

**In Flux: Racial Identity Construction Among Chinese American and Filipina/o
American Undergraduates**

By

Alina Siu Wong

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Doctoral Committee:

**Associate Professor Deborah Faye Carter, Chair
Associate Professor Carla O'Connor
Associate Professor Sarita See
Associate Professor Michael Spencer**

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Dedication

In the process of this project, I came to understand more fully the lessons in strength, confidence, and resilience that I learned from my parents, Wai S. Wong and Ming Y. Wong. My life and work are reflections of their bravery, intelligence, patience, and love.

My family is a source of constant support and laughter. Much love and gratitude to Jaja and Gogo, Stefano and Kim, and to the next generation of Wongs: Abbigail, Amelia, Azlin, and Luca.

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Chapter One

Dis/Orienting Race

I've got to tell you about this experiment I volunteered for in college. I answered an ad for 'Chinese-Americans' to take a test for fifty bucks an hour, more per hour than I've ever made – but hazard pay. So we Chinese-hyphenated-schizoid-dichotomous-Americans were gathered in this lab, which was a classroom. The shrink or lab assistant asked us to fold a piece of paper in half and write 'Chinese' at the top of one half and 'American' at the top of the other. Then he read off a list of words. Like 'Daring.' 'Reticent.' 'Laughter.' 'Fearful.' 'Easygoing.' 'Conscientious.' "Direct.' 'Devious.' 'Affectionate.' 'Standoffish.' 'Adventurous.' 'Cautious.' 'Insouciant.' 'Painstaking.' 'Open.' 'Closed.' 'Generous.' 'Austere.' 'Expressive.' 'Inexpressive.' 'Playful.' 'Studious.' 'Athletic.' 'Industrious.' 'Extroverted.' 'Introverted.' 'Subtle.' 'Outgoing.' We were to write each word either in the left-hand column or the right-hand column. I should have torn up my paper, and other people's papers, stopped the test. But I went along. Working from the inside, I gave the Chinese side 'Daring,' and 'Laughter' and 'Spontaneous' and 'Easygoing,' some Star Quality items. But my bold answers were deviated away in the standard deviation. The American side got all the fun traits. It's scientifically factual truth now – I have a stripe down my back. Here, let me take off my shirt. Check out the yellow side, and the American side.

Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey*, (1989, p. 328)

I do not know how many times I have been asked, "what are you?" This question has taken on various forms over the years, including but not limited to: "Where are you from?" "What is your ethnic heritage?" "Are you Chinese?" "Where are you from...originally?" "Where are you parents from?" "Where were you born?" "What's your background?" "Where were you from before Oregon?" "I once knew someone who..." "I went to school with a Wong. I think her name was _____. Did you know her? Are you related? I think she was from _____; are you?" Most of the time, though

not always, the questioner's intentions are not malicious. The line of questioning is usually innocuous, however annoying. The implication, however, is that I am different or that perhaps I don't belong in some way – I must be sorted and defined. And each time the question comes, despite how many times I have been asked, I am surprised. My heart starts to beat faster. My brain starts to race (no pun intended) to determine the best response – what is this person asking me? What does this person want to know? How can I answer without being rude yet without perpetuating the racist assumptions that compel the question to be asked? How can I get out of this? Why does this person ask *only me* or only those of us who look different from them? Why am I being asked this *again*? Why is this interesting?

What is not surprising, perhaps, is that the shortest answer usually satisfies. I am from Oregon. I am Chinese American. My parents immigrated from China and Hong Kong. That, really, is all they want to know. They want to *place* me and to *name* me. Having done so, we move on. I am not sure why people feel this information is necessary or seemingly relevant. If what they want to know is *who I am*, these would seem like wholly inadequate answers. While my racial and ethnic identities are salient in my life, *who I am* cannot be reduced to these identities alone. And yet, it seems to be what most people are interested in finding out, as though knowing the answer to this question will provide some great clarity about me or the world in which we live.

I have, in fact, often asked myself the question of *what I am* and *who I am*, though in very different ways. My own racial and ethnic identities have never been a question for me, and yet I have spent much of my life exploring them and their impact. This curiosity has led me to consider where racial and ethnic identities come from, their significance in

our lives, and why they have become such powerful ways for us to express ourselves and to relate to each other. I came to realize that my undergraduate college experiences had a deep impact on how I identify myself – as Asian American, as Chinese American, as a scholar, and as an activist. Research on racial identity development indicates that this is not unique, and that late adolescence (traditional college age 18-24) is a pivotal time for cultivating a positive sense of self and deeper understandings of race and racism (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). With concerns about diversity, equality, students' well-being and academic performance, higher education scholars have explored the collegiate experiences of students of color, including Asian American students. What typically occurs in these projects is that a group of students is identified as Asian American (through the registrar or admissions information, or participant recruitment is done through research pools; students confirm their identity through their participation in the study), asked about their college courses, activities, friendships, social behaviors, etc., and the findings are reported and generalized. The majority of these studies used quantitative methods, although a growing body of research is beginning to use qualitative methods. Previous research has examined how Asian American students are raced and stereotyped in schools and colleges (Asher, 2000, 2002; Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994; Osajima, 1991, 1995; Teranishi, 2002) and how students develop a positive affiliation with their racial and ethnic identities (Alvarez, 2002; Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Kim, 1981, 2001; Phinney, 1992, 1996a; Phinney & Alpuria, 1997). This work has provided valuable insight into the experiences of students of color and how their college realities often differ from dominant White narratives (Morrison, 2010). We understand that race matters in students' lives, and that their racial identities inform their

college careers (and vice versa). Yet, there has been little consideration for *being* Asian American. What is it to be Asian American? How do you know if you are Asian American, and what does it mean to have or claim such an identity? And what choice does one have in the matter? Students might check a box as being of Asian descent, but we have little understanding of what this means to students nor how these identities are constructed during this pivotal time.

Today's generation of Asian American¹ college students are at once defining and redefining what it is to be Asian American and altering the American landscape in meaningful ways – struggling for cultural space and challenging the historically exclusive definitions of who is “American.” Considering colleges and universities as spaces infused with and reflective of dominant racial discourses, I examine how Asian American students construct racial and ethnic identities and how they negotiate educational contexts. I am interested in uncovering the process of racial identity construction -- how students define and construct their sense of self, how they express their racial identities, and how their identities are shaped by educational and social contexts. This study is grounded in a conceptualization of race as a social construction involving individual perspectives, collective membership, historical contexts, and political movements (Hall, 2000; Lei, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994).

¹ Other common references include Asian American and Pacific Islander [AAPI], Asian Pacific American [APA] and Asian/Pacific Islander American [A/PIA] to be inclusive of Pacific Islanders who are often grouped together with U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and immigrants of Asian descent. Using a hyphen in “Asian-American” was common in earlier research in Asian American Studies, however, it is less used today. The hyphen has been debated in both linguistic and political arenas. Hyphens connect two nouns such that “Asian-American” would imply a merging of two separate identities. Without the hyphen, “Asian” may be interpreted as an adjective modifier of “American.” In the context of identity politics, “Asian American” is preferred in order to recognize the uniquely American experiences and context, as well as to give voice to a holistic Asian American identity. I use Asian American and AAPI throughout.

This project is framed with a holistic understanding of Asian American identity. I begin with the understanding that Asian American identity is not simply the coming together of two cultural spheres, of “Asian” and “American” as often conceived in research on identity development.² In doing so, I argue against the dominant paradigms which perpetuate the cultural dichotomies of Asian and American as conflicting and mutually exclusive categories. This holistic approach toward holistic Asian American identities created a unique space for conceptualizing racial identity as a dynamic process that is grounded in students’ own understandings and expressions of their identities. The struggle for power and agency in defining one’s own identities is an act of cultural resistance, which challenges the hierarchies of current U.S. society, and also alters how race may be seen and understood.

Scope & Significance: A Social Justice Foundation

In order to examine the experiences of Asian American students in higher education in relation to racial identity construction, I conducted a qualitative study of traditional-age Chinese American and Filipina/o American college students at two four-year, degree-granting public universities using in-depth interviews. Because of the diversity of the Asian American community, I focused on two ethnic groups in order to honor their distinct histories and experiences. I chose these groups because they have different historical interactions and immigration experiences with the U.S. Limiting the focus of the study to two ethnic groups also allows for consideration of both breadth and depth of experiences.

² Understanding Asian American identity as a socio-political construct has been explored in depth in Asian American Studies research. This will be explored further in the next chapter in the discussion on racial formation theory.

My intention was to develop better understandings of how Chinese American and Filipina/o American students understood and expressed their own racial identities, and the processes through which they gained racial consciousness and ownership of their identities. I believe we must consider the subjective processes of identity and identity construction within the contexts of social and institutional structures of power (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991). This study is grounded in social justice, defined by Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) as “both a process and a goal” that includes “the full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p.1). Social justice informed both the conceptualization and design of this study, as well as the process through which this project was conducted. Understanding racial, ethnic, and cultural identities as socially constructed – both individually and collectively – I wanted to deepen awareness and knowledge of that process. I chose qualitative methods and in-depth interviews to create space for students’ agency, so that their identities could be self-defined and expressed rather than assumed or designated with a box. Conceptualizations of race, ethnicity, and culture as matters of heritage, ancestry, or geographic origin silence the impact of racism, power, privilege, prejudice, and pressures of conformity and assimilation on communities of color. I undertook this project to understand race as an identity and not an imposed category. What makes us Asian Americans -- because that is how we are designated or because it is an identity that we choose for ourselves? Is it identity or identification? Both? Neither?

It was also important to include how students experience and negotiate racism as experiences of discrimination and prejudice render their respective college campuses physically and psychologically *unsafe*. Further silencing of students' voices in academic research deepens this pain. Moreover, placing Asian Americans at the top of an inequitable racial hierarchy to create tension with other communities of color or the dismissal of Asian Americans as a community of color because of perceived academic achievement (see discussion of model minority stereotype below) added to the racism and oppression Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders experiences in the U.S. A social justice framework and lens also demand that the histories, experiences, and discourses of communities of color be centered and explored, and to create more space for people of color to define and express their identities in their own voices. "The process for attaining the goal of social justice, we believe, should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, p. 2).

It is important to understand the context in which Asian American undergraduate students find themselves. To do so, I offer a brief overview of the socio-cultural contexts of Asian Americans in higher education. By no means is this a comprehensive summary of the histories and experiences of Asian American college students. Rather, I discuss educational settings as reflective of the stereotypes and racial politics of broader society to illustrate the assumptions and stereotypes Asian American students encounter in higher education. In particular, I discuss the dominant stereotypes of Asian American students: the perfidious foreigner and the model minority.

Asian Americans in Higher Education

Between 1976 and 2000, the enrollment of 18-24 year old undergraduate college students who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander³ increased from 197,900 to 978,200 in the United States. In 2000, Asian American students comprised 22.6% of the total enrollment of “minority” undergraduates in degree-granting institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Not only has Asian American enrollment increased five fold since 1976, but in 1990, 55.1% of Asian American 18 to 24 year-olds was enrolled as undergraduates in postsecondary institutions, as compared to 34.4% of the overall U.S. population (Chang & Kiang, 2002).

This growth in undergraduate enrollment has been used as evidence of the increase in academic access of all Asian American students, often attributed to their achievement in K-12 schools. However impressive, these statistics do not provide information regarding the academic success and enrollment of *all* Asian American students. For instance, in 1990, 66.5% of Chinese American young adults (18-24) were enrolled in college, while only 26.3% of Laotian Americans attended college (Chang & Kiang, 2002). This generalization that all Asian American students, regardless of ethnicity, have equal access to education is a product of the model minority stereotype, and masks the internal diversity of experiences among Asian American students. The model minority stereotype is but one of many that Asian American students confront (Asher, 2002; Chan, 1991; Chang & Kiang, 2002; Chan & Wang, 1991; Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; McEwen, Kodama, Alvarez, Lee, & Liang, 2002).

³ There is some debate on how students are able to self-identify their race or ethnic group in surveys. The NCES Digest on Education Statistics does not specifically list these students as “Asian Americans.” However, it does separate “nonresident aliens” in enrollment figures. My assumption is that the students identified as “Asian or Pacific Islander” are U.S. citizens or permanent residents and can be loosely identified as Asian Americans.

Within educational institutions, Asian American students have been the target of stereotypes, and must negotiate their own academic and social experiences in such an environment (Bhattacharyya, 2001; Kim & Yeh, 2002; Suzuki, 1989). Stereotypes, whether positive or negative, can exert external pressures on the target group, thus affecting their attitudes, behaviors, and experiences (Goldberg, 1983, 2000; Steele, 1997). Additionally, stereotypes may be internalized and affect an individual's self-conceptions and self-esteem, as well as expectations of academic performance and experiences (Asher, 2002; Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; Steele, 1997). They also influence how students see and interact with each other. Stereotypes are one way Asian American students are racialized in educational settings.

Education as stereotyped spaces.

Although many racial stereotypes of Asians exist, two that dominate educational contexts are the “perfidious foreigner” and the “model minority” (Bhattacharyya, 2001; Butterfield, 1986; Levine & Pazner, 1988; Palmer, 1999; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2002). More specifically, the “perfidious foreigner” perpetuates the notion that Asian Americans are unassimilable; that is, that they are not, and cannot ever be, fully integrated into American culture and society. It also supports the notion that Asian Americans are not “true” Americans – that they are too culturally distinct and different to be “American.” This stereotype dismisses the history of Asian Americans and their contributions to the U.S., and encourages the image of all Asian Americans as Asian nationals whose loyalties are suspect (Lee, 1996; Suzuki, 2002). Assumptions of language and ethnic background, citizenship status, and length of residence affect students' experiences in educational institutions. Frequently, Asian American students are targets of harassment,

vandalism, and discrimination because they are seen as outsiders who do not belong in the U.S. or who have taken opportunities away from “true Americans” (Chan & Wang, 1991; Chun, 1995; Delucchi & Do, 1996; Lee, 1996; Suzuki, 2002; Yee, 1992).

Perhaps the most salient stereotype of Asian American students is that of the model minority. With the post-1965 immigration and the relative socio-economic success of older generations of Asian Americans, new images began to appear in the mainstream media in the racially charged era of the 1960s. The “model minority” premise was first proposed by William Peterson on January 9, 1966, in the *New York Times Magazine* article, “Success story: Japanese-American Style” (Kobayashi, 1999; Palmer, 1999; Peterson, 1966; Suzuki, 2002; Takagi, 1992) and was further attributed to Chinese Americans in “Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.” in *U.S. News & World Report* later that same year (“Success story of one minority group in U.S.”, 1966). In the 1980s, the stereotype was applied to nearly all Asian Americans, including the new immigrants of the post-1965 era, as heralded by then President Ronald Reagan, as well as in publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *Fortune* and on television programs like *60 Minutes* and the *NBC Nightly News* (Chan & Wang, 1991; Chang & Kiang, 2002; Kobayashi, 1999; Osajima, 1988; Palmer, 1999; Suzuki, 1989; Takagi, 1992).

The updated model minority stereotype of the 1980s included the apparent academic success and educational attainment of all Asian American students in both K-12 and higher education (Kim & Yeh, 2002; Kobayashi, 1999; Osajima, 1988; Palmer, 1999; Suzuki, 1989, 2002). Other aspects of the model minority stereotype include conceptualizations of “Asian American” as a monolithic racial identity, high admission

and attendance at selective colleges and universities, dominance in scientific fields like medicine and engineering, and adherence to strong traditional, cultural values (Chan & Wang, 1999; Chang & Kiang, 2002, Hurh & Kim, 1989; Osajima, 1988; Palmer, 1999; Sue & Kitano, 1973; Suzuki, 2002). Asian Americans were “extolled as a ‘model minority’ who had overcome racism and ‘made it’ in American society through hard work, uncomplaining perseverance, and quiet accommodation” (Suzuki, 1989, p. 14). Related to the model minority stereotype are assumptions that Asian American students are quiet, obedient, non-aggressive, conform to dominant norms, and do not experience racism or discrimination. Students are expected to revere authority and to be reluctant to challenge social structures and practices (Asher, 2000, 2002; Lee, 1996, 2001, 2005; Lei, 2003; Osajima, 1988).

Another stereotype, though perhaps less prevalent, is that non-high achieving Asian American students are members of Asian gangs, slackers, and violent (Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003). Interestingly, this stereotype is associated more with Southeast Asian American students, particularly those who immigrated to the U.S. as refugees. Also, they are generally of lower socio-economic status whose parents have received less formal education.

This context setting is necessary to understand how Asian American students enter higher education institutions. Colleges and universities are not value-neutral spaces, and the same structures and hierarchies found in other social arenas are present in higher education as well. Administrators, faculty members, and peers hold assumptions of Asian American students that could affect their interactions and experiences. Students themselves come to college with experiences, histories, perspectives, and opinions.

Though these will be added to and changed during their college careers, it is important to understand this interplay between individual and collective, between student and institution.

Parameters of Qualitative Research

This project has important parameters to be noted. While one of the strengths of quantitative research is the possibility to generalize to broader populations using statistical methods to analyze responses from a sample group, qualitative research allows for greater depth of discovery. The focus of qualitative research is not generalizability; rather, it is to better capture the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996). I was able to interview 34 participants at two institutions in this study, which provided rich information from diverse intersecting identities – including gender, socioeconomic status, and academic majors. Because I chose to focus on participants' lived realities, the subjective nature of qualitative research was heightened. This is not a limitation of the study, per se; instead, it allowed me to complicate conceptualizations of race not simply as an imposed category but as an identity that individuals choose and construct.

Another caution of this study is selectivity bias because of the mediums through which participants were recruited and the likelihood that students who were already interested in race and who invested time in examining their identities would volunteer. Some students indicated that they volunteered for the incentive (a \$15 gift card), and not all participants were actively involved with identity-based organizations or AAPI Studies departments. This study may include particular experiences and perspectives, as it is unusual that Asian American students who had no interest or conscious exploration of

their identities would participate. While this places some parameters on the generalizability of this project, it does not diminish the statements of agency, empowerment, struggle, and social change of the participants. It is important to note that qualitative research seeks to understand experiences from the participants' perspectives, and thus selectivity bias is inherent and accounted for in the methods.

Throughout this process, I attempted to be as transparent as possible in terms of my methods, perspectives, and approach. I conceived, designed, and entered this study with the intention of centering students' voices and experiences; thus, they are filtered through my lens as an Asian American (Chinese American) scholar. I asked all participants the same or similar questions, but continued with follow up questions based on my interpretations, interests, and feelings. The interviews were also influenced by the rapport and relationships I was able to build with the participants. Although I was careful not to express judgment in the interviews, I was not an impassive or disinterested partner in our conversations. I also read and interpreted their stories with a social justice and critical lens. I include multiple perspectives from students, not only those which resonated with my own, but my approach also led me to consider some experiences more than others.

Hopes and Contributions

I believe this study provides new perspectives to understand Asian American students as agents in educational contexts to negotiate, even confront and resist, stereotypes and assumptions in higher education. This study also adds to the existing literature on Asian American undergraduate experiences by offering an alternative framework for understanding racial identities, and by centering their experiences in their

own voices. Understanding how Asian American students experience racialization and construct racial identities also has implications for the work of higher education administrators, faculty, and student affairs practitioners to construct better programs and opportunities to meet the needs of Asian American students.

I undertook this study with the intention of critically examining the processes of racial identity construction in college environments. I am interested in understanding the significant relationships and salient experiences students identify as having impact on their racial or ethnic identities. I also sought to uncover the institutional factors and social influences that may affect their sense of self. I believe that the results of this study can be used to better inform policies, practice, and pedagogies in higher education, as well as to contribute to current understandings of race and identity. As will be discussed in the next chapter, much of the existing literature on Asian American racial identity of undergraduates is limited in their quantitative approaches and traditional frameworks. I argue a more critical approach and a holistic framework for understanding Asian American racial identity are necessary to better illuminate the implicit assumptions of identity and race. I bring to this study a social justice lens and framework grounded in critical theory that works within the intersections power, identity, and race. Such an approach is being used more in studies with Black, African American, and Latino students; by using it with Asian American students I hope to reframe the experiences of Asian Americans as another community of color struggling for power, agency, and place.

Chapter Two

Represent(Asians) in Literature

Broadly, research related to Asian American college student racial identities have been studied primarily through identity development and acculturation models. A second approach is through theories of race and racial formation, although this has not been applied widely in education research. Each category represents a broad area of literature, and a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. I limit this discussion to those studies relevant to understanding the experiences of Asian American undergraduate students and racial identity. My intent here is to offer some insight into the foundations and preoccupations in this area of research, as well as to discuss how past research informed this study and my interpretations of students' experiences.

There has been a significant growth in the research on Asian American students that considers issues of identity. However, much of this research relies upon traditional frameworks that do not adequately capture the dynamic and complex nature of race and identity, or the lived experiences of Asian American undergraduates. Building upon the strengths of this past work, and recognizing their gaps and limitations, I suggest an alternative conceptual framework for examining racial identity construction of Asian Americans and attempt to locate my study within this field of research. More recently, intersectionality emerged as a critical lens to examine identity that challenges some of the traditional ways racial identity has been conceived and studied. Although it has not been

used with regard to Asian American identities, I believe it provides a valuable framework to understand students' experiences.

