and a resilient and positive racial self concept (Helms & Cook, 1999). The authors wondered if social desirability might have influenced participants' responses on the Integrative Awareness subscale and the interpersonal racism measure, which may explain the unexpected result. In the end, the People of Color Racial Identity theory showed some potential for understanding Asian Americans' awareness of interpersonal and institutional racism.

Similar to Alvarez and Helms (2001), Chen et al. (2006) found that the People of Color Identity Development theory (Helms, 1995) was in some ways appropriate and in other ways limited in its applicability to Asian Americans. A cluster analysis of Asian American respondents who took the People of Color Racial Identity

Attitudes Scale (PCRIAS) broke the sample into four groups of roughly the same size with scores that centered on four different subscales of different statuses. However, comparing the clusters on other scales that measured color-blind racial attitudes and racism-related stress revealed that Asian Americans appear to perceive racial issues and racism differently from what would have been expected based on the identity status. In particular, the finding that those in the Internalization cluster had high color-blind racial attitude scores was inconsistent with Helms' definition of the Internalization status, prompting the authors to consider whether these results reflected social desirability, as Alvarez and Helms (2001) did, or if the results reflected respondents' superficial level of understanding of racial issues. Based on their findings, Chen et al. concluded that patterns of racial identity for Asian Americans might differ from those for other racial groups, and that those patterns could be related to the unique sociohistorical positioning of Asian Americans in U.S. race relations. They called for improved measures for understanding such nuances.

Overall, current approaches to Asian American racial identity development, either conceptualized anew from empirical research or based on general racial identity models, have provided some insights to the role of race in Asian Americans' self-concept. At the same time, they also seem to have fallen short in addressing the full complexity of racial identity for this group. Considerably more research has been conducted on ethnic identity development of Asian Americans. Next, I will delineate the foundations of ethnic identity research and review extant examinations of ethnic identity among Asian Americans.

Ethnic Identity Development

The concept of ethnic identity and its development has been examined in depth by Jean Phinney (1990, 1992, 1993). A key point that she has reiterated about ethnic identity has been the distinction between the *process* of ethnic identity development and the *content* of ethnic identity (e.g., ethnic behaviors such as speaking the language and associating with other members of one's ethnic group) (Phinney, 1993; Phinney & Ong, 2007). They might be related, but ethnic identity is "an internal structure that can exist without behavior" (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 272), while ethnic identity development refers to the way one's sense of self as a group member and meanings associated with group membership evolves.

Phinney and Ong (2007) grappled with this distinction directly in their revision of Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). Designed to assess ethnic identity across diverse ethnic groups, the MEIM originally sought to measure sense of attachment/belonging, developmental concept of an achieved identity, and involvement in ethnic practices. Phinney and Ong (2007) removed the items related to ethnic behaviors and practices in the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure–Revised (MEIM–R), which was comprised of a subscale for exploration and a subscale for commitment. They ultimately concluded that ethnic identity could appropriately be thought of as "consisting of two factors, exploration and commitment, which are distinct processes that make separate contributions to the underlying structure of ethnic identity" (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 278).

Phinney (1993) also examined the process of ethnic identity development, proposing a model consisting of three sequential stages. Stage 1, Unexamined Ethnic

Identity, may reflect either a lack of interest or concern about ethnicity or foreclosed view of ethnicity that is based on others' opinions. During the second stage, Ethnic Identity Search or Moratorium, the individual explores one's ethnicity in a search for understanding about one's culture and may experience dissonance with recognition of differences between the dominant group's and ethnic minorities' values. The final stage, Ethnic Identity Achievement, is characterized by acceptance and internalization of one's ethnicity.

Looking to examine the specific experience of Asian Americans with ethnic identity, Yeh and Huang (1996) conducted a study of 78 college students to collect demographic and open-ended responses about the subjects' ethnic identity development process. They questioned the linear stage models of ethnic identity development and such models' applicability to Asian Americans. Further, given the collectivistic orientation of Asian cultures and cultural sensitivity to shame, the authors argued that Asian American ethnic identity theories should include the role of external, social context.

Their results showed that ethnic identity development was dynamic and complex and not linear, was strongly influenced by relationships with friends and family and other situational and relational forces (consistent with a value of collectivism), and that shame also played a motivating role in the process. Though Yeh and Huang's (1996) study yielded new insights, its broader implications were limited because the reliability and validity of their assessment tool had not been proven. In addition, although the authors took pains to distinguish between race and ethnicity for this study, the distinction that respondents made between the two is

unclear. For example, the stereotypes encountered by respondents may have been related to their physical traits (i.e., race). Also, Yeh and Huang did not examine differences among those from different ethnic groups. Further, by referring to the role of collectivism and shame in Asian cultures in only broad terms, the authors masked the heterogeneity of the Asian American population, thus perpetuating a sense of the group as monolithic.

Ethnic Identity Development among Specific Asian American Ethnicities

A number of researchers have examined the ethnic identity development process for specific Asian American ethnic groups, such as Filipino, South Asian, Chinese, and Korean Americans. This section will highlight a selected few studies and models of racial and ethnic identity development for specific Asian American ethnic groups; it is not intended to provide an exhaustive review of identity development for all Asian American ethnic groups. I have chosen to feature these studies due to the way they illustrate the unique aspects of ethnic identity negotiation among Asian Americans. What several of the following studies reflect are the tensions related to race and panethnicity and the implications for how Asian Americans from specific ethnic groups choose to identify racially.

In their study of Korean American narratives of ethnic identity, Kang and Lo (2004) used a linguistic approach to examine the meanings of ethnic identity. They noticed that it was less the specific terminology and more the broader discourse that respondents used that showed different ways of considering one's identity positions. They contended that assessing one's ethnic identification based on usage of terms such as "Korean" versus "Korean American" versus "Asian American" was

necessarily limited because different people used the same terms in different ways.

Their analysis paid attention to the meanings behind the usage of terms by looking at

the discourses in which the terms were embedded. They discovered two distinct

patterns in the way participants spoke about ethnic identity, regardless of the specific

terminology they used. In the first narrative pattern, dubbed the discourse of

dispositions, participants described categories of identity as linked to emotional

states, dispositions, and comfort levels. In these narratives, group membership was

defined categorically as opposed to on a spectrum (i.e., you were either Korean or

not) and was indicated by innate or permanent qualities such as birthplace and accent.

In the second pattern of narratives, the discourse of agency, participants categorized

group identity based on observable practices, such as "listening to Korean music,

speaking Korean in public, watching Korean soap operas, and wearing certain kinds

of clothes" (p. 103). With the discourse of agency, being Korean or Korean

American was based on the enactment of such practices. The discourse of agency

highlights the interactive and dynamic nature of ethnic identification, where an

observer who categorizes based on external signifiers of ethnicity plays a role. In this

sense, identities are created and negotiated between individuals.

　　　As part of her larger study of second-generation Chinese Americans and

Korean Americans from the Los Angeles and Boston areas, Kibria (1999) examined

the understandings and reactions to the concept of "Asian American" among those

participants who were not involved in pan-Asian organizations while in college. She

found three main types of reactions among her participants. The first group of

participants was characterized by having a close friendship group composed primarily

of Asian Americans of different ethnicities. For these individuals, the concept of "Asian American" was connoted with a community of shared understanding and worldview, based on commonalities of race and culture, as well as a community of support to combat race-based stereotypes. At the same time, the shared cultural values that these participants appreciated in other Asian Americans did not connect to a sense of shared political interests. A second theme emerged from those participants who felt more salience and sense of community related to their ethnic groups and saw "Asian American" as an artificial, contrived construct; as a result, they felt distant from the politically active pan-Asian American organizations. The final thread of accounts arose from those who were not connected to Asian, Chinese, or Korean American communities on campus at all. For most of these participants, they felt that "Asian American" was a force of conformity, in opposition to individuality. Ultimately, Kibria's study revealed how these Asian Americans responded differently to a common racial context that was communicated via racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans: "These stereotypes entered into the identity negotiations of my informants in powerful yet varied ways, affirming different understandings of 'Asian American'" (p. 48). For these Asian Americans, identifying with their race was a complex process influenced by interactions with others.

Approaches to identity development for Filipino Americans reveal the differing dynamics that underlie how they identify with their ethnicity and with a sense of pan-Asian American identity. Nadal (2004) proposed a theoretical model of Filipino American identity development based on Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1998) Racial/Cultural Identity Development model and Kim's (1981) Asian

American Identity Development model. Nadal primarily based his rationale for creating a separate model for Filipino Americans on the unique colonial history of Filipinos, core Filipino values, and differences between this population and other Asian American ethnic groups. Indeed, Nadal noted that dynamics within the larger Asian American community marginalized Filipino Americans; these dynamics served as a key argument for the relevance of a distinct identity model for Filipino Americans. He contended that traditional Asian American identity approaches were not applicable to Filipino Americans. His proposed model described nonlinear and nonsequential stages that portrayed Filipino Americans' attitudes toward themselves and other Filipino Americans, attitudes toward other Asian Americans and other minority groups, and attitudes toward the White/dominant group. The first stage, Ethnic Awareness, was characterized by positive/neutral attitudes and beliefs toward the self and other Filipino Americans, neutral attitudes and beliefs toward other Asian Americans and other minority groups, and positive/neutral attitudes toward the White/dominant group. In the second stage, Assimilation to Dominant Culture, attitudes toward self, other Filipino Americans and Asian Americans, and other minority groups became negative and depreciating, while attitudes toward the White/dominant group became positive and group-appreciating. The third stage, Social Political Awakening, occurred in response to the realization of social and racial inequality and was characterized by a sense of anger, positive and empowering attitudes toward the self and Filipino Americans, positive and appreciating views toward Asian Americans, positive and accepting feelings toward other minorities, and negative/discriminatory attitudes toward the White/dominant group.

Nadal (2004) identified Stage 4, Panethnic Asian American Consciousness, as unique to Filipino American identity development, in that Filipino Americans claimed ownership of their Asian American identity and had positive and accepting attitudes toward self, Filipino Americans, and other minority groups, positive and appreciating attitudes toward Asian Americans, and negative/discriminatory attitudes toward the White/dominant group. The fifth stage, Ethnocentric Realization, was also unique to Filipino Americans, but could be seen as relevant for other marginalized groups within larger racial categories. In this stage, Filipino Americans recognized their marginalization within the Asian American community, reoriented their identities around their ethnicity, and could react with anger. Their attitudes toward self, Filipino Americans, and other minority groups were positive and empowering, while their attitudes toward Asian Americans were neutral to depreciating and toward the White/dominant group were negative/tolerant. In the final stage, Incorporation, Filipino Americans focused their pride on their ethnic identity and were able to appreciate other racial backgrounds, including White Americans and other Asian Americans. Their attitudes toward self and Filipino Americans were appreciating, accepting toward other Asian Americans, positive and appreciating toward other minority groups, and selectively appreciating toward the White/dominant group.

In seeking to describe a unique identity development pathway for Filipinos while drawing similarities with African American and Latino experiences, Nadal (2004) did so in opposition to other Asian Americans. The author seemed to rely on a monolithic view of "Asian American" in making his argument for the distinctiveness of the Filipino American experience. He asserted that Asian American psychology

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could not be applied to Filipino Americans and, as a result, neither could Asian American identity development theories be applied to Filipino Americans. Ultimately, the proposal of this theoretical model appears to reflect tensions related to panethnicity within the Asian American community, that is, who belongs, who do we mean when we say "Asian American," and what experiences are traditionally considered as Asian American.

In her examination of the emergence of the culturally "born-again Filipino" among the post-1965 Filipino American community, Strobel (1996) explicitly considered the implications of Filipino American identity in connection with a pan-Asian American consciousness. She noted the importance of considering the sociohistorical context, specifically the role of U.S. colonization, in understanding Filipino Americans' sense of cultural identity and their location within a panethnic framework. In a participatory research project involving 100 Filipino Americans in northern California aiming to capture their voices and stories, Strobel discovered that in the 1990s (at the time of writing), Filipino American college students' discourse about cultural identity focused on the notions of decolonization and indigenization. The need for Philippine historical and cultural knowledge, the role of personal memory, and consequences of language loss were all interrelated in how Filipino Americans reconstructed their sense of cultural identity. For many of Strobel's participants, coming to the realization that the term "Asian American" usually referred to those of East Asian background and not to Filipino Americans was a jarring experience that precipitated the search for a Filipino identity. At the same time, these individuals still recognized the political value of panethnic coalitions and

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were receptive to inclusive projects that did not marginalize Filipino American interests. Strobel challenged pan-Asian American activists to be inclusive of heterogeneity, create more opportunities for dialogue, and directly confront issues of power and tokenism. Instead of rejecting any connection or similarity to other Asian Americans as Nadal (2004) did, Strobel engaged with the tensions and meanings behind panethnicity in calling for using an inclusive "we" (*tayo* in Tagalog) to replace the exclusive "we" (*karni*) in recognition of interconnectedness: "Although it is an abstract philosophy, it behooves us to think about the conceptualization of panethnicity not only in its economic, political, and sociocultural implications, but [also] in ways that widen these borders" (p. 49).

Similar tensions with Asian American panethnicity emerge when considering racial and ethnic identity for South Asian Americans. Kibria (1996) spoke to the racial differences between South Asian Americans and Asian Americans of East Asian origins and how those racial differences contributed to an ambiguous racial identity for South Asian Americans and to their marginalization within the pan-Asian American movement. She noted that South Asians, along with Southeast Asians and Filipinos, tended to feel like outsiders in the Asian American community, and that South Asian Americans felt a strong sense of marginalization within the field of Asian American studies, as well. By naming the root of this tension in racial differences, Kibria suggested that highlighting commonalities of historical and contemporary experiences may help to foster pan-Asian unity, but those efforts may ultimately be insufficient. Unless "a frank and open discussion of the meaning of race, both within and between the South Asian and other Asian American

communities" (p. 85) leads to a re-conceptualization of who is included as "Asian American," Kibria remained pessimistic about how truly inclusive the pan-Asian American community could be. Kibria added complexity to Lowe's (1991) call for the acknowledgment and embracement of heterogeneity by showing how much work it would require.

As Strobel (1996) did for the Filipino American community, Ibrahim, Ohnishi, and Sandhu (1997) summarized the sociopolitical history of Indian subcontinent and of South Asians in America in proposing a set of guidelines to counsel South Asian Americans, keeping their unique identity development in mind. They recommended considering the specific and varying impact of contextual factors on identity development for South Asian Americans, specifically the larger culture, ethnic group of origin, community, religion, neighborhood, social class, educational level, gender, and sexual orientation. They particularly noted the role of immigration status on South Asian Americans' sense of identity. Ultimately, the authors fell short of putting forward a new conceptualization of identity development for South Asian Americans, providing instead a list of basic beliefs and values that might be consistent among this group based on sociohistorical culture and implications for counseling practice.

In reviewing literature about Asian American identity, ethnic identity appears to be the most extensively examined social identity for this population. The studies discussed in this section about specific Asian American ethnicities highlight the tensions that arise when ethnicity, panethnicity, and racial identity are considered, particularly regarding who is marginalized and who is included under the term "Asian

American." As researchers addressed the role of other social identities in Asian Americans' experiences, further tensions with race, identity, and panethnicity have surfaced. I explore these tensions as I review literature about additional social identities and multiple identities.

Examinations of Other Social Identities

In addition to race and ethnicity, researchers have examined the role of other social identities in the experience of Asian Americans. In this section, I outline some of the scholarship that has focused on gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status among Asian Americans. Indeed, any research regarding these social identities in addition to race and ethnicity becomes a consideration of multiple identities and could serve as examples of the merits of using an intersectional approach.

Gender. A number of scholars have examined gender issues among Asian Americans. Chow (1987) traced the evolution of feminist consciousness among Asian American women. Given the value of filial piety and patriarchal family structures in many Asian cultures, Chow inferred that Asian American women found limited opportunities to develop their own gender consciousness and to connect with other Asian American women, other women of color, and White women. Some women activists involved in the Asian American movement in the 1960s and 1970s encountered sexism and were relegated to subservient roles under male leadership (Zia, 2000). Even though they recognized their marginalized position in the Asian American activist groups, "their ethnic pride and loyalty frequently kept them from public revolt" (Chow, 1987, p. 287). Meanwhile, choosing to affiliate with the

feminist movement was perceived as a threat to solidarity within the Asian American community. Those women who did get involved in feminist activism confronted race-based discrimination and lack of understanding from the majority White feminist groups. Asian American women experienced a clash between their gender and racial identities, often feeling as if they had to choose which oppression to address as activists first. Ultimately, Chow (1987) said that only those women with an awareness of their multiple oppressions "may develop a feminist consciousness that transcends gender, racial, class, and cultural boundaries" (p. 286).

Pyke and Johnson (2003) further examined the complex, interrelated nature of racial, ethnic, and gender identities in their study of 100 Korean American and Vietnamese American daughters of immigrants. In studying the assumptions these women held about femininity and how they performed gender, Pyke and Johnson (2003) observed that their participants "[did] not construct their gender in one cultural field but are constantly moving between sites that are guided by ethnic immigrant cultural norms and those of the Euro-centric mainstream" (p. 37). They found that these women juggled different cultural expectations as they moved from mainstream to ethnic-specific settings. Their participants felt that the patriarchal culture in Asian ethnic locales prompted gendered behavior that was artificial, while they described White mainstream locales as a more egalitarian environment that permitted their authentic and natural gender behavior. This led to the belief that gender equity was only achievable in the White-dominated world. At the same time, the participants also reported encountering racialized stereotypes in mainstream settings, such as being expected to be quiet or passive, which exerted pressure on Asian American

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women to conform to stereotypes or, conversely, to make efforts to disprove them. Meanwhile, not fulfilling racialized gender expectations in ethnic settings might then challenge one's ethnic identity; in this way, "conformity to stereotypes of Asian femininity [served] to symbolically construct and affirm an Asian ethnic identity" (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 48). Consequently, struggling with gender-related expectations resulted in a concurrent struggle with one's racial or ethnic identity:

> The question is not simply whether Asian American women ... want to be outspoken and career oriented or quiet and family oriented but whether they want to be American (white-washed) or Asian. Those who do not conform to racialized expectations risk challenges to their racial identity and charges that they are not really Asian. (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 49)

This article illuminated the consequences of the intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity for Asian American women as they sought to untangle the tensions among their racial, gender, and ethnic identities.

For Asian American men, negotiating gender was similarly fraught with choices that either confirmed racialized, hegemonic constructions of masculinity or cast themselves as non-masculine. Liu and Chang (2007) noted how race and gender were conflated for Asian American men, since American culture idealizes masculinities that are White, middle class, heterosexual, young, educated, fully employed, handsome, and athletic. Meanwhile, historically and throughout contemporary American culture, Asian American men have been depicted as feminized and emasculated (Liu, 2002). In order to claim masculinity for themselves,

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Asian American men were left having to navigate the difficult path of searching for alternative definitions of masculinity (Liu & Chang, 2007).

Iwamoto and Liu (2009) echoed this dilemma facing Asian American men, having to "either conform to the White male norm, or be typecast as having deviant forms [of] masculinity and not being what society considers a 'real man'" (p. 218). In a parallel to Pyke and Johnson's (2003) findings with gendered expectations for Asian American women, Iwamoto and Liu noted the intimate connection between culture and gender expectations for Asian American men who might take on aspects of hegemonic masculinity in order to counter the feminized images of Asian American men. They found masculine identities and racial identities to be inseparable. In order to address the intersections of masculinity and race, the authors proposed the term "Asianized attribution" to describe the "evaluation process in which attributes or characteristics of an Asian American man are racialized and negatively evaluated" (p. 222). With Asianized attribution, regardless of how strongly a man may identify with his race or ethnicity, any characteristics that could be perceived as patriarchal or overly traditional would be interpreted as being related to his Asian cultural heritage. In the end, Asian American men have to balance their multiple social identities, bicultural expectations, and internalized racism as they try to create a new version of masculinity for themselves.

Sexual orientation. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Asian Americans, the conflict between culture and sexual orientation or gender identity often has implications for both racial identity and sexual identity development. Asian American LGBT individuals may experience oppression related to their statuses as a

racial/ethnic minority and as a sexual minority, and yet feel rejected by both Asian American and LGBT communities (Chung & Singh, 2009; Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Ohnishi, Ibrahim, & Grzegorek, 2006). The nature of such conflicts may vary based on one's cultural background (e.g., role of religions of worldviews that view lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities negatively) and acculturation of the individual, with different results for coming out and identity management (Chung & Singh, 2009). For instance, LGBT Asian Americans who value collectivism may manage their identities differently depending on the given social context, such as choosing to be out among some friends, but not among family, while those who are more individualistic may be out to all family and friends (Chung & Singh, 2009). A collectivistic perspective may prompt an individual to consider how her/his identity expression may reflect on the family as a whole and possibly cause shame for her/himself and later generations (Ohnishi et al., 2006). In addition, being openly gay may be perceived as a rejection of expected family roles, such as having children to pass on the family name (C. S. Chan, 1993; Narui, 2011).

In her study of Asian American lesbians and gay men, C. S. Chan (1993) examined how they identified themselves and in which setting or community they felt the greatest sense of belonging. She found that some respondents identified more strongly with their Asian American identity and felt more belonging within the Asian American community, while others identified more strongly with their gay/lesbian identity and experienced more belonging within gay/lesbian circles, often due to perceptions of homophobia in the Asian American community and perceptions of racism in the lesbian-gay community. However, most respondents refused to choose,

indicating the desire for acceptance in terms of both their sexual identity and Asian American identity. Chan surmised that one's level of comfort in different circles and one's choice of how to identify reflected his/her identity development and could change depending on a given context. In addition, Chan found that both men and women in her study perceived that they had experienced more discrimination due to their status as double or triple minorities, given the intersections of their various social identities as such as race, sexual orientation, and gender.

Coming from a counseling perspective, Ohnishi, Ibrahim, and Grzegorek (2006) developed a framework for helping LGBT Asian American clients make sense of both their sexual identity development and racial identity development, as well as the intersections of their multiple identities. They noted some of the same cultural dynamics of collectivism and shame facing LGBT Asian Americans from their families and racial/ethnic communities as discussed by Chung and Singh (2009) and C. S. Chan (1993) as influences on identity development. Ohnishi, et al. (2006) also discussed how acculturation to mainstream American culture may lead to an over-idealization of White cultural norms and values, which could lead to a devaluation or denial of one's Asian cultural or ethnic identities. Their proposed Racial/Ethnic and Sexual Orientation Identification Chart (RSIC) created a grid with four categories based on a client's level of positive identification with Asian American and LGBT identities. The first category described those with a high positive identification with both identities, the second and third categories described those who positively identify with one identity and have low identification with the other identity, and the fourth category captured those who rejected identifying as either Asian American or

LGBT. The authors suggested that those in the first category would be the most psychologically healthy. Those in the second and third groups felt a sense of active connection around their chosen identity but might experience anxiety or distress related to hiding the other part of their identity, perhaps as a result of fear of rejection due to racism or homophobia. Those in the fourth group would experience isolation, alienation, and extreme distress. This approach to understanding racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation identity differs from that of Chung and Singh, who viewed the process more fluidly; to them, choosing to manage one's identities selectively based on context could be viewed as a coping strategy, not necessarily a sign of being unhealthy or developmentally immature.

Hahm and Adkins (2009) also sought to conceptualize the identity development process for LGBT Asian Americans with their proposed Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Sexual Minority Acculturation Model. Their model integrated four stages of sexual identity development with four acculturation strategies, eventually creating a continuum of sixteen identity possibilities that would reflect where an LGBT Asian American youth might be. They argued that combining cultural and sexual identity processes "accurately illustrates the experience of API sexual minorities' powerful social, cultural, and familial experiences which set them apart from mainstream GLBTs" (p. 158). In the first of four stages, Initiation, Asian American youth began the process of questioning their gender and sexuality within a bicultural context. During the Primacy phase, youth selected one community (related to either culture or sexuality) and began to find belonging around that identity. The third stage, Conflict, arose as the individual learned how to manage discrimination

from both the Asian American and LGBT communities. Not all individuals reached the final stage, Identity Synthesis, when youth reconciled their sexual, gender, and ethnic identities.

Narui (2011) used a poststructuralist theoretical perspective to analyze the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Asian and Asian American college students. The poststructuralist analysis of discourses revealed how Asian and Asian American college students made decisions about disclosing their sexual orientation in the context of different settings and relationships. Narui (2011) discovered how students navigated those decisions by examining the discursive norms and expectations related to sexual orientation in each context and making assessments of how coming out could "change the power dynamics within a particular environment and the relationships they had with the individuals they told" (p. 1222). The ongoing process of deciding with whom and how to share their sexual orientation allowed the participants to grow in confidence and understanding of themselves and their identities.

Religion. Limited research has been conducted regarding the role of religious or spiritual identity for Asian Americans, with the notable exception of studies of evangelical Christian Asian Americans. The intersections of race, ethnicity, religion, and spirituality have been underexamined in general and among Asian Americans in particular (J. J. Park & Dizon, 2017). J. J. Park and Dizon (2017) noted that ethnic identity and religious identity were closely aligned for Asian Americans, and that because religion was often practiced in race- or ethnic-specific communities,

"religious communities represent[ed] major sites for cultural preservation and reinvention among Asian American populations" (p. 41).

In his qualitative study of the meaning Asian Americans made of the term "Asian American," Jerry Park (2008) noticed that for some of his participants, the group label connoted religious identities such as Christian or Muslim, or a plurality of religions in general, some of which were associated with specific ethnicities. In one of the few studies of non-Christian religious identity development among a sample that included Asian Americans, Peek (2005) examined the role of religious identity in the lives of 127 Muslim Americans, the majority of whom (65) were of South Asian or Southeast Asian descent. In her study, she found that early in their lives, Muslim Americans identified with their religion to a similar extent as they did their ethnicity and race, that is, as an "ascribed identity" (p. 223), one that they did not choose or reflect on critically. Once they reached college, however, their religion became more salient than other social identities. In fact, as Peek's participants "learned more about Islam and drew closer to religion, they became more likely to reject or downplay other aspects of their identity" (p. 230), and distanced themselves from identifying with their ethnic backgrounds.

Research on Asian American Christians, however, has directly addressed the intersections of race, ethnicity, and religion. The proliferation of Asian American ethnic-specific Christian fellowship organizations on college campuses since the 1990s prompted questions about the value and role of these organizations in the development of members' racial, ethnic, and spiritual identities (Busto, 1996; R. Y. Kim, 2004). Busto (1996) was among the first scholars to call for a critical

examination of this phenomenon. Pointing out how these organizations mentioned targeting Asian Americans in their mission statements, "while simultaneously affirming a non-race-specific evangelical identity" (p. 138), he wondered if ethnicity-specific fellowships might serve as a particular refuge for Asian American evangelical Christian students. He postulated that such ethnicity-based faith organizations provided "safe havens against both racial antagonism and secular systems of thought" (p. 141) for students already at the margins on campuses due to their race and doubly stigmatized due to their strong faith orientation.

Within the extant research about Asian American Christians, a strong thread has emerged examining these dynamics among second-generation Korean Americans specifically. In her study of why second-generation Korean American college students chose ethnic-specific campus ministry groups, Rebecca Y. Kim (2004) identified three interactive processes that contributed to their choices. First, a desire for community might prompt a second-generation Korean American Christian to seek out a campus fellowship organization; the increases in ethnic density and diversity on many college campuses allowed for the creation and sustainability of separate, ethnic-specific organizations, such as those for Korean American Christian students. Second, homophily also influenced Korean American students' choice in campus ministry, meaning that they would usually choose to "associate with those who are most likely to share the experience of growing up and having intergenerational and intercultural conflicts with the first-generation in the United States" (p. 27). Interacting with homophily was the broader U.S. society's tendency to make categorizations based on ethnicity and race, whereby even those who might choose a

predominantly White campus ministry group were racialized and expected to participate in the ethnic-specific groups. The third interactional process occurred between desire for majority status and marginalization; participating in a separate ethnic-specific faith organization provided Korean Americans more opportunities to take on leadership positions than in other organizations. Indeed, for these students in R. Y. Kim's study, involvement in an ethnicity-specific Christian fellowship was mediated not only by internal, personal desires, but also by broader societal factors related to race and marginalization, where one's religious identity and wish to express that identity might clash with the forces of racialization.

In her ethnographic study of two Korean American churches in Chicago, Chong (1998) took a closer look at the dynamics within the ethnic church and the role it played in cultural reproduction and ethnic identity construction for second-generation Korean American Christians. She found evidence that substantiated Busto's (1996) proposition that such ethnicity-specific religious settings provided a refuge from marginalization based on participants' ethnicity and race (although she did not mention stigma from their faith). Further, the study noted that identity crises prompted by experiences with racism, prejudice, and race-based discrimination in young adulthood (such as in college and work experiences) served as catalysts for choosing to be involved in a Korean American church. In addition, such contexts also provided "positive social identity and group empowerment" (Chong, 1998, p. 262). Chong's participants reported social and cultural reasons (such as desire to connect with Korean culture and language, as well as a Korean American social network) more than religious reasons for seeking a Korean American church. She

observed that what was particularly notable about their responses was "the degree to which participation seem to be driven not only by a simple need for ethnic fellowship, but also by a powerful desire to preserve their ethnicity and culture, not only for themselves, but for posterity" (p. 267), that is, for their future children.

Chong (1998) also found that for second-generation Korean Americans, ethnic identity was related to the sharing and practice of a core set of traditional, Confucian-based Korean values, such as filial piety, respect for parents, importance of the family, and work ethic. The Korean American church then, became the prime arena for cultural reproduction and socialization regarding these values; the ways in which Korean traditional values intertwined with Christian values and ethics engendered the ethnic church as a potent arena for ethnic identity consciousness and group boundary. Chong's study findings also showed that the enmeshing of Korean traditional values and Christian values and "the underlying message ... that one 'must become Korean to become Christian'" (p. 275), however, led to conflicts between first- and second-generation church members, as those in the younger generation questioned the authoritarian decision-making structures of the church and struggled with the subordinated role of females. These conflicts in the church reflected second-generation Korean American Christians' inner struggle with their ethnic and religious identities.

Some Korean American Christians found a place to confront and work through identity struggles with one another through a heterogeneous religious setting. In her study of a multiethnic campus Christian organization, Julie J. Park (2009) described how she saw members of a Korean subgroup of the organization use the

space for dialogue about ethnicity. At the campus where her study was located, Asian Americans comprised the largest racial/ethnic group on campus, and Korean Americans had a choice of many ethnic-specific fellowships to join for faith-oriented affiliation. Focusing on a small group of Korean Americans within a larger, multiethnic campus fellowship, Park found that the setting provided a place to work through conflicts and disillusionment related to their Korean ethnic identity. She similarly saw how ethnic and religious identities were tightly intertwined for these students and how being involved in a Korean-specific small group within a multiethnic organization helped them face and process struggles they had with their ethnic identity. The multiethnic context illuminated issues that may have remained unnoticed in an ethnically homogeneous fellowship, and the ethnic-specific small group provided a space to address shared concerns.

Overall, the literature about Asian Americans and religion was unexpectedly rich with regards to those who identified as Christian, providing insights to the interconnections among faith, race, ethnicity, gender, generation status, and more. Ultimately, as a whole, the amount of research on the role of religion among a broad cross-section of Asian Americans across various faiths was very thin.

Ability, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status. Little research exists that examines the unique roles of other social identities among Asian Americans, such as ability, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status. In the only study I could identify that examined ability status among Asian Americans, Mereish (2012) found that AAPIs with learning, emotional, and physical disabilities experienced more instances of discrimination and poorer psychological and physical

health than AAPIs without reported disabilities. He commented on the novelty of his findings as being "the first to demonstrate the discrimination and health experiences of AAPIs with disabilities; they also underscore the interlocking oppressions associated with their intersectional identities" (p. 56).

Some researchers have suggested that socioeconomic class has been overlooked in Asian American studies and may be ripe for closer study. For instance, Chow (1987) noted the day-to-day burdens experienced by Asian American women to provide for their families' economic survival even as they struggled against gender and racial discrimination; in this position, they lacked the luxuries of time and perspective to consider their economic situation more critically: "they do not fully understand the dynamics of class position; and they are not likely to challenge the existing power structure" (p. 294). In her study of upper-middle class second-generation South Asian American women, Finn (2009) noticed that participants rarely brought up socioeconomic class specifically, although many of their topics (parents, education, careers, family, and neighborhood) were imbued with information about class. In her analysis, Finn found that class was an intersectional identity that was necessarily connected to gender, race, culture, and sexuality. For example, participants who felt that their peers considered them to be White due to their shared, upper-middle class status still experienced marginalization from being racialized. Socioeconomic privilege could not protect these women from the effects of racialized otherness.

Literature addressing immigrant generation status is particularly lacking. Although many scholars have focused on the experiences of second-generation Asian

Americans (e.g., Chong, 1998; Finn, 2009; Kibria, 1999; R. Y. Kim, 2004; J. Z. Park, 2008; Pyke & Johnson, 2003), they have usually only mentioned first-generation Asian immigrants as a point of reference rather than as an actual comparison group under study. Ibrahim, Ohnishi, and Sandhu (1997) took note of the gap in many racial identity models in considering the role of immigrant generation status as a variable. They hypothesized that immigrants would be culturally closer to their home culture than to the culture of their new country, while successive generations would gradually become more acculturated to the adopted country's mainstream culture. Also commenting on the focus on second-generation Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDAs) in extant research, J. Chan (2017) acknowledged the existence and unique experiences of 1.5-, third-, fourth- and fifth-generation APIDAs: "How APIDA identities are constructed for each of these different generations likely varies, given their distinct experiences with immigration and acculturation to U.S. society" (p. 13). Beyond such speculation, the interplay of immigrant generation status with racial identity for Asian Americans remained unclear.

Consideration of social identities such as gender, sexual orientation, and religion necessarily gives rise to tensions with racial identity negotiations for Asian Americans. Researchers have revealed how making meaning of these social identities often provokes questions related to race and ethnicity and how race and ethnicity complicate the processes of understanding oneself in terms of gender, sexuality, and religion. At the same time, however, the way other social identities, such as ability, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status, interact with race and

ethnicity is relatively unknown. Exploration of different patterns of intersections continues in research explicitly focused on multiple identities.

Considering Multiple Identities

As researchers have continued to explore the development of social identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, other scholars have delved into the dynamics of multiple social identities and their relation to identity development. Reynolds and Pope (1991) illuminated the process of identity resolution for individuals who identified with multiple oppressed social groups. Their Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM) outlined four possible ways in which those individuals could choose to identify: (a) identify with one aspect of identity by passively accepting society's or another reference group's (family or community) determination of what is primary, (b) identify with one aspect of identity by actively choosing one's self-identification, (c) identify with multiple aspects of identity in a segmented fashion, or (d) identify based on integrating the intersections of multiple aspects of identity. The authors placed no value judgment on these four identification options, noting that movement among the options was fluid based on personal needs or context.

Expanding on the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991), Jones and McEwen (2000) examined multiple social identities more broadly. As an outgrowth of a grounded theory study of women college students (Jones, 1997), Jones and McEwen {, 2000 #11} proposed the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) as a way to conceptualize the dynamics of multiple aspects of social identity. A core sense of self based on personal characteristics lay at the center; social identities such

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as race, gender, and religion revolved around the core in elliptical orbits. The MMDI was designed to be fluid and dynamic, providing a snapshot in time of how an individual made sense of her identity in a given context, with a given identity dimension's proximity to the core indicating that identity's salience.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) added complexity to the MMDI by applying a lens of cognitive-developmental theory. With the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, the authors posited how context, meaning-making capacity, and perceptions of identity interacted with one another. Meaning-making capacity was illustrated by a filter; its thickness and permeability portrayed how complexly an individual could make meaning of the external context. The meanings made of context in turn influenced one's perceptions of identity.

One of the few writers who set out to consider multiple identities as a whole among Asian Americans is Grace Chen (2005, 2009), who conducted her dissertation research on how Asian Americans managed their multiple social identities. Specifically, she examined the saliency of different aspects of social identity, the prevalence of different combinations of salient identities, conflicts among social identities and how participants managed them, and the influence of societal views on participants' self-identification. Using Reynolds and Pope's (1991) Multidimensional Identity Model as a framework, 287 participants representing 16 Asian ethnicities completed the Social Group Identification Scale, which was developed for this study. Chen (2005) found that ethnicity, gender, and race were the most salient aspects of identity and religion the least salient among participants. Via cluster analysis, she discovered that the most common combination of multiple aspects of identity was

those who rated ethnicity, gender, race, and religion high, sexual orientation medium-high, and age and socioeconomic status medium; this cluster comprised more than 40% of the sample.

