

Negotiating the Boundaries of (In)Visibility: Asian American Men and Asian/American

Masculinity on Screen

by

Helen Kar-Yee Ho

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Communication)
in The University of Michigan
2011

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Susan J. Douglas, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Robin Renee Means Coleman, Co-Chair
Assistant Professor Aswin Punathambekar
Professor Alford A. Young, Jr.

© Helen Kar-Yee Ho

2011

To
Mom, Dad, Liz,
and
Mark

Acknowledgements

A project so long in the making makes it difficult to know where to begin in thanking the many who have provided me with support and love along the way. It has been accompanied by the ups and downs of any major, multi-year project: the highs of discovering a new idea, the lows of struggling to articulate a new idea, and everything in between. I have filled the many roles of graduate student, teacher, staff assistant, research assistant, researcher and writer at the University of Michigan, and this frenetic and exhausting life would have been made unspeakably difficult if it were not for the many friends and their iterations of support along the way.

The most profound, heartfelt thanks go to my dissertation committee, without whom this work would never have been designed, conducted, and completed in the way it was. Their doors were always open to me as a colleague and fellow researcher, and for that I am ever grateful. Robin Means Coleman provided continual support, tough love and structured guidance, helping me learn to grow into my skin as a scholar. Her mentorship showed the value in conducting interdisciplinary research, but more importantly can empower its own participants. Susan Douglas was an invaluable source of encouragement and practical guidance, and her hawk-like eyes helped to edit various versions of my writing. Without Aswin Punathambekar, the major theoretical ideas of this project would not have come into place. His confidence in my work provided me with my own

motivation to continue and complete the project. Alford Young, Jr., has always made me feel appreciated and supported along the way. With his ability to push students for more while instilling confidence and inspiration, Alford provides a model for mentorship and scholarship that I can only hope to mirror in the future.

I particularly thank the many writing partners who have taken part in the elations, venting, strategizing and critiquing that help us succeed as Ph.D. students. As writing partners at various stages, I thank: Deb Melican, Lauren Guggenheim, Rossie Hutchinson, Katie Will, Jeannie Lipson, Emma Garrett, Joanne Hsu. Chung-Hao Ku, Sara Jackson, Alex Olson and Aleksander Bošković helped me see the value of interdisciplinary conversations and the unique bonds that can form from structured gatherings. Most importantly, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Brad Jones, who provided countless hours of reading, helpful critique, and joint theorizing. I feel that some of the ideas in this project are as much his as they are mine. I am proud to count all of these wonderful people as my colleagues.

I also want to thank those who have supported me throughout graduate school, beyond my scholarly activities. These important people have provided me with endless guidance in life, love, and seeing the bigger picture. They include (in no particular order): Fernando Velasquez, Jonathan DeVore, Juan Espindola Mata, Dan Shoup, Brian Librot, Ryan Walsh, and Jeremy Hunsucker, Emily Chivers Yochim, and Megan Biddinger. Shanna Kirschner, Marta Murray-Close, Carolina de Miguel, Jane Larson and their respective partners have also provided me with invaluable career and school advice, and we have shared too many delicious meals, glasses of wine, shoulders to cry on, and peals of laughter to count. I also want to thank Ed Renollet for the countless cups of coffee at

Ambrosia, for my “home away from home” during my writing. I also thank GEO for providing me with life experiences and I will never forget; this indomitable organization reminds us all fight for the voices of those who are told they are too insignificant to speak.

There are still others who have made me who I am today, and my work what it is. Dara Greenwood was an invaluable mentor, sharing advice and life stories to help me make sense of academia and its demands. I am also indelibly shaped by my undergraduate advisor, Jim Schwoch, who shared afternoons with me in his converted office on Sheridan Road discussing the potential paths after college and how to harness my love of teaching and research. Jim helped me better understand the growing field of Communication Studies and introduced me to the notion of graduate school; he also helped me decide to come to Michigan.

I could not have covered the many texts in this project without the tangible resources that make research possible. I am truly grateful for the financial support given to me by the generosity of the Department of Communication Studies and the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan. The Communication Studies administrative staff, in its various iterations, has helped me with everything as small as reserving rooms on campus and unlocking my office door for me, to filling out timesheets and helping ensure that my health insurance had carried over. In particular I would like to thank Chris Gale for his tireless efforts to advocate for graduate students, and Jessica Brown for her patience and kindness when scheduling meetings seemed to be impossible.

Most importantly, the material for this research would not exist without the interviewees who responded to me. Their stories and insights lend so much to the field, and the act of interviewing helped each of us see that, as some put it, “we are not crazy” in

thinking we see race and gender in moments when neither seem to be relevant. I only hope that my work has, and will continue, to do them justice by presenting their voices. I also would specifically like to thank my COMM 478 class, perhaps the best seminar course I will ever have, who provided the first insights into the very first interview transcripts from this research. This brings us to Rebecca Cheezum, who spent many hours meticulously transcribing interviews for me when I needed the help and could not stand to hear my own voice recordings anymore.

If not for my family continually supporting me, pushing me to be accountable for my actions and to be the best I could be, I would not have made it this far. My parents have always wanted the best for me, seen the best in me, and given their best, and my sister has always provided the guidance of one who has blazed a trail before.

Words cannot express how thankful I am to have a partner in Mark Supanich, whose dedication and interest in my work held this entire project (and me) together. Mark has always helped me see the bigger picture and is truly a guiding light in every journey. He has suffered through as much as anyone, serving as a soundboard for ideas and revisions, and as an impromptu editor and housekeeper. He is a true anchor of support and unconditional love.

Ann Arbor, MI • 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
List of Figures	x
Abstract	xi
Introduction	1
Methods	7
Situating the Study	16
Understanding “Asian American”	18
Asian American Men	20
Media and Cultural Studies	26
Asian American Studies	29
Chapter Breakdown	33
Interviewee Profiles	38
Chapter 1 – Visibly Invisible: Exploring “Asian America”	48
Exploring Asian/American	50
Brad: “There’s Something Going On.”	50
Locating Asian American Men	53
Defining Asian American: What Asian American is Not	57

David: “I Guess It’s Kind of an Underdog Story.”	67
Randy: “I’m just Asian American.”	75
Situational Asian America	80
Beyond Race: Asian American as Global Competency	84
Conclusion	87
Chapter 2 – Managing the Octopus: 21st Century Yellow Peril	90
The Role of News and National Discourse	92
Chinatowns and Chinamen: The Origins of Yellow Peril	101
Sample and Methods	106
Mediated Panic and the Rhetoric of Containment	110
“Spreading its Tentacles”: The Looming Specter of China	114
“Learning How to Make Itself More Infectious”: H5N1, SARS, and the Boundaries of Sickness	121
Outbreak	121
The Hot Zone	138
“When Do You Draw the Line Between Cautionary and Crazy?”: Product Recalls	130
Chapter 3 – Viewing Asian Americans	145
“You’ll Never See A Movie Called <i>Saving Private Kim!</i> ”:	
Negotiating Mediated Whiteness	148
The Brad Pitt Phenomenon	153
The Asian/American Spectrum	155
Exit the Dragon: Jackie Chan	155

Entering the <i>White Castle</i> : From Jackie Chan to John Cho	159
From Zeroes to <i>Heroes</i> : Masi Oka and “Geek Chic”	170
Finding a <i>Lost</i> Masculinity: Daniel Dae Kim	176
Multicultural Television and the Invisibility of Difference	184
Conclusion	190
Chapter 4 – Transmedia Possibilities of Race and Gender	194
Mapping Shifts in Television	197
“Dollars for Downloads”: The Writers’ Strike	197
Giving up on TV? Audience Shifts	201
Beyond Television: The Transmedia Experiment	204
“Fishing Where the Fish Are”: The Niches of Transmedia Universes	207
Experiencing <i>Lost</i> : Alternate Reality Games and Audiences at the Periphery	208
Building <i>Heroes</i> : Bringing Peripheral Representations to the Center	215
Transmedia Narratives: Connecting the Dots	224
(De)legitimized Marginality	227
Conclusion	230
Conclusion	233
Appendix	244
Bibliography	247

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker in *Rush Hour 3* (2007). 158
2. John Cho and Kal Penn in *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008). 164
3. Masi Oka as Hiro Nakamura in *Heroes* (2006). 167
4. Daniel Dae Kim as Jin Kwon in *Lost* (2004). 178
5. The *Heroes* cast in a promotional still for the show's second season DVD. 187
6. The *Lost* cast in a promotional still for the show's second season. 188
7. The fictional Hanso Foundation's newspaper advertisement against *Bad Twin*, the *TLE* tie-in novel written by fictional *Lost* character Gary Troup. 212
8. A *TLE* glyph, found on a Sprite ad in *People Magazine*, led to a series of clues and information when "NANITE" was entered into sublymonal.com. 213
9. A panel featuring Hiro Nakamura's bedroom for the *Heroes* graphic novel, issue no. 2 ("The Crane"). 219
10. East meets West: A quintessentially American Superman appears on Hiro's quintessentially Japanese origami crane. 220

ABSTRACT

Negotiating the Boundaries of (In)Visibility: Asian American Men and Asian/American

Masculinity on Screen

by

Helen Kar-Yee Ho

Co-Chairs: Susan J. Douglas and Robin Renee Means Coleman

First and foremost an audience reception study, *Negotiating the Boundaries of (In)Visibility* illustrates the dialogic relationship of racial discourse in the media and Asian American male identity in the United States. It combines in-depth interviews with textual, discursive, and industry analyses. I showcase how economic, political and technological changes in America and the media industry intersect with cultural shifts in narratives and representations. Defining the boundaries of their identity and culture, interviewees discuss the lack of an Asian American narrative in American popular culture. Rather, Asian Americans contend with larger stereotypes of “Asian,” considered to be a loaded term accompanied by a long history of ethnic homogenization and racial and cultural stereotypes. This dissertation locates particular sites of identification—social

surroundings, news media, entertainment media—and how narratives of Asian, American, and Asian American are negotiated, contested, or made visible.

In remembering news stories from the mid-2000s, interviewees show how diffuse the concept of “Asia” is in forming identities as racial subjects in America. Analyzing news texts and the rhetoric used to describe these news events, I suggest that the anxiety over China’s economic rise and the accompanying resurgence of “yellow peril” discourse perpetuates the homogenizing definition of “Asian American,” and how national discourse about a foreign threat can shape race relations within. These anxieties are countered by the rise of multicultural ensemble casts and Asian American male leads on primetime television shows. This juxtaposition shapes the complicated space in which Asian American men actively resist, negotiate, and accept racial stereotypes and problematic representations. Providing textual analyses of *Lost* and *Heroes*, I suggest that the seemingly progressive multiculturalism presented in entertainment texts perpetuates feelings of subordination and marginalization among racial viewers. Finally, I provide a close reading of television shows’ transmedia narratives their treatment of race. In particular, I suggest the ways in which racial difference becomes more visible as texts appeal to more mainstream audiences. In doing so, I begin a discussion of how multi-platform storytelling may offer new opportunities for articulating race and gender beyond television.

INTRODUCTION

“I remember being kind of... shell-shocked, that there were Asians on a movie screen.” Aaron, a college sophomore, was explaining his reaction to a 2002 film called *Better Luck Tomorrow*. Focusing mostly on Ben (Parry Shen), a straight-A high school student who shapes his life to appeal to college admissions officers, the film’s plot unfolds when Ben adds the basketball team to his list of extracurricular activities to push him not only to college, but also toward cheerleader Stephanie (Karin Anna Cheung). When Daric (Roger Fan) suggests that Ben is merely a token on the team, Ben quits basketball only to find his free time filled selling cheat sheets with Daric to other students. The unassuming Ben and preppy Daric are joined by Virgil (Jason Tobin), a hyperactive goofball, and Han (Sung Kang), a chain smoker taking cues from Hong Kong gangster films. Soon, the group’s idealized notions of the underworld life begin to take hold as they move from dealing cheat sheets to hard drugs. Their criminal behavior suddenly makes them the cool kids on campus: so cool that the girls come flocking and the rules don’t apply, especially when it comes to getting rid of Stephanie’s rich boyfriend, Steve (John Cho).

Here was a film in which Asian men were the main attraction, inhabiting different masculine character types, seamlessly moving in and out of filmic spaces, as well as within the Hollywood industry. *Better Luck Tomorrow* turned the “model minority” stereotype of over-achieving Asian Americans on its head, with characters using the

stereotype as a cover as they incited violence and literally got away with murder. The film showed Asian American teenagers as the same as the other trash-talking, sex-obsessed yet vulnerable and naïve high school counterparts in their California school. Given that Aaron denigrated the model minority and kung fu stereotypes that he felt had become so entrenched in making sense of Asian men on screen, this 2002 film was truly groundbreaking, evidence that stories of and performances by Asian Americans were marketable and consumable.

Better Luck Tomorrow reached cult status even before its release, in part due to a controversial, raucous racial debate that exemplifies the context of this dissertation. After the film's debut at the Sundance Film Festival, an audience member suggested that director Justin Lin, an Asian American, was derelict in his responsibility to portray the Asian American community in a positive manner. While moving away from the "model minority" portrayal, the film was accused of merely modernizing and updating the stereotype of the Asian gangster. The uproar of both acclaim and criticism in the audience made it impossible for the film's cast and crew to respond. It ended with film critic Roger Ebert standing on his chair and shouting:

What I find offensive and condescending about your statement is nobody would say to a bunch of white filmmakers, "How could you do this to your people?" This film has the right to be about these people, and Asian American characters have the right to be whoever they want to be. They do not have to "represent" their people.¹

¹ See Richard Chang, "Testing Limits," *Orange County Register*, April 6, 2003. See also No Thrijpkaew, "Filmic Face-Lift: *Better Luck Tomorrow* makes over Asian American Cinema." *The American Prospect*, May 2003.

That the audience was silenced by a white male defending Asian Americans while still calling them “these people” reveals the tensions Asian Americans face in an American media industry and influenced by the diffuse standards of whiteness, and its intersections with masculinity. In the American cultural and media landscape, white characters can be found as heroes, villains, and everything in between. White men have stomped, run, careened and loved their way across stages, but Asian men, as this dissertation will show, have been conscribed to narrowly defined narratives that more often than not keep them at arm’s length from hegemonic masculinity. In this context, *Better Luck Tomorrow* upset the norms of race and gender in Hollywood.

Better Luck Tomorrow broke the tradition of Asian American invisibility in mainstream media texts, but also made Asian Americans visible as racial minorities. While the Sundance debate centered on the visibility of Asian Americans making progress in a predominantly white industry, the acceptance Ebert called for is one that ostensibly renders difference invisible. The many different ways race complicated production, distribution and reception of *Better Luck Tomorrow* reveal some of the discomfort over inserting Asian America into racial discourses, the lack of vocabulary available to discuss Asian Americans in such a way, and the tensions of (in)visibility Asian Americans must juggle.

Aaron’s surprise also highlighted how absent Asian American men are on screens, and the limited venues for Asian American performance in the mainstream media industry. Indeed, while lauded for its Asian American cast, *Better Luck Tomorrow* was met with limited success; a “normal,” mainstream film with an Asian American cast, has yet to be repeated. Years later, *Broadcasting and Cable* was still writing about the

“invisible Asian-Americans,” sorely underrepresented in the media industry.² The marketing campaign for the film also pointed to the difficulty of defining and capturing a specific Asian American audience: Justin Lin recalls being told by MTV marketing executives that there was no “Asian wedge” in the ethnic-specific targeting for his film: “[Asian Americans] resembled whites and so were assumed viewers folded ‘within’ the white wedge.”³

Recent trends suggest that America must acknowledge the Asian population in America beyond “the white wedge.” The 2000 census reported that Asians are one of the fastest growing populations in America,⁴ are leaders in attaining bachelor’s and advanced degrees,⁵ and are more likely than the general population to be in professional occupations.⁶ To some extent, Asian Americans have begun to earn visibility as a viable market: in 2005, AC Nielsen created the Asian Pacific American (APA) Advisory Council, stating that “immigrants, youth and young adults, and second-generation APAs have different and unique viewing habits, which Nielsen cannot ignore.”⁷ A 2007 Nielsen special report entitled “The emerging Asian American market,” featured several key executives of Asian American advertising firms, acknowledging that Asian Americans represent a market with purchasing power of roughly \$369 billion a year. Nielsen’s measurement of Asian American audiences suggests that the Asian American community

² Michael Hong, “The Invisible Asian-Americans,” *Broadcasting and Cable* 135.3, January 17 2005, 78.

³ Tasha G. Oren, “Secret Asian Man: Angry Asians and the Politics of Cultural Visibility,” *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, ed. Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime and Tasha G. Oren (New York: New York University Press): 354.

⁴ Jessica S. Barnes and Claudette E. Bennett, “The Asian Population: 2000.” Census 2000 Brief. United States Department of Commerce. (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

⁵ It is important to note that this data does not parse out educational attainment for varying ethnic identities within the “Asian” census category. Kurt Bauman and Nikki Graf, “Educational Attainment: 2000.” Census 2000 Brief. United States Department of Commerce. (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

⁶ Barnes and Bennett, “The Asian Population: 2000.”

⁷ November 29, 2005.

is beginning to be recognized as a legitimate population worth incorporating into the entertainment and advertising industry.

As Arlene Dávila's (2001) *Latinos, Inc.* shows, the firm delineation of a particular, ethnic market can result in representational shifts in the media and a new level of cultural visibility. Her in-depth analysis of reactions to mass media fare targeted toward, or featuring Latinos, and Latinos' responses to the imagined Latinidad community constructed by Hispanic networks, have provided us with enormous insight into the contradictions minorities experience with texts that seem to speak for them.⁸ However, Dávila focuses on the creation of specific, Hispanic-oriented TV networks and advertisements. As of yet, advertisements geared toward a specific Asian American market in the United States remain to be seen, and many of the ethnic, commercial media fare geared toward Asians—AZN, MTV's various iterations, etc.—have failed to endure on mainstream television.⁹ With no comparable texts for, or featuring Asian Americans, we see a failure to capture or define a distinctive, bounded Asian American audience. In some ways, the population is too distinct in its difference, allowing advertising agencies to cite difficulties reaching a pan-ethnic audience that is too diverse,¹⁰ and has no unified language.¹¹ It is also considered similar enough to other demographics, seen in the case of *Better Luck Tomorrow*, to warrant its own category.

⁸ Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

⁹ AZN TV as well as MTV Chi, MTV K, and MTV Desi all failed as "Asian American" ventures on television, despite some success as web iterations. See Aswin Punathambekar, "What Brown Cannot Do for You: MTV-Desi, Diasporic Youth Culture, and the Limits of Television," *Flow TV* 10 (June 27, 2009), accessed June 30, 2009, <http://flowtv.org/2009/06/what-brown-cannot-do-for-you-mtv-desi-diasporic-youth-culture-and-the-limits-of-televisionaswin-punathambekarthe-university-of-michigan>.

¹⁰ Bill Imada, "Forget the Asian American Market Myths But Remember These Truths," *Advertising Age*, November 5, 2007.

¹¹ Allison Romano, "The Asian American Market is Ready," *Broadcasting and Cable*, October 10, 2005.

This dissertation is thus located at a contemporary moment at which the media industry and the concept of audience-as-community are in flux. Not only are advertisers and networks unsure of how to define Asian American viewers, but they are also struggling to attract Asian American viewers who are a part of an increasingly fractured audience engaging with a diverse array of distribution channels. While it was possible—and still is, to some degree—to categorize audiences bounded by class, gender, race or even text and/or viewing time, it has become increasingly difficult to do so today. The rise of multiple platforms, timeshifted viewing and “post-network” industrial practices, as I will detail in chapters 3 and 4, have divided and separated audiences into groups that are difficult to recognize or even pin down with any particular regularity. One man may be in his living room watching a network television show on the TV set at its scheduled broadcast time; another may be on the bus watching it on his mobile phone a week later.

The main goal of this dissertation is to examine the dialogic relationship between Asian American men and their current media environment. Not only do men like Aaron contend with contradictions in their own lives and experiences, they also face a mediascape that is at once progressive and regressive in its representations of Asian men. Media representations of masculinity and discourses about America in a global economy combine with men’s self-constructs and interactions to form an increasingly complex network of articulations and formulations of racial and gendered identity, at a particular historical moment, in the United States.

How do understandings of the self relate to representations in, and discourses about, the media? In asking this, I aim to explore the contemporary political, social and industrial moment and mediascape that shapes the representations and experiences of

Asian Americans. At its core, my dissertation investigates what Asian American men are saying about representations of Asia, America, and Asian America in the media. First and foremost a reception study, this dissertation is focused on a locally situated group of Asian American men and how their histories, social and lived contexts, and media experiences are intertwined. First presenting interviewees' backgrounds and histories, this project next asks how Asian American men respond to categories of "Asian American" and "masculinity." I then move my focus to news texts, presenting them as a source of some of the narratives that shape the social categories Asian Americans negotiate. Turning next to entertainment texts, I ask how interviewees bring this complex network of definitions and narratives to their interpretations of Asian American men on screen. Lastly, I analyze the role of transmedia narratives in opening up possibilities for articulations of race and gender. In looking at how the media industry might be shifting to account for diverse audiences, I discuss the ways in which multi-platform narratives might expand racial and gendered portrayals.

Methods

Interviews

This project is grounded in interview data from 27 in-depth interviews with self-identified Asian American men from a large metropolitan area surrounding a university campus in Michigan. Respondents were undergraduate and graduate students, as well as recent graduates—all "in between" life stages and embracing the possibilities of upward mobility in their future aspirations. Ultimately, my work aims to build an understanding of Asian American consumer culture as it intersects with notions of race and masculinity

in the mainstream media; it also privileges the voices of Asian American men as they react to these portrayals.

Announcements for the study called for “self-identified Asian American men.” Flyers were placed in and around major buildings on the university campus, and were sent in weekly e-mail digests from a multi-cultural student organization. My interviews were in person and one-on-one, with respondents naming the time and the setting for the interview. All of them took place on or around campus, usually at a quiet table in a coffee shop or restaurant. Each interview was semi-structured with an interview guide (see Appendix A), and each lasted approximately an hour and a half; some men stayed to talk with me for two hours or more. Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling, with interviewees putting me in touch with family members, roommates, fraternity brothers, or other friends in the area.

Interviews with self-identified Asian American men provide a specific example of how Asian American identities and masculinities are constructed at a particular intersection of race, age, gender and representation. Interviewing those who identify as Asian American empowers participants to define their own boundaries of exclusion or inclusion in the study. Through these interviews, I convey the stories of a population understood as situated in between understandings of Asia and America. Interviews with those who actively identify as Asian American provide valuable insight into the elements, experiences, and opinions that prompt identification with the term. This allows for an understanding of how “Asian American” is conceptualized on the ground, and takes this growing segment of the American population as a wholly organic, authentic group in its own right.

Following Michael Patton (1990), my interview guide opened with warm-up questions about school, where they grew up, and their aspirations for the future.¹² A series of questions asked about their past (role models as children, memories of Asian men in the media) as well as opinions and feelings about the present and the future state of Asian American men in the media. Questions were left open-ended for respondents to answer in their own terms. During conversations about media representations, each interviewee was presented with color images of contemporary leading Asian American actors, including 1) Masi Oka as Hiro Nakamura from *Heroes*, 2) Daniel Dae Kim from *Lost*, 4) John Cho and Kal Penn from *Harold and Kumar*, and 5) Jackie Chan from *Rush Hour*. Interviewees were asked to provide general impressions and reactions to these pictures. In all, I interviewed 27 men—8 Korean Americans, 11 Chinese Americans, 2 Japanese Americans, 3 Indian Americans, 1 Vietnamese American, 1 Filipino American, and 1 bi-ethnic Asian American—ranging in age from 18 to 41. Their profiles can be found at the end of this introduction; names have been altered to ensure their anonymity.

This project is grounded in a constructivist approach, rejecting a presupposed ontological truth to be uncovered and instead focusing on the themes that emerge from texts, stories, and transactions. This approach takes into account the role of the researcher as an interpretive subjectivity in the research process, as an interpretive *bricoleur* working to piece together multiple representations within a complex context that emerges during the research.¹³ The constructivist paradigm is, at its core, concerned with socially

¹² Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd edition (Newbury Park, CA: 1990).

¹³ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000).

and experientially constructed realities,¹⁴ or the idea that “the meanings of things rest with what people do with them, how they use them, and under what circumstances pleasures and significance are produced.”¹⁵ Throughout the project, I rely on the stories told to me by the men I interviewed, as well as my own critical, cultural analysis, always acknowledging my own situated subjectivity within the realm of Asian American identity and American popular culture.

After each interview, responses were transcribed, the first set of interviews by the researcher and the rest by a paid professional. Transcripts were then analyzed and coded by hand. Each transcript as well as notes from relevant television texts were coded line-by-line, using Emergent Category Designation (ECD).¹⁶ This process involves organizing categories of ideas that emerge based on the tacit feel or connotations of open-ended data. To validate themes and designations, I engaged in peer debriefings with other researchers familiar with interviews and ethnographies. Lastly, interviews were followed by member checks, during which respondents were given the opportunity to review transcripts and themes, clarify statements, and reflect upon their original interview. This iterative process helped to ensure as accurate representation as was possible, as well as to continually generate new content as respondents added to or clarified their narratives.

Interviews are especially helpful in revealing respondents’ thoughts about masculinity, Asian American masculinity, their opinions and values regarding the formation of masculine identities in America, and the meaning-making activities of self-

¹⁴ Robin Means Coleman, “Appendix.” *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 284.

¹⁵ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 7.

¹⁶ ECD is a classification procedure during which data is recursively sorted and grouped into intuitive or theoretical categories in order to establish an analytic framework. See David A. Erlandson, Edward L. Harris, Barbara L. Skipper and Steve D. Allen, *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (London: Sage, 1993); also Yvonne S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (New York: Sage, 1985).

identified Asian American men interacting with their media environment in the past, present and future. Interviews enable respondents to share the particularity of memories and situations remembered, as well as reveal their sensitivity to certain memories and texts. When respondents share affects linked to these recollections, it imbues their stories with an emotional and psychological complexity that other methods cannot provide. Their stories reflect, using Arlene Dávila's phrase, "contextualized stories" that do not reveal generalizable "truths," but rather provide insight into how individuals' backgrounds, experiences, and interactions within larger social forces intersect with their media engagement.¹⁷

To organize my own interviews with a mostly college-age demographic, I draw on previous work with second-generation (U.S.-born) Asian Americans,¹⁸ which often highlight a community's struggles to negotiate being at once ethnic and American.¹⁹ While I did not actively recruit second-generation interviewees, many who responded to the call for a "self-identified Asian American men" were, in fact, American-born or had moved to the country at an early age. My interpretations of their responses explore whether being located in between two worlds makes these youth somehow different in their ethnicity, or whether they may "also reproduce essentialized notions...in their

¹⁷ Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.*, 182.

¹⁸ Nazli Kibria, *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Mary Yu Danico, *The 1.5 Generation: Becoming Korean in Hawai'i* (Honolulu, HI: Versa, 2004); Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), and "Ethnic Identities of Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City," in *the New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

¹⁹ As Kibria states, "They are in between two different worlds, the immigrant world and the American, and they are not fully comfortable in either one." *Becoming Asian American*, 27.

glances eastward.”²⁰ However, also interesting are the responses of self-identified Asian Americans who, by other respondents’ standards, would be considered “fresh off the boat” Asians. The responses from these men reveal how the processes of immigration and positions of class produce subjects “in between” nations, cultures, and homes.

My project is thus an attempt to see how “Asian American” is conceptualized on the ground, as a wholly organic, authentic group in its own right. Instead of focusing on historical articulations or representations of Asian Americans, my work is largely situated in the present, examining the definitions contemporary Asian Americans bring to and take from their media experiences. Their stories reveal how this relationship might actively shape their sense of self as Asian Americans in the United States. The continued invisibility of Asians in front of and behind cameras has led to an era of absence and subordination that has shaped the lives of contemporary Asian Americans. This context begs for an investigation into how Asian Americans might conceptualize their community.

Textual analysis

Guided by interviewee responses and discussions of specific media texts, I conduct textual analyses, following discourses of race and gender in news and entertainment texts. As men identified news stories surrounding China as a prominent source of information about Asians in America, I turned to several news media outlets with which they were familiar. These included *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, and major newsmagazines *TIME*, *BusinessWeek* and *Newsweek*. I also include specific cases of televised news broadcasts from CNN and NBC to conduct close analysis of the

²⁰ Mimi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 23.

rhetoric and frames used to describe Sino-American relations. More detail about the sample and methods for this analysis can be found in Chapter 2.

At the core of this project is a focus on how audience members negotiate popular discourses of Asian American masculinity. National broadcast culture is a prime site where identities are articulated and reflected back to audiences. Media networks have the power to create common points of reference and shared cultural narratives, and formulations of specific identities in the popular imaginary are influenced by dominant media representations of race and gender. I work with the assumption that media sources and their markets are situated within a larger context of national and global relations, and shape how audiences conceive of normative behaviors and identities. In focusing on the contemporary images and narratives of Asian masculinity in fictional and news media, I answer Edward Said's (1979) call for a focus on "representations *as representations*,"²¹ acknowledging that what is commonly circulated in cultural discourse and exchange has the power to define and guide interpretations of others.²² I also respond to Aihwa Ong's (2006) assertion that racial categories are reproduced through daily practices that are "activities of inclusion and exclusion."²³

Popular, primetime media texts provide common points of reference in a shared narrative of national identity, but also narratives—and hierarchies—of racial and ethnic identities within the nation. Often, these narratives are gendered, specifying particular hierarchies and histories of femininities and masculinities. Elizabeth Alexander (1994),

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979; 1994), 20-21. Original emphasis.

²² As M.T. Kato writes, "Commodity culture constitutes the infrastructure of communication among the masses; popular culture gains its potential for producing affects, aesthetic values, and communal identities." *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop: Globalization, Revolution and Popular Culture* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 3.

²³ Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." *Current Anthropology* 37.5 (December 1996), 740.

for example, describes the ways in which the African American male body is inscribed with a history of violence and abject blackness, claiming, “black bodies in pain for public consumption have been an American national spectacle for centuries.” In this particular formulation of racialized masculinity, the mediated national narrative of blackness in America has resulted in “collective versions of African American male bodily history,” shaping the ways in which media representations “crucially inform [black men and women] about the lived realities of how violence and its potential” informs understandings of group standing within America’s racial framework.²⁴

Dominant narratives of difference can serve to strengthen a national American identity through exclusionary rhetoric, but can also strengthen the communal bonds of a minority group reacting to those narratives. While data show Asian Americans strengthening in numbers and (in some respects) their role in American politics, America’s foreign relations with Asia abroad, particularly with China and North Korea, remain increasingly fraught with tension. Relations and policies with others beyond America’s borders,²⁵ have shaped discourses of “peril”—yellow, brown, red²⁶—within. The concept of the “Other” is shaped by dominant, national hierarchies of race and power relations. In a digital age, print, film, and media technology have become “new fields of power [that] shape social norms by means of circulating images, narratives and information.”²⁷ It is precisely what these circulating narratives provide, and how they are

²⁴ Elizabeth Alexander, “Can you be BLACK and Look at This?”: Reading the Rodney King Video(s).” *Public Culture* 7 (1994), 78-79.

²⁵ See Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Robert MacDougall, “Red, Brown and Yellow Perils: Images of the American Enemy in the 1940s and 1950s.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 32 (1999): 59-75.

²⁷ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999): 158.

identified and interpreted, that is at the heart of my dissertation. As such, I focus on mainstream media texts as a site of struggle and meaning-making that is inexorably linked to formulations of race and gender.

In more ways than one, I am an outsider to the arena of Asian American masculinity. Along with the gender difference, I have not had the experience of growing up male in the United States, contending with its formulations of gender and gender's unique intersections with a racial structure that is predominantly white/black. English is my first language and I have, if anything, a strong Midwestern accent; I am sometimes unfamiliar with the media fare men recall as their childhood favorites; I cannot share the stories of immigration and assimilation; still today, some racial stereotypes and phrases are new to me. As an American-born Chinese, raised in Hong Kong and put through an American school system, I was fascinated with American popular culture and largely identify with it today. At an international school, the beginning of each fall was marked with students returning from their visits to the U.S., showing off new trends, knowing what the next big band would be. I was only vaguely aware that components of Asian culture were as much at the core of a globalized American popular culture.

Today, I am admittedly a fan of the best (and worst) American media has to offer, and have a love-hate relationship with how it portrays, in its myriad of outlets, gender and race. I loathed the race-based "social experiment" of *Survivor: Cook Islands*, and cringed at the jester-like qualities of William Hung on *American Idol*. I also cheered when Chinese brother and sister Tammy and Victor Jih won *The Amazing Race*, and took delight in the portrayals of Harold and Kumar in the eponymous movies, as well as the integrated storylines of Asian characters in the primetime narratives of *Lost* and *Heroes*. I

take note whenever a minor Asian character is allowed to speak a line on a television show. I am pleased to see others like me represented in the media, but often frustrated by the continued ignorance (laughter at my last name, insinuations that I will eat my cat for dinner) that—sometimes jokingly, sometimes seriously—pervades American culture. I am at once inside it, at once outside of it.

This feeling of being simultaneously included and excluded is not unique to me. Indeed, it is reflected in an entire body of scholarship detailing Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners.” It is the experience that Frank Wu details as the impetus for his book, *Yellow*: the contradictory acceptance of Asian Americans in schools and workplaces as the model minority, coupled with the ostensibly innocent compliment of, “Your English is so good,” or the question, “Where are you really from?”²⁸ A goal of this dissertation, then, is to uncover the complexities and nuances of what constitutes the Asian American experience, especially as it is implicated in gendered narratives that also involve issues of class.

Situating the study

This dissertation makes significant headway in both Asian American and media studies, in that it offers an investigation into Asian American representations and how they are connected, or even nestled within, larger discourses of Asia and America; additionally, it does so with the guidance of in-depth interviews to point the way. In my analyses, I look at media representations of Asia and Asian America from roughly 2003-2008. I identify this period as an historical conjuncture, in which the media simultaneously presented racial anxiety and multiculturalism. One need only to look at the contradictory media fare from 2008 and 2009 to see this juxtaposition. In March

²⁸ Wu, *Yellow*, 18.

2008, Texas educators led a controversial effort to change to an ethnically diverse literature list for the state's reading curriculum. Opposing the inclusion of ethnic stories, State Board of Education chairman Don McElroy claimed that putting a Chinese story in an English book would not help students learn English: "You really don't want Chinese books with a bunch of crazy Chinese words in them," he said, but then added that, "words like 'chow mein' might come in useful."²⁹ In a public hearing on voter identification legislation a year later, Organization of Chinese Americans representative Ramey Ko explained the difficulties many Asian American voters face due to discrepancies between ethnic and translated English names on various pieces of identification. In a response to Ko, Texas Representative Betty Brown commented, "Rather than everyone here having to learn Chinese," Ko and "his citizens" should adopt names "easier for Americans to deal with."³⁰ And, earlier that month, a white student at Tufts University drunkenly attacked a group of Korean American students practicing a cultural performance, reportedly calling them "chinks," telling them to "go back to China," and that he would "kill them all."³¹

While moments of racial conflict and discourses of fear surrounding immigration proliferated in the news, entertainment texts presented audiences with more multicultural casts than ever before. In the 2000s film and television studios, along with interest groups, made conscious attempts to increase diversity in the entertainment industry's creative ranks.³² For the first time, Asian American men were given space on primetime

²⁹ "Educators Rip Book List in English Plan." *San Antonio Express-News*, March 21, 2008.

³⁰ R.G. Ratcliffe, "Lawmaker Defends Comment on Asians," *Houston Chronicle*, April 9, 2009.

³¹ Ben Gittleson, "Alleged Bias Incident against Korean Students Prompts Widespread Reaction," *Tufts Daily*, April 10, 2009.

³² Networks with notable diversity initiatives include Disney/ABC with its Diversity Program, and CBS with its Diversity Institute Program to mentor minority writers for its network. The NAACP has also

screens, as well as entry into the sexualized arena of male celebrity, as seen in the rise of Asian American actors like John Cho, Harry Shum, Daniel Dae Kim, and Masi Oka. While multiculturalism is reflected in the increasingly colorful and integrated casts of primetime television shows and mass-marketed films, it is also a multiculturalism that is highly problematic, that some see as a threat to the social order, and can often erupt in episodes of violence. It is clear to those that I interviewed that while the media promote narratives of diversity, lived experience suggests that racial difference cannot be ignored. Sharing stories of being accepted on football teams or into white fraternities, interviewees also shared how their time in these venues was rife with jokes about Asians and stereotypes that prevented them from feeling fully accepted or integrated. Even if specific cases of discrimination could not be recalled or discussed, men were aware of discourses about Asians on a larger, national level that shaped some of the discomfort they felt as racial beings in America.

Understanding “Asian American”

Perhaps the dearth of, and complications in conducting research regarding the Asian American experience is due to the difficulty in defining the limits and scope of the Asian American population under study. The difficulty of labeling what is and is not “Asian American” has prevented many, including scholars and advertisers, from conceptualizing Asian Americans as a part of the American mainstream. The research design of this project contributes to a more nuanced and fluid understanding of what it means to be Asian American. Rather than defining the parameters of my research with my own potentially essentialized definitions of Asian America, allowing interviewees to

partnered with CBS and NBC on a Diversity Fellowship Program. However, criticisms of these initiatives point out that the networks still have the same distribution of majority talent.

determine their own standards for eligibility empowered them to shape their own category of “Asian America.”

This dissertation thus makes headway in Asian American scholarship by building on the more recent contention that “Asian American” is a fluid term. Following Kandice Chuh’s (2003) call to consider “Asian American” as a situational category,³³ I approach “Asian American” as not an essential identity, but one that is shaped within specific contexts such as imagined communities and media narratives. In their edited anthology, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (2007), Mimi Nguyen and Thuy Tu suggest a “subjectless” approach to Asian American studies in order to avoid the debates over authenticity and essentialism that have long ravaged studies of Asian Americans and Asian American texts. They write:

We argue that *Asian American* can be conceived as a marker of historical subjects, an axis of subordination, and a strategic coalition without presuming that it functions as a foundational property of our “selves.” This does not mean that we cannot speak of the experiences of Asian Americans, but that we must account for the ways in which these political and cultural activities are linguistically managed, socially constructed, and tactically deployed.³⁴

In gathering the stories and memories of Asian American men through a series of in-depth interviews, my research provides insight into some of the social constructs, as well as raced and gendered deployments experienced by Asian Americans who are part of an American popular culture today.

³³ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁴ Nguyen and Tu, *Alien Encounters*, 6. Original emphasis.

A term created in the 1960s by Asians in America as a response to the derogatory label of “Oriental,” “Asian American” was subsequently adopted as an official racial category for use in U.S. public policy and census reports.³⁵ Since then, some have declared the term as problematic, creating a pan-ethnic category that often eclipses national, cultural and geographical differences; currently, “Asian American” now encompasses over fifteen ethnic and national groups.³⁶ Not only is the term slippery in regards to geographical location and national origin, but also by generation: for some of my interviewees, Asian American included any Asian who shared the immigrant experience; for others, it meant being born in America and being an American who “happens” to be Asian.³⁷

These differences in definitions allow for us to critique the many contradictions of Asian images in the media without definitional limitations. Examining Asian men in mass media texts acknowledges particular configurations of power and representational history that often interchanges one type of Asian for another—Chinese playing Japanese, Koreans playing Chinese, etc.—resulting in a broad definition of “Asian American” that includes performances of “the Oriental.” Lastly, examining the rhetorical approach to China and Chinese nationals in political and economic discourse illuminates yet another configuration of power that has a specific definition of “Asian” that influences understandings of “Asian American.”

Asian American Men

³⁵ See Neil Gotanda, “Exclusion and Inclusion: Immigration and American Orientalism,” *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization*, ed. Evelyn Hu Dehart (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); Nazli Kibria, *Becoming Asian American*.

³⁶ Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime and Tasha G. Oren, eds. *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

³⁷ Alejandro Portes notes that Asian is a “particularly egregious term” because many second-generation “Asians” do not share parental languages; the distance between the first and second generation is greater. In *The New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 1-2.

American mass media have historically treated Asian Americans in front of and behind the camera with ambivalence. Leading Asian characters—often without specified origin and instead presented generally as “Orientals”—were consistently played by Caucasian actors due to the reluctance of the movie industry to allow Asians to take lead parts. In “yellowface,” a performance often including eyes pulled back by tape and overly harsh “Oriental” accents, white actors portrayed popular Asian characters, most notably the detective Charlie Chan.³⁸ Asian actresses such as Anna May Wong were more acceptable in the 1920s, but only as ferocious “dragon ladies,” submissive “lotus blossoms,” or exotic concubines.

In this history of representations, the racialized spheres of labor, the economy, and material production have specifically affected Asian men. Asian men had fewer entry points in an entertainment industry headed by white men, while Asian women have been afforded wider arenas of performance. As interviewees will elaborate on in future chapters, Asian American women have been allowed entry into these arenas in part due to universal standards of beauty and exotification. While still problematically perpetuating patriarchy, these standards have never been applied, it seems, to Asian men, who have been instead presented as feminine or asexual. While contemporary Asian American actresses—names such as Sandra Oh, Lucy Liu, and Ming Na Wen arise—took on lead roles in films and television shows during the 1990s, Asian American male leads remained elusive, if not completely invisible.

³⁸ Actors starring as Charlie Chan included Warner Oland, Sidney Toler, and Roland Winters.

While the field of gender studies has flourished with approaches of intersectionality,³⁹ studies of masculinity have often looked at gender projects in the context of a singular hegemonic formulation of manhood. In her analysis of the (Western) masculine ideal, R.W. Connell (1995) identifies the current formulation of masculinity as a thoroughly modern identity accompanying the rise of nations. She argues that defining the masculine was a necessary component of empire-building and colonization, which also linked current hegemonic ideals of masculinity with violence, rationality, heterosexuality and, above all, whiteness. This idea of manhood becomes a common ideal and collective practice, setting the boundaries for an exceptional “in-group” of men, marginalizing and feminizing those in the “out-group,” through processes of both coercion and consent.⁴⁰ As such, studies of masculinity can reveal moments where the formation of a gendered identity is consonant with dominant constructions. Even those masculinities not aligned with the hegemonic ideal can at times, work to uphold and perpetuate dominant notions of masculinity.

This has resulted in a portrait of racialized masculinity that is easy to pathologize.⁴¹ Yet, the concept of dominant/subordinate masculinity is not as simple given the complexities of social relations. Tony Coles’ “Negotiating the Field of Masculinity” (2009) suggests:

³⁹ See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.

⁴⁰ See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995).

⁴¹ For example, Nhan Truong’s analysis of Chinese American autobiographies is framed in psychoanalytic terms of melancholia and loss: “Constructing Masculinities and Experiencing Loss: What the Writings of Two Chinese Americans Tell,” *Men and Masculinities* 8.3 (2006): 321-330. Anthony Chen’s interviews with Chinese American men assumes multiple negotiations around one static concept of masculinity. “Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony,” *Gender & Society* 13.5 (1999): 584-607.

While hegemonic masculinity can be used to describe the dominant version of masculinity within the field of masculinity, there are subfields within...that have their own dynamics of dominant and subordinate masculinities. Therefore, one may be subordinated as a gay man within the field of masculinity yet be dominant within the field of gay masculinity.⁴²

By talking to Asian American men about their concepts of manhood, we can see the role the “dominant version of masculinity” plays in their understandings of gender, and how these ideals are challenged or affirmed when “Asian American” is added to the mix.

Most helpful here is Anthony Chen’s (1999) short series of interviews with Chinese American men, which shows how career, education, and relationship choices were influenced by men’s concepts of hegemonic masculinity and rewards of political, financial, and cultural capital. Some men compensated for being Asian American by meeting the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Others attempted to deflect attention away from stereotypical Asian American traits, while others denied the existence of Asian American stereotypes. Still others repudiated the system of domination that perpetuates hegemonic masculinity entirely. While Chen’s work makes headway in exploring a range of Asian American experiences, his main focus is to create a typology of ways in which hegemonic identities can be addressed. Beyond this, it has become increasingly clear that we must acknowledge the existence of multiple masculinities that fall within the hegemonic formulation.

Definitions and performances of Asian American masculinity are influenced by dominant gender schema. As Emily Chivers Yochim (2010) writes, it is not enough to

⁴² Tony Coles, “Negotiating the Field of Masculinity: The Production and Reproduction of Multiple Dominant Masculinities,” *Men and Masculinities* 12 (2009), 42.

consider a singular concept of masculinity as it intersects with a singular concept of race: rather, we must “trac[e] the ways in which particular expressions of masculinity (e.g., the Sensitive New Age Guy, the Urban Cowboy, the Male Cheerleader) traverse expressions, locations, and identities vis-à-vis power relations.”⁴³ In other words, as we investigate the many ways in which Asian American men understand themselves as “Asian American,” we must also look at the ways in which their understandings of themselves as men are complicated, made richer, or become more nuanced as they maneuver their social realities as Asian American men.^{44,45}

Research on alternate forms of masculinity, then, often note how subordinated masculinities are never fully resistant in their formulations: in just one example, racially subordinate men can claim masculinity through patriarchal behavior and attitudes.⁴⁶ In this way, literature on masculinity often results in cyclical arguments that at once point to the continued subordination of alternate masculinities as well as the subversive possibilities of the very same identities. This back-and-forth reveals how the simultaneous subversiveness of alternate masculinities, as well as the subordination to hegemonic masculine ideals, plays a role in men’s understandings of self. By embarking on studies that explore men’s self-awareness or reflexivity of their masculinity, we can

⁴³ Emily Chivers Yochim, *Skate Life: Reimagining White Masculinity* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 81.

⁴⁴ See Michael Kimmel and Michael A. Messner, *Men’s Lives*, 5th ed. (Boston, Allyn & Bacon, 2001), xvi: “Masculinity is constructed differently by class and culture, by race and ethnicity, and by age. And each of these axes of masculinity modifies the others, See also Waters, *Ethnic Options*; and Coles, “Negotiating the Field.”

⁴⁵ Truong asks how Chinese Americans “at once negotiate between their many identities and construct viable masculinities as they contend with discrimination and stereotypes that can undermine their sense of manhood,” 32.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 1979).

lend to the literature by seeing how these two practices, seemingly at odds with each other, come together or build on each other during identification processes.

Allowing Asian American men to speak for themselves helps us move beyond critiques of the hyper-masculine yet asexual, Asian kung fu male representation that has, for so many decades, shaped our understanding of Asian American men. Instead of offering my own views on how Asian American men may be configured within the race and gender narratives of the United States, I have sought out interviewees in an effort to report on their thoughts and opinions. Few scholars have focused their sights solely on Asian American manhood,⁴⁷ with a burgeoning body of research on Asian/American masculinity found in the relatively new field of cultural psychology, where minorities have been found to internalize contradictory narratives to inform their identification processes.⁴⁸

Regardless of whether or not Asian American male identities resist or internalize hegemonic masculinity, they are still constructed in *relation* to the dominant codes, norms, and practices associated with it. For example, Keith Osajima's (1993) study found that Asian students at predominantly white colleges internalized the negative images whites held of Asians in order to form their own identities.⁴⁹ Similarly, Peter Chua and Diane Fujino's (1999) study revealed that Asian men, regardless of immigrant status, evaluate their masculinity using dominant ideals as a standard: whites were considered

⁴⁷ See Chen, "Lives At the Center"; David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Daniel Y. Kim, *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Cliff Cheng, "Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity: An Introduction," *Journal of Men's Studies* 7.3 (1999), 295-315; see also Waters, *Ethnic Options*.

⁴⁹ Keith Osajima, "The Hidden Injuries of Race," in *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions: Asian Pacific American Perspectives*, eds. Linda A. Revilla and Shirley Hune. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1993), 81-91.

more attractive, outgoing, sociable, and powerful than Asians.⁵⁰ Studies such as these reflect Cliff Cheng's (1999) argument that Asian American men are more likely to have to negotiate multiple negative stereotypes within a dominant or hegemonic formulation of masculinity.⁵¹ As mentioned above, racial stereotypes often intersect with understandings of masculinity. Many of these stereotypes highlight the perception of Asian American men as physically smaller and as asexual or homosexual, as well as nerdy and introverted compared to white men.⁵²

Media and Cultural Studies

My investigation of Asian Americans' relationship with the media extends the research constructing audiences as active interpreters contending with dominant ideologies perpetuated by the media. The focus on interpretive processes as well as larger systems of representation positions my work within the field of cultural studies, which "locates sources of meaning in social relations, communication, cultural politics. The stress on culture implies the social construction of meanings, but it also implies the existence of forms of political or communal reason transcending individual subjectivity."⁵³ This approach considers the context—modes of production and consumption—within which texts are found, privileging the lived experience of meaning-making and a dialogic relationship between audiences and texts.

Studies on groups of audiences engaging with popular culture texts have expanded the field of cultural studies by elevating ostensibly mundane texts to levels of

⁵⁰ See Peter Chua and Diane C. Fujino, "Negotiating New Asian-American Masculinities: Attitudes and Gender Expectations," *Journal of Men's Studies* 7.3 (1999): 391-413.

⁵¹ Cheng, "Marginalized Masculinities."

⁵² Eng, *Racial Castration*; Chua and Fujino, "Negotiating New Asian-American Masculinities"; see E.J. Kim, James O'Neil, and S.V. Owen, "Asian-American Men's Acculturation and Gender-Role Conflict," *Psychological Reports* 79.1 (1996): 95-104.

⁵³ Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America* (London: Routledge, 1990), 16.

scholarly appreciation, revealing the importance of cultural representations in meaning-making processes.⁵⁴ The tension of how ideological opposition transfers to everyday life remains when audience studies shift to minority audiences and their experiences with mass media texts, which are commonly understood as a predominantly white, male, heterosexual institution. However, as Herman Gray writes in *Watching Race* (1995), “conceiving of television as a dense site or place of struggle over the symbolic meanings (and uses) of [race] in the production of the nation gives television a central role in cultural politics.”⁵⁵ As I extend my analysis of television texts to the multi-platform narrative environment of the mid-2000s, my study becomes one of the first to explicitly discuss the representations of race and gender in this experimental business model.

Focuses on minority audiences has, in fact, shown that mass texts are interpreted selectively based on individual priorities, whether founded in gender, race, or class: Lisa Duke’s “Black in a Blonde World” (2000), for example, shows how Black female teens read teen magazines to learn about social interactions and boys, while ignoring largely White-oriented material like cosmetic tips and body ideals. Similarly, Robin Means Coleman’s (1998) interviews revealed the tensions African American viewers felt toward the representations in Black sitcoms.⁵⁶ While some enjoyed sitcoms that portrayed Blacks in elevated class positions, others preferred programming that depicted the Black working-class community. In her participants’ responses, Coleman finds that interpretive

⁵⁴ Here, I turn to Benedict Anderson’s (1983) contention that mass media enables the development of common ties by creating what is, in effect, “imagined communities” or, to use Janice Radway’s (1984) term, interpretive networks. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. (London: Methuen, 1985), as seminal examples of early media work on interpretive communities and understanding the political and pleasurable work of reading texts.