Racial Identity in Higher Education Research

Much of the research on racial identity development with undergraduate students relates to Black and African American students, with increasing attention to Latina/o and Asian American students. In some cases, research related to Asian American identity builds on work done with other students of color. Cross' work in *Nigrescence* (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DeBrito, 1998; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, Cooper, 2003; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001) provided a foundation for the majority of racial identity development models and schemas which followed, including those developed specifically to study Asian American student populations. Based on Erickson's theory of identity and ego development, these models recognize the impact racism and other social structures had issues of identity, particularly how negative images can affect students' self-esteem and interactions with others (Evans, et al., 1998; Torres, et al., 2003; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). Many theorists also discuss how Whites have an investment in maintaining negative images of people of color because they benefit (consciously or not) from unequal racial hierarchies (Torres, et al., 2003; Kim, 1981, 2001).

A majority of research related to Asian American racial identity has been done in the past few decades, largely in Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies, psychology, and counseling. Asian American scholars and activists have called for better understandings of students' experiences, and for greater sensitivity to students' needs. Responding to this call, researchers in psychology and counseling have conducted many studies to address the challenges experienced by Asian American college students with a

focus on student adjustment, mental health, and well-being (e.g., Bok Johnson, Takesue, & Chen, 2007; Chang, 1996; Haverkamp, Collins, & Hansen, 1994; Kim, Hill, Gelso, Goates, Asay, & Harbin, 2003; Iwamoto & Liu, 2010; Juang, Nguyen, & Lin, 2006; Kim & Omizo, 2005; Lee & Liu, 2001; Okazaki, 1997; Ong & Phinney, 2002; Solberg, Choi, Ritsma, & Jolly, 1994; Suzuki & Greenfield, 2002; Yeh & Wang, 2000; Yoo & Lee, 2005, 2008). A strong emphasis in this area of research is on clinical practice and counseling, and so while they touch on concerns related to Asian American identity they do not explore identity itself. Rather, they focus on the relationship between identity and help-seeking and well-being. Often, identity is treated using one of the scales included below and students self-identify as Asian American without discussion of what that signifies. I included only studies that address identity development or identity construction directly.

Racial Identity Development Models.

I focus on three approaches used specifically to address Asian or Asian American racial identity development. Although distinct, Phinney's Multi-Ethnic Identity Model (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992, 1996a, 1996b; Phinney & Alpuria, 1997), Helms' racial identity schema (Alvarez, 2002; Alvarez & Helms 2001; Alvarez & Yeh, 1999), and Kim's Asian American Identity Development (AAID) (Kim 1981, 2001) model overlap in many ways because they are based in Erickson's student development model (Alvarez, 2002; Torres, et al., 2003; Wijeyesinghe & Jackson, 2001). The nuances between each approach, however, warrant discussion. Understanding that these works are interrelated and build upon one another, I offer an overview of each approach. I also discuss limitations of each

approach, as well as empirical studies that have attempted to operationalize models. A conceptual diagram of racial identity models is represented in Figure 1 in Appendix B.

Multi-ethnic identity model (MEIM).

Phinney (1996a) defined ethnic or racial identity development as “a process of exploration that includes questioning preexisting ethnic attitudes and searching into the past and present experiences of one’s group and its relations with other groups” (p. 143). According to Phinney, this process leads to a secure sense of membership of an ethnic or racial group, as well as an acceptance of other groups. She used race and ethnicity interchangeably in her work, and summarized ethnic identity as “a complex construct including a commitment and sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group, positive evaluation of the group, interest in and knowledge about the group, and involvement in activities and traditions of the group” (p. 145). Phinney’s three-stage model is based on general identity development models (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DeBrito, 1998; Torres, et al., 2003). However, Phinney’s work focused specifically on identity development of “ethnic minorities of color” (Phinney, 1996a, p. 144), and she argued that “identity formation has to do with developing an understanding and acceptance of one’s own group in the face of lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism” (p. 144).

The MEIM consisted of three stages. The first stage is an “unexamined ethnic identity” (Phinney, 1996a, p. 147) during which individuals explore beliefs and attitudes about their own ethnicity as conveyed by parents, community leaders, or other elders. Generally, individuals accept what information is given to them, and ethnicity is not perceived as an important part of who they are or their roles in society. The second stage,

“ethnic identity search/moratorium” (p. 147) involves a growing interest in one’s ethnic heritage. Individuals may question previously accepted information regarding values, beliefs, and attitudes through conversations and reflections about what it means to be members of their ethnic group. Individuals may begin to understand racism and discrimination and their impact on individuals’ lives. This questioning may lead to anger and confusion, particularly directed at majority culture. During this stage, ethnicity “is now a personal feeling that becomes congruent with behaviors” (Torres, et al., 2003, p. 37). The third stage, “ethnic identity achievement” (Phinney, 1996a, p. 147) occurs when individuals make a commitment to group membership. A bicultural orientation (comfort with majority and minority cultures) may develop when individuals are comfortable with their roles in society. They have resolved their anger toward the majority group and are also open to other groups.

The MEIM measurement instrument consisted of fourteen items that measured positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic behaviors and practices using a four-point scale (Evans, et al., 1998). Using the MEIM, Phinney (1992) found that identity development peaks in late adolescence and young adulthood, which corresponds with other models of college student development as students break away from parental influence (Evans, et al., 1998; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, Gurin, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Lee and Yoo (2004) used factor analysis to examine the internal validity of the MEIM survey instrument using a sample of “Asian American”⁴ college students. They found that Phinney’s three-stage construct fit well with their Asian American sample, and ethnic identity related to psychological well-

⁴ For purposes of this literature review, I indicated the identifiers used by the author(s) in quotation marks. It is important to consider the language and terminology used because they hold implicit meanings of the authors’ perspectives and theoretical paradigms.

being. That is, the results suggested a positive correlation between ethnic identity clarity and pride with well-being, although ethnic identity engagement did not contribute to well-being.

Some studies used the MEIM as a conceptual framework for their research. Kawaguchi (2003) and Yeh and Huang (1996) used Phinney's racial identity development model in their qualitative studies with Asian American students. Kawaguchi found four ethnic patterns among his "Asian Americans" participants: achieved, moratorium, foreclosed, and diffuse. For Kawaguchi, an achieved identity was demonstrated by "a consistent and substantial level of ethnic practice during childhood as well as their college years" (p. 23) while students in moratorium did not participate in "ethnic practice" (p. 23) early in their lives, although they had developed an interest during college. Foreclosed and diffuse students expressed little or no interest in their ethnic identity or practice, although foreclosed students did have a clear sense of their Asian American identity. Kawaguchi also found that the model minority myth impacted students' identity development because of their negative reactions to the stereotype. Kawaguchi indicated that of the 15 participants, five were Indian Americans, four Korean Americans, three Chinese Americans, one Japanese American, and two biracial students. Unfortunately, Kawaguchi did not provide any further information regarding students' backgrounds, for example, generational or immigration status, birthplace or length of residence, parental education or occupation, etc. It is also problematic that although three students did self-identify as Asian American or Asian American, he does not explore this any further. Kawaguchi ascribes racial identities upon all participants, including those who did not claim an Asian American identity. Also, Kawaguchi did not explore what

these identities meant to students, how they talked about their identities, or why they identified in different ways.

Yoo and Lee (2005, 2008) looked at the relationship between MEIM identity status and the impact of racism, well-being, and coping strategies among Asian American students. They hypothesized that “high ethnic identity” (2008, p. 71) would buffer the impact of racism or discrimination but may report lower well-being because. In their 2008 study, they gave hypothetical situations that described multiple instances (five or more) or single incident (one to five incidents) of discrimination (repeatedly denied access to a club) to 128 self-identified Asian American college students (33% Hmong, 20% Korean, 14% Chinese, 10% Asian Indian, 7% Vietnamese, and 16% Filipina/o, Japanese, Taiwanese, Laotian, Cambodian or biracial). Students at a Midwestern public university were recruited through Asian American student organizations and related classes. They found that students who were given the multiple incident vignette reported lower situational well-being than those given the single incident story. However, students with “low ethnic identity reported higher situational well-being (i.e., higher positive affect) when imagining multiple incidents of racial discrimination compared to when they were imagining a single incident” (p. 71)

In 2005, Yoo and Lee surveyed 155 Asian American college students through Asian American student organizations and classes at a public university in the Midwest to find that “strong ethnic identity was associated with more frequent use of social support and problem solving coping when participants perceived racial discrimination” (p. 503) They used the MEIM, the Coping Strategies Inventory, and developed their own 10-item measure of perceived personal racial discrimination. Interestingly, they also found that

students with strong ethnic identity with strong coping mechanisms were “buffered from the effects of racial discrimination on well-being only when racial discrimination was perceived to be low” (p. 503). Their results countered “prevailing literature showing that ethnic identity unconditionally protects individuals against racial discrimination” (p. 503). It is important to note that 72% of the participants in this study reported “sometimes to almost always” (p.503) feeling that they were treated differently because of their racial identity.

In their study, Yeh and Huang (1996) interviewed 78 undergraduates who self-identified as being of “Asian ancestry” (p. 652) to explore the appropriateness of using racial identity development models to study “Asian-American” students. Although they used more traditional identity development models (including Phinney’s) as a framework for understanding ethnic identity, they also critiqued the model for its linear, unidirectional approach. Phinney recognized identity as dynamic in her work, however, Yeh and Huang argued that stage models in general “imply that progression through the stages is highly valued” with ethnic identity as a “final and fixed outcome” (p. 648). They also critiqued these models for being inadequate to study Asian American student populations because Asian and Asian-American identities are more collective and externally influenced than the psychologically grounded models allow.

Juang, Nguyen, and Lin (2006) included measures for social context in their study using the MEIM to examine how ethnic identity and attitudes toward other groups related to psychosocial functioning in “emerging adults,” which they describe as “typical college student age range of 18 to 25 years” (p. 547). They included social context by recruiting students from two different universities: one in which 39% of the students were of “Asian

descent” (p. 549) and one with 4%. They also accounted for “power and status” (p. 546) of the ethnic group by looking at the makeup of faculty and administrators. The “ethnically concentrated” university had 15% Asian administrators and faculty (including a former president), while the other had only 9%. Using the MEIM and other measures of psychosocial functioning, they found that ethnic identity was related to self-esteem and parental relationships, but not depression. Attitudes toward other groups were positively related to better self-esteem and less depression, but not relationships with parents. With regard to social context, they found that ethnic identity was related to more positive functioning in terms of depression and parental relationships only for students in the ethnically concentrated university. They also reported that Asian Americans in the concentrated context did not report stronger ethnic identity or more positive attitudes toward other groups.

Syed and Azmitia (2008) added a narrative dimension to the MEIM by including open ended questions in their study to understanding ethnic identity in college students. This study of 216 college students at a California public university included 53 Asian Americans and 18 multiracial students with Asian heritage. They asked students to describe “instances in which they became particularly aware of their ethnicity when in the company of a close friend” (p. 1017). They took a sample of 40 participants (10 from each group: Asian American, Latino, Mixed ethnic, and White; and balanced by gender), and found four themes: “awareness of difference, awareness of underrepresentation, experience of prejudice, and positive connections to culture/ethnicity” (p. 1018). Asian Americans and Latinos were overrepresented in the “achieved” status. And experience of prejudice was the most frequently occurring theme (46% of cases). They also found that

“Asian Americans told far more stories of social exclusion” (p. 1020) than any other group (53% Asian American, 21% Latino, 0% Mixed, and 26% White). In terms of the relationship between ethnic identity status and the narrative themes, they found that those in the unexamined group reported the most awareness of difference and awareness of underrepresentation; and both achieved and moratorium groups reported more experience of prejudice stories than the unexamined group. The achieved group demonstrated more connection to culture stories than the other groups. Finally, most of the stories recounted by students were about experiences in which they told stories to their friends (88%). Syed and Azmitia suggested needing more studies that included narratives to better understand “how ethnicity is experienced.” (p. 1021). Participants in the achieved group were more likely to tell stories about prejudice, suggesting that students with stronger ethnic identities may be more aware of and sensitive to experiences of discrimination and racism. They also contend that “people with varying levels of ethnic identity experience their worlds differently and may organize their experiences cognitively in ways that favor the recall of certain events over others” (p. 1023) and that students with an achieved identity told more stories about feeling connected to their identities, which may indicate that these experiences are quite salient in their lives.

An important note is that although Phinney’s model (and subsequent models) specifically named ethnic identity, it did not ask students how they understood or what they identified as their ethnic identity. In other words, although the MEIM attempted to measure if students felt a commitment to a particular racial group (categorized as on a low-high scale), the instrument defined that group for them, and is a significant limitation of using quantitative methods in research about racial identity. Students are not asked

how they define, construct, or understand group membership or identity. They were able to self-identify as Asian American, and some studies did ask for ethnic or cultural identities. However, this information is usually included as a fixed variable in statistical analysis, and so we cannot know if students have different conceptualizations of their identities (e.g., heritage or social construction; as a racial, ethnic, or cultural identity). Other scholars have noted the importance of recognizing both a pan-Asian Americans racial identity as well as ethnic group identities (e.g., Cambodian American, Chinese American, Hmong American, etc.). As will be discussed in later sections, students' experiences are diverse and often differ by ethnicity. For demographic reasons, Asian American students are often grouped together as a monolithic racial category that does not honor the ethnic diversity with the Asian American community.

People of color racial identity model.

Alvarez (2002) adapted Helms' racial identity schema to consider Asian American students' experiences. Alvarez directed his discussion to practitioners to encourage practical applications of racial identity theory. Helms' model viewed racial identity development as a linear process through stages or "statuses" (p. 36): conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion, internalization, and integrative awareness. This model also included how racial oppression and discrimination would affect the experiences of people of color. Conformity is the "least sophisticated status" (p. 36) during which individuals trivialize or minimize race. For "Asian Americans," Alvarez noted that this may involve "internalization of the values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant culture and a devaluation of Asian Americans and Asian culture, values, and norms" (p. 36). Asian American students may try to "assimilate" (p. 36) into the dominant White campus

culture and reject any associations with other Asian American students or organizations. In the dissonance status, Asian American students begin to understand the impact of racism and racial discrimination; this may result in “anxiety, confusion, and racial ambivalence” (p. 37). Immersion and emersion indicate a “growing awareness of racial dynamics and hierarchies that relegate Asian Americans to positions of inferiority” (p. 38). Students may replace the negative stereotypes with positive self-definitions and seek community with other Asian American students. Students experiencing this status may become hostile to White students or other groups and develop a strong pride in their racial or ethnic heritage. During the internalization status, students struggle with defining their own Asian American identity rather than conforming to the larger racial or ethnic group. Integrative awareness occurs when students develop positive self-esteem as an Asian American, and are also able to have meaningful relationships with other students. They may also begin to explore other aspects of their social identities such as gender, sexuality, and class.

Alvarez and Yeh (1999) examined the influence that racial climate played in the identity development of “Asian American” undergraduates in a literature review. They identified factors that contribute to racial identity development: family and social factors, immigration experiences, history and collective memory, institutional support and involvement, as well as affective factors and social comparison processes. Importantly, the authors noted that these conceptualizations were based upon their research with middle-class to upper-class Asian American students at predominantly White institutions from Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and South Asian backgrounds. They cautioned that although some generalizations may be made to other Asian American students,

practitioners need to recognize the diversity of experiences and backgrounds of Asian American students.

Alvarez and Helms (2001) used Helms' racial identity model to examine the relationships between "Asian Americans'" racial adjustment and societal messages they receive about their ascribed racial group. With a sample of 188 college students, they found a relationship between the racial identity model and collective self-esteem. That is, those who conformed to majority culture had lower collective self-esteem; that is, they did not feel positively about being Asian American. Alvarez and Helms argued that because the racial identity model was related to awareness of racism, students who were more mature in their development were better able to negotiate negative stereotypes, and thus viewed themselves on more positive terms.

Iwamoto and Liu (2010) used the MEIM and Alvarez and Helms' racial identity theory to examine the relationship between identity, Asian values, and race-related stress. With 402 Asian American college and graduate student participants (Chinese American, Korean American, Vietnamese American, Taiwanese American, South Asian, Filipino American, Japanese American, and mixed Asian ancestry), used the Asian Values Scale, the MEIM, People of Color Racial Identity Attitudes, and Scale of Psychological Well-Being to find that the racial identity statuses of racial identity model were significant predictors of well-being. More specifically, students with low Conformity and high race-related stress reported higher levels of well-being than those with lower levels of race-related stress and low Conformity. And, increases in race-related stress corresponded to increases in well-being for students with high Asian values. They also performed analysis of differences by gender and ethnic identities. They found that men were more likely to

hold stronger Immersion-Emersion beliefs than women; however, women scored higher on Internalization and Dissonance. They found no significant differences by ethnic group or generational status. As might be expected, there was an inverse relationship between Dissonance or Immersion-Emersion statuses in which racial identity was more focused on racism and well-being. Surprisingly, race-related stress was not associated with well-being. Unfortunately, Iwamoto and Liu were unable to separate international students in their study, so some may not have identified as Asian American.

In a study by Yeh, Carter, and Pieterse (2004) of cultural values and racial identity attitudes, they examined gender and racial identity and cultural values to better inform counseling practice. Using the Visible Racial/Ethnic Identity Attitude Scale and the Intercultural Values Inventory, they surveyed 122 Asian American undergraduate and graduate students at two Midwestern and two northeastern universities (ages 17-44 years old) with 78 women and 44 men. They did not report ethnic identities. The results of their regression analyses were not statistically significant to suggest cultural values orientation for the participants. They also found that Asian Americans with Integrative Awareness status showed a preference for bicultural American and Asian values, and Asian Americans with Conformity status tended to toward individualism. In their analysis of gender identity, women tended to value harmony more than men. Yeh, Carter, and Pieterse used “Asian values” and “Asian American values” interchangeably, but also set up a dichotomy between traditional Asian values and European American values. It is not clear how Asian American values are defined in their study, or how they were expressed to students.

Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) had 254 participants (156 women and 98 men; Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Multiethnic and other) in their study of the racial identity model and experiences with racism and racial socialization. Ninety-eight percent of participants reported experiencing daily acts of racism or microaggressions at least once or twice in the past year, and 99% of students experienced some form of vicarious racism directed at Asian Americans. They also found that age, socioeconomic status, generational status, and ethnicity were significantly related to racial socialization. Older students were more likely to take Asian American or Ethnic Studies courses, and first-generation and Chinese participants were more likely to live in neighborhoods comprised of people of their own race (participants were grouped into three categories: Chinese, Filipino, and Other Asian). Older students and students of lower socioeconomic status were less likely to report vicarious racism, while men reported more direct incidents of direct racism. Chinese students were reported lower frequency of daily racism. Also, students who had more explicit conversations about race and racism reported perceiving more racism. And as expected, participants who had more conversations about race and racism were more likely to be in the Dissonance and Immersion-Emersion statuses. This study refuted the misperception that as the model minority, Asian American students do not experience racism. In fact, the overwhelming majority experiences some form of racism, particularly daily or microaggressions which can be harder to measure and have a cumulative impact on students' lives. Alvarez, Juang, and Liang also found that more exposure to conversations about race and racism increases students' awareness about experiencing racism in their daily lives.

Helms' racial identity development model is linear and unidirectional with identity as an outcome or goal. Although Alvarez, Yeh, and Helms acknowledged the dynamic nature of identity, the People of Color racial identity model places identity within a structure in which the researchers determined what values and attitudes were "Asian" and "European." Their work is aimed at student affairs practitioners and counselors, and it is important that these professionals understand the often unique experiences of Asian American students particularly with regard to the impact of racism on students' identities. However, presenting a rigid framework for how students develop their sense of self, and a dichotomous framework of "Asian" and "European" values, may lead to an overly deterministic model.

Asian American Identity Development (AAID).

Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development (AAID) model was the only framework constructed specifically for "Asian Americans." Although the AAID is discussed for all Asian American students, the model was developed from Kim's (1981) dissertation that used a sample of ten, third generation Japanese American women, ranging in age from 20 to 40. Building on Erickson's life cycle model, as well as Cross' and Helms' racial identity models, the AAID model outlines five distinct and sequential stages: Ethnic awareness, White identification, Awakening to social political consciousness, Redirection to Asian American consciousness, and Incorporation (Kim, 1981). The first stage occurs prior to entering school when parents and family members inform children's racial identities and understandings. Kim found that social movements were important to progression into the social political consciousness stage. Growing awareness of racism and the experiences of Asian Americans in the U.S. may also

provoke moving to the next stage. Although the model is unidirectional, Kim noted that even as adults, Asian Americans may become “stuck” in one stage (Kim, 2001, p. 71, 83). Given the dominance of racism in the social environment, Kim (1981, 2001) was primarily concerned with how Asian Americans developed a positive sense of self and moved through their identity conflict.

The AAID model has not been tested with other Asian American ethnic groups, men, or with college students. Kim (2001) used anecdotal evidence to support her work; however, she acknowledged that further research is needed to enhance the internal and external validity of the model. Because the AAID framework was developed from interviews with Japanese American women, it is difficult to determine how the model may resonate with the experiences of younger generations of Asian American college students.