Although almost two-thirds of the participants in Chen's (2005) study reported not experiencing conflict within themselves regarding social identities, those who identified strongly with many social identities reported experiencing more conflict than those who identified less strongly with social identities. The most frequent conflicts between identities were those between gender and another identity or sexual orientation and another identity. These conflicts reflected struggles with stereotypes associated with that identity or with opposing value systems of different groups related to those identities. Based on responses to open-ended questions, participants shared that the social environment, an internal sense of identity, and common experiences and shared background with members of the same social group influenced their level of identification with certain social identities. Some of those influences interacted for some individuals, where both societal views of an identity and one's personal meaning attributed to an identity contributed to their identity definition. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Jones, Kim, and Skendall (2012) regarding the way social context can "push" a social identity into salience or one might "pull" an aspect of identity closer for personal meaning making, sometimes in response to the push of social context.

Based on theories and extant literature about multiple identities, Chen (2009) described three different ways individuals may choose to manage their multiple identities and illustrated how Asian Americans utilized those approaches. First,

individuals may focus on a single social identity due to that identity's fundamental salience to one's overall sense of self. Another approach may be to compartmentalize multiple identities into separate categories or to place them in a hierarchy, often as a way to mediate conflicts between social identities. The third way an individual might manage his/her multiple identities would be to integrate his/her most salient identities into an overall self-concept with consideration of how those identities overlap and intersect. Alternatively, though, some may choose not to focus on social identities at all and instead build their sense of self around their personal identity.

Chen's (2005, 2009) work echoed some of the similar issues related to identity examined by other authors who focused on race or ethnicity and one other social identity, but was particularly valuable for its focus on multiple identities and how Asian Americans managed and made meaning of them overall. The open responses from Chen's (2005) study began to illuminate the dynamic nature of managing multiple social identities. Given within the context of a written survey, the responses may have lacked a broader context that could have been investigated through interviews, which points toward the potential for deeper understanding of these dynamics via in-depth qualitative inquiry. In fact, Chen (2005) suggested that a constructivist narrative approach to understanding multiple social identities, rather than a developmental stage approach, could accommodate a more complex, fluid, and integrated understanding of multiple identities.

Altogether, the existing literature on Asian American identity development has shed light on how Asian Americans make meaning of their social identities. However, examinations of social identities as single entities overlook their

interrelated natures, and research on how Asian Americans experience multiple

identities is nascent. Exploring social identities holistically while being attentive to

their intersections would more fully reflect the lived experience of those identities.

Further, although several of the traditional, stage-based explorations of identity

development acknowledged the existence of contextual influences related to

oppression, their primary focus on individual experiences left systems of inequality

out of view (Abes, 2016). Contemporary approaches to identity development,

informed by critical and poststructural paradigms, critique the systems of oppression

that shape identity, with the intention of dismantling those power structures (Abes,

2016; Jones & Stewart, 2016). In this study, I used the critical perspective of

intersectionality as a theoretical framework for understanding how Asian American

college students make meaning of their race in connection with other social identities.

In the final section of this chapter, I provide an overview of intersectionality, describe

implications of intersectionality on identity development and student development

theory, and outline the contributions of framing my study with intersectionality.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminist scholarship and brought the

dynamics of multiple social identities into view. Its particular value lies in its ability

to serve as a heuristic for understanding the interplay of multiple social identities in

conjunction with the sociohistorical context of power and privilege (Collins, 2007;

Shields, 2008). Specifically, intersectional analyses shed light on how dimensions of

identity mutually constitute one another and how different kinds of power create and

perpetuate oppression of multiple identity dimensions simultaneously (Dill &

Zambrana, 2009). In one of the original works about intersectionality, Crenshaw

(1991) examined violence against women with an intersectional lens to demonstrate

how race and gender interacted together to marginalize women of color. She

highlighted how intersectionality uniquely could address what she saw as the

"problem of identity politics … not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics

charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup

differences" (p. 1242). Indeed, by acknowledging that "no single identity category …

satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to

by others" (Shields, p. 304), intersectionality reflects the reality of lived experience.

The Intersectional Study of Identity

Intersectionality can be an appropriate and powerful lens for the study of

identity. Shields (2008) noted that individuals engage actively in the process of

forming, maintaining, and practicing their interconnected identities. As a result,

identities must be studied in relation to one another, for "the facts of intersectionality

at the individual, interpersonal, and structural level compel us to" (p. 307). Purdie-

Vaughns and Eibach (2008) coined the concept of "intersectional invisibility," which

outlined how systems of seeing the world based on single identity categories, such as

androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism, shaped the lived experience of

those with multiple identities and rendered such individuals invisible by dominant

groups and society as a whole. The work of Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach connected to

Crenshaw's (1991) comment that "when the practices expound identity as woman or

person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of

68

color to a location that resists telling" (p. 1242). In response, intersectionality helped promote the telling of that location, making the invisible visible.

Collins (2009) did note the tension between the potential contribution and limitation of intersectionality to the study of identity:

> In recent years, intersectional analyses have far too often turned inward, to the level of personal identity narratives, in part, because intersectionality can be grasped far more easily when constructing one's own autobiography. This stress on identity narratives, especially individual identity narratives, does provide an important contribution to fleshing out our understandings of how people experience and construct identities within intersecting systems of power. Yet this turning inward also reflects the shift within American society away from social structural analyses of social problems … (p. ix)

Identity narratives can be rich in providing insight into lived experiences within a context shaped by inequality and power, but without a consideration of the macro societal structures, such a study would fall short of a strong intersectional analysis. Such an analysis demands "connecting individuals to groups; groups to society; and individuals, groups, and society—all in connection to structures of power" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 141). Jones and Abes (2013) elaborated further on this tension when studying identity narratives with an intersectional lens: "Structures of power and oppression are entangled with lived experience, so although intersectionality enables us to say something about individual narratives, the analysis must not stop with the individual" (p. 142).

Intersectionality in Student Development Literature

Recent scholarship in student affairs has begun to examine the implications of intersectionality as a theoretical framework on traditional understandings of identity and student development. Part of the "third wave" of student development theory's evolution, intersectionality highlights the systems of oppression, privilege, and power, locating analyses beyond the individual (Jones & Stewart, 2016). In their book about theoretical perspectives on the identity development of college students, Jones and Abes (2013) included intersectionality as one of the emergent critical frameworks with implications for the study of multiple identities. In an autoethnographic study of multiple identities, Jones' (2009) use of an intersectional lens illuminated new possible understandings of identity negotiation and student development, particularly related to self-authorship. She found that for those with visible marginalized identities (such as those related to race or gender), external contexts strongly influenced self-definition. In her study, "an intersectional analysis of identity and the self-authoring process exposed complexities not typically accounted for in the self-authorship literature" (p. 300) and revealed how privilege and oppression shaped the identity construction process.

Drawing upon the same autoethnographic study of multiple identities, Jones, Kim, and Skendall (2012) extended Jones' (2009) intersectional analysis and came upon a finding regarding the troubling nature of authenticity in the process of self-definition and identity expression and management. The use of intersectionality as an analytic framework allowed them to uncover the interlocking dynamics of power structures and identity negotiation. In addition, the analysis highlighted the role of

context in "pushing" some social identities and their intersections into salience, while at other times prompting individuals to "pull" some aspects of identity closer in an almost self-protective or self-preserving manner as they tried to make meaning of social structures of power and privilege.

In addition to Jones and her colleagues, other student development scholars have begun using intersectionality in their work. Abes (2012) and Wijeyesinghe (2012) applied intersectional lenses to advance theory and understanding related to lesbian identity development and multiracial identity development, respectively. Regarding the study of multiple identities among college students, Jones and Abes (2013) once again revisited the MMDI and their reconceptualized version of the model (RMMDI), this time with an intersectional perspective. They acknowledged that the MMDI and RMMDI did not represent intersecting social identities and the sites of intersections well, although the models do show that the intersections exist. In response, they proposed the Intersectional MMDI (I-MMDI), which incorporated the macro level of analysis of social structures of power along with the micro level of analysis of the individual. Already, intersectionality has allowed student development theorists to add complexity to their approaches to identity, indicating its potential as a framework for my study. Ultimately, I hope that this research project promotes social justice and social change by fostering a complex and multidimensional understanding of the experiences and identities of Asian American college students and by pointing out opportunities for student affairs and higher education administrators to create institutions that encourage identity

development and expression for all individuals. Descriptions of the use of an intersectionality lens in the design of the study are provided in the next chapter.

Summary

In this chapter I grounded my proposed study in the existing literature about identity development with Asian Americans, with a focus on racial identity. After introducing the roots of identity and social identity research, I highlighted the interrelated nature of race, ethnicity, and panethnicity for Asian Americans to provide context for the literature review. I found that current approaches to identity development have begun to reveal some of the complexity of racial identity for Asian Americans, yet are limited in capturing the nuances of race, ethnicity, and panethnicity fully. My review showed how research on gender, sexual orientation, and religion has further illuminated the interwoven and dynamic nature of racial identity negotiations among Asian Americans; at the same time, my assessment of extant research found a lack of literature about ability, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status. More recent efforts to examine the experience of multiple identities among Asian Americans have started painting a picture of holistic identity development for this group, while also indicating how a constructivist narrative approach could promote a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the process. I concluded the chapter with an overview of intersectionality. Applying an intersectional analysis allowed me to examine the social location of Asian American college students and their multiple identities and to advance the telling of their stories to counter the predominant stories, such as the yellow peril and model minority constructs, found in American racial discourse. The next chapter outlines the

methodology and methods I used to elicit, analyze, and share these stories about race

and identity.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the role and salience of race to Asian American college students' identities and to explore the intersections of race with other social identities. The following three research questions, informed by Abes's (2003) approach to studying multiple identities of lesbian college students, guided this study:

1. How do Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

2. In what ways, if any, do their other social identities, such as gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status, interact with the way Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

3. How do Asian American college students experience the intersections of their multiple social identities?

The following section outlines the design of the study, including the epistemological perspective in which I have grounded the study, methodology, the application of a theoretical framework, and methods for data collection, analysis, and goodness. I then reflect on my positionality as a researcher, discuss ethical considerations for the study, and review the study's limitations.

Epistemology

My approach to this study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm. Since this paradigm indicates "that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is 'right' or more 'real' than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed

separately" (Glesne, 2006, p. 7), constructivism was an appropriate lens for studying how students make meaning of various aspects of their identity. Constructivism also was fitting because I examined and represented students' stories related to race, other social identities, and their intersections via narrative inquiry; as Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) noted, "Constructivism seeks to understand individual social action through interpretation or translation. … The aim is to understand aspects of human activity from the perspective of those who experience it" (p. 18). Charmaz (2000) further elaborated, "Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings" (p. 510). In this way, constructivism acknowledged the interaction between participant and researcher in understanding experience. Furthermore, constructivism's value of participants' voices and meanings allowed me to place the participants' stories at the center of inquiry as I sought to understand the meanings Asian American students made of their racial identity and other social identities. I do not believe that an objective reality of Asian American students' experiences can be known, as social and cultural contexts richly influence the way they live their lives.

Methodology

In order to examine how Asian American students made meaning of their identity, I used narrative inquiry. Researchers have defined narrative variously, from overly broad approaches to the very restrictive (Riessman, 1993). At their most fundamental level, narratives present a way of understanding and representing human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990)

noted, "the study of narrative ... is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Human experience refers not only to events in a life story, but also to the thoughts, feelings, and meanings related to them (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 1993). Simultaneously, narrative is "both phenomenon and method" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Why Narrative?

I found the choice of narrative inquiry to be appropriate for a study about identity situated within social contexts for several reasons. I agreed with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that narrative inquiry was the most fitting way to understand human experience: "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p. 18). Indeed, through this narrative thinking process of creating and telling stories, people find meaning and coherence in their lives, and thereby, construct and claim who they are (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Riessman (1993) noted that narrative was particularly apt for studies of subjectivity and identity. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) described the intertwined nature of individuals' stories and identities further:

> [S]tories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world; at the same time, however, they shape and construct the narrator's personality and reality. The story is one's identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell. (p. 7)

The careful study of such life stories provides a key channel toward uncovering and understanding identity (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Hallmarks of Narrative Inquiry

Although wide-ranging approaches to narrative inquiry exist, six features emerged from the literature as hallmarks of this methodology: telling a holistic and particular story, subjectivity, the researcher-participant relationship, social context, temporality, and the consideration of form and content. Although researchers have not agreed about a precise definition of narrative (Riessman, 1993), I noted these six features as consistent themes across various approaches.

Telling a holistic and particular story. First, narrative is characterized by its aim to portray a holistic story, with attention paid to particularity. Webster and Mertova (2007) indicated that narrative seeks to "capture the 'whole story,'" including the "important 'intervening' stages" of experience and growing understanding that other research methods tend to overlook (p. 3). The whole story includes actions, events, and characters and the narrator's efforts to organize these elements and to find the unifying threads of consequences and connections over time (Chase, 2005; Webster & Mertova, 2007). As Chase (2005) wrote, "Narrative is retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience" (p. 656). The overarching "sense of the whole" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7) should direct the writing and reading of narrative. In telling the holistic story, narrative researchers are also concerned with the particularity, that is, specific details of stories and uniqueness of voice of the narrator (Chase, 2005; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 1993). Imagining and reconstructing the particular features of a scene

provide avenues for the listener/reader to connect with the story with a sense of authenticity. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) wrote, "It is the particular and not the general that triggers emotion" (p. 8). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) noted the "power of the particular for understanding experience and using findings from research to inform themselves in specific places at specific times" (p. 24) in narrative research.

(Inter)Subjectivity. Narrative inquiry is premised upon the notion of subjectivity, that the experience of living and making meaning of life cannot be known or conveyed objectively. Webster and Mertova (2007) observed: "Narrative is not an objective reconstruction of life—it is a rendition of how life is perceived. As such, it is based on the respondent's life experiences and entails chosen parts of their lives" (p. 3). Analysis of narrative, thus, permits the "systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (Riessman, 1993, p. 70). The subjectivity of a narrative is what makes a story worth telling (Chase, 2005) – a narrative conveys the teller's specific point of view, communicating not only the sequence of events, but also the emotions, thoughts, and interpretations that are connected with the events.

In narrative inquiry, both the narrator and the researcher are the subjects, and their complex interaction yields an intersubjectivity that is key to narrative research. Chase (2005) described the value of using a narrative strategy in analysis that highlights this intersubjectivity so that researchers "examine *their* voices—their subject positions, social locations, interpretations, and personal experiences—through the refracted medium of narrators' voices" (p. 666). Although the voices and stories

of participants ought to remain in the forefront, the experiences of the researcher and the interplay of both subjective viewpoints are inescapable elements in the creation of the research narrative: "We learned that we, too, needed to tell our stories. ... And in our story telling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled [sic] *collaborative stories*" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12).

Researcher-participant relationship. Underpinning the notion of intersubjectivity is the researcher-participant relationship; this interpersonal dynamic lies at the heart of narrative inquiry. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is a collaborative journey of shared storytelling and restorying throughout the research process. In a way, both the story and the relationship are ongoing constructions and negotiations between both parties. The researcher should take the lead with shaping the relationship so that both stories are heard (Connelly & Clandinin). Chase (2005) asserted that narrative inquiry necessitates "transforming the interviewer-interviewee relationship into one of narrator and listener" (p. 660). In making this transformation, both individuals are understood to be rooted in specific, subjective histories, perspectives, and contexts; both will learn and grow as a result of the research process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In Larson's (1997) view, dialogue opens up the researcher-participant relationship, allowing subjective realities to emerge, different existences to be bridged, and meaning to be constructed:

> Dialogue makes understanding the life world and lived realities of others possible. When researchers share their ways of seeing, understanding, and interpreting life events with story-givers, they surface the fissures between

their own life worlds and those of the people they portray. Disparities between

the meaning that researchers make of the lives of others and the meaning that

story-givers make of their own lives become points of entry into

understanding human experience. ... By failing to engage in deliberative

dialogue and inquiry, researchers put themselves at greater risk of not seeing,

not understanding, and misinterpreting people whose lives and life

experiences differ from their own. (p. 459)

Conceptualizing the research relationship in this fashion has implications for data collection and analysis. In thinking about collecting data, researchers must shift away from thinking of interviews as an interchange of questions and answers and toward thinking of them as channels for interviewees' stories and voices (Chase, 2005). The narrative researcher's job, then, becomes to "invite interviewees to become narrators, that is, to tell stories about biographical particulars that are meaningful to them" (p. 661) by framing the interview with a broad overall question and being attentive to the particulars of the narrator's stories and voice during the interview.

The active narrator-listener relationship continues into the interpretation and analysis phase. Chase (2005) recommended extending the relationship after the interviews by first listening to the voices within each narrative before trying to identify themes across them. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) grounded the relationship between the narrator and listener within a study's broader framework, noting that narrative inquiry necessitates dialogical listening to three voices: the voice of the narrator, the theoretical approach for the study (which provides the conceptual

structure for interpretation), and "a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material" (p. 10) on the part of the listener. The act of listening or reading is an interactive process that requires attentiveness and sensitivity to the narrator's voice and intentions.

The researcher-participant relationship provides the foundation for narrative inquiry. It can even frame ethical issues in research by considering those questions as relational responsibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ultimately, to use narrative inquiry appropriately as a methodology and phenomenon of interest, researchers "must come to embrace a relational understanding of the roles and interactions of the researcher and the researched" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 15).

Importance of social context. At the same time that narratives are situated within specific, subjective perspectives, they are also placed within particular social and cultural contexts. Larson (1997) wrote that since "[a]ll coherent life portraits are portraits of personal identity ... personal narratives must be understood within particular social, historical, cultural, and political moments" (p. 467). Atkinson and Delamont (2006) observed that ignoring the social and cultural contexts, including relevant narrative conventions, has been a shortcoming of narrative research in the past. In fact, because both researcher and participant are products of "systems of gender, race, and class and are lived out in particular temporal, social, and cultural moments" (Larson, 1997, p. 459), both parties must explicate and unpack these contexts through dialogue. By acknowledging and analyzing the influence of context,

narrative research could have richer and more powerful possible implications for exploring complex social problems (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Temporality. People's stories are situated within contexts defined in part by temporality, by both the time of the events in the story and the time of the telling. In other words, the time at which an event occurred is an important part of the context for understanding a story about it, but one must also take into account the time at which the story is told. Often, with the passage of time, individuals may change their perspective on an event, reconsider what happened, and/or revise the meaning they make of it. People are ever engaged in the ongoing living, telling, and meaning making of their lives, such that their lives are "an ongoing experiential text" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). Thus, the way individuals reflect upon, make meaning of, and tell others about their lives shifts. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described the difficulty that arises from the interplay of temporality and subjectivity: "... a life is also a matter of growth toward an imagined future and, therefore, involves retelling stories and attempts at reliving stories. A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (p. 4). Narrative researchers must engage with the task of noting and making meaning of stories as they have been lived and relived.

Form + content. In narrative research, the focus of study simultaneously lies in both the content of the stories told, as well as the form the stories take. With narratives, people assemble different parts of experience to craft a story with an ordered sequence of events and sense of meaning; that sense of meaning is conveyed through what the story tells and how it was told:

The methodological approach [of narrative] examines the informant's story

and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it

draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity. Analysis in

narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply

the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told *that*

way? (Riessman, 1993, p. 2)

As Webster and Mertova (2007) asserted, this kind of inquiry "requires going

beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, to an analytic examination of the

underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates" (p. 4). Riessman

(1993) noted that language serves three distinct but interrelated functions to convey

meaning: (a) ideational, which concerns the content of what is said; (b) interpersonal,

which refers to the role relationships between the narrator and listener; and (c)

textual, which regards the semantic and syntactic structure of the text. In her view,

narrative analysis provides ways to examine meaning at all three levels of linguistic

function.

Although the language and shape of a story matter in understanding its

meaning, narrative researchers have noted the limitations of words. Larson (1997)

reflected upon her experience serving as a participant in a narrative study, and after

reading transcripts of her stories, she realized that she had unintentionally left out

many stories or had smoothed away the rough edges of ambivalence and ambiguity in

the telling: "In reading my story, I saw how this text sealed many of life's confusing

splits and cracks" (p. 460). To be sure, the process of recalling and making meaning

of life experience can be challenging, and language may alternately serve to reveal or

conceal that tension. Riessman (1993) acknowledged this tension, but returned to the

need to rely on the stories as they were told: "In the telling, there is an inevitable gap

between the experience as I lived it and any communication about it. ... Yet, without

words, the sounds, movements and images of [my] experience cease to exist" (pp. 10-

11).

The Three-dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed a framework that takes into account

many of the hallmarks noted above. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space

provides a multidimensional approach to understanding and analyzing narrative that

"allows inquiry to travel" (p. 49) in three directions: inward/outward (which captures

the personal and social in all interactions), backward/forward (which attends to

continuity or temporality), and within a specific place or situation. The authors

asserted that this three-dimensional space could define any narrative endeavor:

"studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the

personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in

specific places or sequences of places" (p. 50). The personal and social dimension

attends to the subjectivity inherent in narrative inquiry, as well as to the mutual and

dialogic nature of the researcher-participant relationship. The dimension related to

time acknowledges the temporal aspects of living and telling stories of living. The

dimension of place provides for the solicitation and integration of particular details

that can give stories meaning and power.

The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space can also inform other parts of

the research process. The narrative researcher can use the terms of the three

dimensions to guide data collection and analysis in order to highlight key questions of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The framework can also be applied to keep the subjective contexts and voices of the researcher and participant simultaneously in view. Narrative inquirers should attend to the specific details of place, shifts in time, and changes in personal and social observations for both themselves and their participants. By doing so, researchers can create "accounts that uncover and reveal such questions of meaning, value, and integrity" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 21) that would address issues of trustworthiness in their studies.

Given its focus on lived experience, subjective realities, and social context, narrative inquiry provides an especially powerful way of examining identity construction and meaning making. Narrative inquiry allowed me to engage in hearing, interpreting, and re-telling the holistic and particular stories of Asian American college students while examining how my own story refracts and interacts with their stories. In the next section, I describe how I examined the social structures that have helped shape our stories through the use of intersectionality as a theoretical framework.

Applying Intersectionality as a Theoretical Framework

According to Dill and Zambrana (2009), four foundational theoretical interventions characterize intersectional analyses: (a) starting from the lived experiences of people of color and marginalized groups, (b) delving into the complexities of individual and group identity to avoid essentialization, (c) uncovering how domains of power interconnect and maintain oppression and inequality, and (d) connecting research to practice in order to promote social justice and social change.

These four theoretical interventions helped frame my proposed study. My research

questions focused on the lived experiences of Asian American college students in

relation to race and other social identities. Using narrative inquiry methodology, I put

the participants' voices and constructions of their lived experiences in the forefront. I

contended that the unique position that Asian Americans occupy in U.S. racial

dynamics and the relative invisibility of their position in U.S. racial discourse make a

study of Asian American identity particularly rich and important as a way of

examining social structures that have created and perpetuate this position. An

intersectional analysis yields particular value in understanding the process of racial

identity development, as Wijeyesinghe and Jackson (2012) noted:

> Viewed from an intersectional perspective, racial identity is seen as complex
>
> and holistic, influenced by specific historical and social contexts, and framed
>
> by the dynamics of social power and privilege. … Therefore, we see
>
> analyzing racial identity development and Intersectionality together as
>
> yielding reciprocal benefits that each discipline can build upon in the future.
>
> (pp. 3-4)

Using intersectionality as a lens allowed me to reveal how linked systems of

power have shaped the process of identity development and the negotiation of

multiple identities for the participants. I examined how individual Asian American

college students make meaning of their racial identity along with other social

identities by looking at their particular stories; at the same time, I looked for a larger

story about the experience of Asian American college students, while keeping the

particulars of individual narratives in mind. In doing so, I integrated a consideration

of the influence of sociohistorical factors and interlocking social systems of power that shape the participants' narratives. As Bowleg (2008) and Abes (2012) each suggested, in making meaning of participants' intersections of their social identities, I overlaid the macro analysis with the individual narratives. Bowleg wrote, "The interpretive task for the intersectionality analyst is to make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality, even when participants do not express the connections" (p. 322).

Methods

Collectively, my choices regarding epistemology, methodology, and theoretical framework guided the steps for conducting the study. In this section, I describe the methods related to participant selection, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness I used. By employing these procedures, I was able to portray rich narratives of how Asian American college students make meaning of their racial identity, other social identities, and the intersections between these identities.

Participant Selection

For this study, I sought participants who were current undergraduate Asian American students at the University of Maryland who would be able to serve as "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 242). Using an intensity sampling approach, I worked with student affairs and academic affairs administrators as key informants to identify participants by asking them to think of Asian American undergraduate students whom they knew to have spent some time reflecting on their race, ethnicity, or other social identities and to ask those students to contact me. These were the criteria I used to identify individuals who could "purposefully inform

an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study"

(Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Given my explicit focus on race, I sought out a few key

informants specifically due to their close connection to the campus's Asian American

undergraduate population, such as staff working with Asian Pacific American Student

Involvement and faculty and staff from the Asian American Studies Program. I

enlisted other university staff and faculty members across campus who engaged with

Asian American undergraduate students around issues related to race and social

identities. The invitation email to key informants can be found in Appendix A. I also

asked key informants who managed student Listservs to share an announcement

about my study (Appendix B). As participants were identified, I also used snowball

sampling and asked them to suggest additional participants in order to reach coverage

and saturation (Patton, 2002).

Once I received emails from interested students, I sent them an invitation to

participate (Appendix C) that explained the purpose of the research, along with a link

to a participant interest form requesting contact information, demographic

information, and a questionnaire. The participant interest form (Appendix D) was in

the format of an online form created via Google Forms. The items in the

questionnaire asked participants to describe themselves in terms of race, ethnicity,

gender or gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, ability status,

socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status. I also asked participants about

how important race was to how they saw themselves and about their participation in

organizations, programs, or academic coursework related to their race, ethnicity, or

other social identities.

No set rules for sample size exist in qualitative inquiry. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended sampling to the point of redundancy as ideal, such a strategy is usually unrealistic in practice. According to Patton (2002), "Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). The meaningfulness of findings in qualitative research relies more on the information richness of the cases and the researcher's skills with collecting and analyzing data than on the number of participants (Patton, 2002). I followed Patton's suggestion to identify a minimum number of participants based on my expectations of reasonable coverage. Because I aimed to gain a depth of understanding of how individuals made meaning of their racial identities and other social identities rather than breadth, I sought to identify a smaller number of participants.

I received 22 responses to the participant interest form. In order to find information-rich cases, a key criterion was the apparent salience of race to their identity, as demonstrated by their response to "How important is race in terms of how you see yourself as a person?" and the description of their participation in activities or coursework related to their race, ethnicity, and other social identities. As I reviewed responses, I sought participants who described a strong identification with being Asian American and a pattern of involvement with activities and/or academic courses that indicated reflection and engagement with their identities. Based on that review, I invited six students to participate in the study. After initial communication about scheduling, one student did not reply to confirm an interview time and did not

participate in the study. After completing the first interview, one participant did not reply to multiple emails from me to schedule a second interview and give feedback on the first transcript; because I was unable to complete data collection in order to generate a narrative, I excluded data from that participant from the study. I proceeded with four participants.

Given the differences of experiences among ethnic group as described in Chapters 1 and 2, including the way race has been constructed for Asian Americans historically, I was guided by maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to select participants who identified from a diversity of Asian American ethnic backgrounds. I also sought diversity among participants along other social identity dimensions to have a sample that was inclusive of different kinds of Asian American identities and experiences. Despite my outreach efforts, responses to the participant interest form were predominated by students from East Asian (specifically Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese) backgrounds. Two students who described having Southeast Asian heritage and one who identified as Indian did not appear to meet the criterion of strong identification with being Asian American. No Filipino American students responded to the interest form.

The four students who participated in the study described the strong salience of identifying as Asian American to the way they saw themselves and were actively involved in activities related to race, ethnicity, and other identities. Three reported participating in courses offered by Asian American studies; the fourth had taken a women's studies course. The participants identified ethnically as Korean, Chinese Taiwanese, and Japanese. Two participants also identified as multiracial. Two

identified as cisgender men, and two identified as cisgender women. Three of the

four identified as gay, queer, or pansexual. In terms of immigrant generation status,

one participant was an immigrant (i.e., first generation), two were children of

immigrants (second generation), and one was a third-generation Asian American.

Details of participants' backgrounds and their salient identities are described further

in their individual narratives in Chapter 4.

Access and Rapport

Using gatekeepers allowed me to gain access to participants and build rapport

that helped participants' development investment in the study. Gatekeepers asked

students they felt would be appropriate for my study to contact me directly. In the

invitation to students who were referred by gatekeepers, I introduced myself,

described the purpose of the study and my interest in the topic, and asked the students

for their participation.

For the students selected to be participants, I began our first interview by

explaining the study and my interest in the topic. I eased participants into

conversation further by starting the first interview with questions about their overall

experience in college. I began building rapport further by asking them to write and

share more about themselves through an "I am" poem. After giving them a few

minutes to write, I read my "I am" poem to them, and then asked participants to share

their poems with me; by reading our poems aloud to each other, we introduced

ourselves to each other through the lenses of what we found most salient about

ourselves, while also setting the tone for a mutual and dialogic relationship. The

purpose of this process was to cultivate trust and rapport with participants before

delving into questions about race, ethnicity, and identity. The protocol for the first

interview, including instructions for the "I am" poem, is available in Appendix E.

Data Collection

In most narrative inquiry studies, data consist of field texts generated from

various sources (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field texts could include interviews

and transcripts, field notes, journals, letters, and more. Field texts allow the

researcher to move back and forth between being fully immersed in the story of

participants and being able to observe the story from a distance. These data serve to

"help fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the

reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory

alone is likely to construct" (p. 83). In general, field texts are intended to be more

descriptive than reflective.

Although I collected demographic information about the participants from the

initial questionnaire, my primary sources of data were semi-structured interviews.

Chase (2005) noted that a central task of narrative researchers is to invite stories, and

that doing so involves "framing the interview as a whole with a broad question about

whatever story the narrator has to tell about the issue at hand" (p. 661). For each of

the two interviews, I had a broad question or topic that served as a way to frame the

conversation (Appendices E and F). I followed the additional recommendations of

Riessman (1993) and created a list of seven to ten broad questions that were primarily

open-ended, with additional probe questions to stimulate further storytelling. In

doing so, I paid attention to creating the space necessary for both the narrator and

listener to "develop meaning together" (p. 55) during the interview, as well as "orient

[myself] to the particularity of the narrator's story and voice" (Chase, 2005, p. 661).

Creating this kind of space left room for the narrator to tell the story she or he had to

tell and for me to follow where the story went, especially since "narratives emerge

when you least expect them" (Riessman, 1993, p. 56). I also sought to create a

dialogical process during data collection, as suggested by Larson (1997), in order to

gain a richer understanding of the narrators' stories. By engaging in dialogue with

participants, I sought to elicit a version of their story that felt right and true to them;

Larson (1997) recalled that "by bringing the complexities and confusions of these

stories to words, I felt I could reveal a more complicated, but far more meaningful

and personally authentic story" (p. 461).

I planned to interview each participant two times. In the first interview, my

guiding, broad question was to understand how the participant understood his/her

own racial and ethnic identities (Appendix E). I began with reviewing the consent

form, explaining the purpose of the study, assuring participants of confidentiality, and

briefly addressing my interest in the topic before delving into the interview questions.

As part of assuring confidentiality, I asked participants to select pseudonyms for

themselves and other people mentioned during the interviews use in the study. I used

a protocol so that the same topics were addressed with each participant, but the

protocol was flexible so that participants were able to speak freely. In the second

interview, I focused on other social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation,

religion, ability, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status (Appendix F).

In addition, in order to examine the intersections of multiple identities explicitly,

during the second interviews I asked participants to share an experience with me of a time when two or more of their social identities intersected with one another.

For three of the four participants, I conducted the two interviews as I had planned. For one participant (Clare), I conducted three interviews: the proposed topics of the second interview were split over two separate conversations by her request. The first interviews ranged in length from 84 to 111 minutes; the second interviews (including Clare's second and third conversations combined) ranged from 104 to 120 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio recording to check for accuracy. The second interview was held after I and the participant reviewed the transcript from the first interview for accuracy.

An additional source of field texts was field notes recorded immediately after each interview. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), field notes act as a form of active recording that "are an active reconstruction of the events rather than a passive recording" (p. 5). With that in mind, after each interview concluded, I recorded my observations of the participant, including noting nonverbal behaviors of the participant and a description of the date, time, and place of the interview. Although the primary intent of field texts is more descriptive than reflective, I used field notes to document my immediate reactions, thoughts, and reflections in such a way that captured my experience of the interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in narrative inquiry occurs during the process of transitioning from field texts to research texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) distinguished

between the two: "Field texts have a recording quality to them, whether auditory or visual. Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance" (p. 132). As I reviewed the field texts generated during data collection and worked to transform them into research texts, I sought to understand how participants made meaning of and told their stories related to racial identity, other salient social identities, and their intersections.

Although no standard set of procedures exist for data analysis in narrative research (Riessman, 1993), I used recommendations from a number of scholars to direct the work of interpreting and analyzing. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended, I positioned field texts within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as an overall framework for making meaning of the data. I engaged in close, continual, and repeated reviewing and rereading of field texts (Clandinin & Connelly; Riessman, 1993), beginning with listening to audio recordings of interviews while reading transcripts. In the first stages, I focused on each individual participant's stories, rather than trying to identify themes across participants.

After my first reading of the transcripts while listening to the audio recording, I attempted to uncover the structure and strategies used by participants by "relentless[ly] rereading" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) and "narratively coding" (p. 131) the field texts while using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a guiding framework. I noted elements related to the personal and social (names of characters, interactions, relationships, dynamics between the participant and myself), temporality (times when events and actions occurred, continuities and

discontinuities, shifting perspectives based on time), and place (locations, situations).

I also incorporated an intersectional framework in my analysis by noticing the when

participants mentioned intersecting identities and the contextual influences of power,

privilege, and oppression on their experience of those intersections.

In addition, as Chase (2005) suggested, I worked to "listen to the narrator's

voices—to the subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and

complexities—*within* each narrator's story" (p. 663) to reveal the unique narrative

strategies utilized by each narrator. Narrative strategy refers to the patterns of

storytelling that are particular to each individual; attending to narrative strategy

highlights the complexity within each narrator's voice, as well as the diversity among

narrators' voices (Chase, 2005). Similarly, Riessman (1993) also advised beginning

analysis with a focus on the structure and organization of the narrator's story, rather

than merely on the story's content, to understand why the narrator told her story in a

particular way; centering the early stages of analysis on narrative structure and

strategies helped to privilege the narrator's experience. With these suggestions in

mind, I reviewed field texts and coded aspects of the stories related to form, such as

tone, tensions, and syntactical patterns used by the narrators. I used HyperResearch

qualitative research software to organize the codes and to help me first discover

patterns within each participant's story and then identify patterns across participants'

stories.

After reviewing all the field texts and completing coding, I began writing

interim texts, which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as "texts situated in the

spaces between field texts and final, published research texts" (p. 133). Writing

interim texts served as a stage of analysis as I tried to make meaning of the codes and patterns identified in earlier stages, with particular attention to experiences with intersecting identities and systems of power acting upon the intersections. I first wrote a chronological sequence of events in each participant's story and then wrote drafts of interpretive accounts of each narrative.

Ultimately, data analysis led to the re-presentation of each of the participants' stories, each contextualized and explicated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. I then wrote a story based on the common patterns in the storytelling of how these Asian American college students make meaning of their racial identities, other social identities, and intersections of their multiple identities, which I called a metanarrative. This revisioned, collaborative story also addressed the broader significance of these four individual accounts through the lenses of the research questions and of the intersectional theoretical framework. As Ayres (2008) explained, "The analysis of narrative—that is, the narratives constructed in the course of thinking about narrative— creates meta-narratives" (para. 2). In this study, the metanarrative served as an interpretive account based on the individual narratives, a "research story or report about the research that brings together all the component parts" (Bold, 2012, p. 29). This metanarrative was not intended to serve as a universal or defining story. Rather, the end product was a type of "metastory" (Riessman, 1993, p. 13), a hybrid account that reflects the participants' experiences, refracted through the research questions, my epistemological and theoretical viewpoints, and my own story.