⁵⁵ Gray, *Watching Race*, xiv.

⁵⁶ Robin R. Means Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1998).

pleasures are derived from viewers' own beliefs about Blackness and the Black experience in America.

Research on Asian audiences has yet to do the in-depth work that Coleman and others engage in, resulting in a limited understanding of how the media shape the ways in which Asians understand themselves as individuals within a larger social framework. What little work has been done with Asian American groups has shown that they, like other minorities, negotiate the rhetoric and images informed by dominant ideological approaches to race and gender. Asian American youth have been found to distance themselves from acculturative extremes, using predominantly white terms such as “FOB”—an acronym for immigrants “fresh off the boat”—and “whitewashed”—assimilated immigrants who act and speak “white.”⁵⁷ As is seen in Mary Yu Danico’s (2004) book *The 1.5 Generation*, such racialized hierarchies of Asian immigrants can have a pronounced influence on youth alliances and their relationship with their families. In terms of images, Ji Hoon Park, Nadine Gabbadon and Ariel Chernin’s (2006) focus groups with East Asian, Black, and White viewers of *Rush Hour 2* attempt to understand the different ways a seemingly progressive yet regressive film—black and Asian lead characters developing friendship, but perpetuating racial stereotypes and jokes—can be interpreted. The majority of their participants found the film’s humor to be inoffensive and entertaining, leading the authors to insist that the comedy genre serves the ideological function of naturalizing racial hierarchies through humor. Most importantly, Park et al. suggest that Asian Americans balance negative stereotypes with a desire to see “a positive image of an Asian man in a leading role that Asian viewers can be proud to cheer

⁵⁷ Karen Pyke and Tran Dang, “‘FOB’ and ‘Whitewashed’: Identity and Internalized Racism Among Second Generation Asian Americans,” *Qualitative Sociology* 26.2 (2003): 147-172.

for and support.”⁵⁸ Park et al.’s focus groups point to the contradicting ways in which Asian viewers engaged with Asian representations in the media, and suggest that dominant ideologies about manhood, whiteness and ethnic others may influence perceptions of the self and interactions with others.

Asian American Studies

While this dissertation aims to fill a gap in studies of minority audiences, it also aims to fill a gap in Asian American studies, where very few scholars have discussed the role the media plays in shaping, contributing to, or even forming facets of self. Much of the research on Asian American youth has discussed assimilative difficulties, intergenerational conflict, model minority stereotypes and other internalized stereotypes, and other facets of the Asian American experience. While some studies have looked at Asian Americans and their own venues of cultural production, media and Asian American studies have neglected to examine Asian Americans as part of an American mass audience contending with mainstream American mass media, which include representations of Asians and reflects attitudes of Asian Americans.

I contend that literature on Asian Americans has pathologized their experiences to some degree. Research has long painted Asian Americans struggling with model minority stereotypes and becoming bastions of hybridity and diaspora. While such research has been invaluable in our understandings of minority experiences, particularly from cultural psychology and policy perspectives, cultural studies has neglected to consider Asian American audiences as part of a larger, more mainstream, American audience. Even studies of immigrant children, the 1.5 or second generation, have tended to focus on

⁵⁸ Ji Hoon Park, Nadine G. Gabbadon and Ariel R. Chernin, “Naturalizing Racial Differences Through Comedy: Asian, Black, and White Views on Racial Stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2*,” *Journal of Communication* 56.1 (March 2006), 169.

intergenerational conflict, or maintaining or defining ethnic “authenticity” and the negotiation of a hybrid culture. Asian American studies have focused on the ways Asian Americans may subvert popular culture by creating their own content, or remaining “ethnic” in some way.⁵⁹

These types of works have long situated Asian Americans, particularly second-generation youth, as a population trying to contend with what Sunaina Maira (2002) calls a “reflexive hybridity” linked to a “deep desire...to find a clearly defined point of origin” as they live in the United States.⁶⁰ Other scholars have taken a psychological approach to Asian American identity formation, investigating the struggles—such as intergenerational conflict and low self-esteem⁶¹—that accompany immigration and assimilative processes. However, the focus on assimilation has continued to highlight the tenuous position Asian Americans occupy in terms of race. Investigations of other second-generation immigrants, such as those from the Caribbean or Europe, have questioned the circumstances behind whether or not these youth identify as either black or white Americans, respectively, and how they maintain their ethnic identity.⁶² As neither black nor white, Asian Americans do not have this choice.⁶³

The trajectory of Asian American representations in the media is positioned within America’s white-black racial discourse. Gary Okihiro’s (1994) *Margins and Mainstreams* questions the influence of America’s restrictive racial framework on

⁵⁹ See Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002); Davé, et al., *East Main Street*.

⁶⁰ Maira, *Desis in the House*, 87-88.

⁶¹ See Ruben G. Rumbaut, “The Crucible Within,” in *The New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

⁶² Mary Waters, “Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City,” in *The New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes; Waters, *Ethnic Options*.

⁶³ See James Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* 27.105 (1999); and Tuan, *Forever Foreigners*.

minority identity and inter-relationships. Contending that Asians have been marginalized in conversations of race, Okihiro points out that “yellow” occupies a tenuous position between black and white: Asians are “near whites” or “just like blacks,” depending on educational attainment and occupation.⁶⁴ This formulation of Asian American as a racial category, his work suggests, has fed into the construction of the model minority and yellow peril stereotypes, respectively. According to Okihiro, the two stereotypes work together to cast Asian Americans as walking paradoxes: assimilated (white) yet encroaching (black), masculine yet feminine. Building on this black/white dynamic, other studies have highlighted the continually tenuous position Asian American audiences and representations occupy in terms of race, gender, and class.

Close examinations of what constitutes the Asian American experience have revealed a complex project of identification. For example, in *Becoming Asian American*, Nazli Kibria (2002), which Mia Tuan builds on (2005),⁶⁵ finds her second-generation, Chinese and Korean American interviewees struggling with the dilemma of being “forever foreigners.”⁶⁶ While they at times defined themselves as “American” rather than “Chinese” or “Korean,” they were still aware of the qualities that set them apart (mostly physical/racial signifiers) from white America.⁶⁷ Kibria suggests that Asian American has itself become a category of identity in America’s racial lexicon, and her interviews investigate the nuances of how being Asian American is an ethnic or racial project. Work such as that of Kibria, Tuan, and Nadia Kim (2008) have been influential in

⁶⁴ Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1994), 33.

⁶⁵ Tuan, *Forever Foreigners*.

⁶⁶ See also Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*; Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ Nadia Kim’s interviews with second-generation Korean Americans reflect similar findings. See *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

reformulating the category of “Asian American” and studies of Asian American youth, but still largely ignore the role of the media in their respondents’ nuanced experiences.

Some have made an attempt to account for media representations, but only to a limited degree. Danico’s (2004) investigation of young Korean Americans during the 1990s in Hawaii reveals that youth learn stereotypical images of Korean Americans from interactions with peers, family, and newspapers. For example, internalized stereotypes of “fresh-off-the-boat” Koreans prompted youth to disassociate themselves with their Korean origins. Here, Danico suggests the importance of images and representations in influencing understandings of self, but neglects to explore how such representations and narratives may be articulated and circulated in the media. Not only can such racialized narratives and representations affect notions of self, but they can work to perpetuate an entire hierarchy of race. In analyzing American media and military propaganda narratives in South Korea, Nadia Kim notes that American mass media fare works to perpetuate the white/black racial framework that “highlights Korean and Asian Americans’ outside status relative to blacks.”⁶⁸ Not only do Koreans’ exposure to U.S. mass media texts position the white upper-middle class as an ideal, but negative racial stereotypes—such as the black criminal—are highly influential in forming Korean attitudes abroad.

In the larger scope of ethnic youth studies, not to mention Asian American studies, the role of American mass media in the formation of an Asian American identity has been largely overlooked. Studies have failed to examine Asian Americans as part of an American mass audience contending with mainstream American mass media, which include representations of Asians and reflects attitudes toward Asian Americans. The difficulties Asian Americans face in being considered a wholly independent media

⁶⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 11.

market have been reflected in the relative invisibility of Asian Americans in media texts. As such, how does a minority population that has been denied definition in turn define itself in the face of mainstream media texts? Even with the existence of “Asian American-specific” media fare,⁶⁹ American popular media texts are just as much a part of a larger cultural narrative that implicates Asian Americans.

Chapter Breakdown

The discussions and themes raised in my research begin to build a spectrum of invisibility, touched upon by Nadia Kim’s *Imperial Citizens*, that can be applied to the Asian American mediated and lived experience. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the definitions and narratives that interviewees deploy in their formulations of Asian America and masculinity, as well as how they negotiate a discourse of race and gender that is predominantly shaped by white America. The chapter’s main goal, in addition to providing the histories of interviewees, is to identify the larger cultural narratives and stereotypes of race and gender that influence self-definition and social performance of Asian American men. Experiences with schools, friends and family, as well as with martial arts and model minority stereotypes, reveal feelings of being visible as a racial minority, invisible as an ethnic minority, the sense of absent diversity felt in predominantly white neighborhoods.

What my interviewees reveal are their ideal definitions of “Asian American” as a racial and ethnic category, juxtaposed against the practical definitions employed in complex social situations in predominantly white social (in neighborhoods, with peers) and institutional (educational) settings. Whether coming from diverse neighborhoods on

⁶⁹ Again, despite some progress, Asian Americans have yet to be considered as a wholly independent media market by advertisers. This is also compounded by the failure of Asian-targeted media fare.

the East and West coast or, like the majority of interviewees, from small suburbs in the Midwest, men explained the ways in which they feel they are rendered simultaneously visible and invisible. They negotiate instances of racial subordination, countered by “model minority” expectations and the associated assumptions of class and education, and complicated by the experience of interchangeability brought on by the pan-ethnic category of “Asian American.”

From interview data, I contend that the experience of being Asian American is in large part defined by a narrative of “Asianness,” shaped by the politics of a white-black racial discourse that has marginalized or even prevented discussion of “Asian American.” My interviewees have grown up in a period in which their schools (both their regular weekday schools or their weekend ethnic schools), neighborhoods, and the media failed to produce any visible Asian American narrative. Instead, the narrative that men seem to have worked with, and continue to negotiate, as Asian Americans, is the narrative of what it means to be “Asian” or “non-American.” Regaling me with tales of “breaking stereotypes,” interviewees suggest that the day-to-day practice of being Asian American is one that incorporates assumptions of Asians as understood by white America. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that the men I interviewed are as much influenced by the presence and expectations of white definitions, as they are their own.

Building on the notion that Asian Americans lack a narrative about what it means to be Asian American, Chapter 2 looks at how the concept of Asia informs Asian America. Turning its lens of analysis to the news media, this chapter looks at how news discourses work to define the social categories identified in Chapter 1. In this chapter, I asked interviewees if they felt that news stories about Asia influenced how they were

perceived as Asians in America. The overwhelming consensus was that interviewees felt implicated in larger discourses of Asia or the Orient writ large. Analysis of news events recalled by interviewees, from product recalls and the threat of global pandemics, to the controversies surrounding China's preparations for the 2008 Olympics, reveals the early to mid-2000s as a time in which China became the center of mainstream news stories, providing Orientalist formulations of Asians as advanced yet backwards, but always threatening.⁷⁰ Identifying the main themes used by magazines and papers in coverage of these events suggests ways in which the narratives of China as contaminated, ruthless, and monstrous influence how Asian Americans feel they are perceived as Orientals, but also how "yellow peril" rhetoric—with roots in 19th century American anxieties over Chinese laborers—can work to accompany or eclipse the "model minority" stereotype. Looking at how Asian difference is constructed and how it was reinforced with narratives of contamination, aggression and exoticism that proliferated in 19th century America, we see how what it means to be "Asian," past and present, sets the context and vocabulary available to discuss Asian America.

The anxiety and fear fostered in these news texts reached such an apex in national discourse about patriotism and the white middle class that after the 2010 mid-term elections, *The New York Times* reported at least twenty-nine candidates' political campaigns used China as "a really easy scapegoat" and "a straw-man villain." Using China as "an obvious punching bag," both Republicans and Democrats criticized opponents' leniency toward China as the cause of America's suffering workforce.⁷¹ Supporting China was unpatriotic, and un-American.

⁷⁰ Victor Bascara, *Model Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁷¹ David W. Chen, "China Emerges as a Scapegoat in Campaign Ads," *New York Times*, October 9, 2010.

Perhaps the linkages between discourses of China and discourses of Asian America became most prominent when the conservative group Citizens Against Government Waste released their commercial, “Chinese Professor.” In this ad, a Chinese professor explained America’s economic downfall. “Of course, we owned most of their debt,” he said, standing at the front of a lecture hall flanked by pictures of Chairman Mao. As the Chinese flag appeared behind him, he shouted, “And now, they work for us!”⁷² As he chuckled, his entirely Chinese audience laughed along with him. “Chinese Professor” set the online Asian American community abuzz as viewers tried to make sense of the production and casting logics behind the ad.⁷³ Testimonials from extras—Asian Americans of all ethnicities—cast in the production, as well as debates about whether the ad was truly racist,⁷⁴ revealed the tensions of ethnic interchangeability and the politics linking Asian America to larger discourses of China at this particular cultural moment.

While anti-Chinese sentiment fomented in the news media, mainstream entertainment texts seemed to be embracing Asian actors. This juxtaposition shapes the complicated space in which Asian American men actively resist, negotiate, and accept racial stereotypes and problematic representations. Chapter 3 thus looks at the early to

⁷² See James Fallows, “The Phenomenal ‘Chinese Professor’ Ad,” *The Atlantic*, October 21 2010, accessed December 15 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/10/the-phenomenal-chinese-professor-ad/64982>.

⁷³ “Political Ad: Future China will Laugh at Your Downfall, America,” *Angry Asian Man*, October 25 2010, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/political-ad-future-china-will-laugh-at.html>; “An Extra in the ‘Chinese Professor’ Ad Speaks Out,” *Angry Asian Man*, October 27 2010, accessed December 15 2010, <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/extra-in-chinese-professor-ad-speaks.html>; “Another extra in the ‘Chinese Professor’ Ad Speaks Out,” *Angry Asian Man*, October 28 2010, accessed 15 December 2010, <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/another-extra-in-chinese-professor-ad.html>.

⁷⁴ “Propaganda and Racism: Thoughts on the Chinese Professor YouTube Video.” *8Asians*, October 24 2010, accessed December 15 2010, <http://www.8asians.com/2010/10/24/propaganda-and-racism-thoughts-on-the-chinese-professor-youtube-video>.

mid-2000s, the period in which Asian American lead actors began to earn top billing on television and film screens across America, as a moment in which an Asian American narrative begins to be visible. While still playing largely Asian characters, the rise of Asian American actors in the American popular celebrity scene offered a new narrative of what it meant to be Asian in America.

Chapter 3 investigates how the social categories defined in Chapters 1 and 2 are used as interviewees negotiate Asian American actors and characters on screen. The chapter shows how interviewees formulate a spectrum of what it means to be Asian American. Beginning with Jackie Chan, an Asian actor who lies at the forefront of Asian representations in American media, interviewees then discuss their interpretations of John Cho from *Harold and Kumar*, Masi Oka from NBC's *Heroes*, and Daniel Dae Kim from ABC's *Lost*.

With a particular focus on the multicultural ensemble casts and racial diversity on popular primetime television shows like ABC's *Lost* and NBC's *Heroes*, this chapter ultimately shows how interviewees negotiate multicultural politics. These programs reveal Asian Americans' struggle for both visibility and invisibility within the American popular imaginary. Respondents suggest that the ideal Asian American portrayal is one that is simultaneously visible and invisible: they call for Asian Americans to be visible in the industry, but for narratives that render difference invisible by presenting an Asian American man as "just another guy."

Lastly, my dissertation points to the early to mid-2000s as a moment of tension, paradox, and experimentation in American television. While Chapter 3 maps the industry's embrace of diversity on screen, Chapter 4 maps the industry's embrace of new

channels of distribution to expand the traditional television show model. The chapter links this industrial shift to the “post-network” era,⁷⁵ the rise and solidification of on-the-go audiences and portable media devices that changed the modes of production, distribution, financing, and consumption in traditional media business models. The 2007 Writers Guild of America strike brought these uncertainties to the forefront, and 2010 still saw the industry trying to adjust to a new era of audiences and programming.

Chapter 4 thus turns its lens of analysis to industry production practices, first describing the tumult felt by the television industry in the period leading up to the 2007 strike. I look at the emergence of the experimental practice of multi-platform, “transmedia” storytelling, which several broadcast television shows, including *Lost* and *Heroes*, embraced. The chapter provides case examples of these two television shows’ transmedia experiments, such as alternate reality games and novellas, and their treatment of race and gender across platforms. In doing so, this chapter offers a discussion of how such platforms for storytelling may offer new opportunities for articulating race and gender beyond television.

Interviewee Profiles

Andrew is a second-generation Korean American, born in the late 1980s and raised in a “very diverse” neighborhood in a large cosmopolitan city on the East Coast. He recalls being amongst many other Asian students in school, but in college feels very aware that he is often the only Asian student in a classroom. At home with his parents, who are both in business, he speaks English; he has never been to visit Korea, though he

⁷⁵ See Amanda D. Lotz, ed., *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

would like to. As a college student, Andrew hasn't had much time for television but likes watching sitcom re-runs and dramatic shows like *Lost* when he can.

Brad is a second-generation Chinese American, born in the late 1980s and raised in a Michigan suburb that he describes as “picturesque suburbia.... A conservative town, largely Caucasian.” He only speaks English. Brad does not watch much television on his free time, but tries to stay abreast of popular culture with the help of his brother Aaron (also interviewed), and Internet sites like YouTube, Hulu, and Asian American culture blogs.

Aaron is also a second-generation Chinese American, born in the 1990s. Along with his brother Brad, Aaron cannot recall knowing any other Asian Americans growing up in his Michigan town of “95-98% Caucasian Americans,” outside of the five or six other Asian American students in his high school class. Aaron has never been to Asia, only speaks English, and plans to take Mandarin classes to help him speak to relatives. Aaron watches a lot of television on both the television set and the Internet. Brad and Aaron's family ended up in the Midwest when their father decided to pursue a professional degree; their mother works an office job to supplement the family income.

Edison was born in China in the 1990s and, when he became school-aged, moved to various places in North America due to his parents' positions with a large information technology company. As a result, Edison has lived in Chinese, white, and black neighborhoods. His parents speak to him in Mandarin but he now responds in English. Edison says he barely watches TV, but watches the occasional show on both the television set and through Internet sites.

David is a second-generation Korean American who grew up in a “mostly Caucasian” neighborhood on the East Coast. He was born in the late 1980s to a “middle-class family,” and Korean is his first language. His father is an independent business owner and his mother works in finance. David mostly watches television for sports, and the occasional television show or educational show. For serial dramas like *Lost* and *House*, he usually rents or downloads DVDs for “marathon sessions.”

Jae-Sun is a second-generation Korean American who was born in a medium-sized Korean community near a large Midwestern school while his father finished his Ph.D. His mother emigrated to the U.S. to marry his father who, after finishing his degree, moved the family to a smaller, predominantly white town in Michigan. Jae-Sun’s homemaker mother eventually moved back to Korea, where Jae-Sun goes almost every summer, especially now that his father works there as well. He was born in the late 1980s and mostly watches television for sports and reality television.

Randy is a second-generation Japanese American who was born in the late 1980s and raised in a large cosmopolitan city in New England. Randy speaks both English and Japanese to both of his parents, who emigrated to the U.S. after World War II, pursued doctoral degrees, and are both professors. After attending Japanese summer school as a child, Randy became actively involved in Asian American issues in high school, and this has continued through college. Randy claims he has never watched a television show regularly, and that he “downloads everything” that he watches from the Internet.

Josh was born in Korea in the late 1980s, but came to the U.S. with his parents right after he was born. His father’s position with a large global communications corporation brought his family to a predominantly white neighborhood in New England.

Despite being one of only a few Asian students in his high school, Josh feels he fit in because he played a lot of sports. As a child, he went to Korean school on the weekends. Though English is his first language, he speaks a bit of Korean with his parents, who have since moved back to Korea. As a child, Josh didn't watch much television but now watches television fairly regularly.

Bobby is a second-generation Chinese American, born in the Mountain West in the early 1990s. He spent his early life in Asia, and then moved back to his birthplace when he was school-aged. He recalls being “the only Asian kid in school” in their small Mountain West town, where his parents joined extended family in running a small restaurant. In college, he has given up television; he and his roommates decided that having cable was too expensive. Instead, he watches television on the Internet through YouTube or Hulu.

Young Min was born in the U.S. in the late 1980s while his parents finished their advanced degrees, but then spent his childhood in Korea. When his parents' positions in a large international corporation brought them to the mid-Atlantic region an adolescent Young Min recalled socialization difficulties in a predominantly white school that had “two other Asian kids.” Despite this, Young Min decided to stay in the States to finish high school, living with extended family while his parents moved back to Korea. Young Min watches television through studio web sites and also uses streaming video sites for other cable shows.

Ekram, an immigrant from India, was born in the late 1960s and decided to become a graduate student after working in a technical field. His parents are retired

professionals still living in India. Ekram describes his life as influenced by literature and magazines, and does not watch television at all.

Hugh is a second-generation Chinese American who grew up in what he describes as an “upper middle-class, predominantly Jewish suburb” in Michigan. Born in the late 1980s, Hugh attended Chinese American school on the weekends and is currently learning to speak Chinese. His father is in business, and his mother is a homemaker. He is involved in a college ethnic organization, and primarily watches reality television shows with his girlfriend.

Partha, born in the mid-1980s, was born and raised in a predominantly white Midwestern town. His father went to a large Midwestern university, and is now retired after working for a large Michigan company; his mother still works her office job. A second-generation Indian American, Partha avoids the ethnic organizations in college because he feels he is completely “white-washed.” Partha mostly watches television when his roommates watch it, and supplements this viewing with the occasional episode from studio web sites.

Oliver is a second-generation Chinese American who grew up in Michigan. While he lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, he recalls having a large Asian American community due to a large international business in the area. His father, who worked his way through college in the Northeast, eventually came to Michigan to work for the automobile industry. Once Oliver began college, his father moved to China to work for an automobile manufacturer there. Oliver also attended a Chinese school on the weekends. He is actively involved in a college ethnic organization. Oliver claims to

watch “a lot of TV,” but only with his roommates. Independently, he will occasionally seek episodes on the Internet sites Hulu or Fancast. He has never downloaded a show.

Jonathan is a second-generation Vietnamese American whose parents came to Michigan during the Vietnam War. Born in the early 1990s, he grew up in a small, “predominantly white suburb” with a stay-at-home mother and a father who worked in the automobile industry. Jonathan describes himself as culturally “white-washed,” due to the fact that he was only one of two or three Asian Americans at school. He is active in a religious community along with his family, and in college he is a member of an ethnic student organization. Jonathan is an avid television viewer who has run home to catch new episodes of network shows; he supplements his viewing with the Internet sites Hulu and Surfthechannel.

Fred, born in the early 1990s, came to America from India when he was school-aged. His parents are both in the software industry, and work for a large corporation in Michigan, where he grew up. He recalls growing up in “90% white” town that has since become more diverse. He is an active participant in an ethnic student organization in college. Fred doesn’t watch that much TV due to his schedule, but watches DVDs of his favorite shows to catch up. He does not download anything.

Nick is a second-generation Chinese American born in the late 1980s. He grew up in a “predominantly white neighborhood” in a large cosmopolitan city in the Northeast, where he was one of few Asian students. He recalls hanging out with predominantly Asian students from a mixture of different neighborhoods while growing up. His father and mother both work for the family business, a company started by his father. Nick recalls going to Chinese school on the weekends, and continues to hone his language

skills by returning to China with his family each summer to visit relatives. Nick has not watched television in a long time, and does not own a television. He does not download anything, but occasionally watches episodes of shows his friends tell him about on Hulu.

Hiroki is a Japanese American who was born in Tokyo, but moved to the U.S. right away while his father pursued higher education. Hiroki calls a fairly diverse, large college town in Michigan his home, where his father commutes to his job in the automobile industry as the head of a large department. He also went to Japanese school on the weekends as a child. Hiroki does not watch any real-time television; he mostly watches television shows from DVDs he has bought, a practice he shares with his father.

Dean, a second-generation Filipino, was born in the 1970s and speaks only English. His parents are both college-educated (his father runs an independent business, and his mother is in healthcare) who lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, surrounded by black neighborhoods, in a large Michigan city. Dean is devoted to Asian American educational and policy issues, and is active in the community. Dean does not watch a lot of television, mostly because he is bothered by the lack of Asians on screen.

Avery is a second-generation Chinese American who grew up in a small New England suburb that was “96% white, the remaining minority Asian.” His parents both moved to the U.S. to pursue their doctorates, and are both in academia. Avery attended Chinese school on the weekends as a child. He understands his parents’ Chinese, but responds to them in English. Avery watches some television shows fairly regularly, but “only when [he] can catch it.” He does not seek out shows on the Internet.

Tom is a second-generation Korean born to academic parents. He spent his early childhood in the U.S. while his father finished his doctoral and post-doctoral work; the

family then moved to South Korea for his father's job, when Tom was an adolescent. After many cultural and linguistic difficulties, his family moved back to America so that Tom could finish high school in a large Northeastern city. Tom is part of an ethnic organization in college and believes it is important to spread his culture to others. He does not own a television and watches sports and other television shows on the Internet, mostly from Hulu.

Ben was born in the mid-1980s to Asian parents of different ethnicities. Ben's parents' military service brought him to different bases around the world. He recalls growing up as distinctly "American" on the bases: when he finally attended a public high school, he was shocked at how racial differences were so important to others. Ben grew up without cable television and now primarily uses the Internet to download episodes of popular television shows.

Alex is a second-generation Korean American. He was born in Michigan in the early 1990s as his parents finished their college education, then spent his childhood in South Korea. When his father received a job transfer, Alex followed him to the Midwest; his mother stayed in Korea for her on job. English is Alex's second language. He describes his Midwest neighborhood as "heavily Asian," and had a lot of Asian friends in school. He claims to be a fan of a number of television shows, and watches all of them on Hulu.

Francis, a Chinese student who came to America for college, was born in the late 1980s. English is his second language. Francis describes himself as a world traveler who has studied abroad and often visits his parents in Asia, as they continue their professional work there. Francis considers himself more Asian American than Asian, and does not

know if he will go back to Asia to work once he graduates. He was a fan of some popular TV shows, but no longer watches television due to his schedule.

Jimmy was born in the late 1980s, and is a second-generation Chinese American. Born and raised in a small town in Michigan, his parents are both professionals working for a small business. In his small town, he claims he was the only person of color and “had no choice but to be friends with white people.” In college, he was actively involved in ethnic organizations. He does not watch television unless it is on in public spaces like the gym.

Gary is a second-generation Chinese American, born in the late 1980s, who grew up in a metropolitan suburb in Michigan. He recalls his hometown as “mostly European,” and can only recall one other Asian American family in the town in which he grew up. Like other interviewees, Gary’s family moved from town to town for his father’s job after graduate school. Gary speaks Mandarin with his parents, and hopes to take classes to learn how to read and write; he sees this as useful “in terms of getting jobs.” He likes to watch many popular television shows, sometimes from his cable provider’s video-on-demand service, but mostly on the Internet from studio web sites, Hulu, and tvfreeonline. He does not download files.

Dan was born in Korea in the early 1990s and moved to America when he was in fourth grade. His father, facing financial difficulties in Korea, sent the rest of the family to the U.S. for better educational opportunities. When Dan’s East coast school refused to admit him due to his lack of English skills, his mother moved them to the Midwest. He recalls the difficulties of fitting in with middle-school and high-school students, and now wants “to have a lot of diversity” with his friends and not be “too Asian-oriented.” He

watches all of his media online, either from Internet sites with streaming video or by downloading.

CHAPTER 1

Visibly invisible: Exploring “Asian America”

“I guess the way I think of it is... Whenever I think of the stereotypically generic man, just a guy, I think of a white guy.” Brad, a quiet, bookish college senior, was explaining to me how he thinks of himself as a Chinese American man in the United States. By the end of an intense two hour conversation, Brad’s description of Asian men in the media increasingly reflected the frustration and disappointment he felt in his own life, particularly when it came to dating: “I don’t really see Asian American men portrayed as sexually attractive, anywhere.... Is there something wrong with me or the way that I was brought up that makes me unattractive?”

Brad’s need to negotiate his own sense of self and his everyday interactions with what he and others see on film and television screens reflects the intersections of media images and formulations of gender, race, and self-constructs. Time after time, the men I interviewed told me about how they often joke about being good at math and having “slanty” eyes, but also of fistfights spurred by racial jokes made in their predominantly white schools. They told me about how they admired Jackie Chan’s prominence as an early Asian actor on screens, only to tell me later that kung fu stereotypes and jokes were tiring and damaging to their self-esteem. Unapologetic and aware of the contradiction in these experiences, these men know that they inhabit a specific space at the interstices of

multiple discourses—of race, gender, class—but also negotiate how mediated personae implicate understandings and experiences with lived personae.

This chapter presents interview data from self-identified Asian American men, to add to our understanding of negotiations made in the formation of racial and gender identity, not the least of which involves experiences with popular media. In looking at their stories, I question how these men might identify with or against the concept of “Asian American,” masculinity, and negotiate the social scripts, role models, and ethnic constructions that surround them. While the following chapters focus on the meanings interviewees bring to and draw from the American popular mediascape,⁷⁶ this chapter illustrates how and what a group of locally situated Asian American men choose to remember and defend in regards to narratives of Asianness and masculinity. It addresses how dominant narratives of masculinity and Asianness combine with men’s self-constructs and interactions to form an increasingly complex network of articulations and formulations of racial and gendered identity.

Questions about Asians in the media prompted long lists of stereotypes that interviewees had encountered as children, including “borderline homosexual,” “good at math,” “funny accent,” and “martial arts,” and “model minority.”⁷⁷ These were often listed in a mocking tone, with men often telling me what Aaron did: that these stereotypes are, as Brad’s brother Aaron put it, “completely disingenuous” to the Asian American experience. However, the degree and frequency to which these stereotypes were listed suggests precisely the opposite. For some of these men, these particular signifiers that

⁷⁶ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Age of Globalization,” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

⁷⁷ Indeed, as Michael Hong writes in *Broadcasting & Cable*, these are the main roles that Asian Americans occupy within the industry. “Invisible Asian Americans,” 78.

have become so entrenched in the discourse about Asian male bodies, naturalized to create a common-sense story of what is “real” about Asian Americans. Additionally, scholarly critiques of the “model minority” stereotype suggest the ways in which it positions Asians as visible and invisible. As Shimakwa (2002) writes, the stereotype depicts Asians as able to “assimilate into the ‘mainstream’ (with an eye toward eventually disappearing in/as it),” while singling them out for aptitude.⁷⁸ The stereotypes listed by interviewees, while not reflecting any essential Asian American characteristics, constitute a very real, genuine discursive reality for Asian Americans as a racial minority in America.

Another discursive reality for Asian Americans is the invisibility of Asian American men in mainstream narratives. When thinking about masculine types, interviewees could not see Asian American men as football players, sports celebrities, news anchors, firefighters, or leading men in films. Interviewees felt they faced a massive invisibility in a culture that denies Asian Americans access to traditional notions of American masculinity. Juggling the burdens of both complete invisibility and of omnipresent, visible stereotypes, Asian American men find themselves uniquely situated in discourses of race and gender.

Exploring Asian/American

Brad: “There’s Something Going On.”

Brad, whose thoughts opened this chapter, met me on a snowy evening on his way to work. A senior in college, his plan was to take some time off before pursuing a professional degree in health care. Brad was excited to talk to me because, it turned out,

⁷⁸ Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); see also David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

he had a lot of pent up emotions. His enthusiasm to discuss casting practices and Asian American issues kept us talking for hours, and eventually Brad admitted the source of his interest:

I can't help shake off this feeling that a lot of the troubles that Asian American men have in relationships – they can't get relationships – is because they're Asian, because of media portrayals, or whatever. I can't help but feel that that has something to do with it. Maybe it's white guys being portrayed as attractive, or Asian American men being portrayed as unattractive, or not portrayed at all, but *something!* I don't know *quite* what it is, but...it seems like something's going on. It's difficult because it affects your confidence.... It gets a little bit frustrating because I can't tell what's my fault and what is out of my control. I can't tell what I'm doing wrong, and at what point it's not my fault. And really, it's media not portraying me in a good light and people not looking at me in a good light, stuff like that. It kind of seems minor but, at least to me, it's a big deal. Because this really affects my life, and I think it affects the lives of a lot of Asian American men.

Brad's complaint points to multiple themes that will be addressed throughout this dissertation: the stereotypes of emasculated Asian American men, the expectations of masculinity, how narratives in the media are intertwined with lived experiences, and the active negotiation of multiple sources of narratives. Brad also registers an important element that will be discussed throughout this chapter – that he is aware of himself as defined by, and in, the eyes of the media as well as the eyes of others. His obvious

frustration is seen here, in trying to understand the reasons, limits, and terms of his felt subordination.

Ultimately, interviews with self-identified Asian American men suggest that these men have grown up in an era of absence: they have developed self-concepts without any identifiable narrative presenting what it means to be Asian American, in day-to-day experience as well as in the media. Rather, distinctly visible narratives of what it means to be white, and what it means to be Asian, inform their lives. As Asian Americans, interviewees have contended with negotiations of visibility and invisibility. They are consistently made visible as racial minorities due to their physical appearance, but rendered invisible due to the pervasive definitions that homogenize the concept of “Asian,” as well as their difference from others as not-Asian, not-white.

In discussing Asian American masculinity as well as the broader question of “what is ‘Asian American,’” interviewees used many different standards. Yet, what persisted through these myriad definitions was the perceived invisibility of, specifically, Asian American men. Invisibility also carried into their childhood experiences in American institutions: namely, how schools overlook Asian American experiences by either marking students as “model minorities” or socially inassimilable. Asian Americans are most visible in the educational context as model minorities, but the assumptions of class accompanying this stereotype further justify the invisibility of Asian Americans in discourses of racial discrimination.⁷⁹ Interviewees revealed how they negotiate the boundaries of visibility based on cultural, racial, or ethnic differences, and when invisibility is welcomed. This simultaneous visibility and invisibility has resulted in

⁷⁹ See Kim, *Imperial Citizens*; Stacey J. Lee, *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

coping strategies that intersect with narratives of masculinity. This chapter explores some of the ways in which Asian American men's performances of self embrace dominant narratives of masculinity and whiteness in order to be visible.

Locating Asian American Men

A clear theme that emerged from interviews was that Asian men are missing from the media and subsequently other areas of national discourse: as Gerbner and Gross (1976) would put it, “symbolically annihilated.”⁸⁰ Just as the early films of the 19th century used white actors in yellowface to play Asians as generalized “Oriental” foreigners, the move to disallow Asian men portrayals is still prevalent. Shimakawa's critique of the theater circuit's scandalized casting of Jonathan Pryce as the Eurasian Engineer in *Miss Saigon* in 1990, for example, reveals the continued subordination Asian men on stage and screen. Given the very similar controversy of Asian “whitewashing”—a practice that casts whites to play previously Asian characters—surrounding 2008's *21* and *Speedracer*,⁸¹ it is evident that ambivalence toward Asian men continues to this day. This absence of representation suggests to Asian men that they are less desirable, and less worthy of representation, than other men and even Asian women. Chinese American Avery shared, “I feel like we're more used to [Asian] women than we are to Asian males.”

Interviewees could name Asian American actresses—Lucy Liu and Sandra Oh were popular—more readily than they could name Asian American actors, which for

⁸⁰ See George Gerbner and Larry Gross, “Living with Television: The Violence Profile.” *Journal of Communication* 26 (1976): 172-199.

⁸¹ “Whitewashing” practices are rife for other racial minorities, as well. Take, for example, the debates over the casting decisions made for 2010's *The Last Airbender*, which cast white leads to play the story's Asian and Native American roles, and *Prince of Persia*, which cast white actor Jake Gyllenhaal as the lead did not feature any Iranian or Middle Eastern actors. See Chris Lee, “Hollywood Whitewash? ‘Airbender’ and ‘Prince Of Persia’ Anger Fans with Ethnic Casting.” *LA Times*, May 22 2010, accessed March 2, 2011, <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2010/05/22/racebending>.

them reinforced the notion that America is “more used” to Asian American women. When asked why this might be, interviewees began to think about contemporary standards for media portrayals; namely, beauty and sexuality. Korean American Dan concluded that getting cast in the media is more difficult for Asian American men: “[It’s] worse for men. For women, [you see] the more attractive ones. But for men...they’ll just take whoever.” Korean American Josh added, “Television is so superficial, and that’s why it’s fairer [for women]... beauty is universal whether they’re Asian or not. Whereas, it’s different for guys.” Josh later explained that a universal standard of feminine beauty allows women of all races to be found attractive, while the standard of masculine attractiveness has long been denied to Asian American men.

Building on Josh’s assessment of media and social standards, Korean American Young Min began a complex project of bringing together negotiations of masculinity, narratives of manhood and desirability, and racial hierarchies:

In our society, men are portrayed as more dominant than women. [Except for Obama,] all the presidents have been white.... White men are mostly the ones who make money, mostly successful.... Just the fact that Asian American men don’t have the same type of power and authority than American men; American women, I guess, wouldn’t want that in a society. They wouldn’t want a husband who doesn’t have any power in the society.

Trying to parcel out how he feels as a man that a white woman would not want to date, Young Min points to existing social structures and hierarchies that shape stereotypes of Asian American men as less able to access the trappings of masculinity. In a follow-up, Brad agreed with Young Min’s assessment. Citing that it is common for audiences to see

many different women portrayed as sexually attractive, he moved on to discuss how sexual viability and masculinity has fewer entry points:

For males, it's usually a white male lead character, like your Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Matt Damon kind of people... That might have something to do with it, that the standard for male attractiveness is those kinds of people. And then maybe some cultural stereotypes that might help certain other races. Like, some people might say that African American men are more muscular or athletic, or Latino men are very romantic, or things like that.

When asked if there might be a similar “positive” type for Asian men, Brad could only say that Asian men are presented as “nothing really exciting.”

Many other interviewees agreed with Brad's opinion, suggesting that hegemonic formulations of masculinity have provided some entry points for other races, but not Asians. While interviewees acknowledged that the image of the athletic African American is linked to a different representational history of negative stereotyping (the “brutal buck”), they also felt that notions of dominant masculinity allow some of these stereotypes to become desirable figures in certain contexts. Chinese American Jimmy, on the other hand, shared that the stereotypes of Asian Americans have never allowed Asian American men entry into the arena of desirable masculinity:

If anything, I think society still for the most part portrays Asian American men as submissive, effeminate, and nerdy, which implicates notions of the model minority myth, and ultimately socialize Asian American men to be

toward the bottom of the list of socially desirables in a predominantly heteronormative context.

The narrative that Asian American men are presented as “nothing really exciting” and at the “bottom of the list” has been long projected via media representations of asexual Asian manhood, evident even in the hyper-masculine displays of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. This “racial castration”⁸² has fed into what interviewees feel is the long-standing belief that Asian American men are not desirable.

For interviewees, the undesirability of Asian manhood is strongly felt, and is juxtaposed by a competing narrative about Asian American women. As Japanese American Randy explained, “Asian American women are gonna catch a white guy’s eye.” Several interviewees discussed interracial dating as more common for Asian American women,⁸³ and at one point, Chinese American Gary lamented:

Take *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette*. You don’t see Asian men or women as the ones choosing. You know? I mean, I wouldn’t need to watch all of them to say that the participants generally haven’t been Asian. Have you seen them? Have you seen people being chosen and Asian?

Put succinctly, Korean American David claimed, “More white people have sex on TV than Asians.” When discussing the gender differences of being Asian American, interviewees’ overarching narrative was that Asian American women are more desirable than Asian American men. What is interesting to note here is that men were both critical and envious of the ways in which Asian American women are exoticized and objectified.

⁸² See Eng, *Racial Castration*.

⁸³ “The 2000 Census shows that Asian American women are more than twice as likely to be involved in an interracial marriage than their male counterparts.” David Pierson, “Sex and the Asian Man,” *LA Times* May 12 2004, accessed March 2, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/may/12/entertainment/et-pierson12>.

Chinese American Oliver's explanation: "People will talk about yellow fever [and] Asian women. But I don't hear that about Asian men. There's sort of a fetishizing of Asian women...I feel like sometimes people have prejudged me.. people might not think that I am a prospect." In this light, Asian American women are perceived to be made visible in culture due to their exotified subject positions, as well as able to garner sexual and economic power through their albeit problematic visibility.

In this complex cultural context, interviewees feel so invisible that even exotification is somehow desirable. Interviewees show an awareness of patriarchal and gendered power dynamics that render Asian American masculinity economically, sexually, and socially unviable and invisible. Their comments identifying a hegemonic masculinity privileging white men, and this has made being "at the bottom of the list of socially desirables" a common-sense factor in Asian American male identity.

Defining Asian American: What Asian American is Not

The sense of invisibility indicated by men's comments can be traced also to the more basic question of "What is Asian American?" Many found the category difficult to "officially" define, but easy to conceptualize. One method for some was to emphasize a shared geographical origin – any national originating from the Asian continent, once in America, is considered Asian American. From this perspective the shared experience of migration creates an expanded coalition of ethnic groups, from South and East Asians to those from the Middle East. Yet, this was a minority view; when presented to others as a suggested definition, it was regarded as an ideal at the level of theoretical abstraction.

The most common strategy was to define Asian Americans by shared physical characteristics. David, who struggled with a definition at first, eventually admitted,

“Honestly, someone who has black hair, yellow skin, and kind of black eyes.... I look at people...Asian, not Asian, it’s clear.” Similarly, Korean American Jae-Sun explained, “I think it’s Japanese, Korean, Chinese.... If you think about Asian American, that’s the Oriental Asian. Like a white person, I don’t think they’d think of Vietnamese or Thai.” All 27 interviewees said they had at some point been mistaken for an ethnicity other than their own. While men disliked how this “Oriental” formulation erased ethnic difference, they also found it helpful in defining “Asian American.” Indian American Ekram, whose definitions continued to change as he explained his experiences as an Asian in America, explained for me:

For demographic purposes, I identify as Asian American. But, I also do think that it doesn’t really make sense for South Asian Americans to be clumped together with, say, Chinese Americans.... Just because there’s a continent called Asia and geographically it’s a contiguous continent, it doesn’t necessarily mean that I have something in common with a group of people who originate from China. [Also,] South Asian Americans don’t look like Chinese Americans, or Japanese Americans.... For lack of a better word, “Oriental” Americans are another big cluster.

Even Ekram employs a dominant “Oriental,” phenotypic definition of Asian American, for the practicalities of his lived experience. The position of Indian Americans in the larger framework of Asian America offers a site where the nuances of race and class are augmented.⁸⁴ Ekram knows he is perceived in some situations as a “model minority”

Asian American, but also anticipated, and accepts, his standing as a person of color due

⁸⁴ Of particular help in articulating the interplay of race and class in the formation of Indian identity in America is Vijay Prashad’s chapter, “Of a *Girmit* Consciousness,” in *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 85-107.

to the larger, black/white racial framework that shapes race relations in the United States. At the end of the interview, stressed that “because of [my] dark skin,” he identifies more as a “person of color.”

In contrast, Partha, an Indian American born and raised in Michigan, found the concept of being a person of color quite jarring. For him, his phenotypic, racial identity competes with his cultural and social identity. Socialized in “a 99.9% white hometown,” Partha says, he “didn’t realize” he wasn’t white until he was about thirteen years old:

I felt like I was living a lie, and that I was different. . . . For the longest time I felt like I didn’t really belong, after I realized that I was not white, you know? I felt like I didn’t really belong in either culture. One, because I wasn’t a typical white dude and then another because I wasn’t a typical Indian dude either. So I was, like, lost in purgatory and I felt alone a lot of times.

Partha’s sudden realization of where he fit—or didn’t—within a racial framework was shocking and troubling to him. Having a racial body in a racialized space helped him understand the boundary between who he thought he was, and how he was perceived. For example, he describes himself as “whitewashed” but also recalls that during the 1990s, “people didn’t even know what I was [racially].” Often labeled as Middle Eastern, Partha’s confusion about his culture was compounded by the fact, as he puts it, “the general public sees ‘Asian Americans’ as. . . . I wouldn’t say they see Indians.”

The exclusion—and invisibility, as suggested by Partha’s use of the word “see”—of South Asians from the Asian American category was reflected by many of the respondents, even those who were South Asian themselves. While scholars such as Nadia

Kim find that, for example, South Koreans are rendered invisible in racial discourse due to their “in-between” positioning over blacks and below whites, we can see how this also applies to Asians within the Asian American spectrum. With the exception of one or two interviewees, the men I talked to shared that they were typically one of two or three Asian families in their predominantly white neighborhoods. In this sense, interviewees are aware that they are, indeed, a population viewed “in between” – they are viewed as between black and white, as between Asia and America, and they are stuck in between the interpretations of both Asians and Americans due to their status as Asian Americans.

Overall, racial distinctions seemed to be trumped by generational divides and, linked to this, class and assimilative status, in definitions of Asian American. Josh finds it helpful to focus on the American half of “Asian American,” using cultural characteristics to define who should be included or excluded from the category:

I think there are really two categories: People that are really Americanized, and then people that have a really strong connection back to [Asia]. And they’re kind of two different species, almost.

These definitions suggest that what is considered Asian American is, in these cases, more defined by the degree of American-ness, rather than Asian-ness. Ekram tells that younger, second generation Indian Americans he’s talked to feel they identify as more “white.” This is also reflected in Sunaina Maira’s work with desi youth, whose self-identification is driven by acculturative status. As one of her second-generation interviewees declared, “don’t ever call me [Indian] because I’m not Indian.”⁸⁵

Using cultural and class distinctions allowed men to set themselves apart from unassimilated “fresh-off-the-boat” Asians, or “FOBs.” This distinction secures their place

⁸⁵ Maira, *Desis in the House*, 3.

as Americans first and foremost. This was especially highlighted due to the fact that my conversations were with upwardly mobile men whose families had the resources to settle in the U.S. or send them to be educated in the U.S. Possibly due to this, several men declared that they did not consider themselves wholly “Asian.” Josh confessed, “I think I’m sort of different in that I fit in pretty well.... I don’t give off the vibe of being really *Asian*, you know?” Often, when asked to define or provide specific examples of “Asian American,” men like Chinese American Hugh used “FOB” as a juxtaposition:

I guess I sort of see it two ways. I’d say primarily I think of Asian American as someone who’s not—this will probably sound bad, but—not “FOBby.” I think it’s based on how they’re dressed, or how they talk, what they’re interested in. But I think there’s a clear distinction between those who seem to accept or embrace American culture and those who haven’t.

When pushed to define a “FOB,” it became clear that the distinction is largely based on fashion, English language and social skills: in other words, cultural/class differences. Men told me that it was possible to “just know” a “FOB” on the street based on dress, composure, and even the peers who accompanied them.

Often, the competing notions of *feeling* American and *looking* Asian complicated the social experiences of interviewees. While explaining his situational awareness and the influence of others in his interpretation of self, Vietnamese American Jonathan expressed an opinion that countered the traditional belief that diversity in college is welcome:

Because there are so many Asians here, I kind of feel like I’m judged before people even know me. I feel like when people look at me, they just

think, I kind of don't speak English well. I don't know if they actually—
like, I kind of feel whitewashed because of [the small Michigan town] I
came from.

Jonathan was aware of a racial and cultural stereotype against what he called “true Asians,” or those not assimilated to the extent he is. While he is thankful for the diverse community at college, Jonathan is a member of a student body comprised of many Asian immigrants. In college, he finds himself being compared to “true Asians” due to his racial markers, something he did not experience growing up in a predominantly white community. Many others I talked with shared similar social experiences and interactions.

The degree to which one is Asian or American is in some ways a mindset, dependent on the situation and the “audience” for their performed identity. From this social interactionist perspective, performing “Asian American” is dependent not only on mainstream/white interpretations, but also by other Asian or Asian Americans’ expectations. Chinese American Aaron shared a moment of discrimination not from a white student, but a mainland Chinese student at college:

She asked me, “Do you speak Chinese?” And I said, basically, “A little bit. I was born here.” And her reply, she basically said OK, but walking off, I could hear her mutter under her breath, “ABC.” Looking back on it now, it doesn't seem all that big, but at the time stuck with me a lot more than I thought it would. Just because, the idea that being Chinese has some sort of spectrum kind of blew my mind. But, at the same time, it was basically true. I was—I am—an A-B-C.

For Aaron, being an American-Born Chinese (ABC) places him as not-quite American and not-quite Asian. This experience is common for many of the interviewees: Aaron is aware of himself as an English-speaking Asian with the capacity to be both culturally American and Asian, but knows that there is a classed distinction between him and a class of Asians that may not have as much cultural capital as he does. These men highlight the ways in which multiple “audiences” read their racial identities. Just as Jonathan believes he is perceived as Asian by whites on campus, Aaron shares an experience of having his identity assumed by a “true Asian.”

The task of defining Asian American thus became much easier for men when they were asked to explain how others defined Asian Americans. The easily identifiable consensus was that, in the U.S. (white) imaginary, Asian American was generally defined by “Oriental” phenotype and model minority stereotype, both formulations that erase ethnic difference. The experience of ethnic interchangeability, while highlighting a shared community, also raised an awareness—for some, a heightened sense—of difference. In this case, discussions of what constituted “Asian American” became more abstract than the focus on phenotype or geographical origin. For some, recollections became much more emotional; for all, the conversation turned to their experience of “Asian American” as an experience that has been, continues to be, and will continue to be, shaped by interpretations by and interactions with whites. For Jae-Sun, his experience of being Asian American makes him a member of a specifically marked group, compared to other racial minorities: “It’s just weird. If there’s an African American guy, you don’t go up and ask, ‘Are you Ethiopian?’”

Jae-Sun feels that interchangeability is in some ways a unique experience of being Asian American, and it was clear that this feeling is accompanied by a sense of bitterness toward the ignorance he has encountered. Young Min built on this: “Whites don’t know a lot about Koreans. To them Asia is just one big country; we’re all the same, we all look alike. They just come up and say, ‘Are you Chinese? Japanese?’ Then walk away.”