One of the basic assumptions of the AAID model is that Asian Americans experience an identity conflict because of the prevalence of racism in the U.S. and cultural assumptions of Asian Americans. Racist images and barriers create negative images that Asian Americans (and other people of color) internalize or adopt. Asian Americans may develop identity conflict “as a belief in his or her own inferiority...perhaps coupled with deep-seated feelings of self-hatred and alienation” (p. 70). Kim also assumed that Asian Americans have a more collectivist orientation and were unduly influenced by external images and the social environment. However, she neglected to consider where these assumptions originated, nor did she allow space for Asian Americans to have a different perspective.

Acculturation Models.

Another approach scholars used to study Asian American identity is acculturation. Understanding acculturation as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Ponterotto, Baluch, & Carielli, 1998, p. 109), researchers have used acculturation as a way to measure the adjustment of Asian Americans and Asian American students to “dominant society” (Phinney, Chavira, & Williamson, 1992, p. 300). In relation to identity, acculturation has been used to categorize Asian Americans cultural orientations or adaptation strategies as traditional, bicultural, or assimilated (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001; Kim, Liang, & Assay, 2003; Ponterotto, et al., 1998; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000); or as “ways in which ethnic group members can participate in a culturally diverse society” (Phinney, et al., 1992, p. 300) described as assimilation, integration, separation, or marginality (Phinney, et al. 1992). A conceptual diagram of acculturation models is represented in Figure 2 in Appendix B.

One of the most commonly used instruments to examine acculturation of Asian Americans is the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA). Developed in 1987 from the Acculturation Scale for Mexican Americans, the SL-ASIA is the only measurement instrument created especially to address acculturation of Asian Americans (Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987; Ponterotto, et al., 1998). The SL-ASIA consists of 21 items that ask about language familiarity, usage, and preference; ethnic identity; cultural behaviors, and ethnic interactions using a likert scale from 1 to 5 (Suinn, et al., 1987). Acculturation “levels” are determined by dividing the total of the 21

items by 21. A score of 1 reflects “high Asian identification” or low acculturation” a 3 indicates a “bicultural” acculturation level, and 5 indicates “Western identified” or high acculturation (Suinn, et al., 1987, p. 402).

Acculturation was traditionally conceptualized as a uni-directional continuum with strong ethnic ties on one end and strong mainstream ties on the other. The underlying assumption was that strengthening ties to one community necessitated weakening ties with the other (Phinney, 1990). Therefore, maintaining a strong ethnic identity was not possible if conformity to the mainstream culture was the goal. However, more recent scholarship considered acculturation with a more multidimensional approach that allowed for strong relationships with both the ethnic and mainstream communities. This bicultural stance indicated some level of comfort in one’s ethnic culture as well as in the new or mainstream culture (Phinney, 1990). Rather than two levels of acculturation (ethnic and assimilated), new models indicated four possibilities: strong identification with one’s ethnic culture, strong identification with the dominant culture, identification with both cultures, or identification with neither culture (Phinney, 1990; Yeh & Hwang, 2000).

Acculturation models have been used widely in understanding Asian American undergraduate students because acculturation seemed relevant to how Asian American individuals negotiated or accommodated ethnic and dominant cultures, and because Asian American students must also negotiate the dominant culture of most postsecondary institutions. The common assumption in this approach is that there is some conflict between Asian cultures and values and those of dominant U.S. society, and Asian Americans must choose between a traditional Asian identity and a mainstream

“American” identity. Acculturation models have been particularly popular in examining issues of mental health and well-being in Asian American undergraduates (e.g., Abe-Kim et al., 2001; Gim-Chung, 2001; Kim, Yang, Atkinson, Wolfe, & Hong, 2001; Liem, Lim, & Liem, 2000; Tsai & Pike, 2000).

In relation to issues of identity, acculturation studies treated Asian American identity as a negotiation of their ethnic identities with the values and orientations of dominant society (Abe-Kim et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2003; Phinney, 1992; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Tsai et al., 2000). Abe-Kim et al. (2001) and Phinney (1992) use the language of “home” and “host” communities to examine how acculturation levels related to students’ self-esteem and self-perceptions. In general, students with a bicultural orientation had a more positive self-concept, though this is not discussed further in their study. In the Phinney (1992) study, however, all “Asian” students were grouped together and there was no examination of ethnic group differences, generation or immigration status.

Abe-Kim et al. (2001) compared foreign-born and U.S.-born students, however, in using the SL-ASIA, they made assumptions regarding “Asian” and “American” values in that they are not defined nor complicated in the survey. It is also unclear how U.S.-born Asian American students would understand “home” and “host” cultures as presumably, these communities would be the same for this group of students. In other studies of foreign-born Asian Americans, internalized racism and perceptions of non-Asian American peers also played a role in how immigrant students shaped their identities and interacted with others (Kim et al., 2003; Pyke & Dang, 2003). Students felt pressure to conform to dominant (or White) norms while maintaining the cultural and ethnic identities. Korean and Vietnamese immigrants were accused by their Asian and

Asian American peers of being “FOBs” (fresh of the boat) or “Whitewashed” if they tended toward one extreme. Those who displayed a more bicultural orientation were considered “normal” (Pyke & Dang, p. 147).

This dichotomy is echoed in Tsai et al. (2000) who used a quantitative survey of immigrant and U.S.-born Chinese Americans to examine the meanings of “being Chinese” and “being American” (p. 302). They found that for U.S.-born Chinese Americans (referred to as ABC or “American born Chinese” (p. 302)) being Chinese and being American were independent cultural domains; however for immigrants, being Chinese and being American are dependent domains. That is, ABCs maintained a separate Chinese identity primarily at home, while immigrant Chinese were “Chinese all the time” (p. 306). This was measured using two survey items, which asked students to respond on a likert scale of 1-5, “Overall, I am Chinese”, and “Overall, I am American” (p. 325).

Their findings, taken together, suggest that Asian American students develop strategies to negotiate the dominant values of their college campuses and the cultural values of their “home” cultures, often presented in conflict. The addition of a “bicultural” interpretation of the SL-ASIA scale is important to recognize strategies of cultural negotiation. However, these studies also perpetuate the stereotyped conflicts between “Asian” and “American” values – contributing to Orientalist discourse. The use of “American” as not only distinct from but also in contradiction to “Asian” ignores the pan-ethnic experiences and histories of Asian Americans in the U.S. For example, Tsai et al. (2003) only asked students to respond to being Chinese and being American, without asking about or allowing for an integrated Chinese American identity. This denies the

space for Asian Americans to construct a holistic ethnic identity that is both/and.

Although a bicultural understanding provides an alternative approach to acculturation and assimilation by providing a space for simultaneous identification with ethnic and dominant cultures, it continues to separate them as dichotomous spheres perpetuating the concept of Asian American identities as comprised of two contentious halves.

Furthermore, “American” is not specifically defined, though it is used to implicitly refer to dominant, White culture. Dominant culture must certainly be contended with, particularly for immigrant and ethnic minority groups; however, such a narrow definition of “American” culture is problematic. Given the geographic and demographic diversity of Asian American experiences, White culture is not the only group with which Asian Americans come into contact. Without asking students how they understand “American” or what meanings they give to American identity (e.g., ethnic, cultural, national, etc.), the researchers provided only limited insight into Asian American students’ perspectives and understandings, and thus impose their own view of “American” identity.

Identity development and acculturation models are grounded in psychology and emphasize the internal and individual processes through which racial and ethnic identities are developed and affected. In the next section, I will discuss sociological approaches to understanding racial and ethnic identities, and how these frameworks have been applied to research in education on Asian American students.

Racial Formation Theory

Racial formation theory examines racial and ethnic identities from a sociological perspective. The underlying foundation of racial formation is an understanding of race as

a social construct, countering biological or genealogical assumptions as well as psychological models of development. Omi and Winant (1994) point to the importance of socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts, noting that constructions of race must include how members of a group understand their own racial identifications, as well as how racial identities are understood and ascribed by others. Dominant racial discourses and racial paradigms also affect how race is constructed as power shifts and struggles position groups differently. From this perspective, understandings and meanings of race change over time and between contexts. Racial formation theory rejects the traditional five-category construction of racial identity (White, Black, Latina/o, Asian American, and Native American), which still relies upon biological assumptions of racial identity. Rather, racial formation involves the social, cultural, and political meanings of racial identities, arguing instead that racial categories are constructed in a “system of power” (Kibria, 1998, p. 940). Omi and Winant (1994) noted that

[t]he concept of “Asian American”...arose as a political label in the 1960s. This reflected the similarity of treatment that various groups such as Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, etc. (groups which had not previously considered themselves as having a common political agenda) received at the hands of state institutions. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 89)

Racial formation theory attempts to capture the macro and micro processes through which identities are constructed, deconstructed, challenged, negotiated, enforced, abandoned, and inhabited. The racial category of “Asian [Pacific] American” came out of federally and state imposed homogeneity upon Asian American bodies, and was also claimed by Asian American activists who sought collective power and action. Using a racial formation framework, Kibria (1998) and Espiritu (1992) racialized the social, cultural, political, and historical genealogy of an “Asian American” pan-ethnic identity as

a uniquely “American” construction. Common experiences of discrimination, harassment, and injustice brought together a diversity of Asian American groups. Thus, Asian American identities were both imposed and claimed, and have changed over time and context. Although difficult to represent in a model, Figure 3 in Appendix B offers a visual conceptualization of racial formation theory.

Central to racial formation theory are issues of power and hegemony (Kibria, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1994). In taking a social constructivist approach to understanding race, Omi and Winant (1994) pointed to the ways in which individuals, groups, and structures were invested in developing and maintaining particular categorizations and hierarchies of racial groups. That is, racial formation theory is a way to understand how constructions of race have been used to differentiate, label, and dominate. A necessary component in constructions of race, then, is racism. Racial formation theory does not consider racism as expressions of bigotry or individual attitudes. Rather, racism (and resistance to racism) is built into the racial projects at both macro and micro levels, and most importantly within state structures (Kibria, 1998; Lee, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1994).

[P]rejudice was an almost unavoidable outcome of patterns of socialization which were “bred in the bone,” affecting not only Whites but even minorities themselves. Discrimination, far from manifesting itself only (or even principally) through individual actions or conscious policies, was a structural feature of U.S. society, the product of centuries of systematic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 69)

Although racial formation theory is primarily used to understand the constructions of race as social categories, it is also used to examine the ways in which individuals identify and are identified. Racial formation theory is particularly interested in how racial identities and meanings become normed, such that dominant narratives of race and racial hierarchies become accepted and nearly invisible.

Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus are we inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure. Race becomes 'common sense' – a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world. A vast web of racial projects mediates between the discursive or representational means in which race is identified and signified on the one hand, and the institutional and organizational form in which it is routinized and standardized on the other. These projects are the heart of the racial formation process. (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 60)

Racialization, the microprocesses and interactions through which individuals race themselves and others, is a part of racial formation. Educational research has taken up this concept of racialization.

Racial formation in educational settings.

Racial formation theory offers a framework in which to examine the processes of identity construction. Rather than providing a model to test, racial formation theory suggests a constructivist approach which focuses on making explicit the processes and experiences through which students develop and understand racial identities. There are a limited number of studies that use this framework to look at Asian American students (Asher, 2000; Kuo, 2001; Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; Osajima 1991; Teranishi, 2002). I have included four studies of high school students as examples of how racial formation theory may be applied in educational research. I will also discuss Lewis' (2003) study of racialization and race-making. Lewis did not focus on any particular group or identity, but rather explored the interactions through which elementary school students construct racial identities of themselves and of others.

According to Lewis (2003), "everyday interactions [are] the moments in which the social category of race takes shape, [and] are the means through which boundaries between groups are created, reproduced and resisted" (p. 287). Using an ethnographic

approach, Lewis explored the racialization processes that occur in these “everyday interactions.” Lewis defined racialization as “the assignment of bodies to racial categories (assigning identities to people and groups) and the association of symbols, attributes, qualities, and other meanings with those categories (which then are understood to belong to those bodies in a primordial or natural way)” (p. 287). Racial identities are defined by both who is included and who is excluded. Through the microprocesses of racialization, racial identities are also imbued with meanings, which in turn affect attitudes, behaviors, and actions. “Racial identifications thus are not merely about thought processes but about action” (p. 294). Lewis also noted that context, as well as social and institutional structures, affect how racial identities are assigned and taken up. How one is identified by others, the implicit and explicit meanings and power assigned to those racial identities, informs how an individual might choose to self-identify. It is this relationship that is examined by Osajima (1991), Asher (2000), Kuo, (2001), Lee (1996), Teranishi (2002), and Lei (2003).

Using interviews and ethnographic methods, a common theme in the empirical studies of Asian American students was how students negotiated or responded to stereotypes. Some students felt the model minority stereotype had positive connotations (Lee, 1996; Teranishi, 2002) and even felt pride in being identified as academically gifted. Others tried to downplay their Asian heritages and desired to blend in with their non-Asian peers, even if that meant ignoring fellow Asian and Asian American students and adopting White or dominant norms (Asher, 2000; Kuo, 2001; Osajima, 1991). Still other students found solidarity with their Asian and Asian American peers, resisted dominant norms, and tried to create a space in their schools in which they could bring

their racial and cultural identities (Asher, 2000; Kuo, 2001; Lee, 1996). Finally, some students, primarily Southeast Asian American, had to deal with both the model minority stereotype and assumptions of delinquency and gang membership (Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; Teranishi, 2002). Many students resisted dominant norms by refusing to participate in school (Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003). These strategies or negotiations were generally in response to interactions with peers and teachers, as well as to other social and economic realities.

In every interview Osajima (1991) conducted with undergraduates, students relayed stories of racial discrimination, including name calling, teasing, and harassment. They felt marginalized and were often stereotyped. These experiences of discrimination, isolation, and stereotyping led to three interrelated dimensions of hidden injuries: “dissatisfaction with Asian identity, which often led to a desire to be White or, in their terms, more American; [...] discomfort when they were around other Asians; [...] wonder[ing] whether Whites were prejudging, looking down, or stereotyping them simply because they were Asian” (Osajima, 1991, p. 125).

Students felt that being more like White students or being more “American” would ease their transition to college and feelings of self-doubt. To be associated with “Asia” was to be associated with both the perpetual foreigner and model minority stereotype. Many students distanced themselves from stereotypes by intentionally dressing, acting, or behaving against what they perceived to be ascribed characteristics of Asian Americans – such as changing hairstyles or only hanging out with White peers. Students desired to “blend in” and “not think of [themselves] as different, as being Asian” (p. 129).

Kuo (2001) interviewed four Asian American undergraduates at UCLA and found that students had different means for negotiating their individual and group identities. Two students expressed having an “Asian” and an “American” identity, which were often separate. The “Asian” self was more private and internal, while being “American” was displayed more readily. As one student commented, “I guess what shows on the outside is American but I can also related [sic] to the whole Chinese experience” (p. 14). Others students, however, felt less dissonance in their individual and group identities. They spoke of new experiences in the U.S. that caused greater cultural distance from earlier generations; however, this was not reflected as a negative experience. Students also talked about negotiating expectations from their parents, as well as their Asian American and non-Asian American peers. Though they wanted to connect with other Asian American students, they also resisted imposed definitions of identity, behavior, and attitudes – such as choosing an academic major. Thus, although these students were reflective in defining their racial identities for themselves, they did so with external influences.

The Indian American high school students who participated in Asher’s (2000) study expressed similar feelings of conflict and tension. Students felt it necessary to negotiate their “Indian” identities at home and their “American” identities at school. Students expressed that there was no space for an Indian American identity, though they tried to create a space where they could bring their Indian American experiences into the school. However, their peers had preconceived images of Indian culture and Indian students such that Indian American students felt pressure to conform, or had to confront

the stereotypical images. For example, Indian American students recounted stories in which their White peers told them how Indian students were to behave.

In her ethnographic study of Asian American students, Lee (1996) found that high school students developed four distinct Asian American identities: Korean-Identified, Asian-Identified, New Wavers, and Asian American-Identified. Generally, Korean-Identified and Asian-Identified students were more recent immigrants, concerned with social class, and did not challenge stereotypes or racism. They often tried to fulfill the model minority image. Korean-Identified students attributed their economic success to their ability to get along with Whites. Asian-Identified students believed that hard work and education would help them gain some social mobility and economic success; however, they also recognized that discrimination would act as a barrier. The New Wavers were also recent immigrants, often refugees, and were from working-class or poor families. New Wave students rejected the model minority stereotype by making concerted efforts to sidestep school rules and schoolwork. New wavers recognized the barriers of racism and discrimination. Asian American-Identified students were typically U.S. born who claimed a pan-ethnic identity almost exclusively. They were good students, but recognized racism as a barrier. Rather than opting out of the system as the New Wavers, Asian American-Identified students participated in the academic life of the school, but also believed they had a responsibility to challenge racism. Asian American students were acutely aware of the model minority image and resisted these assumptions.

Teranishi (2002) found similar differences between the Chinese American and Filipina/o American high school students he interviewed. Using critical race theory as a framework for his study, Teranishi examined the role of race and ethnicity in students'

high school experiences, postsecondary aspirations, and racial identity. Chinese American and Filipina/o American students were treated differently and reacted differently to school climates. Chinese American students felt stereotyped as a model minority, with high academic expectations from teachers and counselors. They aspired to attend four-year institutions, and more than half had plans for advanced degrees. However, Filipina/o American students expressed being negatively stereotyped, feeling that teachers and counselors viewed them as delinquents or failures. Male students were particularly concerned with the assumption that they were gang members. They also felt unfairly placed in vocational or non-college preparation classes. Interestingly, they had lower aspirations for postsecondary education, and were more likely to think about alternative opportunities such as the military or vocational school. Some questioned whether they would graduate from high school.

In Lei's (2003) study of stereotypes of Black girls and Southeast Asian American boys, she considered the intersection of race and gender in construction identities. She found that the Southeast Asian American high school students were stereotyped as being quiet, foreign, small in stature, and also gang members. Most of the students that Lei interviewed were refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, and the majority were enrolled in ESL classes. Language was considered to be a barrier, as well as a lack of acculturation or "Americanization" (p. 171). However, teachers equated "Americanization" with deviant behavior, such as wearing baggy pants or using hip-hop slang. Interestingly, Asian American females were not stereotyped in the same way. In fact, both peers and teachers commented on how differently the "Asian boys" and "Asian girls" (p. 171) behaved inside and outside the classroom. Hypermasculinity was also an

issue – the Southeast Asian American males felt it was necessary to protect themselves from physical and verbal harassment and threats, and so “acted tough” (p. 175), which some teachers projected as indicative of gang membership. Although the students talked about walking together in groups in school, most were not in gangs.

How students identified and presented themselves were often in direct response to being racialized and/or stereotyped by their peers and teachers. Pan-Asian identities were adopted at different times, and by different students. In Teranishi’s (2002) study, Chinese American students identified more as “Asian American” than Filipina/o American students. Lee (1996) found that the significance of students’ ethnic or cultural backgrounds changed depending on context. School climate also affected students’ attitudes about themselves and their opportunities (Teranishi, 2002), and students from different ethnic groups, and genders, were also treated differently (Lee, 1996; Lei, 2003; Teranishi, 2002). These studies demonstrated how racialization affected Asian American students’ social and academic experiences. Stereotypes, cultural assumptions, and prejudices affected how students presented themselves to their peers and teachers, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, and actions. Racialization also affected their self-esteem and self-concepts. It seemed that in whatever the racial climate or institutional context, students had to respond to stereotypes and assumptions of others, as well as often harassment and discrimination. Asian American students often had identities ascribed to them, and their self-definitions and racial identities were constructed in response to interactions with peers, teachers, and other personnel.

Although racial formation is used more widely in sociology, it is only beginning to come into education research. Ethnographic studies of school culture and campus

climates may include everyday interactions and examine how race is constructed in educational settings. In higher education research, a few studies have considered how institutional factors affect Asian American student racial identities. I now turn to this area of literature.

College in Asian American Students' Racial Identity

Though many of the previously discussed studies included Asian American college students as participants, there are only a few studies that considered how college experiences played a role in student racial identity. Although in many studies college was included as a context for study, it was not considered as an agent in students' experiences. By agent, I mean that studies did not interrogate the role of institutional factors (such as student, faculty, and staff demographics, student organizations, etc.) or the effects of college experiences in students' lives as they related to issues of identity.

Kibria (2002) and Inkelas (2004) examined the role of student organizations in students' racial identities and awareness. Kibria interviewed students who were not actively involved in pan-Asian student organizations, while Inkelas focused on how participation in racially or ethnically focused student organizations affected students' increased awareness and understanding using a quantitative survey. In both studies, the presence of other Asian American students and organizations prompted students to explore their racial and ethnic identities. However, many students resisted the expectation that Asian American students should interact exclusively with other Asian American peers, or that not participating in ethnic organizations was indicative of a lack of cultural awareness (Kibria, 2002). Kibria focused his study with second generation Chinese American and Korean American undergraduates. Because of common experiences with

immigration and discrimination, some students talked about similarities between different Asian American ethnic groups. Some students sought out friendships and social networks with other Asian American students because they felt an unspoken understanding. However, other students did not participate in pan-Asian ethnic organizations because the “Asian American” construct did not resonate with their experiences, and they felt acute divisions between the different ethnic groups. Inkelas found that 44.6% of respondents agreed that they had gains in Asian American awareness and understanding, and there was a strong correlation between participation in ethnic clubs and racial/ethnic community commitment. There was also a relationship between participation in ethnic clubs and gains in Asian American awareness and understanding.