Assuring Goodness of Narrative Inquiry

I used several strategies to establish goodness for this narrative inquiry. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) promoted the concept of goodness as a way to describe the quality of qualitative research. Although no set rules or procedures exist for evaluating narrative studies (Riessman, 1993), the notion of wakefulness submitted by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provided an important starting point for my contemplation of the topic.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described wakefulness as an alertness to and thoughtful consideration of the tensions, contexts, questions, and decisions that run throughout all stages of narrative inquiry. In an earlier article, the authors had reviewed various criteria for evaluating narrative studies suggested by other researchers, including terms such as apparency, authenticity, and adequacy (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). However, even as they explored newly developing ways of judging narrative inquiry, they returned to wakefulness as a fundamental perspective for inquirers. I kept wakefulness in the forefront of my planning of a good narrative inquiry. In addition, approaches for trustworthiness and goodness suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Riessman (1993) further guided my choices. I used the following specific strategies for assuring goodness of this specific narrative inquiry study. At best, trustworthiness assurances can persuade but not compel a reader of a study's goodness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described prolonged engagement as the investment of sufficient time to build trust with participants and understand their culture.

Persistent observation is used to identify and closely study those aspects of the situation that are most salient to the issue of interest. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), these activities promote the study's credibility by enhancing the probability that credible findings will be produced. I established prolonged engagement and persistent observation via in-depth interviews with participants over time and by building rapport with them, as described in the methods section.

Triangulation

Triangulation was another means of increasing the probability that this study's findings would be credible by rooting conclusions from multiple data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conducting two interviews with each participant and using additional data sources such as field notes also aided in the triangulation of findings. The themes in the metanarrative were triangulated from findings across the individual narratives.

Member Checks

Checking data, analytic approaches, interpretations, and conclusions with participants is a key method for assuring trustworthiness in qualitative research overall and in narrative inquiry in particular. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to member checks as the "most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checks are especially critical in narrative inquiry, given its intersubjective and collaborative nature. Riessman (1993) recommended member checks as an opportunity to ensure that the researcher's representations correspond with the narrator's experience. Feedback from participants can also help to provide additional theoretical insight to the inquirer and promote a dialogic relationship between

narrator and researcher (Glesne, 2006; Larson, 1997; Riessman, 1993). I shared interview transcripts and drafts of research texts with participants via email and solicited their reactions to the adequacy of the representations and interpretations. In this way, I engaged with participants in the interpretive process.

Peer Debriefing

I enlisted two colleagues to serve as my peer debriefers. Both colleagues were experienced with conducting qualitative research from a constructivist paradigm who acted as a kind of "response community" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182) that fostered wakefulness throughout my study. One peer debriefer provided feedback during the research design, data collection, and coding stages of the study, but then had to step aside due to illness; the second peer debriefer served as my response community during ongoing analysis during the writing of research texts and narrative drafts. Utilizing a peer debriefer can promote a study's credibility and confirmability by ensuring that the data and interpretations are not capricious or arbitrary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These disinterested peers served in multiple capacities to promote the goodness of the study by helping me to explore and make explicit what might have otherwise remained implicit in my mind, to be aware of my own positionality and biases, to test emerging interpretations, and to develop next steps of an emerging methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My peer debriefer also helped assure the future pragmatic use of my study by confirming that I had provided the necessary information to show how I reached the interpretations and how my reconstructions emerged from the data (Riessman, 1993). I also used my peer debriefers as avenues

for catharsis by helping me process and release complicated thoughts and emotions that were elicited during the course of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thick Description

Throughout my presentation of the findings, I provided thick descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended using thick description to promote transferability of the study, which helps the reader gauge how well the study and its findings might be transferred to a different setting. Thick description also promotes persuasiveness and coherence, two criteria suggested by Riessman (1993) for assuring quality of narrative research, by providing evidence from narrators' accounts for interpretations and by showing how participants' stories are connected meaningfully to interpretations. In addition to sharing descriptions of the settings, I used a mixture of extended and brief quotations from the participants' voices.

Researcher Journal

I kept an ongoing reflexive journal during the research process. Recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for enhancing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of a study, such a journal provided a place for me to record information about logistics related to the inquiry, methodological decisions, and personal reflections. Keeping a journal that provided a log of methodological choices also addressed Riessman's (1993) criterion of pragmatic use by making what I did visible. My research journal included field notes (i.e., observations of each interview), as well as my inward reflections about an experience, and my thoughts as I puzzled out the meanings of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way,

journaling served as an important means of maintaining wakefulness. Given the intersubjectivity of narrative inquiry, a researcher journal allowed me to bring my personal experiences into view while making sure to keep the stories of the participants in the foreground (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Lieblich et al., 1998).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative inquiry in general, and narrative inquiry in particular, requires attention to the positionality of the researcher. As the "instrument of the research" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 83), the inquirer must explicitly consider her relationships with her participants and her topic. Truly, the researcher's personal biography, inclusive of specific class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, always lies behind the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological choices of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In narrative inquiry, "acknowledging the centrality of the researcher's own experience—the researcher's own livings, telling, retellings, and reliving" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70) is especially important. As an intersubjective and collaborative endeavor, narrative inquiry demands that I bring myself as researcher-subject into view.

As a researcher, I recognized that I brought biases and values into this study and sought to acknowledge them and relevant aspects of my personal background and identities and how they influenced the shaping of my research questions, design, and analyses (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006). I also addressed connections between myself, as the researcher, the participants, and the research site. Indeed, by revealing and monitoring my subjectivity as a researcher, the subjectivity itself contributed to

the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Jones et al., 2006). To guide myself through this reflexive examination of my role as a researcher in this study, I used the approach suggested by Jones et al. (2006) by addressing the following questions: (a) Why is it that I am engaged in the present study? What is it about me and my experiences that lead me to this study? (b) What personal biases and assumptions do I bring with me to this study? (c) What is my relationship with those in the study? I also referred to Patton's (2002) "Reflexive Questions: Triangulated Inquiry" (p. 66) diagram to guide my attentiveness to the perspectives and voices of the participants and my own positionality. To begin this reflexive consideration of self as researcher-subject, I have included the "I am" poem I shared with participants at the beginning of our first interviews:

> *I am Julie. And I am also Yoolee – Choe, Yoolee [in Korean], in fact. I am Asian American. I am Korean. I am a child of immigrants. I am a mom, a wife, a student. I am a daughter, a sister, and a friend. I'm a student affairs educator. I am usually sleep-deprived. I am a reader. I am empathetic. I am a woman. I am trying to balance my crazy life. I am a Christian who is committed to social justice. I am from Richmond, Virginia. I am a UVA alum. I am someone who loves to cook. I am a George Mason employee. I am a former Maryland staff member. I am a procrastinator. I am a perfectionist. I am shy. I am silly. I am reflective. I am grateful. And I am still learning.*

Researcher's Background and Interest in the Study

As a researcher, I have always been mindful of how my interest in questions related to racial identity and other social identities has been informed by own efforts to make meaning of these aspects of identity into my larger sense of self. From my earliest memories, I have felt a sense of difference from those around me, as if I did not belong. As the child of immigrants from South Korea, growing up in Richmond, Virginia, where racial dynamics were defined in historic and contemporary terms along a Black-White polarity, I did not fit in, both racially and culturally. Early on, I wished that I were not so obviously different. As a young school-aged child, I was predominantly concerned with fitting in, with making sense of the customs and mores of my classmates and teachers and people around us. At that time, I saw my ethnic, cultural, and racial differentness as barriers.

I have had to untangle what my ethnicity, culture, and race each mean to me and to others. To me, being Korean (i.e., my ethnicity) meant family, honoring my elders, and working hard to overcome challenges and barriers in the short term for longer-term goals. Being Korean was also about the food I ate, holidays and traditions I observed, and the language we spoke at home. However, my consideration of my ethnicity was also fraught with tensions. How "Korean" was I if I could not speak the language, if I had not visited Korea, if I chose not to socialize primarily with other Korean Americans? Was I more "Korean" because I married a Korean American man or because some of my closest friends were Korean American? Having been born and raised in America, though, American culture has also informed a large part of my perspective and values. Although I have spent time

reflecting on and discussing ethnicity and culture and what being Korean American means to me, a passerby who looks at me will not know that whole story. In many cases, others have seen my phenotypically Asian features and on that basis, thought they knew something about me.

In this way, at an early age and throughout my life, I noticed that race mattered. It affected how people saw me, shaped their expectations of my English-speaking ability and my aptitude for math, and informed their assumptions about where I was from and what mattered to me. Because of the way I looked, other children made ching-chong noises and struck martial arts poses at me in the hallways at school. Because of the way I looked, a well-meaning greeter tried to usher me to a Sunday school class for "foreigners" upon my first (and only) visit to a prospective church in a new town.

As I learned about the experiences of other people of color in America, and then about racial identity development, and even later, about the history of Asians in America, I was able to place my personal experiences into a broader, sociohistorical context. Along the way, I wrestled with the racial and ethnic identity models I learned about in graduate school. I found moments of resonance and recognition, instances of thinking, "Aha! I'm not alone!" as I read about a given model, and at other times, I reacted with a strong sense of dissonance, frowning at seeing how my experiences might be categorized within the context of another model. Through conversations with friends of backgrounds similar to and different from my own, and through ongoing personal reflection, I have made meaning of my ethnicity and race in a way that allowed me to honor my Korean-ness, Asian-ness, and American-ness as

integrated parts of who I am. I identify myself racially as Asian American and ethnically as Korean American.

I have also considered other social identity dimensions and their intersections. As an Asian American woman, I have often encountered the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender and been keenly aware of the combined effects of stereotypical expectations of Asian Americans and of women, where people have expected me to follow along, to be quiet. Growing up, my parents worked hard to provide a middle-class lifestyle, operating small businesses and moving us out of the city to a suburban neighborhood so that my sisters and I could benefit from better schools. But I also remember my mother having to make difficult financial decisions after my father passed away when I was twelve years old, such as giving up our family's independently purchased health insurance policy for several years. I was also raised within a very religious context, and our family was actively involved in a Korean American Presbyterian church that provided both our spiritual and ethnic community. As a result, my religion and ethnicity were intermingled in ways that I continue to unthread. I have contemplated my spiritual beliefs throughout my adolescent and adult life and identify strongly as a Christian without a tie to a specific denomination.

I have also been mindful of the privilege I possess around some social identities. I am able-bodied. I am cisgender. I am heterosexual; I have never had to question whether the state or federal government would recognize my marriage legally or whether I would be able to access services or goods based on my sexual orientation. Thanks to my and my partner's educational levels and continual

employment, we can be considered middle-class. I also recognize the privilege of having my religious holidays coincide with national holidays.

During the course of my doctoral studies, I had the opportunity to delve more deeply into scholarship related to identity development and multiple social identities. In particular, my participation with a research project examining multiple identities and their intersections gave me an opportunity to engage with a group of co-researchers in individual and collective reflections about how we made meaning of our social identities. This project also provided an avenue for learning more about intersectionality as a theoretical framework and using a narrative-driven methodological approach (specifically, autoethnography) to explore these questions. The questions that guided the current study arose from the work of that autoethnographic research group.

The notion of investigating questions of identity and meaning making appealed to me intuitively as a life-long avid reader. For me, as a child of immigrants, reading books was akin to peeking into facets of the American world we lived in, glimpses into "typical" American homes, families, and values. In a way, I felt as if I learned what was American through reading (as well as through watching television).

Through reading, I also found a sense of connection across my feelings of difference. Reading early feminist writers such as Kate Chopin provided my first literary exposure to once silenced voices making their stories heard. African American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Ralph Ellison conveyed the alienation, anger, and pain of being evaluated solely on the basis of skin color and the

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injustice of racist systems. Reading these and other similar writers touched on some

of the feelings and experiences I had had around race and gender but had not found

words to yet. Most profound, though, was the first time I read a story featuring an

Asian American experience. A short story by Amy Tan that later became a chapter of

The Joy Luck Club provided the first time I had seen a story so similar to my own in

print. At age twelve, as I read the story, I remember feeling *known*, less strangely

different, less alone. That is what I feel like is the beauty of reading and writing—

that finding of a sense of connection to help you realize that you're not alone in this

world, that you are indeed part of a larger fabric of stories, a larger human story.

Aptly enough, Amy Tan (2003) also articulated this sentiment in an essay, once again

putting into words what I thought and felt:

> Writing for me is an act of faith, a hope that I will discover what I mean by
>
> truth. … I also think of reading as an act of faith, a hope I will discover
>
> something remarkable about ordinary life, about myself. And if the writer and
>
> the reader discover the same thing, if they have that connection, the act of
>
> faith has resulted in an act of magic. To me, that's the mystery and the
>
> wonder of both life and fiction—the connection between two unique
>
> individuals who discover in the end that they are more the same than they are
>
> different. (p. 323)

In a way, exploring research questions related to identity through a

methodology focused on story-telling and story-making was irresistible to me –

which brings me to this study. As a student and scholar, I found that the racial

experiences of Asian Americans were underexamined, especially within higher

education and student development research. Issues related to race and identity have been salient in my own experience, and I wished to explore how Asian American college students made meaning of these issues. I acknowledge that I am more than the sum of my race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status and their intersections. I am a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a friend. I am a student affairs educator. And more. But reflection on race and other aspects of social identity have shaped how I see myself in the context of the world around me. I hoped that eliciting and re-telling the unique stories of Asian American college students grappling with identity would add to the higher education literature, as well as to the greater stories we tell about what it means to be American.

My Biases and Assumptions

Issues related to identity and the role of race in Asian Americans' conceptions of self have remained salient to me in both personal and professional spheres and have prompted my interest in exploring these issues through research. During my career as a student affairs educator, I worked for four years as an advisor to Asian Pacific American students and student organizations, facilitating students' reflection and learning about their racial and ethnic identities. In this position as Coordinator for Asian Pacific American Student Services and Advocacy, through my interactions with Asian American students in organizations, class, and dialogues, as well as through one-on-one advising, I helped students to think critically about themselves, their families' histories, and the history of Asian Americans in the United States, and helped students make sense of experiences they had with racism. I do believe that

there is benefit to understanding one's racial identity as well as one's other social

identities. Further, as a result of researching multiple dimensions of identity and

intersectionality, I have also gained appreciation for seeking the overlapping

influences of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and other

social identities. My foundational belief that there is value for Asian American

students to examine themselves as racial beings with other intersecting identities

informed this current study.

Relationship with Context for the Study

I worked at the University of Maryland, where this study was conducted, full-

time as a student affairs educator for ten years. For the first four years (2002-2006), I

served in a position titled Coordinator for Asian Pacific American Student Services

and Advocacy. In this capacity, I worked directly with Asian American students,

primarily through their involvement and leadership experiences with culturally based

organizations, but also through a three-credit course I taught on Asian American

leadership. I also interacted with Asian American students as a facilitator for an

intra-group dialogue for Asian students for a diversity education office on campus; I

facilitated a seven-week dialogue group three different semesters. Although much of

my work focused on advising student organization leaders on organizational

management issues such as program planning and facilitating teamwork, I also

provided support to individual Asian American students regarding personal and

academic issues, including issues related to race. Now several years removed from

that position and no longer working professionally at the University of Maryland, my

interactions with the campus's undergraduate Asian American population have

diminished. However, I believe my knowledge of the campus's Asian American population and its history at the institution helped me build rapport with participants, as well as helped provide context for understanding their stories.

While serving in my former position, I developed relationships with other faculty and staff members who worked with Asian American students and others who were engaged with campus diversity issues; I maintained many of those relationships through the rest of my career at the University and even after I left the institution. These colleagues worked in various positions throughout the Division of Student Affairs, Asian American Studies, the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education, the Office of Diversity Education and Compliance, Nyumburu Cultural Center, and other offices and departments from across campus. In this way, I gained a perspective on how diversity "worked" on campus and an understanding of the institutional key players, which provided context to the study.

In studying how Asian American undergraduate students made meaning of their racial and other social identities, I sought to reflect on how my and participants' social identities emerged and interacted through the research process. Regardless of any efforts I made to build trust and rapport, a power dynamic existed between the participants and me as the researcher. I worked to mitigate the influence of such a power dynamic by engaging participants as co-constructors of the research text via peer debriefing and ongoing dialogue. In fact, the similarities we shared based on race or even ethnicity served as an entry point for building rapport. However, given the nature of my research questions and the intersubjectivity inherent in narrative inquiry, I explicitly attended to how our social identities might influence the research

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process, particularly regarding the interpretation of data and presentation of findings (Jones et al., 2006). I began this attentiveness by being mindful of my own standpoint "so as to guard against hearing, seeing, reading, and presenting results that conform to the researcher's experiences and assumptions about self and other, rather than honoring the participants' voice in the study" (Jones et al., 2006, pp. 102-103). I was cautious of assuming my own experiences and perspectives were similar to those of participants; although the narrative inquiry research text is a product of collaboration between the inquirer and narrators, the stories of the narrators should take primacy. Although being an "insider" to the Asian American experience can serve as an entry point to the research relationship, I also had to balance a desire to support participants as a practitioner rather than as a researcher. In a prior study of Asian American college student organization leaders, this concern was realized as participants asked me questions and sought advice or validation from me, given my past role as an advisor to the Asian American community. Anticipating that this could happen again, I proceeded with a sense of care and wakefulness.

Ethical Considerations

Any research endeavor requires attention to ethical concerns. The ethical issues that arise from narrative inquiry can be particularly thorny, since ethical matters continue to emerge and shift throughout the research process and because the most complicated ethical matters tend to relate to the researcher and participant relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2007). Josselson (2007) captured the dilemma facing narrative researchers:

The essence of the ethical conundrum in narrative research derives from the

fact that the narrative researcher is in a dual role—in an intimate relationship

with the participant (normally initiated by the researcher) and in a

professionally responsible role in the scholarly community. Interpersonal

ethics demand responsibility to the dignity, privacy, and well-being of those

who are studied, and these often conflict with the scholarly obligation to

accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation. (p. 538)

In order to balance my dual role both in relationship with participants and as a

researcher, and knowing that every decision I make about the research design

necessarily involves an ethical component (Jones et al., 2006), I attempted to

anticipate areas of potential concern in order to protect and honor the participants in

my study. In addition to the areas outlined below, I also considered questions posed

by Patton (2002) in his Ethical Issues Checklist (pp. 408-409) to account for potential

ethical situations in advance. By doing so, I sought to emulate the ethical attitude

recommended by Josselson (2007) in taking responsibility for my decisions in such a

way as to minimize harm.

Informed Consent

I used the informed consent process not only to meet the Institutional Review

Board's (IRB) requirements for notifying participants but also to empower them in

the research study (Glesne, 2006). To do so, I explained the purpose of the study and

the epistemological viewpoint I brought to the research questions. Unfortunately, one

of the dilemmas involved with informed consent is that protocols must be created and

approved in advance by the IRB before contacting participants, foreclosing the

opportunity to negotiate and mutually construct some terms of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Another tension with the informed consent process is the emergent nature of narrative inquiry, which makes specifying exactly what will arise unforeseeable (Josselson, 2007; Patton, 2002). I approached these tensions by viewing consent from a relational perspective and focusing on care for the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2007).

Privacy and Confidentiality

Ethical concerns related to confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy for participants may also be troublesome. Privacy can be an important key to eliciting participation from narrators (Josselson, 2007). In order to assure confidentiality for participants, I conducted interviews in a private office space or conference room and allowed participants to select a pseudonym to be used in the study. I secured the data (consisting of digital audio files, transcripts of interviews, my field notes, and other field texts) and results of emerging data analysis (such as codes and interim texts) in password-protected computer files or in a locked cabinet. As suggested by Josselson (2007), I used a codebook that tracked how the data, interim texts, and research texts had been changed to protect identities. I stored this codebook on a separate flash drive apart from other data and texts and in a secure location. The codebook allowed me to reconstruct the data later if necessary and to confirm the identities of participants. Even with these measures, however, it is possible that participants could be identifiable to those key informants who nominated the participants for the study or to others to whom participants might disclose their involvement in the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Interviewing

Conducting interviews in narrative inquiry can also be fraught with ethical considerations. Care must be given throughout all aspects of interviewing, including in the way I started and ended interviews (Josselson, 2007). Interviews themselves are interventions, and the nature of data collection in qualitative inquiry can be intrusive (Patton, 2002). With my study in particular, the process of asking participants about their racial identities and other social identities could affect the development of their identities, rather than merely elicit detached observations of their current thoughts and reflections on the topic. As Patton (2002) noted, "The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn't know—or least were not fully aware of—before the interview" (p. 405). Talking about issues related to race and identity could also evoke complex or painful emotions or even psychological distress. Guided by the "ethical imperative to 'do good,'" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 155), as well as the imperative to do no harm, I sought to address these potential situations proactively by creating a list of resources for additional support, including the University Counseling Center, an online directory of psychologists, and a local provider who served Asian American clients.

In addition, I anticipated that participants could see me as an expert or advisor and might ask me questions or seek advice or validation from me. In such cases, I strived to remain neutral in not sharing my personal opinions during the data collection phases, while offering empathy and validation of their experiences as being their own. At the same time, I knew I must honor the ethical imperative as a

researcher to do good and my own moral imperative as a person and as a student affairs educator to care for others, and as such, I negotiated such situations as they arose.

Ownership and Representation

Ethical questions regarding ownership and representation emerged as I sought to transform the data into research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2007; Patton, 2002). I asked for participants' approval of interview transcripts, as well as for their feedback to drafts, but primary authority for analysis, interpretation, and writing remained with me. As Josselson (2007) recommended, I tried to explain my purposes fully, as well as make clear to participants that every story had multiple truths and every person has multiple voices, and the final representation I wrote was a construction of their story based on my interpretations. I wrote about the participants with care and "great respect and appropriate tentativeness" (Josselson, 2007, p. 553), knowing that they might read what I wrote and that I cannot predict or control their reactions, but sought to avoid causing them harm by what I wrote. In order to navigate the complex waters of ownership and representation, I tried to reframe them in terms of relational responsibility, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested.

Relational Responsibility

The research relationship underlies most of the ethical concerns in narrative inquiry described above. "[S]ome of the murkiest and most subtle of ethical matters" (Josselson, 2007, p. 545) lie within the context of the narrator-inquirer relationship, due to its emergent nature. I followed Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) suggestion to consider ethical questions as matters of responsibility in a participatory relationship

and to consult my conscience about how to proceed. Further, maintaining a reflexive stance as a researcher, given that I was the instrument of research, aided me in distinguishing my perspective and experience from those of the participants and helped me to sustain an ethical attitude (Josselson, 2007).

Caveats with Narrative Inquiry

Despite its value as a methodology, I proceeded with caveats in mind when using narrative inquiry. First was a concern about reductionism. With narrative inquiry, a tension exists between honoring individual participants' stories and being tempted to generalize from the individual stories to make broader claims for theory generation based on common themes across multiple accounts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this tension as occurring at the reductionistic boundary of narrative inquiry. As Riessman (1993) noted, narrative studies' small sample sizes usually do not lend themselves to generalizable findings, but at the same time, some enduring theories have been based on the close, careful study of a few individuals. Because I hoped to identify some patterns of common experiences or narrative strategies used in the stories of my participants, I was wary of not overgeneralizing, and thereby reducing the meaning of the individual stories to the themes.

Another caveat came from the potential influence of the study itself on participants. Participating in interviews and being guided through a reflection on their racial identity and other social identities prompted further thinking and potentially further development of these identities. Although I hoped this process of reflection would be ultimately beneficial for participants (consistent with the ethical goal of "doing good" as a researcher), the impact of the study on the issues of

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interest could have complicated my attempts to understand the process of how Asian American college students made meaning of their identities.

Ultimately, although I believe narrative inquiry was a richly appropriate way of understanding the experience of identity construction of Asian American college students, I recognized the limits of representation with narrative and proceed with those caveats in mind. I planned to understand and give meaning to the experiences of this study's participants, seeking and integrating feedback from participants, but even then, the final research text was just one version, one representation, of those lived experiences. Riessman (1993) noted, "Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (p. 15). Such a limitation could also be made about identity construction, which is fluid, contextual, and temporal.

Summary

In this chapter, I described how I used narrative inquiry, grounded in a constructivist paradigm, and intersectionality as a theoretical framework to examine how Asian American college students make meaning of their racial identity, other social identities, and the intersection of those identities. I described the hallmarks of narrative inquiry and how I incorporated them into my use of the three-dimensional inquiry space and, more specifically, into my research methods. Consistent with my epistemological and methodological choices, I then reflected on my role as the researcher. I concluded with a consideration of ethical issues. In the next chapter, I share the findings from the participants and my collaborative telling and re-telling of stories.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I share the findings from the in-depth interviews with four Asian American college students who participated in the study. I convey each participant's story through individual narratives and then tell a collective story through a metanarrative. The individual narratives begin with the participant's own words from the "I am" poems we shared at the start of our first meetings and continue with the major themes that emerged from their interviews. The metanarrative highlights the commonalities of participants' experiences with forging their identities as Asian Americans, as well as the commonalities of how they told their stories and made meaning of their experiences. Ultimately, this metanarrative serves as a larger, collaborative story of the lived experience of how these four Asian American college students made meaning of their racial identity, other social identities, and their intersections, as interpreted through the lenses of the research questions and intersectional framework.

Clare

I am Clare. I am an artist. Creative, expressive, curious. I am an explorer. Questioning, challenging, seeking. I am a woman of color, a feminist, a Korean American, a queer, an advocate, a political force. … An older sister, a daughter, a leader. I am growing. I am learning. I am still trying to understand what I am.

When Clare and I met for our first interview, she was friendly and polite and seemed interested in talking about the topic of identity. At the same time, she also seemed a bit tentative, as if wondering what our conversation would actually hold. As our talk unfolded, I soon learned that Clare was strongly civically minded, deeply

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committed to social justice, and engaged in online and face-to-face communities focused on issues related to feminism, race, and ethnicity. She grew up as a child of Korean American parents who each immigrated to the United States as young children themselves, effectively putting her into the 2.5 generation. She moved up and down the East Coast during her childhood, as her father progressed through different stages of his career as a physician, from Philadelphia to North Carolina, to New York, to northern New Jersey and finally to Maryland. Different dimensions of identity emerged as salient at different points in her life, sometimes separately but also, increasingly often in recent years, in intersection with one another.

Creating a Korean American Identity beyond the Second Generation

When Clare was born, her grandfather didn't think she needed a Korean name. In Korean culture, the paternal grandparents were often responsible for giving a name to their newborn grandchildren. In Clare's case, her father's parents had immigrated to the United States from Korea and settled in an area of Pennsylvania that was mostly White. Clare's father was two years old at the time. Her father's parents focused on assimilating, working hard to fit into the culture of their surroundings. As a result, Clare's father learned little about Korean culture and language as he grew up. When Clare, the first grandchild on her paternal side, was born, her grandparents did not initially see a need to continue this Korean tradition:

> So, okay, so you know how a child's dad's dad chooses the Korean name for
> the child? My grandpa felt like I didn't need a Korean name. … So I wasn't
> going to have a Korean name. And I feel like that says a lot about their
> ideology of what it means to be Korean in America. And even the way that

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they raised my dad, they raised him without talking to him in Korean, so I feel like they see a lot of value in assimilating into America … My impression is that they tried really hard to just become Americanized. (Interview 1, p. 11, ll. 10-23)

Clare's sense of connection to her heritage was illustrated by this story of her grandparents, where her tie to Korean identity was tenuous and questioned as legitimate.

Clare's mother also immigrated to the U.S. at a young age, moving to New York City at the age of five, where she grew up in a multicultural setting with a strong connection to her Korean heritage. In contrast to Clare's father, however, her mother was fluent in Korean language and cultural traditions. However, as the daughter of Korean Americans who spent most of their childhoods in the U.S., Clare seemed to feel displaced in relation to her Korean cultural background, as if she were "lacking parts of my heritage" (Interview 1, p. 12, ll. 32-33). She did not recall having conversations with her parents about the meaning of being Korean when she was growing up.

Contributing to Clare's sense of disconnection from her Korean heritage, in her mind, was her lack of fluency in speaking Korean. Her inability to speak Korean served as a wall that prevented her from meaningfully connecting with Korean culture, Korean family members, and Korean community. Clare shared complicated feelings of loss, yearning, guilt, and even anger related to not knowing the Korean language:

So I grew up not knowing Korean at all, and that is something that, like, I feel

really saddened by. I used to feel really resentful about it, because, I mean, my parents call me by my Korean name, and I just feel like that's so, I used to feel like that was so messed up, that they call me by this Korean name, but then I can't even respond in Korean, like we can't even communicate in Korean. And like, relatives have told me things like, "You would be so much more beautiful if you were able to speak Korean."… So that is something that really affects me. I have been saying this for a really long time, that it is like my life goal to become fluent in Korean and just teach it to myself. In terms of like, culture, again, I don't know that much about my culture. (Interview 1, p. 6, ll. 4-14)

During a visit to Korea, her relatives expressed disappointment at not being able to communicate with her fully and encouraged her to study Korean in the future, which triggered sadness and guilt: "I have always felt a lot of guilt about knowing Korean. … It just really intensified what I had already been feeling all my life" (Interview 1, p. 12, ll. 14-16). Similarly, she lamented her inability to communicate with her maternal grandmother who lived in New York.

Not knowing how to speak Korean became salient in even unexpected encounters. Clare recalled an interaction with a stranger outside a Korean grocery store where her connection to Korean identity was challenged due to her lack of Korean speaking ability:

My mom went to get the car, and I was waiting outside the store with all the groceries. He was just some man who was trying to advertise for his church, and he handed me a flier, and he was speaking to me in Korean. I told him,

"I'm really sorry, I don't understand what you're saying." I don't remember

exactly what he said, but he kind of made a big scene, and he was saying

really loudly, "You're Korean. You should be proud of who you are." And

like, "Why don't you know this? Being Korean is so great," as if I didn't

know that. And it was really embarrassing, and I didn't know how to respond

to that. (Interview 1, p. 11, l. 25 – p. 12, l. 2)

Clare's journey to make meaning of her Korean ethnic identity was fraught with

shame, guilt, sadness, resentment, and hope. The dissonance Clare experienced

between her Korean identity (signified by her Korean name) and her actual

knowledge of and connection with Korean language and culture made it difficult for

her to make meaning of her ethnic identity for herself. To Clare, it appeared that

knowing Korean culture and language were indicators of authentic Korean identity.

She expressed a longing to be able to claim this badge of Korean-ness one day.

Over the course of our conversations, however, Clare's thinking about what it

meant to be Korean seemed to evolve. When I asked her during our first meeting

what she learned from her family about what it meant to be Korean, Clare paused,

seeming to have trouble answering the question. After reflecting, she haltingly shared

that she knew that family shaped her Korean American identity, such as through

stories about her grandparents' immigration to the U.S. and about her parents'

experiences growing up Korean in America. But she knew that there were additional

"cultural nuances" that were a part of her Korean heritage, but had difficulty

articulating them: "It's a little difficult, because there's just so many different things,

and it's hard for me to put it all together and conceptualize it all together, and then

just say it" (Interview 1, p. 9, ll. 21-29).

In our second meeting, she shared that she had reflected further on this question and noticed the cultural underpinnings of expectations and interactions in her family, especially regarding how one shows respect to elders, "knowing your place in terms of your age and your gender, and knowing when to speak up and knowing when to be silent" (Interview 2-1, p. 1, ll. 9-10). Although she could recognize the Korean cultural expectation of honoring elders, she felt uncomfortable and unsure about how to act it out authentically:

I mean, for me, it's kind of a weird expectation, because I feel like I can't speak Korean, I don't even know a lot of the cultural nuances of being Korean. And then there's that expectation. So when I do interact with other Korean elders, I feel very uncomfortable because I don't know like what the right thing to do is, and when I try, I don't know if that is good enough or if I am just looking like a complete fool. Um, yeah. And so, that sort of feeling has come up a lot like when meeting someone at church or when I went to Korea and I met relatives there, things like that. (Interview 2-1, p. 1, ll. 16-22)

For Clare, what she knew of Korean cultural mores was insufficient in helping her feel comfortable in Korean spaces. Clare's limited understanding of Korean culture and language stood as barriers to an authentic connection to her Korean identity.

Clare staked her own claim to Korean-ness through other avenues: popular culture and connecting with Korean and Korean American peers. Since middle school, Clare had been a fan of Korean popular culture, especially K-pop music. K-pop provided Clare with an entry point to contemporary Korean culture, in addition to

providing a platform to see positive and attractive representations of Koreans in media. She explained her enthusiasm for K-pop and why it mattered to her:

I don't know that much about my culture. But I, like, I'm really, really into K-pop, because it makes me feel, like, connected. I mean, I really learned so much from K-pop. I learn what's the trend there, what the slang is there. Just seeing beautiful Korean people is just incredible to me. So since like middle school I've been crazy about K-pop, and it's never going to end. People don't take K-pop seriously, but it's very important to me because of that connection. (Interview 1, p. 6, ll. 14-19)

In between our conversations, Clare had an experience that afforded another opportunity to reflect on her meaning making about Korean ethnic identity. Immediately prior to our third conversation, Clare attended KASCON (Korean American Students Conference) in New York City. Her parents and uncle had attended this conference when they were younger, and they all encouraged her to go. The conference did not meet the expectations she had going in: she had expected the conference's content to focus on Korean American identity issues, but discovered that the sessions focused more on career development. In addition, the conference participants were primarily recent immigrants from Korea or Korean international students attending college in the U.S., rather than other Korean American students who had grown up in the U.S. as Clare had. Although the conference was not what she had expected, she was pleasantly surprised at how excited and validated she felt to be immersed in a Korean environment:

But overall, aside from the workshops itself, it was really good to be

surrounded by Koreans. I can't speak Korean, but I found myself doing what

I could and it was a lot of fun. It was hosted in New York, so we were in K-

Town every night and we – I don't know, I was totally embracing everything

Korean about me, and it just felt so good. Yeah. It felt amazing to be

surrounded by Koreans and, like in the Korean restaurant that we were at, they

were only playing K-pop, and we were totally all dancing to it while eating.

Like, the little things like that are really special. (Interview 2-2, p. 1, ll. 20-26)

In this Korean-centric space with Korean peers, Clare found that language and culture

were no longer obstacles to claiming and forging a Korean identity for herself. Going

to the conference gave Clare an opportunity to consider her Korean-ness anew:

So I was talking to one kid that I had just met and he asked me, "What is your

favorite part about being Korean?" And I told him something that stands out

about Korean culture is community, and like the importance of family. …

then in another conversation, we were talking about like, again, how

communal Korean culture is. Even in how we eat food, it's all about the

multiple *bahn-chan* [small side dishes], and it's like all about sharing. And

even the way that you show someone that you love them is by saying, "Eat

this," or "Eat more." Or how when you finish a meal at a restaurant and the

bill comes, the oldest people are always fighting over the check and it's really

about fighting over who gets to share that love with everyone, you know?

And who gets to provide that to everyone. And I think that's like a huge

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realization that I made over the conference." (Interview 2-2, p. 2, l. 29 – p. 3, l. 5)

Through connecting with Korean peers, Clare was able to revisit the cultural knowledge she did possess and to make meaning of it anew, recognizing the value of the Korean cultural traditions she did know, rather than focusing on what she did not know.

After the conference's conclusion, Clare appreciated how important the experience was and had a sense that she would be continuing to make meaning of its significance to her: "I was really sad when it ended because I felt like I had gone through something, like, life-changing, impactful. I knew that I had made connections that will last for a long time, and I will see these people again sometime in my life, I know." (Interview 2-2, p. 2, ll. 14-17)

Critically Engaging with Identity: From Gender to Intersectionality

While Clare considered the meaning and relevance of her Korean heritage at different stages throughout her life, she began to grapple with other dimensions of identity beginning in high school. Gender was the initial focal point of her identity exploration and became the seed for her engagement in social justice activism. When Clare was in tenth grade, her mother encouraged her to participate in a youth leadership program offered through a local domestic violence shelter where a co-worker volunteered, seeing it as a résumé-building opportunity. Through that experience, Clare began to learn about gender and feminism, which then provided the foundation for her continued critical exploration of identities:

I really had no understanding of feminism. I just went on the premise that,

sure, violence is bad. But then when I went and I went through training and

was just surrounded by this kind of environment, I think I was exposed to a lot

of like, feminist issues that I didn't even realize were feminist issues. And

then it was like a couple years later when I was like, man, this is, like, this is

all interconnected with a much larger scale. And that's when I started

identifying as a feminist. And I mean, I led my own club in high school called

Women's Union, and I think that kind of catapulted into my interest in, like,

intersectional identities and that's where I started becoming really passionate

about critical race theory. (Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 19-27)

Clare identified as a woman and as female, even while she questioned the

substantive meaning of gender. She sometimes felt more masculine, other times more

feminine; she often wondered if gender really mattered. At the same time, she

recognized that gender was a social construct and, as such, had implications for her

lived experience: "because society has placed so much meaning on it, it does impact

my everyday life and it does impact how I think and how I navigate in the world"

(Interview 2-1, p. 2, ll. 23-25). As a result of her engagement with the domestic

violence shelter, Clare focused her activism on gender, even starting a feminist

student organization at her high school: "as a woman, I really want to make sure that I

advocate for other women and for myself each and every day, and so for that reason,

gender is, like, extremely important to me" (Interview 2-1, p. 2, ll. 29-31).