Randy took an even harsher stance: “We’re just Asian people walking around, just some minority they don’t give a fuck about.” Later, he elaborated:

White people—people in general—don’t delineate between Japanese and all those different things.... It’s how everyone views you. You’re just an Asian guy. They don’t think, ‘Is that a Chinese guy? Is that a Korean guy? What’s the difference?’

The feeling that his racial difference makes him visible to “everyone,” but still invisible as part of an amorphous minority category, compounds Randy’s frustration over being “just an Asian guy.” He is at once distinguished for his difference, but also indistinguishable from others who share his difference.

Randy and others, when pressed about their feelings toward interchangeability, had no expectations of change in how they were understood or defined.⁸⁶ In terms of movement in and out of different situations and racial frameworks, many believed that they have been, and always will be, first and foremost Asian due to their racial features.

Avery said:

The biggest part of [a] racial category is your background and your heritage. So, that’s something you can’t change. I guess you can change

your cultural identity – sort of the cultural acclimation thing – but that takes a long time.

By “heritage,” you mean –

--Skin color.

Filipino American Dean added:

Race is always going to matter because there’s so many different things that divide us. It’s so easy to use physical appearances...to delineate us from each other. Whether it’s a disability, whether it’s our skin color, whether it’s how we talk. There’s all these different things..... You know, maybe in the future where we intermarry and maybe have babies with each other....maybe there will only be one single race. Maybe 100,000 years from now. But I don’t see it happening any time soon.

A large factor implicated in their racial identity is the fact that it is shaped in part by the larger racial framework in which they operate, and how others define them. Oliver explained:

I feel like such a large part of it [being Asian American] is how others define me, that it’s really not easy for me to move around freely. And also, it’s become part of my personal identity. I’ve internalized...the idea that I’m not white, that I’m Asian. That I’m not Black or Latino. It’s just like: I am Asian and whatever comes with that; you know, how others see me, and the issues that I will face in life.

What are some of the issues that come along with that?

A lot if it is how others might perceive me. Like, if they'll think that I speak English or something. And workplace discrimination, stereotypes and everything like that.

For Hugh, a college senior searching for a job, class is inextricably linked to understandings of Asian American identity, particularly due to the model minority stereotype. This stereotype has penetrated his field of work so completely that he finds he faces even more pressure to conform to, and exceed, a level of excellence attributed to Asian Americans:

I think for those Asians who obviously are in the upper category—Chinese, East Asians, specifically—that just puts more pressure on them and puts a ceiling on them in terms of what they can accomplish. And then if you look at the poorer Asian groups of people, they still get those stereotypes put on them, but obviously they're not as close to an advantage as possible....I think being an Asian a lot of times does definitely detriment you and whatever you're trying to look for... It doesn't help you, being Asian. A lot of times it can hurt you.

As a part of this “upper category” of educated Asians, Hugh finds that the model minority stereotype is so diffuse that it puts undue pressure on him, to the point where he feels like being Asian “doesn't help.” This echoes the assertion that racial subordinates may be so constrained by racial categories and stereotypes that they are “forced to define themselves in relation to racial schemas and meanings.”⁸⁷ Hugh also acknowledges that his definition of “Asian American” is classed, separating himself from the “poorer Asian groups.” As

⁸⁷ Pyke and Dang, “‘FOB’ and ‘Whitewashed,’” 151.

these interviews suggest, the complexity of Asian American identity involve the paradox of being an assimilable model minority and an unassimilable racial minority.⁸⁸

Oliver acknowledges that that a large part of how he moves throughout the world is how others define him, but also believes that an Asian American is “anyone who would self-identify.” This disparity in definitions—feeling agency in some situations and constraint in others—suggests that definitions and performances of Asian American shift depending on racial contexts. A college senior who leads a pan-Asian student organization, Oliver has “resigned” himself to the fact that he is Asian and understands how Asian bodies are at times influenced by larger structural forces out of his control.

David: “I Guess it’s Kind of an Underdog Story.”

When I met David, he was a senior in college and had arrived at the coffee shop early so he could do some studying before our interview. David is a gregarious but studious man who, slipping multiple jokes into our conversation, got very serious and visibly proud as he talked about his acceptance into a doctoral program. David had a reason to be proud of his educational accomplishments, as he recalls many years of struggle in school. Telling me stories of suspensions and failing grades, he is proud that he has succeeded as “an underdog.” David’s experience in his schools was that being a racial minority meant getting picked on to the point of physical fights. One episode was so violent, it ended in a multi-week suspension. At the same time, David’s immigrant status rendered him invisible when it came to his school’s attention and institutional support.

Asked to describe his childhood, David defined his hometown as “mostly Caucasian. Everyone has a profession.” This predominantly upper-middle class white

⁸⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 139.

setting was the source of much discomfort, particularly when David started school: a native Korean speaker, he struggled with English, was teased by other students, and brushed off by teachers. He recalled:

I was labeled a lot as a slow learner, and I was placed into a lot of these classes where they categorized me as [slow] and whatnot. And I remember going through all of these diagnostic exams, evaluations, to see if I was fit for the 3rd grade, 4th grade, 5th grade. And I think it had some sort of trauma on me too, you know, like lower self-esteem. So elementary school was a time when I felt really out of place. And Junior High School was exactly the same, except maybe possibly even worse.... I remember I used to be teased a lot, and I got into a lot of fights.

David's academics continued to falter as fights in school got worse; multiple times, he recalls, the school threatened to hold him back a grade. Eventually, David was placed in a high school for low achievers. He thinks he was "the first Korean student" that school had seen.

In his new school, the student demographic shifted from mostly white students to mostly black students, and David found himself amidst "Latin Kings, Bloods, Crips, real gang members." Here, he had a genuine fear for his personal safety and, on his father's advice, ignored taunts and avoided fighting by turning to his schoolwork. This introversion was difficult for David, who labels his high school years as a period of depression. Unable to fight back when teased, David said, "I felt very insecure with my identity... I just felt vulnerable." Because of racial, class, language, and social differences, David felt out of place and unhappy, until he got to college. David described

his college experience: “College has been one of the best times... I think I really met genuine friends for the first time...I have a pretty Asian crowd [and] I feel like I’ve been more accepted for who I am.”

David’s history reveals a level of institutional bias that often affects minority students. Linguistic difficulties made him a “slow” learner because his school lacked an adequate program for English as a Second Language (ESL) students. This “remedial” designation made socialization difficult for David in school. Notably, his story lends support to research on the psychological effects of stereotypes—even the supposed, positive model minority stereotype⁸⁹—on Asian American and other minority students. For David, knowledge of the model minority stereotype made his academic struggles seem like even larger failures, and depressed him even more. David linked the feeling of always being watched, and the pressure of needing to perform well, to a media representation he remembered from childhood:

We’re treated in some sense like a Pokémon. (Laughs) The concept is that we’re put in this arena, and we’re expected to, like these little Japanese animated creatures, expected to duke it out using these mystical abilities.

This “Pokémon” experience was most noticeable to David in elementary and middle school, where he felt he was expected to perform as a “model minority.” In a low-achieving high school with a different racial breakdown, this was much less the case.

While David laughed at his Pokémon comparison, but other interviewees see truth in what he says. Young Min told me that “as soon as he walks into a classroom,”

⁸⁹ For a discussion of how the model minority stereotype is linked to issues of class and ethnicity, see Grace Kao, “Asian Americans as Model Minorities? A Look at Their Academic Performance,” *Journal of Education* 103.2 (1995): 121-159. See also Siyon Rhee, Janet Chang and Jessica Rhee, “Acculturation, Communication Patterns and Self-Esteem among Asian and Caucasian American Adolescents,” *Adolescence* 38 (2003): 749-768; and Lee, *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype*.

someone will ask him for help on a math problem. The irony, he pointed out, is that he's not even good at math. In this light, Asian Americans' engagement in making their own racial jokes about model minorities and Asians reflects what is referred to as gallows humor. Adopting the rhetoric invoking these stereotypes can bolster resistance among those who are subordinated by that very same rhetoric.⁹⁰ Across the board, interviewees told me how they were constantly aware of the model minority stereotype in school settings. This was usually accompanied by ambivalent shrugs and declarations of, "you just have to put up with it." The sense of emotional exhaustion and impatience accompanying these stories, however, also reflects how men feel this power dynamic that has yet to change. Humor thus becomes one of the ways men can cope with their visible difference.

Another coping behavior, David acknowledged, was his turn to physical violence to make up for his marginal status. Indeed, other men who confronted racism in schools had stories of suspensions and academic probations as a result of fistfights and, in one case, a gang fight. These stories suggest that minority men may subscribe to dominant notions of strength and physicality in order to gain power as subordinated individuals. It is here that the intersection of masculinity and race/ethnicity begins to become particularly salient. Andrew, a Korean American who grew up in a diverse neighborhood, told me that he now feels a different dynamic at play in his mostly white university classes:

I think for a lot of people in this school especially, they're not used to being with anyone other than white people, you know? So, I think that

⁹⁰ See Antonin J. Obrdlik, "'Gallows Humor': A Sociological Phenomenon." *The American Journal of Sociology* 47.5 (1942): 709-716.

might play a role in how they see me and then how I think how they see me.... Even now I think the only solution is to man up.

When asked to explain what “man up” meant, Andrew explained that Asian students are often overlooked in his college classes—they are expected to be nerdy, quiet students who keep to themselves. Many, unprompted, told me that they felt they needed to work hard at breaking the stereotypes of being socially awkward, diminutive, or excessively proficient in science or math classes. Andrew often makes himself visible by speaking English loudly and clearly, carrying himself with more confidence, and making a marked effort to work with other students in class. Andrew has noticed the reaction when he becomes visible in this way: often, he says, the reaction is, “Oh! There’s an Asian guy!”

That this marking of physical space and performance of confidence is linked to the idea of “manning up” brings us to how concepts of masculinity are implicated in being Asian American. When asked to define “masculinity,” several men offered descriptions that supported definitions of hegemonic masculinity and its notions of strength in physical, social and economic dominance.⁹¹ Aaron pointed to the white figure of the Marlboro Man, an “independent guy, he’s rugged, he can cook, he can hunt, he can survive by himself in the wild... he’s a self-assured person who knows what they want and knows how to get it.” Building on this ideal, Randy added,

It’s telling someone that you’re the best, that you can do something the best, and then doing it. [In the past,] I feel like I told myself to man up every day.... Just not cry. Not be a baby. Not whine. ... I say what I want to say, as long as I get the point across, I don’t care about the tone, I don’t care about how I seem to be, my attitude, I don’t give a shit.

⁹¹ See Connell, *Masculinities*.

Andrew suggested:

He better be able to protect himself, or protect his loved ones. I don't like pansy guys, you know? I never let any of my friends be pansy guys.

The descriptions of masculinity that emerged from these interviews help to explain some of the behaviors during interviewees' adolescence as they moved through predominantly white schools. The fights mentioned earlier were usually verbal and physical responses to racial jokes or comments, mostly about physical attributes such as eye shape, or ethnic slurs like "Chink" and "Jap." David, for example, began to affiliate himself with Asian gang members who were physically larger than he at the time, in order to "build his clout" as someone not to be teased. Jae-Sun recalled beating up a boy at school after being called a Chink. While he was proud of himself for standing up for his beliefs and for winning the fight, he remembers that the story around the school the next day was that he had actually lost the fight. That it was improbable for Jae-Sun to have been physically dominant made him realize that, in the dominant narrative of race and masculinity, "Asian Americans are actually inferior." In another example, Jonathan recalled confronting a girl in front of his entire school music ensemble when she declared, "all Asians looked the same."

In this sense, we can see how dominant ideals of masculinity have been embodied by a group of Asian American men who find themselves subordinated by racial and gender dynamics within their social settings. Similarly, these dominant ideals are embraced in situations when first impressions, or interpretations, abound – such as on the dating scene. Hugh shared:

I get really bothered by those guys who just look like the stereotype, the guys who wear glasses, their hair is everywhere. I try to keep myself well-groomed when I go out, I do my hair. So it annoys me when I see guys who look like that [stereotype].

Hugh's disdain for Asians who "look like the stereotype" again suggests an intimate knowledge of dominant narratives regarding Asian Americans and masculinity. He moves to actively dis-identify himself from being seen as an unstylish, perhaps socially clueless "FOB" as well as a nerdy model minority. While he knows that Asian American men are not seen as powerful—or even seen at all, for that matter—as white or black men as sexually attractive, maintaining his appearance helps his "performance" of Asian American masculinity, placing him as more dominant than other Asian or Asian American men.⁹²

For many of these men, athletics seemed to be a way in which dominant masculine ideals could be embraced, but also subverted. For Korean American Alex, his athletic abilities as a weight lifter allow him to assert dominance over other, less physically built Asians but also subvert the expectations of the other, mostly white weight lifters he meets. Tom, also Korean American, said that "most people expect me to play tennis," and openly delighted in sharing that instead, he was on the rugby and wrestling teams in high school. Despite these successes, these men find that their participation in sports creates cognitive dissonance in other players. Aware of the stereotype that Asians

⁹² Disdain toward those who comply with the image of the model minority or FOB allows interviewees to counter the Orientalist stereotype they feel is willed upon Asians. That this necessarily involves a performance that distances themselves from other Asians reveals how a "common-sense" narrative about race can limit the successful mobilization of a racialized group. Race and ethnicity scholars have pointed to how the model minority stereotype worked to de-politicize the Asian American community by lifting it "above" other minorities during the civil rights era. What the interviews in this chapter suggest is that the model minority stereotype also works to divide racial subjects by notions of class, education, and gendered performance (see Prashad, *Karma of Brown Folk*, and Bascara, *Model Minority Imperialism*).

cannot play sports, Asian athletes find themselves marked merely because of their racial identity. Yet, some take pleasure in defying expectations with their athletic skills.

While these athletes take pleasure in subverting expectations as visible Asians on the court or field, there is also a desire to have their difference be invisible – to reach a point where Asian American participation does not subvert expectations at all. Hugh, who played basketball in high school, recalled how he “would just be stereotyped and called Yao Ming, or something stupid like that.” In retrospect, Hugh believed this had a negative effect on him. “It was sort of demeaning to me,” he said, “because I felt people weren’t judging me based on how I was playing. Because even if I played well, it was always like, ‘you’re playing like [Yao Ming].’” In these situations, Hugh finds that the visibility of an Asian NBA player like Yao Ming is actually detrimental to his identity as an athlete; the celebrity does not promote Asian visibility at all, but rather serves as an exception.⁹³

For Jae-Sun, consistently told by his white teammates that Asians could not perform well in sports, a potential breakthrough was the success of Asian American men in recent sporting events—South Koreans in the World Cup, and an Asian American winner of 2006’s *Survivor: Cook Islands*. When he pointed this out to his white teammates, however, they labeled the examples as exceptions and did not change their attitudes. These stories suggest the power of stereotypes in limiting how Asian American men are seen in social situations. In Walter Lippmann’s terms, they are defined first, and then seen.⁹⁴

⁹³ As Nadia Kim writes, “Yao Ming [does not] seem to be enough for U.S. Society to think of [Asian Americans] when they conjure up “basketball player.” *Imperial Citizens*, 208.

⁹⁴ See Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).

Another theme that emerges from David's story, reflected in other interviews, is his turn to surrounding himself with mostly Asian friends in college. This is, for David, a result of not having an Asian support group growing up. Men are aware of how they are consumed by another audience that has the power to define them, whether it is schoolmates, other Asians, or even institutions. They find themselves moving in and out of invisibility. This reflects the racial position of Asian America "in between" black and white, discussed at length in Asian American literature.⁹⁵ To be visible as an Asian, American, or Asian American is a complex struggle.

Randy: "I'm Just Asian American."

Randy, a member of an Asian American fraternity, was one of the most outspoken and passionate—"bitter," he called it—men that I met. An example of this came out early in the interview when he shared that he was in the Midwest only because his first choice college rejected him. Born in a large cosmopolitan city and raised by Japanese professionals, Randy was sent to a high-profile magnet school where he made friends with many Asian American teenagers involved in helping organize youth conferences on Asian American issues.

Randy remembered attending Japanese camp during many of his childhood summers. He described the camp for me:

Straight everything's in Japanese. It was a little intense for me, but I had a lot of fun there. That was actually where I started to develop my own voice, because the other times of the year I was in this private school, and I was really unhappy and I hated everyone – I just wasn't very content. I

⁹⁵ For a detailed examination of how the rigidity of black/white racial discourse frames Asian America, see Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*. Also helpful is Tuan's *Forever Foreigners*.

couldn't socialize with all the white people.... I just didn't make any meaningful friends. And at Japanese camp was really where I noticed that, you know, I'm different from all these other Japanese kids that are very reserved. Because most of them are recently immigrated, and they're struggling with everything at school, and if anything this Japanese camp was their salvation, their summer vacation where they can finally be at home somewhere.

While Randy saw that summer camps were a haven for Japanese immigrants, he realized that he did not have the same experience of "salvation" that these campers felt. As a Japanese student who had not recently immigrated, Randy did not feel that he was not a part of the "Asian" community at summer camp. What summer camp eventually made stand out the most to Randy was that he did not feel "at home" amongst other Japanese children. Because of this, Randy told me, he identifies as more Asian American than Japanese American.

Many others who went to ethnic camps and schools experienced this sense of not fitting in with other ethnic students. "It didn't help me at all," Chinese American Nick told me of his Saturday Chinese school. This was mostly because none of his other, white friends in school could understand why he had to go to an extra school on the weekends. Avery's Chinese school only highlighted how invisible he was as a Chinese American in his predominantly white neighborhood. In order to better serve the very small, sparsely located Chinese community, his weekend school received children from many towns. "I never built a strong connection [with any other students]," he told me, "because they weren't from my hometown." Unable to form any lasting relationships, Avery's

immersion into Chinese classes each Saturday only made him feel even more out of place as he returned to “normal” school during the week.

Randy described his sense of self as being “in-between” being Japanese and being Americanized. By the end of our interview, he told me that he identifies more as an Asian American rather than a Japanese American, particularly because his experiences of being an outsider at Japanese camp made him feel like he could not identify with Japanese culture. However, as Randy defines “American” in this context as being racially white, he self-identifies as Asian American in order to allow for his racial difference. Since “white people don’t delineate between [ethnicities],” Randy knows that he is viewed, and therefore identifies more as, “Asian American.”

While racial difference may determine which societal norms and codes must be navigated, interviewees also found that classed distinctions—such as upward mobility, educational aspirations, and English acquisition linked to the model minority stereotype—define Asian Americans for Americans and Asians alike. Partha explained:

It’s someone who lives two lives. One life is out in society, in the American society, and the other life is at home. You know, with parents that are from a different country, with different values. And I think these people, they function very well in American society, because they’re usually very educationally-motivated and they focus on school, and they’re not criminals or anything like that. You know? And to be educationally successful also requires social interactions, leadership, those types of things. Things that are more valued. You know, like the model minority kind of thing.

For Partha, the model minority stereotype shapes the category of Asian American in a particular way that combines race, culture, and class. Gary defined something similar:

Asian American is anyone whom...their parents emigrated from an Asian country, who has some kind of an Asian culture back home, mixed with the American culture outside. And even sometimes blended in with the family, like celebrating American holidays.

Both of these constructions exemplify a recurring theme from interviews, as this rhetoric of “two lives” persisted. None of the interviewees could name a site in which the negotiations between home and public life were depicted, suggesting that they were left to their own devices to find help with being “in between.”

The idea that men negotiate two worlds, an inner and outer, private (family) and public (friends), is brought out in experiences like Randy’s. His bitterness is rooted in the fact that he still can’t “socialize with all the white people,” but also feels out of place and “less Asian,” like he did in his Japanese camp. Many other men felt the same difficulties with socializing among whites. Nick, for example, told me that he pledged with a white fraternity on campus but then moved to an Asian American fraternity. For him, “the Asian American frat had a lot more meaning... [in the white frat], the brotherhood is not as close as the Asian American one. [There,] everyone knows each other.” I asked if he still remained friends with brothers from the fraternity he left, and he said that while he could, he didn’t want to, because he felt more comfortable with Asians. Later, he described that there was a “barrier” between him and whites:

It’s my self-conscious. Hanging out with Asian people is, for me, more at ease. I guess [in high school,] that’s when I developed my sense of

identity for hanging out with Asian people over white people. And I still behave that way. Like, I don't hang out with my white friends anymore.

Indian American Fred built on this when he explained how he first began to socialize in college:

You can connect with [other Asian Americans] easier because have the same beliefs, generally. You're brought up pretty much the same way. But then, you start to meet more people. And then you see, like, OK, non-Indian people are into pretty much the same thing as me. You know what I'm saying? So, at first, it's like a comfort zone, I guess, you could say, is within your racial group.

These comments mirror David's move to find Asian American friends once he came to college. For interviewees, an Asian American social circle is a support group of others who share similar experiences, can help negotiate the experiences of being Asian and American, and most importantly, where the "barrier" of being racially different is erased due to racial homogeneity.

Despite the degree to which these men feel they are a part of and contributors to American, "whitewashed" culture, this feeling is continually threatened by moments in which their racial difference is made overt. For some, the biological experience of being Asian is something that prevents full entry into American culture. For bi-ethnic Asian American Ben, his race keeps him rooted in Asian culture. He recalls being embraced by a local Asian community group: "You are interpreted by others based on how you look. Even in ethnic communities it's like a one-drop rule – if you have a bit in you, you're one of them." While this is positive for Ben, who actively sought out an Asian community in

the college town, the “one-drop rule” has, for others, made racial identity a constant reminder of difference.

Situational Asian America

Randy senses that whites see him as an “invisible” man interchangeable with other Asians, and Oliver contends that his sense of self is dependent on how others—particularly whites, have defined, currently define, and will define him. These stories and comments offer many different contexts in which dual consciousness seems prevalent, and point to an acute awareness of the self, of the other, and the interaction between self and other.

Just who is the “other” in these conversations? In most of the interviews, the standard against which Asian American performances are based, defined and judged is whiteness and the related presumptions of race and masculinity. As illustrated above, the answers interviewees provided about what constitutes “Asian American” involved their own insights, but also how their personal definitions are shaped by white standards—or, more interestingly, their perceptions of white standards. Recollections of childhood histories reveal that the standards of whiteness were pervasive in the social circles, neighborhoods, and institutions in which these men were raised. As shown in Randy’s story, interactions in ethnic schools and summer camps, as well as with other immigrants, has created “Asian” as another standard of comparison. In these situations, Asian Americans adopt white standards of defining “foreign” in their attempt to distinguish between “Asian” and “Asian American.”

The shifting definitions of “Asian American” suggests that what it means to be Asian American involves complex, situational negotiations depending on social context.

Narratives of what is “Asian,” rather than what is “Asian American,” inform interviewees from one situation to another. With a lack of an identifiable narrative of what it means to be “Asian American,” men must instead negotiate the definitions of “Asianness” that their racial difference signifies. This is in part due to the under-representation of Asian Americans in the media, and the immense visibility of whiteness and Asian stereotypes that shaped interviewees’ media experiences.

What the conversations in this chapter point to are varied and nuanced contexts in which multiple points of double consciousness strategically come into play, forming a vast repertoire of Asian American performances. While often discussed in purely racial terms and dismissed for its vague and classed assumptions about the project of black identity, W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness remains helpful in understanding the nuances of racial/ethnic experiences.⁹⁶ Du Bois defines double consciousness as the “the inability to recognize one’s black self other than through the mediated veil of the unacknowledging white gaze.”⁹⁷ This is highlighted in the work of race scholars, most notably Frantz Fanon’s assertion that a racial subject—in his work, the black colonial subject—“does not possess a personal value of his own and is always dependent on the presence of ‘the Other’.”⁹⁸ If we are to build on this notion, we can see from interviewees that the personal sense of being Asian American is informed not only by whites as a generalized other, but also the presence of “the Asian” as “the Other.” Without a clearly defined sense of being Asian American, men feel that they are instead

⁹⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994).

⁹⁷ Ernest Allen, Jr. “On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking Du Boisian ‘Double Consciousness,’” in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1996), 52.

⁹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 186.

distinguished against “Asian.” In other words, to be “Asian American” is to be identified as “not-Asian.”

While Du Bois writes of the benefits of mutual recognition between blacks, it is not necessarily the case for Asian Americans. Not merely finding themselves situated between Asian and white, interviewees also find themselves between Asian and Asian American, as seen in “American-Born-Chinese” experiences or encounters with ethnic-language speaking “FOBs.” Marginalized in these moments, Asian Americans find that there is no guarantee of recognition or solidarity based purely on race. Cultural definitions of “Asian American” are most helpful here, as men told me of the distinct boundaries between “FOB” and Asian American social circles.

While the concept of double consciousness is rarely used in the context of Asian American identity, it is surely seen at work in Asian American studies positioning Asians as “honorary whites” or pointing to racial triangulation theory to explain the tenuous position of Asians in American racial discourse. Beyond race, however, there are other ways in which this dual-layered consciousness—the awareness of the self, of the other, and the interaction between self and other—is evident. It opens up space for individuals to create multiple points of reference called upon depending on contexts and situational others. Asian Americans use different points of ‘doubleness’ to add to their complex repertoire of racial, ethnic, classed, and gendered performance depending on their contexts.

These negotiations of assimilations/acculturation suggest a way for us to understand what scholars, in discussing paths to assimilation, describe as self-Otherization. Mia Tuan, for example, finds that Asian American college students tend to

segregate themselves from students of other races. Indeed, the Asian Americans I interviewed admitted to selecting social groups where ethnic interchangeability and cultural differences were less likely to occur; mainly, these groups consisted of other Asian Americans. Some had joined Asian American organizations like interest groups, cultural performance groups, or fraternities on campus. Others mentioned attending predominantly Asian American church groups. Those who kept a more diverse array of friends still expressed gratitude over finding more Asian Americans to befriend in college, a reprieve from their predominantly white high schools and hometowns.

While groups of racially homogenous students on campuses may make segregation a visible issue, these men find their social circles of Asian Americans psychologically soothing due to the fact that, in this setting, racial issues are invisible. Chinese American Francis, one of the last men I interviewed, agreed with this theme:

It is tiring. I mean, I have to look at who I'm talking to, and then I have to adjust myself. Whereas if the population is homogeneous, then I just do whatever I want.

At the core of these statements is that ideas and expressions of "Asian American" depend in part on cultural options and understandings that are available within a particular context; these men, then, have a repertoire of "Asian American" performances that can be strategically enacted in particular situations, albeit shaped by societal norms and codes.

As Jonathan stated:

It's just like, your surroundings. If I was with a bunch of my white friends or something, I would be a lot more whitewashed. And if I'm with my

family or a bunch of other Asians or Vietnamese people, I would feel like that.

Hugh added:

It's more about adapting. Sometimes you are more whitewashed to fit in, and you're probably more Asian at other times.

Asian American identity is thus presented as a collective construction. It is a performance based on social interactions, and one that involves marking the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in particular situations and to positions of power. Jonathan's identity is in part defined in reaction to those around him, based on the norms and expectations of his situational partners. Depending on his audience and their expectations, he is more "Asian" or more "whitewashed."

Beyond Race: Asian American as Global Competency

Perhaps the most interesting insights into distinguishing "Asian American" are the comments from men who moved to the U.S. in search of work or education opportunities. These men considered themselves Asian American despite their accents or style of dress; for other respondents born in the U.S., these interviewees may be considered "FOBby." In these instances, the concept of Asian American meant more than being Westernized, and offers a new site for understanding "Asian American" in an era of global flows.

For Ekram, a key move to becoming Asian American meant distancing himself from other "FOB" Indians who, in his recollections, were actually quite "exploitative" once he arrived in America. When he first came to graduate school, he decided to live in an apartment, "a self-proclaimed 'Indian ghetto'," with other recent immigrants from India. Ekram's decision to do this was largely based on his concerns about socialization:

What if I d[id] something embarrassing? Somehow I felt that if that happened with Indians, it would be somehow less traumatic, less humiliating, than it would be with Americans.

Yet, Ekram found living with other Indians to be stifling because of particular social obligations in the immigrant community. Taking advantage of his naivety, his Indian flatmates placed him in a room with a man no one else wanted to room with. Assuming that Ekram owed them something for connecting him with the Indian community, they also continually asked Ekram for help on their homework and other favors. Now, Ekram feels Asian American precisely because of his desire to disconnect from this community and to remake his life in the United States as an American (he is looking forward to taking the test for citizenship).

Francis, who moved to Michigan for college, feels the same way, telling me that he feels Asian American because he has a “different way of thinking” from the Asians in his home country. Across interviews, Asians were understood to be less cosmopolitan, transnational, or global as Asian Americans. For Francis, being Asian American is to embrace a particular mindset that values globalization, transnationalism, and travel. Asians, on the other hand, are generally thought of as migratory individuals “stuck” in their home culture—seen for example, in “FOBs”’ desire to speak their native languages with others on campus. In this sense, American/Western identity is linked to upward mobility and travel, with the social and cultural capital to interact seamlessly from place to place. A college senior who has traveled to many different countries, Francis claims, “I find myself behaving Asian American when I’m out of America,” to maximize his social

capital with foreigners he encounters. This is also something that Partha has done in his travels to Europe; “just to take sure people know I’m not, you know, *Asian*, from Asia.”

In this context, the concept of being Asian American is linked with feelings of pride or even superiority over both Americans and Asians who hold “local” mindsets. Here, the internalized notion of “FOB” extends beyond the American experience. In these contexts, Asian American is an identity performed to mark class, global stature, and a particular cultural competency not associated with merely “Asian” or “American.” In this formulation, Americans are conceived of as local and small-minded, as the source of discrimination and ignorance interviewees experienced as children. In this sense, Asian Americans truly occupy a space in between the perceived provinciality of Americans and Asians who cannot understand or appreciate the position of Asian Americans. Francis’ travels home and abroad require him to redefine his level of Asian American-ness, at times changing his clothes and mannerisms to fit in to a crowd.

We can understand the styles of dress, confidence and other dis-identifying markers as markers of symbolic ethnicity used to counter stereotypes. Studies of immigrants suggest that ethnics take on symbols of their own ethnic culture—Irish Americans “choose to be Irish on St. Patrick’s Day, for instance.”⁹⁹ While these approaches may provide insight into the identity formation of white ethnics, this idea of “choice” eclipses the structural, political, and representational forces that control the ways in which the ethnic body can move and perform identity.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the position of Asian Americans as both racial *and* ethnic prevents them from exercising the same

⁹⁹ See Herbert Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2.1 (1979): 1-20; Waters, *Ethnic Options*; see also Tuan, *Forever Foreigners*.

¹⁰⁰ This is, in fact, something that Mary Waters notes in *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

choice as other immigrants, which may help to explain some of the “tiredness” men feel among whites.¹⁰¹

Herbert Gans’ notion of symbolic ethnicity suggests that it is a leisure activity, and that ethnic can ignore or refuse to adopt symbols that “require...an arduous or time-consuming commitment.”¹⁰² Interviewees suggested that they do, indeed, avoid performances of ethnicity that are somehow draining or tiring—however, contrary to white immigrants, the symbols they avoid are those from both Asia (e.g., participating in ethnic holidays) and America (e.g., constantly proving they can speak English). Men like Randy enjoy the vagueness of the term “Asian American” in its pan-ethnic reach. The category allows them to identify with one another on the basis of race, but avoid performances that may be difficult, such as speaking their parents’ native language or countering expected stereotypes.

Conclusion

These men find themselves at the intersections of multiple sites of marginalization, negotiating consistent and often contradictory stereotypes of masculinity and race. For interviewees, forming a sense of Asian American masculinity is done in the context of other racialized masculinities. When asked to explain why he believed Asian men on screens are so marginalized, Brad concluded, “Maybe, genetically, Asian American men don’t fit some of the Western values for male attractiveness. Like hairy, or tall, muscular or something.” Building on their discussion of gender inequality at the start on the chapter, men believe that positive masculine types do not exist for Asian Americans. Oliver lamented that “Asian guys always lose, or they get beaten by a white

¹⁰¹ Tuan, *Forever Foreigners*.

¹⁰² Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity,” 8.

protagonist, or they're the side kick....they're—emasculated, is generally the term.”

Partha stated, “They're not the guys with manly qualities.” This simple statement, agreed upon by many others, suggests that the project of defining Asian American manhood is a project of identifying what Asian American is not. This helps to explain why, beyond the examples of stereotypes, functional roles, and the occasional stand-out film, interviewees had difficulty naming any other Asian people, characters, or media texts that stood out to them as important. Men felt that Asian stereotypes were unrealistic and therefore irrelevant to their personal sense of self; however, they are still aware that these representations constitute the cultural knowledge of others with whom they interact.

In part, the prevalence of these stereotypes is linked to the invisibility of Asian Americans not only in these men's social situations, but also in the media. See my interaction with Josh, as he imagined how media, gender, and race intersect to create and delimit Asian American masculinity:

The ideal man, I guess, would be manly, rugged, but gentlemanly, and not a meathead... Smart, suave. Kind. Compassionate, that sort of thing.

Do you find this sort of image with Asian men in media?

Um, no! (Laughs)

As will be discussed in the following chapters, manhood and Asian American ideals inform how these men think they are represented in the media. Many acknowledge that their concepts of masculinity are indeed ideals, and that the media is “just the media” – to an extent, merely representations and not reflections of reality. However, there is a general belief that others, especially white men, have more options in the media and can embody more facets of masculinity than others.

When Randy explained how he is viewed as an Asian American, the reaction against stereotypes becomes clear: “Looking at me, you’re obviously going to stray away from certain stereotypes, right? Like being a nerd, or being metrosexual.... You’re not going to think those things looking at me. So what stereotype does come up then, for me?” Randy’s performance of his own masculinity seems to be, in part, a reaction to the Asian stereotypes that he believes have become ingrained in how Asian Americans—and his own self—are understood. Being unable to perceive of oneself outside of the “Asian” narrative, or having to think of oneself in relation to the stereotypes it prompts, was common across the men who talked with me.

In this light, stereotypes have become the common-sense identity categories interviewees have had to move in and out of throughout their lives. These men have integrated them into their lives—sometimes willingly, sometimes not. Their histories show how their racial difference makes them visible as non-white, but also how the understanding of Asian American as racially “Asian” makes their ethnicities invisible. Overall, their negotiations of what it means to be Asian American involve a complex strategy of defining themselves as “not-Asian,” using the distinctions of class, language, or culture. The next chapter investigates this linkage further, looking at: 1) the rhetoric of “Asian” in news media discourses, 2) how Asian American interviewees negotiate these portrayals, and 3) how they feel these larger concepts of “Asian” inform larger cultural narratives in the United States, affecting how Asian Americans are understood.

CHAPTER 2

Managing the Octopus: 21st Century Yellow Peril

“The differentiation of Asian immigrants from the national citizenry is marked not only politically but culturally as well: refracted through images, memories, and narratives—submerged, fragmented, and sedimented in a historical ‘unconscious.’” – Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*¹⁰³

“The United States does not seek to contain China.” – United States President Barack Obama, November 14, 2009.¹⁰⁴

On August 8, 2008, an estimated 65 million U.S. home viewers¹⁰⁵ tuned in to NBC for the Opening Ceremonies of the 29th International Olympic Games in Beijing, China.¹⁰⁶ Regarded by many as China’s global debut as a modern nation, the broadcast of its own image to the world symbolized the end of a history of closed borders.¹⁰⁷ With thousands of men on the floor of the stadium, concert pianist Lang Lang performing, and gymnast Li Ning running up the stadium’s walls to light the Olympic cauldron, the image of China was undeniably masculine. In the American display of the 2008 Olympics, the

¹⁰³ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Helene Cooper, Michael Wines and David E. Sanger. “China’s Role as Lender Alters Obama’s Visit.” *New York Times*, November 15, 2009, A1.

¹⁰⁵ AC Nielsen, “Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Over 2 billion viewers tune in,” accessed February 10, 2009,

http://www.marketresearchworld.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2230&Itemid=77.

¹⁰⁶ “2008 Olympics: Beijing 2008 Complete Opening Ceremony,” DVD, Ten Mayflower Studios. Released September 30, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ David Lynch, “Beijing’s Dirty Air Could Cloud China’s Olympics,” *USA Today*, August 27, 2005; Calum MacLeod, “China Would Like the World to See Its Best Behavior,” *USA Today*, February 9, 2006; Jim Yardley, “Chinese Nationalism Fuels Crackdown on Tibet,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2008; “Beyond Beijing: Games Show Two Faces of China,” *USA Today*, August 22, 2008.

massive specter of China was inevitably managed, for viewers, by the interpretations of white male news anchors. For American audiences, the image of China's masculinity was negotiated with the help of NBC anchors Jim Lampley, Tom Brokaw, Matt Lauer, Bob Costas and Joshua Cooper Ramo—white men helping viewers interpret the Chinese images on screen. When 2,008 Chinese men, with matching grey and red uniforms and red marks on their foreheads filled the floor of the Bird's Nest Stadium to drum and shout in synchronization, Matt Lauer remarked: "A nation of 1.3 billion people putting on a show like this, and people at home are not alone if they're saying this is both awe inspiring and perhaps a little intimidating."

The comments of NBC anchors throughout this performance reveal some of the complexities in how Asia is understood in the American imaginary. At one point describing the "massive scope" of these performances as "intimidating," and as almost militaristic displays of "minute" and "fierce precision," anchors Bob Costas and Matt Lauer later shared, "To a Western audience, looking at a bunch of guys basically doing karate...must be very confusing." In front of a national audience, the anchormen conflated Japanese and Chinese martial arts. The anchors continued on to essentialize the performance: discussing how the basic principles of tai chi "came naturally" assumed that it was somehow an inherited skill, or that the performers had practiced tai chi throughout their lives; they also focused on the fact that standing in perfect circles, "not the tai chi part," was the choreographic difficulty. The array of interpretations, ranging from fearful, to confused, to dismissive, point to the ways in which Western media consumers have been prompted to stereotype or categorize Asians.

In this chapter, I explore how mainstream American news rhetoric contextualizes the Asian American experience by lending to the national discourse that shapes how we think of Asia, Asians, and Asian Americans. I contend that the rhetoric of Asian/American found in these news texts reifies some of the stereotypes of “Asia” interviewees alluded to in the previous chapter. This chapter uses interview responses to point to case examples of how anti-Chinese rhetoric reflected anxieties over the global economy. This rhetoric worked by painting China as a monstrosity, a predator, and a contagion, with language inciting panic over China’s size and painting America as an innocent victim. Largely drawing from newspaper and newsmagazine material, the chapter also uses CNN’s *Lou Dobbs Tonight* as a case study, due to the show’s prominence and role as perhaps the most vitriolic of news texts reflecting and lending to the rhetorical moves discussed.

The Role of News and National Discourse

A major contribution of this dissertation is an investigation into how news narratives, along with entertainment narratives, form a network of meanings that shape how individuals feel they are perceived. As racial and ethnic minorities, Asian American male interviewees felt implicated in narratives perpetuated by the American mainstream mediascape as a whole, as they contended with stereotypes and prejudices that resulted from the dialogic interplay between media texts and lived experience. As seen in the previous chapter, interviewees’ concept of society writ large is that of a white culture defining, interpreting, and negotiating Asian American men.

For interviewees, the importance of news narratives in shaping their social categories is linked to the invisibility of Asia in the American contexts in which they

grew up. Brad, for example, described the sense of absence he felt as he grew up in a predominantly white suburb and school system: “There’s not enough about Asia in American education. In my whole 12 years of schooling, I didn’t learn a thing about China.” Brad felt that rather than learning about Asia and Asian culture, he only learned things “as they pertained to Western history.” To Jonathan, the invisibility of Asian histories, geographies and cultures is linked to his own sense of ethnic marginalization as a Vietnamese American – despite the fact that his parents came to the U.S. during the Vietnam War, he feels that contemporary U.S.-foreign relations work to shape how Asian Americans are defined in America. He explained, “I have to educate people on Vietnam and the fact that I’m Vietnamese because Vietnam and the U.S. don’t really interact. Not like China and the U.S., or Japan and the U.S.” While most interviewees believed that Asia was absent from larger national discourses writ large, Jonathan also points to how some ethnicities are privileged over others when Asia does become visible.

The ethnic representations of Asians in American popular culture, as Darrell Hamamoto points out, have shifted based on the foreign policies and main events of the time. In *Monitored Peril*, Hamamoto links media representations of “bachelor fathers”—stock Chinese characters performing as traditional domestic servants, often for white families—and “rising sons”—Japanese characters always presented as recent immigrants and thus always alien—to sentiments surrounding WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam war, and other national engagements. Narratives have fluctuated between depicting Asians as overt terrors and subordinate underlings, and this dichotomy reflects how America has imagined a population of generalized “Oriental” Asian,¹⁰⁸ either as an

¹⁰⁸ Prashad, *Karma*, 27.

“unaggressive” model minority¹⁰⁹ or as a spectacle, albeit a carefully managed spectacle, of exoticism.¹¹⁰

For interviewees examining their current situation, “the Orient” was made visible through major news events concerning China. When asked to recall news stories that shaped understandings of “Asian” in America, interviewees of all ethnic backgrounds pointed to news about China: product safety recalls, bird flu, and the 2008 Olympics. Brad, who felt that Asia was invisible in his school, now feels that “with the rise of China, maybe Chinese culture will start appearing more and having more appeal.” Media narratives thus become prime sites where Asian Americans can see Asia become visible. Alex says, “People are easily influenced... media can really change a person’s mind.” Those I interviewed, however, seemed to conclude that media influenced people to feel negatively about Asians. For example, Alex shared, “I walked into a bar one time and this guy looked at me and said, ‘I don’t like your kind.’” In a follow-up conversation, Alex clarified that he felt that media narratives about Asia often served to reify the concept of the Oriental Asian – in this situation, “his kind” referred to Asians as a homogeneous population, rather than those who shared his Korean background. As a racial minority, interviewees feel part of a pan-ethnic, homogenized “Asian” racial category indelibly linked to the discourse of “Asia” abroad. Despite being American, these men negotiate a racial identity which—to use their term—“for better or worse,” has been made visible in very particular ways.

Hugh built on this concept: “Stories shape how Americans think of China as the Orient, the Far East. They shape or confirm stereotypes. People come up with their own

¹⁰⁹ Prashad, *Karma*, 7; Bascara, *Model Minority Imperialism*, 4.

¹¹⁰ See Ronald J. Zboray, and Mary Sacarino Zboray, “Between ‘Crockery-dom’ and Barnum: Boston’s Chinese Museum, 1845-47,” *American Quarterly* 56.2 (2004): 271-307.

conclusions about the news stories they see.” Following this with examples of arguments he has gotten into with his white roommate about China and cultural differences between Chinese and white Americans, Hugh confirmed his feeling that the conclusions he felt that others drew from news stories about China were mostly negative. Upon deeper reflection interviewees shared that they, as Asian American men, felt implicated in the discourse of Asia. For example, Korean American Tom discussed how foreign relations during war-time affected Asian Americans:

In World War II, everybody thought that we were Japanese, and they wanted us out of the country.... Now that the world is more international and Internet is all over the place... now we know, well, Asian people aren't always like this. But in the end, they still keep that stereotype.

Despite also pointing to the role that global media flows and increased channels of information play in combating stereotypes, Tom's statement suggests an entrenched stereotyped narrative that still exists. Chinese American Bobby identifies this narrative as one linked with terror: “The history of [Asian stereotypes] is a lot of times, they were portrayed as evil, back in the day. Have you heard of, like, Dr. Fu Manchu?”

Across the board, interviewees offered that Asian Americans' racial status as non-white minorities in America is coupled with particular, lasting, representations of Asia. Some representations of Asian men have had immense staying power; the “insidious” Dr. Fu Manchu, a product of the anti-Chinese fears from the 1920s, is still remembered by Bobby, in 2010. Indian American Ekram explained how he felt characters like Fu Manchu reflected Orientalist discourse:

Oriental-looking people are almost sinister.... I think that part of is that, historically, China has been an enemy. In the 1970s, 1980s, Japan was a competitor, so Japanese Americans... the second World War, of course, another big piece of history. So you go to the battlefield and fight the men. And that may partly have to do with them being coded as sinister.

Most recently, Yunte Huang's (2010) investigation into the origins of fictional detective Charlie Chan links the character to Fu Manchu. Huang cites Asian American scholar Frank Chin: "Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan are the two Chinese icons of the same myth brewed up in the subconscious region of the white Christian's racial wet dream—devil and angel." While Fu "offended white manhood" with his feline demeanor and hyper/homosexual mannerisms, Chan did the same in his awkward, clumsy, asexual way.¹¹¹

Survey research has confirmed that some of the stereotypes and prejudices interviewees identify are a reality for Asian Americans. The Committee of 100 (C-100), a national, non-partisan committee of Chinese American leaders that has conducted opinion surveys throughout the 2000s, has consistently found links between thoughts about China and attitudes toward Asian Americans. In 2005, a C-100 report found that 68 percent of the general population believed China to be a significant threat to the United States.¹¹² Surveys from both 2001 and 2009 found that perceiving China as a threat is highly correlated to having unfavorable impressions of Chinese people and a higher

¹¹¹ Yunte Huang, *Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 281.

¹¹² Committee of 100. "American Attitudes Toward China," (Jan 2005-April 2005); and "Public Attitudes Toward Chinese and Asian Americans," (April 2009).

degree of prejudice toward Chinese and Asian Americans.¹¹³ As Helen Zia writes in the C-100's 2009 report, "the lack of basic knowledge does not prevent people from offering firm opinions about Asian Americans—whether they are loyal or dangerous."¹¹⁴ Some interviewees were acutely aware of the role such suspicious attitudes plays in constructing Asians in America, and how they lend to a rhetoric that is ambivalent as well as contradictory. Alex explained:

I talk to my friends... and they say they can't trust Chinese people. Some of [my friends] are nice but they say they can never trust a Chinese person. *Even if it's a Chinese American person?*

Yeah. And the media plays a huge role [in that].

The re-emergence of anti-Chinese rhetoric in mainstream American media in the 2000s points to a moment of political foment during which national white identity was consolidated in opposition to the creation of a Chinese Other.¹¹⁵

Indeed, interviewees saw the economic crisis that shaped much of the news in the early 2000s as connected to attitudes about Asian Americans and Asia. Filipino American Dean tried to summarize the contemporary narrative: "The story is that Asians are taking jobs away from Americans... so now we're seeing this anti-Asian autoworker type of story. The economy has a big part in defining how people look at Asian Americans, or Asians in general." At the time of writing, fears of America's diminished role as a global

¹¹³ Committee of 100, "American Attitudes Toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans," (April 2001).

¹¹⁴ Committee of 100, "Still the 'Other?': Public Attitudes Toward Chinese And Asian Americans," (2009), 4

¹¹⁵ See, for example, John Gabriel's "Borderguards, Bodyguards, Lifeguards," in *Whitewash: Racialized Politics and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1998), 97-128. In this chapter, Gabriel discusses how cultural and economic issues such as "a decline in manufacturing, capital flight, unemployment," as well as an "embedded white neurosis, historically primed to project its fears and anxieties on to a racialized object," work together to justify immigration control arguments (103).

superpower were compounded by the loss of American jobs due to multinational business practices of offshoring and outsourcing, practices continued since the 1980s.¹¹⁶ White America has not only seen expanded free trade policies and consumer desire for cheap imports lead to an increasing amount of corporate outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, but has also seen information technology jobs provide opportunities for H1-B visa holders from abroad.¹¹⁷ The Economic Policy Institute reports that approximately 1.8 million American jobs have been displaced since China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, and links these job losses to growing trade deficits with China.¹¹⁸ At the same time, China's economy has continued to grow at a rapid pace, with the country hailing the largest year-on-year rise figures on the globe and attracting far more foreign investments than any other developing country.¹¹⁹ With an increasing trade deficit with China, the Sino-American market is "by far the United States' most imbalanced trading relationship."¹²⁰ Free trade has been lauded by some U.S. business elites, economists and neoliberals as benefiting American multinational corporations. However, the media narrative in the lead-up to 2008 suggested that American workers,

¹¹⁶ See Mobina Hashmi, "No Longer the Iconic American? The Changing Cultural and Economic Value of White Masculinity in the Global Economy." Ph.D. Diss., University of Madison-Wisconsin, 2006.

¹¹⁷ See Prashad, *Karma*.

¹¹⁸ Robert. E. Scott, "The U.S. Trade Deficit: Are We Trading Away Our Future?" Economic Policy Institute. Testimony to International Relations Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade on July 22, 2007.

¹¹⁹ George Wehrfritz, "Second Thoughts: China's Too-Hot Economy is Prompting Firms to Look Elsewhere to Invest." *Newsweek*, November 28, 2005, accessed August 3, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/51217>.

¹²⁰ Robert E. Scott, "Costly Trade with China: Millions of U.S. Jobs Displaced with Net Job Loss in Every State." Economic Policy Institute, EPI Briefing paper #188, October 9, 2007, accessed October 2, 2009, www.epi.org/publications/entry/bp188.

particularly white American men—the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that men have consistently led women in unemployment¹²¹—were the victims of globalization.

The anxiety over the decline of the American middle-class, inherent in the discourse around China’s rise and growth, is thus a classed anxiety that intersects with America’s racial anxieties. In situating contemporary discourse within this historical context, we can see how contemporary narratives of anxiety and threat work to create a spectacle of China controlled and contained by American media. Ben, who is a bi-ethnic Asian American, described a complex interplay between America’s relationship with China and how it implicates Asian Americans:

I just feel like that [China’s] challenge to [Americans’] nationality, that’s going to be developing specifically against Chinese Americans, and that’s a compromising situation to be in...

Can you elaborate a little bit?

Mainly just because of the providence of China and how that’s threatening American hegemony.... Well, we’re not going to be number one anymore, right? And that seems to really threaten people and their egos.

For Ben, news narratives lend to the “general xenophobia” he feels is growing in the United States. Despite linking America’s anxiety to Chinese Americans specifically, Ben still feels that economic fears over job losses affects how Asian Americans are seen as a whole. He added, “People might see us as more competitive in terms of jobs. It might awaken nationalist fears of, ‘We gotta keep jobs for Americans.’”

¹²¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment Status of the Civilian Noninstitutional Population 16 Years and Over by Sex, 1973 to Date,” accessed June 12, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/-tables>; Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Household Data Annual Averages,” accessed June 12, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/-tables>.