Maramba (2008) used semi-structured interviews with 82 undergraduate Filipina American women at a predominantly White, public university in Southern California to look at their college experiences from a feminist perspective and to counter the dominant narratives of pan-Asian American identities that do not allow space for specific ethnic communities or experiences. Students talked about some of the influences on their college experiences, including ethnic identity, family, friends, and culture. She found three primary themes: family and parental influence, home obligations and gender differences, and balancing their Filipina American identities within the context of their family and college experiences. Parents and a sense of family obligation informed college choice and activities in college because of expectations to stay close to home and to concentrate on academics. Stories of hardship in the Philippines and as immigrants in the U.S. were cited as ways that students learned about immigrant experiences, as well as justifications for parental expectations.

Gender roles also explained why daughters were expected to take care of parents more than sons, and Maramba noted that only “a few” students felt they had a “good” relationship with their parents with the majority describing their relationship as “stressful” (p. 341). Despite these challenges, students also felt it was important to preserve their “culture” while balancing college life (p. 343). For them, “family was strongly connected to their identity as Filipina Americans” (p. 343). Speaking with other Filipina American students with similar parental relationships and family dynamics provided much needed support, as well as having role models and support systems at the university. Most of the participants did not begin exploring their identities until college, which was also sometimes the source of a growing gap between students and their participants and childhood friends. They felt their “old” friend and parents did not understand what they were going through in college, especially for students who identified as GLBTQ and feared coming out to their families and home communities (p. 344). Some students were the only women in their home communities who went to college, and so did not have a supportive network there to negotiate their college experiences.

Participants struggled with navigating the tension (and sometimes conflict) created by associating Filipina American identity with traditional values and gender roles, wanting to hold onto that in some way while also seeing them as limitations. Maramba contended that biculturalism was helpful in understanding the experiences of these Filipina American students. “The spheres of biculturalism emphasize an axis relationship in which the structures of power (domination and resistance) interact with the dominant and subordinate culture simultaneously. The women in this study continually negotiated

and renegotiated their identities as college students and as Filipina Americans” (p. 345). Rather than separate from their families and home communities as many college students are encouraged (and expected) to do to form autonomous identities, Maramba found that Filipina American women incorporated their family responsibilities and expectations into their identities as college students. This was a space of challenge and negotiation which many students of color, particularly women, face; and Maramba and other scholars argued that student affairs practitioners and counselors need to be more aware of and sensitive to their experiences.

Martinez Aleman (2000) and Morrison (2010) did not focus on Asian American students, but they were included in their respective studies about the experiences of students of color in college. Martinez Aleman included 41 undergraduate women who self-identified as African American, Latina, and Asian American at a small, predominantly White liberal arts college in the Midwest in her study of female friendships, race and ethnicity, and college experiences. Participants completed a questionnaire and short, semi-structured interviews. She found that female friendships served as a network of support for women of color “in which they reconcile the constructed barrier between autonomous and interdependent learning” (p. 136). She also learned that the participants evaluated classroom pedagogy not on the basis of gender, but race – and that women of color found they needed support from other women of color to negotiate the multilayered dynamics of racialized and gendered politics in their classrooms. Martinez Aleman noted that the experiences of women of color were different than those of White women she included in a previous study. In particular, women of color sought relationships with other women of color to develop positive racial

or ethnic identities and self-image, to encourage and support each other, to be allies in educating others or addressing racism, and to understand the intersections of gender and racial identities, as well as sexual orientation for lesbian students. Martinez Aleman pointed out that particularly important for the women in the study was educating themselves and developing a positive sense of self in their female friendships. Although Martinez Aleman noted the racial identity of participants quoted in the study, she did not discuss any patterns or themes that emerged by racial or ethnic group.

In her study, Morrison (2010) sought to understand the experiences of students of color at a predominantly White university in the Northeast – the “feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that reveal the essence of that experience for those students and the meaning that they have attached to it” (p. 988). Of the 21 participants, 7 identified as Asian American (8 African American, 6 Latino). Students were interviewed, and awareness emerged as the overarching theme; other themes included “personal connection, frustration, doubt, responsibility, satisfaction, pride and resilience” (p. 996). Morrison did not discuss the experiences of Asian American students specifically, but did find that students’ experiences differed by darkness of skin color. That is, students with dark skin or African American students did not express satisfaction with how they had been accepted at their university. Many students from all groups were surprised at not feeling welcomed by their White peers, and talked about situations in which they were reminded about how they were different from the dominant group. Overall, they talked about lack of awareness as a barrier between students. They described White students as ignorant of the experiences of students of color, and needing to connect with other students of color

for support. Barriers caused by the lack of awareness prompted students of color to feel as though they lived in a “separate world” (p. 1009).

Although Sears, Fu, Henry, and Bui (2003) did not specifically ask about college experiences, they conducted a longitudinal study to explore if the ethnic identities of “new immigrant” groups (Asian and Latina/o) changed during college. Using quantitative surveys, they found that students’ identities did not change through college, and that for the most part, college did not affect students’ attitudes, awareness, and self-definitions in general. The majority of Asian participants was first generation immigrants, and even after four years of college, continued to identify their national origins when asked to name their racial identities. However, Sears et al. also noted that at the end of college, for students of color, ethnic identities were linked to political attitudes suggesting that some politicization occurred during college.

Moran (2005) more directly examined the role of contextual influence on students’ identities. She did not focus on students’ racial identities or exclusively on Asian American students, but issues of race and racism did come through in the interviews. She asked about events, experiences, and relationships, and students talked about these in different contexts: beginning and end of college, curricular and co-curricular activities, and social relationships and experiences. Moran noted that different experiences elicited distinct emotions, and these varied amongst students. Some experiences “nourished”, while others “thwarted” (p. 24), students’ identities. Emotions that nourished self-perceptions were pride, acceptance, challenge, competence, and happiness. Emotions that thwarted self-perceptions were feeling different, shame, insecurity, unhappiness, and challenge. For example, academic pressures and

expectations influenced some students to downplay their racial background because they felt marginalized or singled out. Interestingly, in the interviews Moran referenced, students were most concerned with their academic competence and others' perceptions of their abilities, sometimes based on their race.

Discussion

Approaches to understanding racial identity of Asian American undergraduate students encompass both psychological and sociological perspectives. Current research can be broadly grouped into two categories: those that focus on the more internal developmental processes and those that consider the interactions between self-defined and ascribed racial identities. The development models, many focusing on White and African American students, dominate much of the literature on racial identity, although only recently has more attention been given to the identity processes of Asian American undergraduate students specifically. These recent models attempt to incorporate racial identity into student development theories, while recognizing the effects of race, racism, and prejudice. However, they place the burden of adjustment upon Asian American students. An acculturative approach requires students to socialize toward dominant (White) norms, which may contribute to challenges for Asian American students and also involves them in the processes of social and cultural reproduction. Although biculturalism can be employed as a strategy, it establishes "Asian" and "American" as cultural opposites to be accommodated. This may create tension for students. Rather than developing whole identities that recognize their unique racial, ethnic, and socio-cultural experiences, students may feel that they must choose between communities which are not wholly separate in students' lived realities.

I would also argue that traditional models and measurement instruments do not adequately capture the changing and dynamic nature of Asian American identity.

Although scholars attempt to recognize identity as evolving, identity development and acculturation models treat identity as a product, an achieved state following a linear progression suggesting that one *arrives* at an identity through internal and individual exploration and discovery. Psychological models focus on the achievement of a positive sense of their racial identity, in reaction to racism and negative images and stereotypes. Although an important facet of student development, such an approach limits what can be understood about race and identity. These models may offer some insight into how Asian American students develop a positive sense of their ethnic selves, however, they do not provide opportunities to understand what racial and ethnic identities mean. Students are asked about their ethnicity or ethnic ties in general, but no specific information is gathered regarding how students define their racial or ethnic identities nor how broader cultural, historical, political, and social contexts and processes affect their identities.

Sociological approaches to understanding racial identity address this particular issue. Scholars looked at what stereotypes exist in educational settings and how students responded to them. Racial formation theory emphasizes the external, social assumptions and expectations of racial categories that affect how individuals self identify and enact racial and ethnic identities. In this sense, racial identity construction incorporates one's own cultural or ethnic awareness as well as how one is racialized by others. Such an approach may overemphasize racial identity as a reaction to dominant norms and assumptions, overlooking how racial identities may also be used to resist or challenge social hierarchies. The focus on racialization also limits understandings of how students

define their own racial identities. Empirical studies using a racial formation framework demonstrate how context affected identity and their meanings. I would add that it is also important to consider how students may hold onto their own constructions in spite of how they are racialized by others.

Racial formation theory also focuses on racial categories and group identities, without much consideration for individual processes and developments. Omi and Winant's (1994) discussion is primarily concerned with how race and racial identities have been constructed, challenged, and changed over historical time with particular attention to the impact of social movements (e.g., Civil Rights, Ethnic Studies) and government policies (e.g., immigration laws). Empirical research that uses a racial formation framework has tended to focus on how broader social contexts affect students' experiences. Although this is an integral aspect of identity, I would argue that more consideration for how students make sense of and embody their racial identities is needed.

Suggestions for a New Conceptual Framework

With my study of racial identity construction of Asian American undergraduate students, I bring a lens that considers both psychological and sociological approaches to understanding racial identity. I use racial identity construction as a concept to incorporate aspects of racial identity development models and racial formation theory. Borrowing from and working between psychological models and sociological frameworks, I suggest a new conceptual framework to capture the ways in which individual and group identifications interact and inform each other. Individually, the psychological models and sociological frameworks offer important but limited ways to explore Asian American

identity. Using a combination of these approaches allows space for understanding how students construct, define, and understand their racial identities, as well as how they make sense of the socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts surrounding those identities with particular attention to college environments.

Previous research suggests several aspects that need to be considered when studying racial identity and Asian American undergraduate students. Background characteristics such as generational status, birthplace/residence in the U.S., immigration experiences, geographic location, parental education and employment, and siblings are commonly included in studies of Asian American students. Cultural awareness and practices, ethnic heritage, and family diasporic ties are also important.

Racial formation theory contends that social contexts must be included in examinations of race and identity. Institutional characteristics, climate, and culture must be considered in terms of how students perceive and experience them. It is also important to include group membership and collective constructions of race, including student organizations, social networks and peer groups. Stereotypes, cultural assumptions, and racialization may also factor into how students understand, construct, and live their racial identities. Racism should also be addressed explicitly.

As discussed, I bring to this project a social justice lens which emphasizes the importance of centering students' voices while recognizing the hierarchical structures that impact their lives. Aspects of power and privilege need to be examined as part of racial identity construction, with regard to how power and privilege impact their identities and the power and privilege students might experience themselves. "[R]esearchers of college student development theory must focus increased attention on inequitable power

structures that result in oppression such as racism, classism, and heterosexism. Doing so is important because privilege and oppression associated with power inequities affect how college students learn and develop” (Abes, 2009, p. 143).

Building on critical theory, critical legal studies, critical race theory, and feminist theory, intersectionality (Dill & Zambrana, 2009) has been introduced as a new approach to understanding identity and identity development. It grew out of critical legal studies and the scholarship of women of color as a way to examine power structures and social contexts in research on identity. Intersectionality suggested that in order to understand how identities are formed, research must take into account how an individual sense of self interacts with social understandings and statuses of different identities. Using intersectionality may include consideration of different social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc.), but the intersection refers to individual-social statuses and not to the intersection of social identities (e.g., middle class, queer, woman of color). “Intersectionality provides a heuristic for exploring the relationships between identity categories and individual differences and larger social systems of inequality and thus illuminates the complexities of the lived experience” (Jones, 2009, p. 289).

To be clear, intersectionality is an “analytic lens” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 588) and not a theory in itself. As such, intersectionality focuses on praxis to connect research and theory – grounded in students’ experiences – with student affairs practice in order to address inequity by suggesting interventions for social change. Intersectionality is characterized by four “theoretical interventions” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 5):

1. Placing the lived experiences and struggles of people of color and other marginalized groups as a starting point for the development of theory

2. Exploring the complexities not only of individual identities but also group identity, recognizing that variations within groups are often ignored and essentialized
3. Unveiling the ways interconnected domains of power organize and structure inequality and oppression; and
4. Promoting social justice and social change by linking research and practice to create a holistic approach to the eradication of disparities and to changing social and higher education institutions. (p. 5)

Working within this critical framework, careful attention is paid to both individual and collective constructions of race and identity, internal and external to each community. It allows space for the unique experiences and perspectives of each student and recognizes that each individual viewpoint comprise the collective whole. “The point is not to deny the importance – both material and discursive – of categories but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experiences, reproduced, and resisted in everyday life” (Weber, 1998, p. 1783).

There are very few studies that use an intersectionality framework to examine Asian American identities. In higher education research, Jones (2009), Abes (2009), and Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) provided examples of how to use intersectionality to understand better the experiences of students with regard to their multiple identities. Jones (2009) and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) did not focus on any identities in particular. Both studies suggested ways to consider race, culture, gender, religion, social class, and sexual orientation. Abes (2009) used multiple intersections in her study – of theoretical frameworks and identities. Abes used both interpretivism and queer theory to examine lesbian identity development. Although Maramba (2008), Martinez Aleman (2000), and Morrison (2010) did not explicitly use intersectionality in their studies, their consideration of multiple and intersecting identities and discussion of racism and power structures borrows from this approach.

Pyon, Cao, and Li (2007) took on the difficult task of narrating the processes and experiences through which they constructed and were still constructing their Asian/Asian American identities. All three were born outside the U.S. (South Korea, China, and Taiwan) but had lived in the U.S. for many years and struggled with how to understand their experiences as immigrants and international students, and what seemed to be burgeoning Asian American identities. They spoke of their identities as students, teachers, immigrants, students, women, South Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean American, Asian and Asian American. They entered this project to claim agency to define oneself and construct their own identities. “The dialectic interplay between racialization and diversification especially indicates that Asians and Asian Americans are not fully in control of their identity formation. [...] We hope that our stories point to the fact that Asians and Asian Americans are active participants in the process of forming and thinking through own identities” (p. 17). I share in this hope.

Chapter Three

(Orient)ing Research -- Methods

In order to better understand the experiences and processes of racial identity construction of Asian American students using a social justice framework, it was important to ground this study in students' experiences. A qualitative study is "pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). Because I was interested in examining the processes of identity construction and students' interpretations of their experiences with regard to racial and ethnic identities in college, qualitative methods provided an appropriate entry into students' inner logics and subjectivities. By using in-depth interviews, I was able to capture better their lived experiences and centered their voices in my analysis. Qualitative research is "exploratory or descriptive, that assumes the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon" (Marshall & Rossman, p. 60). Further, decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999) suggest that the voices and lived experiences of colonized subjects (as well as subjugated, oppressed, or marginalized peoples) need to be centered in and valued by social research.

This study was guided by four broad questions:

- How do Asian American students understand and construct racial identities?
- What meanings do students give to their racial/ethnic identities and experiences?
- How do college experiences affect students' racial and/or ethnic identities?

- How do students negotiate the racializing discourses of stereotypes and dominant narratives?

These questions were used to develop the interview guide and gave parameters for my conversations with students, as well as reading and interpreting the interview transcripts.

Theoretical Paradigms: Postmodernism, Critical Theory

I approached this study from a postmodern critical perspective that has at its center questions of power. Postmodernism recognizes and seeks out subjective realities and lived experiences challenging the universal Truth notions of positivism and the truth as knowable constructs of the Enlightenment (Kvale, 1996; Macey, 2000; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Instead, postmodernism seeks multiple, dynamic truths that may vary according to time, context, individuals, and interactions. Postmodern thought also regards knowledge as socially constructed by individuals and groups within specific socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts. A postmodern lens approaches identity in this same way. “Identity, then, is socially constructed and naturalized in temporal and cultural contexts” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 581)

Critical theory also challenges dominant social structures and racial hierarchies, seeking and creating sites of agency and resistance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Macey, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It also recenters constructions of knowledge and knowing to include the lived experiences of oppressed and marginalized peoples, as well as to challenge the dominant discourse. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) note, a critical theory paradigm requires a “dialogic and dialectical” methodology (p. 110). In this sense, I also borrow from Kvale’s (1996) understanding of qualitative research interviews as “construction site[s] of knowledge” (p. 42). I approach

the interviews with the understanding that my interactions with students in the interviews may influence how they reflect on and think about issues of identity and race.

Conceptual Framework

As discussed in the previous chapter, I use racial identity construction as a concept that incorporates psychological and sociological approaches to understanding racial identity among Asian American undergraduates. Racial identity development and acculturation models attempted to explain the internal processes through which Asian American students develop positive attitudes and ownership of their racial and/or ethnic identities (e.g., Alvarez, 2002; Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Kim 1981, 2001; Phinney, 1996a, 1996b; Phinney & Alpuria, 1997). In particular, these models emphasized students' development of autonomous selves in relation to their racial identities. Many scholars found that late adolescence was a prime time when students began to explore their identities and struggled to develop independent identities.

Racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 1994) was concerned with the social, cultural, and historical contexts of racial identities and categories. From this perspective, racial identities included how members of a group define themselves, as well as how racial identities are ascribed by others. Racial formation frameworks attempted to capture the macro and micro processes through which identities are socially constructed and their political, historical meanings. Stereotypes of Asian Americans as “super students” and “model minorities” affected students' experiences in educational settings, academically and socially. Some students negotiated this environment by attempting to fulfill stereotypical images while others resisted and challenged them (Asher, 2000; Lee, 1996; Osajima, 1991).

In this study, I attempted to capture the dynamic processes of racial identity construction by considering both students' internal logics and understandings and how students' identities are affected by institutional environment and interactions with others. Such an approach included consideration for how student identities are shaped by family background, past experiences, political consciousness, peer groups, and interactions with other students, faculty, and staff. In particular, I was interested in how family structure, diasporic ties, and community experiences contribute to a student's sense of self; as well as how they respond to or challenge stereotypes and cultural assumptions.

Previous research on Asian Americans in general and Asian American students in particular indicated several factors that should be included: ethnic or cultural heritage, immigration status, generational status, SES, parental education, geography, institutional climate, percentage of Asian American students at institution, peer groups, self-esteem, and self-concept. Experiences with and perceptions of prejudice and discrimination have also been found to impact students' identities. These were included in a questionnaire completed by all participants or in the interview questions.

I also borrow from the principles of decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999) in indigenous studies. Smith argued that in order to recognize the agency of oppressed or marginalized peoples, issues of voice and representation are central. Qualitative research in general, and interviews in particular, allow for the centering of students' experiences using their narratives and insights, thus acknowledging the power of students of color to speak to, define, and interpret their own experiences. Such an approach also challenges more traditional approaches to social scientific research based in the European

Enlightenment which often excludes the voices of people of color and other oppressed peoples in favor of Eurocentric, White, dominant narratives.

Intersectionality is particularly helpful for investigating Asian American racial identity construction and to this study. First, I entered this project wanting to expand understandings of Asian American students' experiences and to work between the traditional, stage-driven identity development models and the imposition of identities onto individual bodies of racial formation theory. Second, the intersection of individual identity and collective membership, as well as with power structures, emerged from the interviews themselves. Intersectionality is also useful in examining racial identity in college students because of its focus on praxis. The "intent and outcomes of an intersectional approach and analysis is the transformation of practice to address inequalities and promote social change" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 588). Students talked about how they understand their identities, as well as the salient college experiences and relationships that had both positive and negative effects. This study provides insight into the kinds of support, networks, and opportunities that may help Asian American college students develop confident racial identities and negotiate racism and discrimination. By centering the expression and development of racial identities as integral to students' educational experiences, this study also challenge the dominant norms around understanding race and identity.

Research Strategies

Participants.

I used a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990) of third and fourth year Chinese American and Filipina/o American students because senior students have had more

experiences with the institutional climate and culture, and also have a more mature sense of self. I focused on two ethnic groups in order to narrow the parameters of the study and to recognize the different experiences of Asian American ethnic groups. Research has shown that ethnic background must be considered in studying Asian American students. The assumption that students of different Asian ethnic backgrounds have the same or similar experiences in higher education has been challenged, although much educational research groups all “Asian” students together without attention to ethnicity. It is important to recognize how ethnic differences may affect students’ experiences, particularly with issues of identity and racialization because stereotypes are ascribed generally to racial groups without regard to ethnicity. Limiting this study to two ethnic groups allows for exploration of similarities and differences across groups, and deeper analysis of experiences within each ethnic group.

I chose Chinese American and Filipina/o American students because their immigration histories of the 19th century are similar, although their sociocultural experiences in the U.S. differ. I also wanted to capture the experiences of a Northeastern Asian ethnic group (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean) and Southeast Asian ethnic group (e.g., Filipina/o, Hmong, Vietnamese). In addition, China and the Philippines have and have had different relationships with the U.S. The colonial and neo-colonial status of the Philippines to the U.S. needs to be considered in understanding how Filipina/o Americans situate themselves and are situated in the contemporary U.S.

California and Michigan Universities.