As Clare engaged more deeply with gender issues, she encountered questions

and confusion from her mother, who did not understand Clare's single-minded focus

on gender. In her mother's experience, race, socioeconomic status, and being an

immigrant were more salient than gender. Conversations and challenges from her

mother prompted Clare to reflect on race once she began college. As Clare began to

think more about race, she realized that she should and could focus on both, which

helped her to center her learning and action on the intersections of race and gender:

> Since I am a woman and I am Asian, I'm thinking about how both gender
>
> issues and race issues come together and how racism and sexism work
>
> together. So, yeah, I think it is like a really big part of the way I think and the
>
> kind of work that I want to do. Like, I do want to be advocating for women of
>
> color. (Interview 2-1, p. 3, ll. 18-21)

Clare had often observed how gender intersected with race and ethnicity. She

had noticed paternalism within Korean culture, with expectations for a woman to join

her husband's family when she married and to focus on taking care of the household

and family. In Clare's view, "there's not much like celebration of her own

individuality, her own background, her own family" within Korean women's roles

(Interview 2-1, p. 4, ll. 26-27).

Beginning in high school, she was troubled when she noticed that a White

male classmate seemed to be exclusively interested in Asian American girls.

Although she was initially flattered when his attention shifted to her, she soon began

to feel as if she were "just another Asian girl to add to his list" (Interview 1, p. 14, l.

28). Since then, she has been wary of potential White male romantic partners who

have an "Asian fetish." She reflected on this dynamic further when we discussed

intersections between race and gender explicitly, as an example of a time when she

saw racism and sexism working together:

Well, I talked about this the last time when we were talking about the

fetishization of Asian women, and so, racism and sexism are working together

in that sense, in that it's like women are being objectified for their bodies, but

it's in the sense that they're exotic. … [I]t makes me feel like I am like not

only not seen as a person, but I'm not seen as a person because of these two

layers, and I'm appreciated not only for just my body, but because my body is

Asian. (Interview 2-1, p. 3, ll. 25-31)

Clare reflected on a much more recent set of experiences where she saw

gender and race colliding for Asian American women. While she was in New York

City for KASCON, the Korean college student conference, she went out in the

evenings with new friends from the conference in Koreatown. One woman from their

group had a harrowing experience where she met a White man while they were at a

club and had trouble getting away from him later that night. Clare was deeply

disturbed by the incident, citing how the combined influences of race and gender

heightened the vulnerability of not only her friend, but also Asian American women

in general, in what she thought should have been a safe space:

I'm still thinking about it a lot. That happened last weekend. And just

thinking about how, clearly that White guy went to the Korean club to find a

Korean girl. I mean, he was there on his own and his motives are just so clear.

It's like, Koreans go to K-Town to be with other Koreans and experience what

it's like to be in Korea and really embrace that part of their identity and

culture. And they're not really looking – they're not interested in White

people there. That's not why they go to K-Town. And yeah. It's just, like …

it's just really clear what his motives were. It's so obvious that he specifically

went to K-Town to hang out with a bunch of Koreans and that he was in that

club alone to take advantage of a Korean girl. So. Yeah. It's just really

disgusting. (Interview 2-2, p. 8, ll. 6-14)

This event was the most upsetting of several Clare experienced that weekend related

to intersections of race and gender, including getting cat-called and having to put off

the persistent attentions of an older White man on the subway. The joint forces of

racism and sexism took a toll on Clare, especially as she recalled these experiences in

retrospect:

I'm, like, I'm not surprised by any of these stories, but then so many of them

happened, condensed in one weekend that – and even like during the

weekend, I wasn't really thinking about it that much. It was just something

that I was like, "It happens. It's fucked up, but it happens." But then now that

it's over, I'm just – it was, yeah, it was really unsettling. (Interview 2-2, p. 9,

ll. 1-5)

Awakening to Race and Asian American Identity

Clare's understanding of intersectionality grew concurrently with her learning

and critical reflection about her racial identity. Her mother challenged Clare to

consider her Asian American identity as she began college:

I feel like it wasn't even until college, so like last year, that I started thinking

more about race. And I think it's because of my mom, because while she

understood why I cared so much about gender issues, she didn't understand

why I cared to the extent that I did. And then like one day, we had – like,

there's always been a lot of conflict as to how intense I am about this kind of

stuff. And one day we were having a conversation. It was really tense,

though. And she's like, "Why isn't your activism surrounded on your Asian

American identity?" And she was telling me about her experience, how

growing up, she never felt like held back because of her gender. She always

felt like it was because of her socioeconomic status and being an Asian

immigrant. So that's when it, like, clicked for me, and I started thinking like,

I can do and I should do both. (Interview 1, p. 4, l. 33 – p. 5, l. 7)

Clare's early experiences with race were related to feelings of difference.

Recalling when she lived in North Carolina as one of very few Asian American

families, she remembered a time in preschool when another Asian American family

arrived at the school and the mother asked Clare if she was Chinese. Clare replied

yes before her mother stepped in to correct her. This was Clare's earliest memory

related to race. At that time, she did not understand what being Chinese or Korean

meant; looking back, she could identify dynamics related to the construction of Asian

American as a racial category and the reality of living in a non-diverse community as

one of the only representatives of one's race:

Somehow we're taught, just throughout everyday living, that … all Asians are

the same. There's a lot of erasure of like Southeast Asians or South Asians.

And so we kind of have this idea of what it means to be Asian, this like, very

fair skin, jet black straight hair, thin and submissive, that sort of thing. And

also the whole thing, I mean, that we're all Chinese or whatever, or this idea

of Asian invasion. And so I don't know, I think as a little kid, I wasn't able to

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make that distinction or maybe my parents never had the conversation with me up until that point, like, "This is what Koreans do," or like, "We're Korean, this is our culture," that sort of thing. Yeah. And also I'm pretty sure that everyone around me was White. And so I'm just this Asian girl in my preschool class. I'm sure I was the only Asian person. (Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 12-21)

Clare lacked having a person or place to process her impressions and to give her a framework for understanding her race, ethnicity, and identity. She seemed to lack a larger context for making meaning of subconscious impressions and messages and what those meant for her construction of what it meant to be Korean or Asian.

She eventually found such spaces, first in conversations with her mother when she began college. They discussed the depiction of Asian Americans in media, microaggressions, and the lack of activism by Asian Americans. As a result, she began considering the intersections of her multiple identities, including gender and race, and shifted the focus of her advocacy to women of color. Online communities, such as a Facebook group dedicated to Asian American feminism, provided a platform for Clare to learn about the interconnected threads of race and gender and continued to serve as a rich resource for her:

[I]n this group, people would post different articles, different thoughts, different questions, different experiences. Literally, just anything that has to do with being an Asian American woman. And just reading the comments and the thread posts, all the dialogue that was happening in this group, it was all so new to me, and I was learning so much with every single post. Yeah,

and I also think that that is like really, that was a huge impact on the way I think today. And I mean, I continue to be in those Facebook groups. (Interview 1, p. 17, ll. 13-22)

Once she came to college, Clare sought a face-to-face arena to address topics related to race, gender, and intersectionality. She found that space with the Asian American Student Union (AASU) and the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy office. The influence was "so huge," as she put it: "all this time, I was just like, learning about things on the Internet or like talking about it with my parents. But then this really gave me the opportunity to be active about what's going on in my mind" (Interview 1, p. 18, ll. 8-10). Seeing the president of AASU, an Asian American woman, speak at an event was similarly powerful:

> [O]nline, I would see all these characters of people who talk about these things and talk about the advocacy that they do in their own lives, but I had never seen anyone in my own life, like offline. So she was the first person. And it like made me – I don't know how to say this, but basically, it was the first time seeing a leader like that. (Interview 1, p. 18, ll. 29-33)

At last, Clare was able to interact with Asian American peers who identified as activists and discuss issues related to race, gender, and identity with others who had similar experiences in real life.

Asian American Identity: From the Personal to the Political

To Clare, being Asian American signified a political identity with implications for action and was distinct from her identity as a Korean American. She delineated between race and ethnicity and how she identified with each:

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So for race, as an Asian American, I do see it as a very political identity. Um. I am thinking about how Asian Americans have internalized our racism and how that impacts our community in terms of mental health, in terms of advocating or not advocating for institutional changes. Also thinking about anti-Blackness in our community and how we interact with other races in America. Things like that. So definitely more of a political sort of lens. Whereas for my ethnicity, as a Korean American, that feels really personal. (Interview 1, p. 5, ll. 27-33)

In this response, Clare highlighted how Asian American identity carried meaningful implications on the intrapersonal and intergroup levels. On the intrapersonal level, Clare saw claiming her Asian American identity as a way to combat negative racial stereotypes that have been internalized by some Asian Americans. She shared:

Growing up, I always hated when Asians would make self-deprecating jokes about their Asian-ness. … I really want to resist that and just be like completely unapologetic about the way that I look, the way that I might talk or the family that I come from, the food that I eat. Yeah, I think being Asian American is just something that I really want to embrace. (Interview 1, p. 19, ll. 18-23)

Embracing her Asian American identity was an act of resistance against the force of internalized racism.

For Clare, Asian American identity also came with a greater understanding of U.S. racial dynamics and how she and Asian Americans as a whole fit in. As she

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learned more about her racial identity, her knowledge of race in the U.S., the positionality of different racial groups, and the role of power and privilege also grew:

> Being Asian American makes me political. As I learn more about the racial landscape of America or the international community as a whole, … I'm so eager to understand it more and more. And I think it is really intriguing to understand these different systems and how I fit into these systems and what I can do to change these systems, if that's even possible. (Interview 1, p. 16, ll. 14-18)

As she shared, her deeper awareness of identity and race prompted a sense of activism and responsibility related to these issues. As a result, she chose to devote her time and energy to advocacy related to racial justice. The call to action that her racial identity as an Asian American imparted was also clear from her long-term career goals: she sought to pursue a career in government and politics, including a law degree, in order to effect change and advance justice.

She also found connection, community, and shared purpose with other people of color. "Even if we don't share the same experiences, there's this feeling of empathy, solidarity" (Interview 1, p. 14, ll. 6-7), Clare explained. Unlike when she was with White folks, she did not feel a need to explain herself or to be mindful of how she was representing herself among people of color. Beyond the feelings of comfort and connection, Clare was purposeful in learning about and reaching out to other groups. She made intentional efforts to connect with other Asian American ethnic groups by joining organizations such as the Chinese Student Association and Japanese American Student Association in order to educate herself further on issues

within the AAPI community. Clare also focused on issues facing the Black community, including addressing anti-Blackness among Asian Americans, and recognized a need to learn more about the Latinx community. She felt a personal responsibility to learn and to show up in solidarity with other people of color, and she wanted AAPIs as a group to do the same.

Sexual Orientation: An Emergent Intersection

Throughout our conversations about ethnicity, race, and gender, Clare was open, straightforward, and reflective. When she did not have a ready response to a question I asked, she took note of it, saying that she'd like to think about it further; at our subsequent conversation, Clare would bring those questions up again and share what she had thought about since. However, when the topic of sexual orientation arose, Clare hesitated and asked if we could table the topic for another time. We were talking over a video call while she was at home for spring break, and she was uncomfortable talking about her sexuality while her family was in the next room. When we discussed sexual orientation during our third conversation, she described this identity as one that was in a way liberating, but also confining in terms of how comfortable she felt about expressing it. Clare identified as pansexual, while having a preference for men:

> I do have a preference for men, but I feel like it's so much more complicated than that. … if I were to fall in love with someone who is male-identifying but then later turns out to be trans or non-binary, or there's some sort of change that they decide to make and share with me, … I'm not going to love this person any less. (Interview 2-2, p. 4, ll. 1-5)

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Clare's consideration of her sexuality began when she found herself attracted to someone she thought was female, but she later discovered was a trans man. After this experience, she was confused about what this attraction meant in terms of her sexuality, wondering if she was bisexual or straight. She returned to feminist readings and online resources to explore sexual orientation further, eventually discovering the term pansexual fit her well.

The process of reflecting on her sexual orientation identity was affirming and freeing for Clare in many ways, but she still experienced confusion and times of feeling not fully free:

In terms of the way I see myself, I think coming to terms with this part of my identity has made me a lot more comfortable with who I am. It's made me more of a fluid person, in that I feel like I don't have to worry about – I was going to say I don't have to worry about who I'm attracted to, because this sexual orientation allows for so much room, but that's not true. Like, I do have to worry about it. It does still, like, confuse me. And it is still something that I'm not, like, open about. I've tried having the conversation with my mom, and it has never went well. I've had it with her, like, multiple times because she pretends she doesn't remember and then she like forces me to explain myself again and again, and it's really painful. Um. [pause] But at the same time, this identity is really liberating, I think. And it is something that I'm becoming more and more comfortable with exploring. (Interview 2-2, p. 5, ll. 1-11)

In a way, identifying as pansexual helped her not to feel as if she had to define her attractions in a rigid way. Overall, despite the occasional moments of confusion, Clare described her personal meaning making around sexuality in largely positive terms (e.g., freeing, liberating). When she considered external perspectives to her sexual identity, however, she did not feel the same level of comfort. She mentioned that she was not open about her sexual orientation and was reluctant to discuss it when she was at home, with her family nearby. As she shared above, her mother's lack of receptivity to Clare's disclosure attempts was hurtful. At the same time, she was also aware of the privilege she had with her sexual orientation identity, since it was not as visible and was not pushed into salience by others' reactions:

> I feel like this is an identity that I hide more. So, I think, maybe, a lot of times I'm not thinking about it as much because it's not at the forefront of who people think I am. So, … I don't feel like other people are aware of it in a lot of different social situations. So I think most of the time, yeah, most of the time, I'm not considering it. (Interview 2-2, p. 6, ll. 29-33)

Clare only recently began thinking about her sexual orientation as it intersected with her racial identity. Within the previous month of our conversations, she attended the East Coast Asian American Student Union conference, where she participated in a workshop that addressed intersections between LGBTQIA and Asian American identities. The experience was powerfully moving for her:

> [S]o one of the workshops that I went to was LGBTQIA, … that intersection with being Asian, and so, it was like a room full of people who identify with both those identities. … [T]his workshop was really a discussion among

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everyone in the classroom. And people were sharing like different

experiences, different questions, and it was super moving, because I think it

was the first time that I was in a space like that, that I felt like both parts of my

identity were being affirmed. And it felt really good to be around people who

are kind of questioning the same things as me, trying to learn about the same

things as me, sharing these experiences all throughout our lives that we didn't

– that I didn't realize that there were so many people out there. And so, it was

very moving, and I ended up tearing up at the end. It was only an hour-long

session, but it was like so powerful to me. (Interview 2-1, p. 12, l. 31 – p. 13,

l. 4)

Before this workshop, Clare had never considered her sexuality in connection with

her racial identity. Being in a space where both identities were acknowledged felt

validating, and she returned to campus excited about continuing to explore them.

However, she soon recognized the inherent challenges of trying to make meaning of

her intersecting identities and finding a space for them. Clare found Asian American

spaces, such as cultural organization meetings or events, to be heteronormative and

cisnormative, where teams were created as "boys versus girls" and date auctions were

planned with only heterosexual pairings in mind. She had not been in many queer

spaces, but she found them to be dominated by White people who did not usually

consider people of color. "Where does someone who is Asian and queer fit in?" she

wondered (Interview 2-2, p. 5, ll. 26-27). One possibility she recently found was a

brown-bag lunch for queer Asian Americans, which she had recently attended for the

first time. For Clare, the intersection of her sexuality and racial identity remained an area of continuing discovery and meaning making.

Conclusion

During our conversations, Clare and I spoke about other social identities, but not in as much depth. She shared that she grew up attending Korean American Christian churches sporadically with her family, but she did not identify strongly with faith. Although she could see the role that church plays in creating a Korean American community, she never felt a sense of belonging there. She was aware of privilege she possessed in terms of socioeconomic status and ability (despite mental health concerns).

Overall, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation were salient to Clare and her sense of self. Clare recognized that her immigration generation status was unique among her Asian American peers, since her parents immigrated at such a young age, and saw how it shaped her connection to her Korean heritage and ethnic identity. She explored intersections of these identities more deeply once she began college, particularly as race and gender and as race and sexual orientation connected. As she investigated her identities and intersections further, she felt a concomitant responsibility to connect with communities and act for social justice.

Jay

I am a thinker. I am multiracial American. I am creative inclination. I am a person of color, a mother's son, a father's son, my sister's brother. I am devout to the principle of loyalty. I am someone who hears a different drummer. I am a leader. I am more than the surface. I am someone with a

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plan that lives. I am conscious. I am on the hunt for more. I'm someone who

seeks optimal potential and imagination and heart.

In conversations with Jay about identity, the word "tricky" came up several

times. As the son of a Black man and a Korean woman, he found ethnic and racial

identity and belongingness complicated to navigate. Jay's wayfinding toward self-

understanding became more complex when considering other social identities,

including gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and ability

status, especially when taking their various intersections into account. When Jay

would say, "It's tricky," as we discussed different identity dimensions, those words

indicated the perilousness of his efforts to create a sense of meaning about identity

and to connect with identity-based communities, usually due to the challenges his

identification and affiliation choices faced from his peers. In describing his

involvement on campus with cultural organizations early in our first meeting, Jay

spoke to these tensions:

> it's always been a point of contention in my life as far as how I identify or
>
> how I should identify, and that sense of community that can be there or cannot
>
> be there. It's kind of made me compelled as to, rather than like be kicked
>
> around, kind of like stand up for myself and be involved and be proactive, and
>
> kind of take advantage of opportunities and potential that can come with being
>
> involved in the community that people identify. (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 3-8)

A central friction for Jay lay between how others believed he should identify and how

he chose to claim identity. A corollary to the issue of how Jay identified was the

question of where he could find a sense of community related to his identities. Most

often, as he described above, he sought opportunities to assert his agency in defining his own identity and forging his own connections to communities.

The most frequent stumbling block on Jay's ongoing path to self-definition was others' notions and definitions for racial and ethnic identity. He noticed that people seem to carry around an unofficial, internal inventory for determining who belonged in a given group: "I guess there's a general expectation for what an Asian American is. And then, so, this imposed identity, like this identity that's imposed on people, it kind of creates … kind of like a checklist. A mental checklist for everybody" (Interview 2, p. 1, ll. 26-29). As a person of Black and Korean heritage, Jay challenged these preconceived mental checklists:

> Black people aren't supposed to really watch anime. … Yeah, like that's an Asian thing, you know, right? Or Asian Americans aren't supposed to be into hip-hop. Like that's another thing, you know? It's like, that policing and stuff, it makes things a little bit more tense when it comes to those issues. … You shouldn't discount their Black experience simply because they're interested in [anime], you know? Same with the APA experience, right? Like you can't discount their experiences as an Asian American. Like, yeah, they might be into hip-hop, but they still might face those same discriminatory practices or the same stereotyping. (Interview 2, p. 3, ll. 8-17)

In Jay's experience, people used these mental checklists to "police" who belonged to a racial group and who could legitimately claim a racial identity, in effect adjudicating racial belongingness. He also saw these checklists applied to other social identities, such as sexual orientation. As someone who often upended such

checklists, Jay had to manage other people's judgments while making meaning of identity and belonging for himself. He asserted the need to expand understandings of social identity categories to be inclusive of diverse ways of being. Jay's journey of moving through the world with multiple social identities and navigating others' perceptions to create his own meaning of identity began with ethnicity.

Ethnic Identity: Being Korean, Being Black, and Being Counted as Neither

Jay's experiences with ethnicity were characterized by concurrent searches for personal meaning and for belonging and ethnic affiliation. However, his efforts often encountered resistance from the "mental checklists" for ethnic belonging of his peers. Jay's father was Black, and his mother was Korean; both parts of his heritage were important to him. He had to create his own meaning of those ethnic identities largely on his own; he did not recall hearing clear messages from his parents regarding what being Black, Korean, or Asian American meant as he was growing up. In terms of ethnicity, he identified as Black American, a term that he believed was more inclusive of African diasporic communities than the term African American. Simultaneously, he also identified with his Korean American ethnic identity, even though that identification had been "tricky" at times:

> I definitely say I am Korean. But it's like tricky, I guess, because … it's hit-or-miss as far as like what values I know or what culture or traditions that I know, as far as like what makes me Korean and what does not. So ... it can get really tricky, but … let's say if I were to be relocated and I had a choice, I would go to South Korea, you know. (Interview 1, p. 5, ll. 16-22)

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In this statement, Jay expressed a strong personal attachment to his Korean identity, as well as a tentativeness in his legitimacy to claim that identity. He seemed to question what being Korean meant and whether he would "qualify" as Korean, yet maintained his own connection to Korea for himself.

Jay grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Prince George's County, Maryland, that did not have a significant Korean population. In order to connect with a Korean community, Jay and his mother drove to Annandale, Virginia, at least weekly to attend church and visit with Korean friends. He saw these regular sojourns, which required driving across the Potomac River from Maryland to Virginia, as analogous to traveling over a different body of water to connect between his American and Korean heritages:

> It's interesting because we would cross the bridge, the Woodrow Wilson, to go to Virginia. And it's funny because I didn't realize it at first, but when you take flights to Korea, you have to cross the Pacific Ocean from the States usually. And I just think it's like really interesting because that's usually how my journey would go to visit Korea, so to speak, or like my Korean side. (Interview 1, p. 6., ll. 15-19)

Much of what being Korean meant came to Jay indirectly, communicated through messages primarily from his mother, as well as from their Virginia-based Korean American community. He recollected the presence of several *eemo*, friends of his mother who served as surrogate aunts. Since his Korean American community was located at church, his meanings of being Korean and being Christian were linked. He also recalled his mother's regular prompting of him to do things quickly and properly,

her expectations that he help out in the kitchen, and the near-constant encouragement to eat more, all of which he saw as rooted in Korean culture. Jay was also keenly aware of the influence of Korean culture in the responsibilities and expectations he shouldered as the first-born and only son in his family.

The role of language in defining Jay's Korean ethnic identity was fraught with many of the same tensions he encountered in making meaning of all of his identities. He was not fluent in speaking Korean, but was able to speak and understand in conversations that arose in day-to-day home life and at church. As he put it, "Most of my terminology, it's either food-related, Christianity-related, and just like basic commands, because they're barked out" (Interview 1, p. 9, ll. 20-21). However, at times, his ability to speak Korean at home was difficult, specifically when he lived with his paternal grandmother in Philadelphia for two years during elementary school while his parents lived abroad. His grandmother did not understand why he would speak to his mother in Korean on the phone, leaving him to feel compelled to justify his claim to language, and in a way, to his Korean heritage, even among members of his own family:

> sometimes I would try to practice my Korean with my mom on the phone, …
> and then my grandmother got upset with me. She was like, "Why do you
> have to speak Korean around your mom? Your mom understands English."
> And I was like, "I just want to speak Korean with my mom. Can I not?"
> (Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 23-28)

His mother sent Jay to Korean school at different times to advance his learning of Korean language and culture, but none of those attempts were successful

in helping him become fluent, ultimately because he did not have the opportunity to continue practicing speaking, especially when his mother was abroad. When his mother returned to the U.S. and reunited with him, she was unhappy that Jay had forgotten what he knew of the language:

> I think she got upset because she tried to take me to *hangul hag-gyo* [Korean school], but I forgot everything. I was just like, "I don't know anything. I don't practice it." And then she got upset. I was like, "I'm sorry, I forgot everything, because everything was out of practice." So there was that.
>
> (Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 18-21)

The guilt he felt about the challenges of learning and retaining language remained even as he related this story to me. As the child of an immigrant, Jay felt a responsibility to gain fluency in Korean language and culture: "I feel socially responsible: I need to learn the language, I need to go back, I need to learn the customs" (Interview 2, p. 23, ll. 20-21).

In addition to serving as a connection point to his mother, Korean language also seemed to serve as a potential (dis)connection point to Korean ethnic belongingness for Jay. Indeed, his Korean-ness came into question due to the incongruity others experienced between the way he looked and Korean language ability. His Korean peers challenged his legitimacy to speak Korean:

> Like I mentioned before, language was a big thing, so like in elementary school it was tough because on both sides, I was told I wasn't allowed to say certain things, because I wasn't, like, it didn't sound right coming from me. For Korean people, I wasn't allowed to speak Korean, like Korean kids would

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tell me I wasn't allowed to speak Korean, I shouldn't say Korean words

because it didn't sound right coming from me. (Interview 1, p. 5, l. 32-37)

Even as he tried to claim his own Korean identity by speaking Korean, he felt shut

down by Korean American peers, his bid for belonging rejected by other community

members. At the same time, as he told me this story, he seemed to brush off this

rejection in retrospect: "It's really weird now because when I say certain terminology

or words to Korean folk now, they say my pronunciation is great, but that's none of

my business," he commented with a half-shrug (Interview 1, p. 5, l. 32- p. 6, l. 2).

Jay also recounted experiences when his Black identity was challenged in

similar ways. In terms of his Blackness, he found his language and his appearance

policed by Black peers:

> Same with other Black students, like if I were to say certain slang to fit in or
>
> something like that, they would be like, "You sound weird. You don't sound
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> like you should be saying that." I was like, "Oh, what do you mean?" I mean,
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> part of it, it can be argued that, oh it's personality, but I felt like it was more
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> racially motivated than anything else. I think also, there's a lot of talk about
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> my hair. My hair was not as long as it is now – it was actually very short. But
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> a lot of my Black peers would be like, "Oh, your hair is different, that means
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> you're different." I'm like, "Oh, I guess, yeah." (Interview 1, p. 6, ll. 5-11)

Jay's mixed racial and ethnic heritage challenged the mental checklists that others

held for Korean-ness and Blackness. Indeed, he was different from monoracial peers

by virtue of his mixed heritage, but where he tried to stake claims to both ethnic

identities and groups, he faced resistance for not being solely those identities.

Jay's attempts to find a sense of belonging among Korean American communities met with varied results. When he was growing up, church provided his connection to Korean American community, not only through his network of *eemo*s, but also through a group of close Korean American male friends. Elsewhere, however, he had trouble finding that sense of connection in Korean American spaces, such as at Korean school and with Korean American student organizations in college. Once in college, he tried getting involved with different Korean student organizations, first a Korean Christian organization, and then the Korean Student Association, but his efforts to find a sense of belonging in those spaces were awkward and ultimately unsuccessful:

> Because I tried to get involved with the Korean student population, but it didn't, it was just like, it was tricky. I guess I didn't, I don't know, maybe it was just the way things were framed, it was probably for the best, but it was just not really working. (Interview 1, p. 13, ll. 13-15)

Expanding further about his experience with the Korean Christian organization, he described the "just like awkward" interactions he had (Interview 1, p. 14, l. 13):

> I saw their chalking, I came to their thing, I tried to figure out, but I guess that's when understanding of my religious identity was more of a thing. I was just like [dismissing sound]. I don't know. And so then I tried KSA, I think because I was late to their meeting, they had started with icebreakers and stuff, I tried to make friends but it was just like really clique-y and really awkward. (Interview 1, p. 14, ll. 15-19)

In both settings, Jay reported feelings of discomfort and dislocation, rather than the ease of connection and inclusion he had sought. Notably, the way he described his experiences with Korean school as a child and with Korean student organizations in college seemed to reflect his feelings of disconnection. His sentences were shorter, more fragmented, as he discussed how his ventures for Korean American affiliation foundered. In contrast, when he discussed most other topics, Jay was more discursive, even expansive, in sharing his views. In these particular spaces set aside for Korean Americans, Jay had trouble fitting in. Eventually, he found his sense of connection in college through other campus organizations that were less ethnic-specific in orientation, first through an organization for multiracial students, and then through a pan-Asian American advocacy organization and other organizations that were multicultural in focus.

Being Asian American: Finding Community and Defining Identity on His Own Terms

In college, identifying with the Asian American community provided Jay with a sense of belonging that he had not found in ethnic-specific spaces. After his unfruitful efforts to find connection among Korean American organizations, he connected with the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association (MBSA), where he found the welcome and sense of belonging he had been seeking. He also joined a multicultural Greek organization; both the fraternity and MBSA belonged to a coalition of Asian American organizations coordinated by the Asian American Student Union (AASU), a pan-Asian American organization focused on advocacy. He then began getting involved in other Asian American community initiatives that

did not have an ethnic-specific focus, such as a fashion show and a comedic pageant of men from Asian American organizations. He built friendships through these fun events, which paved the way for his increased involvement in AASU. Through these engagements, he found both a sense of community and a way to contribute to a collective set of goals, culminating in his assumption of a leadership role as an AASU officer:

> And that's really where I was like, oh yeah, I'm part of the community, I feel like a part of it. Because it wasn't like ethnic-specific, it was just like, everyone was going to help out and we're gonna make this thing happen. And I was like, oh yeah, I want to get more involved. (Interview 1, p. 13, ll. 22-25)

Affiliating with a pan-Asian American organization, along with conversations about navigating multiple racial identities with other multiracial students (especially those who also claimed Asian American heritage), prompted Jay to think more about Asian American identity. In Jay's view, being Asian American meant having a direct familial or relational connection to Asia. Jay explained:

> Having blood ties to Asia and ending up in America makes you Asian American. Whether that means you are born in the States, or you're a transracial adoptee or that sort of thing, or multiracial, all of that goes under Asian American. (Interview 1, p. 17, ll. 27-29)

His conception of being Asian American was thoughtfully and intentionally constructed to be inclusive of various Asian ethnicities and types of experiences, such as being adopted and being multiracial. Having a biological connection to an Asian heritage as an American was the key element of claiming an Asian American identity.

However, Jay soon described additional aspects to his definition of true Asian American identity. For Jay, identifying as Asian American came along with a responsibility to learn about and know one's history and culture and to work in service of one's community:

> Though I have a very general definition of what an Asian American is, I feel like there are certain responsibilities that come with identifying as Asian American. So that commitment to the community is understanding your place in engaging at least some of the cultures from your home country. And knowing a good amount of history, because one thing that upsets me is when people claim an identity, claim any type of identity, but then they have nothing to show for it. They're not working to help it. It's almost as if they're using it as a crutch, or they only use it when they need to. That's not how it should work, that's not how you claim a connection to a community. It should be maintained. It sucks to say we have to police people to do that, but it's only fair, it's not fair to the community if people just abuse it. (Interview 1, p. 18, ll. 5-14)

Jay delineated between his general definition of Asian American and his conception of what claiming identity as an Asian American meant. Interestingly, however, Jay also referenced the policing of identity, this time asserting the need for it. In this response, Jay seemed to critique public figures who claimed a racial identity when convenient but without the commitment to and engagement with the community that he saw as required.

In a way, his definition of who rightfully could claim Asian American identity could be seen as a response to the mental checklists of socially constructed identity he had encountered. He was wary of excluding folks from a racial identity or community based on those checklists, which seemed to ignore the diversity within racial communities and the many different ways people could be Asian American:

It's like, if you're being exclusive when you say, "you're not a true Asian" or "you're not a true Asian American." And so, because you yourself are creating these levels of standards – because I link a lot of things to my Black experience … But coming from the perspective of the Black community, I think it's like, when those rules are in place as far as this is what it takes to be a real Black man, or a real Black person or whatever: you have to be into hip-hop, you have to employ a certain stereotype. You're excluding those and then you're invalidating their racial identities and their ability to connect with people. Because for all intents and purposes, the multiracial individual who may look, you know, more the other race, the person might be a transracial adoptee, and the person who's like, you know, who might have been born in the States and left for an extended period of time, those are all, like those should all, along with other examples, should be considered part of the community and part of that population. So, granted, there's a certain expectation as far as serving the community, but recognizing the diversity within a community is a key part in really, really dismantling, you know, White supremacy and the whole idea of racialized, I think, anything, you know? (Interview 2, p. 2, ll. 10-25)

Notably, Jay's definition of Asian American identity hinged on heritage, knowledge of history and culture, and community engagement; it markedly excluded physical appearance. According to his definition, his identity and belonging were within his own power to control and assert by virtue of his actions. In contrast, the mental checklists of racial belonging he faced from others usually centered on physical appearance. At times when he stepped forward to claim a space in the Asian American community, he encountered resistance and rejection due to the way he looked:

> I feel like it's a little unfair when it comes to certain things. Like, I feel like when it comes to how physical appearance plays a role in terms of determining Asian-ness, so to speak. Because when it comes to role models and getting involved and stuff, because I have that blood tie, I feel like I have those connections or I should have a stake or I should have access to those responsibilities or being accepted in certain spaces, but I feel like sometimes they're like, it's not okay or whatever, or it's not as embracing as I would like it to be as opposed to other spaces. (Interview 2, p. 26, ll. 16-22)

In his eyes, he had credibility as an Asian American due to his familial ties, his active engagement with learning about his Asian heritage, and his sense of responsibility to the community; according to his definition, he qualified as a "true Asian American" and thus should be accepted in Asian American spaces. College had provided him with opportunities to learn more about what being Asian American meant; he saw that education as bolstering his claims to Asian American identity and community:

I feel like part of me is catching up, so to speak, as far as my Asian American

identity is concerned. And part of it is like just, I guess, developing the

language, knowledge, and confidence to navigate the space like it's nothing.

(Interview 2, p. 27, ll. 8-10)

Navigating Multiple Racial Identities

In addition to identifying as Asian American, Jay concurrently claimed other

racial identifications; he also resonated with identities of being a person of color and

as multiracial. His experiences of finding dislocation instead of belonging among

various identity-based communities influenced his identity-making:

Like I said before, I think getting kind of in a metaphorical sense kicked

around, like how I should identify racially, culturally, and what not, has kinda

put me in a more general space of like feeling not just blurred, but still

conscious. I generally default to saying multiracial American or a person of

color, as opposed to specifics, because my experiences have shaped me to

have a greater sense of empathy with other groups, other communities that are

outside of my own. (Interview 1, p. 3, ll. 5-10)

Others' (mis)perceptions of his race continually shaped how Jay made meaning of his

racial identity. In predominantly White spaces, people often assumed that he was

Black. At other times, people thought he was Latino. He recognized that his

appearance led to varying reactions, which in turn affected how he chose to identify

racially: "So I guess I see myself as multiracial American, a person of color,

especially because of the way I look," he explained (Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 30-31). At

the same time, external judgments about his race and racial belonging spurred him to

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learn more about other communities. He shared that being mistaken as Latino "kind of acted as a gateway" for his learning more about the Latino experience (Interview 1, p. 3, l. 6) and recognizing the parallels between Latino and Asian American experiences. Those commonalities included "language being a fundamental part of affirming or validating your identity" and "being placed in the space between the binary, the racial binary that is Blackness and Whiteness, and trying to navigate that space" (Interview 1, p. 3, ll. 19-21). In this way, Jay's racial identity was the result of the interplay between others' perceptions and his own meaning making. As he explained, Jay's identification as a person of color served as an act of claiming identity and connection on his own terms, rather than simply as a reaction to others' assumptions:

> I generally go by person of color because as someone who's Asian, or Asian American and Black American, it's kind of like, oh, I don't have that sense of, I guess, sense of privilege. I'm not able to engage or participate in some of the privileges that other multiracial Americans have that whose parents, or one of their parents are of a White background. So I really push for that because, especially because like I said before, I have a great sense of solidarity with other groups outside of my community that are of color. I kind of adopted that persona more. (Interview 1, p. 4, l. 36 – p. 5, l. 3)

Asserting his identity as a person of color was particularly meaningful to Jay because doing so positioned him solidly among communities of color.

Gender: Privilege and Its Limitations

From the beginning of our conversations, Jay noted the importance of gender in the way he saw himself. In both his "I am" poem and his response about the identities that defined him, Jay mentioned his role as son and brother as key to his self-definition. He identified as "a guy, 'his' pronouns" when I asked about how he saw himself in terms of gender. He has become more aware of his gender identity from conversations with people who identify as women and trans; consequently, he recognized the privileges he had as a cisgender man. As he described at the beginning of our first interview, he felt the pressures of expectations as firstborn and as a son, especially combined with his ability status, in comparison with his younger sister, who had autism; however, he recognized the privilege he had with the gender-based expectations he faced: "I can only imagine how my experiences, if like me and my sister were to swap genders or things like that" (Interview 2, p. 15, ll. 28-29). He also received messages from his mother regarding gender-related expectations of physical appearance, from the length of his hair to his height and his weight and size.