Working with a concept of “Asian America” that is inextricably linked to narratives of “Asia,” Asian Americans find themselves shaped as a threat subject to “both willful blindness and hysterical concern,”¹²² the “raced, classed, and gendered embodiment of contradiction itself.”¹²³ This has resulted in a history of representations perpetuating long-lasting yet incongruous stereotypes of Asian men. Huang describes Charlie Chan as “the hackneyed symbolism of Chinatown and the clichéd notion of Chinese inscrutability....an American stereotype of the Chinaman,”¹²⁴ a product of “racial bias and cultural fantasy.”¹²⁵ The contradictions of fantasy and fright, fun and fundamentalist, for scholars like Vijay Prashad, Victor Bascara, and Wendy Brown (2006), are linked to globalization and its accompanying discourse of multiculturalism.¹²⁶ In this context, America embraces that which can be contained, consumed, or appropriated; simultaneously, it fears what positions America as feminine, what defies norms, encroaches upon borders, and is too foreign to be adaptable.¹²⁷ One can see the continued embodiment of such anxieties same in other “Oriental” portrayals, regardless of ethnicity: Fu Manchu, *Sixteen Candles’* Long Duk Dong (Gedde Watanabe, 1984) or *The Karate Kid’s* Mr. Miyagi (Pat Morita, 1984). To understand the staying power of these representations, we must first begin with America’s contradictory relationship with Chinatowns and its men.

¹²² Bascara, *Model Minority*, 22.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁴ Huang, *Charlie Chan*, xvii-ix.

¹²⁵ Huang, *Charlie Chan*, 237.

¹²⁶ Prashad, *Karma*, 112; See also Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹²⁷ Victor Bascara explains the intersection of globalization and multiculturalism: “the postcolonial Oriental under globalization converges with the Asian American under multiculturalism,” *Model Minority Imperialism*, xvii.

Before looking at the stories and sources with which interviewees were familiar, it is important to note that anti-Chinese rhetoric is not new to Americans, and has worked to bolster white identity with narratives highlighting the difference of racial minorities. Contextualizing the contemporary narratives discussed in this chapter, the intersections of race, gender and class in the past help us understand the politics of containment in the present.

Chinatowns and Chinamen: The Origins of Yellow Peril

The contemporary discourse surrounding China can be traced to 19th century America. While China itself was not a threat, its men were perceived to be, as global trade networks enabled the entry of a migrant workforce of merchants and laborers leaving poverty-stricken South China in search of profit in the United States. An Asian workforce largely comprised of Chinese men provided a cheap alternative to slave labor in a post-emancipation industrial economy. Anti-Chinese sentiment was fueled by the influx of Chinese immigrants and anxieties over the preservation of white male dominance in America's public sphere. As Lisa Lowe's (1996) quote at the start of this chapter indicates, foreign policies and anxieties over the immigrant presence in America have shaped geographical spaces, the foreigners contained within those spaces, and the vocabulary used to describe them. Historically, the concept of a wholly inassimilable, foreign population has been used to manage Western anxieties over Eastern/Oriental men.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ See Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*; Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999). Sabine Haenni writes of New York's Chinatown: "an aesthetic of fakeness.... Helped [whites] negotiate the Chinese presence in the city." *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 147.

From the start, the Chinese male was something to be contained. California's gold rush encouraged a major wave of immigrant laborers from China, and the new territory provided ample work that Chinese men were eager to do. The work in the West was so readily available that in just thirty years (1852-1882), anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000 Chinese entered the United States. By the 1860s, roughly 80 percent of the Central Pacific Railroad's workforce was made up of Chinese laborers.¹²⁹ Much of the literature on Asian Americans discusses the policies and immigration laws enacted to prevent the spread of Chinese labor. Despite their role in the workforce, Chinese men were excluded from unions and workers' organizations that coalesced in the mid- to late-19th century. As white industrial laborers found themselves competing with Chinese men the stereotype of the "coolie" worker, originally used to describe post-emancipation Chinese labor on sugar plantations,¹³⁰ was used to construct the Chinese workforce, seen as a competitive threat.

Fearing the loss of white jobs, California's legislature passed the 1852 Foreign Miner's Tax, requiring Chinese miners to pay a hefty fee. Other restrictions included higher laundry licensing fees for Chinese launderers, and legislation preventing Chinese from testifying against whites and from gaining citizenship. Restrictive immigration policies like 1882's Chinese Exclusion Act—America's first immigration policy actively targeting a single population—and anti-miscegenation laws actively limited men's reproductive choices.¹³¹ Preventing women and family members from joining male

¹²⁹ Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai, "Early Chinese Immigrants, 1852-1904," in *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 1-6. See also Lisa Lowe, "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique," in *Immigrant Acts*, 1-36; and Huang, *Charlie Chan*.

¹³⁰ See Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*.

¹³¹ Eng, *Racial Castration*.

laborers desexualized a working population, effectively “castrating” Chinese men.¹³² The results were visible: by the 1920s, the Chinese population in San Francisco was over 90 percent male, confined to “bachelor societies” of single men. By the 1880s, a singular narrative of what President Rutherford B. Hayes described “the Chinese invasion” had formed,¹³³ as containing the “yellow terror” or “yellow peril” became a national issue.

The face of yellow terror was undeniably male, mostly due to the scarcity of Asian women in America at the time. As Lisa Lowe aptly points out, the extension of citizenship to the Chinese legally presumed the “Chinese immigrant” to be male, as female immigrants were not included in citizenship discussions during the 1940s.¹³⁴ Bachelor societies eventually turned into Chinese enclaves or Chinatowns, which became key in the narrative construction of Asian masculinity.¹³⁵ As scholars of 19th century America have discussed, the active containment, discursively and geographically, of Chinese in America have helped to define America as a modern space and make Western difference desirable.¹³⁶ As Nayan Shah (2001) explains, the San Francisco the Board of Health long refused to consider Chinese San Franciscans as “part of the city’s ‘public’; they were instead perceived as the antithesis of ‘civilized citizens’.”¹³⁷ Alien populations were confined to Chinatowns, which were understood as morally depraved, uncivilized spaces of gamblers and opium dealers. Huang describes the role of Chinatown in American narratives of the time:

¹³² Eng, *Racial Castration*; see also Lee, *Orientalism*; Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, And Love* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008).

¹³³ Huang, *Charlie Chan*, 126.

¹³⁴ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 11.

¹³⁵ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press), 13. See also Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene*, 145.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 146-7; see also Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 18.

¹³⁷ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 70.

The mere mention of “Chinatown” immediately calls up images of pestilential slums, opium dens, filthy brothels, and gambling parlors, all crowded by Chinamen with their long, plaited queues and baggy pantaloons.¹³⁸

Images, stereotypes, and policies worked to reify Chinese men as non-Christian,¹³⁹ lascivious predators of white women,¹⁴⁰ or evil masterminds with devoted followers.¹⁴¹ Establishing Chinatown in this way created a new racialized urban modernity to juxtapose the superiority of white labor, culture and society.

The potential threat of Chinese men’s economic and geographical mobility led to the concept of the Chinese as carriers of disease, and this was also transposed onto the products they produced. In San Francisco, smallpox and syphilis were traced to incoming Chinese immigrants and the squalid environment of Chinatown.¹⁴² The Chinese were deemed a volatile threat to the entire city’s health, and public health and urban planning decisions marginalized Chinatown as a “cesspool.”¹⁴³ These narratives of disease and contamination were also gendered, with Chinese laundrymen, servants, and other man-made products portrayed as the potential source of “domestic contamination for the middle-class white family.”¹⁴⁴ The discourse of contamination claimed domestic goods made by Chinese laborers as the source of multiple, incurable diseases. White consumers

¹³⁸ Huang, *Charlie Chan*, 58.

¹³⁹ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*, 90.

¹⁴¹ Gary Hoppenstand, “Yellow Devil Doctors and Opium Dens: A Survey of the Yellow Peril Stereotypes in Mass Media Entertainment,” in *The Popular Culture Reader*, ed. Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983), 178.

¹⁴² Susan Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty and Deviance in San Francisco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

¹⁴³ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 51. After the earthquake in 1906, San Francisco city planners attempted to rebuild Chinatown further away from the city’s center (Huang, *Charlie Chan*).

¹⁴⁴ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 63.

would buy Chinese-made products at their own risk, if they decided not to follow the protectionist impulses of American workers: as early as 1874, unions embarked on a campaign to mark their products as “Made by White Men.”¹⁴⁵

The 19th century saw the beginnings of a discourse of monstrosity as Chinatowns—sprawling and filthy—and Chinamen—depraved and ruthless, became spectacles for consumption. As Ronald Zboray and Mary Zboray (2004) show in their analysis of late 19th century representations of China in Boston’s Chinese Museum, Chinese-ness and Asian-ness have long occupied a gray space between civilization and barbarism, easily sensationalized into spectacle for white audiences as a result of consumer culture and global commerce.¹⁴⁶ In New York, “rubbernecking” tours enabled whites to enter Chinatown to see firsthand the inassimilable differences, monstrous, and dangerous qualities of Chinese culture, bodies, and products.¹⁴⁷ The fascination over Chinese spectacle was also reflected in popular culture texts aimed at a wider, more mainstream audience than those with direct experience with Chinatowns. These mediated representations often presented the Asian male as a grotesque, such as Thomas Edison’s *Dancing Chinamen* (1898), featuring marionettes with “strangely multijointed bod[ies].... ‘foreign,’ coded as ‘Chinese,’ and....aggressively handled.”¹⁴⁸ Other films from the era focused on storylines in which Chinese men, no matter how Westernized, preyed on white women and ultimately revert back to their inherently foreign ways,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 158, 160.

¹⁴⁶ See Zboray and Zboray, “Between ‘Crockery-dom’.”

¹⁴⁷ Haenni, *Immigrant Scene*, 147, 150. From the tour trolley, white men could consume the Chinese spectacle from a safe distance but also entertain the fear that leering Chinese men could, at any point, threaten white space or, even worse, snatch a white female tourist.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 147.

inseparable from the dark underbelly of Chinatown.¹⁴⁹ Haenni writes of the racializing process of mapping “fears of Chinese fluidity and mobility” onto the Chinese, evacuating “any sense of Chinese humanity, subjectivity or spectatorship.”¹⁵⁰ Her work explains how Asian America’s threat to American cities, sense of civilization and rationality, became spectacularized as their inability and/or refusal to assimilate,¹⁵¹ and that such racializing narratives were thus tools to (re)secure American nationalist fears.¹⁵² The transfer of cultural, political, and economic anxieties onto Asian spaces and Asian men was commoditized for audiences across the United States, reinforcing the notion of a dehumanized Asian threat.

Sample and Methods

Similar to Herman Gray’s (1995) attempt to map representations and negotiations of televised blackness as “the centerpiece of manufactured resentments, moral panics, and fears that appealed to white working- and middle-class insecurity” during the 1980s, this chapter looks at the ways in which images of Asians on screen have “mark[ed], locate[d], and then naturalize[d]” particular threats of Asian America in contemporary American popular media.¹⁵³ I explore the anti-Chinese rhetoric that proliferated in the news media during the mid-2000s, culminating in coverage of the 2008 Olympics. These

¹⁴⁹ As Huang notes, even Charlie Chan, the detective character who wore Western suits, is described as being “all Oriental,” returning to wearing silk robes and shoes in the comfort of his own home. *Charlie Chan*, 153-4. Crime and mystery films set in Chinatown proliferated in the early 20th century, such as *Shadows of Chinatown* (1926), *Mysteries of Old Chinatown* (1924), *The Chinatown Mystery* (1928), *Captured in Chinatown* (1935), *The King of Chinatown* (1939), and the *Phantom of Chinatown* (1940), to name a few.

¹⁵⁰ Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene*, 147.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

¹⁵² See Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril*. The role of racialized images as opposite to white ‘normality’ is also discussed in Gray’s *Watching Race*. See also Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁵³ Gray, *Watching Race*, xix.

stories reflected anxieties about China and used Orientalist strategies to mark China as inherently different and antithetical to American values.

Locating discursive trends in the news lends tremendous insight into how realities are presented for audiences and how a “common sense” is formed to think about those realities. As Todd Gitlin (1980) writes, “[News organizations] normally and regularly combine to select certain versions of reality over others.... [to] define ‘the story,’ identify the protagonists and the issues, and suggest appropriate attitudes.”¹⁵⁴ Using particular points of emphasis and presentation styles, news media help contribute to “little tacit theories” about what is important and why.¹⁵⁵ As interview responses showed, men were able to at least acknowledge the existence of the “little tacit theories” that shaped the Asian American experience.

Interviewees were asked what news texts informed their sense of national and global events, and were then asked to recall any specific stories or events about Asia and whether or not they thought these stories affected Asian Americans in any way.¹⁵⁶ *Time* and *Newsweek* ranked as the two most popular magazines covering political and news events.¹⁵⁷ While *BusinessWeek* has had a much smaller circulation in comparison, several men recalled reading the magazine for high school classes or with their families, so it was included in the analysis as well. Newspapers included two of the nation’s highest circulating newspapers, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. *USA Today* and *The New York Times* cover a fairly broad spectrum of the news mediascape; for example, *USA*

¹⁵⁴ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, when asked to recall stories about *Asia*, some men named stories that would ostensibly be seen as stories about *Asian America*, such as Korean American Seung-Hui Cho’s shooting spree at Virginia Tech. These connotations suggest the close links between concepts of Asia and Asian America.

¹⁵⁷ “Paid Circulation in Consumer Magazines, Dec. 31, 2004.” *Advertising Age*, February 21, 2004, accessed October 8, 2010, http://www.adage.com/datacenter/article?article_id=106861.

Today claims a readership that is 64% male and 45% college educated,¹⁵⁸ while the *New York Times* lays claim to “affluent, educated professionals,” over half of whom earn over \$100,000 a year and 88% of whom are college educated.¹⁵⁹ According to a reader survey in 2009, *NYT* readership is fairly evenly split in terms of gender.¹⁶⁰ While *The Wall Street Journal* also ranks in the top three, none of the interviewees identified it as a consistent news source.

Despite not being mentioned by any interviewees, I also provide examples from CNN’s *Lou Dobbs Tonight*.¹⁶¹ The show serves as a prime example of how white male anxieties are reflected in the discourse over China and globalization. Lou Dobbs was perhaps one of the loudest and most insistent voices expressing concerns over China during the 2000s. As a self-identified “independent populist,” he claimed to be an advocate for “working men and women, their families, [the] middle class and the American way of life.”¹⁶² During his time on air, Dobbs held such vehement opinions on China and its looming threats that he was often viewed as the exemplar of anti-Chinese sentiment. At one point, a *USA Today* writer called for readers to look beyond the influence of “television polemicists such as CNN’s Lou Dobbs [who] fulminate about the

¹⁵⁸ “Audience.” *USA Today*, accessed 8 October 2010,

http://www.usatoday.com/marketing/media_kit/usat/audience_overview.html.

¹⁵⁹ “Media Kit: Audience,” *The New York Times*, accessed October 8, 2010,

<http://www.nytimes.whsites.net/mediakit/magazines/audience/index.php>.

¹⁶⁰ “MRI NYT Reader Profile,” May 2009, accessed October 8, 2010,

<http://www.nytimes.whsites.net/mediakit/magazines/audience/index.php>.

¹⁶¹ Lou Dobbs hosted CNN’s *Moneyline* for almost 20 years after the network’s 1980 launch, before leaving for a brief period of time to embark on an Internet business venture. In 2001 he returned to anchor *Lou Dobbs Moneyline*, and in 2003 the program transitioned to *Lou Dobbs Tonight (LDT)*, an hour-long, weekday general news and commentary show. Dobbs was the anchor and managing editor of the program, as well as the author of *Exporting America* (2006), *War on the Middle Class* (2007), and *Independents Day* (2008). The program and books reflect Dobbs’ continued argument that America’s politicians and multi-national corporations pursue policies that export jobs, weaken the middle class, and do not serve the best interests of the general public.

¹⁶² CNN, “Lou Dobbs: Issues, TV, Radio and Books,” *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, <http://loudobbs.tv.cnn.com/tv>.

evils of ‘Communist China.’”¹⁶³ Dobbs has sparked controversy with claims linking illegal immigrants to leprosy,¹⁶⁴ and has been a target of Hispanic groups calling for his resignation. Despite or perhaps because of this, *LDT* was the second most viewed program on CNN by 2007, bringing the network close to 900,000 viewers in its primetime slot.¹⁶⁵ The Cable television Advertising Bureau (CAB) described Lou Dobbs’ reach to a predominantly white and middle-aged audience as being an “important observer of power and the powerful, tell[ing] you who has it, who wants it and why you should care.”¹⁶⁶ Dobbs’ rhetoric and the use of the similar themes and images in mainstream media texts that are ostensibly more objective than Dobbs’, culminate in a larger, general mediascape that shapes China as a threat.¹⁶⁷

LDT consisted of several “special issues” reports featuring CNN correspondents, special guest interviews, and Dobbs’ own commentary.¹⁶⁸ “Red Storm Rising” began to air on CNN’s *LDT* in 2005, as a recurring segment of the show’s “special reports.” The segment was at times referred to as “Red Star Rising,” until the title “Red Storm Rising” solidified in mid-2005 when Dobbs declared, “Administration officials won’t even talk

¹⁶³ David J. Lynch, “*Oracle Bones: China Revealed.*” *USA Today*, April 27, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Leonhardt, David. “Truth, Fiction and Lou Dobbs,” *New York Times*, Business Section, May 30, 2007, C1.

¹⁶⁵ The Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Cable TV.” *The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism*, 2008, accessed February 29, 2011, http://www.stateofthemedial.org/2008/narrative_cabletv_audience.php?cat=2&media=7.

¹⁶⁶ Cable television Advertising Bureau, “2008 Network Profiles,” 92, accessed December 10, 2010, http://www.thecab.tv/php/networkprofiles/08profileData/08_pdfs/CNN.pdf.

¹⁶⁷ At one point, *USA Today* writer David J. Lynch called for readers to recognize Lou Dobbs as the exemplar of “television polemicists... who fulminate about the evils of ‘Communist China;’” “*Oracle Bones*”.

¹⁶⁸ Some of these segments included: “Broken Borders,” focusing on the damage illegal immigration allegedly inflicts on America’s culture, economy, health care and environment; “Exporting America,” featuring stories on the continued outsourcing of jobs to other countries and the import of cheap goods made outside of the United States; “What Foreign Policy,” highlighting “fragmented policies that damage [American] military and trade advantage and prestige overseas;”¹⁶⁸ and “Homeland Insecurity,” focusing on a wide range of security issues, from habeas corpus for terrorists to 2nd amendment issues and defense budget expenditures.

on the record about the red storm that is hitting our shores.”¹⁶⁹ The title of the segment, paralleling the 1986 Tom Clancy novel of the same name, links China’s rise to the Soviet threat of the Cold War. Focusing on the rise of China’s global economic and political power, its increased military spending and the link to the continued loss of American jobs, the segment continued to run until Dobbs left CNN in November of 2009. In “Red Storm Rising” segments, Dobbs continually referred to China as “Communist China,” condemning American “corporate supremacists” and politicians for supporting the free trade policies behind America’s trade deficit and China’s growth.

LexisNexis searches for printed news sources from 2000 through 2008 revealed that stories on China began to proliferate roughly in 2004 and 2005. Using interview recollections of news stories as a guide, I ran searches in the LexisNexis database using keywords for China, flu, security, recall, and Olympics. This resulted in 223 *New York Times* articles and 81 *USA Today* articles. Accessing back issues of newsmagazines on microfilm, I looked through each issue of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *BusinessWeek* from 2000 onward for cover stories, special reports, and articles on China. All articles were read and coded thematically. For *LDT*, LexisNexis transcripts of episodes containing the “Red Storm Rising” segment and references to “communist China” from 2005 through 2008 were read and coded, a total of 280 episodes.

Mediated Panic and the Rhetoric of Containment

In 2005 and 2006 *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *BusinessWeek* each printed numerous special reports or devoted special issues to China. PBS’s *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* produced a seven-part series, “China on the Rise,” described by PBS as “a seven-part series on the Asian nation’s rise as a global economic contender and America’s anxieties

¹⁶⁹ June 27, 2005.

that China will overtake the United States as a superpower in the 21st century.”¹⁷⁰ These texts were followed by continued special issues and reports in other media outlets, including *National Geographic*¹⁷¹ and the *New York Times*, during the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. In the span of three years, these reports, stories or programs functioned as special outlets of information: to explain the factors—open trade policies, undervalued currency, a massive, upwardly mobile population—behind China’s rise, as warnings over the ways in which China has developed (too fast, too unchecked), and to criticize and critique America’s own trade policies that have fostered China’s success.

As news about China proliferated in the years leading up to the Beijing Olympics, news texts took on instructive tones over the issues China faced.¹⁷² Producing economic projections, growth models, and predicting China’s obstacles on the path to modernization, news media provided critiques of China’s environment, political climate, financial concerns, and public health issues. By establishing a privileged distance between America and China, American news reports consistently shaped China as an inexperienced and pre-modern country, but also as an encroaching force that challenged America’s economic dominance, political power, and civility. These narrative frameworks placed Americans in a position to critique and strategize, while containing threat and managing anxieties through discussions of China’s inability to meet Western standards on broad issues like “health” and “the environment.”

¹⁷⁰ PBS, “Paul Solman Reports: China on the Rise,” Online NewsHour, accessed July 15, 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/china>.

¹⁷¹ National Geographic, *China: Inside the Dragon, Special Issue*, May 2008.

¹⁷² One *BusinessWeek* article offered, “To achieve high growth predictions, China... will have to overcome formidable challenges,” continuing to list the possibilities of political backlash, financial crisis, and even war (“Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons,” August 22, 2005).

It is, of course, a fact that China has a large and growing population, and a history of corrupt regulatory officials and human rights offenses. Its political and regulatory failures were, indeed, genuine concerns. Yet, in a follow-up interview, Chinese American Aaron explained why the news rhetoric about China is still important to understand, and how he feels it implicates Asian Americans:

Yes, there is a basis in reality. The regulation there *is* a lot more lax.... But at the same time, the popular opinion has tended to drift far more into the, “Chinese people in Chinese factories are crazy, they’re misbegotten, third-world pariahs,” almost. Just the idea that there’s someone else threatening Americans being number one. The idea that someone else is economically opposing...America makes it a lot easier to go to broad stereotypes.

Alex continued on this theme, focusing mostly on the use of “broad stereotypes” to explain the dynamic between the U.S. and China:

I mean, take...newsmagazines. They view China as a threat rather than, “Oh, another country is getting bigger.” They always have like, this dragon, fighting with U.S. symbols.

What these men implied was that, instead of focusing on the challenges—diseases, regulations, labor laws—that most developing countries face (the United States included), ostensibly objective news sources presented narratives that interviewees could identify as generalizations and speculations. Aaron and Alex have an acute sense that news narratives do more than just present facts. Rather, news stories’ focus on nationalism and threats to global dominance lend to a larger national discourse that transforms China into

a generalized “Asia,” promoting “broad stereotypes” which then become troubling for Asian Americans contending as racial minorities within a contradictory mediascape.

Interviewees’ lists of news events generated an abundance of news items and articles to analyze. Follow-up interviews and discussions with peer debriefers helped clear themes emerge. These themes, prevalent and intertwined, formed a contemporary anti-Chinese narrative that reflected the anxieties borne out of 19th century Chinese presence and Chinatowns in America. These themes promote a narrative of Orientalism writ large, as a way for the West to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the East.¹⁷³ The major themes that continually repeated themselves were:

- **Monstrosity** (or, “the octopus”; emphasizing the image of China as growing yet machine-like, monstrous organism, determined and all-encompassing);
- **Emphasis on predatory behavior** (related to the theme of monstrosity, this focuses on shaping China as having predatory qualities, such as ruthlessness, amorality, irrationality);
- **Contagion** (using language that identifies China as a source of contagion, whether biological or philosophical);
- **Panic of scale** (emphasizing China’s large population in terms of disproportionate growth, unstoppable expansion, and sheer enormity);
- **American vulnerability** (positioning America as a victim unable to defend itself from China).

In the years leading up to the 2008 Olympics, these themes were often intertwined and presented as subtle variations on the other.

¹⁷³ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

While studies such as Gitlin's have followed the trajectory of news themes based on their chronological development, I choose instead to organize this chapter by news event. This is primarily due to the organic nature in which interviewees recalled the news. All naturally turned to memorable news events, rather than identifying particular themes or narrative techniques used to describe those events. By following interviewees' recollections of the years leading up to the Olympics, we can see just how diffuse the themes about China are, how repetitive they are, and how they constitute a larger national narrative that shapes understandings of Asians and their relationship with America.

“Spreading its Tentacles”: The Looming Specter of China

By far, one of the most frequently discussed news items regarding Asia was China's growing economy, particularly in the context of America's economic woes. As Chinese American Francis explained, “[What's going on in Asia] is driving the face of America now. Because of the rise of China.” Interestingly, multiple interviewees discussed China's economic developments in the context of its military growth. Chinese American Avery described what he felt to be the climate of news coverage as well as national sentiment: “We're at the point with China where we're not openly warring with them, but we feel very anxious about them and their growth.” While the link between economic and military build-up may not have seemed entirely logical at the time of my interviews, my thematic analyses confirmed that these issues were indeed linked in the news. Mentions of China's rise included hyperbolic references to China's size, depictions of China as a monstrosity, and were often linked to discussions of military build-up and America's national security concerns.

In a May 3, 2005 special issue of *Newsweek* entitled “China’s Century,” a feature report discussed America’s key concerns over China’s rise, while announcing the country as “*the* powerful new force on the global scene.” Much of the news in 2005 seemed to pivot on determining just what shape China’s force would take. In June 2005, a special issue of *Time* featured a portrait of Chairman Mao on the cover, wearing a mandarin-collar shirt stamped with Louis Vuitton logos, “CHINA’S NEW REVOLUTION” emblazoned across his chest in large, capital letters. Inside, the accompanying photo essay explained, “A New China Rises.” This singular image encapsulated what Juan Williams, at the time a political analyst for National Public Radio, called “the global disconnect,” or “the two faces of China.”¹⁷⁴ Writing of his first trip to China, Williams mused on “cornerstone[s] of Chinese communism next to glossy shrines to capitalism” and the lack of a free press to explain how China was at odds with his Western sensibilities as a journalist and an American.

The first inklings of news concerning China’s growth point to a number of converging themes that shape China as, literally, a sizable threat. Using hyperbolic language, news texts took on a tone of alarm regarding China’s size and growth; focusing on the “global disconnect,” texts shaped China as philosophically and militaristically opposed to American values; these themes combine to create an image of China as a massive, monstrous octopus taking over the globe. The June 27, 2005 issue of *Time* devoted a section to “China by the Numbers,” in which a series of statistics detailed the size and scale of China’s influence. With some lighthearted facts—China consumed 20 percent of the world’s ice cream, had 350 million smokers (larger than America’s entire

¹⁷⁴ Juan Williams, “The Two Faces of China,” *USA Today*, January 23, 2008. Juan Williams was fired from National Public Radio after making an anti-Muslim comment in 2010. He was subsequently offered a multi-million dollar contract with FOX news.

population), 500 million estimated rural Chinese who have never brushed their teeth—others were more ominous: China was responsible for 66 percent of America’s counterfeit imports and had 700 ballistic missiles pointed at Taiwan. Facts related to the size of China’s military, as well as the rapid expansion of its construction efforts, linked China’s threat to the size of its population.

In trying to determine what China’s revolution actually was, news tended to focus on China’s military expansion. This was seen most prominently on *LDT*’s “Red Storm Rising” reports. On *LDT*, China’s military was discussed using discourses of monstrous enormity, as Dobbs described the “massive military buildup now underway in Communist China,” its “massive ongoing joint military exercises with Russia,”¹⁷⁵ and the fact that “China’s army stands at 2.3 million,”¹⁷⁶ for American audiences. Dobbs featured stories on China purchasing Israeli weapons¹⁷⁷ and Russian submarines,¹⁷⁸ citing China’s escalating nuclear capacity as “a threat to hundreds of American cities.”¹⁷⁹ In these stories, the biggest threat of China’s military was its sheer size, accompanied by the notion of an army of devotees to China’s communist—and thus inherently anti-American—philosophies. As CNN correspondent Christine Romans told Dobbs: “[China] is a country, Lou, that has an unwavering commitment to the national Chinese agenda.”¹⁸⁰ For Dobbs, the Chinese nation was unfit to be a player on the world stage:

¹⁷⁵ August 23, 2005.

¹⁷⁶ November 18, 2005. This makes China’s army almost 3.5 times larger than the U.S. Army which, according to its web site, consists of around 675,000 soldiers. “About the Army,” accessed March 5, 2010, <http://www.goarmy.com/about/personnel.html>.

¹⁷⁷ June 20, 2005.

¹⁷⁸ June 28, 2005.

¹⁷⁹ June 17, 2005.

¹⁸⁰ June 27, 2005.

playing by different rules it was, inherently and by choice, “an obstacle to U.S. and international efforts to enforce norms of acceptable behavior.”¹⁸¹

Bi-ethnic Ben, musing about the types of stories he saw in the news, linked China’s economic growth, American anxieties, and the military, in a few sentences:

China’s economic developments, and how they’re the downfall of the United States, the perceived military build-up of China; and they’re just a huge influence. I think it’s really just a concern of who’s in control... this concept of going to war with China.

While Ben felt that military engagements or an “all-out war” with China was untenable, he still felt that the news presented the possibility of China as a military threat. The general xenophobic culture that Ben felt surrounded by is linked to personal experiences that suggest a national discourse preoccupied with American defense tactics and overseas military threats. He shared: “Some people ask, ‘If we went to war with Korea, who would you fight for?’ [It] always pisses me off. People ask, ‘North or South?’ Yes. I’m a fucking sleeper spy from North Korea, and I’m going to tell you that.” Despite being a U.S. citizen and highly patriotic, Ben feels that larger national discourses about foreign threats shape how he is seen in America. Korean American Tom, for example, described a fight with a fellow classmate after Korean American Seung-Hui Cho went on a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech University: “One guy asked, ‘Are you going to shoot me now? Are you going to kill me now? Are you going to kill everyone?’” For Tom and other interviewees, these reactions to large national news events shows how easy it is for generalizations and stereotypes to emerge. Tom explained what he perceived to be the stream of consciousness that shapes how people read him: “It just dwells inside them:

¹⁸¹ Kitty Pilgrim, July 29, 2005.

‘Oh, this guy’s Korean. Korea, North Korean, North Korea, Korean War, Kim Jong-Il, nuclear bombs.’” Overall, informants felt that the new stories in the years leading up to their years in college created the same climate of suspicion, fear and anxiety, but with a focus on China.

The news sources in this chapter, then, suggest that news media work to define the social categories in which Asian Americans find themselves situated. In the 2000s and in the context of multiple stories focused on China, series like *LDT*’s “Red Storm Rising” helped to perpetuate a Manichaeian division of world powers. *LDT* shaped China as oppositional to the Western image of international diplomacy and democracy, by referring to its actions as self-serving, aggressive, and suspicious. Casting China as a monolithic, rigid and determined country ignoring the rest of the world’s rules, correspondent Romans reported that China is a land with “no rule of law,”¹⁸² and “its own definition of democracy.”¹⁸³ In addition, On June 27, 2005 *LDT* ran a special report on the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC)’s bid for American energy company Unocal, describing China’s ostensibly sudden burst of competitiveness as “an aggressive grab” for “a Chinese takeover.” Peter Leitner, from the Center of Advanced Defense Studies called the bid a move toward “world domination, or at least domination over the United States.”¹⁸⁴ In an interview with Richard D’Amato of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Dobbs asked the rhetorical question, “Their policy makers, leaders, are strategic in terms of economics, politics and military. They see little distinction amongst those three elements of their strategy, correct?” Continuing with a discussion of China’s “seamless patchwork” of economic, political and military

¹⁸² November 15, 2005.

¹⁸³ November 17, 2005.

¹⁸⁴ June 28, 2005.

needs and growth, Dobbs and his guests shaped Chinese leaders as cunning strategists using American companies for personal gain. R. James Woolsey, former head of the CIA, at a Congressional hearing on the matter a month later, furthered the formulation of China as untrustworthy. Woolsey named China the “worst of the worst” of the remaining world dictatorships, not to be trusted since it “more or less invented strategy some thousands of years ago.”¹⁸⁵

By referring to China’s bid for Unocal and other oil companies as an “energy assault,”¹⁸⁶ its “aggressive attempt to take control”¹⁸⁷ and “aggressive nationalistic energy policy,”¹⁸⁸ as well as a communist government that would “do anything to suit its needs,”¹⁸⁹ “Red Storm Rising” presented China as an aggressor of nonconsensual brutality. Constant references to an incessant need for energy to fuel growth imbued China’s activities with biological imagery.¹⁹⁰ This was fully realized in an interview with U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-New Jersey), who opined:

In an octopus-like way, China is spreading its tentacles and forging friendship where they ask no questions about human rights, but then take these very valuable minerals—oil and the like—and in exchange provide weapons and cash.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ June 28, 2005. Woolsey was also found on *LDT* on August 24, 2007 using similar rhetoric to explain Iranian nuclear weaponry programs: “The Persians invented chess and the Iranians are doing a pretty good job of moving their pieces -- Muqtada al-Sadr and those explosive devices, and Hamas and Hezbollah around to protect their queen, which is their most lethal piece -- their nuclear weapons program.”

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Kitty Pilgrim, December 1, 2005.

¹⁸⁹ December 13, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ July 29, 2005; August 22, 2005.

¹⁹¹ November 29, 2005.

References to China's "voracious appetite for weaponry,"¹⁹² and to "the Middle Kingdom's thirst for energy"¹⁹³ not only continued Orientalist discourse but imbued China with a biological yet also machine-like imagery, dehumanizing it to a living, growing, expanding organism, a threat easy for all to identify.¹⁹⁴

In constant references to China's size and its needs for everything from oil to ice cream, news reports described China as—to use a term from *BusinessWeek*, "a big, dirty growth engine."¹⁹⁵ In *Newsweek*, Fareed Zakaria warned readers, "You cannot switch it [China] off."¹⁹⁶ This threat was reinforced by a hyperbolic panic of scale, as seen in Zakaria's descriptions of China's size: "It is a country whose scale dwarfs the United States.... Now the very size and scale that seemed so alluring is beginning to look ominous."¹⁹⁷ The *New York Times* wrote of the dangers of an "emerging dragon,"¹⁹⁸ while *USA Today* compared the country to a "sleeping giant:"

[The] sleeping giant now is wide awake.... The Chinese are coming on strong. Their economy has been the fastest growing in the world during the past decade. Their population is 4.5 times ours. Their military is by far the world's biggest. Just last week, they put a man in space, something we no longer are able to do unless we hitchhike on a Russian ship.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² June 28, 2005.

¹⁹³ Clive McDonnell, "Oil-Thirsty China Reaches for Unocal," *BusinessWeek*, June 23, 2005.

¹⁹⁴ Erin Seuter and Deborah Wills, "Discourses of Dehumanization: Enemy Construction and Canadian Media Complicity in the Framing of the War on Terror," (paper presented at the Canadian Communication Association, Ottawa, Canada, 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Frederick Balfour, "A Big, Dirty Growth Engine," *BusinessWeek*, August 22, 2005.

¹⁹⁶ "Does the Future Belong to China", 38.

¹⁹⁷ "Does the Future Belong to China", 28.

¹⁹⁸ Anne Wu, "Whispers That May Wake the Dragons," *The New York Times*, August 6, 2004.

¹⁹⁹ Al Neuharth, "Asia Showed Bush Giant China Awake." *USA Today*, October 24, 2003.

The language in these texts discussed China's surge toward modernization juxtaposed against a stagnant America. China became an unstoppable, encroaching force threatening the boundaries of American logic and standards.

“Learning How to Make Itself More Infectious”: H5N1, SARS, and the Boundaries of Sickness

Outbreak

Also threatening American boundaries in the 2000s was the emergence of avian influenza (H5N1). The major news cycle for avian influenza began in July of 2005, prompting concerns of a global, viral pandemic.²⁰⁰ As the virus took hold in China, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, health officials from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) began to show concern about animal-to-human contact and the role of migratory birds in spreading the disease to Western countries: first Europe, then potentially America. Filipino American Dean did not name avian flu as a memorable news event at first, but immediately jumped—literally, almost jumped out of his chair—to it when I asked if he thought news events abroad influenced how people viewed Asians in the U.S.

Yes! One that I didn't mention was the avian flu. This supposedly started because of how people think Asians are unclean in other countries.

Because [Asians] live with livestock, and partly what comes from people living on top of each other, how things spread. So that had a big sense of what I think people view Asian Americans as.

²⁰⁰ Once an ostensibly weaker strain of the flu reached Turkey by 2006, avian flu stories began to drop off and newsmagazines and programs began to focus their sights on other stories.

Pointing to “how people think Asians are unclean,” Dean provided an example of how he felt the news shaped Asians as culturally different from Americans. Other interviewees linked news on H5N1 to stereotypes of Asian exoticism; it became clear that for this news event, the paradox of a modern yet backwards China—diseased yet linked in to a global network—rose to the forefront.

While the first outbreaks of H5N1 were reported in Vietnam and Thailand,²⁰¹ the first mention of avian flu on *LDT* was part of a “Red Storm Rising” segment on a mysterious pig disease that had resulted in human deaths.²⁰² Correspondent Kitty Pilgrim explained to Americans, “the disease comes from eating or slaughtering sick pigs, which is commonly done in rural China. No news sources discussed the fact that developing countries, including the United States, have contended with outbreaks of disease, ranging from tuberculosis to syphilis. Rather, Pilgrim’s report on a disease (eventually found to be unrelated to H5N1) that came from “common” rural practices constructed China, and its people, as naturally unclean and uncivilized.

China’s health problems were also amplified by linkages to previous China-related illnesses, as a WHO spokesman interviewed on *LDT* related: “I think the first thing that pops into everyone’s mind is avian influenza, and then comes SARS.”²⁰³ Referring to the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was a widespread tactic in news reports, as critiques of China’s handling of SARS in 2003 informed critiques of H5N1 in 2005. Constant references to China’s attempts at cover-ups rampant during the SARS outbreak in 2003, were at the forefront of H5N1

²⁰¹ World Health Organization, “Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A (H5N1),” Global Alert and Response,” accessed November 3, 2009, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en.

²⁰² July 28, 2005.

²⁰³ Ibid.

discussions. *The New York Times* wrote about the first suspected cases of avian flu in late October 2005, and China reported its first official cases of the disease a few weeks later on November 16, 2005. The newspaper labeled China's report as a "potentially far-reaching change in how China handles the emergence of new diseases," contrasting the country's information-sharing to the tight-lipped secrecy with which it handled SARS in 2003.²⁰⁴ With WHO officials stating that the low number of reported Chinese cases was more likely due to inadequate rural health care reporting rather than a propaganda effort of the Chinese government,²⁰⁵ alarmist news was not as dominant as it was with SARS.

The linkages made between avian flu and SARS were more prevalent in magazines, which published special reports and columns with hypothetical scenarios of a global virus. On May 5, 2003, *Time* magazine devoted a special issue entirely to SARS. In it, writers focused on the severe global impact of the SARS outbreak, which would later prime health officials and politicians to voice concerns over the economic implications of an H5N1 pandemic. The magazine compared China, the source of the outbreak, to Toronto, the first non-Asian city to report cases SARS. A self-proclaimed "investigation into what went wrong," the article presented the China and Toronto cases in a point-counterpoint comparison style. Author Steven Frank wrote, "bad luck explains most of Toronto's tale, but not all of it."²⁰⁶ With a superficial description of how a Chinese hospital patient infected a neighboring patient who then went on to spread SARS, Frank declared that "most" of Toronto's SARS experience was a result of mere misfortune. By relegating the sickness and its spread to chance encounters and bad

²⁰⁴ Keith Bradsher, "China Confirms its First 3 Cases of Bird Flu Infecting People," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2005.

²⁰⁵ Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Experts Doubt Bird Flu Tallies from China and Elsewhere," *The New York Times*, December 2, 2005.

²⁰⁶ Steven Frank. "A Tale of Two Countries: Toronto," *Time*, May 5, 2003, 56.

timing, this narrative relieves Toronto officials and medical practitioners from any failure in oversight or agency.

Romesh Ratnesar and Hannah Beech's story on China, on the other hand, was more detailed than Frank's, with quotes from various sources and a tone of suspicion that shaped China as an untrustworthy harbinger of disease and deception. The juxtaposition of these stories identified Chinese negligence and the self-serving interests of the Communist party—rather than the “bad luck” of Toronto's officials—as the reason behind the SARS epidemic set the stage for discussions of avian flu only a few years later. Ratnesar and Beech described China as “scenes of calm mask[ing] a quiet frenzy,” and government officials’ “stonewalling,”²⁰⁷ attempts to “preserve [Shanghai's] ‘SARS-free’ reputation at any cost,”²⁰⁸ and “spreading false assurances.”²⁰⁹ References to Chinese deception were echoed in emphasis throughout the magazine: for example, in his letter to readers, managing editor James Kelley relayed the story of how 31 infected hospital workers were “loaded into ambulances and driven around until inspectors left.”²¹⁰ On *LDT*, CNN correspondents reported on bodies cremated before adequate samples could be taken,²¹¹ and interviewees suggested that China's number of reported cases was suspiciously low.²¹²

While these events may certainly have occurred, the juxtaposition of China (East) and Canada (West) highlighted China's deception as antithetical to the rest of the world's standards of cooperation, transparency, and public health. Readers of *The New York*

²⁰⁷ Romesh Ratnesar and Hannah Beech, “A Tale of Two Countries: China,” *Time*, May 5, 2003, 54.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ James Kelley, “To Our Readers.” *Time*, May 5, 2003, 8.

²¹¹ November 17, 2005.

²¹² November 28, 2005.

Times were led to remember China's deceptive government in an article on avian flu, which recalled how China hid knowledge of SARS for four months, until it became an epidemic.²¹³ A 2003 article on SARS highlighting China's shameful behavior detailed how CDC officials were invited to China only to be denied access to patients and information. "It was the Asian cultural thing of not wanting to say no," a CDC spokesman declared. "Chinese leaders are so obsessed with maintaining social order," *Newsweek* wrote, "that they may opt to sacrifice transparency for the sake of keeping citizens blissfully in the dark." Dobbs used the H5N1 outbreak to reiterate that China did not play by the world's rules: "As the world prepares for the possibility of a bird flu epidemic, there is one country holding out vital cooperation, globally, on bird flu. The country is, of course, China."²¹⁴ That Dobbs suggests that China is "of course" the usual suspect reconfirms China's position as a natural enemy from whom America needs to be shielded, something increasingly difficult in a global era.

As the mobility of avian flu became increasingly possible, the news narrative became one of spread and containment. Tom, recalling this moment in the news, explained the concerns over the mobility of people and diseases:

Because it originated from there, and in Asia, if you're from Hong Kong, then Hong Kong is so dense, it goes everywhere in Asia. Then it's bound to spread very quickly. And from there, obviously, it was spread from there to another country. So in the end, back then [Americans] thought that we were kind of dangerous. They wouldn't really want to interact with us... [But] they aren't as paranoid as they were back then. I mean, they

²¹³ Bradsher, "China Confirms."

²¹⁴ November 17, 2005.

still – it was kind of like one of those thoughts that lasted there for maybe about ten minutes when they saw me.

Even Tom, whose academic interests in health care helped him understand the spread of outbreaks, still felt implicated by the discourses surrounding H5N1. In news sources, the impact of these diseases was inherently linked to the global(ized) mobility of diseased Chinese to other countries—namely, America.

In these contexts, the viral pandemic was a threat to America’s public health as well as its corporate and economic security. The rhetoric of containment was deployed in two ways throughout media stories: to handle the spread of the disease and people, and to paint the pandemic as a national security issue. Discussions of China’s interconnectedness in a global economy linked the narrative of disease to the discourses of globalization and potential contamination by a consistently growing, mobile population. As *Time*’s Bryan Walsh recounted:

Chances are your shirt, your pants and your underwear all came from southern China, the new manufacturing center of the world. Add one more export: your flu virus. With its dense populations of people and animals trading germs back and forth, southern China has been the traditional birthplace of influenza, including the nasty strain of H5N1 bird flu that’s keeping public-health officials awake at night.²¹⁵

Here, global trade networks were presented as vulnerable to the flow of germs and tainted people. The inflated, sensationalized panic over globalization and diseases implied that Americans could get the flu simply by buying something made in China; it

²¹⁵ Bryan Walsh. “The Bird Flu Hunter,” *Time*, October 31, 2005, accessed July 10, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1124290,00.html>.

was a small chance, but a chance nonetheless, that the “new manufacturing center of the world” could also manufacture a disease of epic proportions. For Japanese American Randy, the presumed fears about the spread of H5N1 from products also extended to fears about Asians and Asian Americans:

I remember how people were afraid of Asians, were afraid of them spreading it. Or like, just looking at how people viewed me... they were scared of Asians having the bird flu.

In detailing H5N1’s global threat, *Newsweek* interviewed the author of *An Investor’s Guide to the Avian Flu* who declared, “Now, because of global supply chains, even people who are nowhere near being infected are going to suffer.” By detailing the threat to Americans who “are nowhere near being infected”—whether this means they are not global travelers, or live in all-white areas, was not specified—news sources played to hypothetical fears of contaminated people and products coming into the U.S.: Americans did not need to seek out the virus; it would seek out them. As *LDT*’s Kitty Pilgrim reported, “The problem with the new diseases... is that they are an airplane ride away from anywhere.”²¹⁶

In imagining the extent of devastation such a pandemic would cause, *Time* propagated hyper-inflated speculation by likening the potential disaster to Hurricane Katrina on a national level. The magazine warned that the flu could possibly make one third of the world’s population sick at one time;²¹⁷ in a similar move to quantify the potential deadliness of the disease, *Newsweek* wrote that avian flu “*could*, in the worst

²¹⁶ July 28, 2005.

²¹⁷ Bryan Walsh, “A Threat That Knows No Boundaries,” *Time*, December 6, 2004, accessed July 10, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,880311,00.html>.

case, kill as many people in a few months as AIDS has done in two decades,”²¹⁸ and that it *could* decimate “2.5 percent of the world’s population—in a matter of months.”²¹⁹

Linking the disease to a war on America’s health, avian flu was described as “the threat that knows no boundaries.” America was presented as a victim as *Time*’s mention of the 85% drop in North American airline bookings as part of the “surprising [economic] impact of SARS.”²²⁰

The Hot Zone

China was described as not only politically responsible for the spread of disease, but also its origins: in this discourse, news texts continually named China was the natural birthplace for disease. *Newsweek*’s Zakaria explained, “China is the natural habitat of the influenza virus.... Across thousands of homes in China every day, chickens are slaughtered in highly unhygienic ways.”²²¹ Similarly, a *New York Times* article claimed that “China is known as an incubator for diseases,” with no explanation as to why.²²² These moves make a commonsense narrative of China as provincial, unhygienic, and naturally contaminated: a “natural” incubator of disease.

In one early *Time* report, protectionist impulses went so far as to use the language of miscegenation, detailing the hypothetical threat of “mixing” Chinese germs and Western bodies:

²¹⁸ Jeff Adler and Underwood, Anne. “The Race Against Avian Flu,” *Newsweek*, October 17, 2005, accessed July 10, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/50852>. Emphasis added.

²¹⁹ Jeff Adler, “The Fight Against the Flu,” *Newsweek*, October 31, 2005, accessed July 10, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/50843>.

²²⁰ *Time*, May 5, 2003.

²²¹ Fareed Zakaria, “A Threat Worse than Terror,” *Newsweek*, October 31, 2005, accessed July 10, 2010 <http://www.newsweek.com/id/50766>.

²²² Jim Yardley, “W.H.O. Asks China to Conduct More Tests to Determine Whether Girl Died of Bird Flu,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 2005.

...the risk to Westerners who do not come into direct contact with Asian birds is infinitesimal, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease control. But the farther the virus spreads, and the more people who become infected with it, the greater the risk.... The resulting hybrid could be both deadly and virulent. Even if it weren't immediately contagious, it could quickly evolve.²²³

Despite highlighting the “infinitesimal” chance of coming into contact with H5N1, the article focused instead on presumed infection. The potential damages of a global pandemic became increasingly conjectural and hyperbolic as articles began to detail the possibility and consequences of a global pandemic, as well as how to contain it. The presumption about contamination and the hyperbole surrounding the affects of H5N1 was also reflected in the gallows humor and social experiences of Asian American interviewees. Nick shared, “I guess [whites] were scared of Asians having the bird flu. My friends used to joke with each other about it, like, ‘You’ve got bird flu!’ It was a joke...but I guess also rooted in reality.” These types of jokes were common amongst several interviewees and their Asian American peers; these recollections suggest how diffuse the fears pervading the stories around H5N1 became, and how Asian American men, while joking about the possibility of being carriers, knew it was how they were read by others they met.

That H5N1 could infiltrate America’s borders at any time prompted a call for America to shift from being a passive victim to a pro-active defender. China was described in connection with an agentive, determined virus “learning how to make itself

²²³ Anthony Spaeth, Andrew Perrin, Ben Ya Pad, Karl Greenfeld, Bryan Walsh, and David Bjerklie, “Revenge Of the Birds,” *Time*, February 9, 2004, accessed July 10, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,993277,00.html>.

more infectious,”²²⁴ which not only anthropomorphized the virus but also reinforced the image of China as an organic, biological, growing threat too large to comprehend.

Claiming to know “the TRUTH about SARS,” *Time* explained, “the deadly respiratory illness may have started in a rural province of China, but its impact—economic and otherwise—is rippling around the world, spreading even faster than the virus that causes it.”²²⁵ In these anxieties over global impact, one might imagine that H5N1 became interchangeable with China itself, as a country learning to become more competitive and spreading influence across the globe.

In reports on the United States’ readiness for an avian flu outbreak, America’s medical infrastructure and emergency preparedness system was discussed in military terms; at its head, Commander in Chief George W. Bush. The President’s report on handling the outbreak detailed a national strategy involving “surveillance and detection,” and “response and containment.”²²⁶ Ultimately, these narratives aimed to protect America’s borders and workers by containing China’s mobility and global reach. Framing H5N1 as a national security issue threat—as seen in Fareed Zakaria’s move to claim the disease as “a threat worse than terror”—allowed for discussions to move into the realm of national security and protectionist efforts. The threatening combination of Chinese germs in Western spaces bodies led to the call to close borders and promoted a trend of “staying local.”

“Where Do You Draw the Line Between Cautionary and Crazy?”: Product Recalls

²²⁴ *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, November 28, 2005.

²²⁵ Michael D. Lemonick and Alice Park, “The Truth About SARS.” *Time*, May 5, 2003, 50.

²²⁶ Mike Allen. “Bush v. Bird Flu,” *Time*, November 1, 2005, accessed July 10, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1125104,00.html>.