In 2006-2007, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with third and fourth year Chinese American and Filipina/o American undergraduate students at two

public, predominantly White universities, one in California [California University] and one in the Michigan [Michigan University].⁵ I chose these locations because they provide interesting and contrasting contexts for understanding APIA identities. California has one of the largest populations of Asian Americans in the U.S. and outside of Asia, and is thus a critical and unique location to examine the experiences of Asian American students in the state as well as in California state institutions. I chose a Michigan university as a corresponding institution that is similar in size and selectivity, but is dissimilar in student racial diversity, state demographics, and geographic location. I included two institutions so as to consider social and geographic context in my study, although this is not a comparative study. In the 2000 census, California's population included 12.3% Asian residents, and Michigan had 2.1% Asian residents. The California city where CU is located has the second highest Asian population in the U.S. (10.9%), and the Michigan city where MU is located ranked tenth (1.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

California University is a highly selective (average undergraduate enrollment 26,500; Fall 2010 admission rate 21.7%), public university in southern California, located in a wealthy area of a large city. At the time of the interviews, CU had 35.48% Asian American students and 4.02% Filipino students (total 59.15% students of color). The ethnic identities of Asian American students were not disaggregated so I could not locate the percentage of Chinese American students. Asian American and Filipina/o American students made up the largest group of students of color on campus, and were also the numerical majority on campus (White/Caucasian students made up 34.83%, and Chicano/Mexican American/ Latino/Other Spanish students made up 16.84%).

⁵ I use pseudonyms for institutions, student groups and Asian American Studies/Ethnic Studies programs with distinct names which would make the institution easily identifiable.

On their website, CU made explicit their values and commitments toward a diverse campus, including faculty staff and students.

Diversity is a commitment to recognizing and appreciating the unique beliefs, values, skills, attributes, and characteristics of all individuals in an environment that promotes and celebrates individual and collective achievement. When individuals have problems relating to each other because of their differences, morale declines and productivity suffers. These problems can be overcome by respecting and valuing differences. Recognizing and appreciating diverse perspectives leads to more flexibility, more productivity, more creative problem-solving, better decision-making, and an enhanced ability to meet the needs of a multi-faceted employee, student, and patient population. (CU website)

The Student Affairs office made a special welcome and statement regarding diversity in the undergraduate student population.

[CU] has a strong commitment to attracting, admitting and educating a broad population of students reflecting diversity of intellectual interests, as well as representation from different cultures, races/ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, gender, socio-political perspectives, religious affiliations and sexual orientation/identities from throughout California, across the U.S. and around the world. This rich blend of individuals enhances the academic and intellectual experience for all who come to [CU]. (CU Website)

They also supported several ethnic identity based student groups, including the Chinese Student Organization (CSO) and the Filipino American Student Organization (FASO), with which many students were actively involved. Other organizations included the Asian Pacific Islander Law Students Association, the China Law Association, the Indonesian Bruins Students Association, and the South Asian Performing Arts. On their website, most groups were all listed under the “Student Groups: Ethnic” tab, except for FASO which was listed under the “Political: Social Activism” tab. Their mission statement described the work of FASO:

Promotes an open environment in which we can engage one another about our unique social, political, academic and cultural experiences within the Pilipino/Pilipin@-American community. Builds and strengthens community relationships based upon common struggle and/or goals. Develops student leaders

that will invest to organize, provide services, and advocate for justice and equity in the community, with the community.

The CSO's had this as their mission statement:

We, the [CSO], strive to be the most passionate organization in raising interest and awareness of Chinese culture towards the student population in the [CU] through cultural events and activities of various scales. In addition, we aim to foster a kindred spirit amongst students who are inclined to expand their interpersonal network, both academically and socially.

Another important space and resource for students was the Asian American Studies Center. Some of the participants worked there, and many had informal relationships with the department administrator.

The [CU AAPI Studies Center] was established in 1969 as a result of faculty, student, alumni, and community advocacy. Through its programs in research, teaching, publications and other endeavors, the Center has sought to enrich and inform not only the [CU] community, but also an array of broader audiences and sectors in the state, the nation, and around the world. Today, [CU] is recognized as the premier research and teaching institution in the field of Asian American Studies.

Michigan University is a predominantly White institution (68.4%) with an average undergraduate enrollment of 40,000 (42.1% admission) and is the premiere public university in the state. At the time of the interviews, MU had 12.8% Asian American students, although this data was not disaggregated by ethnicity. Overall, MU had 26.2% students of color, and Asian Americans made up the largest student of color group.

MU also had explicit statements regarding the value of and commitment to diversity. The Diversity Council was established in 2003 “to assess, encourage and celebrate diversity initiatives. The council's mission is to offer ‘expertise and guidance to promote the pursuit and dissemination of essential knowledge and skills that foster effective participation in a diverse, multicultural and inclusive University community.’”

(MU Website) Amongst the many programs and services offered, the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) provided support and resources to identity-based organization including the South Asian Awareness Network and the Asian American Student Organization.

The [OMA] serves as resources of support for diverse student populations in our campus community. We strive to engage and empower students in all of their identities by implementing programs that foster intercultural leadership and strengthen community development. In our ongoing commitment to social justice, we seek to create a campus that is inclusive to all students.

MU participants were also involved with the Chinese Student Organization and the Organization of Chinese Americans, although I could not find information about them online. The AASO has as their mission “to work in unity to provide education, promote awareness of Asian Pacific American cultures, and to establish a communication core for the APA organizations and individuals at [MU].” (AASO website, MU)

Interviews.

Given the nature and focus of this study, in-depth interviews were appropriate because they allowed for deeper examination of process and meaning, and provided space for the dynamic natures of identity, race, and ethnicity (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, interviews centered the voices, perspectives, and subjectivities of participants. “The qualitative research interview seeks to describe specific situations and action sequences from the subject’s world” (p. 33).

Students were identified and contacted by email through ethnically affiliated student organizations (e.g., Chinese American Student Associations, Asian American Student Associations, Filipino Cultural Clubs, etc.), appropriate student affairs personnel (e.g., Director of Multicultural Affairs, Advisor to Asian American Student groups, etc.),

and AAPI/Ethnic Studies programs. I limited participants to students who self-identified as Chinese American and Filipina/o American. I interviewed 34 students in total, twelve at CU and 22 at MU. Ten students were excluded from this study. Two students at CU were excluded because they identified as Filipina, not Filipina American. At MU, eight students were excluded. Five were only in their second year; two identified as Chinese and Filipina only; and one was in a joint graduate program in Pharmacy, making her collegiate experiences markedly different from other students in the study. I included one transfer student at CU – she was only in her second year there but was in the last year of her undergraduate career. There were eight male and 16 female participants; 12 Filipina/o American, 12 Chinese American; 14 at MU and 10 at CU.

Interviews were conducted at MU in the Spring of 2006 and Fall of 2007; and at CU in the Fall of 2007. Interviews ranged from 40 to 120 minutes, and were recorded and professionally transcribed. Prior to the interviews, I asked students to complete a short demographic survey that inquires about their birthplace, generational status, language abilities, parental education and occupation, academic interests and majors, and other relevant information. The questionnaire and sample interview guide are included in Appendix C.

In the open-ended, semi-structured interviews, I asked students to talk about their racial and ethnic identities and how students came to those identities. I constructed open-ended questions that explore students' understandings of racial and ethnic identities, as well as the meanings that students give to these identities. I also asked students to reflect on interactions with Asian American and non-Asian American peers, faculty, administrators, and staff.

Students talked about their past experiences and reveal their understandings of and experiences with their racial and ethnic identities. As expected, students constructed identities within the interview itself; that is, in articulating their understandings of race, culture, ethnicity, as well how they experienced their identities both individually and collectively, and participants came to express identities in ways they had not done so previously. This is further explored in the next chapter. I wrote a participant memo after each interview to capture my reactions and thoughts regarding each participant. This allowed me to remember students and record nonverbal signals, and to move better from one interview to the next. I referred back to these memos while performing my analysis as another form of trustworthiness; to note if my immediate impressions were similar to my later interpretations; and to investigate if these memos might inform the analysis.

Interpretations and Analysis: Phenomenological Approach

I used thematic coding schemes to perform cross-case analysis using a phenomenological approach because phenomenology “is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview. It rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated.” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). Further, phenomenology is used to understand

social phenomena from the actors’ own perspectives, describing the world as experienced by the subjects, and with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be. It studies the subjects’ perspectives on their world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects’ consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings. Phenomenology attempts to get beyond immediately experienced meanings in order to articulate the prereflective level of lived meanings, to make the invisible visible. (Kvale, 1996, p. 52-53)

As part of the exploratory analysis to generate themes and categories, I read interview transcripts from the 24 participants. I decided to sort them by institution and ethnic/cultural group. I also ensured that I read all interviews with male participants as there were fewer in the study. This process allowed me to explore if patterns emerged within or across gender identities, institution and geographical location, and ethnic/cultural group. I began with participants from CU as there were fewer than at MU. As I read the transcripts from MU, saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) began to occur. “This [gathering data until each category is saturated] means until (a) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category, (b) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (c) the relationships among categories are well established and validated” (p. 212). Because I had only ten participants at CU and as saturation began to occur with participants from MU, I decided to include a total of 20 interviews in this project as no new information or perspectives were found, and the remaining four interviews supported my findings based on the other transcripts. Of the 20 participants, ten students were from each institution, five from each cultural/ethnic group. Of the four participants from MU who were not included in this analysis, two were Chinese American and two were Filipina American.

In the analytic process, I focused on the intersections and departures of students’ experiences with respect to the four orienting questions. I wrote research memos after transcript, and took careful notes regarding similarities, differences, common experiences, and emerging patterns. Following this exploratory coding, I read individual interviews more deeply to understand in more detail upon the emergent themes around students’ identities. My focus was on process: how students recognized, claimed, and

talked about their racial identities; how they developed their perspectives on race, racial identities, and stereotypes; how they perceived institutional climate and culture; and the college experiences they identified as having an impact on their identities and perspectives.

These broad themes emerged in the initial process:

- Asian American as umbrella category versus political coalition
- Asian American as distinct identity from Chinese American and Filipina/o American identities
- Chinese American and Filipina/o Am identities
- Identity as strategy
- Culture as active participation

To better understand the nuance of students' expressions and experiences within these broad themes, I used AtlasTI software to develop interrelated and overlapping codes, properties, and dimensions to organize and enhance my understanding of students' identities. These interpretations emerged from coding all of the interview transcripts, and allowed me to unpack the complex and multiple ways students talked about college, their lives, and their identities. Below is a listing of the descriptive categories (outline level one) and interpretive codes (outline level two) I used in my analysis. I created categories (e.g., Asian American, Career, College, Culture, etc.) to group themes together and then moved to interpretive codes (e.g., coalition, activism, community, culture, stereotype) in order to capture better the dynamic manners in which students described and talked about their identities and college experiences.

- Asian American:

- coalition, culture, hierarchy, identity, power, racism, shared, studies, umbrella
- Career
- College:
 - activism, awareness, choice, classes, community, friends, identity, major, mentors, orgs
- Culture
- Filipina/o American:
 - community, culture, identity, postcolonial, stereotype, Fil/Pilipino, gender, Filipino, identity strategy, internalized racism, language, model minority, parents, Philippines, race/ethnicity, racialization, reaction to study, religion, sexuality, whitewashed, fobby
- Chinese American:
 - community, culture, identity, stereotype, gender, Chinese, identity strategy, internalized racism, language, model minority, parents, China, race/ethnicity, racialization, reaction to study, religion, sexuality, whitewashed, fobby

This allowed for a third layer of thematic analysis, in much greater detail and specificity from the first round of exploratory reading. From this process, four strong themes emerged in response to my research questions:

- Understanding “Asian American” as a political coalition
- Shared experience of racialization and racism amongst Asian Americans
- Unspoken sense of community and understanding

- Simultaneous Asian American and Chinese American/Filipina(o) American identities

Although students talked about the influence and salience of college experiences in relation to these four themes, I decided to consider college experiences separately to better understand what experiences had the most impact and because it was a rich source of information about how Asian American students experience college.

Perspective and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the methods to ensure that the researcher's interpretations resonate with participants' perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Prior to embarking on this project, I conducted a pilot study in 2006 with six Asian American graduate students who had received their bachelor's degrees within three years of that time. This study was not limited to Chinese American and Filipina/o American students, but it did allow me to test the interview protocol and make necessary adjustments to language and the order of the questions. It also gave me the opportunity to practice interviewing and develop prompts for asking deeper questions regarding identity. I was also interviewed as part of the pilot study by a co-researcher, which helped me to understand the experience of being interviewed and talking about my own identities. It also gave me an alternative perspective to consider the questions and interviewing techniques. I later realized that this process was invaluable as it gave me an opportunity to speak my truths about my own identities, constructions of "Asian American" and "Chinese American," and name my collegiate experiences. I believe this helped me to bracket, for a time, my perspectives rather than explicitly reading them onto the participants. Having to verbally express my understandings of race, identity, and college

– and to a co-researcher – helped me to understand my biases and assumptions, as well as my interests in the topic.

I contacted all participants to conduct member checking, and seven responded (three from MU and four from CU, two Chinese American and five Filipina/o American students). They provided feedback on my interpretations and agreed with my portrayal of their institutions and identities. I also conducted peer debriefing with two undergraduate students at another institution (a White woman and a Chinese American woman); a Korean American student affairs practitioner who works with cultural organizations; and a student affairs practitioner with experience in qualitative research.

It should be noted that although I am relying upon students' voices to inform my research, the analysis is a product of my interpretations of students' experiences and reflections. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) noted researchers cannot "directly capture lived experience" and all experiences must be considered "in the social text written by the researcher" (p. 28). Thus, although I centered the voices of Asian American students, it is important to recognize that their narratives are cast in my interpretations and analysis. As such, my own perspectives are inherently part of this study. A postmodern, critical approach requires recognition of my own subjectivities and identities and also refutes notions of objectivity or scholarly distance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Throughout the interviewing and analytic process, I wrote research memos to track my own thoughts and reactions.

My identity and personal experiences inform my research and approach, and have some bearing on the interviews and analysis. Some phenomenological studies suggest that researchers write a "full description" of their own experience with the phenomenon

prior to the interviews for the “researcher to gain clarity from her own perceptions” and to bracket “her experiences from interviewees” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). My participation in the pilot study allowed for this, and I wrote research memos after each interview and reflected on my own assumptions, reactions, and feelings regarding each participant. I was careful to track how my conceptualizations of Asian American identity, my background and experiences, and my biases contributed to the analytic process.

Relationships of power between researcher and participants are also important to consider particularly because this study focuses on the experiences of college students and issues of race and identity; and a social justice framework reminds us that educators must pay attention to multiple identities and dynamics. It is important that students feel a level of safety and comfort with me in the interviews because our conversations may turn to delicate, confusing, or personal issues. In most instances, I was afforded an “insider” status with Asian American students because of my similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. This affected how I was able to interact with students, as well as their comfort in discussing personal and difficult topics such as identity and stereotypes. Some students expressed that they would not have participated in the study or would not have been as comfortable had I not been Asian American. I noted my impressions of how my identity influenced our interactions as well as how students discussed their own identities in research memos. In many cases, participants felt a sense of comfort and common understanding and so I was careful to ask clarifying questions and not rely on such assumptions. This was especially true for Chinese American students with similar heritage to my own (Cantonese/Southern China, Hong Kong). Some Filipina/o American

students expressed some hesitation because of cultural and ethnic hierarchies which sometimes privilege Chinese Americans.

Chapter Four

Living Constructions

I entered this study, and each interview, with many questions and tried, as much as possible, to have few answers. As students shared their stories with me, a picture began to form as differences and similarities in their experiences and perspectives began to emerge. After each interview, I was excited for the next, eager to fill in the details. I am indebted to the students who were brave enough to be vulnerable to the research process, and who took the time to talk with me. Some students were quiet, some more eager to talk, and a few admitted to participating for the gift card. It was apparent that many students had spent time considering the very questions I was asking them, though perhaps not so directly. In many cases, students appreciated having the time to reflect on their identities in the interviews, and a few even remarked that they felt greater clarification after having to express their identities verbally, something that is rarely done. What I have culled are the intersections and divergences from the students' stories to give some insight to how students understand and talk about their identities – racially, ethnically, and culturally – as well as the collegiate experiences that informed their current perspectives. The interviews themselves were snapshots *of the moment*, of how students saw themselves at that time. I learned that not only are identities dynamic, but also in flux. Through their classes, co-curricular activities, interactions, and relationships, students construct and are in the process of constructing who they are, how they see

themselves, and how they express themselves to others. It is a constant process of negotiation, choice, and confidence while still holding on to some core self that is both inescapable and elusive. What emerged from my conversations are the nuances between *being* and *feeling* one's identity.

One consideration and strength of qualitative methods is to recognize the voice and agency of participants, centralizing their experiences in scholarly research. Such an approach creates space for participants' subjective perspectives while also allowing for the identification of common themes and patterns across students' experiences. To honor students' perspectives and to recognize the importance of context in their experiences, I begin with profiles of the participants. A summary table is provided in Appendix A.

Participant Profiles⁶

California University: Chinese American Participants.

Molly was a senior, born in San Francisco, CA and identified as second generation Chinese American, ethnically and culturally. She is fluent in Cantonese and English; and her dad owned a restaurant and mom is a retired custodian. Majoring in political science, Molly hoped to be a lawyer and eventually a judge. She had a difficult childhood, getting into trouble and fighting with her parents through high school. She began working at her family's restaurant, which was in a predominantly Black community, at the age of 10 – the only one of her siblings (a brother and sister) to do so. Because her father had limited English skills, Molly took care of much of the accounting and taxes. She attended California University to prove that she could though did not do

⁶ Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities. Participants are introduced in random order.

well academically during her first year. While at college, her father became ill, which caused Molly to reevaluate her choices and relationship with her parents. She also applied more effort to her academics and became more involved with co-curricular activities. Her renewed Christian faith also helped her to realize her goals and repair her relationship with her family, especially her father. Molly has always been “very proud to be Chinese,” and her interests “escalated” in college. She had a diverse group of friends in college, and talked about identity as a matter of context and strategic choices. She thinks of identity as how others see her and thought they would describe her as “Whitewashed.” She also made choices about how to identify herself, as well as what norms or behaviors she might exhibit – she might “play up” different perspectives or side of her identity depending on who she is with and what she is trying to accomplish. In college, she joined the Chinese American Student Association [CASO] and has had leadership positions with the group.

Eddie, a junior, was born in Boston and moved to California at the age of five. His parents emigrated from Hong Kong, though his dad was educated in Taiwan. His dad, retired, worked for the Taiwanese government and his mom is an accountant. Eddie spent his childhood in a predominantly Cantonese community and feels uncomfortable with ethnic groups other than the Hispanic and Asian communities he grew up with. He applied to California University and another California public university because he wanted to college with large Asian communities. He described himself as Chinese racially, ethnically, and culturally – as well as Chinese American. For Eddie, being Chinese American was about having lived here and having particular physical attributes. He thought there was a stigma attached to being U.S. born – that Chinese people thought Chinese Americans had “sold out” in order to assimilate to U.S. culture. Eddie thought

his parents had sacrificed their Chinese culture in order to be successful in the U.S. He described being Chinese American as being on a spectrum from being really Chinese to be really American, or White, and that Chinese immigrants took American culture and twisted it to make it their own. Eddie felt that Chinese Americans were forming their own ethnicity, and also felt that there was a pan-Asian American identity, mostly imposed by Whites who could not distinguish between different Asian ethnicities. Eddie's predilection for cultural isolation also affected his perspectives and relationships with women, and he talked a lot about his perception that Asian American women did not date Asian American men, which was troubling to him because he believed that interracial dating would lead to loss of culture. Although Eddie attended a few meetings of various Chinese American and Asian American student organizations, he was not actively involved.

Carmen emigrated from Shanghai, China at 18 and was in her second year at California University, after transferring from a community college. Carmen is fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese, and English and is majoring in Business and Economics. She plans to pursue a career in finance or banking, and is ambitious in her goals and wants a job that will allow her to travel between Shanghai and U.S. Although she immigrated to the U.S. at 18, she talked about being somewhere between Chinese and Chinese American, noting that she was "leaning toward" Chinese American. She had a difficult transition when she first arrived and did not have good experiences at the community college she attended. Initially, she wanted to return to Shanghai, but her mom had brought her to the U.S. to get a better education and encouraged Carmen to persevere. California University was a better fit for Carmen's ambitions as she talked

about not understanding the difference between an Associate's and Bachelor's degrees when she first began college. Carmen's identity as Chinese American seems like a strategic decision for her as she described how she wanted to "fit in" and get ahead. She described Chinese Americans and Asian Americans as hard working, open minded, and economically motivated – characteristics she wanted to adopt. She became active in two Chinese American student organizations, though felt more comfortable in one. She also joined a sorority and talked about knowing not to dress "fobby" in her sorority, but that she can when she's with her Asian or Asian American friends. She also felt that after living in the U.S. for some time, she does not feel as familiar with Shanghai and that she has different perspectives from her friends in China -- that she is more open minded and more individually focused.