Jay was particularly attuned to the intersections of gender with race and colorism. He felt self-conscious about his skin color, but imagined that his concerns would be magnified if he were a woman. Where he has faced challenges in being accepted in Asian American settings, he thought the barrier would be even greater as a darker-skinned multiracial woman:

> It might be a crazy hypothesis, but I would argue that colorism is a very, it's a
> fairly strong issue in the community regardless of, like even though it might
> not be formally talked about, because I think physical appearance in general is

gatekeeping, like you know, in Korean culture, right? You having to attach a

picture to your application for a job – like, come on now. The expectations

for what a person's supposed to look like are further intensified if you're a

woman. … My skin color as a multiracial Asian American, you know, it's

darker than most. It's darker than most multiracial Asian Americans at least

that are portrayed, so it's difficult, because how do I claim the heritage, you

know? But you know, fortunately, I'm able to claim it with probably less

pushback than most. (Interview 2, p. 16, 23-29; p. 16, l. 34 – p. 17, l. 2)

At the same time, he experienced a tension between his privileged gender

identity and his marginalized racial identity; he saw that he had access to some

privileges due to being a man, but that some of that access was mitigated by being

Asian American. Some of his meaning making of his identity as an Asian American

man was hampered by a lack of identifiable role models in his immediate circles. He

did not see Asian American men very much as he was growing up, likely due to the

prominent role of his mother and his mother's friends in his life. As he put it, "it was

more about the *eemo*s [aunties] than the *samchon*s [uncles]" (Interview 2, p. 15, l.

16). When contemplating intersections of race and gender for Jay, though, sexual

orientation also had to come into consideration.

Sexual Orientation: Going "Full Circle" with Intersectionality

"This identity goes full circle with a lot of identities when it comes to

intersectionality," Jay said when the topic of sexual orientation arose (Interview 2, p.

20, ll. 22-23). He was reluctant to discuss sexual orientation at first, partially due to

his identifiability as a participant: "I get uncomfortable sometimes because I feel like

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it'd be very easy to kind of pinpoint the guy that's, you know, the guy with these particular experiences" (Interview 2, p. 18, ll. 22-24). He still opened up to share his reflections and thoughts on sexual orientation. He did not identify as gay, because of his firmly held belief that he described in relation to Asian American identity, that if a person identified with a specific kind of community, then they should be involved with that community. According to this ethic, there were moral implications for activism that came along with claiming an identity:

> if I was to identify as gay, I should be involved in the LGBT community, but I'm not, so I don't. And that's just how I am with certain words or when it comes to language and stuff. If there's certain implications that come with identifying things as they are, you should kind of, you should fulfill the definition. (Interview 2, p. 20, ll. 11-18)

In this way, Jay policed his own identification with sexual orientation. As a result, instead, he explained, "usually, I'll say I'm into guys or identify as queer, like loosely" (Interview 2, p. 20, ll. 23-24).

Jay was also cautious about disclosing this identity within Asian American spaces because he sensed a stigma with identifying as queer. He had not shared his sexuality with many of his friends in the Asian American community, so he had not personally confronted that stigma, but he had a strong feeling that "there would be pushback, or it would be difficult or make things uncomfortable" (Interview 2, p. 22, ll. 26-27). He perceived the heteronormative culture within the community and anticipated that by coming out and thus deviating from those norms would be fraught

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with risk. He felt the greatest risk with disclosing to other men, saying it was "tricky trying to navigate" when to share this part of himself as a friendship grew:

> it's actually fairly difficult as far as the conversations like, disclosure not necessarily meaning interest, if that makes sense? Like me sharing that I'm queer doesn't mean that I'm interested in you. It's just like me feeling, me wanting to establish a level of comfort I am around you when it comes to these types of issues. (Interview 2, p. 22, ll. 19-23)

Intersections between sexual orientation and other social identities caused conflict in various ways for Jay. He noted that his sexual identity contributed to his ambivalence about religion. He also saw this identity as incompatible with gender-related expectations he felt connected to starting a family; with the recent passing of his grandparents, he felt that this expectation was strongly implied by his family, yet acknowledged that he might be internalizing and putting the pressure of these expectations on himself.

As he considered the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, Jay also wondered about the overlaps and contradictions of various stereotypical expectations associated with those identities. He had seen how the mental checklists for being Korean, being Black, or being Asian American dictated who could be seen as legitimately claiming an identity or joining a community, and he questioned how the checklists associated with being a man, queer, and of color played out together. He pondered "what it means to be a man, what it means to be a queer man, and queer man of color" (Interview 2, p. 22, ll. 2-3).

In terms of pursuing relationships, Jay's sexual orientation was deeply tied to gender and race. In the queer male dating world, Jay had trouble with portraying himself in a way that was inclusive of his multiple identities and with forging meaningful connections. On queer dating apps, men had the option to identify their race and to express racial preferences for potential matches. As he sought out other men on the apps, he wondered how much people who claimed an identity actually were meaningfully engaged with that identity and found himself doing a version of identity policing that he resisted in other settings:

> And for me, I feel like I'm kind of a proponent of, you know, this racial/ethnic policing. Because often, people identify as multiracial, and I'm like, you don't have that multiracial experience, you know what I'm saying? You don't have that multiracial stake. And so, it gets really difficult for me. (Interview 2, p. 21, ll. 10-13)

The dating apps did not allow for the nuance and complexity of racial and ethnic identities that Jay experienced. For instance, he wanted to share his Asian American identity on these dating apps because that identity was important to him, but he did not want to mislead anyone if he were to identify solely as Asian American. He also recognized that his racial identity would eliminate him as a match for some men due to racial preferences:

> It gets difficult for me because sometimes I want to disclose my Asian American-ness, because I know it's not as apparent, but then it gets very awkward because I think the racial/ethnic categories are very much superficial, but I know it would be inappropriate for me to identify as solely

Asian. So, it's very difficult. … So yeah, I guess it's difficult, because maybe

I want to have, you know, relationships or just meeting up with someone,

often, I'm, because of racial preferences, I'm excluded, and then it gets

difficult because some people are very much upfront about it. It's like, "Oh,

yeah, I'm not interested in Black men, or Black or Latino men or people of

color, usually try to avoid them." (Interview 2, p. 21, 14-23)

As a multiracial man who identified with both Black and Asian American identities,

Jay was very much aware of the contrasting ways in which both racial groups were

sexualized: "When it comes to sexuality, it's funny, because … I'm kind of placed on

the two extremes as far as like racial, masculine sexuality, as far as like Asian

Americans seen as asexual and Black Americans seen as hypersexual" (Interview 2,

p. 22, ll. 28-31). Ultimately, sexual orientation seemed to serve as a nexus of difficult

intersections of Jay's multiple identities, where he grappled with the meanings of

identity that he had created for himself and the meanings that others put on him.

"The Way Christianity Is Done amongst the Korean Community": Reflections on Religion

Jay referred to Christianity and church throughout our conversations. His

religious identity and his Korean identity were interwoven, yet his religion identity

was not as salient. Jay grew up going to a Korean Christian church with his mother;

those weekly drives across the river signified his weekly opportunity to connect with

their Korean American community. He appreciated the role church played in

providing a cultural community for his mother, as well as the central role that faith

played in her life, but questioned how relevant Christian faith was for him personally.

Having attended church regularly throughout his childhood, Jay was very familiar with Bible teachings and said he would identify as Christian; at the same time, he found the daily application of the belief system to be challenging: "For me, the practice is really difficult" (Interview 2, p. 5, ll. 23). The meaning he made of faith was shaped by his growing up in a Korean church; the uniqueness of the setting made it difficult for him to explore faith further in a non-ethnic-specific context. As he put it, "the way Christianity is done amongst the Korean community, like, it's a little different" (Interview 1, p. 9, ll. 17-18). To some extent, the barrier was related to language; at his mother's church, services were conducted solely in Korean. Although he was able to understand only a fraction of the service, he felt more connected to a spiritual experience in a Korean setting than in an English-speaking setting:

> My experience, honestly, when it comes to church or religion is that when I go to an English-speaking service or things like that, I completely understand what's being said, but I don't feel anything. But for some reason, when I go to a Korean-speaking church – I mean, I only probably understand two percent of what's being said – however, I feel a little bit more. (Interview 2, p. 5, ll. 32-36)

In the end, religion was not as salient to Jay as his racial and gender identities: "I think it's more, it's kind of subconscious or subtle" (Interview 2, p. 7, ll. 25-26). He considered his conservative approach to alcohol and substance use as having religious underpinning, but thought that it might also be related to Korean culture.

Church was special to Jay more due to the opportunity to connect with other Korean Americans and to engage with his Korean American identity, rather than to explore his faith identity. His close circle of male Korean American friends was based at church. Unfortunately, internal divisions at their church led to dwindling membership and ultimately a breakdown of the church, which resulted in the loss of this important social-cultural support circle:

> And it was just really tough because, like I said, church was a good place where, especially growing up with other Korean American guys, is where I got a good sense of my identity. And I think that was the difficult part is that seeing the church kind of fall apart because leadership changed or things like that. (Interview 2, p. 6, ll. 27-31)

He was able to reconnect with this group of friends recently after a period of almost four years and reflected on what remained and what was lost:

> Fortunately I was able to, I got to see them this past Christmas, and that was almost four years. And it wasn't that awkward, actually. It was actually really cool. It was almost like nothing changed, honestly. But it was really tough because it was almost that part of my – I guess that is related, huh? That sense of community that was there, it went away. (Interview 2, p. 7, ll. 14-20)

As described earlier, Jay was not able to find connection to a similar ethnically based faith group in college. He usually tried to avoid discussing religion with Asian American friends, recognizing that it could often divide people, so that he could maintain connections to the multiple communities to which he belonged.

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Further, his sexual orientation was "another reason why religion's a little difficult for me" (Interview 2, p. 20, ll. 24-25).

Being Working Class and Asian American

Jay often felt the salience of socioeconomic status, coming from a working class background while feeling surrounded by an upper-middle class lifestyle at college. He perceived a sense that most people seemed to assume that Asian Americans were socioeconomically privileged. He recalled a conversation from high school with friends from diverse backgrounds where they discussed which racial groups faced the greatest challenges, and he felt his multiple racial identities collide with others' pre-conceptions:

> I think someone said like, "Oh yeah, Blacks and Latinos have it the toughest."
> And I was like, "That's not necessarily the case." I think someone discounted
> my experience because my mom was Korean. And they're saying like, "Oh
> yeah, Korean/Asian was better than Black or Latino." And I was like, "Wait a
> second, no, that ain't it. That's not how it works." … I do remember the big
> thing was that, yeah, Asian might be better, but one, I'm not the typical Asian.
> Two, my version of the Asian American household is different. And three,
> my mom was different, you know? And the big thing was like socioeconomic
> status, right? … you can't discount my experience as an Asian American
> person saying, like, you can't say I can't count when it comes to this thing.
> (Interview 2, p. 25, ll. 21-34)

Once again, Jay seemed to confront yet another item on the mental checklist of what it meant to be Asian American that he did not embody: being financially well off. He

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realized that most of his Korean American friends from church lived in nicer houses and seemed more financially privileged. He continued to claim his Asian American-ness nonetheless: "Because though I am Asian American, … I don't have those privileges that … the more well-off peers in the community have" (Interview 2, p. 26, ll. 1-3). Continuing to argue for more expansive understandings of race and racial belonging, Jay asserted, "It's what cultivates my sense of ideas as, like, race isn't so cut and dry as you would like it to be" (Interview 2, p. 26, ll. 8-9).

Ability: The Salience of Privilege

Jay recognized the privilege he possessed due to his able-bodiedness and felt the salience of this privilege due to his younger sister's ability status. His sister had autism, what he described as being on the "more extreme [end] of the spectrum" (Interview 2, p. 11, l. 34). As we discussed his ability status, the conversation also turned toward gender, ethnicity, and immigrant generation status. As the firstborn son, Jay already felt the pressure of expectations from his parents and from the Korean side of his family that he succeed academically and professionally; the expectations weighed heavier with the knowledge that his sister would not be able to achieve similar milestones. He explained:

> My mom always says study hard and things like that. Which is maybe typical
> of the community, but I think it's when in the more seldom talked about
> conversations about my sister and her status and things like that, it's more
> apparent why that kind of pressure is always put on me so regularly.
> (Interview 2, p. 12, ll. 18-21)

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He recognized some of the similar expectations that his Asian American peers faced from their immigrant parents, who "sometimes hit a certain limit as far as their economic mobility or their social success when it comes to being in the States, and so, they want to live vicariously through their children" (Interview 2, p. 12, ll. 32-35). These expectations were magnified for Jay, who felt a responsibility to make the most of opportunities and experiences that he knew his sister would miss.

Conclusion

For several of his salient social identities, Jay had to negotiate tensions between external definitions and his own meaning making. He struggled when confronted with mental checklists for ethnic and racial belonging that were narrowly focused and thus seemed to delegitimize his identity. In response to these external definitions, he sought to define identity on his own terms and to forge his own meaning making about identity and community. His definitions of identity became based on his actions, becoming involved and taking leadership roles. No matter which social identity was considered or what combination of intersections, Jay sought to complicate those categories, to make them more inclusive of the diversity of backgrounds and experiences people held.

John

I am John. I am a Chinese American, born in Taiwan. I am 20 years old. I am a younger brother. I am a junior biology major. I am a gay, cisgender male. I am an aviation enthusiast. I am a hopeless romantic. I am a caring boyfriend. I am an immigrant. I am a world traveler. I am a sports fan. I am a foodie. I am pretty happy with how my life has turned out to this point. I

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am an animated movie fan. I am a person who loves to go out of my way.

And I am smart enough to be lazy.

As John sat down at the table across from me, he pulled off his sunglasses and smiled. At the time of our first meeting, it was summer break, and John returned to campus to sit and talk with me in a residence hall conference room. He sat tall and straight. He had a strong voice, loud, and it carried. He spoke in fully formed, complex sentences, with very little of the starts and stops of sentence fragments that I noticed in my own speaking. He was thoughtful, but at the same time, he did not seem hesitant to share his story. He was candid and straightforward and confident, self-assured. He was also driven and goal-oriented. Early in our first conversation, when I asked how he was liking college so far, John described college as a "stepping stone" to his future goals: "I sort of view it as a stage where I can't relax yet. … I'm not gonna risk my grades or my future career for having too much fun now. I'd rather wait for fun later. It's like delayed gratification" (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 14-18).

John's outlook, forswearing immediate enjoyment in favor of long-term goals, was shaped significantly by his parents and by his family's immigration to the U.S. from Taiwan when he was three years old. The salience of his ethnic identity and racial identity reflected his experience as an immigrant. While they remained primary ways he identified himself, they were also intricately intertwined with gender and sexual orientation. For John, intersections of identity were inescapable, although how he navigated those intersections changed as he grew in awareness and knowledge about them.

Being Asian and not American

For John, his identity as Asian was salient for most of his life. When I asked John about the most important aspects of his identity that defined him, he responded, "being Asian is one of the biggest things" (Interview 1, p. 2, l. 24). He elaborated:

It's always been a big thing, because I wasn't born here. My legal name is my Chinese name. So in school people would know me as John, but whenever there was a substitute teacher they would call my legal name and then they would always mispronounce it, but it's okay, I got used to it. So it's part of, like, it's part of the culture I get immersed to, I get immersed in at home, it shapes what food I like to eat, it shapes how I think about school, like my work ethic, my values. And it's something that like, it's more prominent in my life because it's something that people can see directly, like, my skin isn't any other color, and they can tell that I am Asian immediately. (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 24-32)

Within this response, John conveyed the multiple meanings he attributed to "being Asian." A key aspect of being Asian, to John, was being different. Part of his difference was ascribed to being an immigrant and not having been born in the U.S.; his legal name and its frequent mispronunciation signified this difference. He also felt a sense of visible difference, along with an awareness that his appearance was easily categorized by others as Asian.

"I was born in Taiwan, but I am Chinese." John's response about being Asian also included references to culture, such as food and values. He distinguished between race and ethnicity: in terms of race he saw himself as Asian, and in terms of

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ethnicity he saw himself as Chinese, born in Taiwan. Mindful that claiming identity

could be complicated for people from Taiwan, John explained his choice:

> And in terms of like ethnicity, I definitely view myself as Chinese, and yeah, I
>
> come from the part of Asia where the politics are very complicated … And
>
> although I would identify as Taiwanese, I identify as Taiwanese in the same
>
> way someone from Texas identifies as a Texan, because, like culturally,
>
> they're still American, but they're Texan. It's not that I believe that Taiwan is
>
> part of the mainland. It's that I feel like to identify only as Taiwanese and to
>
> like spurn the word Chinese really doesn't, isn't fair, in my opinion, because
>
> much of Taiwanese culture is still Chinese. We speak Chinese. We eat
>
> Chinese food. A lot of the cultural traditions are Chinese. We are the
>
> Republic of China, after all. So I was born in Taiwan, but I am Chinese.
>
> (Interview 1, p. 3, l. 37 – p. 4, l. 9)

For some, identifying as Taiwanese might serve as a political statement

regarding Taiwan's relationship with China. For John, though, the aspects of Chinese

culture that transferred to Taiwanese culture and eventually to his U.S. experience

were more relevant to his ethnic identity than political considerations. He maintained

strong connections both to his Chinese cultural heritage and to Taiwan. He attended

Chinese school weekly throughout his childhood and traveled to Taiwan every

summer to visit members of his extended family. He also took pride in his Chinese-

speaking ability. However, John recognized that his perspective on ethnic identity

might differ from his peers and couched his views within the context of U.S. society:

in terms of the bigger picture here in America, like, if we're bickering

amongst ourselves, like who's Chinese or who's Taiwanese, over these like

what I think are pretty irrelevant labels, like, … we're missing the bigger

point that we are still a minority in this majority White society and the

problems that we have there, and we might as well tackle those problems,

instead of like giving weird looks at each other for being like Chinese or

Taiwanese. (Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 19-25)

In John's view, the distinction between claiming Chinese identity or Taiwanese

identity felt less important given the minoritized status of immigrants of both

backgrounds in the U.S.

His earliest memories related to race hinged on how others noticed his visible

difference. He compared living in the U.S. to living in Taiwan, where "there wasn't a

concept of race, really because the society was homogenized, you know. … So there

wasn't, it wasn't like here, where there are people of different skin colors and races"

(Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 30-33). Cultural differences also made John feel conspicuous;

he recounted the experience of bringing Chinese food to school for lunch and the

questions he received from other children. When asked to recollect how he felt at the

time, John replied, "I think at that moment I felt like, oh, this is why I buy lunch

everyday" (Interview 1, p. 6, ll. 14-16), because doing so would have allowed him to

fit in with his classmates more seamlessly, and thus minimize the feelings of obvious

difference.

Being Asian means working hard. Growing up, what John learned from his

parents about being Chinese or Taiwanese or being Asian seemed to reflect an

immigrant's mindset. A defining characteristic of his childhood was discipline instilled by his parents, which sometimes was expressed by strict rules and a strong work ethic; as he put it, "When I was younger, like I just knew that having Asian parents meant having a stricter household" (Interview 1, p. 10, ll. 35-36). A belief in the value of hard work and the meritocratic notion that hard work would be rewarded with educational and economic opportunities was embedded in John's approach to thinking about his identities as an immigrant and as an Asian American, as well as his socioeconomic status. His parents' experiences growing up in Asia informed what John learned:

> What I've realized from my parents about being Asian is that you cannot ever really relax because coming from a continent and a region of the world where there's just so many people, your value goes way down unless you work hard. Like, they don't need you, because there's, like, in China, you're not special because there's 1.3 billion people. There's any number of people that can replace you immediately. So I think coming here, they really instilled in me that sort of, like, I wouldn't say killer instinct, but definitely like, you better work your butt off, otherwise you're not going to get anywhere. (Interview 1, p. 11, ll. 10-16)

John believed that working hard was fundamental to the Asian experience, as passed down from his parents. His parents' perspective seemed to inform John's sense of competition and drive. However, this drive took on additional meaning within the context of being an immigrant in the U.S.:

And what they also taught me from a very young age was that being here in America, it was going to be very unfair. And I knew that. I knew that growing up. … It was going to be unfair because I don't look like everyone else. I don't know English as well as them. I've had plenty of really embarrassing stories where I had to read something from a class and I mispronounced a word that apparently everyone knows but I didn't know. And all that added up to is I can never be complacent, because if I'm complacent – I'm already at a disadvantage, so if I'm complacent, then I'm really going to be at a disadvantage. I need to work hard to be at the same advantage as other people, and then work even harder to surpass them. (Interview 1, p. 11, ll. 16-25)

From his early childhood, John seemed to be aware of the hurdles he would face in the U.S. as both an immigrant and a person of color. John seemed to feel a need to prove himself in the face of challenges, which motivated him to study hard and focus on his academic goals throughout high school and into college. However, as he learned more about race and social justice during college, he began to see such hurdles critically.

"Oh, they're the Asians, they're really smart." Growing up in Montgomery County, Maryland, a diverse suburban area, John felt less out-of-place as an immigrant and as an Asian: "Being Asian here is kind of normal, like people are used to seeing Asians, people know what Asians are, there's a lot of Chinese and other Asian establishments" (Interview 1, p. 10, ll. 26-28). He had schoolmates of Asian heritage throughout his childhood. During middle school, he noticed the

emergence of an "Asian clique," which often sat together during lunch. He explained the dynamics: "there wasn't really, like, a negative concept of Asian, but it was more like a, oh, they're the Asians, they're really smart, you know, they're good at math" (Interview 1, p. 5, ll. 36-38). Although he had a different group of friends in middle school, he joined the Asian clique in high school, surrounding himself with friends with whom he had much in common: "we immediately just clumped together, because it seemed like there was more that we could relate to" (Interview 1, p. 8, ll. 38-39), including food, parental backgrounds and expectations, and extracurricular activities.

Growing Critical Awareness

John began college with a similar mindset as he had in high school, to focus on his studies with his long-term goals in mind; he described his thinking at the time: "I'm just going to get good grades, go to med school, and just live a simple life and not ruffle too many feathers" (Interview 1, p. 25, ll. 9-10). Despite the relevance of his immigrant identity, he did not spend a lot of time critically focusing on race before college: "it didn't feel out of place to be Asian, so I never really put that much thought into it" (Interview 1, p. 20, ll. 20-21). What prompted his greater awareness of race were romantic relationships with White partners; these relationships brought differences in culture, race, socioeconomic status, and privilege overall into sharp relief for John:

> It was definitely, [sigh] it was definitely when I started to date people that it made the fact that I was Asian American so much more glaring. Um. So.

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With both White guys that I've dated, one currently, one in the past, … the

cultural gap is just so jarring sometimes. (Interview 1, p. 20, ll. 21-25)

Spending more time with his older brother, who was also attending Maryland

and was already involved in campus-based social justice activities, further contributed

to John's growing interest in diversity and identity issues. As a result, John began

exploring diversity and social justice activities on campus, such as events hosted by

the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy office. During the second

semester of his freshman year, John participated in a five-part, one-credit leadership

seminar offered by the Asian American Studies program, during which he began

learning about Asian American history and issues with a more critical lens. He got

involved with the Alternative Breaks program, first volunteering as a trip participant

and then as a trip leader; his training as a trip leader engaged him on social justice

issues and intersectionality, which informed his interest when he saw my call for

participants for my research project. He also began connecting with the LGBT

community on campus. At the time of our conversations, John seemed to be

integrating critical reflections on identity into his thinking, a process that appeared to

still be in progress.

From Asian to Asian American. Learning more about Asian American

issues prompted John to reconsider the way he viewed himself and his racial identity.

For most of his life, John identified more strongly as Asian as opposed to Asian

American. When I asked him how he saw himself in terms of race at the beginning of

our first interview, he answered with a bit of hesitation: "Mm, okay. I feel like

because I wasn't born here, it took me a while to identify as Asian American. Like

for the most part, I don't see myself as American. I see myself as Asian" (Interview 1, p. 3, ll. 30-32). John's identity as an immigrant figured significantly into his conception of himself as Asian but not Asian American. He referenced how people of Asian descent were frequently asked about their origin and how the question left him feeling unable to claim American-ness:

> there are often many different discussions about, you know, microaggressions against Asians, like, "Oh, where are you from? Where are you from-from?" They're like, "I'm from Texas" or "I'm from Michigan." But that doesn't apply to me, because when they say where am I from, I'm from Taiwan. So, in a way it's weird, because … being a [*sic*] immigrant takes away my ability to kind of fight back against the people that don't see me as an American. Because if I was born here, I could be like, "I'm from Maryland," and when they ask me another question like, "No, where are you from-from?" I would be like, "I'm from Maryland," you know? But for me, it's like because I'm an immigrant, because I speak Chinese at home, because I was born in Taiwan, I can't say those things, because I kind of do feel foreign. And I kind of feel like them asking me, even though they would've asked the same thing to all my Asian American friends who were born here, it's only me, because I wasn't born here, that I can't kind of retort against that. (Interview 2, p. 14, ll. 9-25)

John understood the implicit stereotype that underlay questions about origin for Asian Americans – the assumption that they were always from somewhere else, perpetual foreigners who could not be seen as true Americans. John found it difficult to

respond to such microaggressions, because as an immigrant, that feeling of foreign-ness pervaded his lived experience. Given that, he questioned whether he could call himself an Asian American.

Another barrier to seeing himself as American was his perception of Asian American peers who seemed to disengage from their Asian heritage and identified almost exclusively with their American side. In his eyes, they were dismissing what was a salient part of his identity:

> this actually bothered me a lot in the earlier part of my life, when there would be a lot of kids who were Asian Americans, but then they would only identify with like the American part. And then they would complain that the food that they ate was too Asian, or like, like, they were very, like, they were all trying to be really White-washed, and that kind of like was very off-putting for me, because I feel like, I came from, you know, the areas that they were trying to get rid of. (Interview 1, p. 3, ll. 32-37)

John felt distant from the idea of American-ness partially because he associated it with a rejection of the Asian heritage with which he strongly identified.

Later in our first interview, when I asked him about experiences that contributed to the way he thought more critically about race, John reflected on his resistance to identifying as American and his evolving perspective. Acknowledging "I've always really strayed away from 'American' for the longest time" (Interview 1, p. 28, l. 30), John delved more deeply into this reluctance: "I had this fear that if I started accepting my American identity, I would lose all my identity. Once I started accepting that I was American, it's like, what does that mean?" (Interview 1, p. 29, ll.

13-15). John's initial inability to conceive of an identity that could accommodate both his Asian-ness and American-ness made him reluctant to incorporate American into his self-definition. He also saw the idea of an American identity problematic, given the association with racism and privilege that was endemic in U.S. society. However, he recently came to some new understandings of what being American could mean for him:

> being American, it didn't seem very, it didn't seem right to me, because I knew how problematic it was. The problem of this American identity, whether it's racism or privilege, … it was very off-putting for me, so that's why I tried to avoid it. But how I see that's changed over the years now, is that now instead of avoiding it, now I'm starting to accept it as the fact that I grew up here, I'm a product of American society, and I know it's very problematic, with the privilege and the racism. So instead of running away from it, I want to try to change it, you know? (Interview 1, p. 29, ll. 22-28)

John recognized that he had been partly shaped from the experience of growing up in U.S. society. For him, acknowledging and integrating his identity as an Asian American came with a concomitant desire to work toward social change.

At the same time, John was still learning about what being Asian American meant. For instance, when we discussed his high school friend group, I learned that they were mostly of Chinese or Taiwanese background, and he distinguished them from Indian classmates:

> Because if you looked at the Asians, although we all grouped together, now that I think about it, there was only Vietnamese girl, one Korean girl,

everyone else was either Chinese or Taiwanese. So it wasn't, there weren't a lot of ethnicities. There were several Indian people, but if we're talking about East Asian, as I'm referring to mostly what my group was, we were East Asian, Oriental, if you will. (Interview 1, p. 9, ll. 26-30)

In this way, it became clear that when John referred to Asians, he mostly meant those of East Asian descent. His conception of the racial category emerged explicitly when he asked me near the end of our second interview,

Okay, so I have a question. When you're doing your study about Asian Americans, are you specifically looking at East Asians, or do you have people in your study from like the Middle East, or India, or Central Asia, or even like the Asian parts of Russia? (Interview 2, p. 24, ll. 31-33).

I explained that I was basing my definition of Asian American on the racial category as constructed by the U.S. Census, including people from East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and so on), and Filipino backgrounds. John found this thought-provoking:

It's really interesting how, now that I'm thinking about it, even like this is definitely a byproduct of just American stereotypical views, but when I think about Asian American, it typically comes to mind as East Asian, and that's it, and I'm kind of just surprising myself that I think that way right now, but it's kind of so automatic, like, "Oh, Asian American, what does that mean? Oh, Oriental." (Interview 2, p. 24, ll. 9-13).

John's less expansive conception of the Asian American racial category reflected the influence of stereotypical depictions of Asian Americans and the limits of what he had learned so far about Asian American identity.

Recognizing the limits of hard work. John grew up valuing hard work as the key to educational and economic success in the U.S., but began questioning this belief as he recognized the role that racism played in limiting actual opportunities and privileges for Asian Americans. During high school, he seemed to have internalized the model minority stereotype; he felt that the work ethic he and his Asian American friends held was rooted in Asian cultural values and initially did not find the stereotype problematic: "we were like, oh, why is it a bad thing if people think we're smart, you know, like if people look up to us in terms of grades and everything?" (Interview 1, p. 6, ll. 3-4).

Once in college, however, he noticed the drawbacks of identifying with the model minority stereotype:

> this whole model minority thing, I feel like the problem is that with a lot of these racial issues, these topics, Asian Americans tend to ignore them for the sake of not ruffling feathers, you know? Because it is a Confucian doctrine to not be the bamboo that stands out because you'll get chopped down, you know? (Interview 1, p. 26, ll. 8-11)

He described the attitude of his parents and others in their generation as focused on individual effort and achievement, despite encounters with racism. Their "don't rock the boat" mentality seemed to reflect a practical understanding of systemic racism and realistically modest hopes for success within that system:

It's sort of like my parents when they told me that life was unfair here in America, as an Asian American, they were also saying, it's unfair, but learn to live with it. It will always be unfair, so let's not waste energy trying to change it, but just try to make the most out of it. So if you can be a doctor, and make good money, and live comfortably, then that's fine. But are you going to go out there and protest in the streets? No, don't do that. Are you going to gun for big, top, executive positions that very few Asians currently fill? No, we don't need that. We just want a stable job because you know you're smart, I know you can get into professional schools, and that's it. (Interview 1, p. 26, ll. 22-29)

As John shared the perspective of his parents' generation, he expressed dissatisfaction with the complacency embedded within it. Even as he identified with the parts of the model minority stereotype that linked academic and economic success with Asian cultural values, he recognized the limitations that Asian Americans faced:

And it's strange, because we are a minority, but in many ways, we are, we, especially Asian Americans, our culture dictates us to excel intellectually, academically, and that somehow, I guess it's true that those can be conflated with general success, and I guess for Asian parents that's enough, but if we're talking about true equality, or true equal privileges, if we're talking about privilege, there's still definitely a big gap. And I guess we don't really notice it until we interact more closely with, I mean we do notice it, but I didn't notice it until I started dating White people. (Interview 2, p. 21, ll. 31-37)

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John had begun learning about the model minority stereotype more critically through his Asian American leadership seminar, which helped him to see the differential access to privileges that different races experienced and some of the problematic nature of the stereotype. However, he was not aware of some of the other critiques, such as the way the model minority stereotype disguised educational and economic disparities among different Asian American ethnic groups, which I shared with him near the end of our second interview.

  "We're stuck on this weird place on the race spectrum": The positionality of Asian Americans in U.S. racial dynamics. As John reflected on the limitations that Asian Americans faced, he also considered how various racial groups fit within the broader landscape of U.S. racial dynamics. John shared:

> I think being Asian is very unique because we're a minority, definitely, but because we're stuck on this weird place on the race spectrum, if this study primarily is to talk about Asian American identity, I think the one experience that could sum up a lot of Asian Americans' experiences is that, while we're disadvantaged because we're not White, we're also advantaged because we're not Black. And that's very weird. That's a very weird position" (Interview 2, p. 21, ll. 22-27).

John encapsulated the unique and awkward positionality of Asian Americans, vis-à-vis other racial groups, in conversations about race in the U.S. To him, an intrinsic part of being Asian American was occupying a place of relative privilege while still experiencing oppression. He recognized the persistence of the perpetual foreigner

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stereotype of Asian Americans and how it contributed to the marginalization of Asian Americans in conversations about race in the U.S.

In one way, he saw being Asian American as disadvantageous when he applied to college. He specifically noted affirmative action as detrimental to Asian Americans:

> And the whole problem of affirmative action, … I personally think that the intention behind it is perfectly fine, but how it's implemented really, really hurts Asian American students like me … the one example of how I know affirmative action is flawed is that if I could change my skin color to Latino or African American or Native American, with what I have done and with my credentials, I know I could go to any school that I want to. But because I am Asian, I cannot. And because I'm Asian, all the schools I applied to rejected me or waitlisted me. (Interview 1, p. 22, ll. 5-12)

John saw the differential effects of affirmative action on racial groups as a consequence of the invisibility of Asian Americans in conversations about race: "when people talk about race in America, they don't really talk about Asians. It's always Black versus White. All this Ferguson, Baltimore, all these things, it's always Black versus White" (Interview 1, p. 22, ll. 14-16).

John's experiences with other communities of color further complicated his view of U.S. racial dynamics. Growing up, he noticed anti-Black and anti-Latino racism among his parents' generation, which he attributed to the perception that they and their children had lost out on opportunities to other racial minority groups. John also recalled how Black and Latino peers called him racial slurs when he was

growing up; however, looking back now, he could see the larger picture of how these individual interactions reflected systemic dynamics of power and privilege related to race:

> The only times I've ever been called a racial slur were by other racial minorities. … back then I didn't understand it because I was only in middle school. Now that I've grown up, it's so interesting to me, because I'm like, why am I being called a racial slur by other ethnic minorities? And I realized why, it was because when racial minorities are pitted against each other, the White majority wins, you know? It's like, oh, all of you racial minorities can fight each other and be displeased at each other, whether it's for affirmative action or whatever, but the really White, privileged, rich people will stay in charge, and we're fine with that. (Interview 1, p. 27, ll. 13-21)

John's nascent critical perspective on race and the positionality he and Asian Americans more broadly held in U.S. society informed his growing interest in engaging with social change. As his awareness of his racial identity grew, he also became more reflective of his other social identities, chief among them sexual orientation and gender.

Inextricable Intersections: Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Race

John's identity as an Asian American was closely intertwined with his gender and sexual orientation. In our introductory "I am" poem exercise, he stated, "I am a gay, cisgender male." Being gay was one of his most salient social identities, the second one he mentioned after race. His sexual orientation was a central part of his identity because of his value of relationships:

being gay is a really big part of my identity. And it didn't use to, because I

didn't come out yet, but I came out in high school, and since then it's been

something that's affected me a lot … it's not a big part in terms of like the

social justicey part, like, in fact, I'm kind of more like quiet in terms of that.

It's bigger because I have a lot of feelings, and I'm a very emotional person,

so in terms of relationships, I put in like tons and tons of effort. (Interview 1,

p. 2, l. 33 – p. 3, l. 1)

For John, identifying as gay did not carry political meaning; it was meaningful

because it signified his connection with a romantic partner; as indicated by his

introductory "I am" poem, being a hopeless romantic and a caring boyfriend were key

parts of his self-identification. Being gay was also salient because it was

continuously negotiated as he encountered new people and new situations: "coming

out never ends" (Interview 2, p. 9, ll. 25-26).

Gender was inextricably linked to being gay: "simply because I'm a cisgender

male, and I like other males, my whole sexual orientation is kind of contingent upon

my gender identity in a way" (Interview 2, p. 3, ll. 15-17). John learned the terms

cisgender and transgender once he began participating in the LGBT community in

college, but he had reflected on gender identity throughout his life. He recalled how

he had always felt an inner sense of femininity and how he was always interested in

women's fashion, gymnastics, and dance as a child, which prompted him to wonder

about his gender identity. However, he ultimately seemed to have confirmed his

identification as a cisgender man: "having gone through many years of, like, self-

discovery, I can say very strongly that I identify with the gender that I was born with,

that I was assigned with at birth" (Interview 2, p. 2, ll. 17-19).   Although he felt comfortable with his gender identity, John struggled to navigate expectations based on gender and its intersections with sexual orientation and race.