In 2007, toy company Mattell conducted the largest recall in its history.²²⁷ The company recalled 83 types of toys including remote airplanes, easy bake ovens, toy grills, and a line of Thomas the Tank Engine trains.²²⁸ This was accompanied by a surge of news articles on other contaminated Chinese products—recalls had been called on everything from pet food and tires,²²⁹ to children’s jewelry and toothpaste²³⁰— as well as consumer anxieties and reactions including purchasing lead-testing kits for home use.²³¹ “No one wants to be a paranoid parent,” a concerned mother told the *New York Times*. “But,” she added, “Where do you draw the line between cautionary and crazy?”²³²

These news stories again used the converging themes of contagion and panic of scale, as well as an innocent America, to support protectionist policies. Rather than discussing the consequences of un- or under-regulated industries, the major theme in most news stories surrounding these issues tended to focus on China as an intentionally lawless place. The construction of America as a victim depended on the subsequent construction of China as irresponsible, reckless, and ruthless.

For Chinese American Jimmy, the coverage of China’s massive product recalls reinforced a connotative link between contamination and “Orientals”:

[These stories] definitely impact how non-Asian Americans, and arguably some Asian Americans, view China and the untrustworthiness of its products. I do believe that it distinguishes some people’s analysis of how Asians are viewed in America.

²²⁷ David Barboza, “Owner of Chinese Toy Factory Commits Suicide,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2007.

²²⁸ Mindy Fetterman, Greg Farrell and Laura Petrecca, “Recall of More China-Made Toys Unnerves Parents,” *USA Today*, August 3, 2007.

²²⁹ Louise Story, “Lead Paint Prompts Mattel to Recall 967,000 Toys,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2007.

²³⁰ Louise Story and David Barboza, “19 Million Toys Sent from China,” *New York Times*, August 15, 2007.

²³¹ Adam Newman, “What’s a Parent to Do?” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2007.

²³² *Ibid.*

Indian American Partha, thinking through the meanings and narratives he saw in the news, elaborated on this point: “People might – maybe falsely—think that Chinese people may have some of the qualities of the Chinese government, Chinese society. They might think, ‘Maybe they like to be more this way because China’s like this way, or that way.’ They might associate the two.” Coverage on China’s practices did not merely hinge on a distrust of China; as Partha and Jimmy identify, the perceived suspicion and blame from these stories could extend to Asian Americans as a whole.

Combined, narratives of product recalls and H5N1 bolstered the call for protectionism as not only matters of national security, but also patriotism. Products tainted by chemicals, imported to America and bought for American homes and children, elevated the “innocent American” theme and spurred an intense backlash to the “Made in China” label. The focus on a “buy local” movement, which newspapers mostly depicted through interviews with consumers, empowered patriotic consumers to protect American families and workers. *USA Today*, for example, interviewed Sara Bongioni, whose book *A Year Without ‘Made in China’* detailed her family’s year-long boycott of Chinese goods. In the same article, consumers declared, “I am finding it hard to trust China,” and, “If I can, I’d prefer to buy American to support workers here.”²³³ While more moderate interviewees for *The New York Times* were less concerned over the quality of Chinese goods, one buyer explained the difficulties of finding American-made products: “I bought a drill press. I decided to buy American. So I bought the Craftsman label and when I got home I saw on the box it was made in China.” Another in declared that, “With cars and things that cost a lot, I prefer to buy American-made.”²³⁴

²³³ Mindy Fetterman, et al. “Recall of More China-made Toys.”

²³⁴ “Concern over Quality Isn’t Limited to China.” *New York Times*, October 22, 2007.

With buyers “scrutinizing labels to ensure that what they [bought was] not produced in China,”²³⁵ products “Not Made in China”²³⁶ gained legitimacy—American-made products were cast as superior (read: cleaner) products. This clean/unclean dichotomy was seen when the move to “Buy American” reached its peak in the 2007 holiday season, where reports suggested that recalls would leave “the safest,”²³⁷ American-made toys in stores. Despite this, *USA Today* declared, “The ‘anti-China Christmas’ didn’t come to pass.... Recalls have had virtually no effect on toy sales.”²³⁸ In this context, the even the most ardent, patriotic American consumer could not escape the grip China had on the American market. Indeed, the wide-reaching recall brought to light China’s hold on the world’s manufacturing, with a June 19, 2007 *New York Times* article reporting that “China is responsible for about 60 percent of all product recalls, compared with 36 percent in 2000.”²³⁹ In focusing on the size and influence of China’s manufacturing system, news stories on the massive toy recall framed China as a threat that could not be contained. “Toys made in China make up 70 to 80 percent of the toys sold in the country,” the *New York Times* declared.²⁴⁰ *Newsweek* referred to China as “the workshop of the world,”²⁴¹ *BusinessWeek* “the global factory,”²⁴² and the *New York Times* “the world’s toy chest.”²⁴³

²³⁵ Coco Masters, “Japan, China Head Off a Dumpling War,” *Time*, February 7, 2008, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1710742,00.html>.

²³⁶ John Carey, “NOT Made in China,” *BusinessWeek*, July 30, 2007, accessed October 8, 2010, http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_31/b4044060.htm.

²³⁷ Jyoti Thottam, “This Christmas, a Lump of Lead?” *Time*, September 6, 2007, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1659711,00.html>.

²³⁸ Mindy Fetterman, “Traditional Toys Sales Skirt China Recalls,” *USA Today*, December 24, 2007.

²³⁹ Eric S. Lipton and David Barboza, “As More Toys Are Recalled, the Trail Ends in China,” *New York Times*, June 19, 2007.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Fareed Zakaria, “Does the Future Belong to China?”

²⁴² Jeremy Quittner, “The China Code,” *BusinessWeek*, August 17, 2007, accessed October 8, 2010, http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/aug2007/sb2007089_716295.htm.

²⁴³ Lipton and Barboza, “Trail Ends in China.”

Within these depictions of China's global reach was the discussion of China's loose safety standards, a combination against which the Americans could not defend themselves. Also adding to a discourse of an innocent America, seen above, was the prominent focus on American families and safety. In an October 19 special report on the decline of American manufacturing jobs, correspondent Kitty Pilgrim walked through an American house, telling viewers:

In a typical American home, nearly everything is made in China.

Everything on this table, in the kitchen, accessories, home office:

Americans are increasingly addicted to Chinese products. The greatest irony? This "Made in America" sign was made in China.

The ubiquity of Chinese-made products also lent to a certain degree of visibility for Asian Americans like Young Min. A Korean American, Young Min shared numerous instances of when he had been mistaken as Chinese. He attributes this to the fact that "it's kind of true that there's so many more Chinese people in the United States [than before]...and because everything is now made in China." Young Min's rationalization suggests how global flows of labor and manufacturing affect how he is viewed, and why he thinks he is viewed that way. Feeling that China-made products are everywhere, Young Min believes that the same logic is applied to Asians in America: that the assumption is that they, too, are "Made in China."

"Red Storm Rising" combined the image of Chinese manufacturers sneaking their way in to American homes with that of contaminated and diseased, or counterfeit, products.²⁴⁴ On *LDT*, Dobbs and his various correspondents referred to Chinese imports

²⁴⁴ The news stories on collided in December of 2005 when customs agents seized a shipment of fake "generic" Tamiflu, an antiviral influenza drug, in San Francisco. Diana Walsh, "Customs Seizes Fake

as a “flood,” but also applied the contagion theme by calling Chinese goods “an epidemic,”²⁴⁵ and “an addiction.”²⁴⁶ Introducing a segment on the decline of American-made products, Dobbs lamented over “America’s dangerous addiction to cheap Chinese goods. From textiles to electronics, American consumers want them and China is more than willing to sell them.”²⁴⁷ Here, the rhetorical turn cast America as an addict. Some news sources explained the presence of contaminated goods in American stores as America’s own fault, due to a self-policed toy industry,²⁴⁸ outdated safety policies,²⁴⁹ and consumers’ and corporations’ desire for cheap goods. However, self-critique never lasted long, with news texts describing America’s role as consumer as a position of vulnerability and innocence; the teenage drug addict who just didn’t know any better. As one *Time* reporter quoted, “Consumers are the canary in the coal mine for this [global trading] system.”²⁵⁰

Summing up his thoughts on these news events, Chinese American Bobby confirmed the sense of feeling conscribed by discourses of ruthlessness and panic in the news:

When people have a specific thing like, “Things from this country aren’t good,” then it might sometimes be, “Well, the only reason they’re not

Tamiflu,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 19, 2005, accessed November 1, 2009, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article/article?f=c/a/2005/12/19/BAGGFGA9F11.DTL>. Guest host Kitty Pilgrim reported “new concerns about dangerous, out-of-control imports from communist China.” A breaking news report, CNN correspondent Bill Tucker did not have much to inform viewers of in the segment, such as “who sent these counterfeit doses of Tamiflu, [or] where they came from. Only that the instructions on the box are written in Chinese.” At the end of a year’s reporting on China, *LDT* combined disease, counterfeit goods, and Chinese imports as a powerful contagion to the American way of life. (December 19, 2009).

²⁴⁵ September 14, 2005.

²⁴⁶ October 19, 2005.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Lipton and Barboza, “Trail Ends in China.”

²⁴⁹ “China’s Shoddy Standards Threaten U.S. Consumers,” *USA Today*, July 10, 2007.

²⁵⁰ Jyoti Thottam, “The Growing Dangers of China Trade,” *Time*, 28 June 28, 2007, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1638436,00.html>.

good is because the people who made them aren't good," you know? So then it might be, "Oh, well, Chinese people aren't very careful with making their toys or careful in evaluating what they put in their toys." So, you can see how that could affect me negatively.

Here, Bobby anticipated that some of the descriptions found in the news would affect how he would be interpreted as an Asian in America. Indeed, more in-depth reporting on a Chinese government "inured to reports of official venality,"²⁵¹ a business community of "unscrupulous producers,"²⁵² and manufacturers "uninhibited by regulation [or] lawsuits."²⁵³ This language often absolved Americans from any blame surrounding the purchase of tainted goods by focusing instead on the ruthless competition and amoral practices of the Chinese.

"The Big Red Machine": China and the Olympics

The Olympic Games were also framed as somehow tainted or counterfeit. By 2008, what *USA Today* described as "a growing United States populist mood against China" had made the themes of China as a massive, monstrous, contaminated threat part of a common-sense narrative. Even Brad discussed the Olympics in terms of the "two faces" of China that Juan Williams discovered upon his visit to the country. Describing coverage of the Olympic host, Brad identified two dominant images he encountered: "One of China putting on a very spectacular Olympic event, being a very advanced, industrialized nation, and then on the flip side, being kind of backwards and corrupt, and not being able to regulate itself." When asked to elaborate upon these images, Brad tied it

²⁵¹ Simon Elegant, "A Chinese Regulator Sentenced to Die," *Time*, May 29, 2007, accessed October 8, 2010 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1626042,00.html>.

²⁵² Jessie Jiang, "China's Rage over Toxic Baby Milk." *Time*, September 18, 2008, accessed October 8, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1842727,00.html>.

²⁵³ Thottam, "The Growing Dangers."

all together: he felt that the coverage surrounding avian flu and product recalls presented a “backwards and corrupt” China, while the focus on its military and economic growth, as well as its key place in global networks, presented an “advanced, industrialized nation.” Given the amount of news concerning China since 2005, the 2008 Olympics opening ceremonies were a way for China to save face in the aftermath of the negativity surrounding product recalls.²⁵⁴

The 2008 Olympics were, by far, hailed as an unprecedented spectacle of China, its build-up and unveiling broadcast around the world. News sources discussed China’s rapid preparations for the Olympic Games as a metaphor for the country’s rise in the global economy; as NBC China analyst Joshua Cooper Ramo explained to television audiences before the ceremony, “Some of the energy we feel here tonight is the nervousness of a nation about to put a match to the fuse of a rocket.”²⁵⁵ As interviewees’ conversations turned to the Olympic games, it was clear that the interpretations of China and the symbolism of the Olympics as a media event were still vexed. Chinese American Hugh told me that he juggled two perspectives:

There are two views. The Olympics brought into mind that Asians can do great things. But I think it also reinforced some stereotypes. Like when you had all these thousands of men [in the Opening Ceremony], they were just submissive men in exotic costumes, going in unison, with no individuality. I think it demeaned their specific roles.

Chinese American Hugh offered an interpretation of the thousands of performers during the Olympic Opening Ceremony that was reflected in the newspaper coverage of the

²⁵⁴ Calum MacLeod and Paul Wiseman, “Whatever it Takes, China Aims for Dazzling Games,” *USA Today*, August 6, 2007.

²⁵⁵ August 8, 2008.

Games. “China and the Olympics were actually made for each other,” *The New York Times* offered. “There may not be much left of the ideological aspects of communism, but mass mobilization and control are still very much Chinese specialties.”²⁵⁶ Seen in the NBC commentary that began this chapter, NBC anchors noted the choreography of the Opening Ceremonies, but consistently marveled at the display of discipline and control of dancers who could move in precision without the aid of a director on the stadium floor.

“Obviously, they’re not going to put together something crappy,” Chinese American Avery mused, as he recalled the Olympics. While more ambivalent toward the Olympics coverage, Avery shared how his mother believed that the ceremonies were designed “to show the world that China is a strong, new nation.” Avery’s mother was not the only one to see the political posturing. The *New York Times* also labeled the opening ceremonies as the ultimate display of “maximalist preparations” to showcase the nation’s unity, seen in its performers’ movements, and prosperity, seen in the modern buildings constructed for the Olympics.²⁵⁷ Korean American Phil saw the same message in the opening ceremonies as the *New York Times*: “I think people were surprised, how much [China] advanced as a country. And how much of a powerhouse they’ve become. They are just as competitive, wealthy, and powerful as America.” Francis agreed, concluding, “China wouldn’t have made it such an elaborate event if not for the economic crisis, and knowing there’s a lot of uncertainty, in America.”

Continuing to juxtapose the image of an advanced nation and its global rise, news sources focused on images and language to shape China as completely antithetical to America. In the lead-up to and coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, news media

²⁵⁶ Ian Burma, “Political Games,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2007.

²⁵⁷ Tom Scocca, “Letter from Beijing,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2008.

shaped China's Olympic preparations and goals as again ruthless and aggressive. Most notably, *USA Today* appealed to American nationalist sentiment by alluding to national conflicts like the Cold War and WWII. A series of articles compared and conflated China with Nazi Germany, and promoted imagery of China's authoritarian capitalism: describing the scene at the Beijing torch relay, *USA Today* wrote of a "sea of red Chinese flags and plenty of red Coca-Cola flags, too."²⁵⁸ *USA Today* took the lead in covering the debate over whether or not the U.S. should boycott the Opening Ceremonies, quickly linking 2008 Games to the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the Chinese to the Nazis.

In a blatant move, *USA Today* published a letter written by U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) calling for a boycott of the Opening Ceremony:

In 1936, the world made the mistake of providing Adolf Hitler with a global platform to showcase his fascist propaganda by participating in the Olympics hosted by Nazi Germany. It was wrong to support the Olympic venue then, and it's wrong for the United States to support this prestigious event being held in a similarly fascist regime in 2008.²⁵⁹

The comparisons of these "similarly fascist regimes" were even reinforced in moments of ostensible objectivity. The day before the Games began, *USA Today* printed a back-and-forth between conservative and liberal columnists. Discussing China's move to censor international journalists at the Olympics, they eventually came together to agree that, "Like the Nazis, the Communist Chinese lie to preserve their power and privilege."²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Calum MacLeod, "What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been: Olympic Torch Nears the End of its Journey," *USA Today*, August 6, 2008.

²⁵⁹ Dana Rohrabacher, "Wrong Then, Wrong Now: China Shouldn't Participate in Games Hosted By an Abuser of Human Rights," *USA Today*, April 8, 2008.

²⁶⁰ "Tolerating China's Games," *USA Today*, August 7, 2008.

One article deferred the Nazi comparisons to “critics of China” who saw China’s human rights practices “echo[ing] those of the Nazi regime.”²⁶¹ Olympic historian David Wallechinsky claimed that the Olympics would serve as a way for China to legitimize the Communist Party within its borders, similar to the Nazi Party’s goals with the Berlin games.²⁶² References to Soviet era administrations were also rife, to the point that a *New York Times* critique of Olympics coverage complained of the “the tendency to see Potemkinism” in China’s Olympic aspirations.²⁶³ Building on the notion that the preparation for Games exposed politics and ideologies, the Beijing Olympics were seen as a potential, “galvanizing Sputnik moment” that would hopefully spur America to realize that “China will be a formidable competitor, and not just in the athletic arena,” and “a challenge that the U.S. dare not avoid.”²⁶⁴ A *USA Today* article containing Nazi references later claimed that China could win the gold medal count, a feat no nation “other than the USA or the Soviet Union” had accomplished since Germany in 1936. Again using mechanistic, inhuman descriptors, the athletic prowess of China’s athletes was woven in to the stories of China’s monstrosity: describing the rigorous training of Chinese children, *USA Today* labeled China’s athletic system a “Big Red machine.”²⁶⁵

As *USA Today* described, this Chinese training machine was contaminated in its own way. Articles focused on abusive Chinese trainers, and their philosophy of discipline far removed from America’s celebratory athletic culture. This discussion combined human rights discourse, already at the forefront of China’s problems, with descriptions of

²⁶¹ Vicki Michaelis, “China-USA Rivalry Shapes Olympics,” *USA Today*, August 8, 2008.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Scocca, “Letter from Beijing.”

²⁶⁴ “Beyond Beijing,” *USA Today*.

²⁶⁵ Christine Brennan, “Games a Turning Point for China Beyond Sports,” *USA Today*, August 25, 2008.

Chinese athletes and the “iron hand” of China’s training system.²⁶⁶ *USA Today* wrote that while abuse was not condoned in children’s training schools, a trainer diplomatically declared, “the concept of beating and abuse are different in different cultures and countries,”²⁶⁷ and the *New York Times* ran an article on the intense pressure placed on athletes in the push for medals, despite—or in spite—of athletes’ health and safety.

In recalling these stories, Avery shared the belief that negative reporting is common during the Olympics, but that it reached a new level because of America’s stance toward China:

People view the Olympics as a source of national pride, and expect the U.S. to succeed at everything. Anyone that would’ve beaten us would’ve gotten some dirt flung at their face. But, in addition to being Asian and exotic, because they are also our rivals, people felt the need to say something even dirtier.

It was clear that, by the 2008 Olympics, most interviewees had a clear understanding of the negative stereotypes perpetuated in news texts, and how the shape of news narratives structured Orientalist discourses writ large. Hugh, for example, recalled a specific news event and, in imagining perceived reactions to the event, extrapolated the sentiment:

And the little girl who sang, that they replaced with a different girl because she was cuter? I guess that just showed how far China would go to perpetuate its image... But it also can link to these ideas that Asians are backstabbers, really competitive.

²⁶⁶ MacLeod and Wiseman, “Whatever it Takes.”

²⁶⁷ Calum MacLeod, “Chinese Sports Schools Feel an Urgency to Find Gold,” *USA Today*, June 14, 2007.

At the core of these interview responses is a series of layered readings. Asian American men not only saw how China was presented in the news, but also imagined how others would react to those presentations, and how those reactions would implicate them as Asians in America.

One interesting theme that emerged from news on the Olympics was small yet noticeable, and highlighted the complex role of the media in framing countries and politics to audiences. Some news sources focused on Beijing's "Manners Movement," a top-down and sometimes grassroots, ostensibly backwards attempt to teach Chinese citizens manners, courtesies, and even English to help with the Olympic Games. This movement garnered much attention from reporters and even documentary filmmakers.²⁶⁸ In one article's interview with different Beijing citizens learning English, it became clear that the manners movement was an attempt to pre-empt Western (read: American) stereotypes about China:

"I hope U.S. visitors will see China as a normal country, friendly with good manners, good hosts," [Beijing resident] Wang says. "China always seems so far away and mysterious. When I meet people who are on their first trip to China, they always say, 'It's so different from what I had read about or seen on TV.' That's what I am hoping for."²⁶⁹

This Beijing resident's familiarity with China's (mis)representations in the West, which he readily identifies as the United States, shows how American formulations of China are visible and interpreted not only by American audiences, but by Chinese audiences as

²⁶⁸ The move to teach the masses English was documented in the film "Mad About English," documenting China's so-called "love affair" with English and the mad-cap method of teaching English to 10,000 students at once.

²⁶⁹ MacLeod and Wiseman, "Whatever it Takes."

well. Wang declared a desire for China to be seen as a “normal” country, a theme reflected in Asian American interviewees’ declarations of just wanting to be seen as “a normal guy” in the United States. These similarities suggest just how diffuse the stereotypes and narratives of whiteness are, in America and beyond.

Conclusion

Interviewees of all ethnicities felt implicated in the news discourses surrounding China in the 2000s. They acknowledged the conflation of China-as-Asia, as well as a larger racial discourse that conflates their own ethnicities into a larger category of “Oriental.” In this context, news on China is believed to inform larger understandings of America and its attitudes toward Asia, and lends to the complex matrix within which interviewees negotiate their own identities as Asian American men.

Just as Partha felt that some “might think that Chinese people may have some of the qualities of the Chinese government,” interviewees agreed that the timbre of news stories shaped fears and anxieties not only of China as a country, but the Chinese as a people—and by association, Asian Americans. A story picked up by *The New York Times* revealed how pervasive this anti-Chinese sentiment had become. Chinese leaders demanded an apology from CNN commentator Jack Cafferty, who had shared some personal opinions on *The Situation Room* during a conversation about Chinese imports. “We continue to import their junk with the lead paint on them,” Cafferty ranted. “They’re basically the same bunch of goons and thugs they’ve been for the last 50 years.” That Cafferty had to explain that he meant “China’s government, not its people” to his viewers, revealed a conflation that Asian American interviewees can sense in their own lives.

In news from 2003-2008, themes of monstrosity, predatory behavior, contagion, panic of scale and American innocence converged to form a common-sense narrative of Chinese difference as a threat. By tracing the history of anti-Chinese sentiment in America, we can locate these themes as part of racial, classed, and gendered discourses rooted in 19th century American anxieties over globalization. As America sensed a shift in its power over global flows of products and people, news in the 2000s revitalized Orientalist themes to help manage fears of China's rise. Taken as a whole, this anti-Chinese rhetoric worked by galvanizing an American national identity in opposition to Oriental difference. As such, managing U.S. anxiety was in part a project of bolstering the white male American citizen as the norm. Interviewees' sense of the diffuse standards of white masculinity carried through to news stories, as national audiences saw white anchormen on ABC and CNN confirm and affirm stereotypes of Asia. This complex mediascape highlights, for interviewees, the annoyingly important role that attitudes about China play in understanding Asia, and Asians, in America.

CHAPTER 3

Viewing Asian Americans

The last two chapters, “Visibly Invisible: Exploring Asian America” and “Managing the Octopus: 21st Century Yellow Peril,” have shown how to be “Asian American” is to negotiate both “Asian,” and “American” narratives, in part due to the prominent role discourses of Asia play in defining Asian American, and in part due to the lack of any identifiable Asian American narrative in popular discourse. For interviewees, Asian American identity is a complex negotiation of visibility and invisibility. This chapter turns its lens of analysis to burgeoning representations of Asian Americans as visible, major characters in American popular media texts. At the very moment anti-Chinese rhetoric was feeding anxieties in the news, Asian American men were making gains in the entertainment industry. In 2004, ABC presented primetime viewers with the multicultural cast of *Lost*, which featured Korean American Daniel Dae Kim as a Korean survivor of the Oceanic 815 crash; in 2006, NBC’s *Heroes* offered Japanese American Masi Oka as a Japanese man with heroic impulses and the powers of time travel, as well as his friend Ando, played by Korean American James Kyson Lee. In 2009, the short-lived CBS hospital drama *Three Rivers* featured Korean American David Lee as a transplant surgeon; ABC’s *FlashForward* starred Korean American John Cho as FBI agent Demetri Noh.

The stars from these programs have increased the visibility of Asian American men in American popular culture. They have also lent to the gradual shift toward the concept of the sexually viable Asian American man, a concept interviewees declared nonexistent earlier on. In 2005, Daniel Dae Kim was featured as one of *People* magazine's "Sexiest Men Alive," and John Cho was featured on the list twice, first in 2006 and then in 2009. While Masi Oka did not make the official list, he was featured as a "Chic Geek" in *People*'s 2006 "Sexiest Men Alive" issue.²⁷⁰ While *People* is certainly not the gold standard of popularity in American culture, the inclusion of these Asian Americans among its rankings of sexy male celebrities does show that Asian Americans have gained access to a predominantly white arena. The rise of sexy Asian American men points to an unprecedented era of multiculturalism in the media, and a shift in how politics of difference are portrayed on screen. Understanding how narratives promote or deny identification with particular characters, and how they marginalize or focalize minority characters, gives insight into the context in which communities are imagined. It details how texts, readers and communities engage in discursive relationships about race and ethnicity.²⁷¹

Media representations of minorities, particularly during the period in which interviewees grew up, contribute to their sense of marginalization and invisibility. During their teens, media presented bimodal images of Asian American communities; either integrated, model minority Asian sidekicks or fresh-off-the-boat, street car-racing,

²⁷⁰ Daniel Dae Kim was listed 8th in his year; John Cho as 11th both times. From 2004-2009, 88 men have been listed as the magazine's "Sexiest" of the year; out of these, only 21 were men of color. Other Asian men featured were Korean American Will Yun Lee from NBC's *Bionic Woman* and Chinese pianist Lang Lang, in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

²⁷¹ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

immigrant gangsters. However, the last decade has seen interest groups and film and television studios making conscious attempts to increase diversity in the entertainment industry. In the late 1990s, the dearth of minority representations led to actions by the NAACP, as well as the National Council of La Raza, to protest the “whiteout” practices of mainstream media and to call for more diversity in front of and behind cameras. Studios instituted diversity initiatives to increase the number of minorities on casts and crews.²⁷² In 2009, the television season presented audiences with more multicultural ensemble casts and Asian American lead actors than ever before.²⁷³

This chapter asks how interviewees, having grown up in an era of absence, react to and understand a small but increasingly visible cadre of Asian American actors on screen. In discussing who they thought represented Asian America, interviewees provided insight into how their own understandings of self and those who define them implicate negotiations of race on screens. Lastly, a reading of the multicultural narratives of television shows like *Lost* and *Heroes* reveals ways in which Asian Americans are treated in relation to other races and ethnicities. Ultimately, interviewees negotiate contemporary representations of Asian American men using their personal experiences of race and ethnicity, and may incorporate these negotiations into expectations of others, and performances of self.

²⁷² Networks with notable diversity initiatives include Disney/ABC with its Diversity Program (<http://abctalentdevelopment.com>), and CBS with its Diversity Institute Program to mentor minority writers for its network (http://www.cbcorporation.com/diversity/cbs_network/institute/index.php). FOX has also created its own diversity programs for aspiring writers and actors (<http://www.fox.com/diversity>). The NAACP has also partnered with NBC on a Diversity Fellowship Program (<http://www.diversecitynbc.com>). Despite these efforts, less than ten percent of television writers were people of color in 2007. Writers Guild of America, West. “Rewriting an All-Too Familiar Story? 2009 Hollywood Writers Report,” (Los Angeles, CA: 2009).

²⁷³ See Mary Beltran. “Meaningful Diversity: Exploring Questions of Equitable Representation on Diverse Ensemble Cast Shows.” *Flow TV* (August 27, 2010), accessed August 28, 2010, <http://flowtv.org/2010/08/meaningful-diversity>.

As we saw in Chapter 1, conversations with each of the men began with stories about childhood and growing up as Asian American and male in the United States. When the interview questions turned to the issue of Asian American representation in American popular media, men immediately began to discuss film and television, with more of a focus on television. Based on the interviews and a search of popular American films and television shows since 2000, I compiled a series of photographs of major Asian male leads. This resulted in four, 8x10-inch color images: Jackie Chan, with Chris Tucker in a promotional image from *Rush Hour 3* (2007); John Cho and Kal Penn in a promotional image for *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008); Masi Oka in a still from the NBC television show *Heroes*; and Daniel Dae Kim in a promotional photograph from ABC's *Lost*. Interviewees were asked if they would add or subtract anyone from this offering. While Jet Li was discussed by a few of the interviewees, he was generally acknowledged as an actor who no longer produced American texts with as much frequency as the four presented. Before discussing these actors, interviewees shared their thoughts on the media industry and its approach to racial minorities.

“You’ll Never See a Movie Called *Saving Private Kim!*”: Negotiating Mediated Whiteness

Most interviewees had a clear idea that, through images and stories, media networks have the power to create common points of reference and shared cultural narratives, and that normative behaviors and identities in the popular imaginary are influenced by dominant media representations of race and gender.²⁷⁴ Indian American

²⁷⁴ This is the basic premise informing the works of Gray, *Watching Race*; Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular’,” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. R. Samuel (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1981); Kato, *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop*; Ong, “Cultural Citizenship.”

Partha's explanation of media content, which under-represents Asians, includes how he thinks of the media as a cultural force:

I think media is kind of a good gauge as what people accept and what people are used to. I can't explain exactly why. Maybe it's because that's what the producers of that media think people are used to or maybe that's what the people call for so the producers – like, which came first? I don't know. Or maybe, the producers have an agenda.

None of the interviewees held the belief that there was an active, conspiratorial agenda to bar Asian Americans from screens. However, the majority believed that Hollywood is understood to be a space predominantly for white men, and that racialized images are part and parcel of an entertainment industry that has generally not included minorities in its creative ranks.

One of the most noticeable, major themes that emerged from interviews was the idea that media representations have powerful effects on, but are also a product of, the arena of daily social relations in which these men find themselves. In other words, the media industry and its representations work to define the boundaries of whiteness against which these men have reacted to in their daily lives. Korean American Josh, for example, expressed dissatisfaction over Asians being presented as foreign and unassimilated. In a follow-up, I asked if he thought these images influenced how other people understood him as an Asian American. Josh replied emphatically:

Yeah, yeah! The people that don't really hang out with all sorts of Asian people, that only know one kind of Asian, a lot of the movies definitely just kind of narrows down their perceptions of Asians.

Later, he explained the link between growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood and within a predominantly white media environment:

Asians don't really go into the media, proportionally. And there's no...Asians in the neighborhood, so Caucasians don't really get to know them. Some of my really suburban white friends, they're like "Oh, all Asians are good at math, they're just nerdy kids, blah blah blah," because that's all they see. And those are the kinds of [Asians] that are in the media.

In Chinese American Avery's view, an Asian American character is readily identified by the stereotypes they embody.

For some people, it's hard to see an Asian person without some kind of brilliance, or without some kind of Kung Fu ability. So, for them, the character might exist less real-y[*sic*] if those things weren't there. But that's just because that's the only thing they've been exposed to for all this time.

Avery points to particular markers or signifiers of "Asian American"—in this case, model minority intelligence or Kung Fu skills—used to package the Asian American body into digestible representations to those who see Asians on screen, or in person. These stereotypes provide fodder for interviewees' experiences of having to react to assumed math proficiency or, as Korean American Stephen shared, his ability to trick friends that he is related to Jet Li.

The general consensus among all interviewees was that there is little to no room for Asians in the media. Even when given room on screens, Partha described, "Usually an

Asian would play a very diminutive role...in which they don't make decisions." Many thought of Asians as sidekicks or as mere extras. Japanese American Randy could barely contain his anger over two-dimensional, marginal roles:

Asian American people are playing tools.... they're utility roles. They're not really people. That's not how – I don't view them as people.

Asian portrayals were seen as homogeneous and dehumanized: Korean American David described Asians portrayed as “a pack of people,” Japanese American Hiroki as “just filling space.” For Korean American Young Min, these portrayals are linked to Asian Americans' lived experience in a society that views Asians and Asian Americans as ethnically and culturally homogeneous. “It kind of represents the society right now in the United States,” he mused, “that all Asian Americans are the same.”

Several men pointed to Justin Lin's film *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002) as a groundbreaking example of Asian American representation. Chinese American Aaron was “shell-shocked that there were Asians on a movie screen,” and others expressed similar reactions to the film. The surprise an Asian American cast created was based on interviewees' sense that major players in the entertainment industry, those who “make the decisions” both on and off screen, are white men. To Chinese American Nick, this is a straightforward power dynamic: “[Asians] don't have the roles that...white people have. The main roles.” Korean American Alex believed wholeheartedly that “people who work in Hollywood prefer white actors.” Building on this, David offered an example: “You don't see an Asian soldier in a movie like *Saving Private Ryan*. You'll never see a movie called *Saving Private Kim!*” In this way, Asian American men begin to see themselves as undesired not only by Hollywood, but also by audiences who approve Hollywood's

choices through consumption. The lack of adequate Asian American representation, for these men, is in part due to the fact that images are driven by the demands of the industry in which they are found. The story of Asian American men that seems to pervade is one of abjection²⁷⁵: in social situations, public discourse, market segments, and mediated spaces.

The invisibility of an Asian American narrative again became evident as men thought about how media texts are marketed to a mainstream audience. The sharp perception of a white-oriented market was linked to the shared feeling that Asian American media marginalization is a result of an industry headed by a white political economy. As bi-ethnic Ben stated, “Opportunity [for Asian Americans]... doesn’t exist on television, remotely, other than Margaret Cho and that TV show for a little bit,²⁷⁶ and she still had to do some pandering, obviously.” The structure of the television industry is seen as a major factor in a power dynamic that is biased against Asian Americans— it is an industry that “obviously” requires special exceptions to be made for racial minorities. Nick assigns this to the fact that “TV has a broader audience. A more narrow-minded audience.” In this formulation, Nick conceives of a mainstream audience for whom Asians are not acceptable. The men I interviewed feel that Asian American men are denied opportunities, pushed aside for more marketable, profitable/valuable performers. Simply put by Chinese American Oliver, “Asian men don’t get a lot of love in the media.”

²⁷⁵ Shimakawa, *National Abjection*.

²⁷⁶ Ben refers to the short-lived ABC series *All-American Girl*, a 30-minute serial sitcom based on Margaret Cho’s stand-up comedy and featuring a Korean family’s relationships. The series only lasted 19 episodes. Cho describes the tensions of being an Asian American on screen: “Hollywood thought I was too Asian, and Asians thought I wasn’t Asian enough.” Mireya Navarro, “Returning in Her Favorite Role, Herself.” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008, accessed March 1, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/arts/television/10nava.html>.

The Brad Pitt phenomenon

Defining “masculinity,” similar to defining “Asian American,” is just as much shaped by media narratives as it is by everyday experiences. Given the modal age of interviewees, it was no surprise that actor Brad Pitt was frequently named as an example of a man who set the standard for masculinity in U.S. mass media. Pitt belongs to a class of white actors—George Clooney, Matt Damon, and Russell Crowe were also named—or heroes on screen against whom Asian Americans could not compete. When I asked Chinese American Francis if there was a man in the media he admired he rather sheepishly admitted:

When I was young, I liked Brad Pitt and all those [actors].

What did you like about Brad Pitt?

He’s cool, strong, and muscular. (*Laughing*) He gets all the girls.

What Francis was getting at, he later told me, was that Brad Pitt exemplified American (white) masculinity. When I asked him to define it for me more explicitly, he explained, “I think it’s still very much based on what Hollywood portrays it. Physical masculinity.” Francis joins many other interviewees in admiration of “all those” men, white actors playing characters who embody ideal American masculinities. While personal definitions of masculinity were richer and more complex than the “physical masculinity” portrayed by actors like Russell Crowe or Gerard Butler, there was also a sense of admiration for these actors precisely because they are given the chance to embody and perpetuate this gendered media narrative. As an audience, the men I talked with have been presented with a variety of White actors, ranging from Robert Redford and Clint Eastwood to Ryan

Reynolds and Paul Rudd,²⁷⁷ embodying a wide variety of roles from heroes and villains to heartbreakers and guys-next-door.

Given the ratio of white to minority actors on screen, Chinese American Gary finds that there are simply more options for identification: “I’m pretty sure you can find any, like, white person, they can find some character in a movie or TV show that pretty much embodies their life.... So it’s hard for Asians because there’s not that many to pick from and not that many storylines that they play along with.” While many interviewees were critical of Hollywood’s white ranks, they still found pleasure in white-oriented texts and the white men within them. Nadia Kim labels this a form of “racial imperialism,” a term coined to describe how Koreans she interviewed in Seoul learned to adopt hegemonic racial biases (preference for whites and disdain for blacks) through the consumption of U.S. military propaganda. Explaining that “South Korean women have long expressed favor toward White Western men or, more accurately, the hegemonic masculinity that defines them,”²⁷⁸ Kim places the dominance of U.S. superiority at the heart of this racial narrative. Kim identifies several common-sense narratives— America is white, America is a land of riches, Americans are good looking, white men are superior—found in U.S.-based media that work to uphold this hegemonic ideal.

Despite the continued prevalence of white masculine types in the media, the rise of multicultural ensemble casts in primetime television suggests entrance into an era in which Asian men do seem to be “getting (some) love.” The rise of actors like John Cho and Daniel Dae Kim in the American cultural mediascape points to a new, potentially positive narrative for Asian American men to incorporate into their self-concepts, beyond

²⁷⁷ Also actors listed by interviewees as admirable men.

²⁷⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 64.

the “Asian” narratives that have long formulated “Asian American” in the United States. As such, how might they be making sense of these narratives, and how do they contextualize them? In discussing Asians and Asian American men on screen, interviewees brought their demarcations of Asian/American to their negotiations of characters and actors.

The Asian/American Spectrum

Exit the Dragon: Jackie Chan

All of the interviewees cited Hong Kong-born and raised martial arts actor Jackie Chan as the first and most memorable Asian they recalled seeing on screen, often citing *Rush Hour*. Jackie Chan entered the Hong Kong film industry as a stuntman and, eventually, began to star in his own films. After some failed attempts to break into the American market, *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) was met with success, and eventually led to the *Rush Hour* (1998, 2001, 2007) and *Shanghai Noon* (2000, 2003) films.²⁷⁹ Given the demographic of my interviewees, most were about 10 or 11 when the first *Rush Hour* film was released; they have thus followed Jackie Chan’s major American successes through adolescence and into college. When shown a picture of the actor, many interviewees groaned, laughed, or sighed as if expecting to be asked, and tired of speaking about, Jackie Chan. It seemed generally accepted that some of the stereotypes Asian Americans complained about find their roots in Jackie Chan performances.

Chinese American Edison described Chan as, “for better or worse,” a core point of reference for understanding Asians in America. As Korean American Tom put it, “He’s the reason why...everybody thinks that we do kung fu. People actually came up to

²⁷⁹ “Biography.” The Official Website of Jackie Chan, accessed April 22, 2010, <http://jackiechan.com/biography>.

me and asked me if I know how to do kung fu.” Despite being Korean American, Tom acknowledges that his identity as an Asian American in the United States is tied to the prominence of Jackie Chan in American popular culture. “It fits the public’s stereotype [of Asian Americans],” Indian American Fred explained to me. “You take *Rush Hour* or something –Jackie Chan is Asian. That’s why kung fu is associated with [being Asian].” Tom and Fred do not share Chan’s ethnic background, but acknowledge that his presence in American popular culture has indelibly linked him to a racial stereotype that implicates how they, and the concept of Asian American, are understood in their daily lives.

Edison told me that he believed America is moving toward new characters, beyond “older media like *Rush Hour*.” The idea of moving beyond Jackie Chan was a common theme: while Chan was named without prompt, he was often deemed irrelevant to contemporary Asian America. As Filipino American Dean explained: “Jackie, in particular, he’s maybe the last line of some of the older archetypes of his generation, like Bruce Lee, Jet Li, Jackie Chan. You know, from the older kung fu movies.” By associating Jackie Chan with a specific cohort of actors, Dean suggests a generational definition of “Asian American.” While much import has been placed on Bruce Lee as an icon of his time,²⁸⁰ only Dean named him as a memorable Asian figure from his childhood. One of the older interviewees, Dean recalls growing up in a racially segregated city during the 1970s; from this context, he shares a reading of Bruce Lee’s symbolic import as an anti-authority figure during a time of racial tension.

While Asian Americans of an older generation may have admired Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, this generation of interviewees saw Chan as a spectacle for entertainment.

²⁸⁰ A body of scholarship has flourished based on readings of Bruce Lee as the embodiment of racial politics and the struggle against authority. See, for example, Kato, *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop*, 41.

Randy agreed with Edison that Chan is “ridiculous”: “He’s defined himself in his own way, he’s that comedic kind of—still like a monkey, kind of thing.” Thinking of all Chan’s characters, Ben declared, “He’s the same guy in every movie.” In these interpretations, Chan was seen as a figure for mass-market consumption. By being the “same guy” in every movie, he has become so uniquely identifiable that he represents nothing but a brand. Avery explains:

Jackie Chan, I guess is sort of an odd exception because even though he is Asian and he is extremely Asian—to a lot of people, he is the embodiment of, say, China—but we’ve become so used to him because he’s been around so long. When Jackie Chan does something funny, it’s not like, “That’s so Asian.” It’s like, “That’s so Jackie Chan.”

I contend that, by focusing on Chan as a brand, Asian Americans develop a strategy that enables them to dismiss him as a representative of race or ethnicity. By developing a “That’s so Jackie Chan” approach allows them, in a nuanced way, to position him as a figure who no longer represents Asians in a specific context, but rather as an, albeit ridiculous, global commodity.



Figure 1: Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker in *Rush Hour 3* (2007).

Despite Chan's global status and symbolism, another strategy was to interpret the actor as purely Asian. For Japanese American Hiroki, the global flow of Jackie Chan's texts was an important factor in how he interpreted the actor. Hiroki described Chan as no longer "really Chinese" and instead more "Asian American" due to his status as a global commodity and his pervasiveness in American popular culture. However, Hiroki stood alone in this interpretation. Responding to Hiroki, Partha firmly stated, "Sure, he's in the mainstream but.... He's an Asian guy." Most emphatic in his disagreement was Ben: "I guess you could go with media power. But he's not [Asian American]. He's a Chinese national. I'm not saying that to any level of detriment, but I mean, for me.... I make that exclusion."

Ben's definition of "Asian American," based on his experiences as a child of parents in the U.S. military, shapes his attitudes of who is relevant to his racial identification and who is not. Other responses reflected a dis-identification with Chan based on their own definitions of Asian America. For Oliver, Chan is Asian not only as

someone who engages in Asian performance, but who is also widely interpreted as Asian: “He’s always been more associated with China, and not just himself being that way, [it’s also] perceptions of him.” Francis could only find the words “very Asian” to describe Chan’s acting and mannerisms. Descriptions of Chan ultimately mirrored how men described “FOBs” on the college campus. Said Chinese American Brad, “There’s always this thing where he’s foreign... people don’t really accept him as American. People accept him as the Chinese guy.” In these conversations, Asian Americans understood Chan as a foreigner unable to fit into American social settings; he represents the “FOB” image that they, as Asian Americans, identify against.

Korean American Jae-Sun’s belief that media representations and audiences are moving beyond Jackie Chan is confirmed by the recent rise of younger Asian American lead actors in primetime television: John Cho, Masi Oka, and Daniel Dae Kim. While other Asian leads can be found before and during these actors’ careers, these three actors were the most commonly named and frequently discussed by participants before photos were shown in the interviews. For Dean, Jackie Chan led the generation of kung fu fighters from the 1980s through the 1990s, and John Cho leads this new slate of actors: “[John Cho] kind of represents the newer generation of not only Asian Americans in this country, but also Asian American characters in the media.” If Jackie Chan symbolizes, or makes visible, the prominence of an Asian narrative and the lack of an Asian American narrative, how might the visibility of new Asians signal a new narrative? How have we moved beyond Jackie Chan?

Entering the White Castle: From Jackie Chan to John Cho

Interviewees felt that Korean American John Cho stood in distinct opposition to Jackie Chan. Born in Korea and raised in Los Angeles, Cho was the other actor most recalled as a memorable Asian in the media. He was remembered by some for a small role in the *American Pie* films, as well as a larger part in 2002's *Better Luck Tomorrow*. Some were aware of his crossover success in more mainstream fare, such as his role as Sulu in 2009's *Star Trek* and as FBI special agent Demetri Noh in ABC's *FlashForward*. However, most recalled his debut to fame in *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) and its sequel, *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay*.²⁸¹

Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle follows the adventures of second-generation Korean American Harold Lee (John Cho) and his roommate, Indian American Kumar Patel (Kal Penn). Harold is an investment banker whose White co-workers take advantage of his quiet demeanor by giving him the work they don't want to do; Kumar is in the process of applying to medical school to follow in the footsteps of his father and brother. Both men feel dissatisfied with their professional lives and feel trapped by the model minority stereotypes that define them. The film takes place over the course of one night, when Harold and Kumar see an advertisement for White Castle on television while high on marijuana. Their adventures to buy more drugs and find the restaurant place them in a variety of situations, confronting "stereotypical" Korean students at Princeton, skinheads, a racist white policeman, and actor Neil Patrick Harris. In the sequel, Harold and Kumar board a flight to follow Harold's love interest to Amsterdam; when Kumar brings out a bong, a white passenger believes it to be a bomb and claims that Kumar is a terrorist. Believing that Harold and Kumar are North Korean and Al-Qaeda terrorists,

²⁸¹ "John Cho: Biography." *TV Guide Online*, accessed April 23, 2010, <http://www.tvguide.com/celebrities/john-cho/bio/157818>.

respectively, U.S. Homeland Security sends them to Guantanamo Bay. The rest of the film follows Harold and Kumar escaping the island, finding their way back to the mainland, and Kumar trying to stop his ex-girlfriend from marrying a college friend.

The *Harold and Kumar* films have been prominent, mainstream (albeit tongue-in-cheek, crass humor) texts that interviewees followed through high school and college. Like TV's *South Park*, a program popular among most interviewees, *Harold and Kumar* provided a space for Asian Americans to engage in racial discourse, owning some stereotypes, rejecting others, and bringing some of the tensions of the Asian American experience to light. Here, gallows humor is given space on the big screen: interviewees shared that the films' Asian American characters made them more valuable resources for reclaiming racial marginalization than the white male characters on *South Park*. Fred found that the racial jokes in *Harold and Kumar* actually worked to take the focus away from Asian Americans; instead, the films mocked those who made the jokes as racially and culturally ignorant. In this way, Asian American viewers can identify tiresome stereotypes and, following Harold and Kumar, confront the white mainstream culture that shapes those stereotypes. More generally, Nick labeled the marijuana, party culture of *Harold and Kumar* as "teenager culture," and Ben agreed: "it's pretty clear that you don't have to be Asian American to enjoy watching [*Harold and Kumar*]." Gary felt that the culture presented in the films was more generally American than Asian:

Eating White Castle... the sexual jokes he makes and the people he hangs out with, you know, doing drugs and alcohol...he more portrays himself toward Americans than he does towards Asians.

While Gary uses “American” and “Asian” to describe these differences, his focus on cultural discrepancies makes Cho less distinctly Asian than Jackie Chan’s inherent “Asianness” in his films. For Young Min the similarity with Cho, and his character Harold, is strong: “He’s kind of my age, and he’s grown up in the U.S., too. And he kind of portrays...myself.” Josh explained his admiration for the film, as well as John Cho, in the context of the films’ humor:

He’s kind of just like a regular guy in his movies. I mean... the humor behind it is that he’s actually pretty American, but everyone that the two confront in the movie goes, you know, “Ching chong, ching chong, your dad runs a gas station,” that’s the whole humor behind it.

For Josh and many others, the films highlight issues that they have each confronted in their lives as Asian Americans, such as being confused for other ethnicities, negotiating their own biases against “FOBs,” and battling misperceptions whites have about Asians.

One key element in Josh’s explanation above is that he calls John Cho “a regular guy.” This theme of “just being a guy” was echoed over and over again as interviewees discussed John Cho, his characters, and his career. Brad felt, “ [Harold is] more of a fun-loving, regular American kind of guy;” Alex added, “these guys are just regular guys. Nothing special. Just, stuff happens to them and they react to it.” Partha also expressed something similar:

He was Sulu in Star Trek. And that wasn’t really like, an Asian-ified role. Because Sulu was—Sulu was always kind of Asianized in the old days. But like, now, you know, modern times, he’s more the action guy. He can fight, you know? He’s just like one of the other guys. He’s just a dude!

Also building on Harold as “just a dude,” Aaron summed up: “He’s cool, he’s just another guy, he just happens to be Asian.” When I asked Aaron if being a “guy [who] just happens to be Asian” is something with which he identifies, he emphatically agreed: “I want to avoid it having it be like, ‘This is the Asian guy,’ I don’t want it to be something that makes me stand out.” This is Aaron’s ideal: to be seen first and foremost as someone whose racial identity is not the first marker—just a regular guy with many qualities, including a racial designation.

These men thus read Cho’s performance on and off screen as American, not necessarily rooted to his Korean heritage. In this way, the idea of being racially invisible began to emerge as an ideal, if not key, component of being Asian American. Hiroki agreed that John Cho was an exemplary Asian American, claiming that the actor is “definitely more assimilated to the American culture.” Chinese American Jimmy brought his concept “Asian American” to understanding the success of *Harold and Kumar*:

I think these characters are fairly representative of a middle-class, easily consumable by White culture, reality of many educated second-generation Asian Americans.

The Asian American representations in *Harold and Kumar* thus, in a way, represent Jimmy’s reality, but also reinforce the sense that identities are consumed by audiences and are influenced by narrative heuristics. Interviewees define their racialized identities through performance and appearance, but also by how this performance is consumed and re-interpreted by others. Comparing the opinions about Jackie Chan to John Cho, these negotiations also highlighted the role of class in these men’s definitions of Asian

American: second-generation, assimilated Asians in America are more easily acceptable for consumption than a “FOB.”

For some, *Harold and Kumar* films are beyond race, as they focus on cultural differences and misperceptions rather than on race.



Figure 2: John Cho and Kal Penn in *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008).

While interviewees agreed that the *Harold and Kumar* films were entertaining, some chose to critique Cho’s performance of Harold. These critiques paralleled earlier descriptions of Asian American identity, showing how men brought their negotiations of their own minority position to reading minority characters. Interviewees like Avery felt that Harold perpetuated narratives of “typical” Asian Americans in the United States:

He’s sort of what people stereotype Asian Americans as. He’s sort like this overly hard-working guy who’s underappreciated and sort of goes unnoticed by everyone. And he has these fantasies in his head, but they don’t really matter because he’s just the quiet Asian worker. In the movie, in the end, he breaks free of that. But the entire movie is impressing upon us that he’s this stereotypical Asian guy.

Cho's character thus highlights for Avery the difficulties Asian Americans feel as stereotyped model minorities and interchangeable, generalized Asians. Korean American Andrew complained, "He's just not a risk taker at all," and Hugh agreed: "Harold, that really upset me a lot...he's some sort of investment banker, he's in finance, he gets picked on by his white bosses, and throughout the movie, he can't talk to a white girl." For these interviewees, the comic adventures may show a different side of the nerdy stereotype, but are negated by the fact that Harold is still a model minority.