Sherry, a fourth year student, was majoring in International Development Studies with a minor in Asian American Studies. She identified as second generation and was born in Los Angeles, California. Sherry was fluent in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin and plans to be a social worker. Her mother was a seamstress, and she has an older brother and twin sister. Her parents emigrated in the late 1980s, and they lived in predominantly Asian communities. As a child, Sherry participated in "fun" cultural activities like celebrations and performances but said these were not "educational." In high school, she and her sister hung out with the "Asian crowd," and she described her parents as protective and strict. Her parents sometimes made disparaging remarks about other racial groups. In high school, Sherry was involved with the Pacific Asian Club which put on an annual cultural show. She said she was proud of being Chinese to the point of being defensive about it. She went to college knowing she wanted to learn more

about her culture and looked for those opportunities. In her first year, she took courses in Asian American Studies and joined a pan-Asian coalition student group. She identified as Asian American racially, and as Chinese American ethnically and culturally. She understood race as a broad identity imposed by others, whereas ethnicity was more specific to one's personal heritage. Culture was based on personal experiences. She described identity as dynamic and changing, especially when she traveled outside the U.S. She also worked in the Asian American Studies department and has been politically active to change various institutional policies and practices.

Tanya was born in Alhambra, California and was in her third year. She was majoring in biochemistry and planned to be a doctor. Her father was an engineer and her mother worked in public health. They emigrated from Hong Kong, and Tanya has two sisters. She identified as Chinese racially, ethnically, and culturally, as well as Chinese American. She described being Chinese American as holding onto some traditions and ideas but having an American influence. She said she was not "traditional Asian" because she was more outgoing and independent. She talked about experiences that Chinese Americans have in common, often relating to family relationships and living in a combination of cultures. She joined the CASO in her second year and also studied Mandarin, wanting ways to learn about her culture. In CASO, she has mostly been involved with social and cultural events, including a charity concert and other performances. She described being Chinese as something she would like to keep alive, noting that it was easy to become "Americanized." She wanted to continue learning about the history and traditions, although she prioritized her academic courses and medical career.

California University: Filipina/o American Students.

Mary was a senior from Stockton, CA and identified as second generation, U.S. born. Her parents both hold bachelor's degrees from the Philippines, and her dad worked for the Postal Service and her mom is a registered nurse. Mary was majoring in anthropology with a minor in Asian American Studies, but hadn't yet decided on a career path. Academia, research, and policy were all areas she was considering. Mary grew up in Stockton, which has a large Filipino American community with a long history. Her parents emigrated in 1981 and met in the U.S. Mary is the oldest of four, and talked about working on her relationships with her sisters, though she mentioned some conflict with her parents. Mary had three vivid examples of being treated differently by her peers in elementary school, memories that have affected her into adulthood. She internalized these negative experiences and had a difficult time confronting others or expressing herself until college. At California University, Mary found her voice through the FASO, where she served as a staff intern in her first year and later as a tutor and peer advisor. In her senior year, her peers asked her to run for president, an election she won. Mary described her second year of college as a "big growth year" when she developed a political consciousness and learned about education inequities and community organizing. She began thinking about how she could use her education to work in the Filipino American, and changed from being pre-med to anthropology to better combine her academic work and activism. She talked at length about her Pinay (Filipina woman) identity, recognizing the need for more leadership from women. She identified strongly as Filipina American, seeing it as a dynamic process that she was continually exploring. She talked about the colonial history of the Philippines and how it affected her identity as Filipina American.

Although she said there was an Asian American culture, she had a difficult time describing it.

Leslie was a junior majoring in psychology with minors in Education and Southeast Asian Studies. She was born in Torrance, CA and identified as 1.5 generation. Her mother has a bachelor's degree from the Philippines and is a retired nurse. Her father attended some college in the Philippines and is a retired engineer. Leslie's family emigrated to the U.S. in 1965 – her uncle worked in the Alaskan canneries and her mom was recruited to work as a nurse. Her parents met in Carson, CA in the 1970s. Leslie has an older brother. It was important for Leslie to tell me that her family is from Ilokano, an island in the northern Philippines, distinct from dominant Tagalog and Filipino groups. She grew up with Ilokano food and language, though her parents did not make explicit efforts to connect them to their heritage. Her high school had about 20 percent Filipino American students, though Leslie was not socially involved with them or the Filipino Club. She described them as being an exclusive social clique that she did not want to join. She was proud of being Filipino, but it wasn't a large part of her identity. She chose California University because her brother went there, and she idolized her brother growing up. Having been involved with FASO and Asian American Studies classes, Leslie followed in her brother's footsteps. Through that involvement, Leslie's attitudes and activities. She looked for FASO at Orientation and quickly joined the organization's leadership in various positions. She took Tagalog and classes about the Philippines and U.S.-Philippines relations. She began to realize the importance of knowing her culture, and also developed a strong political consciousness through her activities and courses. She plans to work in secondary education to increase access to college among

communities of color, particularly Filipino American students. She identified strongly as a Pinay woman, preferring the indigenous term to Filipino because she considered Filipino to be an imposed term of ethnic dominance. She described her race as Filipino American and ethnicity as Pinay American. She also talked about Asian American culture as being imposed and expected. She does not consider the Pacific Islands to be part of Asia, and therefore does not identify as Asian American; also noting the hierarchy of ethnicities within Asia and Asian America that places Filipinos and Filipino Americans at the bottom.

Rosa identified as U.S. born, first generation Filipina American from Stockton, CA. She was actively involved with Little Manila Foundation in Stockton, particularly with historical preservation of both physical space and community member's stories. Her father was a forklift driver, and her mother owned a small janitorial service and did odd jobs for extra income. Neither had a college degree. Rosa is majoring in Asian American Studies with a minor in Education. She plans to be a high school educator. Rosa learned Tagalog from her grandmother, who lived with her parents and two sisters. Her parents met in Stockton, where most of her extended family also lives. Rosa said she was always surrounded by Filipino and Filipino American food, language, moves, and culture. She felt a very strong connection with her grandmother. Because of her family and growing up in Stockton, Rosa was well aware of social, racial, and economic disparities and decided to attend California University to study Asian American Studies after meeting an alum who worked with the Little Manila Foundation. Rosa identified as Pilipino American racially and ethnically (which she uses interchangeably), and also culturally though very strongly with the Pilipino side. Using "Pilipino" rather than "Filipino" was

very important to Rosa because the “Filipino” came from Spanish colonialism as there is no “F” in Tagalog; though in speech, Rosa used both terms. For Rosa, Asian American was strongly associated with mainstream images in the media, having more to do with stereotypes and assumptions. Being Pilipino American was about embracing her roots through an American lens, not preferring one over the other, but negotiating how to be both simultaneously. She mentioned that she was surprised by how many White students were at California University (which is 44% Asian American) because she had been surrounded by Filipino American in Stockton. When I asked if being Pilipino American was part of her core identity, she said not yet but she wanted to get there.

Christopher was born in Quezon City, Philippines and emigrated to San Mateo, CA when he was just one year old, considering himself first generation. He is fluent in French, Spanish, Filipino, and English, and both his parents hold bachelor’s degrees. His father works for the post office, and his mother is a treasury analyst. He is majoring in International Development Studies, French, and Linguistics with minors in Political Science and Southeast Asian Studies. He plans to go on to graduate school to pursue a career in International Affairs. Christopher’s extended family is still in the Philippines, and he has traveled there nine times to see them. He remarked that he felt quite “at home” there, noting a strong connect with Filipinos than Filipino Americans at times. When he was growing up, there were few Filipino Americans in his community. He had a diverse group of friends, and was very involved with music. He described his family as being different from most Filipinos in that his parents chose to emigrate to the U.S. as an “adventure,” and they encouraged him to pursue his dreams, prioritizing happiness. Christopher felt his perspectives on race and racism changed a lot between high school

and college, that they were not things he thought about or encountered. Despite going to the Philippines fairly often, he felt deprived of knowing his culture until he went to college. He chose California University because a Filipino American alumnus had called him as part of a Filipino outreach program sponsored by the University. He came to California University “hungry” for opportunities to explore his heritage, including taking Tagalog classes and getting involved with FASO. At first he didn’t feel comfortable with other Filipino American students, feeling a strong connection to the Philippines in terms of his worldviews. He also became more aware of his family’s upper middle class background. Being connect with the Philippines was very important to him, and he identified as Filipino in terms of race and ethnicity, but Filipino American in terms of culture. He described himself as “assimilated” in high school, and despite feeling “at home” in the Philippines, fundamental differences in his experiences would prevent him from “fully assimilating” there because he had grown up in the U.S. He talked about the colonial mentality of many Filipinos who revere the U.S., and he wants to do more work in the Philippines to change that perspective. He did not particularly identify with a pan-ethnic Asian category because for him, being Filipino was distinct from all others, including Southeast Asian ethnicities. He saw Asian America as a coalition of solidarity but too diverse to be considered as a unified whole.

Henry, a senior, grew up in Eagle rock, CA after emigrating to the U.S. when he was six. He identified as 1.5 generation and is fluent in English, Tagalog, and Spanish. His parents both hold bachelor’s degrees and are accountants. Henry is majoring in biology and Asian American Studies and has plans for medical school. He described a Filipino revival in Eagle Rock when he was growing up, with new malls, restaurants, and

grocery stores. His elementary school had many Filipino and Filipino American students, but he went to high school in Monrovia, which was predominantly Filipino and Filipino American though his friends were mostly White. He said he didn't fit in with either group because the Filipinos were more recent immigrants who though Henry was "Whitewashed." Henry also described them as being gangster and adopting hip-hop music, slang, music, and dress from popular images of Black culture. His parents kept Filipino foods, music, and pop culture at home, and he attended a Filipino church. He's been to the Philippines four times and each time, felt more and more like a tourist. He became interested in Asian American Studies after seeing it on his girlfriend's Facebook page and was intrigued that he could create a major out of studying himself. He did not get involved with FASO until his junior year, mostly attending events and he auditioned to perform in the Pilipino Cultural Night (PCN). At the time, he didn't know that performing in PCN also involved participating in educational activities. He still participates as a general member. He identified as Pilipino American ethnically and Asian American (broadly inclusive of Pacific Islanders) racially. He felt there were some collective, common values about Asian Americans. To Henry, being Filipino American meant being politically active and into hip-hop; though he didn't fit into that, the distance he feels from the Philippines prompted his identity as Pilipino American. He also talked about making choices about how to identify – as Asian American or Filipino American depending on context and what he wanted to convey, that it could be both an advantage and disadvantage, citing examples of the hierarchy among Asian ethnic groups.

Michigan University: Chinese American students.

Tamara is a senior, majoring in biology and international health, and is interested in global health. She identifies as second generation, Taiwanese American and grew up with her mother, father, and older sister in Ohio, later moving to New Jersey. Both her parents have graduate degrees with careers as a computer scientist and chemist. Tamara has a strong Taiwanese American identity, having learned about Taiwanese history from her parents and during six years at a Taiwanese American summer camp in the Midwest. In high school, she consciously chose activities that she felt did not conform to stereotypes of Asian Americans, instead emphasizing her individuality. In college, Tamara was active in the community service center and global health initiatives, and has not been involved with Asian American student organizations or taken Asian American Studies classes.

Beth emigrated to the Michigan from China when she was two and a half years old and is fluent in Mandarin and English. Her parents are both mechanical engineers with Master's degrees. Beth actually lived on campus when she was a child in family housing with her parents, and also attended Chinese school. Beth had a reverence for China as a "superpower," and also said being Chinese was important to her. She is a senior, majoring in biochemistry and public health and hopes to work as a public health physician. Beth's co-curricular activities have focused around community service and social justice, and have only more recently found more Asian American friends. She said that when she first started college, she was afraid of Asian people, but her interest in Asian American issues has grown in the past year. She recently attended a graduate student of color conference, and became involved with an Asian American literary

magazine at the university, as well as a high school conference sponsored by the Asian American Student Organization (AASO).⁷

Angela, a junior, was born in Taiwan. Her father has a doctorate degree and works as a research professor; her mother has a bachelor's and works at a publishing house. Angela is a political science and creative writing major, with a minor in Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) Studies and plans to be a novelist and teach writing. Angela emigrated to Michigan at 14 and grew up in a suburban area. Angela described herself as having a strong urge to "assimilate" to American culture, to learn English and adopt a more American attitude and lifestyle. She developed a Chinese American and Asian American identity during her second year in college, noting that she was "anti-Asian" when she first began college, intentionally looking for and making non-Asian friends in an attempt to be "American." She had not been introduced to "Asian American discourse" until college, and it was in writing for the school newspaper that she developed a stronger confidence and identity as an Asian American. During her sophomore, she covered a story about a hate incident on campus in which two Asian American students were targeted. In writing the story, she learned more about racism against Asian Americans and also became involved with the AASO. She has taken several Asian American Studies courses and actively seeks Asian American writers and artists.

Sam was a junior and majored in sociology, contemplating a career in law. He was born and grew up in Michigan, though his family has strong ties in Chicago and the Chinese community there. His father worked at a restaurant, and his mother was a production worker. Sam also has a younger sister, and the two are close in age. Sam had a

⁷ A pseudonym is used for the organization to protect the identity of the institution.

strong Chinese American identity (Toishan and Cantonese), and came to college with the intention of exploring his own heritage, as well as getting involved with various multicultural initiatives at the university. Although he grew up in a predominantly White town, he found a diverse group of friends as a first year student. He sought leadership positions in the AASO as a sophomore, participated in a program on cross-cultural learning, and worked in Residential Life. Because of his courses in sociology and Asian American Studies, Sam was well versed and reflective about issues of race, ethnicity, and culture particularly with relation to his identity and sense of self. Sam was also very politicized and was working in Chicago's Chinatown to encourage voter registration and educate the community about their voting rights.

Daniel was political science major in his fourth year, and planned to pursue a career in law. He is first generation, U.S. born in Michigan; his parents work as a cook and waitress. He has an older brother who was born in China, and a younger sister who was also born in the U.S. Daniel grew up in Detroit, and his family owned a restaurant and lived in a predominantly Black community. He is very close to his family with many extended family members in Michigan. Unlike many of the stereotypical tensions between African American and Asian American communities, Daniel grew up with very close African American friends, his "brothers," and said he was very popular in high school. He also got into a fair amount of trouble, mostly fighting, as a way to "prove himself." His brother also attended Michigan University, and when Daniel came to visit him, he decided he also wanted to attend. He had a challenging first year, but with the help of friends a new found Christian faith, he was to graduate the semester after the interview occurred. Daniel had a strong Chinese American and Asian American identity,

noting similarities amongst different cultures. Most of his friends are Asian American, African American, and Latino, and believes in coalitions across communities of color. As a first year student, he joined every Asian or Asian American organization on campus because he was excited to be part of a larger Asian American community. He became more “politicized” in his third year because of an anti-affirmative action on the state ballot, as well as a bias incident on campus (same as the incident Angela covered for the newspaper).

Michigan University: Filipina/o American students.

Dedric, a fourth year senior from Detroit, Michigan was majoring in English with a minor in Asian American Studies. His father is an engineer and also has an MBA, and his mother has a master’s degree in nursing. Dedric hadn’t yet decided a career path, though his perspectives had changed greatly in his last year of college. He had only recently declared an Asian American Studies minor after taking a service learning class and working with a Filipino American youth organization in a Detroit suburb where he grew up. Until working with this work, Dedric said he hadn’t thought much about his heritage or identity, but that working with the Filipino American youth helped him understand the importance of addressing stereotypes and connecting with older generations. Dedric described himself as “Whitewashed” growing up, noting that his parents didn’t talk much about Filipino traditions. They did eat Filipino foods, but did not celebrate traditional holidays. He identified as first generation, U.S. born – as American first and Filipino American second, when asked about his racial identity. He also identified more generally as Asian American and was aware of stereotypes of Asian Americans, as well as the invisibility of Asian Americans as a community of color,

especially Filipino Americans, despite being the second largest Asian American ethnic group in the U.S.

Ruby was a junior and majoring in biopsychology. Her father has a Master's degree in computer science and works as a project manager for an information system company. Her mother has a Bachelor's degree and is a nurse. Ruby hasn't chosen a career for herself yet. Ruby identified as second generation, U.S. born and spent part of her childhood in Chicago, where her maternal grandfather founded a large Filipino American church. Her parents emigrated to the U.S. in 1985, and her father attended graduate school in Michigan while she, her younger brother, and mother stayed in Chicago. The family reunited in Michigan in 1990; however, their parents' difficult marriage and her father's subsequent affairs and emotionally abusive behavior strained relationships between her dad and other members of the family. Ruby felt that for many years, her father sought to isolate them from her mother's extended family because they were a tight group. He brought Ruby and her brother to the Philippines several times to visit his family. She said she felt very "foreign and American" there and was never able to bond with her paternal extended family. Her father left them a few years ago, and her mother moved to California. As result of these challenges, she and her brother are very close. In high school, Ruby studied Tagalog in order to connect more with her heritage as she did not "feel very Filipino." When she arrived at Michigan University, she joined the Filipino American Student Organization (FASO) but did not connect with them immediately. As a second generation Filipina American, Ruby felt it was important to preserve her culture while also allowing for influence from the American social context. For Ruby, being Filipina American was very much tied to her grandfather's church and

so she had a difficult time relating to a secular conceptualization of Filipino American community. By the time of the interview, however, Ruby had mostly Filipino American friends and had found a strong community of support for herself.

Jerry, a senior and German major, was also pre-med and planned to be a doctor. His father worked at the General Motors plant and had some high school education. His mother was an electrical engineer with a Bachelor's degree. Jerry grew up in a suburb of Detroit with an older brother and older sister, and is also close to his aunt. As a youth, he was active in the community Filipino organization and was president of their youth organization while in high school. As a result of this involvement, Jerry grew up with a strong identity as Filipino American. He was involved with the FASO in college, having had leadership positions with the organization, and also talked about common, unspoken understandings amongst Filipino Americans. Jerry is studying Tagalog, and was also planning a medical mission to the Philippines, where he will provide basic medical services for two months. This would be his first trip to the Philippines, and Jerry talked about how important it was to him to "keep [his] Filipino identity in this life."

Nicole was a third year student majoring in Political Science with a minor in Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies. She hoped to have a career in law focusing specifically on Asian American justice rights issues. Nicole's father is a radiologist and her mom does not work outside the home. Nicole identified as second generation and was born in Detroit, Michigan. Nicole's father is well established in the community of Filipino doctors who met regularly. Although her family did not talk about being Filipino or Filipino culture, she said it was "absorbed" through her grandparents, Filipino soap operas, movies, and food. In her elementary and high schools, however, there were very

few Filipino students. She did participate in different cultural activities such as learning traditional dances. As a teenager, Nicole said that she wanted to be more “American,” to have fewer restrictions and a life more like her peers. Her family did not talk about racism, although her mother told her she would have to work harder to get ahead. She was expected to be a doctor, but her parents have accepted her choice of a career in law. She chose Michigan University for practical reasons, but appreciated its commitment to having a diverse student body. She had friends at another state university who told her about the Filipino American student group on campus, so she looked for one at Michigan University when as a first year student. She has been involved with both FASO and the Asian American Student Organization (AASO). She identified strongly as Filipina American, racially, ethnically, and culturally. For her, being Filipina American is having a balance between one’s individual identity and still respecting the values of her parents. Her classes in Asian American Studies have helped her develop political consciousness and a voice around issues facing Asian Americans.

Marc was a senior from Saginaw, Michigan, majoring in Political Science and Biology. His parents are both retired, and his father worked as a respiratory therapist and his mother as a registered nurse. In the Philippines, his father was a political scientist and philosophy professor, but they had to leave during the Marcos regime. Because his father was almost deported once, Marc said his family felt pressured to “assimilate” and fit into the small, predominantly White town in which they lived. He was one of very few Filipino Americans and in high school, he became aware of being gay and had a difficult experience coming out to his friends. He remembered being harassed for being gay and for being Asian, but not necessarily for both simultaneously. He said that he internalized

the harassment and felt powerless to respond, channeling his energy into piano and local theater. Marc identified as second generation Asian (racially) and Filipina American (ethnically). He described his culture as “Midwestern American with a twinge of Filipino influence.” Marc had been active in both FASO and the LGBTQ student group. He has felt more welcomed by FASO where he said his sexual orientation was never an issue while he encountered racism from the LGBTQ peers. He was also involved with the pan-Asian AASO and held leadership positions in both FASO and AASO. Because of his family’s desire to “fit in” when he was younger, he described himself as being “Whitewashed” when he first came to college, but has found many opportunities to explore his heritage – through Asian American Studies classes and student organizations. He said that he’s felt accepted as a “short Asian queer male,” but isn’t always allowed to have both identities.

Chapter Five

Identities and Identific(Asians)

The participants revealed maturity and sophistication in talking about their identities. Students illuminated the ways they developed (and were developing) their sense of self. In some sense, identities were being constructed in the interview itself as some participants noted that opportunities to directly and consciously talk about their racial identities and to draw connections between their heritage personal experiences, relationships, and college activities were rare, though important. Many students chose classes or co-curricular activities in order to explore their identities, learn more about their histories, or meet other Asian Americans. Many had developed a political significance to being Asian American with an understanding of racism and inequities that stemmed from their intersecting identities with gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status.