      Facing the pressure of gender expectations. As a child, John could tell that he did not seem to meet others' expectations for boys. He remembered many instances of playing games where boys competed against girls and being singled out and shamed by coaches and peers if he lost to a girl. He also felt targeted for his inner femininity, being teased for walking like a girl or carrying his books like a girl. Looking back, he could see the sexism and homophobia that underlay the remarks, but at the time, he felt embarrassed and perceived the distinct message that acting like a girl was bad. He faced similar gender-related expectations from his family to be athletic, strong, unafraid, and not overly emotional, which weighed heavily on him: "I just felt this immense pressure that being male meant like, I shouldn't cry as much, even though I cried a lot when I was little, or I can't be scared of things." (Interview 2, p. 3, ll. 25-27)

      John encountered additional expectations informed by culture from his mother to "have kids, to pass down the family line, to bring honor to the family" (Interview 2, p. 5, ll. 15-16). For his mother, John's sexual orientation threatened his ability to fulfill his role as an Asian son:

> I think in my mom's eyes she saw me being gay as a direct blow to me being a boy, because she knew with my abilities and with what I've achieved so far, that I could be the very successful model of, you know, … like, I could fulfill all of the expectations that she had of having an Asian son. Like the good job,

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becoming a doctor, blah blah blah, earning a lot of money, being well

respected. But then me being gay, it was like, "Oh!" She automatically

assumed with me being gay that I could never have kids. (Interview 2, p. 5, ll.

20-25)

John had had a close relationship with his mother until he came out to her during his

junior year of high school. His father had a minimal presence in his life, so his

mother primarily raised him and his brother. John felt a strong sense of filial respect

toward her, mindful of the sacrifices she had made for their family, and would obey

her mostly without question, whereas his brother would push boundaries and

challenge her. His coming out, though, marked a shift in their relationship, where he

began "drifting apart" from her and started to think more critically and develop his

own opinions apart from hers. He shared a poignant story about how, as he was

growing up, his mother occasionally asked him to pinky promise that he would give

her grandchildren one day, and he had worried that she suspected that he was gay.

Coming out shifted their relationship:

it was basically me coming out to her that kind of put a big rift in between me

and my mom, because that was the one time, where I was like no, mom, I

cannot promise you that I'm going to give you grandchildren when I'm going

to tell you this, and this is a really important part of me, and I want you to

know that. (Interview 1, p. 13, ll. 34-37)

He learned that his mother's concern was that he had chosen a harder path by being

gay; he tried to explain that being gay was not a choice. Since then, she seemed to

grow in her acceptance slowly, and John had introduced her to his boyfriends. As

John put it: "So yeah, that's still like a narrative that's still being played out" (Interview 1, p. 14, l. 16).

Race and the mitigation of male privilege. Growing up, John had few models and reference points for Asian American masculinity. The only representation he saw of Asian men was his father and his father's generation who seemed to conform to what he described as a "traditional Asian male … archetype: hard working, works a lot, not very lovey-dovey, kind of strict, very distant father figures" (Interview 2, p. 4, ll. 10-11). At the same time, John never saw images of Asian men as beautiful or attractive in media. Rather, the impressions of Asian men he gleaned were stereotypes of being weak, nerdy, unathletic, and good at math. John elaborated further: "they're portrayed as like, not sexual, and then they're almost like emasculated by like this sort of culture. And then there's also a sense that like they're just kind of submissive in a way" (Interview 2, p. 4, ll. 26-28). John felt the influence of those stereotypes when teams would be picked during gym class.

During college, John learned about social identities and privilege and recognized the privileges he possessed by virtue of his gender: "coming to college and discovering things about privilege and identity, I realize that being male helps me secure a job easier, it makes people assume that I'm somehow more capable of doing things" (Interview 2, p. 3, ll. 33-35). However, this realization was more intellectual rather than personal, given that being Asian American shaped his lived experience of being male. He noted that he had not noticed experiencing his own male privilege as much as he had noticed it among other men "because in myself there's other factors like race and ethnicity that affect that, so I guess I started to realize more complexities

about this whole gender identity" (Interview 2, p. 4, ll. 2-3). To John, the lack of positive Asian American media portrayals and negative stereotypes of Asian American men "mitigate[d] a lot of the male privilege" (Interview 2, p. 4, l. 34) he might have experienced otherwise. He observed:

It would be different if I grew up in like Taiwan, or China, or East Asia, because the male privilege there is like, stark. Like, very profound in terms of like job opportunities and cultural expectations, but here, because there is the dominant White male group, it makes being an Asian male kind of below them. Being an Asian male means … like, I mean we still do have male privilege, but it's certainly like usurped by the fact that a lot of White males are like the alpha. (Interview 2, p. 4, l. 34 – p. 5, l. 3)

Creating strategies for managing expectations and identities. John felt the stresses of gender-based stereotypes while also privately grappling with his sexual orientation. In order to cope, John used social groups focused around specific identities as refuges from external pressures and internal anxiety. During middle school, he began thinking about his sexual orientation; at the same time, he also started receiving more comments about acting "like a girl." In response, he chose to seek out an all-male group of friends who could serve as a shield from the remarks and questions targeting him. Surrounding himself with a group of male friends minimized the visibility of his behavior that could be criticized for not appearing more masculine. In addition, the friend group provided a protective dynamic in yet another way:

JULIE: It sounds like maybe it was like, protective in a way, do you think?

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JOHN: Yeah. Yeah, even though the source of like the, "ooh, like, that's so

gay" was also from the same group of guys. But it was like, if I were to, like,

if I were to hide, then hiding in that group where those insults came from was

the best method, instead of being outside and being on the receiving end, you

know? Because if I was friends with them, then they would, they would

launch it outward, but I would be, like, in there, so I wouldn't get hit.

(Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 18-23)

During high school, as he continued to wrestle with his growing awareness of

his sexual orientation, he similarly sought a refuge from both his internal struggle and

external comments. He utilized a similar strategy as in middle school, this time

joining the "Asian clique"; doing so provided a safe social circle where he did not

have to question his belongingness while he could also choose to be focused on

academics, which would further distract him from thinking about his sexual

orientation. He explained:

So within my body, it was like okay, so there's this gay thing that I'm not sure

about, but I know that I'm Asian, so let's go with the Asian ... So it was like,

okay, since like schoolwork is kicking into high gear, if I stick with the Asian

crowd, which I naturally am really comfortable with already, because if I

bring Chinese food, no one's going to ask me what that is, they all know what

it is. And if we were to do group projects, we would all just bunch together

and get it done really quickly because we were all really intelligent. And I

was like, oh, this is perfect. And I didn't have to deal with the "Oh, what is

this gay thing?" (Interview 1, p. 7, l. 35 – p. 8, l. 6)

Once again, John retreated to safe harbors where he could find affinity based on one of his social identities in order to minimize his sexual orientation from public comment and from his own reflective meaning making. Looking back now, John saw his racial identity as an asset for someone coming to terms with one's sexual orientation. He compared his experience with that of his current boyfriend, who was White; John believed that his journey was easier in a way:

> if you're like having an internal conflict with this whole gay thing, like my boyfriend did back in high school, … He just kind of had to struggle through that time. But for me, it was like, oh, like, yeah, I did struggle with being gay internally, but I could cover that up with just being Asian and not having any more questions asked about that. (Interview 1, p. 8, ll. 10-22)

By choosing to affiliate with a group of Asian American friends, John could put off external pressures while he tried to make meaning of his sexual orientation identity internally in his own way and in his own time. Thanks to his Asian American identity, he had the latitude to hold reflections about his sexuality at arm's length: "because while I was grappling with that [sexual orientation], I was like, oh I have this Asian identity I can identify with, so it's just much easier, it's like, let me go there, as like a back-up of living my life" (Interview 1, p. 8, ll. 8-10).

"Dating up" as a gay, Asian American man. The intersections of John's gender, sexual orientation, and race became most salient once he began dating. Just as being gay pushed his racial identity into salience, being Asian American shaped John's experience of being gay; his experiences as a gay, Asian American man shaped his overall sense of self. John eventually came out during his junior year in

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high school; at the time of our interviews, John described feeling now very comfortable identifying as gay. Soon after coming out, though, John quickly learned about the relative desirability of different racial groups in the gay community and where he fell as an Asian American man:

> But after I came out, … I soon realized that like, in terms of the gay community, Asians are definitely like at the bottom of the food chain. And that's had a big impact on me, because of how I see myself. It's been hard to see myself as someone that's attractive, if at all. (Interview 1, p. 15, ll. 22-25)

He described a social hierarchy he observed in the gay dating world where White men were seen as most desirable and Asian men and other men of color less desirable. As he used dating apps to meet possible partners, he saw these dynamics play out, unfettered by social mores where racial preferences might otherwise be left unspoken and revealed less blatantly.

Further complicating John's search for a romantic partner was his attraction to White men. John felt he had unconsciously adopted the view of White men as the paragon of attractiveness, which he believed was rooted in the idealized portrayals of White masculinity he had seen as he was growing up:

> I can't help but feel like it's because I've been indoctrinated to feel like White guys were like the, the epitome of beauty and the epitome of, like, masculinity and, like, attractiveness. Like male models and on TV and celebrities. In my mind, I've grown up to think White guys are really attractive, and now I can't, I can't even internally force myself to be attracted to any other race.
> (Interview 1, p. 16, ll. 6-10)

In contrast to the plentiful and appealing depictions of White masculinity in the media, the relatively few images of Asian American men that John saw did not show them as attractive sexual beings: in addition to being pictured as nerdy and unathletic, "Asian men have been portrayed as very, like, not sexual. Very effeminized, … very like, like, not attractive in a way" (Interview 1, p. 17, ll. 18-19). As a result, John had trouble seeing himself as desirable, which affected his overall sense of confidence and self-esteem. His idealization of White masculinity, combined with his negative view of his own desirability, caused him to feel he had to prove himself worthy of a White partner. This occurred in both of his romantic relationships, both with White men. With his first boyfriend, John recalled:

> I felt like I owed him one, because he was, like, in my mind, it was like he was making a concession in liking an Asian guy. … I already had the tendency to go above and beyond and go out of my way in my relationships, so like I did so much for him when I really didn't need to. And that relationship didn't end up really well. He cheated on me, and there were all these dramatic things. (Interview 1, p. 15, ll. 33-37)

Similarly, with his current boyfriend, John initially had trouble shaking the feeling that he was "dating upward" and needed to earn his partner's affection by putting more effort into the relationship: "for the longest time, I felt really undeserving of him … it's impacted like my self-esteem, it's impacted like how confident I feel in myself" (Interview 1, p. 16, ll. 17-22). Although his current relationship felt more balanced and reciprocal than his first, John still seemed to subscribe to the racialized hierarchy of desirability. In a way, John's romantic

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preferences reflected a form of internalized racism wherein he elevated Whiteness and denigrated Asian-ness. Intellectually, he recognized the problematic nature of the hierarchy; he had read research and blogs that addressed it, especially from the perspective of Asian American men, and could see how his personal preferences were shaped and contributed to the system's perpetuation. Nonetheless, he felt powerless to change his feelings:

> It's like, why can't I find all races equally attractive? But no, I predominantly find only White guys attractive, and it's like my body internally has subscribed to this sort of power structure. And there's not much I can do about it. (audible sigh) (Interview 2, p. 12, ll. 23-26)

John's experiences as a gay man were indelibly shaped by his race. Apart from his romantic relationships, he felt the burden of intersecting stereotypes of his identities. John found that images of Asian men as feminized hit close to home, partially due to his sexuality, which made navigating around those stereotypes more challenging:

> being an Asian male already kind of carries the connotation that you're weaker, or you're somehow asexual, or you're just nerdy, or you don't really, you're kind of like flimsy, lanky, not very strong. And being gay and Asian, … that femininity gets added to how people see me. The problem with that is that then people really think that I'm kind of weak or girly or, you know. And why that has affected me a lot is because when I was younger and people called me girly, they could've called me girly for the sake of me being an Asian male alone, but the fact that they called me girly, and the fact that I

could feel those feminine feelings inside of me, it made it really hard because

I knew that somehow what they were saying was true. It wasn't like I could

be like, "No, that's not true." I mean, I said that outwardly to kind of fight

back a little bit, but on the inside, I was like, well, what they're saying *is* kind

of true. I can feel those things inside of me. (Interview 2, p. 11, ll. 12-23)

John wanted to distance himself from the negativity of these depictions, even while

seeing some of himself within them. He also struggled with the stereotypes he faced

within the gay community:

Being a gay Asian in the gay community, you become hyper-sexualized, to

the point of objectification, where people think you're very, very

promiscuous, you like dating old White men, like your sugar daddy. People

assume that you're very thin, you're hairless, you're very submissive, all those

things. People also assume that you're only after attractive White men.

Another facet which I can't really deny, because I find myself attracted to

White men, but then I don't want to say that out loud because they're going to

be like, "Oh yeah, you're just like every other gay Asian guy I know," and I'm

just like, oh ... I can't say anything about that. (Interview 2, p. 11, ll. 24-32)

Whether within the gay community or in other settings, John continued to attempt to

define himself as he confronted the expectations held of him based on his multiple

intersecting identities.

Reflections on Religion and Socioeconomic Status

John felt the salience of other social identities, especially in intersection with

each other. He faced tensions between his sexual orientation and religious identities.

He had grown up as Catholic, and his Catholic identity was one of the primary ways John identified himself, along with his race, early in his life. In a way, he seemed to have clung to Catholicism as a way to deny his emergent gay identity to both his own consciousness and others' suspicions:

> I guess when I was younger, and I was more staunchly in belief of being Catholic and everything, that kind of, in my mind maybe that was a way for me to feel more relieved. It was like me in middle school, and there were these voices inside me saying, "Oh, you might be gay, you might be gay." And then I like quashed those voices with louder shouts of, "Oh, I am Catholic. I go to church, I do this, I believe in all the teachings, I go to Sunday School, blah blah blah, look at me, I'm a very, very strong Catholic," so if people think I'm a very strong Catholic, maybe they won't think I'm gay. (Interview 2, p. 16, ll. 26-32)

When we spoke, John shared that he did not attend church regularly any longer. He did not experience any anti-gay sentiments or feel a lack of belonging at church. Rather, he said that he realized he did not need religion as much. He still believed many of the core teachings he had learned from church, which were focused around love and helping others in need. He described his current beliefs as a more "general sphere of spirituality" (Interview 2, p. 17, ll. 18-19) that was "a sort of mix of Catholicism, Christianity, and Buddhism" (Interview 2, p. 17, l. 21).

The final social identity that John discussed extensively was socioeconomic status. John had not noticed this identity much at all until recently – he grew up comfortably and never lacked for anything. However, he became more aware of his

socioeconomic class when he began dating his current boyfriend, who came from a wealthy family; suddenly, John had a vivid and up-close example of the combined privileges of race and class. John was incensed by the advantages his boyfriend possessed that were outside his own reach, regardless of how hard he worked:

> I've been talking to him a lot about, like you know, his bougie friends, his really rich friends, his really, really, really rich private school. And it's just like, I've rolled my eyes thousands of times at him by now. I'm just like, ugh, like every time that comes up, I just get sort of like angry on the inside, … because it's not fair. And the fact is that I know I can work harder than all of you, all of him and his rich White friends who've never had that sort of sense of urgency instilled in them since they were young. They've never had a fire under them telling them that if you don't move up, this fire is going to burn you, you know? (Interview 1, p. 23, ll. 8-15)

The difference in the socioeconomic class underscored the feelings of inferiority John already experienced due to race: "the difference in socioeconomic status, … and the fact that I'm kind of below him in that regard, it reinforces the fact that I feel below him already in the gay Asian and gay White male department" (Interview 2, p. 14, ll. 34-37). For John, seeing the easy access his boyfriend had to educational and economic privilege made him realize the ceilings that he faced as an Asian American.

Conclusion

John's experiences during college, including learning about Asian American issues and social justice, as well as his romantic relationships, provided the context for his critical reflection of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and

socioeconomic status. Even in the course of our conversations, he sought to learn more by asking me about my research questions. His critical perspective seemed to be evolving continually as he considered his identities further, which came with a nascent desire to work toward social justice. He thought about how his viewpoint differed from that of his parents' and his parents' generation:

> I can perfectly understand why my parents kind of just want to live their life out, and not have to deal with being socially active in terms of all these things. And it makes me feel kind of bad, because they, I know they're definitely discriminated against, but they kind of just put up with it because … it's a very Asian way of, you know, … shut up, be thankful, and get over it. But for me, it's like, no, I need to speak about my sexual orientation, I need to speak about gender, or race, or socioeconomic status, and then all my parents are doing, they're looking at me weirdly, and they're like, "Why do you care so much? Just like, get a job. Make money. Live your life." And I'm like, "But life could be better." And then they're like, "But what use would it be?"
> (Interview 2, p. 20, ll. 13-22)

For John, his growing understanding of identities and systems of privilege and oppression prompted him to look beyond individual achievement, toward a possible future of a more inclusive, more just world.

Riku

I am a woman. I am 20 years old. I am mixed race. I am a student at the University of Maryland. I am a double major in math and Japanese. I am a double minor in Spanish and Asian American Studies. I am from Hyattsville,

Maryland. I am a third-generation Japanese American. I am anxious to

explore the world. I am Riku Catharine Takahashi Schmidt.

Riku was a deliberative and rational thinker who valued relationships and learning. As she told her story, she also shared the stories of those to whom she was close. First among these relationships was that with her father. She was close to her father, a research scientist, from whom she inherited an interest in nerd culture (including superheroes and comic books), a commitment to scientific thinking, and pride in their Japanese heritage. She related the story of her father who grew up facing bullying and racism as one of the few non-White people in his Midwestern town. She told the story of her paternal grandmother, a Japanese woman who married an American soldier and moved to a German Lutheran town in Illinois. Riku also told the stories of her mother, a White woman whose family roots in the United States could be traced back to the Boston Tea Party, and of her cousin, who was adopted from China. The stories of her family members reflected where she came from; they came to mind as we discussed questions of identity and salience, of difference and finding belonging. Their stories shaped the way Riku made meaning of her own story and identity.

Japanese American Identity: Recovering What Was Lost

Riku had actively claimed her Japanese American identity since childhood. At first, it was mostly a way to differentiate herself from her primarily White classmates during elementary school; it was what made her unique, not unlike a special talent or hobby. At the time, though, she acknowledged that she did not have a clear idea of what being Japanese meant. Riku's father, the biracial son of a

German American soldier and Japanese war bride, did not grow up observing

Japanese customs or speaking Japanese. Consequently, Riku did not grow up

knowing or observing Japanese cultural traditions. However, being Japanese was

important to her father's identity, a value that he passed on to his daughter and

reflected by giving her a Japanese name. As a child, Riku knew she was Japanese

and that being Japanese set her apart from her peers. But when she traveled to Japan

for the first time at age 7, she realized that being Japanese could mean something

more. She wanted to learn Japanese in order to speak with her cousins and began

studying the language with a tutor. Since then, Riku said, "Japan-related activities

have been pretty much defining my life" (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 27-29). She saw this

purposeful immersion in her Japanese identity as a way to reconnect with and reclaim

what her father missed:

> I was kind of sad that my dad doesn't really know anything about his heritage,
> because he also defines it as a big part of who he is, but he really doesn't
> know anything about Japan or Japanese culture. Like, he doesn't speak
> Japanese. He doesn't know how to make Japanese foods. So I kind of felt
> like I wanted to get back in touch with what he had lost in his generation.
> (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 23-27)

Riku's parents named her with the intention of preserving her tie to her

Japanese heritage. Her middle name came from her Japanese grandmother's maiden

name. Her first name was also Japanese, but her parents chose a word that was not

usually used as a name. Her name highlighted the tension Riku sometimes felt in

terms of the authenticity of her ethnic identity. She shared the reaction her name

received from Japanese people:

> When I tell people from Japan that that's my name, they kind of laugh,
>
> because they think I just made it up. Because it's a word, but it's not
>
> something you would name your kid. So it's kind of embarrassing, because
>
> whenever I tell people my name, and then they realize that my parents don't
>
> know what they were talking about when they named me. On the other hand,
>
> I mean, it's not like they would think I was Japanese anyway based on how I
>
> look. So I can't really try to hide by having a normal Japanese name anyway.
>
> So I like my name. (Interview 1, p. 5, ll. 8-14)

Her name provided a bridge to Japanese culture, while simultaneously serving as a

symbol of her non-Japanese-ness.

Although her father was not well versed in Japanese culture and language, he

had pride in his Japanese heritage and also identified with Asian American issues.

Her close relationship with her father also lent salience to her Japanese identity. She

was not especially close to her paternal grandmother, as she usually only visited with

that side of the family once a year, but she was a significant figure to Riku because

"she's the one that makes me Japanese" (Interview 1, p. 17, l. 3). Riku was raised

with the story of how her Japanese grandmother grew up, met and married an

American soldier who was stationed in Japan during the Korean War, and then moved

to an all-White town in Illinois, where the memory of World War II remained fresh

and she was seen as an interloper, literally the face of the once-enemy. Although she

did not speak any English when she first arrived, she eventually became fluent in

English, only returning to her native language when speaking with her sister in Japan. Riku's father, who looked visibly different from his peers, faced racism daily growing up. He missed the opportunity to be meaningfully connected to his Japanese heritage, but felt the salience of his ethnic and racial identity due to his childhood, which he passed down to Riku:

> I think he was really forced to be conscious of being Japanese, and then … his mom, obviously being Japanese was an inescapable thing for her, and she talked about it all the time that she had grown up in Japan. So I think that even though she couldn't really get ingredients for Japanese foods, and she had to make American foods all the time, and she didn't speak Japanese at home because she was kind of forced to speak English, so he didn't really have a Japanese upbringing, but it was very inescapable that he was Japanese. So I think he passed that down to me as like, "You know, we're Japanese, that's a big part of our identity. It affected my childhood so much. It's affected my whole life being Japanese, so it's going to affect you, too." (Interview 1, p. 14, ll. 10-19)

Riku began reclaiming her Japanese heritage in an intentional way, starting with Japanese language lessons with a tutor at age 7. She went on to take Japanese in high school. She participated in an exchange program where she met students who were visiting from Japan and then visited Japan herself. In college, she majored in Japanese (along with math), was involved in the Japanese American Student Association (JASA), and planned to spend her junior year studying in Japan. As a result of her efforts, she was now able to converse with her grandmother in Japanese,

in a way recovering part of that which had been lost over the previous two generations:

> When I started studying Japanese, I would try to talk to her in Japanese, and she was really excited that I was learning Japanese. I would call her up on the phone and tell her the only sentence I knew, which was, "I like cats," in Japanese, and she would always say, "Oh, that's so good. I like cats, too." That was the only conversation we could have for years. *"Watashi wa neko ga suki desu."* I like cats. *"Yokatta desu nee. Watashi mo neko ga suki desu."* Oh, that's good. I like cats, too. We would just literally only have that conversation for years. Now that my Japanese has gotten better, I saw her a year ago for Christmas. I started speaking Japanese with her, and she was completely shocked with how much I could speak. She said she was so happy that I could speak Japanese so much because she thought I was never going to get anywhere with it, because all I could say was "I like cats" for so many years. She couldn't believe how much Japanese I was speaking. I think that was definitely really important for me, being like my Japanese studies are actually paying off. Because the whole reason I wanted to study Japanese was to be able to speak with my Japanese relatives, which many of them don't speak English, especially the older ones. So being able to actually speak with my relatives and have a conversation in Japanese was like a really big moment for me. I felt like I was so happy that she was proud of me for speaking Japanese.

Her increased fluency in speaking Japanese strengthened Riku's tie to her grandmother and her Japanese relatives, and in way, to her Japanese identity as well.

Race: Embracing Asian-ness, Resisting Whiteness

Riku's racial identity was grounded in and acknowledged her multiracial heritage, but reflected the choices she made to affiliate with and immerse herself in her Japanese American and Asian American identities. At times when she was required to check a single box to identify her race, Riku usually selected Asian American. She also identified as mixed race; when there was space for nuance, she would identify as mixed-race Japanese American. However, early on, her identification as Asian or Asian American was a conscious decision that was not necessarily grounded in critical reflection.

She identified multiple influences in her strong identification with being Asian American and Japanese American. As a child, her identification with her Asian heritage was informed not only by her close relationship with her father, but also by her cousin Wei, who was adopted from China by Riku's mother's sister. Riku felt a commonality with Wei. They grew up together, almost as siblings. Neither was exposed to the culture and language of their Asian heritage at home, so they both had to make active efforts to engage with and learn about their Asian side. Riku explained:

> So I think that having a cousin that was racially completely Chinese definitely
> had a lot to do with identifying as an Asian American, even though culturally,
> we both had to learn our cultures. We weren't raised in an environment where
> we had Japanese or Chinese culture at home. We were very much actively

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going out and trying to reclaim those cultures. So Wei would go to Chinese school and try to learn Chinese and later had a tutor. And I would go to my Japanese tutor. It was kind of our way of trying to, like, claim our Asian American identities back. (Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 15-22)

Riku's path toward a growing awareness of her Asian American identity started with affiliating with her Asian background. In high school, claiming her Asian heritage helped Riku fit in and find commonalities with Asian American students. There was some conscious performativity in this, as Riku recalled acting intentionally in order to fit in, to "figure out ways to prove [she] was Asian" (Interview 1, p. 9, l. 1). She described the scene at school:

I would just hang out with the other kids that were Asian, and we would all eat Asian food for lunch and just talk about how Asian we were. I don't know. I just really wanted to prove I was Asian so I could fit in with them and so I could not just be labeled as White. I would sit in class, like writing letters to my Japanese relatives so people would see me writing in Japanese and be like, yeah, she's not White. I just really didn't want to be White. (Interview 1, p. 9, ll. 3-8)

Growing up, eating Asian food, writing in Japanese, and actively talking about being Asian were signifiers of Asian-ness for Riku. The population of her high school was predominantly Black and Latino, and in that setting, claiming her Asian-ness (and downplaying her Whiteness) helped her establish common ground with peers: "I really wanted to distance myself from being White even more, because everyone else was a person of color. So I was like, yeah, … I'm Japanese. I just really didn't want

to be White in that environment" (Interview 1, p. 8, ll. 23-26). In this way, Riku was able to see herself and position herself to others as a person of color.

Riku actively asserted her Asian-ness and minimized her Whiteness in opposition to her physical representation of race. She was troubled by her ability to pass as White, especially when her connection to Japanese American identity was cultivated from early childhood. She was conscious of how her appearance cast her lived experience with race in marked contrast to that of her father's and grandmother's:

> It's just weird for me, because people look at me, and they don't think that I'm Japanese, but for my dad and my grandmother, every day was people looking at them and being like, you're different. So it feels really weird for me knowing that people can look at me and think, you're just like me. When I talk to old White men, they seem to really like me. They're like, oh, she's a sweet young White girl. I just feel very strange that I can pass for White because being Japanese has been such a big thing in my dad's life and in my grandmother's life that they just couldn't escape. (Interview 1, p. 14, ll. 20-26)

Identifying with her Asian side further affirmed her affiliation with her cousin and her father. These relational ties were important to Riku:

> Wei can't be White, because Wei doesn't look White, but for me, if I wanted to, I can very easily just say I'm going to be White, and people wouldn't assume that I was anything but White. But I very actively didn't want to be White, which I think had a lot to do with just the importance of my family in

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Japan and of Wei and my dad and the way my dad really treasured his

Japanese roots. (Interview 1, p. 4, ll. 23-27)

Again, distancing herself from a White identity allowed Riku to associate herself

more closely with her Japanese and Asian relatives. As she described these

dynamics, Riku often used the term "Asian" as opposed to "Asian American,"

seeming to focus on the significance of being visibly, racially different.

Riku was deeply uncomfortable with identifying as White. Her unease did not

reflect antipathy toward her mother or other familial connections, but rather how

Whiteness was positioned in U.S. racial dynamics. She offered recent reflections she

had regarding White identity:

I was just reading an article last night that said a lot of the time White people

when they realize how there is so much racial injustice in the world, they want

to distance themselves from being White and try to immerse themselves in

non-White communities, so that they can kind of get away from the horrible

oppression that they realize they're a part of. And I feel like that might also

be a part of it, just that I want to distance myself from my White identity and

identify more with my non-White identity, because I realize how much racial

injustice there is. (Interview 1, p. 3, l. 36 – p. 4, l. 3)

For Riku, disclaiming her White identity was an expression of a desire to distance

herself from the part of her racial identity that might be seen as complicit in current

racial power structures that oppressed people of color.

Awakening of Asian American Identity

Once Riku began college, she became aware of and started to make meaning of an Asian American identity for herself. In college, she continued her immersion in Japanese culture through her studies, living in the language house, and joining the Japanese American Student Association (JASA). During her freshman year, she volunteered to serve as JASA's representative to the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month planning committee, which was coordinated by the Asian American Student Union (AASU). It was through her involvement with the Asian American Student Union that she first learned about Asian American issues.

Before college, Riku "didn't really know that Asian American was like a thing really" (Interview 1, p. 19, l. 13). She explained, "Before college I probably didn't really realize that there was like this identity 'Asian American' where people do face kind of like issues of bridging cultures and being of a descent of another culture but they're American" (Interview 1, p. 19, ll. 14-17). This experience of navigating between Asian culture and American culture resonated with Riku, who felt like she had to cultivate her connection to Japanese culture and identity consciously amid an American family context. When she met other Asian Americans in college who grew up with connections to their Asian heritage in an American context, she was struck with a sense of recognition and shared experience:

> I realized that there are other people that feel the same thing that I do. I guess just like going to college and having these kinds of conversations and realizing that so many other people have experienced the same thing that I have with Asian American identity. (Interview 1, p. 19, ll. 33-35)

Growing up, her father's identities as a Japanese American and an Asian American informed Riku's early lessons about what being Japanese and what being Asian American meant. Riku recalled how her father would latch onto any issue or news he heard about Asian Americans. When he learned about Asian American issues such as the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (which happened before his mother came to the U.S.) and later about the murder of Vincent Chin, he felt connected to a larger Asian American experience. She heard more about these issues when she got involved with Asian American organizations. When she went to Asian Pacific American Heritage Month committee meetings, she discovered the context for the stories she had heard from her father:

> I realized that they were talking about that kind of stuff that my dad would occasionally find glimpses of, like Vincent Chin and the internment camps. This was a whole bunch of people that were always talking about stuff like that. I was like, oh, there's a bunch of people out there that think and talk about these things. I got really involved with it, because it just really reminded me of my dad and how he thought it was so important. I learned that there are all of these movements out there. (Interview 1, p. 18, ll. 17-22)

Through her involvement in pan-Asian American organizations, Riku expanded and deepened her understanding about Asian American issues and connected with supportive campus resources, including the coordinator for Asian Pacific American Student Involvement and the Asian American studies program. She went to campus-based and regional Asian American student conferences and continued to connect with others who were also interested in Asian American

community concerns. She also took an Asian American studies class on immigration and ethnicity in America, eventually deciding to minor in Asian American studies. Through AASU, she worked with a high school outreach program that helped high school students learn about Asian American history and identity. She took on leadership positions in AASU and participated in leadership development opportunities with Asian American community advocacy organizations. As she learned more about Asian American issues, she shared her new insights and knowledge with her father. In this way, she moved from identifying as Asian to identifying as Asian American.

Questioning Her Claim to Asian American Identity

Even as she sought a sense of personal meaning and belonging by exploring her Japanese identity and connecting with Asian American peers, Riku continued to question herself and her legitimacy to claim an authentic Asian American or Japanese American identity. She drew a contrast with her boyfriend who is Chinese American:

My boyfriend is Chinese American, and he grew up with like a Chinese American community, and all of his friends and family friends are Chinese Americans. He didn't have any issues with his identity, thinking, like, how do I fit into all of these, because he was like, yeah, I'm Chinese American. But for me, I definitely thought about my identity all the time because I was like, I don't fit in with any of this. I don't even fit in in my own house, because it's like my own house has all these different races in it. So I definitely think I was always wondering about my race, and whether it was okay to call myself Japanese. I feel like in a lot of ways I wasn't really different from those

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people that are really obsessed with anime, and they're like, I love Japan, and

I want to learn Japanese. I was like, what's really the difference between me

and them, just because my grandmother is from Japan? She didn't even speak

Japanese to me growing up really. So I would think about that a lot and

worried that I was appropriating Japanese culture by claiming to be Japanese

that it wasn't really okay. So I've definitely thought a lot about identity

growing up. (Interview 1, p. 10, ll. 14-26)

For her monoracial Asian American peers, an authentic claim to ethnic identity was

assumed and not taken for granted. In contrast, as a multiracial person, Riku had to

deliberately consider how to identify in terms of ethnicity and race. She interrogated

her legitimacy to claim her Japanese ethnic identity.

During college, she engaged in discussion and reflection with peers and came

away with the idea that mixed-race people could claim their racial identity as they

wished, regardless of others' perceptions and labels. Nonetheless, she continued to

feel as if she needed to justify her claim to Japanese identity:

But for the most of my life I felt like in order to earn my Japanese identity, I

had to learn about Japanese culture. So I was studying Japanese and going to

Japan all these times is my way of earning the right to call myself Japanese,

because I felt like it was wrong for me to call myself that if I didn't really

understand Japanese culture. But I think now a lot of people have told me it's

okay, you don't have to earn being Japanese. You just are Japanese. So I feel

like I've been more accepting of myself lately and just being like, yeah, it's

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okay to be Japanese. Like, I'm Japanese. (Interview 1, p. 10, l. 32 – p. 11, l.

2)

Throughout her life before college, Riku believed that she had to earn authentic ethnic

identity by her actions; she sought to prove her Japanese-ness by learning the

language and culture. More recently, however, she had come to see ethnic identity as

something that could be claimed without justification and disclaimers.

This evolution in her thinking about ethnic identity was paralleled in the way

she thought about racial identity as an Asian American. Riku had come to an

understanding of being Asian American that did not depend on actions or behaviors

that prove legitimacy. To Riku, "being Asian American means that you have to

bridge this gap of cultures, or maybe you feel like you don't have a culture, or you

feel like you don't have a complete culture, you have part of each culture" (Interview

1, p. 20, l. 37 – p. 21, l. 1). She highlighted the significance of the American context

for Asian Americans, which distinguished them from Asians she knew in Japan or

may be living in the U.S. as international students. In her eyes, being Asian

American meant

> that you're not just from Asia. You're American, but you're of Asian descent.
>
> I think a lot of people don't know that that's a thing that people identify as.
>
> There are a lot of people that call themselves Asian American for a reason
>
> because they're not just Asian. They're not from Asia. I think there's a lot of
>
> people that are confused by that. (Interview 1, p. 21, ll. 34-37)

Riku understood that Asian Americans were treated as foreigners when they visited

the nation of their heritage, so their sense of home was split between Asia and

America. Further, Riku did not believe that Asian Americans necessarily had to be knowledgeable about their Asian heritage or culture: "Like the whole point of it is that we might not know about our Asian culture. That's why we're Asian American" (Interview 1, p. 22, ll. 17-18). Being Asian American had become "a huge part of my sense of self" (Interview 1, p. 21, l. 11) to Riku. She had claimed her Asian American identity and created significant meaning for it: it was now "the biggest defining thing that I have chosen to define myself" (Interview 1, p. 21, ll. 15-16).

Grappling with Gender-Based Expectations

Gender was salient to Riku, because although she might not always be perceived to be Asian American racially, she was consistently identified as a woman; consequently, she believed gender had a greater influence on how others treated her than race did. Just as Riku's awareness of her ethnicity and race was influenced by the role of significant relationships in her life, her meaning making of gender was shaped by family members.

Riku recalled wanting to be a boy when she was around six years old. When I asked her what was appealing about being a boy, she referenced the influence of two of her closest relationships:

> I think that because the people who were close to me were my dad and Wei, and they thought, well, they were both masculine and wanted to act a certain way that I just thought it should be better to be a boy. Especially because Wei was always saying, "I want to be a boy. I want to be a boy." So I was like, "Yeah, being a boy must be better. I want to be a boy, too." (Interview 2, p. 4, ll. 25-29)

Riku's father raised her with what she called "boy interests," such as comic books and *Star Trek*. She also did not resonate with portrayals of girls she saw in movies as damsels in distress and preferred the strong male characters she saw in superhero movies with her father: "I wanted to be the one doing the saving" (Interview 2, p. 4, l. 34). Because she was not interested in things like fashion, dolls, or make-up as other girls were, she often "felt really out of place trying to pursue traditionally girly interests" (Interview 2, p. 6, ll. 3-4).