Interesting to note is that even though the image shown to men included both John Cho and Kal Penn, none of the interviewees talked about Kal Penn in the context of the films and Asian America. Some talked about the pair as a duo, such as when Alex called them both "regular guys," but overall, Asian Americans of every ethnicity focused only on Cho. At the end of his interview, Partha pointed to the image of Kal Penn and laughed, claiming, "I forgot about this dude!" After this realization, however, his attention turned back to Cho and his success "working his way through [Hollywood] in all the right ways. Being the leading man, winning women, white women." I offer that this diligent focus on John Cho is a result of these men's ideas that Indian Americans, or those from South Asia, do not fit within the limits of "Asian American."

In general, interviewees cited John Cho as an Asian American breaking boundaries and increasing the visibility of Asian Americans. If Jackie Chan portrays the hyper-masculine, kung fu-fighting "FOB," John Cho portrays the modern-day, cosmopolitan Asian American. Cho embodies a more palatable commodity than Jackie Chan: there is never a doubt in any of his films that his characters are not at ease in American social settings or that his English is accented. Mulling about the differences

between the photos of actors, Hugh pointed to John Cho and stated, “He even *looks* the most American.” The idea that an actor can “look” American mirrors interviewees’ definitions of Asian American as a performance of dress, mannerisms, and stature. Both Jackie Chan and John Cho portray characters in American situations, but Cho’s unaccented English, as well as the fact that he portrays “regular guys” marks him as Asian American, while Chan’s broken English and portrayals as foreigners marks him as a “FOB.” What then, to do with Asian American actors who play foreign nationals?

From Zeroes to *Heroes*: Masi Oka and “Geek Chic”

More popularly known as Masi Oka, Massayori Oka was born in Japan but moved to America at an early age. He is infamously known for being on the cover of *Time* magazine’s issue on “Those Asian-American Whiz Kids” in 1987, his work as a digital effects artist for George Lucas’ Industrial Light and Magic, and his genius IQ.²⁸² Oka rocketed to mainstream celebrity status in 2006, when NBC launched a new ensemble show featuring a global cast of characters discovering and coming to terms with superhuman abilities. In *Heroes*, the multi-layered storyline centered on the story of Hiro Nakamura, a Japanese man using his powers to transcend boundaries of time, space and geography to unite the rest of the show’s characters in a mission to save the world.

Most interviewees had heard of and knew about *Heroes*, but due to its relatively recent debut had not seen much of the show or any of its accompanying extra texts such as magazines, comic books, or web site. Despite not being regular viewers of the program, many were knowledgeable about Oka’s character from having seen several episodes, talking with other viewers, or reading about the show in various other texts.

²⁸² “Masi Oka: Biography,” *TV Guide Online*, accessed April 22, 2010, <http://www.tvguide.com/celebrities/masi-oka/bio/256529>.

Even if interviewees were unfamiliar with the program, they commented on the image and what it meant to them. Compare Hugh's response to Masi Oka to his comment that John Cho "looks" American: "[Masi Oka] looks like one of my dad's friends! Again, the weak, small guy with the glasses and bad hair!"



Figure 3: Masi Oka as Hiro Nakamura in *Heroes* (2006).

Oka's portrayal of Hiro prompted the most, sometimes intensely negative comments. Much of the negativity built on Hugh's focus on Hiro's outward appearance. Josh labeled Hiro "a token Asian.... chirpy and small," and, despite knowing that Hiro was an adult businessman on the show, both Vietnamese American Jonathan and Korean American Dan described his outfit as a "Japanese schoolboy uniform." For these men, the visibility of an Asian American male lead on television is complicated, even negated, by this stereotyped appearance. Brad expressed his dissatisfaction with the character:

He just gives me that sense that he's that little, shrewd Asian who just works on his projects all day, doesn't mind anybody else's business, and just isn't very outspoken. I'm sure he has those moments where he breaks

out of that stereotype, but just the mere fact that they show it to begin with is enough to say that they are perpetuating stereotypes.

That Hiro's mere appearance could elicit such a specific stereotype and negative emotions for so many interviewees suggests just how much outward appearances are implicated in Asian American men's negotiations of race and performance.

Ben, one of the men who watched *Heroes* the most, had the most nuanced negotiation of the character, bringing in his definitions of "Asian American":

Quite a few people don't like him because he kind of still plays the stereotypical Asian.... [But] he's Asian American....And he has to put the accent on and play all this game even though he's American. And it's slightly marginalized, but he has his own powers or whatever, however you want to put it. So, like, you know, it's not really any kind of awesome, positive portrayal that makes me want to watch the show, you know what I mean?

Ben's knowledge that Oka is an Asian American seems to make the actor's portrayal of an Asian character particularly conspicuous. When it came to an Americanized actor playing a "FOB," interviewees seemed to experience more dissonance. Because of his performance, Masi Oka was most often compared to Jackie Chan and his films.

While John Cho was understood as Asian American not only in real life but also on screen, Oka's Asian American background was negated by his performance as a Japanese man on *Heroes*. Aaron, another interviewee who followed the show, explained how he felt this stereotype overshadowed any other sign of representational progress. In this context, Asian American performances on screens can be viewed as political work.

Jackie Chan basically, for better or worse, is kind of perpetuating the popular idea of what *Asian* American is. And from *Heroes*... The Asian male character [had] the romantic storyline. But for all the good that that was worth, it kind of detracted from the obvious fact that he basically encapsulates everything that Jackie Chan basically started. He is a short, nerdy, comic book geek who can't pronounce his R's right.

For Aaron, Jackie Chan's visibility has played such an integral role in forming the "popular" idea of the Asian American-as-Oriental, and this Asian stereotype has become so pervasive, a character like Hiro cannot be separated from it. While Avery contends that Jackie Chan's accent and behavior has become a part of the Jackie Chan "brand" could be dismissed, Hiro's foreign nature was more visible. He explained, "The fact that he's Asian American doesn't really matter to most people because they see him and they just think, Asian." Hiro's difference was a racial difference, in part highlighted by his inability to assimilate to the social contexts in *Heroes*.

It follows, then, that interviewees' reactions to Hiro also involved how they believed others, particularly white viewers, saw the character. For Dean, Hiro was a problematic stereotype precisely because "of the way he looks...and the way he fits into society and how people react to him. So, I guess my definition of Asian American is really based on how people react to us." Tom saw the character slightly differently because he knew white viewers who felt positively about Hiro: "[they] think he's really cute in the way that he acts... I mean, these are white people that say this. So, that has a lasting impression."

The issue of Asian American male attractiveness threaded through each of these conversations. When interviewees labeled an actor appealing, they used white standards of masculine attractiveness. Dan felt that a white actor's popularity is based on theatrical ability and looks, but that different standards apply to Asian American actors. The belief that Asian men are not good looking, he explained to me, is why "they don't make it quite on top as the other actors who have both [good skills and attractiveness]." As an example, Dan pointed to the fact that while some might view Hiro as good looking—or, as *People* magazine would say, as "geek chic"—the character still could not compare to the attractiveness of the other, predominantly white, characters on the program, such as hero Peter Petrelli (played by Milo Ventimiglia) or even villain Sylar (played by Zachary Quinto).

Discussions of attractiveness were also linked to narratives about romance and sexuality. Earlier, Aaron pointed to the romantic storyline given to Hiro in the show's second season. Subtly acknowledging the asexual/homosexual stereotype of Asian men, Aaron offered the *Heroes* narrative as a potentially groundbreaking moment for Asian representations in American popular culture. Given the seemingly contradictory positions Hiro occupied in the television show—marginalized minority or central hero, Asian stereotype or love interest—how might the narrative structure of the program, as well as Hiro's place within that narrative, suggest a preferred reading of this character? Looking at the first three seasons of the show, from its debut to the point of reference for most of these interviews, I argue that Hiro was presented in such a way as to promote the marginalization of Asians in relation to other ethnicities and races on the show.

"We Are Not Special, We Are Japanese!"

In the first episode of *Heroes*, Hiro Nakamura, who has just discovered that he has the ability to stop time, debates with his friend Ando Masahashi in a Tokyo alleyway about the benefits of being special. Hiro has just asked Ando why he wants to be “the same.” “Because that’s what I am,” Ando responds. “The same. It’s what we all are. Homogeneous. Yogurt.” “I want to be special,” says Hiro. Ando retorts, “We are not special! We are Japanese.” This is the basic framework of *Heroes*: characters coming to terms with superhuman abilities, struggling with the time-old superhero dilemma of “fitting in” versus “saving the day.” Hiro feels that being homogeneous is something that Asian culture—signified by his corporate workspace and stoic father—stipulates. But, when Hiro teleports to New York, he finds that he can indeed be special: here, he can live up to his name and become a true hero.

Hiro is placed on an equal playing field with men of all statures and races contending with their powers in the show. Yet, given the conventions of Western cinema, he is relegated to the margins, denied heroic status. Paul Smith contends, “the pleasure of masculine representations is given as essentially and intrinsically bound up in [a] three stage shift from objectification to [masochism, to] empowerment.”²⁸³ *Heroes* denies Hiro this most basic arc of heroic development, barring him from being objectified in any pleasurable way. Other characters on the show are gazed upon, either by the audience or other characters: When Indian geneticist Mohinder earns powers, his muscular body cannot stay clothed for long; even the more Westernized, cosmopolitan Japanese Ando is given well tailored Western suits and, in season three, a chick magnet motorcycle. Hiro, on the other hand, is described by a contributor to the New Demographic blog

²⁸³ Paul Smith, “Eastwood Bound,” In *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 95.

Racialicious as “an affable buffoon just a few steps from William Hung.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, the show’s constant and active refusal of a heroic, sexual body to Hiro Nakamura supports David Eng’s contention that “the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary.”²⁸⁵ In this context, *Heroes* can be seen as a part of a dominant scopic regime that regulates the Asian male body by limiting its access to normative White American heterosexuality.

A tension, then, exists surrounding Hiro’s specialness, particularly as it intersects with his masculinity. In looking at formulations of Hiro Nakamura’s masculinity in the television show, I argue that *Heroes* presents the character as special precisely because he is Japanese. He is a character vexed by his lack of Western machismo and also is staunchly rooted in Bushido, or the Japanese “way of the warrior.” A large component of Hiro’s masculinity in the first season of *Heroes* is his acquisition of a samurai sword shrouded in the myth of his childhood hero, samurai warrior Takezo Kensei. Hiro sees it as directly linked to his ability to become a hero, believing that “the sword will fulfill [his] powers.”²⁸⁶ In a narrative where heroic masculinity and performance is always at stake, it is no feat to identify the symbolism of this phallic weapon.

Hiro does manage to obtain the sword, but his time with it is short-lived. Furthermore, his identity once he has acquired the sword remains defined by white characters. When an inexperienced Hiro attempts to use his sword in a fight against villain Sylar, his sword is no match for Sylar’s physical powers. Hiro’s only defense is to

²⁸⁴ Jennifer Fang, “The Words of Asian American Men.” *Racialicious*, June 26, 2007, accessed March 20, 2009, <http://racialicious.com/2007/06/26/the-words-of-asian-american-men>.

²⁸⁵ Eng, *Racial Castration*, 2.

²⁸⁶ NBC, “Godsend,” January 22, 2007.

teleport away— only to find his sword snapped in two.²⁸⁷ While Ando comments, “It’s still sharp,” Hiro laments, “Even if the sword is still whole, I am not fit to wield it.”²⁸⁸ In short, the show denies Hiro the ability to wield his phallus – he is unfit to use it, and unable to repair it without the aid of the elderly Mr. Claremont. Further access to his Bushido masculinity is only granted by permission from other male characters: Hiro can train in the ways of a warrior only after his father (George Takei) reveals himself to be a master swordsman willing to train his son. In a clichéd montage, Hiro’s father dictates samurai folklore to help Hiro learn to use the sword. By embracing his Japanese ancestry and an Orientalist formulation of his masculinity, Hiro becomes more of a man.

Yet, white masculinity even has a hold over Hiro’s samurai history, as seen when Hiro teleports to feudal Japan in the second season. Here, his childhood hero Takezo Kensei is revealed to be Englishman Adam Monroe. Shocked that Kensei is actually a white, self-interested, womanizing drunkard, Hiro decides to stay in feudal Japan to help “turn [Monroe] into the man that history needs him to be.”²⁸⁹ Hiro’s competition with Adam’s virility aside, the feudal Japan storyline provides Hiro a love interest in the form of Yaeko, a swordsmith’s daughter. This moment allows Hiro to catch up to other characters on the show, as every lead character to this point—from teenage cheerleader Claire Bennett to villain Sytar—has had a sexual encounter; several with multiple partners. In season two, Hiro is finally granted a romantic scene, once Yaeko finds herself less physically attracted to Adam and more attracted to Hiro’s personality.

Viewers like Aaron can identify the progressive nature of showing an Asian romance, particularly when Asian masculinity competes with white masculinity and wins.

²⁸⁷ NBC, “The Hard Part,” May 7, 2007.

²⁸⁸ NBC, “Landslide,” May 14, 2007.

²⁸⁹ NBC, “Kindred,” October 8, 2007.

Yet, the narrative structure of the program works to suppress any real breakthrough, limiting the ways in which Hiro can access heroic status typically reserved for white men. Additionally, as some interviewees noticed, the show suggests that a romantic Hiro can only exist in the alternate reality of feudal Japan.²⁹⁰ When Hiro kisses Yaeko, he knows his romance will betray his friendship with Adam. Because of this, he cannot take pleasure in the act and even looks pained while doing so. Furthermore, this romantic action is not without its consequences: Adam's anger over seeing Hiro steal his love interest provokes a death wish upon Hiro and anything he loves.²⁹¹ Hiro's move to (re)claim his sexuality thus has serious consequences, as Adam's revenge sets off a chain of events that eventually leads to the murder of Hiro's father, one of the key purveyors of Hiro's masculinity.

Hiro's attempt to actively assert masculinity or heroism ends up threatening the safety of other characters or even the entire world of *Heroes*. In a double bind, his lack of masculinity also endangers a world structured on hegemonic masculine standards. In season three, matriarch Angela Petrelli tells Hiro that his father "had faith you would grow up to be a great man, but he was mistaken, and his folly will be the downfall of us all."²⁹² Angela is not alone in her estimation, as viewers continually see other characters doubt his ability to be a masculine hero. While these brief examples provide cinematic space for an Asian male character that has so far been unprecedented in primetime television, the narrative and visual representation of Hiro places him at the periphery, moving him in and out of stereotypes, ultimately rendering him subservient to, and

²⁹⁰ Hiro's relationship with Texan waitress Charlie (detailed in the next chapter) again unfolds in an alternate reality unseen to viewers.

²⁹¹ NBC, "Out of Time," October 9, 2006.

²⁹² NBC, "I am Become Death," October 6, 2008.

incapable of achieving, the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. As interviewee Dan notes, Hiro can never be a Peter Petrelli, the rugged, broody, romantic hero. Instead, he remains the baby-faced comic foil, complete with comedic music in his slapstick scenes.

In the context of a multicultural show and a narrative that spans the globe, Hiro is also the only lead character with real language barriers, reinforcing the “FOB” stereotype that many interviewees identify against. Even Japanese friend Ando and season three’s African seer Usutu can converse in English, and Indian-raised Mohinder has a sultry, colonial British accent. Hiro only speaks Americanized English in an alternate, future reality.²⁹³ Throughout the remainder of the seasons, however, Hiro remains in what men identified as “schoolboy” dress with slacks and colorful cardigans. Furthering the “FOB” stereotype, Hiro also finds himself with unique immigration difficulties when he teleports: when detained by New York police after teleporting from Tokyo, Hiro is caught with “no English, no passport, no American money, [and] no ID.”²⁹⁴ Lastly, the show uses Hiro’s concept of heroic masculinity, informed by American media fare like Marvel comics and *Star Trek*, as comic relief. Unaware of many social cues in interactions with American characters, Hiro uses clichéd understandings of heroic masculinity to dictate his performance, such as “a hero doesn’t run away from his destiny,”²⁹⁵ and “A hero never has regrets. A hero never runs.”²⁹⁶

Heroes thus presented a somewhat progressive representations of Asian American masculinity, with an Asian playing a lead, heroic role and a love interest. However, interpreting Hiro in light of the show’s narrative structure and in relation to the rest of the

²⁹³ Interestingly, this more Westernized performance presents Hiro without glasses and wearing slimmer, sleeker clothes.

²⁹⁴ NBC, “Genesis,” September 25, 2006.

²⁹⁵ NBC, “One Giant Leap,” October 9, 2006.

²⁹⁶ NBC, “Run!” February 12, 2007.

show's characters reveals him to be marginalized in more ways than one. Even if interviewees were not reading the television show as closely, it is clear from their criticisms—Hiro's "FOB" nature, his bumbling ways, his unattractiveness—that he is far from an adequate representation Asian American masculinity.

Finding a *Lost* Masculinity: Daniel Dae Kim

Similar to Oka, Daniel Dae Kim is an Asian American actor who plays a foreign national on a primetime, mainstream television show. With a career mostly on stage before parts in *Spider Man 2* and *Crash*, the Korean American is mostly known for his work in ABC's *Lost*. Kim was also signed by CBS to star as Detective Chin Ho Kelly in the 2010 remake of the TV series *Hawaii Five-O*. Premiering in 2004, *Lost* quickly became a hit, immensely popular within the 18-49 year-old demographic and reeling in upwards of 18 million viewers after its first three episodes.²⁹⁷ The show was so popular that after its series finale, props from the show were auctioned off to fans, bringing in almost \$2 million in bids.²⁹⁸ *Lost* presents the crash of Oceanic Airlines flight 815 over a mysterious island and the tale of the flight's 48 survivors. Known for its twisting plotlines and complicated story, the program focused on a primary cast of 13 characters at first struggling to stay alive on the island, later battling the island's prior inhabitants and unveiling the mysteries behind the island's mysterious elements. *Lost* provided viewers with flashbacks into characters' lives, each episode focusing on a different character or set of characters, the reasons why they were flying from Sydney to Los

²⁹⁷ Allison Romano, "ABC Gets Big Rise Out of Fall," *Broadcasting & Cable*, October 11, 2004. See also Paul J. Gough, "'Lost' Captivates 18 mil viewers," *Hollywood Reporter*, October 6, 2006, 3.

²⁹⁸ Brooks Barnes, "No *Lost* Left to Unravel, Fans Buy it Piece by Piece," *New York Times*, August 22, 2010, accessed August 23, 2010, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/us/23lost.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=lost auction&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/us/23lost.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=lost%20auction&st=cse).

Angeles. As the series progressed, flashbacks turned into “sideflashes,” depicting parallel storylines in alternate realities.

Interviewees rarely recalled Kim in their lists of Asian American actors, but had the most to say about his character on *Lost*, Jin Kwon. Randy identified Jin as a typically stoic, quiet, minor-role character on television; finding similarities with Hiro, many interviewees cited Jin’s lack of English skills and the rigidity of his traditional Korean values. Yet, the negativity surrounding the portrayal of Hiro Nakamura from *Heroes* was not as readily expressed in discussions of Jin. The often intense dislike of Hiro as opposed to the respect for Jin may be rooted in the type of masculinity each actor reflects in his character: Daniel Dae Kim is muscular, toned and tan, offered as a sex symbol, while Masi Oka is baby-faced, pudgy, and a real-life computer geek with a genius IQ. In *Heroes*, Oka’s performance is comedic, and centers on a meek demeanor, slapstick humor based on his small physical stature, and general awkwardness, all qualities that interviewees labeled as stereotypically Asian.

I suggest that respondents admired Jin precisely because they could watch him break the traditional stereotype of the traditionally stoic, conservative Asian man to become the embodiment of a more assimilated masculine performance. Kim was consistently labeled as more Asian American than Oka; for example, Avery described him as “Still foreign, but [with] a more American feel than Hiro.” Interviewees were quick to take on the task of identifying how he straddled the line between Asian and American. Ben described the image as “not exceptional, [but] for media, yes.” In defining the image as unexceptional, Ben pointed to the myriad of Asian American body types he has seen, providing examples of “dudes that are a bunch of meatheads that live in a gym.”

Yet, in pointing to the exceptional nature of such an Asian American figure in the media, Ben notes the representational bias in media that portrays emasculated, physically weak Asian American men. Indeed, Edison said the image was a new representation of Asian Americans being “very manly.”

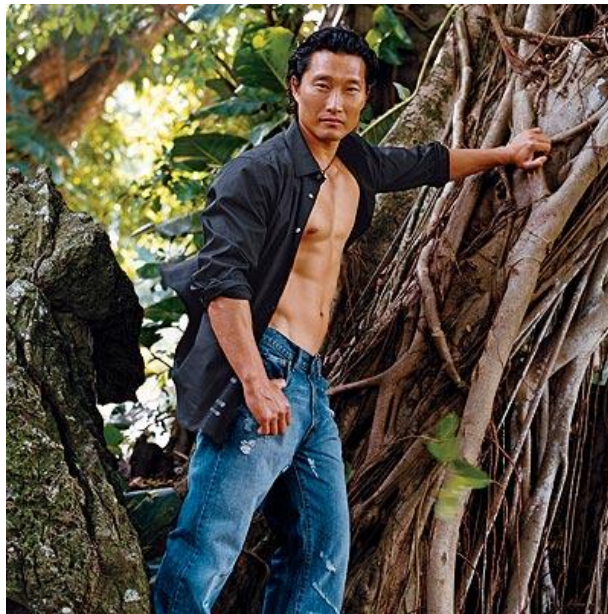


Figure 4: Daniel Dae Kim as Jin Kwon in *Lost* (2004).

A major component of Kim’s “American feel” was the promotional photo from *Lost* featuring the actor leaning against a tree, shirt unbuttoned, and thumb tucked into a belt loop on a pair of ripped jeans. Interviewees felt that this image was truly exceptional, one of the first images of a muscular, Asian man that was not the hyper-muscular body of Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan. “I’ve never seen an Asian American portrayed like that before,” Brad told me, and then pointed to the photo: “I’m not used to seeing this.” Francis worked through the disjuncture of an Asian American in a white subject position:

He looks semi-between Asian and American.

Can you explain that?

I think it's an image you'll find in America, of portraying something Asian, but packaging it into an American product.

Tom shared a similar thought.

The body he has right now is not really the common Korean body... So he's not like the typical Korean. He's more American.

A Korean in an American body?

Yes, exactly.

For interviewees, the image linked Kim to those typically given representational space, such as the white television drama hero whose shirtless poses have long graced the pin-up pages of magazines from *Teen Beat* to *People*. Indeed, several interviewees mentioned the model-like quality of Kim's pose and his "American big muscles." The image of Kim as a text itself, then, worked to signify American masculinity. Men were familiar with the composition of the image and the bodily signifiers of the subject, but experienced dissonance with the fact that the subject was Asian American rather than white.

These responses suggest that, for these interviewees, masculinity is manifested in the American physical ideal. In saying that "it's good to see the Asian American man as not so effeminate," Jimmy points to an inherent binary that has positioned white as masculine and Asian as feminine. This is a stereotyped dynamic that he has long identified in media representations, and one that he thinks this image ruptures. "It's not a very common portrayal," Oliver mused, finally determining that "it's kind of funny that objectifying him is positive." Fitting the standards of Western masculine physique,

Daniel Dae Kim's body can be objectified and becomes pleasurable in a way that others are not.

In this way, similarities are drawn between Daniel Dae Kim and John Cho as two Asian Americans who have broken into a predominantly White industry. Both men are visible Asian Americans in popular culture and have multiple points of appeal to mainstream audiences: they have lead roles in popular mainstream texts and, in those texts, are marketed as sexually desirable. In a way, their racial difference is also rendered invisible as their performances become consumable.

However, interviewees focused mostly on Jin, as the best example of "Asian American" precisely because his racial difference was so visible at the beginning of the show. For Oliver, the narrative structure of *Lost*'s flashbacks made it possible for a mainstream text to add depth to an Asian character. Because of this, he sees Jin as a complex character with a detailed past, and the amount of narrative focus places Jin on the same playing field as other characters. This allows viewers to judge him as a three-dimensional character rather than a racial caricature. Says David, "I could really trust this guy. He just does what he says. He's very humble.... Jin is the type of guy that helps, you know, while other guys hurt and complain.... He's a respectable character."

The visibility of Jin's story in the narrative, along with Daniel Dae Kim's visibility in Hollywood, lends to the credibility of his Asian American identity. Most of the men who talked with me spoke the most eloquently about Jin's story, his character development, and his role as an Asian character interacting with other Americanized characters. Josh called Jin "really, *really* conservative Korean" who eventually learns

English. Along with Josh, others mentioned Jin's Korean ways as stoic, patriarchal, and insular. Andrew explained the character arc:

He has a very strong Korean character, very stern. He begins to open up later, you see it in his relationship with his wife at the beginning, where he's very, like, "You listen to me and me only, it's just me and you and we're gonna get off this island," and stuff like that. But later he opens up and stuff, and he's like – actually I probably like his character the most, because he has a lot of honor, and I like that a lot. He has a lot of heart.

Men of all backgrounds appreciated the depth of Jin's character and the transformations the character underwent on the show. Fred, who emigrated to the U.S. from India when he was five years old, found striking similarities to, and comfort in, Jin's story:

I feel like he represents the general Asian population just because...he's trying to change from being Asian. Like, he tries to learn English and stuff like that. So, the small stuff he does, I can see his transformation. I can relate to him more, I've seen him grow on the show. Because of his background, I can connect that to my background... it's how he takes his background and uses it in a new setting, which is like what an Asian American pretty much has to do, when they come from whatever country to another country to live, how they change. I feel like Jin does that on the island, so you can connect to him a lot more, and gives a better representation of Asian Americans.

For Asian American viewers, seeing Jin's personal history, his present situation, and the negotiations he must make to interact in a new social setting, provides a realistic account

of what it means to be a racial minority in white America. For those like Fred, Jin's story showed a pathway to assimilation and respect. For others like Dean, it enabled a sense of self-pride in being American but also Asian: "[He's] the ideal Asian American because he is very unapologetic for who he is. He is very individual in the sense that he retains his traditions in spite of those around him or what may be going on around him."

In the two-part pilot of *Lost*, Jin Kwon and his wife, Sun, huddle under a piece of fuselage from the plane as a storm hits the island. "Don't worry about the others," he tells his wife. "We just need to stay together."²⁹⁹ A native Korean from Seoul, Jin seems to embody "traditional" Asian culture through his conservative and patriarchal values. When Sun suggests that others on the beach might ignore them less if they tried to communicate, Jin tells her, "We'll be fine. We don't need them. I will tell you what to do."³⁰⁰ Jin's determination to provide for and protect Sun is presented as stern and abusive. Throughout the pilot, Jin's interactions with Sun involve him either yelling at her or speaking to her in a patronizing manner. He slaps her hand away when she tries to help him gather food, orders her to button up her cardigan,³⁰¹ and to wash up because she is "filthy."³⁰² Furthermore, Jin's cultural difference is highlighted in the reciprocal discomfort he and others feel toward each other. When pregnant Claire asks Jin to feel her baby kick, Jin is visibly awkward about this physical contact. Later, when Jin tries to venture out and share raw sea urchins with others on the beach, they find his suggestion wholly unappealing. "I'm starving," says the overweight Hugo when Jin offers him a sea

²⁹⁹ ABC, "Pilot: Part 1," September 22, 2004.

³⁰⁰ ABC, "White Rabbit," October 20, 2004.

³⁰¹ ABC, "Pilot: Part 2," September 29, 2004.

³⁰² ABC, "Tabula Rasa," October 6, 2004.

urchin, “but nowhere near that hungry.”³⁰³ Jin is seen as a foreign Oriental, exoticized as a patriarchal tyrant who can catch fish with his hands, eats raw urchins, and is uncomfortable with Western women.

Jin’s alien nature is intensified by the numerous ethnicities white son the island use reference him: Hugo continually mistakes both Jin and his wife as Chinese,³⁰⁴ Sawyer calls him “Mr. Miyagi”³⁰⁵ and even refers to him as Chewbacca from *Star Wars*.³⁰⁶ When discovered by the “tailies” on the island, Bernard and Mr. Eko note that “he doesn’t even speak English”³⁰⁷ and is therefore not a threat. In relation to other ethnicities on the show, Jin is also positioned as inherently more foreign. Even ex-Iraqi Republican Guardsman, Sayid Jarrah, speaks English and embodies the hegemonic militaristic masculinity admired by even Whites. In a DVD commentary, Daniel Dae Kim explains the usefulness behind Jin’s difference: “I think the idea that you cannot understand what Jin and Sun are saying is a way of highlighting their Otherness on the show. And it allows people, and the other characters, to project what they think is going on with them, when they may not really know.” At first, viewers learn about Jin’s character through how he comes across to the other characters on screen, a social experience similar to those explained by interviewees.

However, the narrative structure of *Lost* allows Jin to become less foreign, literally and figuratively. As flashbacks reveal more of the history behind Jin and Sun’s relationship, their story becomes less about an Asian couple and more of a love story. If

³⁰³ ABC, “Pilot: Part 2.”

³⁰⁴ ABC, “White Rabbit”; “House of the Rising Sun,” October 27, 2004; “The Moth,” November 3, 2004; “D.O.C.,” April 25, 2007.

³⁰⁵ ABC, “White Rabbit.”

³⁰⁶ ABC, “Abandoned,” November 9, 2005.

³⁰⁷ ABC, “The Other 48 Days,” November 16, 2005.

anything, the couple is placed at odds against Sun's "stereotypical" Asian parents. Sun's mother believes that she should have found a husband instead of a college degree, and her father portrays the high-powered business executive and mob boss. We see both Jin and Sun defiant toward the traditions of this older generation: Sun learns English and wants to go to America, and Jin dismisses his roommate's premonition out of a Korean "destiny book" that he will meet Sun. On the island, as Jin learns to be less stubborn, he admits that English would be helpful and that he needs the help of his wife. Through this in-depth storytelling, Asian Americans are able to see the everyday story of "just another guy": Jin shows vulnerability, determination, and sexual desire; Sun and Jin live a couple's life of kissing, crying, making love, and fighting just like any other *Lost* couple. Jin is also depicted as virile/fertile, being the only man on the island to sire a child. These narrative developments enable Asian Americans to look past Jin's race and view him as more of a "normal" character, but also are evidence of the politics of difference found in multicultural narratives.

Multicultural Television and the Invisibility of Difference

Ultimately, interviewees' negotiations of these characters and texts reveal Asian American men's struggle for both visibility and invisibility within the American popular imaginary. Their interpretations of Asian American actors and characters suggest that the ideal Asian American portrayal is one that is simultaneously visible and invisible: they call for Asian Americans to be more visible in a predominantly white industry, but for narratives that render difference invisible by presenting an Asian American man as "just another guy." As I concluded my interviews, it seemed as if these ostensible "post-racial"

ideals indicated an embrace of a multiculturalism that focuses on social/cultural, rather than racial, differences.

This call for multiculturalism is something the industry seems to have embraced. As scholars have endeavored to make sense of the changing business models of the television industry (which I will discuss in the next chapter), such as the multitude of distribution channels and the niche markets they reach, the concept of “least objectionable programming” has shifted to incorporate narratives and casts—least objectionable casts—that reach the widest possible audience. In 2006, *Lost* creator Damon Lindelof explained that while *Lost* was “essentially a cult show in its design and its genre... what makes it accessible to a wider audience is that there is a character on the show who is like you, even if that character is Jin (a Korean who doesn’t speak English).”³⁰⁸ The use of ensemble casts has been a “magic” formula for programs to incorporate minorities without it being a “minority show;” a way for them to make differences visible yet invisible at the same time.

Take, for example, FOX’s hit show *Glee*, which debuted in 2009 and has been rewarded for its diverse cast by the Multicultural Motion Picture Association.³⁰⁹ In its first two seasons, the program tackled minority issues such as disabilities (one of their singers is confined to a wheelchair), coming out and dealing with homophobia, and teen pregnancy. Yet, others—mostly in the blogosphere—have criticized the program for its multi-tokenism, with the ultimate claim that the narrative of *Glee* promotes identification and support for mainly white, heterosexual, often male characters. As one blog put it,

³⁰⁸ Jeff Korbek, “Popular ‘Lost’ is a Cultural Phenomenon,” *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 18, 2006, accessed November 18, 2010, http://journalstar.com/lifestyles/article_2dac9f1b-8027-572f-8614-359526e4bc6e.html.

³⁰⁹ Katie Kravit, “Diversity Awards to Fete ‘Glee’,” *Variety*, October 27, 2009.

Glee includes “individuals from oppressed groups to make a TV show ‘feel’ more inclusive.... nearly all the secondary characters are tokenized even as writers attempt to cover it up by ‘special episodes about –insert oppression here--’.”³¹⁰ Such an approach allows for any accusations of tokenism, racism, or ignorance on the part of creators or characters to be eclipsed by larger concepts like humanity and citizenship.

A strategy for these multicultural programs is that they promote narratives built on character relationships. *Heroes* also presented an ensemble cast and was praised by the NAACP Hollywood Bureau for casting actors of color.³¹¹ The show was lauded for featuring East and South Asian men in “one of the most diverse casts in a primetime television show,”³¹² earning nominations for the NAACP Image Award and winning a Multicultural Prism Award.³¹³ With no overt focus on characters’ racial or ethnic differences in the storylines, *Heroes*, was instead billed as a program where “the story is king. People connect with one another at odd times and in unpredictable ways.”³¹⁴ The reading of Hiro presented above suggests how, despite its multicultural colorblindness, *Heroes* still marginalizes the character in a way that privileges the white masculinity. While Hiro plays a key role in the overall story, the central figures of the narrative are white brothers Peter and Nathan Petrelli, and white villain Sylar. Despite the show’s “human relationships,” its treatment of racial others can be read as supporting what

³¹⁰ “Top 5 Problems with *Glee*: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Season 2 Premiere,” *Feminist Frequency*, September 23, 2010. See also Michael Landweber, “Is *Glee* a Little Bit Racist?” *Pop Matters*, December 9, 2009.

³¹¹ Kimberly Nordyke, “NAACP: Biz Short on Diversity Again,” *Hollywood Reporter*, December 19, 2008.

³¹² Jennifer Fang, “The Last Hero,” *Racialicious*, June 28, 2007, accessed March 20, 2009, <http://racialicious.com/2007/06/28/the-last-hero>.

³¹³ NAACP official web site.

³¹⁴ “*Heroes*,” *Hollywood Reporter*, September 25, 2006.

Wendy Brown (2008) calls the “regime of White, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexuality.”³¹⁵

Heroes and *Lost* were both advertised as diverse, multicultural shows with intentionally international casts. Promotional pictures for each season of both shows involved ensemble images with characters of different races, ethnicities and genders in a group pose, promising narratives of inclusive communities and cultural representation. Yet, as Mary Beltran’s (2010) analysis of promotional material suggests, “the inclusion of actors and characters of color...is not necessarily tantamount to equitable representation.” Conducting a careful analysis of how diversity is presented in media narratives can reveal how those narratives privilege particular ideologies and communities.³¹⁶



Figure 5. The *Heroes* cast in a promotional still for the show's second season DVD.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 70.

³¹⁶ Beltran, “Meaningful Diversity.”

³¹⁷ NBC, accessed March 5, 2011, <http://www.nbc.com/heroes/dvd>.



Figure 6. The *Lost* cast in a promotional still for the show's second season.³¹⁸

Beltran's approach to multicultural casts—she recommends asking, for example, “Are characters of color fully realized individuals[, and] does the diversity of the cast appear natural?”—suggests that seemingly “diverse” shows can still work to privilege dominant, white characters in their narratives.³¹⁹ In these moments of subtle marginalization, multicultural ensembles can be read, at best, as narratives of tolerance.³²⁰

On *Lost*, for example, presenting human stories enabled racial or cultural conflicts to be described as differences of opinion. The trade press described *Lost* as a “relationship show”³²¹ about humanity, with “people falling in love, people stabbing each

³¹⁸ Kristin Dos Santos, “Guess Which *Lost* Star *Won't* Be Back?” October 20, 2009, accessed March 5, 2011, http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/watch_with_kristin/b149601_guess_which_lost_star_wont_be_back.html.

³¹⁹ “The Lost Supper,” a promotional still for *Lost*'s final season that mimicked Leonardo Da Vinci's “The Last Supper,” created a buzz among *Lost* fans searching for meaning in the image's symbolism. See Dave Itzkoff, “Decoding the ‘Lost Supper,’” *The New York Times*, January 5, 2010, accessed January 7, 2010, <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/05/decoding-the-lost-supper>. An image of “The Lost Supper” can be found at <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2010/01/05/arts/supperbig2.jpg>. Combined with the series finale's focus on Christian imagery and the white male characters Jack Shephard and John Locke, this diverse image can thus be read as upholding the “regime of White, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexuality” Wendy Brown identifies as framing the larger discourses of tolerance. *Regulating Aversion*, 94.

³²⁰ See Brown, *Regulating Aversion*.

³²¹ Ben Grossman, “*Lost* Shuns Sci-Fi Label,” *Broadcasting and Cable*, July 11, 2005.

other in the back, people having differences of opinion,”³²² hailing it as an “opulently produced adventure thriller,”³²³ with some of “the most innovative episodes of television. . . . With its sprawling characters and complex storytelling.”³²⁴ It blazed a trail in 2004 when television was searching for a key drama - NBC’s *The Apprentice* was the only other broadcast network show on Time’s “10 Best television shows” list of 2004.³²⁵ *Lost* also won a Screen Actors Guild award for best drama ensemble.³²⁶ Despite the truly international cast of the show, its narrative became a project of colorblindness that relegated racial and cultural difference to individual choices and actions. In this context, For example, Jin’s speaking Korean becomes a personal choice once he learns that his wife can speak English; even more illustrative is that other characters, particularly Michael and Hugo, seem to understand his Korean once they become friends with Jin.³²⁷ Jin’s inability to speak English is not linked to his linguistic abilities, but rather to his willingness to respect his wife and participate in the relationships on the island. In this context the premise of the show can be seen as a post-racial social project in which survivors must learn to live together and form a workable, liberal democracy on the island while they await rescue.³²⁸

The narrative works to eliminate any sense of Otherness within the relationships on the beach, most overtly by creating an unknown-yet-barbaric group of natives, aptly named “The Others,” on the island. By casting The Others as an external threat, the show

³²² Jim Benson, “The *Lost* Generation,” *Broadcasting and Cable*, May 16, 2005.

³²³ Matt Roush, “Lost & Found! An Original Idea,” *Broadcasting & Cable*, October 11, 2004.

³²⁴ Nellie Andreeva, “‘Lost’ Forever: End is Near,” *Hollywood Reporter*, May 7, 2007.

³²⁵ James Poniewozik, “The Best TV.” *Time*, December 18, 2004, accessed May 14, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/bestandworst/2004/tv.html>.

³²⁶ “‘Crash,’ ‘Lost’ Ensembles Lead Way at SAG Awards.” *Hollywood Reporter*, January 31, 2006, 37.

³²⁷ See: ABC, “The Greater Good,” May 4, 2005; “Born to Run,” May 11, 2005.

³²⁸ Michelle Dean, “Isle of Man,” *The American Prospect*, May 21, 2010, accessed May 25, 2010, http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=isle_of_man.

binds the survivors to each other in a common humanity, exemplified by their cautionary motto of “live together, die alone.” Deviant acts among the survivors are easily dismissed by the narrative to ensure that “The Others” remain literally intolerable. For example, in a climactic moment, Jin attacks Michael on the beach. Angry, Michael tells the others that Jin picked a fight because “Koreans don’t like Black people.” In the DVD commentary for this scene, writer Christian Taylor points to a “racial can of worms that opens because it’s a Korean man attacking a Black man, and in some places that doesn’t mean anything—in the United States, in certain places in America, it means quite a bit.” Yet, this exhortation of racial difference is brushed aside when Michael tries to explain his comment to his son: “I don’t think like that, OK? I was just angry.”³²⁹ That Michael personally doesn’t “think like that” renders claims of racism as an individual issue; by the next episode, Michael defends Jin by pointing out that he is Korean, not Chinese, to other survivors.³³⁰ In another example, after torturing a fellow survivor, Iraqi Sayid is quickly positioned as a fundamentalist extremist in comparison to the civilized rationality of Jack Shephard. In this case the only solution is Sayid’s self-imposed exile to remove his intolerable actions.

Conclusion

For interviewees, the experience of invisibility and the lack of any distinct Asian American narrative provided them with an acute awareness of the ways in which popular media texts influence their larger social surroundings. While many interviewees did not watch TV in the traditional sense, they were certainly aware enough of the images that surround them to be able to comment, quite critically, on their existence. Even if not

³²⁹ ABC, “House of the Rising Sun.”

³³⁰ ABC, “The Moth.”

actively engaged in consuming these Asian American men on screen, interviewees were still eager to offer—sometimes very emotional—critiques, bringing their own definitions of “Asian American” to figures and also by thinking about how actors and characters are consumed by a larger audience that, in turn, defines Asian Americans.

Interview responses also revealed a belief that under-representation of Asian Americans in Hollywood is in part due to the white institutional structure of the entertainment industry. It is seen as a system dominated by whites that caters to white audiences, and interviewees sense a dialogic relationship between social relations on the ground and social relations on the screen. These Asian Americans’ negotiations of media representations, then, intersect with the unique positioning of Asian Americans in America’s racial discourse. As some noted, while other racial minorities such as Hispanics and African Americans have to an extent managed to penetrate racial discourse in the United States, Asian Americans remain invisible.

When it comes to seeing Asian men on screen, interviewees feel conscripted into limited roles: they have long been faced stereotypical characters—bachelor fathers, rising sons, evil masterminds, dutiful model minorities—with narrative options as limited as the ranks they can fill in the entertainment industry. Indeed, the prominence of white actors on screens, fulfilling a wide range of roles, provides a number of positive role models whose performances they can enjoy. In this way, *Gladiator*’s Russell Crowe and others who fit the “Brad Pitt type” work to uphold hegemonic ideals of masculinity, naturalizing them into the white male body.³³¹ Only two interviewees named black actors among their favorites, and cited similar masculine traits such as physical stature as to why.

³³¹ See Dyer, *White*, 146-157.

I hesitate to conclude that the admiration of white male actors is somehow indicative of self-denial or white idealization. I—and the interviewees—offer an alternative that situates Asian American men within a larger context of multicultural consumption. Given the wide range of masculine performances white men portray in popular media, these men have found salient aspects of these performances to inform their own sense of self. By being versed in the stereotypes of Asian men within mainstream white discourse, they have developed strategies to react against, or work with, these performances of white masculinity. Interviewees were acutely aware that a certain degree of their idealization was a product generated by the imbalanced power relationships of the entertainment industry. This by no means assumes a passive, “complicit” audience that some scholars of “racial imperialism” claim; rather, it suggests that interviewees have found other facets of their identities, beyond race, to engage with when it comes to media representations. Interviewees also offered that they have found other media to engage with that may offer stronger racial models for them. Tom, for example, has found respectable, interesting and attractive Asian men from the Korean television shows and soap operas his family buys from Korea. While interviewees may not find much being offered to them as Asian American male viewers, they are aware of other characters, actors, or narratives that appeal to their status as men, regardless of race, in America.

Men’s negotiations of Asian American portrayals thus suggest an ideal of invisible visibility—being present, but not noticed as different. For example, they dislike Jackie Chan’s visibility because he is a visible stereotype, but they enjoy John Cho’s visibility because his difference is rendered invisible as he portrays “just another guy.”

Based on the discussions in this chapter, interviewees enjoy roles that are accepted by others on screen, moving throughout white society without drawing attention to their racial difference. The appeal of *Harold and Kumar* for interviewees is that the films allow interviewees to see, in the managed arena of filmic narrative, the burden of racial difference played out. Interviewees suggest a desire to be seen, but not to have to carry the burden of their racial identities from one encounter to another. Their admiration of Jin from *Lost* allows interviewees to see an Asian American character, for the first time on prime time screens, learn how to balance his “Asian” life with his “American” life, becoming truly “Asian American” in interviewees’ eyes.

Media representations matter, but in a very nuanced way. Interviewees saw media representations of Asian Americans as a matter of absence, focusing on the blank space of what was not there, or not portrayed. Similar to their everyday experience, this absence or invisibility becomes the structuring mechanism for their understanding of what it means to be Asian American. Their critique of the television industry, their belief that things would not change in the near future, and their open confessions that they have disengaged from media use suggest that these men have, in large part, given up on television. Indeed, what surprised me most from these discussions was the number of times a young man told me that they did not regularly watch television, choosing instead to sporadically download episodes or rent DVDs. These men did not count on television for positive portrayals, for power dynamics to shift, for television to provide them with an adequate lens or mirror into their perspective of genuine experience. Rather, for these interviewees, television is merely another factor in the white discourse they negotiate.

CHAPTER 4

Transmedia Narratives and Possibilities of Race and Gender

Audiences are getting harder and harder to reach – they're fragmented in many different ways, and they're very rarely offline. They're almost always connected to some device, which means they can be reached on these other platforms. To get a really big audience, you need to be able to reach these people where they're connected. You're foolish if you don't. Hollywood is starting to take these ideas very seriously. – Tim Kring, creator of *Heroes*³³²

As seen in the previous chapter, interviewees negotiated the increasing visibility of Asian American actors, particularly in shows such as *Lost* and *Heroes*, as a complex and contradictory move toward diversity on screens. Some actively dismissed actors such as Masi Oka in NBC's *Heroes* for perpetuating stereotypes; others saw Daniel Dae Kim from ABC's *Lost* as inhabiting a more realistic character but within a storyline still constrained by television's dominant, white ideological agenda. While *Lost* and *Heroes* have been lauded for their diverse casts and multicultural storylines, in-depth readings of the characters and their treatment within program narratives reveals the ways in which diversity can be celebrated yet undermined at the same time.

Despite sharing opinions of these programs, few interviewees watched them—or even television, for that matter—on a regular basis. Indeed, interviewees recalled episodes viewed on DVDs, or downloaded on or streamed through computers. Their lack

³³² Stuart Dredge, “Tim Kring Talks Transmedia, Mobile, and the Conspiracy for Good,” August 12, 2010, accessed October 18, 2010, <http://www.mobile-ent.biz/news/read/interview-tim-kring-talks-transmedia-mobile-and-the-conspiracy-f>.

of television viewing was explained by a variety of reasons, from high cable subscription prices and constrained viewing schedules, to a conscious rejection of racial biases in entertainment texts. While some may continue to watch television from their couches, many more have turned to computer screens to view selected texts at their own leisure. Whether using network studio sites, web-based clearinghouses such as Hulu.com, or peer-to-peer downloaded files, interviewees shared how they avoided fees and pricing schemes, long advertising breaks, and geographical or time constraints – they can watch anywhere, at any time. Indeed, these types of viewing habits signal a larger cultural moment in which television consumption is no longer tied to the actual television itself. As such, television production has had to respond to an audience that is increasingly difficult to pinpoint.³³³ As *Heroes* creator Tim Kring muses in the opening quote of this chapter, audiences are now constantly connected to content, but also more fragmented.

This chapter continues to look at minority representation in the media, but turns its focus to the diversity of channels, texts, and audiences that have challenged the traditional business model of broadcast television. Work on the television industry in this “post-network” era has linked changes in political economy, financing and regulation to changes in both the style and content of television products, arguing that the economic processes of production are inseparable from the cultural contribution of narratives.³³⁴ The more holistic approach of linking the multiple sites of production—the production of texts, distribution channels, narratives and meaning—moves beyond television studies that regard television texts as self-contained. By examining the additional texts

³³³ See Lotz, Introduction.” In *Beyond Prime Time*, 1-13.

³³⁴ See: Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will be Revolutionized* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007); Lynne Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

(paratexts) beyond the broadcast program, we can see how expanded narratives create new spaces to broaden articulations of race and gender.³³⁵ How have technological shifts changed the nature of broadcasting as well as the nature of audience consumption? How have television narratives changed to accommodate these shifts? And, if it is possible to conduct a close, textual analysis of multi-platform narratives in their complexity, might we see new spaces forming for new representations of race and gender beyond television?

The call to look “beyond television” does not deny the importance of televisual texts, but rather contextualizes television narratives within a new framework where the concepts of “television” and its “mass audience” are, from some perspectives, rendered obsolete. Television must be understood within a larger context in which production, dissemination and consumption now includes new technologies and multiple, fragmented audiences. Looking at the construction of these audiences and representations of Asian American masculinity, this chapter builds on the work of Amanda Lotz (2007, 2009), Henry Jenkins (2006), Jonathan Gray (2010), and others. It maps industrial shifts, the content these shifts produced, and where this content appeared, addressing the possibilities—yet to be fully realized—offered by a new business model that goes beyond television to build wider-reaching, multi-platform narratives.

Taking examples from *Lost* and *Heroes*, this chapter discusses the potential for new technologies to extend television narratives and the representations within them. Two popular shows caught in the midst of contentious industrial shifts, both *Lost* and *Heroes* presented audiences with in-depth mythologies comprised of web-based

³³⁵ See Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

adventure games, graphic novels, novellas and more, in addition to the primetime broadcasts. After explaining the experimental production context in which these mythologies developed, I use *Lost* to illustrate how a mainstream text used alternative texts—specifically, Alternate Reality Games (ARGs)—to widen its audience reach. In looking at the types of audiences ARGs attract as well as the complex nature of ARG gameplay, *Lost* provides an example of the challenges transmedia projects face in generating new interest in audiences beyond television. I then follow with examples from *Heroes* to illuminate the possibilities niche graphic novels and novellas offered Masi Oka’s character Hiro Nakamura. These texts offered new representations of Asian masculinity, but also revealed how genres shape content and how paratexts and their representations can be understood in the context of the mainstream text at the center of a narrative universe.

Mapping Shifts in Television

“Dollars for Downloads”: The Writers’ Strike

In 2007, mounting tensions in contract negotiations between the Writers’ Guild of America (WGA) and television studios signaled a fundamental shift in the structure of the entertainment industry. Television writers felt cornered by an old contract that failed to compensate for content distributed beyond television.³³⁶ Networks were turning to new avenues of content distribution through studio web sites, DVD box sets, and even portable devices such as mobile phones. Industry reports called this shifting landscape a

³³⁶ Andrew Wallenstein and Jesse Hiestrand, “Guilds, ABC Reach Mobisode Deal,” *Hollywood Reporter*, April 25, 2006. See also Richard Verrier and Claudia Eller, “Writers Union Feeling the Heat,” *LA Times*, 12 December 2007, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-strike12dec12,0,5281951.story> (accessed July 2, 2010).