In particular, I was interested in the ways that students' identities were dynamic and in flux. Multiple meanings and conceptualizations emerged, and for most students, Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American were whole and holistic ways of being that were both individual/personal and collective/social. Their identities were contextual and relational; they were also imposed on their bodies, taken up by choice, and claimed with pride. I would describe these as two paradoxical dialogues: one between the individual and the collective, and one between having an imposed identity

and then claiming agency over that identity. I found these to be constant, simultaneous, and parallel processes located at the core of racial identity construction.

I expected, yet was surprised by the myriad meanings of “Asian American” which emerged, particularly with the ways that students had consciously, and sometimes strategically, thought about who they were as Asian Americans as well as how they were perceived by others. I discovered distinct, though interrelated, understandings of being Asian American: as a political coalition; as a shared experience of racialization and racism; as an unspoken sense of community and understanding; and as simultaneous racial and ethnic identities. In this chapter, I discuss each of these manifestations of Asian American identity and touch upon various collegiate academic and co-curricular experiences (discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). Each section is organized around these four themes, which highlights the dialectic relationship between how students recognized their identities as inherited and imposed, yet also chosen and owned. I also offer some perspectives on the regional, ethnic, and cultural differences that emerged. I did not intend to create a comparative study of geography, institution, or ethnic/cultural groups; however, it is interesting to note the collective similarities in experiences and perspectives expressed by students of similar ethnic/cultural group or at the same institution.

Strength in Numbers

Participants talked about understanding, experiencing, and creating “Asian America” as a political coalition, one which grew out of necessity. For many of them, “Asian America” had begun as an imposed category defined by U.S. immigration policies and social norms that grouped together all people of Asian descent. While this

amalgamation of diverse communities had been somewhat arbitrarily determined, it was also taken up as a rallying point for political voice and action. Having experienced similar forms of harassment and discrimination, and because of stereotypes that all Asian people look like, many students found coming together as a site of resistance to dominant norms. Some students also talked the importance of creating as broad a community as possible, and including Pacific Islanders as well. As students described it, the AAPI political coalition included people of multiple ethnicities, cultures, generations, histories, and geographies.

Both Chinese American and Filipina/o American participants understood this as a uniquely American construction and struggled to take ownership of an imposed identity often used to discriminate against peoples of Asian descent. Participants noted that in other contexts, the many nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures in Asia are not grouped together in the same way. What drew together these distinct communities into a coalition was the general lack of awareness of the many nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures that comprise Asian America, and the resulting stereotypes, assumptions, and racism. Feeling stronger together and developing newly shared experiences of struggle and activism, what may have began as a coalition slowly evolved into an identity. Finding agency to claim that Asian American identity, rather than simply having one placed onto them, was important. Mary, a senior, anthropology major with a minor in AAPI Studies at CU, noted this.

I would describe it as a category...imposed on a group of people by an entity in power...the United State government. I see it as an imposed identity, but then I'm beginning to see it as something that's empowering. (Mary)

Similarly, Marc, a senior Filipino American student at MU, felt that although the grouping of all Asian ethnicities together was artificial, Asian Americans had forged a unique community which grew out of a political coalition.

Even though there are differences between each of the ethnicities, it's just the stronger, the more united we can be, then we can have a greater force within society. [...] [W]e've had to create sort of this hodge podge because society here in America has kind of forced us to. [I]t takes all of us, Chinese American, Korean American, Japanese American, Filipino Americans... all in our collective, to own any sort of issue that would affect our communities even in some way. [I]f we're to do that only by ourselves, we wouldn't be able to really get so much of a voice out there. (Marc)

Rosa, a senior from Stockton, CA, had been very active in the Filipino/Filipino American community in her hometown as well as in college. She felt that it was the very forming of a coalition, this coming together, which helped to construct an Asian American identity.

Like in terms of solidarity, coming together and supporting one another's endeavors to advocate on behalf of, whether you're Filipino, Vietnamese – I think that in itself creates this whole Asian American culture of support and solidarity, in trying to help one another translate...to be your ethnicity through that American lens. (Rosa)

Rosa also felt that although common experiences did bring AAPI's together and afforded them a stronger voice, it was important to recognize the distinct ethnicities and cultures within Asian America. She also recognized AAPI as a construct that has been both imposed and claimed, and she was aware that not everyone who might be included in this broad umbrella would choose to be.

In terms of that political power, political voice, inclusion, I mean many [AAPI's] find it important to stand together. But at the same time, making sure that we still recognize the unique experiences, the unique histories and people's unique stories and experiences. (Rosa)

A junior at MU, Sam also recognized the challenge of bringing together such a diverse group while honoring the multiple histories and not erasing differences for the sake of unity.

The identity itself though can be very diverse and so my experiences as an [Asian American] can be very different from someone born right from Hawaii but still is an [AAPI]. You know what I mean. So I think there's kind of this empowerment piece, but there's also this, how do we empower such diversity? (Sam)

Sam also talked the most about the importance of having an AAPI coalition in order to have a stronger political voice, and to protect the smaller communities under this broad umbrella, particularly Pacific Islanders.

I think it's really important to include Pacific Islander because we as Asian, Asian Americas, have, you know, considerable amount of power in our society but Pacific Islanders alone, you know what I mean? Like they're already a very invisible community. A very powerless community, and so I think it's important that they're a part of a community that we can move forward. So that we can both benefit from [...] that shared struggle. (Sam)

Rosa nuanced the political importance but challenges in including Pacific Islanders in such a broad community. While coming under an AAPI umbrella might offer some safety and power for Pacific Islanders, and could strengthen the AAPI community overall, it also added another layer of paradox – of creating an imposed identity rather than one constructed out of choice for Pacific Islanders. It could silence specific experiences of oppression and colonization that Pacific Islanders faced not only with European countries and the U.S., but with other Asian countries as well.

We definitely take pride in who we are, and we have to push, with [Asian American Pacific Islander Month] and everything, we have to push for that voice in society and how to create a dialogue for people to discuss Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. It's really hard for me to add Pacific Islanders at the end too when I say that cause I know that Pacific Islanders don't necessarily want to be clumped into Asian America. And I kind of agree with that too, but just in general, so that we're powerful when we're together. (Rosa)

There seemed to be a strong association between an interest in social action with conceptualizing Asian America as a political coalition. Sherry's experiences in campus organizing – working in the AAPI Studies office and holding leadership positions in AASO – gave her a very politicized understanding of an AAPI coalition.

I think [with the] Asian American community, you come together in a time when something needs to be done. [Y]ou're uniting under a cause, but you're uniting to fight for something. [...] And so, it's identifying within a larger community, not only Chinese Americans. And if you're an activist and you're working to eliminate race or working on racial problems, class and ethnicity and race and all these things overlap each other and so you can't be for one without being for another, you know? [B]eing in [AASO] is like being in a student of color coalition type thing. So I think by doing that it creates and an even bigger picture. (Sherry)

Similarly, Mary's involvement in FASO and other college activities helped her develop a stronger connection to a pan-Asian American movement. Though she understood the strength of a coalition, she also felt that Filipino Americans' experiences were marginalized or overlooked. Mary wanted to honor her own heritage and had been focused on supporting Filipino American communities. It was only recently that she began to connect being Filipina American with broader struggles.

This past year, there was a big focus on, working in coalition with not only, like, Asian American specific groups but, like, students of color, in general. And I think this is, maybe, a critical part in my development; this is when I, like, finally started connecting myself to a larger struggle beyond Filipino American. I started understanding my connection to other communities of color and why coalition building is so critical, when we're trying to fight these big fights. (Mary)

Not all students saw Asian America as a broad community for political action. For example, Ruby understood it as more of a social space. For her, Asian American was an “umbrella,” a rubric under which people of different cultures (and churches) could gather, not necessarily as a coalition.

I think I would sort of see it as more of an umbrella thing. And I guess I would use the, I was so religiously brought up. But like as a metaphor around like every month, the Southeast Asian church would get together. So it wasn't a formal church. It was just a once a month thing. And so during that time the Asian church, the Chinese church, the Korean church would all come together. And so yeah in my mind being Asian American has like this, Asian American is like this umbrella sort of, it's a larger group that everybody is a part of, it allows everyone to come together. (Ruby)

Like Ruby, Molly talked about Asian America as inclusive of multiple ethnicities and countries, but not as a political coalition. A senior, Chinese American student at MU, Tamara chose to devote her time and energy in the Community Outreach Office (COO), focusing on global health and economic disparities. Tamara talked at length about why she had chosen to commit most of her co-curricular time there rather than ethnic/cultural organizations. For her, social justice and community organizing were central to her identity, and she had taken time to reflect personally about being Taiwanese American. In the COO, they did have workshops and conversations that focused directly on issues of race, racism, and identity. However, she did not experience Asian America as a politically active space that met her needs or resonated with her priorities around social action.

I guess I don't think there is, I don't think there's like a political movement. I don't really consider like that Asian American community as being very politically active in general. I guess it would be nice if they were, but I just, I don't think they are. So I wouldn't consider them a coalition. (Tamara)

At CU, Tanya, Eddie, and Carmen identified as Chinese American, and they also did not see Asian America as a coalition. They were involved in OCA and CSA, which were important cultural spaces but did not have a politicized orientation to their events and meetings. Having such a strong Chinese American identity, combined with the dominance of Chinese Americans in California as well as their less politicized

consciousness, may have led them to center their attention more on their own identities rather than reaching out to other groups.

Jerry identified strongly as Filipino American, and was active with FASO as a way to keep his “Filipino identity in my life.” For Jerry, Asian American was a specific construct of the university setting and not one he experiences outside of MU.

Yeah I guess like Asian American, it’s kind of hard to say because here at the University they do have like an Asian American organization but outside of the university, I mean I don’t see how my Filipino group interacts with other Asian Americans. (Jerry)

I was impressed by the sophistication and political awareness that the Filipina/o American students at California University expressed in talking about their identities, as well as their understandings of race and racism. All of the participants were involved with the Filipino American Students Association (FASO) and had also taken courses in AAPI Studies or Filipino Studies. Two were born in the Philippines, and all grew up in California in communities with a large Asian American (and Filipino American) population. They also went to CU with the intention of getting involved with FASO, though many were surprised by course offerings in Tagalog, AAPI Studies, and Southeast Asian Studies. They had lived in and studied Asian American communities, and had become aware of the diverse cultures and experiences generally included in Asian America. More than other students in the study, the Filipina/o American students at CU were activist-oriented and recognized the inequalities that Filipinos and Filipino Americans faced, particularly within Asian America. This political consciousness, and their struggle against racism and for social justice, empowered them to see and to form coalitions with other Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

The Filipina/o American students at MU were more reserved, and overall, less politicized than their peers at CU. With only one exception, their parents worked in engineering or medicine, and many were involved with the Filipino Community Center in a town near the university. Although they had strong Filipino roots, many had not consciously reflected upon their identities. Two were minoring in AAPI Studies, and all had grown up in Michigan. Four of the students had held leadership positions in the FASO, and only two were also involved in AASO. It was interesting that despite a having Filipino immigrant community in the state, Filipino American students did not seem to have a large presence on campus. Although all of the participants had experiences in Filipino and Filipino American communities, they seemed less confident in their identities. This may be related to the recent nature of Filipino immigration to the state, as well as the intersections with class identities in that the students as they all had grown up in the suburbs with at least one college educated parent. Further, although there was a strong Filipino organization, including a summer camp for children, it is a small, young, and transient community with many graduate students who do not stay in the local area.

The Chinese American students at CU were a quiet group. While they were active with the different Chinese student organizations and AASO, overall they were not activist oriented which was surprising to me given the long history of Chinese Americans in the state. Four were born in the U.S., and Carmen immigrated to California when she was 18. Only Sherry expressed an understanding of Asian American as a political coalition. Other students did talk about an Asian American identity that included people of various

ethnicities and cultures, but they did not necessarily see this as a coalition of groups coming together for political power.

At MU, the Chinese American participants were interesting in that there seemed to be little that connected them together as a group. While all of them had done some work around race and racism, many had not given direct consideration to their own racial identities. It is not surprising, given that the Chinese American students were less involved with cultural or ethnic organizations, that they did not feel a strong sense of coalition with other AAPI groups.

Misery Loves Company: Shared Experiences of Racialization and Racism

While students came together to form coalitions under a broad umbrella, they recognized the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, experiences, and perspectives, and the importance of recognizing that despite being grouped together -- Asian American was not a monolithic identity. However, because their distinct identities and histories were not generally recognized in dominant, mainstream American narratives, they experienced the same stereotypes and discrimination. They experienced similar forms of direct and indirect racism – being marginalized for looking different than their White peers, eating foods considered to be strange, or having parents whose first language wasn't English. Sometimes, their right to present seemed to be questioned, both at the institution and in the country. Often, it was the neglect they felt that had the deepest impact, in terms of not learning AAPI history or of being rendered invisible at their respective schools. While each student had different stories to share, what connected them was that they had such stories to share. What united them was less how they saw themselves and more how others chose to define them. For example, Beth commented:

I kind of realized that no matter what it's pretty explicit because of the way I look. You know it's sort of, [it doesn't matter] whether or not I want to own that identity [Asian American], [it's] the identity perceived by other people when they look at me. (Beth)

Leslie also felt the forceful nature of having an identity imposed upon her. She had a strong Filipina American identity, and more specifically as Ilokano, where her family is from, as well as Pinay American in recognition of the dominance of Tagalog in the Philippines and "Filipino" as an imposed colonial identity itself. It was clear that Leslie a strong sense of her identities and how they impacted her sense of self, as well as the Filipino American and Asian American communities. Although she identified strongly as Filipina/Pinay American, and felt the experiences of Filipinos and Filipino American were distinct from other Asian American ethnic groups because of the colonization of the Philippines by Spain and the U.S., as well as ethnic and class hierarchies, Leslie also experienced being raced as Asian American and seemed unsure how to resist it, if she could.

I think it's kind of forced on us. Like, society wants us to be acclimated to this one identity, I mean, sometimes if that was the only...was to bring us together, or you know, sometimes you just have to, you have to be part of it because it was expected of us to be a part of already. (Leslie)

Nicole shared a similar perspective. "I think that the similarities we share are the result of other people lumping us together."

Many students spoke of the paradox between having a monolithic and singular identity imposed on their beings and claiming agency to construct a shared identity with other Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The irony, here, is that this shared identity would not occur without the experience of being raced as a monolithic group in the U.S. Integral to feeling confident in their identities was the power to define and shape what being Asian American meant to them. Rather than it being a way to categorize

individuals by geographic origin/hemisphere or physical appearance, students took up their Asian American (or AAPI) identities as means to honor the related histories of exploitative immigration policies, racism, and discrimination that they, their families, and previous generations of Asian Americans had experienced and survived. It was a way to resist the ways in which dominant, White norms had artificially created racial categories to exclude, oppress, and marginalize communities of color. This ambivalent negotiation around owning and redefining an identity that had once been imposed through racism was challenging for many students.

Although Rosa had a strong identity as Filipina American, she had also experienced being seen as simply “Asian American,” as a monolithic identity without recognizing the distinct histories, traditions, and experiences of the many ethnicities and cultures that could be included under this umbrella term. Rosa understood that although she might unite with other AAPI communities to form a coalition against racism, non-AAPI individuals might see them merely as one group rather than coalition of many groups. For Rosa, it was important to come together in order to show the diversity within this broad community.

I think [it’s about] banding together against, combating this broader notion that Asian America, [that] we’re all the same. But [what] we all have a common, the common knowledge is that we’re different, [that] we’re all unique in different ways. (Rosa)

Marc thought that although Asian Americans first came together because they were grouped together, it was important to “create” an Asian American identity that they could own. He also felt that rather than letting ethnic and cultural differences divide Asian Americans, those differences should be embraced.

[I]t’s just like we’ve had to create and Asian American identity. [...] I feel like what needs to be done is to [...] embrace the differences between our cultures

[...] but at the same time realize we still, because of, because of the White man, we've been put together in this group, and we have to stick this together. (Marc)

Sam had similar experiences with being grouped with other Asian Americans.

While he sought ways to express his individual identities, Sam also felt it was the struggle that brought AAPI's together.

Because when I'm walking down the street, people don't care whether or not I'm Chinese, Cantonese, Mandarin speaking, Japanese, Korean. They're gonna look at me and think I'm Asian. [AAPI's] have a shared history of discrimination and you know like lots of folks, a lot of White people [are] going to look at you and think you're Asian. [...] That alone is enough for us to be in common because they all, they, as in like the White majority or sometimes other people of color groups, treat Asian Americans a certain way and that experience of being treated a certain way is enough for us to be...that alone is grounds for us having commonality. [...] So I think there is kind of a value maybe in like how do we struggle together and how do we overcome struggle. (Sam)

Sherry talked about the connection she felt with other communities of color around struggle. While Sherry was the most engaged with the AAPI Studies department and AASO, and was the most socially conscious of the Chinese American students I talked to at CU, her awareness of issues seemed very distant from her personal experiences. She was able to talk about broader social movements and questions of race and racism, but she did not seem to connect them with her own identities. She talked about growing up in a strong Asian/Asian American community, and so her Chinese American identity was never threatened or questioned. Sherry did frame the struggles of Chinese Americans (and Asian Americans) within the experiences of other communities of color.

Well, I think I also represent myself in, like, a people of color community and so then being Chinese American is being able to relate to a lot of the other experiences that other people of color have faced and working together for a cause. [I]t's just what I've learned, and it pretty much defined a lot of my experiences. (Sherry)

Angela, a junior at MU who was born in Taiwan also considered struggle as a common experience amongst Asian Americans. “Well, the way we grew up, the way we felt like we had to assimilate. The way we felt like, the struggles that we had to go through to construct our own identity.” Angela had not really thought about her racial identity until, while writing for the school newspaper, a hate incident occurred. She talked about how much this affected her personally, and that she had several arguments with her peers on the newspaper staff who did not see it as an act of racism. It was this experience that caused her to join the Asian American student group and become more involved with Asian American social issues.

For Daniel, struggle was also a marker of being Asian American. Daniel’s family had a Chinese restaurant in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and he felt that racism connected all communities of color.

Asian American culture struggles in the USA. I mean, every Asian, you know, ethnicity in the USA, in the past they, they screwed it if someone coming in because, if they, like you came in and took all of our jobs. And then some Chinese came in, Japanese came in, it just goes on. So struggles. [...] I mean, that’s a culture. (Daniel)

Resisting stereotypes was another common experience for many students. Ruby’s views of Asian America and her Asian American identity stemmed from the common stereotypes.

When I say Asian American, I feel like I am connecting myself with a much broader pool of people that I have some sort of affiliation with, and so I guess it’s the mix of similar background and [...] I could share the same stereotypes with these people. And when I’m Asian American, I’m thinking of, cause growing up I had White friends, and the only Asian friends I had were of other, they were Chinese, Malaysian, and Thai. And so when I think, I’m Asian American, like I’m part of that group of people. (Ruby)

Rosa felt it was important to explore the ways they impacted Asian Americans, which she considered a shared experience amongst all Asian Americans.

Maybe the most common experience, between us all is that, I guess it shows that...we're constantly stereotyped in that sense. And I kind of, well for me anyways, I hate when, well not really hate, but kind of annoys me when Asian Americans are always like, oh stereotypes, you know, down with stereotypes and that kind of thing, you know, you should move forward. But it is very important to talk about cause it affects people mentally, physically. (Rosa)

Tamara chose not to actively participate or associate with the AAPI student community. Part of this distancing came from Tamara's experiences being grouped together with other Asian Americans as she was growing up.

I think like a lot of times people just group Asians as Asians, and they all do the same things, and they're all like really smart. Or like they're all really great at tennis. So I felt like I didn't want to be part of that little group. So I didn't, I guess I liked feeling unique, and it was like a way for me to feel unique by doing stuff that isn't typically Asian. (Tamara)

For Dedric, a senior Filipino American student at MU, taking a Filipino American Studies class that had a community engagement component was the first time he had really explored his heritage, despite living in a strong Filipino community in Michigan. He volunteered at a Filipino Cultural Center near the university and continued to do so after the class ended. Dedric felt empowered in talking with Filipino American youth about not letting stereotypes limit their identities and experiences. Prior to this course, Dedric (like Tamara) did not have a strong Filipino American identity prior to this course because he had not wanted to be "lumped together" with other Asian American students because of the model minority stereotype. Through this class and his volunteering, he realized that there were multiple ways of being Filipino/Asian American, one of which was to work against racist stereotypes and empower youth in the community.

Probably I mean as a whole I would say [Asian Americans are] invisible. Just since Asian Americans have come here, it's been a recurring cycle of, you know, like small degrees of like progress, but then something new to just bring em down. I think as a whole, we are invisible to Americans, you know [we are only] 5% of the population. But still, stereotypes like kung fu and Chinese food, and all that kind of thing. And I think to a lot of Asian American culture, kind of reinforce the kind of stereotypes like you see in commercials with Asian people making fun of kung fu stuff. But that's who we are, so it's the stereotypes that make us. So it's what we have to live with. I mean just because everybody's like all Asians are the same, you know, so stereotypes of one group will fall into another and on into another. I think White Americans and Black Americans consider Asian Americans like a single group mostly. (Dedric)

Some students had a pragmatic approach to being racialized in a monolithic group. While they understood the problematic nature of being grouped together and stereotyped in this fashion, they conceptualized their identities as being strategic choices rather than simply imposed categories or definitions.