Growing up alongside her cousin Wei, Riku observed her cousin's developing awareness of gender identity and Wei's eventual identification as transgender. Meanwhile, Riku eventually accepted herself as a girl and began to understand how she could play around with what being a girl meant and how she could express it in a way that felt right to her. Riku now identified as a cisgender woman, but continued to grapple with gender expectations for women.

Riku's mother served as both a role model for resisting gender expectations, as well as a cautionary tale of what could happen when doing so. Her mother was a feminist who refused to accept limitations due to gender, passing on to Riku that "it's okay to be a woman but not be traditionally feminine. You can do whatever you want and you're still a woman. And it's okay to go into fields that are usually full of men" (Interview 2, p. 6, ll. 13-15). At the same time, Riku was very aware of how her mother was perceived in negative ways. She saw how her mother's strong personality, which she described as stubborn and aggressive, was not well received and sometimes described as bossy. Riku felt conflicted about how to forge her own identity as a woman in response:

I had her as an example of what to do as a woman, so I was like, I don't really

know how everyone else learned to be a woman, because I don't know what

I'm doing. And so, I kind of worry that people see me the same as her, so I

try to be the opposite and not be aggressive. But then they're like, "You're not

assertive enough." So, you just can't win. (Interview 2, p. 7, ll. 14-19).

To Riku, navigating competing expectations seemed like a distinguishing aspect of

being a woman. She shared,

I feel like it's partly because of being a woman, but I mean it's also just my

personality, I think, that I worry what people think of me. But I definitely

think that part of the reason I worry what people think of me is because I'm a

woman, and I've seen so many women being judged for what they do.

(Interview 2, p. 7, ll. 32-35).

Riku did not want to be judged in a negative way and felt trapped between being seen

as either a pushover or as bossy and aggressive.

Riku noticed the salience of gender most often in spaces where she was one of

the few women, if not the only woman, in a room of men. As a math major, she often

had this experience in her classes. She sometimes felt intimidated, knowing that math

was a male-dominated field, and was wary of asking for help from classmates out of

fear of being judged for lack of ability. She occasionally used assumptions to her

advantage so as not to intimidate men in her classes by "play[ing] the part of the

clueless girl" (Interview 2, p. 9, ll. 10-11). She recognized the double-edged nature

of using gender stereotypes in this way: "But I just feel like it's easier to be non-

intimidating and play into what they think you will be. But then the problem is that

then they don't take you as seriously" (Interview 2, p. 9, ll. 15-17). Riku tended to be self-effacing about her math ability and knowledge, but was frustrated when male students presented themselves with confidence that outstripped their ability. She saw this attitude as a byproduct of male privilege, recalling studies that her mentor shared with her that when White men did well in a class, they were more likely to attribute their achievement to their own abilities, whereas women and racial minorities would attribute their success to good teaching. Conversely, White men would attribute lower grades to poor teaching, while women and racial minorities would blame themselves.

Riku noticed gender at other times as well, such as during an activity about leadership style with AASU officers and saw that all the women seemed to value seeking harmony. She also recalled an instance of being at a protest where a key organizer, a woman student, was spoken over and then had to assert her right to speak. However, in discussing gender, Riku did not mention many occurrences when gender intersected with her other social identities. She did observe strict gender roles dictated by Japanese culture when she traveled to Japan; she felt some freedom from those expectations because she was seen as a foreigner, but she still felt the need to act in a more overtly feminine way. Overall, she felt confined by expectations as she tried to express her identity as a woman. More recently, though, the topic of gender had emerged as more resonant, not as much due to her own identity, but due to Wei's transition, as Riku endeavored to support her cousin and advocate for Wei to family members who were less understanding.

Intersectional Awareness of Privilege and Difference

Where Riku experienced salience of additional social identities and their

intersections was within her community growing up in Prince George's County.

Within this context, she noticed her socioeconomic status, her race, her religious

identity, and their various intersections, usually due to how different they were from

most of her community members. For instance, she described how socioeconomic

status emerged as salient to her sense of self:

> I think that socioeconomic status is definitely a big part of how I see myself
>
> because I grew up in a county where most people were not as well off as me,
>
> so I was very aware that I had more than them. And I think that I always felt
>
> guilty about it, and I noticed it a lot. (Interview 2, p. 10, ll. 16-18)

Although Riku's father grew up as working class and held blue-collar jobs before

earning his undergraduate and graduate degrees, his educational and professional

attainment, combined with her mother's privileged upbringing and professional

employment, situated their family solidly as middle class. Her parents decided to live

in Prince George's County due to affordability when they moved to the DC area.

However, they were concerned about the quality of local schools and decided to

enroll Riku in a private Quaker school. As a result, although she lived in a majority

Black and Latino neighborhood, she went to a mostly White elementary school. Riku

recognized and appreciated the education she received, but was aware of the privilege

that allowed her to access it:

> I also feel like really guilty that my parents had the privilege that they could
>
> send me to such a better school, and I didn't have to go to the school that all

of the other kids in my neighborhood were forced to go to because they didn't have any other options. (Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 10-12)

School continued to be a setting where Riku noticed the intersections of her privileged identities. After elementary school, she attended the local public middle school, where she tested into the most academically advanced classes. Later, she was accepted into a magnet program offered at the best high school in her county. She believed that her positive experience in a county whose educational resources were often questioned was due to benefits associated with her White identity and socioeconomic privilege. Her ability to pass as White allowed her to escape the scrutiny her peers often faced, a privilege that they would call "the White girl pass":

They would always say, like, "Oh you don't need a hall pass, you have the White girl pass." Because if I was walking through the hall, [teachers] just wouldn't question why I was there. But if a Black kid was walking through the hall, they would be like, "What are you doing in the hall? Where are you going? Are you loitering? Get back to class." (Interview 1, p. 7, ll. 26-29)

She recognized that looking White accrued her the privilege of being assumed to be a "good kid," which led to better treatment and additional educational opportunities. Riku was aware that her experience in the county school system was unique, due to the combination of her racial identity and her family's socioeconomic status:

I was very lucky in PG County public schools. I wasn't just another student. I got the best treatment. I got the best classes, the best teachers, and it definitely had to do with the fact that my parents were educated and that they taught me things at home, and they taught me to love education. If I needed

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help with my homework, they could help me and things like that. I had a lot

better chance than the other students in the school. (Interview 1, p. 8, ll. 13-

18)

She also noticed her religious identity within her neighborhood context. She

currently identified as atheist, following her father's guidance to explore questions of

religion and faith critically. However, she realized that most of her community

members did not share her belief system. From her perspective, religion seemed to be

a large part of people's lives in her county, with the assumption that everyone was

Christian. She remembered coming to school an hour late once because she had

missed the switch to Daylight Saving Time; a woman in the school office questioned

Riku's mistake, asking "Didn't you go to church yesterday?" Consequently, Riku

usually tried to avoid disclosing her religious beliefs so she would not be judged or

proselytized to.

Conclusion

Identifying with a social identity usually served as a way for Riku to claim

connection and affiliation with important people in her life. Exploring her ethnic

identity, racial identity, and gender were often prompted by her relationships with

father, grandmother, cousin, or mother. Other times, certain social identities – such

as socioeconomic status, race, and religion – surfaced as salient due to their

difference from those in Riku's community. Riku particularly noticed race and

socioeconomic status due to the privilege she experienced with them.

She discussed other identities but did not describe them as being as salient to

her sense of self. She noted that she usually did not notice her ability status because it

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was similar to most of the people she knew. She did not discuss sexual orientation, besides in reference to her family members' identities. Riku did notice that her immigrant generation status was different from most of her Asian American peers, who were typically immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. As someone who valued connections with others and with community, Riku tended to notice the social identities that helped establish commonality or highlighted difference. She continued to explore her identities through additional learning, critical self-reflection, and meaningful relationships.

A Metanarrative of Identity Meaning Making for Asian American College Students

Clare, Jay, John, and Riku each shared their stories about making meaning of their racial identities as Asian Americans and intersections among race and their other social identities. Each individual's narrative was unique, given their particular constellation of salient identities within various contexts of family and background. In reviewing the individual narratives collectively through the lenses of the research questions and an intersectional framework, several areas of overlapping experiences emerged as themes to form a collective metastory of identity development and meaning making for these four Asian American college students.

Reclaiming Roots: The Personal Meaning of Ethnic Identity

For all four of the participants in this study, ethnicity connoted personal connections to family, traditions, food, language, and community. For the three U.S.-born participants in the study, however, the process of claiming ethnic identity was characterized by questions of legitimacy and a search for signifiers of authentic

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cultural connection. Riku, Jay, and Clare each felt disconnected from their ethnic

heritage and actively staked their claims to their ethnic identities. Clare's parents had

immigrated as young children themselves, with differing levels of exposure and

connection to Korean culture and community. As a result, Clare felt distant from her

Korean roots, leaving her doubting how strongly she could assert connection to an

ethnic identity with only limited familiarity with Korean customs, values, and

language. Encountering expectations to be fluent in Korean language from strangers

and extended family left her feeling guilty and questioning her Korean-ness.

However, spending time with Korean American peers at the Korean American

Student Conference (KASCON) in New York gave her the opportunity to reflect on

her ethnicity with a new perspective, informed more by a sense of communal caring

than knowledge of language and culture. Where she had used words such as

"uncomfortable" and "embarrassing" in our initial conversations about her ethnicity,

after her experience with KASCON, she spoke about her Korean-ness in terms

including "embracing," "so good," and "amazing."

Jay did not feel fully fluent in Korean culture and values, but he identified

strongly with his Korean heritage; being Korean shaped his day-to-day life and

perspectives. Jay's connection to his Korean identity was cultivated through his

relationship with his mother and their weekly pilgrimages to their Korean church

community in Annandale. There, he found support among the aunt-like figures of his

mother's friends and belonging among his circle of friends. The persistent questions

about his Korean-ness came externally, however, as others challenged the legitimacy

of his Korean identity because he did not meet their expectations for how a Korean

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person should look. In the face of these external checklists, Jay asserted his Korean-ness and his claim to ethnic identity as a Korean American who was also multiracial on his own terms.

As a third-generation Japanese American who was multiracial, Riku actively sought to make meaning of her ethnic heritage. She assiduously performed the signifiers of Japanese culture – using chopsticks, eating Japanese food, writing in Japanese – each act a deliberate demonstration of her Japanese-ness. For Riku, Japanese American identity also denoted her connection to her father and grandmother. Learning how to speak and write in Japanese created a bridge to her grandmother, who had had to set aside much of her Japanese culture when she moved to the U.S. In addition, Riku's assertion of Japanese American identity and performance of cultural practices served as indicators of her identity as an Asian American and person of color to others.

In contrast to these three participants, John did not think twice about his connection to his Chinese Taiwanese background. As an immigrant, his memories of living in Taiwan remained vivid; in addition, he visited Taiwan regularly, could speak Chinese fluently, and was connected to a U.S.-based Chinese community through Chinese school and in his neighborhood. John did not question his connection to his ethnicity, and neither did he feel a need to justify his Chinese-ness to anyone else. He easily formed relationships with friends of Chinese descent and felt comfortable ensconced within his group of mostly Chinese and East Asian friends in high school.

In this way, immigration generation status seemed to play a role in the ethnic identity process for participants. From the stories of Clare, Riku, and Jay, the process

of making meaning of ethnic identity for Asian Americans involved a consideration of cultural knowledge, including what was passed down from family and what was learned from a larger ethnic community, as well as an active exploration of cultural practices and values. Through these reflections, they forged their own sense of what their ethnic identity meant to them. Ethnic identity development was an active negotiation between the personal meanings they made of their culture, heritage, and family and the search for belonging and affiliation with others.

Making Meaning of Race: Defining and Claiming Asian American Identity

Ethnic identity held close, personal meaning to the participants, representing connections to family, heritage, and community. When considering racial identity, however, they strove to make meaning of experiences with difference, their relationship to other racial groups, and social systems of privilege and oppression in the U.S. Claiming their racial identity as Asian Americans was an active, conscious choice that served as a statement about how they saw themselves within the national racial landscape.

Both John and Clare were aware at an early age of how they looked different from other people around them and learned that the difference was related to race. John sometimes conflated race and ethnicity, seeming to equate Chinese-ness with Asian-ness; consequently, initially identifying as Asian came easily and without much reflection. For John, identifying as Asian was connected to his identity as an immigrant and his ethnic identity as Chinese Taiwanese. Although he did not question his connection to an Asian identity, he resisted incorporating American into his identity for much of his life, believing that doing so would come at the cost of his

Asian identity. He consciously decided to incorporate American into his identity as an acknowledgment of systems that perpetuated racism and injustice that had shaped his and others' experiences and as a commitment to working to combat those systems.

Similar to John, Clare did not question her legitimacy to claim an Asian American identity. However, she only made the conscious choice to do so after being prompted by her mother to reflect on race with the same critical engagement she brought to gender. To Clare, the experience of being Asian American was ineluctably shaped by systems of privilege and oppression:

> I think being Asian American means that ... you're born into a set of struggles that you might be aware of or not, but you're also born into a set of privileges that also you might be aware of or not. And depending on how aware of either of the two you are, that is going to determine how you navigate in the world. (Interview 1, p. 19, ll. 1-5)

By claiming her identity as an Asian American, Clare performed a political act that stood in opposition to racism and in solidarity with other people of color. Like John, identifying as Asian American for Clare came with a responsibility for working to advance social justice.

Where Jay's and Riku's journeys toward making meaning of their Asian American identity differed from John's and Clare's, at least in part due to their mixed-race heritage, they ended in a similar commitment to community action. Where John and Clare did not experience dissonance between their appearance and others' expectations of what "Asian American" looked like, Jay and Riku each had to assert their claim to Asian American identity. As a result, when asked what being

Asian American meant to them, Jay and Riku each had purposefully constructed a definition of the identity. For Jay, being Asian American meant having a biological tie to Asia while living in the U.S.; Riku's definition hinged on the familial tie to Asia while being an American. For both of them, being Asian American did not depend on whether other people categorized them as such; being Asian American was contingent on heritage, which was not open to external perceptions and judgments based on physical appearance. Their definitions were also intentionally created to be inclusive of multiple backgrounds, such as multiracial Asian Americans and transracial adoptees.

Jay's definition went beyond Riku's in one respect that was consistent with Clare's and John's: where Riku's definition pointedly excluded a requirement for knowledge or behaviors to prove legitimacy, Jay believed that claiming an identity necessitated learning about history, culture, and issues of the identity community and working on behalf of the community. Claiming an identity meant actively maintaining a connection to it. Jay identified as Asian American and was deeply involved in the campus Asian American community. Although Riku did not make the service component an explicit part of her definition of being Asian American, she nonetheless lived it out through her leadership roles in Asian American organizations and initiatives and her engagement with Asian American studies courses.

For all four participants, conscious engagement with and reflection of their racial experiences, as well as engagement with other students, identity-based organizations, courses, and advisors and professors, were keys to their racial identity development. In addition, their identification as Asian Americans signified a

commitment to activism on behalf of the Asian American community, other communities of color, and social justice.

The Influence of Context on the Experience of Intersecting Identities

All four participants told stories of how they experienced and negotiated their multiple identities. In all of their stories, their experiences with intersecting identities elicited responses of guilt, vulnerability, and unease. As they described their feelings of discomfort, the participants noted the influence of context and the dynamics of privilege and oppression on their intersecting identities.

Riku's example of a salient intersection of identities was her keen awareness of privilege related to her socioeconomic class and her perceived racial identity as White. Within the context of a school system that enrolled predominantly Black and Latino students, she was acutely conscious of privileges accorded to her in contrast to schoolmates. She described the guilt she felt, cognizant of both structural and individual ways in which she had advantages that most of her peers did not, from the low ratings of the county school system, to the socioeconomic privilege her parents had in enrolling her in a private elementary school, and to the "White girl pass" she was afforded at school by teachers and administrators. Privilege, which often allowed some identities to escape notice, was actually what made these identities salient for Riku.

Clare's reflection on identity focused solely on gender initially, but after prompting from her mother and exploring online resources and communities, she pivoted to examining her race and its intersections with gender. She discussed the way she felt targeted as an Asian American woman, from being the object of

fetishization during high school, to having to fend off unwanted, persistent attentions from White men during a weekend in New York. Most vivid was the experience of her friend, another Korean American woman, who felt trapped by a White man she had met at a Koreatown club. Within the context of romantic relationships and in most public spaces, Clare had a heightened awareness of her visibility and vulnerability due to the intersection of her race and gender. Her friend's experience caused Clare to feel particularly threatened, because the targeting had occurred in an ethnic-specific space where Clare had initially felt safe.

John's and Jay's stories depicted the uniquely positioned experience of Asian American men as simultaneously privileged and marginalized. Both recognized the privilege they possessed within the context of their ethnic culture as men and as sons in Chinese or Korean families. However, neither had a strong Asian American male presence in his life growing up, leaving each of them without affirming role models for Asian American masculinity in their personal lives. Their primary reference points for models of masculinity ultimately came from popular culture and media, which centered White men as the standard, rendering men of color in marginalized, stereotypical portrayals, if they were even included. They keenly felt their lower status relative to White men in terms of power, attractiveness, and privilege, especially within the context of their dating lives. In these ways, although John and Jay recognized the privilege afforded them by virtue of their gender, they saw that privilege effectively mitigated within the context of U.S. society that cast Asian American men as weak, asexual, and undesirable.

Navigating Tensions: Managing Intersections with Sexual Orientation

For Clare, Jay, and John, being gay or queer as Asian Americans seemed to add yet another dimension of marginality to efforts to find community and belonging in arenas that were most often organized around single identities. Although Clare and Jay deeply appreciated the sense of belonging they found in the Asian American community, they did not feel comfortable making their sexual orientation known in those spaces. John, who held his Asian American identity in a positive light in contexts such as school, had internalized a denigrated view of Asian American male desirability when it came to the gay world.

Living out their intersecting identities meant living with discomfort within contexts that varyingly valued some but not all of their multiple identities. Since their sexual orientation was not visible to others, Clare, John, and Jay seemed to be able to move within and through Asian American spaces without acknowledging their gay or queer identities. However, Jay and John described how they were unable to move in gay or queer spaces without confronting intersections of their sexual orientation with race. Wherever they were, they were always fully aware of the context and its influence on how they chose to express their identities, unable to inhabit all of their identities fully in the spaces they occupied.

Although Clare was hyper-aware of the intersections of her race and gender, she had not spent as much time considering how her sexual orientation connected with her other identities. Where her race and gender were outwardly visible, her sexual orientation was hidden in most contexts. She noted the role of context on identity salience, reporting that she often did not consciously consider her sexual

orientation and could choose to conceal it because "I don't feel like other people are aware of it in a lot of different social situations" (Interview 2-2, p. 6, ll. 31-32). She described the difficulty she had with finding a space where both her racial and sexual orientation identities could be acknowledged and accepted; Asian American community activities often seemed predicated on cisheteronormative assumptions, and queer spaces seemed to be dominated by White folks. Her recent discoveries of AAPI queer spaces at a conference and on campus were powerfully affirming.

For John, the intersections of his race, gender, and sexual orientation identities were often difficult to navigate. In the context of his family, John felt these three identities collide when confronting the expectations his mother had for him to get married and continue the family line. The intersections became even more salient when he began dating and saw where Asian Americans ranked on the hierarchy of desirability in the gay world. He recognized and resented the White supremacism that anchored the desirability hierarchy, while also feeling resigned as he acknowledged the way internalized oppression underlay his own romantic preferences.

As a multiracial Asian American man who identified loosely as queer, Jay managed his intersecting identities through uncomfortable situations and contexts. Similar to John, he negotiated tensions arising from conflicts between his sexual orientation with gender-related expectations from his family. In the context of the queer dating world, he struggled with dating apps that failed to accommodate the complexities and subtleties of his mixed-race identity while also confronting dueling stereotypes of his racial backgrounds, where Asian American men were desexualized

and Black men hypersexualized. In the context of Asian American community spaces, he did not feel comfortable disclosing his sexual orientation. Jay also found reconciling his sexual orientation with his religious beliefs challenging. In these varying contexts, Jay's questions of "what it mean[t] to be a man, what it mean[t] to be a queer man, and queer man of color" (Interview 2, p. 22, ll. 2-3) persisted.

Family Members as Catalysts in Identity Meaning Making

Family members played significant roles in the meaning making of identity for all four participants. In one way, family members were a source of information about culture and ethnicity: Clare and Jay learned about Korean culture from their mothers, and Riku learned about Japanese identity from her father and grandmother. Beyond passing along cultural knowledge, though, family members served as prismatic mirrors through which participants' identities were not merely reflected back, but refracted, as participants considered their identities as they were shaped and illuminated by their family members' perspectives and experiences.

Riku spoke at length about her family members, especially her father, mother, and cousin. Much of Riku's self image was created in emulation of her father, from her interest in science and comic books to her immersion in her Japanese heritage. In a way, her father's experience of growing up with limited knowledge of Japanese culture and language sowed the seeds of Riku's determination to claim her Japanese heritage. In addition, Riku's close relationship with her cousin Wei prompted her to consider her Asian American and gender identities more carefully. In contrast, however, Riku seemed to see her mother as both an example and counter-example of how to be a woman; although she respected her mother's strong feminist ideals, she

saw how her mother was perceived negatively as bossy and aggressive. Afraid of being seen as too similar to her mother, Riku often swung to the opposite extreme, reluctant to assert herself.

John's mother and brother prompted him to reflect on his identity in different ways. He was compelled to make meaning of his gender and sexual orientation identities in part due to the expectations he confronted from his mother. Her requests for pinky promises for future grandchildren were consistent with Chinese expectations for sons, which he knew he could not fulfill in the way she imagined. After coming out to his mother, he began to drift away from her, losing some of their closeness. Meanwhile, John grew closer to his older brother, who encouraged him to think critically about social issues. His brother inspired him to connect to campus events focused on diversity and social justice, which ended up serving as his gateway for learning more about Asian American identity.

Jay's relationship with his mother informed the way he saw himself in terms of ethnic identity, gender, and sexual orientation. She was his avenue to Korean-ness, from teaching him Korean language and cultural values to traveling together weekly to their Korean church community in Virginia. Further, according to Korean culture, as firstborn son, he held a position of privilege, which came with high expectations for academic and professional achievement and familial duty. Jay felt the weight of those expectations, especially as he considered his sexual orientation and wondered if he would meet expectations to one day start a family of his own. He could not help but feel additional pressure when bearing his sister in mind, as her autism precluded her ability to reach similar achievements.

Clare created meaning of her ethnicity, gender, and race partially in response to what she saw from her parents' experiences. Her feelings of connection and disconnection to her ethnic identity reflected the contrasting ways in which her parents were linked to their own Korean heritages. The distance she felt from her Korean identity echoed the experience of her father, who was raised without a strong connection to Korean language and culture. Her mother, who grew up in a Korean American community, provided an access point for building Korean cultural fluency. Further, her mother, having observed Clare's engagement with feminism, directly and repeatedly pressed Clare to consider race along with gender. In these direct and indirect ways, family members served as catalysts for participants to see and make meaning of their identities.

Campus-Based Spaces to Explore Asian American Identity

All four participants noted the role of campus-based experiences in the exploration and development of their identities as Asian Americans. Involvement in student organizations and participation in events and seminars provided them with the opportunity to connect with fellow Asian American students, find mentors, and learn about Asian American history and issues, as well as about social justice more broadly. Riku, Jay, and Clare all found entry points through Asian American student organizations, but their pathways varied. Given her interest in Japanese culture, Riku connected with the Japanese American Student Association during her freshman year, which led her to her involvement with the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month committee that was coordinated by the Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy (MICA) office, as well as to the Asian American Student Union (AASU).

She eventually became an executive officer of AASU and decided to minor in Asian American Studies.

Similar to Riku, Jay sought to find a sense of community through ethnicity-based student organizations, but his first forays with Korean American student organizations were off-putting. He soon found acceptance and belonging with the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association and a multicultural fraternity. These organizations served as non-ethnic-specific gateways for Jay's involvement in the Asian American community and his eventual leadership role in AASU.

After first learning about gender and race through blogs and online communities during high school, Clare came to college seeking a way to engage with identity issues in a critical and political way. However, she did not see political engagement happening in ethnicity-based organizations such as the Korean Student Association. A friend who was involved with the MICA office's Asian Pacific American Heritage Month planning committee invited her to a meeting, opening her eyes to the opportunities to get involved on campus in the ways she had been seeking. Connecting with the MICA office and the Asian American student community helped Clare find anchor and belonging at Maryland after an unhappy first semester; she had found a community to which she could belong and contribute: "I was so inspired by the leaders that I saw all around me. And I was like, man, I want to be in that position, and I want to inspire, like, other freshmen, like who I was then" (Interview 1, p. 2, ll. 19-21).

John did not find his connection point on campus among Asian American student organizations, but rather through programs and events coordinated by student

affairs and academic units. After conversations with his older brother first prompted

his interest in social justice issues, he began attending events focused on diversity

organized by the MICA office and participated in an Asian American studies

leadership seminar. Those experiences served as his entry points for reflecting on

himself as a racial being, eventually leading to his integrating his Asian and American

identities into an Asian American identity. Afterward, he deepened his engagement

and learning about social justice through his involvement with the Alternative Breaks

program.

In these ways, student organizations, student affairs offices, and academic

programs played critical roles in these participants' consideration of their racial

identities and other social identities. Not only did these spaces help students to meet

peers and cultivate connection and belonging, but they also provided opportunities for

them to learn about Asian American history, identity, and contemporary issues and to

engage in action to promote social justice. Although it was not confined to the

campus, opportunities to connect with Asian American college students from other

institutions provided yet another forum to learn about and engage with Asian

American identity and community. Clare, Jay, and Riku also spoke about their

involvement with the East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU) regional

conference; for Clare and Jay in particular, ECAASU provided a uniquely valuable

space to address intersecting identities of AAPI LGBTQ students.

Conclusion

Looking across all four participants' individual narratives, six themes emerged

to form a collective metanarrative about how Asian American college students made

meaning of their racial identities and intersecting social identities. Ethnic identity held deeply personal meaning to each of them; U.S.-born participants described their journeys of seeking and claiming an authentic sense of ethnic identity. In contrast, racial identity felt more political than personal to these students, as they actively reflected on their experiences with difference and with other racial groups in order to craft what being Asian American meant to each of them. As they discussed ethnicity and race, these students also shared stories of intersecting identities, noting contextual influences of privilege and power on those intersections. Particularly salient were intersections that involved sexual orientation, which often lent another layer of complexity and marginality to their efforts to make meaning of identity and to find belonging.

For these four students, experiences with close family members and campus-based activities shaped how they engaged with and thought about their social identities. Family members served as powerful catalysts for reflection and meaning making for identity. Participants saw some of their parents' experiences reflected in their own; in other cases, participants considered their identities in reaction and contrast to expectations and challenges from family members. Once they came to college, involvement with student organizations and participation in campus programs provided valuable spaces for these students to explore Asian American identity and engage with social justice efforts.

This metanarrative highlighted themes that emerged when viewing the individual narratives through the lenses of the research questions and an intersectional framework. Although the six themes of the metanarrative indicated areas of

commonalities across the participants' individual stories, the particularities of each story remained. The metanarrative presented should not be seen as the only story or the defining story, but rather as one version of a joint story of identity, meaning making, and experience.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings from this study of how Asian American college students make meaning of their racial identity and intersections with other social identities. I retold stories that the participants had shared, refracted through the lenses of the research questions and an intersectional framework, as well as through my own perspective as a researcher, by means of individual narratives. I then told a collective story based on themes across the individual stories in a metanarrative that brought the dynamics of racial identity development, intersecting identities, and contextual influences into view. In the next chapter, I situate the study's findings within the broader landscape of the research questions, scholarship, and student affairs practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

When my daughter was five years old, I found myself having to explain what being Asian American meant. Her initial question over breakfast did not immediately signal the beginning of a critical conversation.

"Mommy, what are we?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, barely looking up from my laptop screen as I read and responded to emails.

"What are we?" she asked again. "I know we're not Black, and I know we're not White, so what are we?"

I snapped my head up, suddenly giving her my full attention. It was February, and I recalled that my daughter had been learning about the significance of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other famous African Americans in kindergarten during Black History Month. My daughter did not seem to be overly concerned – this was an idle question that had passed her mind while she ate her Cheerios, not unlike her asking why the sky was blue. Given my professional and research interests in racial identity for Asian Americans, I had had a number of conversations with college students about what being Asian American meant, but I realized that I had not prepared to have that conversation with a five-year-old. I took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and began to explain the social construction of race to my daughter.

The questions from that early conversation with my daughter continue to resonate. What are we, indeed? What does it mean to be Asian American? What does being Asian American mean in the context of our relationships with other people of color, in the context of a nation shaped by histories of racism and colonialism, in

the context of a society where systems of White supremacy, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia continue to exert their power over people of marginalized identities?

These questions have nagged at me throughout my life. Even before I had the words and the cognitive skills to articulate them, I noticed how I was different from others around me, how my and others' experiences were influenced by privilege and marginalization. I wondered how I fit into the world around me. This study served as an attempt to grapple with these essential questions once again. By exploring the stories of how college students who identified strongly as Asian American came to understand their racial identity, I hoped to see what was common, what was distinctive, and what was transformational. By also examining how they made meaning of other social identities, I sought an intersectional understanding of identity development that would bring the influence of systems of power and privilege into view.

In this narrative inquiry study, I examined how four Asian American college students made meaning of their racial identity and other social identities. Each participant's individual narrative depicted how she or he experienced her or his racial identity, ethnic identity, other social identities, and the intersections of those identities. A collective metanarrative highlighted the themes that emerged across the participants' stories. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the study in relation to the research questions, consider the findings within the context of existing literature, suggest implications for practice and future research, and address the study's limitations and strengths.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to explore the salience of race to Asian American college students' identities and to explore the intersections of race with other social identities. The following research questions guided the study: (a) how do Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity; (b) in what ways, if any, do their other social identities, such as gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status, interact with the way Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity; and (c) how do Asian American college students experience the intersections of their multiple social identities? Using intersectionality as a framework and narrative inquiry as a methodology, I began to uncover responses to these questions in the individual and collective narratives of the participants.

How do Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

The four participants in this study came to identify as Asian American through reflection about their experiences with difference and how they saw themselves fitting into the racial world around them. Their definitions of being Asian American seemed to be premised on a connection to Asian heritage within the context of U.S. history and society. Riku boiled down the essence of her definition of being Asian American to "You're American, but you're of Asian descent," going on to describe the navigating of cultures as a shared experience of Asian Americans. In this sense, identifying as Asian American was straightforward: being from Asia or having a

familial connection to Asia and living in the U.S. meant that one was Asian American. However, the apparent, simple directness of these definitions belied the process of careful consideration of experiences with racial belonging that gave rise to them.

Similarly, for these four students, claiming the mantle of Asian American identity for themselves was a conscious choice that followed active reflection and engagement with learning about Asian American issues and community involvement. The choice to identify as Asian American also signaled these students' connection to other people of color and a commitment to social justice. As an immigrant from Taiwan, John identified strongly as Asian and resisted adopting "American" into his identity until he decided that doing so would acknowledge the influence of racism and privilege in his life and his commitment to working to change it. Although Jay's definition of being Asian American was similar to Riku's in its succinct clarity ("Having blood ties to Asia and ending up in America makes you Asian American"), in his eyes, claiming the identity came with a responsibility to the Asian American community. Clare saw being Asian American as a political identity that indicated a call to reflect on how power and oppression shaped her and her relationship to other people of color. For Riku, identifying as Asian American allied her with other people of color.

As multiracial individuals, Jay and Riku saw their pathways to claiming Asian American identities characterized by questions of legitimacy and feelings of needing to defend their claims. Conscious of how she was often perceived to be solely White, Riku deliberately asserted her Japanese ethnicity, which helped affirm her status as

both an Asian American and a person of color. Jay readily identified himself racially in multiple ways simultaneously: as a person of color, as multiracial, as Black American, and as Asian American. His struggles with racial identity arose when he encountered those who challenged his claims to Asian American and Black American identity because he confounded their expectations and "checklists" for those identities.

Meaningful engagement with Asian American issues and community was instrumental in the development of their racial identities as Asian Americans. Whether through taking an Asian American studies course or through connecting with an office or organization focused on diversity and social justice, learning about a broader context for participants' own and their family members' experiences with race was crucial. Riku found her initial entry point with an ethnic-specific organization, but soon connected with the Asian American Student Union (AASU), the pan-Asian American organization, and the campus multicultural involvement office. This in turn led to increased engagement, including leadership roles in AASU, as well as to her pursuit of a minor in Asian American studies. The key opening for Jay was the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association, which led to pan-Asian American community events, and eventually to his leadership role in AASU. Seeking in-person avenues to engage with Asian American issues, Clare found AASU and the multicultural involvement office, where she was finally able to learn alongside peers who inspired her. John's path differed from the other three participants in that his primary involvement was not through Asian American student organizations, but rather through academics and programs run by student affairs units; after attending a

few events hosted by the multicultural involvement office, he participated in a five-week leadership seminar offered by Asian American studies and then went on to become a trip leader for the Alternative Breaks program. Events, programs, and opportunities hosted by campus offices and student organizations provided early exposure to identity and diversity topics, as well as critical pathways for reflecting on and deepening learning about racial identity for these four participants.

In what ways, if any, do their other social identities, such as gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status, interact with the way Asian American college students describe and make meaning of their racial identity?

Creating their senses of racial identity occurred in concert with other social identities. Racial identity seemed to be most closely aligned with ethnic identity. Although John seemed to conflate race and ethnicity at times, in most cases, the participants delineated between the two social identities. Where racial identity signified how participants saw themselves within U.S. society and how they connected to other communities of color, ethnicity, for most of the participants, signified their connection to family and cultural knowledge (or the lack thereof). In turn, immigrant generation status influenced meaning making about ethnic identity, with those participants who were second- or third-generation feeling further removed from their heritage and a concurrent pressure to demonstrate cultural aptitude. For Riku and Jay, as multiracial Asian Americans, validating their ties to their Japanese and Korean heritages seemed to establish their connection to Asian American identity

in a way that was different from John and Clare, who did not feel a need to prove their Asian-ness.

Gender interacted with racial identity for Clare. Her critical engagement with feminism in high school provided a pathway for her to learn about and engage with learning about race and being Asian American in a parallel way. Once she began learning about race, she noticed that her experience of being Asian American was entwined with her experience of being a woman and approached her learning about her identities in an intentionally intersectional way.

For John, gender and sexual orientation affected the way he made meaning of being Asian American. Through his relationships with White partners, he noticed the privileges that they had by virtue of their race that he could not access. Dating as a gay Asian American man, he confronted the racialized hierarchy of desirability that elevated Whiteness while devaluing Asian-ness, a hierarchy that John saw that he had internalized for himself. Without strong role models and portrayals of Asian American masculinity, John struggled to see his race in a positive light.

Jay had a rigorous standard for claiming an identity; when it came to race, he believed that he qualified as a "true Asian American," based not just on his heritage, but also on his knowledge of and engagement with Asian American issues and community. However, his ability to claim his racial identity was complicated by intersections with gender and sexual orientation. Like John, Jay lacked the presence of Asian American men role models in his life. As he tried to find partners through dating apps, Jay had difficulty trying to navigate his racial identification in ways that felt authentic to him while anticipating others' perceptions. A closer examination of

how Jay, John, Riku, and Clare experienced their multiple identities illuminated the influence of context, power, and privilege on their identity meaning making.

How do Asian American college students experience the intersections of their multiple social identities?

Clare, Jay, John, and Riku experienced various intersections of their multiple social identities in different ways. In some cases, participants considered some identities singly, without much apparent mindfulness of how they intersected. At other times, they saw how multiple identities bled together and mutually constituted each other. Often when they noticed the intersections of their multiple identities, they were aware of how dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression shaped their experiences.

For Riku, she recognized that the combination of her race and socioeconomic status afforded her individual and structural privileges compared to her middle and high school peers. For instance, being perceived as White, along with her middle-class status, allowed her to escape the scrutiny cast upon her Black and Latino peers. Otherwise, she did not describe other salient intersections of her social identities and seemed to consider them individually.