“rapidly changing marketplace with no precedent,”³³⁷ and noted that networks “built on an old business model”³³⁸ were at a “digital crossroads.”³³⁹ “Television is dying,” *Lost* creator Damon Lindelof’s opinion article in the *New York Times* began, as he went on to explain how writers received royalties from syndicated airings or DVD sales, but not from the Internet. He explained:

My show, “Lost,” has been streamed hundreds of millions of times since it was made available on ABC’s web site. The downloads require the viewer to first watch an advertisement, from which the network obviously generates some income. The writers of the episodes get nothing. We’re also a hit on iTunes (where shows are sold for \$1.99 each). Again, we get nothing.³⁴⁰

Seeing little to none of the residual pay from these new channels of distribution (“dollars for downloads,” as one picket sign demanded), the WGA responded to an impasse in contract negotiations with a strike that lasted from November 5, 2007 through February 12, 2008.

The strike forced all scripted Hollywood shows, including *Lost* and *Heroes*, to plan for stalled production by December of 2007.³⁴¹ Some producers made settlements with show writers to keep shows on schedule, while others attempted to shorten

³³⁷ Diane Mermigas, “New Media’s Effect on the Value of a Viewer,” *Hollywood Reporter*, March 14-20, 2006.

³³⁸ Paul J. Gough and Nellie Andreeva, “New Reality for NBC Uni,” *Hollywood Reporter*, October 20-22, 2006.

³³⁹ Kimberly Nordyke, “Net Chiefs: TV Faces ‘Digital Crossroads,’” *Hollywood Reporter*, October 20-22, 2006.

³⁴⁰ Damon Lindelof, “Mourning TV,” *New York Times*, Opinion, November 11, 2007.

³⁴¹ “WGA Strike Shuts Down Most Scripted Shows,” *United Press International*, December 14, 2007.

storylines for the attenuated season.³⁴² Many other shows had limited television seasons at the start of 2008. *Lost*, which originally planned 16 episodes for its fourth season beginning in January 2008, could only finish eight by the time of the strike.³⁴³ After the strike ended, show creators filmed five more episodes, but not without a five week gap. The WGA strike also interrupted *Heroes*' second season, with producers only able to complete 11 of its 25 scheduled episodes.³⁴⁴

During the strike, some writers sought to continue their creative work by producing alternative, mostly Internet-based texts like graphic novels and mini-series. Perhaps one of the most popular texts to emerge from the work stoppage was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Joss Whedon's *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, starring Neil Patrick Harris. The series was Whedon's attempt to "create new work that circumvented the [studio] system."³⁴⁵ Whedon brought in family and friends to write and shoot the three-part series that was delivered for viewers around the world via the Internet in July 2008. After three days of free viewing, *Dr. Horrible* and its soundtrack were then made available for purchase on iTunes, then on DVD later in the year. As "writers tried to form partnerships for outside funding," Whedon explained to viewers, the idea behind *Dr. Horrible* was to "show how much could be done with very little. To show the world there is another way."³⁴⁶ In the end, Whedon's project earned twice what it cost to produce,³⁴⁷

³⁴² Richard Verrier, Claudia Eller, and Andrea Chang, "Writers file labor charge against studios." *LA Times*, December 14, 2007, accessed 14 May 14, 2010, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-strike14dec14.0.4069082.full.story>.

³⁴³ Josef Adalian and Michael Schneider, "An Early Gaze at What Awaits in '08," *Variety* 409.7, January 7-13, 2008.

³⁴⁴ Eric Goldman, "Heroes Creator Tim Kring Talks," *IGN*, December 14, 2007, accessed July 22, 2010, <http://tv.ign.com/articles/841/841573p1.html>. Before the strike, however, *Heroes* had already incorporated alternative content to supplement its television seasons. *Heroes: Origins*, a self-contained six-episode mini-series, was brainstormed to add episodes 24-episode season, in an attempt to attract audience attention.

³⁴⁵ "Master Plan," accessed July 22, 2010, <http://drhorrible.com/plan.html>.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

generated an action figure and graphic novel, and prompted a sequel. Whedon's creation highlighted the ever-increasing importance of web content in entertainment distribution, which was indeed the crux of WGA negotiations.

Studios also used the work stoppage to experiment with new content. For example, NBC took negotiations over entertainment industry business models as a signal, and an opportunity, to embrace "NBC 2.0," cutting 700 jobs and expanding its digital offerings in an attempt to stay competitive with YouTube, social networks, and other new media distribution channels. In this new model, NBC's goal was to be a media company that "happens to do television."³⁴⁸ The new "NBC 360" image aimed to draw young audiences to the NBC web site and the other distribution channels under its corporate conglomerate.

Trying to maintain audience interest in *Heroes*, which had significantly boosted the network's primetime ratings,³⁴⁹ NBC supplemented the show with a project called *Heroes Evolutions*. Originally dubbed *Heroes 360*, *Heroes Evolutions* was a digital extension of the show to bring *Heroes* content to fans, along with the graphic novels started in 2006. "Go beyond your television screen and take the next leap forward with *Heroes Evolutions*," NBC.com advertised. "Online, offline, and on your phone, *Heroes Evolutions* brings adventure into every corner of your world."³⁵⁰ With the original intent to add short-form scripted content after each episode aired, NBC instead posted behind-the-scenes, unscripted videos to the web to avoid WGA regulations.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ "Joss Whedon's Plan to Monetize Internet Content (Watch Out, Hollywood)," *Knowledge@Wharton*, February 4, 2009, accessed July 22, 2010, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2152>.

³⁴⁸ Frank Ahrens, "NBC Taking a Big Step Back from Television," *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2006.

³⁴⁹ Paul J. Gough, "'Heroes' Saves Night for NBC," *Hollywood Reporter*, September 27, 2006.

³⁵⁰ <http://www.nbc.com/heroes/evolutions>.

³⁵¹ James Hibberd, "NBC Finds Webisode Workaround," *Television Week*, March 26, 2007.

What the WGA strike signaled was an historical turning point in the way Hollywood and its audiences conceived of entertainment and its production, distribution, and consumption. The strike was symptomatic of larger shifts in the industry that began to fully emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the rise of digital technologies and niche programming. By 2007, the WGA work-stoppage revealed the challenge broadcasters faced in moving beyond television to appeal to audiences, who in turn had given up on traditional television viewing for newer, more personalized channels of consumption.

Giving up on TV? Audience shifts

The period of interest in this dissertation, roughly 2000-2008, marks a shift from an era in which television was originally conceived as a delivery system for network content, to what some have dubbed the “post-network era.” Television was a mass medium when only three channels were available and limited content was delivered to captive audiences. Today, the proliferation of niche television channels caters to a fragmented audience of varying interests and desires. Nielsen research in 2004 showed that the average American home received 100 television channels, compared to a mere 27 channels a decade earlier.³⁵² By the 2007-2008 season, ABC and NBC stood out as two of the three original television broadcast networks trying to stay afloat in this moment of audience fragmentation and proliferation of choice. Ratings research has shown that

³⁵² Testimony of Susan D. Whiting, President and CEO of Nielsen Media Research before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation Communication Subcommittee, July 15, 2004, accessed May 13, 2010, <http://www.nielsenmedia.com/forclients>.

primetime programs remained the most dominant and popular form of television, but shrinking ratings for broadcast networks.³⁵³

Amanda Lotz (2007) identifies the 1980s as the start of major industrial shifts. She labels the period as a “multi-channel transition,” when new broadcast and subscription channels offered more choices to audiences, who also had more control over what they wanted to watch. This was in part due to changes in government regulations and new technologies like Video Cassette Recorders, which altered the ways in which content was delivered and could be watched, respectively. Institutional structures and practices responded to appeal to smaller segments as audiences fragmented into smaller demographics and interests. Content delivered to broad swaths of the audience faced competition from niche content providers “narrowcasting” to specific target audiences, altering the definition of television’s interpretive community. The broadcast networks faced sharp declines in viewership, particularly among the coveted demographic of men aged 18-34.³⁵⁴

Broadcast television not only competed with the rise of niche cable television networks’ original and syndicated content,³⁵⁵ but also with digital video recording (DVR) technologies problematizing traditional structures of distribution and viewing. When TiVo was first commercially released in March of 1999, consumers were introduced to an even more flexible way of watching television. With new digital video recording (DVR) technology, hard drives replaced chunky, barely programmable video cassettes, allowing viewers to pause and rewind live TV, and introduced new programs of potential interest

³⁵³ David Bauder, “Broadcast Viewership Hits Record Low,” *Washington Times*, July 8, 2010, accessed July 20, 2010, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/8/americans-arent-watching-tv>.

³⁵⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 244.

³⁵⁵ Lotz, “Introduction.”

based on personal viewing profiles. Most importantly, larger hard drives enabled viewers to store more television content for timeshifted viewing; television content from sitcoms to movies could be watched not only live, but an hour, a week, or even months after their original broadcast. As *Advertising Age* declared in 2002, “Primetime is no longer a ‘time of day.’ It’s a frame of mind. Prime time is ‘my time.’”³⁵⁶

The embrace of advanced technologies like recording devices and the Internet, as well as the move to make content specifically for these technologies, contributed to an overall digitalization of entertainment and its reception,³⁵⁷ and audiences’ divided attentions were exacerbated by an ever-growing number of competing outlets and technologies. This has allowed individuals to view material on a variety of personal and mobile devices, freed from the confines of their living rooms to watch, pause, and share content on the go. The widespread adoption of digital, broadband technology by content providers and audiences made it difficult for advertisers to accurately predict financial expectations for a single television program;³⁵⁸ it also made other financial calculations, such as residual pay to WGA writers, tricky to estimate.³⁵⁹ Yet, looking to reach audiences and maintain interest in television texts, broadcast networks turned to digital technologies to expand their offerings. Technology, financing, and corporate deregulation made room for networks to embrace multi-platform productions that took advantage of the many media divisions under their corporations.³⁶⁰ Highly experimental in nature, this

³⁵⁶ Dom Rossi, “Rethink ‘Prime Time.’” *Advertising Age* 73.17, April 29, 2002.

³⁵⁷ See Lotz, “Introduction”; Göran Bolin, “Media Technologies, Transmedia Storytelling and Commodification,” in *Ambivalence Towards Convergence: Digitalization and Media Change* (236-248), eds. Tanja Storsul and Dagny Stuedahl (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2007).

³⁵⁸ Mermigas, “New Media’s Effect”; Ben Fritz, “Viewers Watch on the Web, But Blurb Bucks Lag,” *Variety*, March 16-22, 2009.

³⁵⁹ Ben Fritz, “Viewers Watch on the Web.”

³⁶⁰ Geoffrey Long, “Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company,” Master’s Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

synergistic business model created new texts and representations in an attempt to build a wider audience.

The demographic of the interviewees for this project make them part of a wave of media users who have moved beyond television for entertainment. Members of this “millennial generation,” born roughly from 1982-1995, have been referred to as “digital natives” whose technology-driven lives enable them to be “always connected.”³⁶¹ While the concept of “digital natives” has been critiqued for its essentialism and inability to capture the diversity of lived experiences among children, teens, and adults,³⁶² market research confirms viewing habits that suggest at least some sort of generational phenomenon that encapsulates the men I interviewed for this project. For example, viewers aged 25-34 lead the statistics in timeshifted viewing,³⁶³ and younger men are more likely than other viewers to watch television shows online.³⁶⁴ As television producer Mark Burnett explained of his sons, “My kids don’t know what a TV network is anymore. They watch one channel: TiVo.”³⁶⁵

Beyond Television: The Transmedia Experiment

Truly, this “post-network” era saw the television industry warp, buckle and reshape itself in response to the changing affordances of technology and the demands of audiences. In an attempt to capture more audiences beyond television, broadcast

³⁶¹ Mark Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon* 9.5, October 2001. See also Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, Eds. “Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next.” Pew Research Center, February 2010.

³⁶² See, for example, Sue Bennett, Karl Maton, and Lisa Kervin, “The ‘Digital Natives’ Debate: A Critical Review of the Evidence.” *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39 (2008): 775–786.

³⁶³ “Americans Using TV and Internet Together 25% More than a Year Ago,” March 22, 2010, accessed March 13, 2010, http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/three-screen-report-q409.

³⁶⁴ “Is the Internet Killing Cable TV?” *Retrevo*, April 9, 2010, accessed May 13, 2010, <http://www.retrevo.com/content/blog/2010/04/internet-killing-cable-tv>.

³⁶⁵ Alison Jamas, “Just Don’t Turn Off the TV: Miller, Burnett Say the Future is Online,” *Daily Variety* 291.3, April 5, 2006.

networks, led by ABC, began to offer reruns of recently aired episodes for viewing on studio web sites. In May of 2006, ABC experimented with *Lost*, one of their most popular shows, by airing episodes on television and then posting the episode for viewing on ABC.com the next day. They decided to allow audiences to purchase episodes through iTunes. Supplementing their television broadcasts with digital offerings, studios could still compensate for potential losses in one area (television) with profits in another (digital downloads)—indeed, a \$1.99 iTunes download of *Lost* generated roughly three times more revenue for ABC than from primetime television advertisements.³⁶⁶

The move to offer episodes beyond the television proved so successful that by the next season, the majority of ABC programs were distributed in this way: first television, then the web.³⁶⁷ Other broadcast networks followed, and in 2007 ABC, NBC and FOX partnered to create the online service Hulu, a web site which collected television and film content for free, limited-advertisement, online viewing.^{368,369} Catering to new audience demands, Hulu's business model was predicated on "help[ing] people find and enjoy the world's premium video content when, where and how they want it." Hulu secured audiences who did not tune in during the original broadcast, and also ensured network advertisers that timeshifting viewers would come to a studio-sanctioned portal to view the online episode. It also helped show producers keep the attention of busy audience members: "On a practical level," wrote James Poniewozik of *Time*, "DVRs, DVDs and

³⁶⁶ Mermigas, "New Media's Effect."

³⁶⁷ Fritz, "Viewers Watch on the Web."

³⁶⁸ "Hulu-About," accessed May 14, 2010, http://www.hulu.com/about/company_timeline.

³⁶⁹ Interestingly, Hulu's name is of Chinese origin, derived from an ancient proverb and loosely translated into "holder of precious things." Tim Stack, "Hulu: Five Burning Questions," *Entertainment Weekly*, accessed May 14, 2010, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0..20185419.00.html>.

iTunes downloads mean it's less likely fans will miss episodes, fall behind and give up.³⁷⁰

In order to provide access to their television narratives whenever, wherever and however audiences wanted, broadcast networks began to think of ways to expand on their traditional creative, marketing and distribution models. This new model of media production required what Göran Bolin calls “textual production that travels over technologies”³⁷¹ or, in other words, transmedia texts. The transmedia text involves intricate multi-platform narrative webs that, according to Henry Jenkins (2006), capitalize on the affordances of digital media convergence.³⁷² In his case studies of transmedia stories, Jenkins points particularly to *The Matrix* (2000), a feature film with a story extended into video games, animated series, web stories, and comic books, all providing clues to understanding the larger narrative in an interactive, iterative process for fans.³⁷³

The transmedia text thus capitalizes on cultural synergy, or texts and formats that travel over several technologies, and a non-linear narrative, in which different stages and threads of a story are distributed through different channels. One of the noted economic incentives for non-linear storytelling, then, is that the parceling of stories onto different platforms makes consumers dependent on multiple platforms to fully appreciate and interact with the narrative. As Jenkins and other scholars of transmedia production suggest, these moves to expand commodification across different platforms have been

³⁷⁰ James Poniewozik, “Why the Future of Television is *Lost*,” *Time*, September 24, 2006.

³⁷¹ Bolin, “Media Technologies,” 243.

³⁷² Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

³⁷³ This is not to deny that viewing a film or a television text is an interactive process. We must acknowledge the different psychological, aesthetic, parasocial, and other elements of engagement that vary from platform to platform, but also the wholly new process of engaging with multiple platforms to create a singular experience. For more in this area, see Elizabeth Jane Evans, “Character, Audience Agency and Transmedia Drama,” *Media, Culture & Society* 30.2 (2008): 197-213.

driven by producers' needs to maximize means of consumption in response to a diverse array of technologies.

In an April 2010 move that acknowledged the truly “post-network” business, the Producers Guild of America (PGA) approved the title of “Transmedia Producer” to the list of official project credits. The PGA defined a transmedia producer as one working to produce upwards of three narrative storylines from the same fictive world on multiple platforms including film, TV, internet, print media, comics, and mobile downloads.³⁷⁴ A few months later, *Heroes* creator Tim Kring started his own entertainment company, Imperative, devoted to transmedia storytelling and marketing. The move to officially incorporate transmedia production into the entertainment industry signals a change in the way we conceptualize television production and use.

Creating a transmedia narrative can be a successful marketing and branding strategy. Ivan Askwith has extensively discussed the evolution of a program into a brand, with expanded access as “touchpoints” for viewers to connect with the narrative.³⁷⁵ These multiple access points increase the potential to draw in, and foster the loyalty of, multiple niche audiences. The transmedia strategy offers a path by which new texts—and subsequently new content and new audiences—can be introduced into the broadcast television arena, often more constrained and regulated than its cable counterpart. *Lost* and *Heroes* were two of the first major broadcast shows to wholeheartedly embrace the transmedia model, and this embrace was not without its challenges.

“Fishing Where The Fish Are”: The Niches of Transmedia Universes

³⁷⁴ Robert W. Welkos, “PGA Approves “Transmedia Producer” Credit,” April 6, 2010, accessed April 9, 2010, <http://www.hollywoodnews.com/2010/04/06/pga-approves-transmedia-producer-credit>.

³⁷⁵ Ivan Askwith, “Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium.” Master’s Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

Experiencing *Lost*: Alternate Reality Games And Audiences at the Periphery

Working to capture as wide an audience as possible, *Lost* creators Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse worked to develop the narrative into a larger mythology, one to be experienced rather than merely watched. In the first official *Lost* podcast, Lindelof explained, “You’re going to have to watch the show, and not just the show, but what happens in between the show, sort of fairly carefully, in order to...begin the path on this, what we’re calling an experience.”³⁷⁶ *Lost*’s transmedia narrative was comprised of mobile phone episodes—“mobisodes”—podcasts, and web-based Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) between television seasons. The idea behind each of *Lost*’s many distributed narratives was to keep existing audiences interested and potentially draw in new viewers through different points of engagement.

Lost’s first ARG, *The Lost Experience (TLE)*, was truly an experiment in interactive participation, and its intense storyline requiring obsessive and dedicated work was ultimately deemed a failure by *Lost* creators.³⁷⁷ Helping to intensify the mythology behind the program, the ARG engaged players in an intricate public relations campaign that blended *Lost*’s narrative fiction into game players’ real lives. A collaborative project between ABC and television companies in Australia and the UK, the *TLE* centered on the

³⁷⁶ November 8, 2005, <http://www.ABC.com>.

³⁷⁷ Other ARGs included a more puzzle-based *Find 815*, following an Oceanic technician on a search for his girlfriend, a flight attendant on the doomed flight; the *DHARMA Initiative Recruiting Project*, with competitive games for viewers to play under the guise of applying for a position with the research group on the island; *Lost University*, and online, DVD and iPhone-based project that allowed viewers to enroll in “courses” based on the show; and *Damon, Carlton and a Polar Bear*, in which clues to geographical locations provide viewers with access to limited edition artwork related to *Lost*. Many ARGs, despite strong mainstream media publicity, involved appearances and/or tie-ins to annual Comic-Cons.

premise that the Hanso Foundation, a company from the show, was a real-world business that *Lost* writers had appropriated for their teleplays.³⁷⁸

In true non-linear fashion, *The Lost Experience* ARG would make sense to players as a self-contained game. Season three of *Lost* would still make sense to viewers if they did not play the *TLE*; the richest experience, however, would be for viewers who became players, with the game adding a level of depth to the show and its mythology. Abba situated the ARG within a network of digital technologies. Viewers, slowly becoming players in a five month-long game, would further *Lost*'s narrative through their dedicated consumption of ARG texts and their collective digital labor.

In his analysis of ARGs, Tom Abba offers that an ARG player might not even be aware that a game has begun, and that he or she is an active participant.³⁷⁹ A viewer interested in exploring one clue might find a hidden piece of information that leads to a longer and more complex line of participatory exercises that constitute the ARG. In *TLE*, a curious viewer could quickly become an active co-creator in the interactive, transmedia universe. *TLE* began during a commercial break during a second-season *Lost* episode, which provided a Hanso phone number and an address to the Hanso Foundation web site. This point of entry—a “rabbit hole”³⁸⁰—into the ARG at first provided details about the company, with several hidden “Easter eggs” on the web site that, when found, would link visitors to new web pages. Other areas of the web site were password protected; when viewers dialed the number in the Hanso TV commercial, voice messages provided clues

³⁷⁸ *TLE*'s narrative web extended so far that an actor playing Hanso executive Hugh McIntyre was interviewed on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. McIntyre furthered the plot of the ARG by complaining about *Lost* as a television text: “The writers and producers of the show have decided to attach themselves to our foundation and use us as part of their mythology, but it’s not true.” ABC TV, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, May 24, 2006.

³⁷⁹ Tom Abba, “Hybrid Stories: Examining the Future of Transmedia Narrative,” *Science Fiction Film and Television* 2.1 (2009), 64.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

as to what these passwords were. *TLE* entered a new stage when the Hanso web site was hacked by Internet activist Rachel Blake (the only female lead to appear in a *Lost* ARG). Along with other ARG characters, Blake enlisted players to follow her attempts to publicize the Hanso Foundation's shady business ethics.

Simultaneously, an integral part of *TLE* was the novel *Bad Twin*, authored by Gary Troup, a fictive character who did not survive the crash of Oceanic flight 815. Published as part of the *Lost* mythology, the *Bad Twin* was key to narrative developments in the ARG because it contained controversial statements about the Hanso Foundation; it also provided readers with more information about the TV narrative itself. Real-life publicity for *Bad Twin* thus centered on the Hanso Foundation's supposed attempts to dismiss Troup's work. "Interviews" with Troup posted on Barnes and Noble, Borders, and Amazon web sites revealed that the Hanso Foundation had pulled an earlier book, also written by Troup, from public access Foundation. On May 9, 2006, newspapers across the country including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* featured a quarter page advertisement purportedly bought by Hanso, pleading readers to disbelieve the claims made in the novel: it was billed as "the book the Hanso Foundation doesn't want you to read." The advertisement urged readers to instead visit the Hanso web site for information about the company. The back-and-forth between the company and the novel would also be aired out on publisher Hyperion Books' web site, with an "official" statement about the novel's controversy.

The dual function of *Bad Twin* highlights transmedia storytelling's structural and interactive capacities to subvert reality and hail audiences on multiple levels.³⁸¹ *TLE*'s blend of new and old, digital and print media enabled *Bad Twin* to hold multiple

³⁸¹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 124.

functions—not only serving as narrative artifacts, but also as a “meta-text” of the *Lost* narrative.³⁸² The role of the novel in the game, in the actual TV show (characters read the manuscript to pass time on the island), and in its real, published form, added multiple layers of meaning to the *Lost* experience. Yet, while *Lost* fans criticized the novel for failing to contribute meaningfully to the *Lost* narrative, it still managed to rank on the *New York Times* bestseller list.³⁸³ With a narrative unable to be contained in a single medium, *Lost* experimented with “meta-texts” such as *Bad Twin* to connect audiences from one line of the story to another.³⁸⁴

³⁸² Abba, “Hybrid Stories,” 70.

³⁸³ Felicia R. Lee, “‘Bad Twin,’ a Novel Inspired by ‘Lost,’ Makes the Best-Seller Lists,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2006, accessed May 14, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/27/books/27lost.html>.

³⁸⁴ Abba, “Hybrid Stories,” 70. Other texts and characters within *TLE* blurred the line between reality and fiction. At one point, an actor playing Hanso Foundation executive Hugh McIntyre appeared for an interview on the May 24, 2006 episode of *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, where he stated disdain over *Lost* writers’ appropriation of his company’s name. Later in the game, players were given McIntyre’s email address and could receive email messages from the character. Another *TLE* character berated fans for describing him as a fictional character on a *Lost* Internet fan site. Rachel Blake’s web site and blog began to include comments from *TLE* players, whose collaborative research into *Lost*-related topics furthered the *TLE* narrative.



Figure 7: The fictional Hanso Foundation's newspaper advertisement against *Bad Twin*, the TLE tie-in novel written by fictional *Lost* character Gary Troup. This one was found in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.³⁸⁵

As *TLE* progressed, Blake's new web site provided ARG players with new clues, or glyphs, that unlocked fragments of a secret video exposing some of Hanso's business ventures. Glyphs were revealed to players in a complex, integrated marketing campaign involving ABC subsidiaries: they were found in advertisements for both Sprite and Jeep, as well as on the job-seeking web site, monster.com. At one point in the ARG, Hanso Foundation was revealed to own Apollo Candy (a food item on *Lost*); shortly after, Apollo Candy giveaways were scheduled at state fairs and other summer events around the United States as well as in the UK and Australia. These market tie-ins highlight how transmedia storytelling is motivated by economic incentives: through media convergence, producers maximize points of distribution and therefore consumption and revenue.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Accessed May 14, 2010, <http://www.thelostexperience.com/ads>.

³⁸⁶ Bolin, "Media Technologies."

Providing so many points of entry through product tie-ins, integrating known brands into the narrative, and bringing the ARG into players' everyday experiences worked to promote emotional attachments that boosted revenue not only for *Lost*, but its product partners as well.³⁸⁷



Figure 8: A *TLE* glyph, found on a Sprite ad in *People Magazine*, led to a series of clues and information when "NANITE" was entered into sublymonal.com, a specially designed website which viewers were led to from the Hanso Foundation website. Not only were *TLE* players expected to be knowledgeable in following these web-based clues, but were also tasked with finding glyphs in places ranging from advertisements to physical locations as far as Sydney, Australia.³⁸⁸

TLE players were asked to complete increasingly difficult tasks, particularly when it came to identifying hidden glyphs and cracking encrypted video files. The tasks involved in playing *TLE*—finding clues hidden within web page source code, obsessively tracking clues, translating mathematical and computer coding—depended on an audience well-versed in the digital labor of the Internet. While ARGs are built on the concept that no one individual can participate without the help of others, they do depend, as Jenkins states, “on consumers with the kind of cultural competencies that could only originate in the context of global convergence.”³⁸⁹ To be a fully dedicated participant in *TLE*, one

³⁸⁷ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 104.

³⁸⁸ Accessed May 14, 2010, <http://www.thelostexperience.com/glyphs>.

³⁸⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 113.

must have had access to the Internet, a certain mastery of “pop cosmopolitanism,”³⁹⁰ and the ability to “grind...away at these games for 10, 20, 30 hours a week.”³⁹¹ The “play” of the ARG was, indeed, “homework,” with a global study group of *Lost* fans collaborating with one another to share answers.³⁹²

Jenkins’ formulation that the transmedia system provides content for “migratory media audiences who will go anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want,”³⁹³ suggests that the success of a niche text is reliant on active consumers willing to seek it out. This makes the success of transmedia paratexts a complicated challenge: it must be unique enough to appeal to a different audience, but similar and general enough to feed back into the central television program. Developing a narrative on a new platform must account for the types of audiences drawn to that platform.

While designed to draw in new audiences, *TLE* instead reinforced fan loyalty among a community already used to the ARG genre and its level of detail. By the end of *TLE*, some had criticized that ABC and *Lost* producers created the game for “the 1%” of “minutiae-obsessed,” “serious hard-core fans.”³⁹⁴ Indeed, the ARG built on an already existing collaborative intelligence project, the online wiki *LostPedia*. This online encyclopedia was so devoted to the minutiae of the show that loyal viewers helped each other make connections between episodes, characters, and even objects. After *TLE*

³⁹⁰ Henry Jenkins, “Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence,” in *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (152-172), ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

³⁹¹ Mary Jane Irwin, “Q&A with Alternate Reality Game Designer Jane McGonigal,” *Wired Magazine* 15.6, May 17, 2007, accessed May 28, 2010, http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/15-06/st_arg2.

³⁹² As Jenkins states: “To truly appreciate what we are watching, we have to do our homework,” *Convergence Culture*, 94.

³⁹³ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 282.

³⁹⁴ Poniewozik, “Why the Future of Television is *Lost*.”

concluded, even Lindelof admitted that it “went too deep” and became inaccessible to a mainstream audience, potentially turning away new viewers. Ultimately, creators missed the goal to bring back old audiences and intrigue new ones, losing 5 million viewers in the season premier that followed the ARG.³⁹⁵ It is important to note that the ARGs in following seasons were much more simplified and less dependent on the types of digital labor mentioned above.

While the ARG may have struggled to bring in new audiences to the program, it did offer new possibilities in distributing narrative content and appealing to a niche audience beyond television. In the next section, I suggest that transmedia texts also open possibilities for content beyond what is found on television. What might (un)conventional texts and representational spaces in transmedia narratives offer audiences, in terms of racial and gendered representations?

Building *Heroes*: Bringing Peripheral Representations to the Center

Similar to *Lost*, the *Heroes* transmedia universe was calculated and intense. Even before *Heroes*' 2006 premiere at Comic-Con, the world's largest annual comic book convention, show creators developed the web site “9th Wonders”—named after a comic book read by characters in the show—to create a fanbase and build anticipation.³⁹⁶ This was quickly followed with other digital components that provided entry into the *Heroes* mythology. Show writer Jesse Alexander wrote on his personal blog:

At HEROES we have embraced the transmedia approach. We extend our narrative across multiple media platforms simultaneously. Taking the

³⁹⁵ “*Lost*'s Savvy Entrepreneur Damon Lindelof Wonders Who Watches the *Watchmen* Viral Videos,” March 7 2009, accessed June 10, 2010, <http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/lost-savvy-entrepreneur-damon-26811.aspx>.

³⁹⁶ Jesse Alexander, “Is it Marketing, or Content?” *The Global Couch*, June 28, 2008.

characters, stories, and concepts from our broadcast show and expanding them via every platform we have access to. DVD. Websites. Cell phone games. Comic Books. Manga. Toys. And so on. Every piece of content that we create is designed to be a point of engagement for our audience, both a way for potential fans to discover the franchise, and for loyal fans to immerse themselves in the world of HEROES.³⁹⁷

Indeed, *Heroes*' embrace of transmedia storytelling's "encyclopedic capacity"³⁹⁸ was evident even in some of the show's opening images. In the first episode, viewers see geneticist Mohinder Suresh discover his father's research into individuals around the world who hold super powers. The image, a world map dotted with thumbtacks connected by different colored string, points to the interconnected stories of *Heroes*' characters but also mirrors the "contextualizing devices—color-coded paths, time lines, family trees, maps, clocks, calendars, and so on," [that storytellers create] to help viewers make sense of the world."³⁹⁹ The inclusion of global storylines and characters was also brought to the show's marketing campaigns, with extensive premieres and cast appearances in cities around the world.⁴⁰⁰

Heroes presented a television text that was accessible to mainstream, primetime television audiences, but also spoke to a niche audience that appreciated the graphic novel genre, superhero narratives, and the mythology and origin stories that accompanied them. As with *Lost*, *Heroes* producers established a fan community through a forceful presence at Comic-Con, where fellow comic book fan and cult director/independent film

³⁹⁷ Jesse Alexander, "Embrace the Transmedia Approach!" *The Global Couch*, June 14, 2009.

³⁹⁸ Janet Murray in Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 116.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ Henry Jenkins labels this "global convergence." In "Convergence? I Diverge." *Technology Review*, June 17, 2001.

actor Kevin Smith announced that he would direct an episode of *Heroes: Origins*, a spin-off mini-series for fans.⁴⁰¹ *Origins* was designed to add to the *Heroes* universe while also luring viewers to the television: *Origins* was meant to allow viewers to pick their favorite mini-series character for inclusion in the regular primetime story. However, *Origins* was put on hold due to the 2007 WGA strike and ultimately canceled by NBC entertainment in order to “focus on keeping the *Heroes* mothership as strong as possible.”⁴⁰²

While trying to experiment with offshoots like *Origins*, show creators and writers kept their fans engaged and interested by thinking of additional paratexts. When the WGA strike preemptively ended the show’s second season, writers continued their work on the *Heroes* graphic novel offered on the show’s NBC web site. Premiering alongside the television show, the graphic novel at first continued the show’s narrative and provided the origin stories of the show’s characters. Later, the graphic novels soon began depicting new characters not seen on the show, adding more depth to the television content. Writers Aron Eli Coleite and Joe Pokaski, graphic novel writers, shared:

We had so many stories to tell and there was only so much room in the TV show—so we decided that we could tell these alternative stories in the comics. The stories could be deeper, broader and reveal more secrets about our characters. It was also a way to tell stories that would be otherwise unproduceable[*sic*] on our show.⁴⁰³

One deeper, broader, alternative story that the *Heroes* comics told was Hiro Nakamura’s. A unique element of the *Heroes* universe was the fact that it featured a lead Asian male

⁴⁰¹ Borys Kit, “TV: Comic-Con’s Heroes,” *Hollywood Reporter*, July 30, 2007.

⁴⁰² “NBC Reveals *Heroes*’ Season 3 Return: In a Word, Big,” April 3, 2008, accessed July 28, 2010, <http://www.heroestheseerie.com/nbc-reveals-heroes-season-3-return-in-a-word-big>.

⁴⁰³ Henry Jenkins, “We Had So Many Stories to Tell,” *Convergenceculture.org*, December 10, 2007, accessed July 22, 2010, <http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/transmedia>.

character in its transmedia narrative. Not only was Hiro central to the television narrative (as his name suggests), but he was also a central character in the transmedia narrative. Following the transmedia representations of Hiro provides insight into the ways in which transmedia strategies may allow for new representations of race and gender.

The second issue of the *Heroes* graphic novel focused entirely on Hiro Nakamura, casting him as a central figure in the larger *Heroes* mythology. Entitled “The Crane” and set in Japan, the issue provided Hiro’s origin story, including what motivated him to take action after prophesying a nuclear explosion in futuristic New York. The comic’s panels showed Hiro rummaging through his room for a particular comic book given to him by his grandfather. Finding it, he rips off the cover and folds an origami crane, then takes the crane to a Hiroshima memorial site where he envisions talking to his grandfather. Readers learned that Hiro’s name was given to him “so that we would never forget” the story of Hiroshima victims like Hiro’s grandfather, who “survived devastation and...fought cancer.” Throwing away his Yamamoto Industries ID card, Hiro promises to remember this history and to honor his grandfather’s memory.⁴⁰⁴

Here, Hiro is presented as a fellow comic geek, a nod to the audience that actively sought out Hiro in this comic book paratext. Posters of Japanese anime and comic book heroes adorn the walls and ceiling **of his room**. The panel shows his room as sparse, with just a bed and a computer, boxes of comic books piled on the floor, and bookshelves neatly lined with action figures. The comic book that Hiro searches for is Action Comics #1, an issue in which several iconic American superheroes, including Superman, were introduced in 1938; the origami crane he folds is from the cover page and prominently features Superman.

⁴⁰⁴ “The Crane,” October 2, 2006.



Figure 9: A panel featuring Hiro Nakamura's bedroom from the *Heroes* graphic novel, issue no. 2 ("The Crane").

As reflected in the previous chapter, Hiro Nakamura is interpreted by many as a stereotypical Asian character, with a meek demeanor, childlike behaviors, nerdy clothing and non-sexual physique. The same may be found in the graphic novel. His room is a boy's room, not a grown man's. Hiro's name is tied to honorable duty; the tradition of origami is so central to this issue and Hiro's personal history that the issue is named after it. Yet, there is something to be seen in the multicultural tone of Hiro's origin story. He is inspired by an American superhero to honor the memory of his grandfather, a survivor of the U.S. nuclear attack. Superman, an American symbol that has traversed geographical and cultural boundaries, is a prominent character in the issue. With its diverse cast of characters and global storylines, *Heroes* skirted the line multicultural politics and representations, presenting characters that were different, but not too different. In this way, Hiro is presented as an Asian-American character, whose racial difference in the comic was eclipsed by larger, more abstract human interest issues such as family pressure and the quest for individuality.

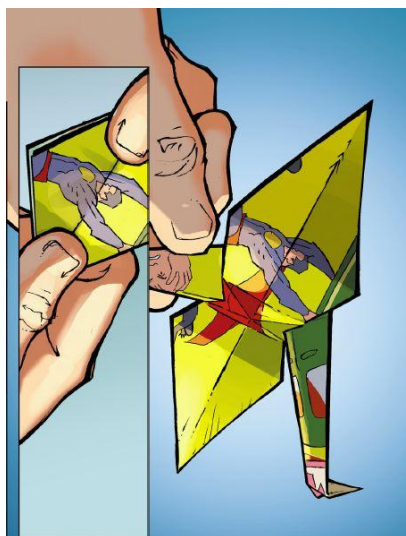


Figure 10: East meets West: A quintessentially American Superman appears on Hiro’s quintessentially Japanese origami crane. From the *Heroes* graphic novel, issue no. 2 (“The Crane”).

The other prominent text in the transmedia narrative featuring Hiro’s story is *Saving Charlie: A novel*, released during the WGA strike.⁴⁰⁵ When Hiro and Ando take a cross-country drive from LA to New York in the show’s first season, Hiro meets waitress Charlie at a Texas diner and falls in love, only to witness her murder several minutes later. In an attempt to save her, Hiro uses his powers to teleport back in time. *Saving Charlie* presents *Heroes* fans with 256 pages of unseen romantic storyline, from Hiro’s perspective.

As a text in which the primary focus is an inter-racial, sexual relationship with an Asian man, *Saving Charlie* opens new possibilities for a narrative rarely seen on television sets. The novel’s challenge to the dominant television representations is seen in Hiro’s courtship of a white woman and ultimate triumph over a white man, Lloyd, who also wants to date Charlie. As an alternate text in the transmedia universe, the novel makes room for new performances of sexuality that Asian American interviewees rarely—or never—see on screens. In *Saving Charlie*, Hiro is given an entire novel in

⁴⁰⁵ Aury Wallington, *Saving Charlie: A Novel* (New York: Del Rey, 2007).

which to become a man—quite literally, as the story follows courtship with Charlie and ends with Hiro losing his virginity.

While the novel broadens the range of racial and gendered performance for a mainstream TV character, whether or not the content appealed to and was consumed by a wider range of audience members remains in question. While show producers and scholars might suggest that texts in a transmedia narrative are intertwined and form a web of meanings, I contend that the aesthetics, representational logics and niche audiences of each alternative text can be understood in terms of the aesthetics, representational logics and “mass” audience of television. As the creative labor and assumed audience undoubtedly shape the content of a cultural text, portrayals of Hiro were implicated not only by the broader mass market of the TV show but also the niche female market of the novella. The author, Aury Wallington, is a writer whose target audience is female young adults: her work has included *Pop!*, a controversial novel about a high school senior looking to lose her virginity, as well as a series of books based on the FOX teen show, *The O.C.*⁴⁰⁶ Additionally, Wallington has television writing credits in HBO’s *Sex and the City* and UPN’s *Veronica Mars*.

As such, the content of the novel is written for those familiar with the genre of Wallington’s work. Written in a style and register for teenage girls, Hiro becomes a stand-in for a teenage heroine. He is often placed within stereotypical feminine situations, ranging from retail therapy to decorating his apartment with scented candles. When detailing Hiro’s preparations for his first date with Charlie, Wallington drives home the appeal to teenage consumers:

⁴⁰⁶ Accessed July 28, 2010, <http://www.aurywallington.com>.

Choosing the perfect outfit had required four additional trips to the mall...
As he assessed and revised every single item of clothing he had planned to
wear, from his sexy-yet-modest underpants... to his shoes.⁴⁰⁷

Teen girls might also identify when they read that Hiro's knowledge of seductive
performance is informed by *America's Next Top Model*,⁴⁰⁸ and that his only
understanding of sexuality comes from a book his older sister has discarded, titled *I Like
Me: A Growing Guide for Girls*.⁴⁰⁹

In writing for young adults, Wallington's portrayal of Hiro focuses on
inexperienced, awkward encounters. Hiro is thus presented as child, whose virgin history
is an "embarrassment," consisting of "only a handful of dates, each more humiliating
than the last."⁴¹⁰ Throughout the novel, Texas policeman Lloyd links Hiro's effeminate
nature to his racial difference, at one point stating, "He can barely grow a mustache. He
probably doesn't even have hair on his yin-yang yet."⁴¹¹ As Hiro contends with this
bullying as well as his burgeoning sexuality, complete with inconvenient erections,⁴¹² he
is reverted to adolescence despite being 24 years old. While Hiro's determination and
sincerity do win him love at the end, he fails to become any more articulate or confident,
only uttering, "Wow," once he loses his virginity.

Saving Charlie thus offers a contradictory presentation of an Asian male. Like the
television show, it can be read as portraying Asian manhood as stereotypically feminized.
Providing more details about his shopping and clothing than his sexual encounter, the

⁴⁰⁷ Wallington, *Saving Charlie*, 65.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 71.

novella makes the ending as asexual as it can be, marginalizing his masculinity. Yet, *Saving Charlie* can also be read as a progressive text that markets a minority character in an inter-racial romantic relationship, providing an Asian American male character opportunities not normally seen in American mass media. In this context, we can understand the transmedia universe of *Heroes* as liberating and norm-breaking, providing an opportunity to delve into characters' histories in venues and formats beyond television.

A multitude of texts contribute to our understanding of *Heroes* and its characters. This transmedia context troubles readings of Hiro's masculinity, and Asian masculinity overall, in the *Heroes* universe. As a part of the show's transmedia mythology, the novella might have drawn in a broader audience, but ultimately was geared toward a niche readership attracted to Wallington's work and others in her genre. I argue that Hiro's "adult" adventure was infantilized for the novella's assumed female audience in order to make it as marketable as possible beyond the comic book audience of *Heroes*.

I also contend that Hiro's story in *Saving Charlie* added an interesting and ultimately marginalizing nuance to understanding Hiro's story on television. Hiro's entire sexual relationship was contained between the book's covers, allowing the *Heroes* universe to parcel away what Hiro has gained—ostensibly, his masculinity—within the novella. Mainstream audiences not caring to seek out paratexts would never have to be aware of Hiro's sexuality. Furthermore, even if the novel's narrative were inserted into the chronology of the television program, it becomes clear on the television program that Hiro did not "earn" any more manliness from his transmedia experience. On the show, he returns to Texas to see Charlie die despite his efforts, and his continued bumbling and

buffoonery is not mitigated by his sexual encounter. While the peripheral spaces of a transmedia text like the *Heroes* novella provide the opportunity to challenge traditional television norms, it is precisely the periphery of that text in comparison to the central television text that illuminate how those challenges are marginalized.

Transmedia Narratives: Connecting the Dots

As transmedia universes allow audiences to construct meanings beyond television, analyses must take into account the dialogic relationships between paratexts. The market logics behind each transmedia text lend insight into the assumptions about the content within, and audience hailed, those texts.⁴¹³ Amanda Lotz's (1995) ethnographic work shows that the rise of niche networks have opened possibilities for new audiences and content, but that some of the new content must still work within the limits of existing ideological and economic structures.⁴¹⁴ If a transmedia universe with "a narrative that cannot be contained within a single medium,"⁴¹⁵ we must look at what narratives offer as they shift from the television. As the example of *Saving Charlie* shows above, such an analysis shows what representations are offered in new contexts, and also how the newness of those contexts may limit, or even undermine, the content. In this way, we can see how the economic imperatives of supporting a broadcast television program at the center may define the content and financial scope of texts on the periphery.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Amanda D. Lotz, "Textual (Im)possibilities in the Post-Network Era: Negotiating Production and Promotion Processes on Lifetime's *Any Day Now*." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21.1 (2004): 22-43.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. Other scholars of television transformations point to John Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

⁴¹⁵ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

⁴¹⁶ Abba, "Hybrid Stories." Yet, as Jenkins points out in his analysis of transmedia entertainment texts, the most successful ventures have been those controlled by a single creative unit. *Convergence Culture*, 106.

The transmedia universes discussed in this chapter center on television shows as the primary text from which each new offshoot builds. While Lotz's *Any Day Now* investigation does not contend with a transmedia model, her observations suggest a way to understand how niche paratexts support or challenge televised narratives. Here, the dialogic relationship of niche texts with central text can provide insight into the presumed value of niche texts and audiences in serving the "mothership," or central television show. While Carlton Cuse explained the transmedia capacity of *Lost*, he also admitted, "The show is the mothership."⁴¹⁷ When NBC attempted to broaden the *Heroes* audience developing the *Heroes: Origins* mini-series, it was, in part, canceled for fear that this peripheral text would draw mass interest away from the central broadcast show.

TLE, the *Heroes* graphic novel and *Saving Charlie* were all texts with forms and genres already located at the margins of mainstream media, and consequently appealed to audiences already congregating at the margins of the mainstream. With *TLE* and the *Heroes* graphic novel in particular, ABC and NBC worked to target a specific demographic of fanboys, often conceptualized as predominantly young, white and male.⁴¹⁸ Both programs built influential presences at Comic-Con, featuring show premieres as well as continued appearances from show creators, writers, and stars. Identified as fanboys themselves, show creators were pointedly targeting a particular type of consumer with their mythologies.⁴¹⁹ As described above, *TLE*'s intricate digital labor

⁴¹⁷ Maria E. Fernandez, "ABC's *Lost* is Easy to Find, and Not Just on a TV Screen," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2006.

⁴¹⁸ Matthew J. Putstz, *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999). See also Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15.

⁴¹⁹ Henry Jenkins refers to the cohort of producers and creators – Tim Kring (*Heroes*), Damon Lindelof (*Lost*), J.J. Abrams (*Star Trek*), Jesse Alexander (*Heroes*, *Lost*) and others – as "Hollywood's fan boy elite." June 3 2008, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2008/06/more_transmedia_news.php#more.

and fanboy aesthetic was a gendered and classed experience.⁴²⁰ While ARGs have been discussed as a more democratic form of video gameplay, presenting more female lead characters than traditional video games and showing a more even split between male and female players, game designers admit that ARGs and similar projects typically target young men.⁴²¹ While this is not to deny the role of women in fan or comic book culture or the democratizing power of collaborative participant communities that transmedia universes privilege, the political economy of such transmedia texts suggests narratives marketed to, for and by white men.

Similarly, texts like *Saving Charlie* can, due to their peripheral status in the transmedia narrative, do the work of appealing to niche audiences in order to draw them to mass audience market. In a transmedia model, niche texts may do the work of identifying another portion of the population as a financial market. By drawing these niche audiences to the mothership and its more general audience base, television can assure financial success by delivering viewers to advertisers. However, the examples in this chapter suggest a need to balance the fine line between being too niche (just appealing to a small group who will not have interest in the main text) or not niche enough (continuing to appeal to those already loyal).

In a discussion on transmedia strategy, Lindelof expressed some frustration over the difficulty of extending a central narrative to new texts:

⁴²⁰ *The Lost Experience* required some collaboration to translate messages written in Korean and Dutch, participation hinged on fluency in English as well as access to particular subsidiary texts and products for clues. The game also included some real-life clues geographically situated in Australia and London that players could visit.

⁴²¹ Irwin, "Q&A."

Let's face it, what is the subset of your audience that is going online to seek this [extra content] out? So suddenly like Joe from Poughkeepsie who doesn't give a crap about the Internet at all has heard that you need to basically have this online experience to understand *Lost*, then he gets turned off of the mothership. He's basically like, 'I just want to watch the show, man. If you tell me I have to go online for an hour and unlock all these puzzles to understand the show, it's hard enough as it is, don't make it any harder.'⁴²²

Here, Lindelof pointed to the larger issue of understanding each text's narrative and audience boundaries. The structure of a text like *TLE* shapes the boundaries of its engagement. A text like *Saving Charlie* may be "too niche" in its format and style, failing to appeal to mainstream viewers. On the other hand, a text like *TLE*, while increasing the potential promote fan loyalty and interest, may have only appealed to those already dedicated as loyal fans. In Lindelof's terms, the ARG merely served as "liner notes" for fans already invested in the narrative.⁴²³ The highly experimental nature of transmedia universes and the uncertain terrain of appealing to audiences was best described by Tim Kring: when asked to explain the show's transmedia strategy, he claimed that show producers and creators were merely trying to "fish where the fish are."⁴²⁴

(De)legitimized Marginality

⁴²² "Lost's Savvy Entrepreneur."

⁴²³ Gillian Reagan, "Lost's Lindelof Talks Marketing *Watchmen* for Geeks, Others," March 5, 2009, accessed August 1, 2010, <http://www.observer.com/2009/movies/losts-lindelof-talks-marketing-watchmen-lost-geeks>.

⁴²⁴ Austin Carr, "Heroes Creator Tim Kring on His New TV Series, Transmedia, and the Future of Television," *Fast Company*, July 30, 2010, accessed August 6, 2010, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1676076/heroes-creator-tim-kring-on-his-new-tv-series-transmedia-and-the-future-of-television>.

While it is impossible to know the true impetus for creating such texts without the kind of industry ethnography done by Lotz and others, analyzing what the text tells us about audience assumptions—through its aesthetic, its use, the dominant or preferred readings in the narrative—helps us understand the larger context of its production. Despite many challenges, industry producers have embraced—albeit experimentally—transmedia models for their marketing and narrative potential.⁴²⁵ Each narrative format and its accompanying market can create new content beyond television’s standards (e.g., narrative arcs) and restrictions (e.g., show length). However, the economic imperatives a transmedia universe built on a television mothership, may limit any truly progressive challenge to industry norms. Close analysis of transmedia narratives can provide insight into how each new format and its market, in relationship to television, shapes representations and stories as they travel throughout the transmedia universe.

Written with full cooperation of *Heroes* producers, *Saving Charlie* was, according to fans of the TV show, riddled with so many inconsistencies that its role as a legitimate text in the *Heroes* canon is hotly debated. It is precisely the debate over what constitutes the canon of a particular universe that troubles who or what can define legitimate identities. In other words, that Hiro’s masculinity is placed into a text that is itself on shaky canonical grounds relegates his masculinity—whatever it is that he achieves—to the margins of the *Heroes* universe. Additionally, paratexts are dictated by the audience they attract. *Saving Charlie*, written by an author who recognizes and is recognized by young adult romance readers, is thus shaped like other texts in that genre. Appealing to an audience already attracted to this genre necessarily shapes how Hiro’s character can think, interact, and perform. In this context, Hiro is a character in a double bind: he is

⁴²⁵ Lotz, “Textual (Im)possibilities.”

feminized in the subject position of a teenage heroine within the text, and is also feminized as a character catering to teenage female readers. In the specific examples of the *Heroes* graphic novel and *Saving Charlie*, we can see that these media texts were still shaped by the industry's expectations of a successful mainstream, televised text. In these experimental cases, transmedia texts support the story found on the mothership; some continuity must be provided for fans of the show following characters throughout the transmedia narrative. If the story for mainstream audiences promoted a reading of Hiro as a stereotypical Asian character, the paratexts featuring Hiro could not diverge too far from this portrayal.