Learning about intersectionality gave Clare a lens for making meaning of the intersections of her race, ethnicity, and gender. She had observed gender-based expectations in Korean culture that seemed to subordinate girls and women. She was also keenly aware of settings where she felt vulnerable due to the intersections of her race and gender, having felt targeted and objectified by persistent attention and advances from White men. These threads of identities were intertwined into her lived

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experience as an Asian American woman of Korean heritage. Clare was just beginning to reflect on how her sexual orientation intersected with other identities, acknowledging how the invisibility of her pansexuality contributed to its lower salience in her day-to-day life. However, she was concerned about how to find a space for "someone who is Asian and queer to fit in."

John and Jay navigated tensions as they sought a version of Asian American masculinity that felt affirming amid contexts where Asian American men were either marginalized or depicted in demeaning stereotypes. As Asian American men who also identified as gay or queer, John and Jay constantly confronted external and internalized messages about their relative (un)desirability according to a racialized dating hierarchy. How they grappled with who they were as gay or queer men influenced how they saw themselves as Asian Americans and vice versa. For instance, although John claimed pride in being Asian in most settings (especially in school), in the context of dating and relationships, he could not inhabit his racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities simultaneously in a way that was self-affirming. In addition, similar to Clare, they were carefully attuned to how out they could be in different spaces, especially within the Asian American community. Ultimately, how these participants experienced their intersecting identities reflected processes of personal reflection and navigation of systemic influences of privilege and power.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature

The findings from this study connected to literature related to Asian American racial identity development, multiracial identity development, and the use of intersectionality to study multiple identities.

Racial Identity Development of Asian Americans

Although this study did not intend to test the validity or appropriateness of existing racial identity development models for Asian Americans, the findings from the four participants' stories confirmed and extended understandings of how Asian Americans develop their sense of racial identity. The findings illustrated the limitations of traditional, stage-based theories and the added complexity offered by contemporary, critical approaches such as intersectionality. The influence of growing up and living in a society shaped by racism was evident in all four participants' experiences, consistent with the premises of both Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity model and Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development (AAID) theory. However, these linear models seemed rigid when compared to the fluidity and richness of identity meaning making described by the four participants. In addition, these models' acknowledgement of oppressive social contexts fell far short of pulling into view how systems of power shaped identities. Intersectionality and other critical and poststructural theoretical perspectives highlight "the need to see identity articulations … as enacted, dynamic, and fluid" (Jones & Stewart, 2016, p. 22). In this study, use of an intersectional lens showed how interconnected structures of power and oppression shaped the participants' experiences with race and how race and other social identities were mutually constituted.

The study's findings further extended previous scholarship by Kim (2001) and Kodama and Abreo (2009) by unpacking what being Asian American meant to participants. This study addressed the call for examining how and why students identify as Asian American (Kodama & Abreo, 2009). According to the AAID model, Asian Americans begin with a negative view of their race and gain racial pride at the fourth stage; at this stage, Redirection to an Asian American Consciousness, being Asian American "entails knowing they belong here, having a clear political understanding of what it means to be Asian American in this society, and no longer seeing themselves as misfits" (J. Kim, 2001, p. 79). The participants in this study did not describe similar trajectories, but did report an understanding of the political significance of identifying as Asian American. Clare, Jay, John, and Riku each constructed carefully considered definitions of what it meant to be Asian American, rooted in shared Asian heritage and shared racial experiences in the U.S., and delved deeply in sharing how they came to those meanings.

In addition, the study contributed to understandings of racial identity development of Asian Americans by explicitly considering how other social identities influenced racial identity meaning making. In Kim's (2001) model, racial identity was paramount and seemed to evolve independently from other social identities. Other social identities began to be integrated only in the fifth stage, Incorporation, which was distinguished by "the blending of individuals' racial identity with the rest of their social identities" (p. 80). However, in this study's participants' experiences, other social identities often influenced the emergence and salience of race. This was particularly evidenced by John, whose sexual orientation and gender identities

interacted with how he perceived his race. Further, other social identities sometimes developed before or contemporaneously with racial identity, as in the case of Clare, whose engagement with her gender identity provided a roadmap for her exploration of her Asian American-ness. In addition, ethnic identity was closely related to racial identity, consistent with Johnston-Guerrero's (2016) intersectional understanding of the constructs; although all the participants described ethnic identity as distinct from racial identity, for both Jay and Riku in particular, the ethnic connection to Asian heritage was a key gateway for their identity constructions as Asian Americans.

Identity Development for Multiracial Asian Americans

The stories of Riku and Jay provided additional insights to the experience of racial identity development for multiracial Asian Americans. Researchers have explored identity development for individuals from multiracial backgrounds, noting the influence of various factors including family, racial heritage, social, cultural, and historical context, and more (Renn, 2003; Root, 2001; Simons, 2015; Wijeyesinghe, 2012). Both Riku and Jay claimed racial identities for themselves in ways that aligned with identity patterns described by Renn (2004), with Jay choosing multiracial and multiple monoracial identities as Asian American and Black American and Riku most often choosing a monoracial identity as Asian American. Their experiences with identity negotiation also resonated with Wijeyesinghe's (2012) Intersectional Model of Multiracial Identity (IMMI), which described how choice of identity can change over time, how factors that vary in salience can influence choice of identity, and how other social identities can influence racial identity experiences for multiracial people.

Jay's and Riku's experiences negotiating others' (mis)perceptions of their race were consistent with microaggressions faced by multiracial people described by Harris (2017) and Johnston and Nadal (2010). Many of those microaggressions were related to monoracism, a system grounded in the belief in "singular, discrete racial categories" (Johnston & Nadal, 2010, p. 125), which marginalizes and oppresses individuals from mixed-race backgrounds. Having to navigate monoracial assumptions and expectations had implications for multiracial identity development. Jay's encounters with others' "mental checklists" for identity left him feeling as if he had to prove his authenticity as a social group member, whether as a Black American or an Asian American. Riku seemed to be aware of how her behaviors could convey her Asian-ness to others in a way that echoed Khanna's (2004) work applying the concept of reflected appraisals to examine racial identity of adults of Asian and White backgrounds. Khanna found that other Asians' perceptions of Asian-White individuals' looks and cultural knowledge (usually manifested by language and food) seemed to inform the way Asian-White individuals chose to identify as Asian.

Within the context of college campuses, Renn (2004) described environments that could be more or less difficult for multiracial college students to navigate. Particularly challenging were those settings where the "boundaries of identity-based groups … were carefully policed by members who, often tacitly but sometimes openly, assessed the authenticity and legitimacy of claims to group membership" (p. 80). Although Jay did not unpack why he did not feel welcome when he approached Korean student organizations, he did describe the sense of belonging he found much more easily among non-ethnic-specific identity-based groups such as the multiracial

student organization, a multicultural fraternity, and the pan-Asian American organization.

Considering Intersections and Intersectionality

This study offered in-depth personal narratives that added to previous understandings of multiple identities with the use of an intersectional lens, particularly among Asian American college students. Beginning with the lived experiences of people of color was the first of Dill and Zambrana's (2009) four characteristic interventions of intersectional analyses; the second was to avoid essentialization by delving into the complexities of both individual and group identity; and the third was to reveal how interconnected power structures maintain oppression and inequality. The stories of Clare, Jay, John, and Riku portrayed the lived experience of managing multiple intersecting identities amid contexts shaped by the influence of power and privilege. Even as I asked participants to consider their social identities one by one, they responded from perspectives situated deeply within the experience of their intertwined identities. Their narratives reinforced the core tenet of intersectionality that identities were "not independent and additive, but multiple, interlocking, and mutually constitutive" (Bowleg, 2013, p. 758). Their stories about their social identities overlapped in a way that showed what Holvino (2012) called simultaneity, indicating "the simultaneous processes of identity, institutional and social practice, which operate concurrently and together to construct people's identities and shape their experiences, opportunities, and constraints" (p. 172). In this way, intersectionality helped reveal "how both privilege and marginality

shape and inform each other in individuals' identity meaning makings and in the context of their environments" (Jones & Stewart, 2016, p. 25).

In addition, the intersectional framework foregrounded the way context shaped the experience of intersecting identities. Clare, Jay, and John reported navigating tensions and managing their identities depending on the context and their perceptions of power and privilege structures, echoing findings from Jones, Kim, and Skendall (2012) that identities were fluid "as we negotiated multiple identities depending on the time and place and the influence of power and privilege" (p. 715). In this way, an intersectional lens focuses on the different "layers of context" (Kodama & Maramba, 2017, p. 32) Asian American students encounter as they move around campus, experiencing varying levels of comfort and belonging depending on the specific setting.

The intersectional analysis that revealed the context-dependent negotiations and decision-making regarding how, where, and when to disclose sexual orientation identities in this study paralleled Narui's (2011) poststructural analysis of discourse and agency among gay, lesbian, and bisexual Asian and Asian American students. As Narui found in her study, Clare, Jay, and John were keenly aware of discursive norms within different settings and relationships, as well as of the attendant power dynamics. For instance, John understood that the home-based discourse about pinky promises for grandchildren signaled his mother's lack of acceptance of his sexual orientation. Jay and Clare were attuned to discursive norms within many Asian American student organizations that informed them that those spaces might not be fully welcoming and supportive of their queer identities.

John's experiences managing his multiple, intersecting identities during middle and high school fit patterns identified by Ocampo and Soodjinda (2016). Although Ocampo and Soodjinda did not explicitly use an intersectional or critical framework, their study described the lived experience of how gay Asian American men negotiated their racial, gender, and sexual identities with attention to dynamics of power and oppression – specifically how they used academic achievement and the model minority stereotype to avoid bullying based on their LGBT identity. Many of the stories related in this article corresponded closely with John's experiences, from the teasing for effeminate behavior during childhood to the conscious adoption of practices to downplay the targeted behavior and fit in with popular kids as protection. Ocampo and Soodjinda's (2016) participants placed "academics at the forefront of their identity as a means to distract themselves, and others, from their feelings towards the same sex" (p. 495). Engaging with studious and academically oriented peers in his "Asian clique" during high school allowed John to feel comfort with identifying with his racial identity while avoiding grappling with his sexual identity in a way that was completely consistent with Ocampo and Soodjinda (2016):

> Our findings revealed that some gay Asian American men negotiated their identity by suppressing their sexuality while using academics as a scapegoat. For example, some respondents felt validated when they lived up to model minority expectations by excelling in honors classes and earning good grades, while others used academics to fit within the norms of their social networks. (p. 497)

Looking more closely at the experiences of both John and Jay as Asian American gay and queer men, the influence of interconnected structures of power and oppression on interconnected identities becomes vivid. In fact, intersectionality helped to elucidate the insidious sway that White supremacy held on their lives, as they struggled to forge a sense of themselves as desiring and desirable Asian American men and men of color in the face of hegemonic masculinities defined by a White standard (T. Liu & Wong, 2018; W. M. Liu & Chang, 2007). The racial preferences built into gay dating apps reified the racialized desirability hierarchy, as well as structural monoracism. Structurally, racism and sexism mutually reinforced each other, as Collins (2007) wrote, while on the individual level, the interlocking mechanisms of racism and sexism were revealed in internalized gender-based racism (Liang, Rivera, Nathwani, Dang, & Douroux, 2010).

Implications for Practice

The fourth and final theoretical intervention that characterized intersectional analyses, as noted by Dill and Zambrana (2009), was "promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice to create a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions" (p. 5). Keeping their adjuration in mind, insights from the stories of these four students suggested implications for practice in higher education, in terms of both support for Asian American students and opportunities for making institutions more socially just and inclusive. Within the context of student development work, Abes (2016) explained that critical perspectives like intersectionality "critique and deconstruct the ways in which systems of oppression shape the nature and process of development,

situating the problem to be fixed within these systems rather than the student" (p. 14).

On the individual level, student affairs educators who work with Asian American students should be mindful of the unique and particular lives they have lived and stories they have to tell, without a set of expectations of what to expect or assume. Providing the prompting question and the safe space for students to consider their multiple identities and their intersections can provide the gateway for identity reflection and meaning making.

The stories of these students in particular highlight the role that identity-based student organizations play, especially those that are not ethnic-specific but still community-oriented. For instance, the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association, which was created to provide a place for those with mixed-race heritage, was simultaneously identity-specific while still inclusive of the diversity of backgrounds students had. A pan-Asian American organization such as the Asian American Student Union also cultivated spaces where students from a variety of backgrounds could connect around shared experiences, community, and advocacy. Cultivating outlets for students to explore and develop both their ethnic and racial identities should be a part of an intersectional approach (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Educators who advise and support identity-based student organizations should also work to provide leadership development training and pathways to provide entry points for students to get involved and gradually grow their involvement and learning. The leadership development offered by organizations like the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association and Asian American Student Union provided opportunities for the participants in this study to get involved and engage in learning about identity and

community. The findings of this study echoed others that highlighted how involvement in racial and ethnic organizations, diversity programs, and activism promoted Asian American students' identity development (Inkelas, 2004; Osajima, 2007), and how Asian American identity development could in turn prompt engagement in leadership and activism (Manzano, Poon, & Na, 2017).

Relatedly, curricular and co-curricular avenues for learning about Asian American history, identity, and contemporary issues should be cultivated. Courses and workshops about Asian American history are especially valuable for students who are immigrants or children of immigrants who might not otherwise know about the hundreds of years of history of Asians in the United States. Collaborations between academic and student affairs units would be particularly potent, as suggested by Osajima (2007), to promote critical consciousness among Asian Americans.

At the same time, services and support for students based on social identities must develop and incorporate intersectional approaches. This includes working with identity-based student organizations that are often organized around single dimensions. McShay (2017) noted that "students' own developmental readiness may predispose them to engaging in single-axis thinking as opposed to embracing perspectives that view identity as fluid, overlapping, contextual, and linked to systems of oppression" (p. 30). Given this, advisors and staff who work with student organizations should plan trainings to promote students' learning about intersections and intersectionality. In addition, creating spaces that focus on various intersections of identities for Asian Americans, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, could

be particularly valuable in helping Asian American students make meaning of their intersecting and simultaneous identities.

To promote systemic change for more inclusive and socially just institutions, implications include re-examining and revising the structure of multicultural affairs and diversity and inclusion offices to integrate intersectional approaches. McShay (2017) provided an example of how multicultural centers could incorporate intersectionality in their efforts, while using Museus's (2014b) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model as an overarching framework. His recommendations included how centers could design positions and reporting lines in order to address needs of identity-based communities while intentionally making space for and promoting attention to intersecting identities. Further, other functional areas that engage students in reflection on identity, community, and social change, such as leadership development and service learning offices, should incorporate intersectional approaches to their work, especially since their activities could serve as entry points to activism and identity development.

Implications for Future Research

This study indicated paths for future lines of inquiry. Although the goal of this narrative inquiry study was not to create a generalizable theory, the individual and collective stories of these four participants suggested ways to consider the racial identity development of Asian Americans in a more complex way by integrating an intersectional focus and how race and other social identities were interconnected and mutually constructed. To pursue this line further, the study could be expanded to include more participants and with different identity backgrounds and combinations.

The inclusion of participants from South Asian, Filipino, and Southeast Asian backgrounds could point to deeper understandings of the development of pan-Asian American identity. The role of religion in racial identity development and socioeconomic status could also be more deeply investigated.

To further extend an intersectional analysis of identity among Asian American college students, the research questions could be revised to address participants' experiences with intersections more explicitly, similar to the questions that guided Bowleg's (2013) qualitative study of Black gay and bisexual men. Indeed, examining the experience of Asian American men, inclusive of various sexual orientations, with an intersectional lens could be particularly illuminating. Similar to Bowleg's (2013) study, research focused on the experiences of gay and queer Asian American men would advance understanding of intersectionality "among a sample who is advantaged by virtue of gender, and disadvantaged by virtue of the intersection of race, gender, and sexual identity" (p. 755). T. Liu and Wong (2018) also commented on the value of studying Asian American men in intersectional research, given their "dual positions of privilege and marginalization as men and racial minority, respectively" (p. 89) and the opportunity to explore their unique experience navigating gendered racism and hegemonic masculinity. For instance, the stories of heterosexual Asian American men could provide an opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences with race and masculinity with queer-identifying Asian American men. Regardless of the specific identities and dynamics under consideration, intersectionality remains a potent tool for research in higher education for its ability to bring the lived experience of multiple intersecting identities to the

foreground while revealing the interlocking power structures that pattern those lived experiences.

Employing other critical and poststructural theoretical perspectives could also be effective in uncovering systems of power and oppression as they shape identity meaning making for Asian Americans. Narui's (2011) examination of discourse and agency among gay, lesbian, and bisexual Asian and Asian American students suggested the potential for poststructural analyses on studies of intersecting and interlocking identities for this population. Critical race theory (CRT), which is premised on the centrality of race and racism in the experiences of people of color, also offers an analytic tool for examining Asian Americans' experiences with race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Johnston-Guerrero, 2016; Jones, Abes, & Quaye, 2013; Museus, 2014a). Student development scholars have been utilizing critical race theory increasingly to study identity among college students (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). Specifically, AsianCrit, which builds from CRT to provide a tailored framework that "centers racial realities that are at the core of Asian American experiences" (Museus, 2014a, p. 23), could provide a lens for viewing and analyzing how racism affects Asian Americans in the U.S. and for suggesting systemic changes to address inequality. Asian Americans have been racialized since early in their history in the U.S. (Gotanda, 1995); institutional, cultural, and individual racism continue to affect Asian American students' experiences in college (Museus & Park, 2015). AsianCrit could offer a more holistic understanding of Asian Americans as racial beings while

integrating intersectionality and an intertwining of stories, theory, and praxis (Museus, 2014a).

Limitations

In addition to the caveats related to narrative inquiry noted in Chapter 3, the study's findings should be considered with the following limitations. A limitation arose from my decision to use maximum variation sampling in order to select participants of diverse social identities. Choosing a diverse sample of participants could have made identifying common themes difficult, as well as run the reductionistic risk of disguising the uniqueness of experiences. Previous researchers who examined Asian Americans based on ethnicity (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002; Strobel, 1996), gender (Chow, 1987; W. M. Liu, 2002), or intersections of multiple identities (Finn, 2009; Hahm & Adkins, 2009; Kibria, 1999), focused their inquiries to understand experiences for a particular Asian American subgroup. Although I did end up with some common experiences with social identities such as sexual orientation and multiracial background, it is possible that by exploring a broader Asian American experience across so many differences, I lost depth and understanding of specific experiences.

Although I had also originally planned to seek a representation of diverse identity backgrounds for my participants, with particular interest in ethnic diversity, all four of the study's participants came from East Asian backgrounds. The intensity sampling approach I used to find information-rich participants who identified as Asian American and had already engaged in reflection on their identities could have precluded the selection of participants from South Asian, Filipino, and Southeast

Asian backgrounds, given historical and contemporary questions of how they have been included and excluded from the "Asian American" category (Espiritu, 1992; Kibria, 1996; Nadal, 2004; Strobel, 1996). Based on conversations with key informants, as well as my previous experiences with the campus's Asian American student community, I believed it would be possible to recruit an ethnically diverse, information-rich set of participants for this study. However, of the 22 students who completed the Participant Interest Form, only one came from a South Asian background, and two others reported Southeast Asian heritage; none identified as Filipino. As a result, I could not explore how students from those backgrounds found paths to pan-Asian American identity.

Another limitation of my study could have arisen from the way I asked participants to consider and share stories about their social identities. I asked participants about their racial and ethnic identities first, and then asked them to reflect on other social identities in succession. In doing so, I may have encountered the pitfall that Strayhorn (2017) described, whereby I unintentionally encouraged participants to consider their identities in singular ways, potentially compelling them to resist telling their stories from their lived intersections. Although participants did seem to share stories highlighting their interwoven identities throughout our conversations, in hindsight, I could see how the nature of my questions did not reflect an intersectional approach.

Strengths

The primary strength of this study lies within the unique, rich stories of the four participants. The participants brought openness, vulnerability, and committed

engagement to the research process. For this study, they were willing to discuss dimensions of their identity that they hid in other contexts. I remain deeply honored by the trust they placed in me and in the research project. In addition, the diversity of their gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant-generation backgrounds brought light on how these intersections interacted with racial identity development. Jay and Riku, as multiracial Asian Americans, shared particularly resonant stories of searching for belonging and identity.

Another asset of the study was the use of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry allowed the unique particularities of each participant's stories to emerge; the semi-structured nature of the interviews focused the conversations on topics relevant to the research questions, yet provided latitude to allow participants to share their stories as they experienced and made meaning of them. Narrative inquiry also highlighted the specific contexts of the stories and the unique voice of each participant.

The use of intersectionality as a theoretical framework for this study illuminated how systems of power and privilege acted upon the development of racial identity in unique ways due to the interaction of other, simultaneously experienced and mutually constituted social identities. Racial identity development models, including Helms' (1995) People of Color Racial Identity model and Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development theory, were predicated on an understanding of the influence of power and oppression on people of color, as their stages describe individuals' encounters with White supremacy and internalized racism. Those models, however, did not address how intersecting social identities interacted with the racial identity development process. Jones and Abes (2013) incorporated the

consideration of power and privilege when examining individuals' experiences with multiple social identities in their re-envisioned Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity. This study reinforced the absolute necessity to continue including the influence of systems of oppression and privilege explicitly in studies about racial identity and other social identities. The use of intersectionality helped elucidate the lived experience of intersecting identities and how interconnected systems of power and oppression exerted themselves differently given different constellations of identities in different contexts.

Returning to Intersubjectivity: Researcher Reflections

When I designed the study, I kept the idea of intersubjectivity – the interaction between researcher and participants in creating narrative – in mind. By reflecting carefully on my own background and biography that informed my interest in the study, biases and assumptions, and relationship with the study site, I intended to make my role as researcher-subject explicit. By monitoring my researcher subjectivity, I planned to be mindful of how the participants' voices were interpreted and expressed through my own, while keeping their stories in the forefront (Chase, 2005). Several instances emerged where I noticed the relevance of the researcher-participant relationship during the research process. Knowing my familiarity with the campus and the university's AAPI community, participants used acronyms for offices and organizations and presumed my awareness of campus dynamics and events. This familiarity helped to build a sense of rapport and connection with participants, but I found myself being careful not to make assumptions about their knowledge and perceptions.

My ethnicity as a Korean American was particularly germane in my conversations with Jay, who also identified as Korean American; Jay often peppered Korean words into his responses with the assumption that I would understand what he meant. The only other participant who used a language besides English during an interview was Riku, who made a few references in Japanese, but always explained the translation afterward. Our shared ethnic heritage helped to build rapport between Jay and me, as he did not seem to feel a need to prove himself according to any checklist, and afforded me a more nuanced understanding of what being Korean meant to him.

A challenge I encountered as I monitored my researcher subjectivity was navigating my role as an educator who had mentored many Asian American students in their exploration of their racial and other identities. When John described his belief that affirmative action hurts Asian Americans, I found myself holding back my instinctive reaction to unpack and explore his beliefs, as I might have if we had an advisor-student relationship rather than a researcher-participant relationship; as an advisor or mentor, I would have sought to provide alternate viewpoints on the issue and challenged him to view affirmative action holistically and historically. Unfortunately, by holding back, I might have inadvertently missed an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of his beliefs. Similarly, I kept myself from commenting on his conception of Asian American as referring to those from primarily East Asian backgrounds until the end of our second interview, when he asked me directly who was included in my definition of Asian American. I explained how I constructed the racial category of Asian American, which prompted John to reflect on his assumptions about the category, which in turn led to a conversation about the social

construction of race for Asian Americans. Ultimately, I found I could not set my role as educator aside completely.

I reflected on the researcher-participant relationship further after my final interview with Clare. We had turned off the recorder and after casual conversation about weekend plans, she asked me what made me interested in the research topic, so I shared. I recorded notes in my researcher journal immediately afterward:

> I appreciated her asking, since it surfaces my subjectivity, brings the fact that my own experience and views influence my lens and how I will eventually make meaning of and write her story. … The significance of sharing my story – I think – is the mutuality piece, our connection. She has shared so much with me, been so vulnerable. I appreciated that she realized that I have a story, too.

I felt that my relationships with participants were authentic and allowed space for them to tell their stories, but I felt somewhat uncomfortable with the lack of full reciprocity – an imbalance and distance between us remained, as they shared much more with me than I with them. In previous experiences working with research teams, I valued the shared nature of the meaning-making process. In particular, I appreciated working on a group autoethnography studying identity construction with multiple, intersecting identities (Drechsler Sharp, Riera, & Jones, 2012; Jones et al., 2012). The autoethnography research group provided a truly collaborative and dialogic research experience, from designing the study, to collecting and analyzing data, to writing and preparing papers, presentations, and articles. The current study's design and practical limitations did not permit me to engage participants as full co-

constructors of meaning throughout the data analysis and writing stages, but motivated me to seek to honor the participants' stories of identity and the systemic influences that shaped those stories.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the role and salience of race to Asian American college students' identities and to examine the intersections of race with other social identities. Through the stories of Clare, Jay, John, and Riku, the lived experiences of Asian Americans as racial beings were centered. Their individual and collective narratives painted a complex and nuanced picture of how Asian American college students made meaning of their racial identity, how other identities interacted with that process, and how they experienced those intersections. For them, identifying as Asian American was a conscious choice whose meaning was created through reflection on experiences with race, often in conjunction with intersecting identities. Systems of power, oppression, and privilege acted upon those intersections and indelibly shaped the way these four individuals made meaning of their identities, as illuminated by intersectional analysis. In this way, the stories of Clare, Jay, John, and Riku contributed to the understanding of identity development of college students, as well as to the larger picture of Asian Americans within the landscape of U.S. social dynamics.

APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO KEY INFORMANTS

[DATE]

Dear [NAME]:

Hello! I am a doctoral candidate in the Student Affairs Concentration in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education at the University of Maryland, and I write to solicit nominations of participants for my dissertation study. The purpose of my study is to explore the role and salience of race to Asian American college students' identities and to explore the intersections of race with other social identities. I hope to learn how Asian Americans see themselves as racial beings and how they make meaning of their multiple and intersecting social identities.

I am seeking current Asian American undergraduate students who have spent some time thinking about their race, ethnicity, and/or other dimensions of their identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, socioeconomic status, and immigrant generation status). Please take a moment to think of any Asian American students whom you may have taught in a course related to race, ethnicity, or identity, or advised in a cultural or identity-related organization, or with whom you may have discussed issues related to race and identity. I am seeking participants who represent the range of diversity within the Asian American community in terms of ethnicity and other social identity dimensions (such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, ability status, and immigrant generation status), but the most important criteria are that they have thought about their race and would be willing to engage in reflective conversations with me about their identity. Participants must be at least 18 years of age. Participants will be asked to participate in three interviews with me, each 60-90 minutes in length; at the conclusion of the third interview, they will receive a $20 gift card to Amazon.com as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Please send my name and email address (yckim2@umd.edu) to any students who come to mind by [DATE]; you may forward this message to them to give them context to my study, if you wish. Once I hear from them, I will send them an email to invite their participation that includes a link to an online interest form.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at yckim2@umd.edu or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Stephen John Quaye, at quayesj@miamioh.edu. Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Yoolee Choe Kim
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
College of Education

University of Maryland

APPENDIX B: LISTSERV ANNOUNCEMENT

Subject: Participate in a Study about Race and Identity among Asian Americans!

Are you an Asian American student who has wondered about race, racial identity, and other aspects of identity? We are seeking current undergraduate students who identify as Asian American to participate in a study about race and identity. After filling out an initial interest form, participation would involve two 60- to 90-minute interviews, plus a follow-up interview. If you are at least 18 years of age and have spent time thinking about race and how it relates to the way you see yourself and would be interested in participating in reflective conversations about it, please consider participating! If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the online interest form at http://ter.ps/asianamstudy. If you have additional questions, please contact Yoolee Choe Kim, Doctoral Candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, at yckim2@umd.edu.

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

[DATE]

Dear [NAME]:

Hello! My name is Yoolee Choe Kim, and I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Maryland. I am exploring how Asian American college students see themselves in terms of race and other social identities (such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, ability status, and immigrant generation status) for my dissertation study. To study this topic, I am interested in hearing the stories of how Asian American college students make meaning of their race and identity. Thank you for your interest in participating.

I will ask participants to participate in three interviews with me, each 60-90 minutes in length, during the summer and/or fall of 2015. In these interviews, I will ask you to share stories from your life that are related to race, ethnicity, and other social identities. I will also ask you to review transcripts from interviews and to provide feedback on draft summaries based on the interviews.

I know that participating in a study like this will represent a commitment of time, energy, and reflection. I also understand that discussing issues related to race and ethnicity and other social identities can feel very personal and sensitive. I will work to preserve your confidentiality as a participant throughout the study, and whenever I write or talk about the study, I will only refer to you through a pseudonym you select and a generic code. Further, your participation in the study is voluntary, and you can discontinue at any time. I hope, however, that you will find the experience of sharing your stories with me to be personally rewarding and interesting. As a token of appreciation, participants will be given a $20 gift card to Amazon.com at the conclusion of the study.

If you are interested in participating in this study and are at least 18 years of age, please complete the online interest form at http://ter.ps/asianamstudy. After reviewing the interest forms, I will select participants who represent a range of backgrounds. I will follow up with you to let you know your status as a participant, as not everyone who completes the form will be selected. I will not share whether or not you participate in the study with anyone (including your nominator, if applicable). If you are a student at the University of Maryland, your grades or standing with the university will not be positively or negatively affected by your decision to participate or not participate in this study.

If you would like to discuss this study or your potential involvement further, please contact me at yckim2@umd.edu or XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Stephen John Quaye, at quayesj@miamioh.edu with any questions, comments, or concerns.

Thank you for considering this invitation! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Yoolee Choe Kim
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
College of Education
University of Maryland

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study!

I am a doctoral candidate in the Student Affairs program in the College of Education at the University of Maryland. I am exploring how Asian American college students see themselves in terms of race and other social identities (such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and ability status).

The purpose of this form is to collect preliminary information about you. It should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. I will use the information to select participants who represent a range of backgrounds. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, a small number of participants will be selected, so not everyone who completes the form may be selected to participate.

If you are selected to participate, you will be asked to participate in three interviews, each 60-90 minutes in length, during the summer and/or fall of 2015. Interviews will be conducted in person or via phone or video-call technology such as Skype. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to review transcripts of the interview for accuracy, as well as to review draft summaries of your interviews and provide feedback. You may also record your thoughts or reactions outside of interviews and share them with the researchers.

Completing this form and participating in this study are voluntary; you may stop at any time. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering. If you are selected to participate, the information in this form may be reported in aggregate or by a pseudonym you select. This information will not be linked to your actual name or other identifying information about you.

More information will be provided if you are selected to participate. If you have any questions, you may contact me in the following ways:

Yoolee Choe Kim
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
University of Maryland
yckim2@umd.edu

Thank you again for your interest! Please answer the following questions in order to be considered for the study.

Last Name

First Name

What is your preferred email address?

What is your preferred phone number?
Please answer in this format: 000-000-0000

What is your birthdate?

mm/dd/yyyy

Where did you grow up?
Please list the locations where you've lived by providing the city, state, and/or country (if outside USA)

What college/university are you currently enrolled in?
○ University of Maryland, College Park
○ Other:

What year are you in college?
○ Freshman or first year
○ Sophomore or second year
○ Junior or third year
○ Senior or fourth+ year

What is your major?

When do you anticipate graduating from college?
Please answer in this format: MM/YYYY

Will you be available to participate in interviews during Summer 2015 (May-August)?
○ Yes
○ No

Will you be available to participate in interviews in the Fall 2015 semester?
○ Yes
○ No

Continue »

25% completed

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

How would you describe yourself regarding the following dimensions of identity?

Race

Ethnicity

Gender or gender expression

Sexual orientation

Religion

Dis/ability

Socioeconomic class

Were you born in the United States?

○ Yes

○ No

« Back | Continue »

50% completed

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

If you were not born in the United States, where were you born?

At what age did you come to the United States?

« Back | Continue »

75% completed

274

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

Is there anything else you would like to share about how you identify?

How important is your race in terms of how you see yourself as a person? Why?
Please share in a few sentences below.

Have you participated in any organizations, programs, or academic coursework that are related to your racial or ethnic identity? If so, please describe below.

Have you participated in any organizations, programs, or academic coursework that are related to your other social identities, such as gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, dis/ability status, religion, or immigrant generation status? If so, please describe below.

« Back | Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

100%: You made it.

Interest Form: Study of Identity among Asian American College Students

Thank you for completing this interest form! I will be following up with you soon. If you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact me at yckim2@umd.edu.

Sincerely,
Yoolee Choe Kim
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
University of Maryland

Edit your response

This form was created using Google Forms.
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APPENDIX E: FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (FOCUS ON RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY)

Opening:
- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.
- Review informed consent.
- Ask participant to select a pseudonym.

"I Am" Poem Exercise

At the beginning of the first interview, participations will be asked to participate in an "I Am" Poem Exercise to build rapport. Instructions:

"To help us begin getting to know one another, I would like to ask you to do an exercise with me called the 'I am' poem. Each line should begin with 'I am,' but you can complete each line however you wish. You may share where you are from regionally, culturally, ethnically, and so on; or favorite memories, personal mottos, interests, hobbies; or whatever defines who you are. Please take about 10 minutes to write your poem. We will share our poems with each other by reading them aloud."

Questions
1. Tell me a little about yourself. To follow up:
    a. What are you studying?
    b. How are you liking Maryland?
    c. What do you like to do?
2. Did you have an opportunity to write an "I am" poem *[see above]*? [Share poems with one another by reading aloud.]
3. Thinking about how you see yourself, can tell me about some of the most important experiences and/or aspects of your identity that help define who you are?
4. How do you see yourself in terms of race? How do you see yourself in terms of ethnicity?
5. Tell me about your earliest memories related to race.
6. Tell me about your experience growing up.
    a. Where did you grow up?
    b. What did you learn from your family about what it means to be [ethnicity]?
    c. What did you learn from your family about what it means to be Asian American?
    d. What was your neighborhood like in terms of diversity and other Asian Americans?
    e. What was your high school like in terms of diversity and other Asian Americans?
7. How has being [ethnicity] or Asian American shaped your life and how you see yourself?

8. Could you tell me about a time when you were prompted to think more seriously about being Asian American? What prompted it and how did you go about thinking through it?
    a. What was the role of others in this process, such as friends, family, faculty, university staff, or other students?
    b. What meaning did you take away from it?
9. What does it mean to you to be Asian American? Where did that meaning come from?
    a. How does being Asian American fit into your larger sense of self?
10. What does it mean to you to be [given ethnicity]? Where did that meaning come from?
    a. How does being [given ethnicity] fit into your larger sense of self?
11. How do you see yourself in relation to other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups?

APPENDIX F: SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (FOCUS ON OTHER
SOCIAL IDENTITIES)

1. Since our last interview, is there anything you would like to share with me in terms of any stories or reflections that have occurred to you?
2. We spent most of our last conversation talking about race and ethnicity. Today I'd like to talk about some other aspects of social identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, socioeconomic class, and immigrant generation status.
3. We touched on some of these identities last time: [mention those identities that did arise in the last interview]
   a. How would you describe yourself in terms of _____?
   b. How important is this social identity to you and the way you see yourself?
   c. How does this social identity relate or not relate to how you see yourself as an Asian American?
   d. Can you tell me about a time when this social identity emerged as particularly important or salient to you?
   e. Are there times or contexts when this social identity is less salient or noticeable to you?
4. When you think about other social identities such as [those not discussed in Question 2], which feel important to you and the way you see yourself?
   a. How does this social identity relate or not relate to how you see yourself as an Asian American?
   b. Can you tell me about a time when this social identity emerged as particularly salient, important, or noticeable to you?
   c. Are there times or contexts when this social identity is less salient or noticeable to you?
5. We haven't yet discussed [identities that have not been mentioned in Questions 2 and 3].
   a. How would you describe yourself in terms of _____?
   b. How important is this social identity to you and the way you see yourself?
   c. How does this social identity relate or not relate to how you see yourself as an Asian American?
   d. Are there times or contexts when this social identity is more or less salient or noticeable to you?
6. Although I've asked you about each of these social identities separately and in relation to race, sometimes they overlap with each other in different ways, in different combinations, perhaps including race but not always. (Share "working model" of MMDI with moving "arms" that allow identity dimensions to rotate around the center, and with the identity dimension written on circles that can slide up and down the arms, to be closer and further away from the core.) This is based on a theory called the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, but slightly modified so that you can move parts of it around. The closer the social identity is to the core shows how salient or important that identity is at a given time in a given context. The social identities can move around and overlap with one another. Can you think of a time in your life when two or more of these social identities intersected with one another? Tell me about that experience.

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7. Are there other stories about being Asian American or any of these identities that occur to you that you'd like to share with me?

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