My reading of Hiro-as-transmedia-character suggests a spectrum of visibility depending on the location of the text within the *Heroes* universe. In this case, at least, Hiro can be given a fully visible, central role *Saving Charlie*, located in the outskirts of his transmedia world. In this most niche of texts, Hiro can win over a white woman and lose his virginity. However, as portrayals of Hiro move closer to the mothership, the character is more visibly stereotypical, brought to a level safe for a general audience to consume. In a graphic novel that might appeal to wider audiences, Hiro becomes more stereotypically Asian, a character rooted in "Oriental" stereotypes of family honor and saving face. Even closer to the mainstream, a *TV Guide* cover featuring Hiro has the character as a samurai stereotype, in Japanese robes, wielding a sword.

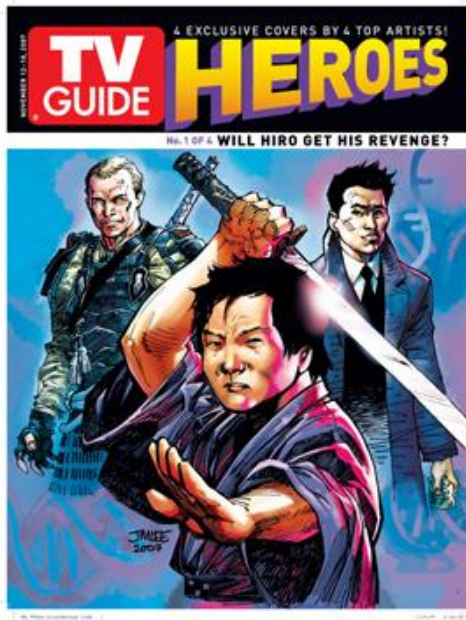


Figure 11. One of four possible *Heroes* covers for *TV Guide* in 2007.⁴²⁶

Whether or not this progression of “visibility” can be applied to other transmedia narratives remains to be seen. However, the dynamic representations of Hiro Nakamura’s masculinity suggest that a representational logic, favoring television, that influences the extent to which race can be articulated in a transmedia environment. This is not to say that the audiences hailed by mainstream and niche texts, are mutually exclusive consumer positions. Rather, in an era when transmedia texts are created to counteract the erosion of a mainstream television audience, it will remain interesting to see how new possibilities for audience fragmentation, cohesion, and representational shifts arise.

Conclusion

The transmedia model for broadcast television shows arose in a time of crisis, in part driven by the shifting economics of the industry, the WGA strike, and the need to engage audiences with fleeting attentions. Transmedia narratives provide an opportunity

⁴²⁶ “Sneak Peek: ‘TV Guide’ *Heroes* Covers,” November 6, 2007, accessed March 5, 2010, <http://www.mtv.com/photos/sneak-peek-tv-guide-heroes-covers/1573611/2653989/photo.jhtml>.

to engage with these audiences, through a diversity of texts and the ability to expand what is offered on television. However, as case examples show, paratexts must walk the fine line of providing new and exciting content and attracting niche audiences, while also staying true to televised narratives and a generalized market. This struggle brings the dialogic relationship of transmedia texts to light.

With show producers articulating a conscious move to make transmedia phenomena like *Lost* and *Heroes*, a series of questions thus shapes how we must approach the move from the “post-network era” to a full-fledged, “transmedia era.” This chapter shows how content is affected by genre and presumed audiences. As such, how do such narratives remain similar, despite diverse platforms? In the complex world of transmedia mythologies built around a central mothership, what texts are deemed canonical and which are not? And, what does the canonical standing of a text mean for the representations of race and gender it can provide? In addition, the development of transmedia spaces not only opens up space for representational shifts, but also shifts in the political economy of creative labor. Might transmedia texts provide entry points for Asian American artists and performers? Might they allow for Asian Americans to control how they are presented to audiences?

If transmedia narratives continue to reflect the “spectrum of visibility” that still privileges stereotypes for mainstream audiences, what might it tell us about the value of viewers interested in diverse representations? Additionally, what might it tell us about the value of diverse representations, if those representations are pushed to the margins? These questions can point to ways of analyzing texts in the “transmedia era,” beyond the examples listed here. As the entertainment industry continues to consider issues of

distribution, political economy, and the responsibilities and ethics implicated in these questions, Asian American men, at least, are still waiting to be seen and heard.

CONCLUSION

The interviews presented in this dissertation suggest that Asian American use multiple social categories, from Asian to America, and multiple media narratives, from news and entertainment texts, to define their sense of identity. In Chapter 1, “Visibly Invisible: Exploring “Asian America,” men shared a commonly practiced definition of “Asian American” based on racial phenotype. Even interviewees who identified themselves as Asian American for this study, when asked to define the category, would exclude themselves if they did not share “East Asian” racial signifiers. For some interviewees, this exclusion means identifying more as a person of color; for others, it means expanding the definition of “Asian American” to include cultural differences that set “Asian Americans” apart from “Asians,” or “FOBs.” As interviewees shared their experiences growing up in predominantly white hometowns and schools, they showed an acute awareness that they had no model of what it meant to be Asian American. Growing up with histories that failed to contain a visible Asian American narrative, in real life or in the media, the narrative that seemed to define them most is what it means to be “Asian,” or “non-American.”

Interviews showed how multiple media sources, from entertainment to news texts, can influence understandings of self. In particular, interviewee responses to prominent news events concerning Asia show how the social categories that pervade their lived

experience were reinforced or reaffirmed by rhetoric in the news. As my textual analyses of news sources in Chapter 2, “Managing the Octopus: 21st Century Yellow Peril,” showed, the social categories of “Asian,” “Oriental,” and the accompanying “yellow peril” stereotype were rife in the news sphere. By the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the tenor of the news rhetoric surrounding China was overwhelmingly negative, with themes of contamination, ruthlessness and aggressiveness shaping how the country was to be interpreted by Americans.

Before the Olympics’ opening ceremony, Tom Brokaw joined Jim Lampley at NBC’s Olympic studio to narrate a video retrospective NBC.⁴²⁷ Brokaw stated that the video served as “an overview of just how much these games, and this night, mean[t] to the Chinese people,” stressing the role of the video in formulating American ideas not only of the event, but of China as well. This 20 minute, documentary-style retrospective, allowed for an explicit acknowledgment of America’s anxiety over the rise of China. One of America’s most trusted news anchors,⁴²⁸ Brokaw, a white male, legitimized a rhetoric of Chinese difference (describing China’s readiness to “finally move beyond its walls,” and the build-up to the opening ceremony as a “long march”) that shaped China as a looming, potential threat to the American way.

With sweeping panoramic shots of Beijing skyscrapers and construction on the stadium, China was described as having a “building revolution” to become “a city of tomorrow, so far removed from the deprivations and the self-imposed exile of the China of not so long ago.” Brokaw narrated, “culturally and especially politically, China and the West have an uneasy relationship.” As Brokaw claimed that China’s emergence as a

⁴²⁷ “2008 Olympics: Beijing 2008 Complete Opening Ceremony.”

⁴²⁸ Michiko Kakutani, “Is Jon Stewart the Most Trusted Man in America?” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2008, accessed November 11, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/arts/television/17kaku.html>.

world player has been, and should continue to be, watched closely by critical eyes, the video showed how China was actually viewed by the West, with news clips from the Szechuan earthquake in 2008. In the next segment, with images of rice paddies and a farmer with a water buffalo juxtaposed with bird's-eye views of China's sprawling roadways, Brokaw proceeded to highlight the tensions unique to China, but also the paradoxes of China's modern existence:

There are so many Chinas. This is a country where a half a billion people live on two dollars a day, but where hundreds of millions now experience modern prosperity. It's a country where the few rule the many, where protest is not welcome, a country that still can't shake the echoes of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. It is a country racing into the future, confident it can claim its place on its own terms.

This video retrospective served as a primer for the NBC audience but also as a guide to how America, in 2008, should approach China as a nation. At a moment of patriotic displays and heightened national articulations, the video reminded viewers of China's communist history, using rhetoric that connected China's government and politics to a mysterious, threatening past and a calculating, suspicious present and future. The pageantry and capitalist celebration spurred by the Olympics, the video suggested, was a façade hiding a troubled past that could break through at any moment. In case this implied message was unclear, Brokaw told Lampley after the video, "My standing rule is don't assume you know what the Chinese government will do."

The texts explored in Chapter 2 thus work to show how outward glances toward China in the East inform glances within, to Asian Americans in the United States. The

video retrospective reinforced a rhetoric that, circulating throughout the news media in the lead-up to the 2008 Olympics, constructed China as a source of anxiety for, and managed by, white men. This narrative was made “common-sense” as narrative tactics converged in various news texts to foster Orientalist fear, found everywhere from mainstream newspapers like *USA Today* and *The New York Times* to the extremist viewpoints of *Lou Dobbs Tonight*. As interviewees recalled prominent news stories about Asia/China, they also shared how, due in part to the lack of any visible Asian American narrative in their lives, they feel implicated in discourses of Asia writ large.

This was also the case with a recent controversial, viral video on YouTube posted by University of California Los Angeles student, Alexandra Wallace. In the video, Wallace sat in front of her computer’s camera complaining about the “hordes of Asian students” admitted to UCLA each year and their lack of “American manners;” mimicking Asians on the telephone, Wallace adopted a sing-song accent as she exclaimed, “Ching chong, ling long, ting tong.” Wallace’s sweeping generalizations reaffirmed many of the stereotypes identified by my informants, including the fact that, despite being Asian American, they were still viewed as one of the faceless “horde.” The video caused an uproar on the Internet, with thousands of video responses also posted to YouTube. The fact that Alexandra Wallace was a white, blonde woman prompted Asian American men to respond with their own commentary, some angry, but most using humor to challenge stereotypes, but also accepting and taking ownership of others.

In these mediated spaces, the narratives of Asians as threatening and ruthless combine with other dominant narratives that cast Asian masculinity as also effeminate, asexual, nerdy, and thus low on the social, political, and sexual hierarchies of American

culture. The interview data throughout these chapters show the ways in which Asian American men feel structured by the dominant culture's stereotypes of Asians. For Lisa Lowe, the diffuse standards of this dominant culture often essentializes and underestimates differences in the Asian American community. She writes:

To the degree that the discourse generalizes Asian American identity as male, women are rendered invisible; or to the extent that Chinese are presumed to be exemplary of all Asians, the importance of other Asian groups is ignored. To the extent that Asian American discourse articulates an identity in reaction to the dominant culture's stereotype, even to refute it, I believe the discourse may remain bound to, and overdetermined by, the logic of the dominant culture.⁴²⁹

Interviewees were, indeed, aware of the dominant culture's definition of Asian Americans as "Oriental," and, while acknowledging its essentialist function, also found it a helpful social category. Even though my research design promoted self-identification, South Asian or Indian American interviewees continually excluded themselves—rendered themselves invisible—from the category of "Asian American."

While Lowe contends that Asian American identity is largely classified as male, interviewees argue that Asian American visibility privileges women over men. My dissertation thus points to how diffuse the feeling of invisibility is for Asian American men as men, as Asians, and as Americans, as well how the diffuse standards of whiteness and masculinity shape their lived experience. While still aware and critical of the racial and patriarchal dynamics shaping the sexualization of Asian American women,

⁴²⁹ Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences." In *A Companion to Asian American Studies* (254-275), ed. Kent A Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 251.

interviewees feel that being objectified is to be made visibly desirable. This yearning to be desired reveals how absolute the absence of positive Asian masculinities is for Asian American interviewees. This is a paradox of marginalized masculinity: interviewees desire an idealized Asian masculine form, but the visibility of such an ideal will leave them continually striving (and potentially failing) to attain it. However, interviewees' discussions of how "Asian American" is seen in the eyes of others suggest that the desire to see a visible masculinity on screen is driven by the knowledge that other audiences will see it.

From early ages, these Asian American men engaged with continually shifting boundaries of invisibility and visibility, both in lived and mediated experiences, depending on who is there to "read" them. The identities and presumptions of those with whom Asian Americans interact play an enormous role in defining the boundaries of their visibility. In predominantly white social settings, they are made ethnically invisible as general "Orientals," and visible as a generalized racial minority. In other contexts, such as when they surround themselves with Asian friends in college, interviewees' racial difference becomes invisible, while ethnic differences may become visible. Cultural or class differences can also become visible when race is ostensibly invisible, such as in settings like Japanese camp or Chinese school, or when interacting with "FOBs" or "real Asians." Future research would benefit from an in-depth investigation into ethnic schools, churches, and even family gatherings, as key sites of socialization and cultural education.

Interviewees brought their lived experiences to their negotiations of Asian American men on screen. Focusing specifically on contemporary, working Asian

American actors, interviewees were quick to note when Asian men on screen are still defined as “FOBs” or foreigners. This was particularly evident in the persistent role appearance played in attitudes toward characters and actors. Interviewees dismissed actors Jackie Chan and Masi Oka for their inability to “look American” and fit into their Americanized surroundings on screen. For interviewees, the presence of these men on screen only works to make Asian men visible as stereotypical, “FOB” outsiders.

Alternatively, the overall admiration for Daniel Dae Kim’s character, Jin, hinged on his muscular, typical “American” ideal body; as Francis put it, he is “a Korean in an American body.” In this way, Kim was able to be looked at as “just another guy,” objectified as any other white Hollywood male celebrity. The ability to objectify Jin thus allowed interviewees to worry less about his performance of masculinity and instead focus on his performance of “Asian American.” Despite being a Korean national on the show, Jin embodied the Asian American experience for many interviewees, making a transformation from his identity in an Asian world to a new identity in an American world. For interviewees, Jin’s American body completely ruptured the “Asian” narrative that accompanies the emasculated stereotypes of Asian Americans. This was especially highlighted by the shirtless image of Daniel Dae Kim, posed as a model to be desired. Future research might investigate how the aesthetic qualities of these images signify a particular narrative of masculinity that interviewees found desirable.

The texts and narratives discussed throughout this dissertation reveals a multifaceted mediascape simultaneously projecting racial anxieties and embracing multiculturalism. The celebration of multicultural inclusivity is especially visible in the ensemble casts on primetime television shows like *Lost* and *Heroes*. Some interviewees

saw the diverse casts and integrated characters on these shows as progressive, as they allowed interviewees to see Asian American actors in a new light. Yet, as close readings of *Lost* and *Heroes* suggest, these ostensibly progressive portrayals reveal power dynamics that continue to uphold the dominance of white masculinity. Hiro struggles to speak English and focuses on his role in uniting mostly white male characters to save the world, and Jin also struggles to speak English and focuses on his role in becoming a cooperative and productive member of a survivor society led by white men. In both of these programs, the marginalization of minorities becomes subtler, masked as deviance from the more abstract themes of humanity, civility, and citizenship. Difference, in this context is not a matter of race, but a matter of individual fault.

While scholars and critics see the problems of patriarchy and white dominance in these narratives, interviewees see a helpful narrative. The men I talked with embraced the notion of being judged as individuals, rather than as racial or ethnic minorities. This is, indeed, the message promoted by multicultural programs lauding the commonality of “humanity” rather than the difference of race. Interviewees placed immense value in the thought of being seen as “just another guy,” who “happens to be Asian,” by others around them. In this ideal context, they can move freely without the burden of race impinging upon how they are read, or interpreted, by others. This desire to be interpreted a “just another guy” is a call to be visible but not to the point of intolerable difference, to relieve the burdens of carrying an entire history of what it means to be “Asian.” Put another way, interviewees identified a common desire to reduce their visibility as a racial minority and to simultaneously counter their invisibility as Asian Americans.

As interviewees move from classroom to classroom on their college campus, or from one social group to another, they feel their lives are informed by dominant discourses of race and gender that limit their performance and how they can be read. In some ways, what their ever-shifting moments of dual consciousness reveal is how diffuse the hegemonic concepts of masculinity and whiteness can become, and how these concepts at times limit how their performances can be seen. In this light, understanding the negotiations of Asian American interviewees becomes similar to understanding transmedia representations and how they can travel throughout a transmedia universe, discussed in Chapter 4, “Transmedia Narratives and the Possibilities of Race and Gender.” Representations of Hiro Nakamura in the *Heroes* transmedia world are shaped by larger, dominant narrative logics of the mainstream “mothership;” the larger a text’s appeal to a wider audience, the less progressive his character can be in breaking the stereotypes of Asian masculinity.

So far, transmedia studies have yet to address the ways in which race and gender are represented in transmedia narratives. Cases—*The Lost Experience* ARG, the *Heroes* graphic novel and *Saving Charlie* novella—discussed in the chapter reveal the complexities of negotiating both mainstream and niche audiences in the transmedia universe. Not only do genres and their audiences shape the content of the text, but so does the text’s location in transmedia world. While it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the overall success of these transmedia experiments, the various portrayals of Hiro Nakamura in the *Heroes* universe suggests that the central role of the television “mothership” limits the extent to which his character can legitimately break normative boundaries. Hiro moves from being “just another” guy in the most niche of texts to a

more Orientalized stereotype in more mainstream contexts, and I use this example to pose important questions about how representations change from one platform to another to promote future analyses of transmedia narratives.

The conversations in this dissertation point to future sites of research and analysis that can continue to shed light on how Asian Americans make sense of their social categories, and how these negotiations are interrelated with industry categories and artistic articulations of characters and cultures on screen. For example, casting calls and practices for major Hollywood projects can reveal the language used to describe Asia and its cultures, as well as the intentions (or lack thereof) of those in authority positions when it comes to presenting minorities. Additionally, this dissertation is not meant to deny the rich, grassroots, independent arena of Asian American performance and cultural production. There are, indeed, key sites—such as the Angry Asian Man blog, the online independent production company Wong Fu Productions, and the Center for Asian American Media, almost 30 years old, among others—in which Asian Americans perform themselves, articulate their own sense of self, and transcend definitional boundaries. The role of the Internet in allowing Asian American men express themselves and respond to moments of hatred and ignorance—as seen in the response to Alexandra Wallace—should not be denied in future research on audience engagement. These online arenas allow Asian Americans to serve as watchdogs, educators, comics, or support groups.

What this project aimed to do was highlight how a particularly situated group of Asian American men identify their sense of what it means to be Asian/American and male, and how they negotiate the studio system and its hold on mainstream formulations

of race and gender. While advertisers struggle to define the boundaries of and capture an Asian American audience, Asian American interviewees have moved beyond television, embracing the freedom of digital downloads and alternative, independent productions. To capture fickle audiences and their divided attentions, content creators have turned to transmedia narratives and multicultural casts in order to diversify representations and distribution channels. The potential reach of these channels, audience configurations, and business models remains to be seen. In all of these realms, however, what it means to be Asian American remains an elusive subject, as Asian Americans negotiate the boundaries of (in)visibility.

APPENDIX

Interview question guide

Warm up questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Prompts: How old are you? What are you studying? What languages do you speak?

2. Where did you grow up, and what was it like?
3. Tell me what it was like to come here for college.

Prompt: Is it more/less diverse? How do you feel here?

On being Asian American

4. Can you recall a time for me where it was very evident to you that you were Asian American?

Prompt: Was there ever a time for you where trying to define “Asian American” was particularly difficult or confusing?

5. How might you define “Asian American?”

Prompt: Do you think this definition differs from how the general public might define “Asian American?”

6. How is “Asian American” is a useful racial category? How is it not?

Prompt: Do you feel you can move in and out of racial categories?

Prompt: Do you think we will see a point in the U.S. where race won't matter?

Media, and masculinity

7. What do you watch on TV?
8. Where do you get your news? What newsmagazines or newspapers do you read?
9. Who would you say is an important or memorable male character in the media?

Prompt: Is this a person you admire? Why or why not?

10. How would you define a good man?
11. Can you recall an early moment when you saw an Asian character in the media?
12. How do you think Asian men are presented in the media?

Prompt: Do you think the description you just gave links up with your earlier definition of a good man?

Asians in the media

13. *With photos:* What are your general impressions of these characters and actors?

Prompt: If you were to rank these photos from most Asian American to least Asian American, how would you do it?

Prompt: Do you see yourself in any of these pictures?

14. What would you like to change about, or add to, these representations?
15. Do you think Asian men are portrayed differently in TV than they are in film?
How?
16. Do you think Asian men are portrayed differently than Asian women? How?
17. Can you recall any major news stories about Asia from the past few years?

Prompt: Do you think these stories might influence Asians in America? Why or why not?

18. How did you feel about this interview? Is there anything you'd like to add?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2008 Olympics: Beijing 2008 Complete Opening Ceremony. DVD. Ten Mayflower Studios, September 30, 2008.

Abba, Tom. "Hybrid Stories: Examining the Future of Transmedia Narrative." *Science Fiction Film and Television* 2.1 (2009): 59-76.

AC Nielsen, "Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Over 2 Billion Viewers Tune In." Accessed February 10, 2009. http://www.marketresearchworld.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2230&Itemid=77.

AC Nielsen, "The Emerging Asian American Market." November 29, 2005.

Adalian, Josef and Michael Schneider, "An Early Gaze at What Awaits in '08." *Variety* 409.7 (January 7-13, 2008): 21.

Adler, Jeff. "The Fight Against the Flu." *Newsweek*, October 31, 2005. Accessed July 19, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/50843>.

Adler, Jeff and Anne Underwood. "The Race Against Avian Flu." *Newsweek*, October 17, 2005. Accessed July 19, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/50852>.

Ahrens, Frank. "NBC Taking a Big Step Back from Television." *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2006.

Alexander, Elizabeth. "Can you be BLACK and Look at This?": Reading the Rodney King Video(s)." *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 77-94.

Alexander, Jesse. "Embrace the Transmedia Approach!" *The Global Couch Blog*, June 14, 2009. <http://www.globalcouch.com>.

Alexander, Jesse. "Is it Marketing, or Content?" *The Global Couch Blog*, June 28, 2008. <http://www.globalcouch.com>.

Allen, Mike. "Bush v. Bird Flu." *Time*, November 1, 2005. Accessed July 10, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1125104,00.html>.

Allen Jr., Ernest. "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking Du Boisian 'Double Consciousness.'" In *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, edited by Lewis R. Gordon, 49-68. New York: Routledge, 1996.

"Americans Using TV and Internet Together 25% More than a Year Ago." March 22, 2010. Accessed March 13, 2010.

http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/three-screen-report-q409.

Andreeva, Nellie. "'Lost' Forever: End is Near." *Hollywood Reporter* 399 (May 7, 2007): 1, 32.

"An Extra in the 'Chinese Professor' Ad Speaks Out." *Angry Asian Man*, October 27, 2010. Accessed December 15, 2010. <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/extra-in-chinese-professor-ad-speaks.html>.

Ang, Ien. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Methuen, 1985.

"Another extra in the 'Chinese Professor' Ad Speaks Out." *Angry Asian Man*, October 28, 2010. Accessed December 15, 2010. <http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/another-extra-in-chinese-professor-ad.html>.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Askwith, Ivan. "Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium." Master's Thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

Barnes, Brooks. "No *Lost* Left to Unravel, Fans Buy it Piece by Piece." *New York Times*, August 22, 2010. Accessed August 23, 2010.

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/23/us/23lost.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=lost_auction&st=cse.

Barnes, Jessica S. and Claudette E. Bennett, "The Asian Population: 2000." Census 2000 Brief. United States Department of Commerce. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002.

Bascara, Victor. *Model Minority Imperialism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Barboza, David. "Owner of Chinese Toy Factory Commits Suicide." *New York Times*, August 14, 2007.

Bauder, David. "Broadcast Viewership Hits Record Low." *Washington Times*, July 8 2010. Accessed July 20, 2010.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/8/americans-arent-watching-tv>.

Bauman, Kurt and Nikki Graf, "Educational Attainment: 2000." Census 2000 Brief. United States Department of Commerce. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003.

Balfour, Frederick. "A Big, Dirty Growth Engine." *BusinessWeek*, August 22, 2005.

Beltran, Mary. "Meaningful Diversity: Exploring Questions of Equitable Representation on Diverse Ensemble Cast Shows." *Flow TV*, August 27, 2010. Accessed August 28, 2010. <http://flowtv.org/2010/08/meaningful-diversity>.

Bennett, Sue, Karl Maton, and Lisa Kervin, "The 'Digital Natives' Debate: A Critical Review of the Evidence." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39 (2008): 775–786.

Benson, Jim. "The *Lost* Generation." *Broadcasting and Cable* 135.20 (May 16, 2005): 8.

"Beyond Beijing: Games Show Two Faces of China." *USA Today*, August 22, 2008.

Bolin, Göran. "Media Technologies, Transmedia Storytelling and Commodification." In *Ambivalence Towards Convergence: Digitalization and Media Change*, edited by Tanja Storsul and Dagny Stuedahl, 236-48. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2007.

Bradsher, Keith. "China Confirms its First 3 Cases of Bird Flu Infecting People." *New York Times*, November 17, 2005.

Brantlinger, Patrick. *Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America*. London; New York: Routledge, 1990.

Brennan, Christine. "Games a Turning Point for China Beyond Sports." *USA Today*, August 25, 2008.

Brown, Wendy. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Burma, Ian. "Political Games." *New York Times*, September 23, 2007.

Cable Television Advertising Bureau, "2008 Network Profiles." Accessed December 10, 2010. www.thecab.tv/php/networkprofiles/08profileData/08_pdfs/CNN.pdf.

Carey, John. "NOT Made in China." *BusinessWeek*, July 30, 2007. Accessed October 8, 2010. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/07_31/b4044060.htm.

Carr, Austin. "*Heroes* Creator Tim Kring on His New TV Series, Transmedia, and the Future of Television." *Fast Company*, July 30, 2010. Accessed August 6, 2010. <http://www.fastcompany.com/1676076/heroes-creator-tim-kring-on-his-new-tv-series-transmedia-and-the-future-of-television>.

- Chang, Richard. "Testing Limits." *Orange County Register*, April 6, 2003.
- Chen, Anthony S. "Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony." *Gender & Society* 13.5 (1999): 584-607.
- Cheng, Cliff. "Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity: An Introduction." *Journal of Men's Studies* 7.3 (1999): 295-315.
- Chen, David W. "China Emerges as a Scapegoat in Campaign Ads." *New York Times*, October 9, 2010.
- "China's Shoddy Standards Threaten U.S. Consumers." *USA Today*, July 10, 2007.
- Chua, Peter and Diane C. Fujino, "Negotiating New Asian-American Masculinities: Attitudes and Gender Expectations." *Journal of Men's Studies* 7.3 (1999): 391-413.
- Chuh, Kandice. *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- CNN. "Lou Dobbs: Issues, TV, Radio and Books." *Lou Dobbs Tonight*. <http://loudobbs.tv.cnn.com/tv>.
- Coleman, Robin R. Means. *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor*. New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1998.
- Coles, Tony. "Negotiating the Field of Masculinity: The Production and Reproduction of Multiple Dominant Masculinities." *Men and Masculinities* 12 (2009): 30-44.
- Committee of 100. "American Attitudes Toward China." Jan 2005-April 2005.
- Committee of 100. "American Attitudes Toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans." April 2001.
- Committee of 100. "Public Attitudes Toward Chinese and Asian Americans." April 2009.
- Committee of 100, "Still the 'Other?': Public Attitudes Toward Chinese And Asian Americans." April 2009.
- "Concern over Quality Isn't Limited to China." *New York Times*, October 22, 2007.
- Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995.
- Cooper, Helene, Michael Wines and David E. Sanger. "China's Role as Lender Alters Obama's Visit." *New York Times*, November 15, 2009, Asia Pacific Section: A1.

- Craddock, Susan. *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty and Deviance in San Francisco*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- “‘Crash,’ ‘Lost’ Ensembles Lead Way at SAG Awards.” *Hollywood Reporter* 392.46 (January 31, 2006): 37
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.
- “Crouching Tigers, Hidden Dragons.” *BusinessWeek*, August 22, 2005.
- Danico, Mary Yu. *The 1.5 Generation: Becoming Korean in Hawai’i*. Honolulu, HI: Versa, 2004.
- Davé, Shilpa, Leilani Nishime and Tasha G. Oren, eds. *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Dávila, Arlene. *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
- Dean, Michelle. “Isle of Man.” *The American Prospect*, May 21 2010. Accessed May 25, 2010. http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=isle_of_man.
- Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Dos Santos, Kristin. “Guess Which *Lost* Star *Won’t* Be Back?” October 20, 2009. Accessed March 5, 2011. http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/watch_with_kristin/b149601_guess_which_lost_star_wont_be_back.html.
- Dredge, Stuart. “Tim Kring Talks Transmedia, Mobile, and the Conspiracy for Good.” August 12, 2010. Accessed October 18, 2010. <http://www.mobile-ent.biz/features/305/Interview-Tim-Kring-talks-transmedia-mobile-and-the-Conspiracy-F>.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- “Educators Rip Book List in English Plan.” *San Antonio Express-News*, March 21, 2008.
- Elegant, Simon. “A Chinese Regulator Sentenced to Die.” *Time*, May 29, 2007. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1626042,00.html>.

- Eng, David. *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Erlandson, David A., Edward L. Harris, Barbara L. Skipper and Steve D. Allen, eds. *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods*. London: Sage, 1993).
- Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, And Love*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008.
- Fallows, James. "The Phenomenal 'Chinese Professor' Ad." *The Atlantic*, October 21, 2010. Accessed December 15, 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/10/the-phenomenal-chinese-professor-ad/64982>.
- Fang, Jennifer. "The Last Hero." *Racialicious*, June 28 2007. Accessed March 20, 2009. <http://racialicious.com/2007/06/28/the-last-hero>.
- Fang, Jennifer. "The Words of Asian American Men." *Racialicious*, June 26 2007. Accessed March 20, 2009. <http://racialicious.com/2007/06/26/the-words-of-asian-american-men>.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Fernandez, Maria E. "ABC's *Lost* is Easy to Find, and Not Just on a TV Screen." *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2006.
- Frank, Steven. "A Tale of Two Countries: Toronto." *Time*, May 5, 2003.
- Fritz, Ben. "Viewers Watch on the Web, But Blurb Bucks Lag." *Variety* 414.6 (March 16-22, 2009): 37.
- Fetterman, Mindy. "Traditional Toys Sales Skirt China Recalls." *USA Today*, December 24, 2007.
- Fetterman, Mindy, Greg Farrell and Laura Petrecca, "Recall of More China-Made Toys Unnerves Parents." *USA Today*, August 3, 2007.
- Gabriel, John. *Whitewash: Racialized Politics and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Gans, Herbert. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2.1 (1979): 1-20.
- Gerbner, George and Larry Gross, "Living with Television: The Violence Profile." *Journal of Communication* 26 (1976): 172-99.

Gitlin, Todd. *The Whole World is Watching*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980.

Gittleson, Ben. "Alleged Bias Incident Against Korean Students Prompts Widespread Reaction." *Tufts Daily*, April 10, 2009. Accessed October 2, 2010. <http://www.tuftsdaily.com/alleged-bias-incident-against-korean-students-prompts-widespread-reaction-1.1652715>.

Goldman, Eric. "Heroes Creator Tim Kring Talks." *IGN*, December 14, 2007. Accessed July 22, 2010. <http://tv.ign.com/articles/841/841573p1.html>.

Goram, Christine. "Avian Flu: How Scared Should We Be?" *Time*, October 9, 2005.

Gotanda, Neil. "Exclusion and Inclusion: Immigration and American Orientalism." In *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization*, edited by Evelyn Hu Dehart, 129-151. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.

Gough, Paul J. "'Heroes' Saves Night for NBC." *Hollywood Reporter* 396.16 (September 27, 2006): 3, 13.

Gough, Paul J. "'Lost' Captivates 18 Mil Viewers." *Hollywood Reporter* 396.23 (October 6-8, 2006): 3.

Gough, Paul J. and Nellie Andreeva, "New Reality for NBC Uni." *Hollywood Reporter* 396.33 (October 20-22, 2006): 1.

Gray, Herman. *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Gray, Jonathan. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Grossman, Ben. "'Lost' Shuns Sci-Fi Label." *Broadcasting and Cable* 135.28 (July 11, 2005): 10.

Haenni, Sabine. *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, 166-77. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular.'" In *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel. Boston, MA: Routledge, 1981.

Hamamoto, Darrell Y. *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Hashmi, Mobina. "No Longer the Iconic American? The Changing Cultural and Economic Value of White Masculinity in the Global Economy." Ph.D. Diss., University of Madison-Wisconsin, 2006.

Hibberd, James. "NBC Finds Webisode Workaround." *Television Week*, March 26, 2007.

"*Heroes*." *Hollywood Reporter* 396.12 (September 25, 2006): 14.

Hong, Michael. "The Invisible Asian-Americans." *Broadcasting and Cable* 135.13 (January 17, 2005): 78.

Hoppenstand, Gary. "Yellow Devil Doctors and Opium Dens: A Survey of the Yellow Peril Stereotypes in Mass Media Entertainment." In *The Popular Culture Reader*, edited by Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar, 171-85. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983.

Huang, Yunte. *Charlie Chan: The Untold Story of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous with American History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Imada, Bill. "Forget the Asian American Market Myths But Remember These Truths." *Advertising Age* 78.44 (November 5, 2007): 14.

Irwin, Mary Jane. "Q&A with Alternate Reality Game Designer Jane McGonigal." *Wired Magazine* 15.6, 17 May 2007. Accessed May 28, 2010.
http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/15-06/st_arg2.

"Is the Internet Killing Cable TV?" *Retrevo*, April 9 2010. Accessed May 13, 2010.
<http://wvp.retrevo.com/content/blog/2010/04/internet-killing-cable-tv>.

Itzkoff, Dave. "Decoding the 'Lost Supper.'" *The New York Times*, January 5 2010. Accessed January 7, 2010. <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/01/05/decoding-the-lost-supper>.

Jamas, Alison "Just Don't Turn Off the TV: Miller, Burnett Say the Future is Online." *Daily Variety* 291.3, (April 5, 2006): 5.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Jenkins, Henry. "Convergence? I Diverge." *Technology Review* (June 17 2001): 93.

Jenkins, Henry. "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence." In *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, edited by Henry Jenkins, 152-172. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Jenkins, Henry. "We Had So Many Stories to Tell." *Convergenceculture.org*, December 10, 2007. Accessed July 22, 2010.
<http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/transmedia>.
- Jiang, Jessie. "China's Rage over Toxic Baby Milk." *Time*, September 18 2008. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1842727,00.html>.
- "Joss Whedon's Plan to Monetize Internet Content (Watch Out, Hollywood)." *Knowledge@Wharton*, February 4, 2009. Accessed July 22, 2010.
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2152>.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Is Jon Stewart the Most Trusted Man in America?" *New York Times*, August 15, 2008. Accessed November 11, 2009.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/17/arts/television/17kaku.html>.
- Kao, Grace. "Asian Americans as Model Minorities? A Look at Their Academic Performance." *Journal of Education* 103.2 (1995): 121-159.
- Kasinitz, Philip, John H. Mollenkopf and Mary C. Waters, eds. *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004.
- Kato, M.T. *From Kung Fu to Hip Hop: Globalization, Revolution and Popular Culture*. New York: SUNY Press, 2007.
- Kelley, James. "To Our Readers." *Time*, May 5, 2003.
- Kibria, Nazli. *Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation Chinese and Korean American Identities*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Kim, Claire Jean. "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics and Society* 27.105 (1999): 105-138.
- Kim, Daniel Y. *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Kim, E.J., James O'Neil, and S.V. Owen, "Asian-American Men's Acculturation and Gender-Role Conflict." *Psychological Reports* 79.1 (1996): 95-104.
- Kim, Nadia J. *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to L.A.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Kimmel, Michael and Michael Messner, eds. *Men's lives*. 5th edition. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

Kit, Borys. "TV: Comic-Con's Heroes." *Hollywood Reporter* 400.33 (July 30, 2007): 1, 18.

Korbelik, Jeff. "Popular 'Lost' is a Cultural Phenomenon." *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 18, 2006. Accessed November 18, 2010.
http://journalstar.com/lifestyles/article_2dac9f1b-8027-572f-8614-359526e4bc6e.html.

Kravit, Katie. "Diversity Awards to Fete 'Glee.'" *Variety* 416.11 (October 27, 2009).

Landweber, Michael. "Is *Glee* a Little Bit Racist?" *Pop Matters*, December 9, 2009.

Lee, Chris. "Hollywood Whitewash? 'Airbender' and 'Prince Of Persia' Anger Fans with Ethnic Casting." *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 2010. Accessed March 2, 2011.
<http://herocomplex.latimes.com/2010/05/22/racebending>.

Lee, Felicia R. "'Bad Twin,' a Novel Inspired by 'Lost,' Makes the Best-Seller Lists." *New York Times*, May 27, 2006. Accessed May 14, 2010.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/27/books/27lost.html>.

Lee, Robert G. *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999.

Lee, Stacey J. *Unraveling the "Model Minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1996.

Lemonick, Michael D. and Alice Park. "The Truth About SARS." *Time*, May 5, 2003: 50.

Leonhardt, David. "Truth, Fiction and Lou Dobbs." *New York Times*, May 30, 2007: C1.

Lincoln, Yvonne S. and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*. New York: Sage, 1985.

Lindelof, Damon. "Mourning TV." *New York Times*, November 11, 2007.

Lippmann, Walter. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922.

Lipton, Eric S. and David Barboza, "As More Toys Are Recalled, the Trail Ends in China." *New York Times*, June 19, 2007.

Loewen, James. *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Long, Geoffrey. "Transmedia Storytelling: Business, Aesthetics and Production at the Jim Henson Company." Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

“*Lost*’s Savvy Entrepreneur Damon Lindelof Wonders Who Watches the *Watchmen* Viral Videos.” March 7, 2009. Accessed June 10, 2010.

<http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/losts-savvy-entrepreneur-damon-26811.aspx>.

Lotz, Amanda D. ed., *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming in the Post-Network Era*. New York; London: Routledge, 2009.

Lotz, Amanda D. “Textual (Im)possibilities in the Post-Network Era: Negotiating Production and Promotion Processes on Lifetime’s *Any Day Now*.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21.1 (2004): 22-43.

Lotz, Amanda D. *The Television Will be Revolutionized*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2007/

Lowe, Lisa. “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences.” In *A Companion to Asian American Studies*, edited by Kent A. Ono, 254-275. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Lynch, David. “Beijing’s Dirty Air Could Cloud China’s Olympics.” *USA Today*, August 27, 2005.

Lynch, David J. “*Oracle Bones*: China Revealed.” *USA Today*, April 27, 2006.

MacDougall, Robert. “Red, Brown and Yellow Perils: Images of the American Enemy in the 1940s and 1950s.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 32.4 (1999): 59-75.

MacLeod, Calum. “China Would Like the World to See Its Best Behavior.” *USA Today*, February 9, 2006.

MacLeod, Calum. “Chinese Sports Schools Feel an Urgency to Find Gold.” *USA Today*, June 14, 2007.

MacLeod, Calum. “What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been: Olympic Torch Nears the End of its Journey.” *USA Today*, August 6, 2008.

MacLeod, Calum and Paul Wiseman, “Whatever it Takes, China Aims for Dazzling Games.” *USA Today*, August 6, 2007.

Maira, Sunaina. *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

- Masters, Coco. "Japan, China Head Off a Dumpling War." *Time*, February 7, 2008. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1710742,00.html>.
- McDonnell, Clive. "Oil-Thirsty China Reaches for Unocal." *BusinessWeek*, June 23, 2005.
- Mermigas, Diane. "New Media's Effect on the Value of a Viewer." *Hollywood Reporter* 393.27 (March 14, 2006): 8.
- Michaelis, Vicki. "China-USA Rivalry Shapes Olympics." *USA Today*, August 8, 2008.
- National Geographic, *China: Inside the Dragon, Special issue*, May 2008.
- "NBC Reveals *Heroes*' Season 3 Return: In a Word, Big." April 3, 2008. Accessed July 28, 2010. <http://www.heroestheseis.com/nbc-reveals-heroes-season-3-return-in-a-word-big>.
- Neuharth, Al. "Asia Showed Bush Giant China Awake." *USA Today*, October 24, 2003.
- Newman, Adam. "What's a Parent to Do?" *New York Times*, September 29, 2007.
- Nguyen, Mimi Thi and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, eds., *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Nordyke, Kimberly. "NAACP: Biz Short on Diversity Again." *Hollywood Reporter* 407.50 (December 19, 2008): 8, 30
- Nordyke, Kimberly. "Net Chiefs: TV Faces 'Digital Crossroads.'" *Hollywood Reporter* 395.33 (October 20, 2006): 60.
- Obrdlik, Antonin J. "'Gallows Humor': A Sociological Phenomenon." *The American Journal of Sociology* 47.5 (1942): 709-16.
- Okiihiro, Gary. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 1994.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Ong, Aihwa. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." *Current Anthropology* 37.5 (December 1996): 737-62.
- Ong, Aihwa. *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

Ong, Aihwa. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

Oren, Tasha G. "Secret Asian Man: Angry Asians and the Politics of Cultural Visibility." In *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, edited by Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren, 337-360. New York; London: New York University Press, 2005.

Osajima, Keith. "The Hidden Injuries of Race." In *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions: Asian Pacific American Perspectives*, edited by Linda A. Revilla, Gail M. Nomura, Shawn Wong, and Shirley Hune, 81-91. Pullman, Washington State University Press, 1993.

"Paid Circulation in Consumer Magazines, Dec. 31, 2004." *Advertising Age*, February 21, 2004. Accessed October 8, 2010.

http://www.adage.com/datacenter/article?article_id=106861.

Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Park, Ji Hoon, Nadine G. Gabbadon and Ariel R. Chernin, "Naturalizing Racial Differences Through Comedy: Asian, Black, and White Views on Racial Stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2*." *Journal of Communication* 56.1 (March 2006): 157-77.

Patton, Michael Q. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2nd edition. Newbury Park, CA: 1990.

Pierson, David. "Sex and the Asian Man." *Los Angeles Times*, May 12 2004. Accessed March 2, 2011. <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/may/12/entertainment/et-pierson12>.

"Political Ad: Future China will Laugh at Your Downfall, America." *Angry Asian Man*, October 25, 2010. Accessed December 15, 2010.

<http://blog.angryasianman.com/2010/10/political-ad-future-china-will-laugh-at.html>.

Poniewozik, James. "The Best TV." *Time*, December 18, 2004. Accessed May 14, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/bestandworst/2004/tv.html>.

Poniewozik, James. "Why the Future of Television is *Lost*." *Time*, September 24, 2006.

Portes, Alejandro, ed. *The New Second Generation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Prensky, Mark, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants." *On the Horizon* 9.5 (October 2001): 1-6.

"Propaganda and Racism: Thoughts on the Chinese Professor YouTube Video." *8Asians*, October 24, 2010. Accessed December 145, 2010.

<http://www.8asians.com/2010/10/24/propaganda-and-racism-thoughts-on-the-chinese-professor-youtube-video>.

Punathambekar, Aswin. "What Brown Cannot Do for You: MTV-Desi, Diasporic Youth Culture, and the Limits of Television." *Flow TV* 10 (June 27, 2009). Accessed June 30, 2009. <http://flowtv.org/2009/06/what-brown-cannot-do-for-you-mtv-desi-diasporic-youth-culture-and-the-limits-of-television-aswin-punathambekar-the-university-of-michigan>.

Putstz, Matthew J. *Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

Pyke, Karen and Tran Dang. "'FOB' and 'Whitewashed': Identity and Internalized Racism Among Second Generation Asian Americans." *Qualitative Sociology* 26.2 (2003): 147-72.

Quittner, Jeremy. "The China Code." *BusinessWeek*, August 17, 2007. Accessed October 8, 2010.

http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/aug2007/sb2007089_716295.htm.

Radway, Janice A. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Ratcliffe, R.G. "Lawmaker Defends Comment on Asians." *Houston Chronicle*, April 9, 2009.

Ratnesar, Romesh and Hannah Beech, "A Tale of Two Countries: China." *Time*, May 5, 2003.

Reagan, Gillian. "*Lost*'s Lindelof Talks Marketing *Watchmen* for Geeks, Others." March 5, 2009. Accessed August 1, 2010. <http://www.observer.com/2009/movies/losts-lindelof-talks-marketing-watchmen-lost-geeks>.

Rhee, Siyon, Janet Chang and Jessica Rhee. "Acculturation, Communication Patterns and Self-Esteem among Asian and Caucasian American Adolescents." *Adolescence* 38 (2003): 749-768.

Roediger, David. *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1999.

Rohrabacher, Dana. "Wrong Then, Wrong Now: China Shouldn't Participate in Games Hosted By an Abuser of Human Rights." *USA Today*, April 8, 2008.

- Romano, Allison. "ABC Gets Big Rise Out of Fall." *Broadcasting & Cable* 134.41 (October 11, 2004): 6.
- Romano, Allison. "The Asian American Market is Ready." *Broadcasting and Cable* 135.41 (October 10, 2005): 8.
- Rosenthal, Elisabeth. "Experts Doubt Bird Flu Tallies from China and Elsewhere." *New York Times*, December 2, 2005.
- Rossi, Dom. "Rethink 'Prime Time.'" *Advertising Age* 73.17 (April 29, 2002): 16.
- Roush, Matt. "Lost & Found! An Original Idea." *Broadcasting & Cable* 134.41 (October 11, 2004): 44.
- Rumbaut, Ruben G. "The Crucible Within." In *The New Second Generation*, edited by Alejandro Portes, 119-71. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1979; 1994.
- Scocca, Tom. "Letter from Beijing." *New York Times*, August 3, 2008.
- Scott, Robert E. "Costly Trade with China: Millions of U.S. Jobs Displaced with Net Job Loss in Every State." Economic Policy Institute, EPI Briefing paper #188, October 9, 2007. Accessed October 2, 2009. <http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/bp188>.
- Scott, Robert. E. "The U.S. Trade Deficit: Are We Trading Away Our Future?" Economic Policy Institute. Testimony to International Relations Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade. July 22, 2007.
- Seuter, Erin and Deborah Wills, "Discourses of Dehumanization: Enemy Construction and Canadian Media Complicity in the Framing of the War on Terror." Paper presented at the Canadian Communication Association, Ottawa, Canada, 2009.
- Shah, Nayan. *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001.
- Shimakawa, Karen. *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Smith, Paul. "Eastwood Bound." In *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, 77-97. New York: Routledge, 1995.

- “Sneak Peek: ‘TV Guide’ *Heroes* Covers.” November 6, 2007. Accessed March 5, 2010. <http://www.mtv.com/photos/sneak-peek-tv-guide-heroes-covers/1573611/2653989/photo.jhtml>.
- Spaeth, Anthony, Andrew Perrin, Ben Ya Pad, Karl Taro Greenfeld, Bryan Walsh and David Bjerklie, David, “Revenge Of the Birds.” *Time*, February 9, 2004.
- Spigel, Lynne and Jan Olsson, eds. *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Story, Louise. “Lead Paint Prompts Mattel to Recall 967,000 Toys.” *New York Times*, August 2, 2007.
- Story, Louise and David Barboza, “19 Million Toys Sent from China.” *New York Times*, August 15, 2007.
- The Project for Excellence in Journalism, “Cable TV.” *The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism*, 2008. Accessed February 28, 2011. http://www.stateofthedia.org/2008/narrative_cabletv_audience.php?cat=2&media=7.
- Thottam, Jyoti. “The Growing Dangers of China Trade.” *Time*, June 28, 2007. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1638436,00.html>.
- Thottam, Jyoti. “This Christmas, a Lump of Lead?” *Time*, September 6 2007. Accessed October 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1659711,00.html>.
- Thrijpkaew, No. “Filmic Face-Lift: *Better Luck Tomorrow* makes over Asian American Cinema.” *The American Prospect*, May 2003.
- “Tolerating China’s Games.” *USA Today*, August 7, 2008.
- “Top 5 problems with Glee: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Season 2 Premiere.” *Feminist Frequency*, September 23, 2010.
- Truong, Nhan. “Constructing Masculinities and Experiencing Loss: What the Writings of Two Chinese Americans Tell.” *Men and Masculinities* 8.3 (2006): 321-330.
- Tuan, Mia. *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998.
- Verrier, Richard and Claudia Eller. “Writers Union Feeling the Heat.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 2007. Accessed July 2, 2010. <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-strike12dec12,0,5281951.story>.

Verrier, Richard, Claudia Eller, and Andrea Chang. "Writers File Labor Charge Against Studios." *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 2007. Accessed 14 May 2010. <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-strike14dec14,0,4069082,full.story>.

Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso, 1979.

Wallenstein, Andrew and Jesse Hiestrand. "Guilds, ABC Reach Mobisode Deal." *Hollywood Reporter* 394.6 (April 25, 2006): 117.

Wallington, Aury. *Saving Charlie: A Novel*. New York: Del Rey, 2007.

Walsh, Bryan. "A Threat That Knows No Boundaries." *Time*, December 6, 2004. Accessed July 10, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,880311,00.html>.

Walsh, Bryan. "The Bird Flu Hunter." *Time*, October 31, 2005. Accessed July 10, 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1124290,00.html>.

Walsh, Diana. "Customs seizes fake Tamiflu." *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 19, 2005. Accessed November 1, 2009. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article/article?f=/c/a/2005/12/19/BAGGFGA9FI1.DTL>.

Waters, Mary C. "Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City." In *The New Second Generation*, edited by Alejandro Portes, 171-196. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.

Waters, Mary C. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

Wehrfritz, George. "Second Thoughts: China's Too-Hot Economy is Prompting Firms to Look Elsewhere to Invest." *Newsweek*, November 28, 2005. Accessed August 3, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/51217>.

Welkos, Robert W. "PGA Approves "Transmedia Producer" Credit." April 6, 2010. Accessed April 9, 2010. <http://www.hollywoodnews.com/2010/04/06/pga-approves-transmedia-producer-credit>.

"WGA Strike Shuts Down Most Scripted Shows." *United Press International*, December 14, 2007.

Williams, Juan. "The Two Faces of China." *USA Today*, January 23, 2008.

World Health Organization, "Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A (H5N1)." Global Alert and Response. Accessed November 3, 2009. http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en.

Wu, Anne. "Whispers That May Wake the Dragons." *The New York Times*, August 6, 2004.

Wu, Frank H. *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Yardley, Jim. "Chinese Nationalism Fuels Crackdown on Tibet." *New York Times*, March 31, 2008.

Yardley, Jim. "W.H.O. Asks China to Conduct More Tests to Determine Whether Girl Died of Bird Flu." *The New York Times*, October 29, 2005.

Yochim, Emily Chivers. *Skate Life: Reimagining White Masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010.

Yu, Henry. *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Yung, Judy, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai. "Early Chinese Immigrants, 1852-1904." In *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, 1-97. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

Zakaria, Fareed. "A Threat Worse than Terror." *Newsweek*, October 31, 2005.
<http://www.newsweek.com/id/50766>

Zboray, Ronald J. and Mary Sacarino Zboray. "Between 'Crockery-dom' and Barnum: Boston's Chinese Museum, 1845-47." *American Quarterly* 56.2 (2004): 271-307.