Henry was a senior, Filipino American student at CU. He became a member of FASO beginning in his third year, but talked about staying away from the organization in his first two years because he didn't understand the purpose of such a group. He became involved through FASO's Pilipino Cultural Night (PCN) more because he wanted to perform than to explore his identity. Henry described himself as "Whitewashed" prior to college and did not know that AAPI Studies existed as a field of study until he went to college. He expressed surprise as he "didn't know that people cared about me." Henry also saw his Asian American identity as a strategy, one that he could use to his advantage depending on how others read him. He did this because he felt that people saw Asian Americans as a U.S. born/second generation, upper middle class, model minority; and depending on the situation, would identify as Asian American and then only reveal that he was Filipino American if it might benefit him. For example, he applied as a disadvantaged minority on his applications for medical school. Although Henry clearly

was proud of his Filipino heritage, it seemed that he could take on or cast off his Asian American and Filipino American identities as needed

I used to think it was Filipino American separate from Asian Americans. But then now I realize a lot of when you go out into the world and stuff, I mean you're interviewing and meet people, you're gonna have to go with what they see. And so Asian America is going to be an umbrella. And you're gonna have to, well if you want to, you have to define yourself and have your own identity. So as much as it seems like you can be your own Filipino American and have this one side, pick it up whenever you want it, take it off. A lot of it is going to depend on what other people's perceptions are. (Henry)

Being an immigrant, Carmen was mostly concerned with fitting in with her peers, and at times she expressed an assimilationist lens; that is, that she made adjustments to her speech, dress, and appearance in order to find community and to be successful.

Carmen had first attended a community college, which she found socially difficult. CU was a better fit for her, and although she expressed an interest in returning to Shanghai, she talked about developing her Chinese American identity because her experiences in the U.S. had changed her. Her perspectives on race and racism were also still forming, and her ambitions in finance did not allow much time to explore her identity or learn about racism. Carmen's priority was fitting in and being accepted by her peers.

Molly had a similar approach to Carmen. Molly had been a rebellious teen, and much of her college life was dedicated to repairing her relationship with her parents; her father in particular. Molly was interested in Chinese history, customs, and traditions, but also saw her identities as "playing a role" in that she made strategic choices about how to identify depending on context.

Not all students felt connected to other Asian Americans through shared experiences of racism. Christopher, a senior Filipino American student at CU, understood how Asian Americans had been put together in a broad group and that Asian Americans

had some shared experiences, but he did not identify as nor felt part of an AAPI or Asian American identity. Like Leslie, Christopher had a very strong Filipino American identity. He did not feel connected to other Asian Americans, however.

I've learned that there [have] been solidarity movements. I feel that our struggles are similar, but I characterize Asian American more by its diversity than its unity. I think that our experience in discrimination in terms of being discriminated against has been very similar in the States. But then again, this is only an intellectual argument because it's not something that I personally feel or have known. (Christopher)

Tanya was particularly focused on her academics and career in medicine. She was involved with OCA and used it as a way to explore her culture. For Tanya, her Chinese American identity was made of two halves, although she said they were neither distinguishable nor equal halves. Rather, being Chinese American was informed by two distinct cultures, and that all Asian Americans experienced this blending of cultures. Her friends in high school and college were mostly Asian Americans. She was thoughtful, but admitted that she had not given much time to reflect on her own identity or to explore issues of race or racism more deeply. Being Chinese American was simply who she was.

While Eddie did recognize the ways that Asian Americans were raced together and the discrimination which resulted as a consequence, he did not approach it as a shared history of struggle. Eddie, a Chinese American junior, chose CU because it had a large Asian American student population similar to his home community. He talked at length about his fears of more racially diverse and multicultural settings. Eddie was able to talk about the tensions between different racial/ethnic groups, and his experiences with racism, but his perspectives were grounded in his belief that people of different racial/ethnic groups should not mix. I do not believe this fear came from hatred of other groups, but rather as a defensive posture. His perspectives seemed to be more informed

by his desire to protect and preserve his cultural identity rather than growing out of an awareness of systemic oppression. At the same time, Eddie did recognize the ways that Asian Americans were raced together.

[I]t's because of the White people, they don't know, because we all look the same to them and we, we Asians are, we Asians know [and can tell each other] apart. We can at least have you're not from my culture or you're from that culture. We can, we would identify each other easily, but, because the White people, they have a hard time. I have a lot of Korean friends they say they get mistaken as they're Chinese because White people are just extremely, they're just, not because they're ignorant; they're not as exposed to it. (Eddie)

As Chinese Americans have a long history in California, I had expected more multigenerational students to participate. I was surprised that all students were first or second generation. With one exception, all students were born and grew up in California, and one student was born in Shanghai, China. Only two students spoke directly about the racism or racialization they experienced, which could be related to the large Chinese American communities in the state and on campus. It important to recognize the ways that Chinese Americans experience privilege within AAPI communities, particularly in California where Chinese Americans have a long history and make up a majority of the AAPI population. While having such a strong community may help to ground students in their identities, living in this insular environment might not urge them to step out of that comfort zone. It can also shield them from harsher realities and the experiences of other AAPI communities.

Unspoken Bonds: Comfort and Community

Although it could also be a source of discomfort, being grouped and stereotyped as a monolithic identity also brought students together. Most of the students I spoke with *sought* opportunities to explore their identities and cultures more deeply in college. While

their racial and ethnic identities had been largely personal and family based growing up, they wanted to learn about AAPI history more broadly and to connect with other AAPI students. This was particularly true for the Filipina/o American students at both CU and MU, and for some of the Chinese American students. Often, students engaged with AAPI classes, organizations, and spaces because of an unspoken and intangible sense of comfort, community, and understanding they felt with other AAPI students, particularly if they shared an ethnic or cultural identity. Seeing students, faculty, and staff who shared physical characteristics, as well as assumptions about family dynamics, academic interests, and common histories united them without necessarily having to form close or explicit relationships. Students talked about having a sense of familiarity and comfort amongst Asian American students that arose out of a shared identity which they acknowledged as imposed, artificial, and yet very real. Many students sought out these spaces, while others found them unintentionally and perhaps subconsciously.

Henry felt a strong, unstated familiarity with his Filipino and Filipino American friends. “Yeah, I mean with like your Filipino friends, it’s really totally understood. As long as like they’re Asian American, I think I can fit in more and be a little more normal.” It was difficult for him to describe the source of this sense of common understanding and greater acceptance, though he thought that students had similar relationships with their parents and were familiar with Filipino foods and customs. However, Henry had been introduced to traditional Filipino dances and cultural practices only after arriving at CU.

Sherry also had a difficult time articulating what brought Asian American students together. She acknowledged that though they might have common experiences,

they were not necessarily the same. Despite such differences, she felt they were similar enough that they could relate to each other.

Yeah, the fact that we're Asian Americans. No, I feel like for a lot of them, or for a lot of us, we've gone through similar experiences. We've had to grow up with similar experiences even though they're not all the same, but it's, like, a common thing. (Sherry)

Like Henry and Sherry, Ruby found comfort in the indescribable sense of understanding and common experiences.

There's a comfort level. Definitely a comfort level. There are things I can say to them that, you know, enough to understand. I can make jokes. I can share frustrations that a lot of people, of my non-Filipino friends, wouldn't understand. I think now I'm happy being with just a few people who understand me well because you know that cultural upbringing was so vital. I think being around Filipino people makes me more comfortable. (Ruby)

Nicole had a similar feeling about an understanding amongst Filipino Americans which others might not share. "If you consider your Filipino American identity to be this very inside joke, then like an inside story, and only we would get it. So I don't think it's so much comfort as it is connection" (Nicole). Detric also thought commonalities around family, values, and hardships existed amongst Filipino Americans; and he felt this was true regardless of geographic location.

When we talk to [Filipino] kids, and we joke around about stuff that we usually did, it's like most families, there's commonality between Filipinos everywhere. So I think even though there aren't that many Filipinos in Michigan, we can relate to Filipinos in California, you know, wherever else, you know, just the struggles but also just the cultural things that all Filipinos probably go through or have. (Detric)

As a recent immigrant and transfer student to CU, Carmen joined various AAPI-centered student organizations, as well as a sorority which had a diverse membership. She was particularly concerned with finding a space to fit in, to have a sense of belonging. When she first moved to the U.S., most of her friends were international

students; but her perspectives soon distanced her from them. Despite only living in the U.S. for a few years, she had quickly taken on an Asian American identity, which she described as more progressive and political. Living in the U.S., she found more in common with her Asian American peers than with international students.

You know sometimes I just feel like now I can talk to Asian American pretty much about anything and I can have comfortable conversation. I would say most, most of my friends are Asian American, right now, so I would say, yeah, I'm part of the group. I think I'm more fitting in with Asian Americans. (Carmen)

Asian American communities and student organizations provided a network of support to explore identities and develop a strong sense of self. While there were many experiences and activities that informed this process (including academic courses, community organizations, and family relationships), being in a community with Asian American peers who might be involved in a parallel journey or have similar interests was paramount. For Marc, having an Asian American community was not just about a sense of comfort or connection. He found it an important space of support and to explore his identity, which he considered important to having a meaningful college experience. Having Asian American peers with whom he felt shared identity and experiences provided a supportive network as he navigated college.

You know, and the ability to meet Asian Americans here and to like really develop that part of my identity, that has been great just because it's just like the friends I made in that community, the friends I made outside of that community, it's just like it's been amazing to me like how much of a family people have turned into for me. Like for support and just like fun. (Marc)

Rosa joined FASO as a first year student because coming from Stockton, she wanted to find a Filipino American community at CU. While this sense of familiarity helped her transition to college, these spaces became integral to Rosa's development of a

strong, confident identity as Filipina American and to expand her own understandings of AAPI histories and experiences.

I think when I first came as a student, it was just trying to find that community. So that was an automatic response, but what kept me in it was something challenging and reformatting that definition of my identity, and also that push to be very active in the community. So first [it was] finding this sense of comfortability again here, but it definitely evolved into mixture of both identity formation and that whole thing and understanding one another, learn from one another, and also garnering those types of skills for my future and just help the community in general. (Rosa)

During her time at CU, and as Rosa explored her identity not only as Filipina American but as Asian American, she broadened her networks and found both community and coalition with other AAPI students.

So I immediately sought to find that [Filipino] family community that I had back when I get home and stuff. But now I've pushed myself to, I definitely like, I had a lot of Vietnamese friends back at home too. And so I found that here too. Like finding more Asian Americana friends. I would say my friends are definitely more Asian Americans than anything. And we all talk about, you know, or you know end up talking about injustices. (Rosa)

Similarly for Mary, having a close group of Filipino American friends gave her not only a sense of comfort, but also a sense of safety from the racism or prejudice she anticipated and a community within which to fight inequities and discrimination.

Definitely Filipino Americans, people of color. My closest friends are Filipino Americans. I work with, I shoot to work in places where I'm not the only person of color, just because I know that that might not be healthy for me. (Mary)
Angela also thought Asian Americans had common experiences that helped them

relate to each other, although she felt most connected to Asian Americans who were also politically active on campus. Their perspectives on race and social justice were more important than a shared identity.

Uh, I feel most comfortable with some [Asian Americans] because we share a lot of things in common. We talk about social construction and imperialism, all that good stuff all the time. And so I feel the most comfortable with them. There are

Asian Americans who aren't activists. I wouldn't say I feel totally comfortable with them probably because we do have different interests, and I mean that's why. I think I tend to be with people who have similar interests. (Angela)

Like Angela, Sam wanted friends with whom he could talk to about his identity, about racial politics, and about his activism around issues related to race and racism. Although Sam had a diverse group of friends, he had learned that he would have to adjust his behaviors and conversations depending on the groups of friends. For Sam, these changes did correspond with his friends' racial identities. He did not judge his White friends, necessarily, but just had a different sense of connection and depth in their friendships.

There are a lot of things that I would talk about with my Asian American friends, but I don't talk about with my White friends. Some of my White friends are getting to the point where they understand race and they understand all this like social constructions. And so those make for really good conversations. But there's still is like this kind of cultural barrier if you will. Like they don't care. It's not because they're bad friends, but it's because, you know, their identity has not shaped themselves in a way that they want to care. (Sam)

This sense of knowing was not as perfunctory for all students. Like Henry, Christopher had not grown up in a large Filipino American area. He talked about exploring his identity at CU. Interestingly, Christopher developed a very strong connection to the Philippines, even more so than to Filipino American communities and students. While Christopher looked for and wanted opportunities to connect with other Filipino American students, as well as to explore his heritage and culture, it was not always a source of comfort for him. This awkwardness did not deter him; rather, he worked harder to forge relationships and connections. Students may shy away from difficult or awkward social situations where they feel they don't fit in; however, it seemed that the very personal nature of finding a sense of community influenced Christopher to try harder rather than to run away.

My initial contact was going to a bunch of welcome events with fellow Filipinos. So I would go to those, and they were really, I mean they were really welcoming. I remember going to my very first general meeting for [FASO], and the whole idea of being around, being in a room with other Filipinos was so daunting. I didn't know how to act around them. You know what I mean. I didn't feel comfortable; like I feel like they interacted with each other in a certain way that I just couldn't pick up on. You know, and instead of alienating me, I think it just made me curious. You know, there was this side of myself that was so, that seemed so like evident like obviously, I'm Filipino, but it, I was so out of touch. So you know, it was more so out of curiosity and this hunger that just, this sort of side of myself that had been, I had been deprived of it this whole time that I was now trying to really sink my teeth into. (Christopher)

Marc's first exposure to a strong Asian American community was also at college through the FASO, and other Filipino American spaces.

My first exposure to the [AAPI] community was through [FASO] my freshman year. Then I went to this thing called on Filipino Americans coming together in November of 2003 where it was like a whole bunch of Filipino groups from campuses throughout the Midwest, and we would just go to workshops, and then we'd go and drink together later. And that was really awesome. You know, just being able to be around so many people and then building this camaraderie with other Filipinos. And granted, I was very apprehensive about going at first cause I'm like oh my god, there's so many Filipinos. What the hell is up with this? But then it was just so comfortable, and it was so much fun. It was like, you know, hanging out with a whole bunch of brothers, sisters, or you know, cousins and stuff. And it was just like, this is awesome. (Marc)

Having grown up in predominantly Black communities in Detroit, attending MU was the first opportunity Daniel had to live in and develop relationships with Asian Americans. He did so with great intention, and also found a space to express his political consciousness, particularly around affirmative action. Although he found a home with fellow Asian American activists, Daniel brought his previous life experiences to build coalitions with Black and Latino students to stage protests against a proposed state bill to end affirmative action in Michigan.

I mean, I was like, I saw so many Asian people. I mean even though freshman year I hung out with a majority people from Detroit, I wanted to, you know, really in a sense I guess I mean I started to have a comfort with all Asian people. You

know, like [build a] connection. Also like it's different. It's like you kind of get into the community here. (Daniel)

While Rosa, Christopher, Mary, Leslie and others looked for organizations and other identity-oriented spaces to build community and support networks, not all students were so intentional though many still found themselves surrounded by Asian Americans. Indeed, Dedric seemed surprised to find himself with four Asian American roommates.

Well just, I don't think my roommates and I ever planned this out, but I live with four Asian guys. Like one Filipino, two Chinese. We never really planned it out that way. Maybe, there's some kind of, you know, subliminal unconscious thing that draws us together. (Dedric)

Beth and Tamara were less connected with the AASO and Asian American students broadly, although they did have a close network of Asian American friends. Tamara talked extensively about her work with the COO and her commitment to social justice. Although they talked about race and racism in the COO, she did not make direct connections between her work in the community and her own identities. However, all of Tamara's roommates were AAPI students. They had been good friends during their four years at MU, and while they had not sought each other because they were Asian American, she admitted that she did feel more comfortable with them because they shared similar experiences and perspectives as Asian American women.

I do identify with like other Asian Americans so in that way I know that there is some kind of culture or some kind of connection. Yeah it's not necessarily something that you can describe. It's just, like I don't connect with all Asian Americans. Of course. But I do connect with Asian Americans of, you know, different backgrounds so while I feel like there is some kind of, there is something that brings people to me that are Asian Americans. (Tamara)

Similarly, Beth did not specifically seek an Asian American community. However, many of her closest friendships were with Asian American students. She felt she shared more

values with them, and thus was more relaxed because they had similar perspectives or habits.

I can't pinpoint how, but I feel like if I'm traveling or if I'm making plans, it just like will flow better with other Asian friends versus like [non-Asian] friends. Maybe it's like you can let down the guard a little bit more, and you don't have to worry about, you know, you don't have to explain everything. They know what you're talking about or bringing them home to the parents is easier. (Beth)

Eddie also surrounded himself with Asian American peers, although he had a different perspective than other participants. Eddie seemed to have the most challenges navigating a diverse environment and found safety amongst other Asian Americans, specifically Chinese Americans. While he did have a sense of comfort with other Asian Americans, he also struggled to develop relationships within this community because some of his views were perceived as rigid and prejudicial. He was particularly upset with what he saw as a prevalence for Asian American women to date non-AAPI men.

For students, it was not simply a matter of self-segregation but of community, comfort, and a collective sense of self. Having friends and peers with whom they shared experiences, perspectives, values, and orientations toward family was incredibly important and helped them to navigate college, particularly at predominantly White institutions. Interestingly, this shared sense of identity was often unspoken or implicit. While students did discuss their parental relationships, cultural traditions, and other experiences with each other, they also talked about assumptions they made about what would already be understood.

Interestingly, many students at both MU and CU talked about feeling marginalized at their respective institutions, despite CU having a large and diverse AAPI student population and MU's explicit commitments to diversity and affirmative action.

With only a few exceptions, students looked for and found support with AAPI peers, and in AAPI student organizations and AAPI Studies courses to navigate their college campuses. These spaces became critical for students to only explore their identities and histories, and to develop strategies and support networks to counter both the micro and institutional forms of racism they experienced.

Although CU had a large AAPI student body, Filipina/o American students still felt marginalized and isolated. Students who came from strong Filipino American communities and those who did not both sought out classes and student organizations that were entered around AAPI identities, as well as friendships with other AAPI and particularly Filipina/o American peers. Because many of the Filipina/o American students had an awareness of hierarchies within AAPI communities and in Asia, I believe they sought spaces where they felt greater agency and empowerment in their Filipina/o American identities. For example, Christopher and Leslie both chose minors in Southeast Asian Studies (rather than AAPI Studies) because they wanted to focus on the Philippines and Filipino (American) experiences specifically. Mary, Henry, and Rosa all had majors or minors in AAPI Studies, and all students were active with FASO. Being from California, most had heard of FASO from friends or family prior to attending CU and looked for them at the student organization fair. Indeed, many students chose CU because they wanted a strong AAPI and Filipino American student community to join. What was most interesting is that while students expressed a familiarity and comfort with other AAPI and Filipina/o American students, they also felt that their own experiences and perspectives were unique to their peers. This contradiction between a sense of common understanding and unique individuality did not seem to bother the students.

There was only a small Filipino American student community at MU, and although they did not seem to be activist oriented, they were interested in exploring cultural practices and traditions. Although the FASO at MU was not as large or organized as at CU, they did develop a strong sense of community. There was also a small though strong Filipino and Filipino American community in a town near MU, including a vibrant community organization with which many of the students' parents were involved. Also, many of their parents hosted Filipino graduate students in their homes and so students were familiar with MU even prior to their matriculation there. My impression was that while students had been introduced to Filipino culture through their parents, they went to college eager for the opportunity to explore their own identities. While the AAPI student population was small compared to CU, there were more Asian American students there than where most students had grown up. Having attended overwhelmingly White high schools, MU had a vibrant, diverse Asian American community where they could not only develop their own identities, but also be a part of a collective.

Both-And: Simultaneous Identities

As discussed, students understood Asian American (or AAPI) as a political coalition inclusive of many ethnicities and histories. Experiences with racism and struggle were part of their socio-political and even cultural realities; and being Asian American was to be part of a collective understanding and community space that offered comfort, support, and growth. These represent some of the meanings that students gave to their Asian American identities, and in doing so, they constructed new ways of understanding, knowing, and being Asian American. This was not merely a historical categorization of immigrants nor simple shorthand for a group of people from a global

region. Students also refused to be limited to or narrowly defined by heritage, customs, and specific histories. Rather, they demanded space to construct their unique identities as Asian Americans, distinct from – though simultaneous to – their identities as Chinese American and Filipina/o American. Claiming these multiple identities gave students the freedom to define and make meaning of their own identities and experiences. Without disregarding their cultural heritage and family histories, students were able to develop an independent and dynamic identity that honored their ancestries *and* recognized their current social contexts and subjective realities. These were not exclusive identities that decided who was or was not Asian American. Instead, they reflected students' individual perspectives and experiences while connecting them to each other and with a broader socio-political history. In doing so, they were in the constant process of constructing identities that were not Asian (Chinese/Filipino) *and* American, but rather holistically and uniquely Asian American.

In all of these narratives, students located themselves and their homes in the U.S. While many did explore their roots in China, Taiwan, and the Philippines, they recognized the ways that their experiences, identities, and perspectives were uniquely American. Even Carmen, who immigrated to the U.S. at 18, found her ideas and outlooks different than her childhood friends in Shanghai, and she expressed feeling greater comfort in the U.S. and with her American peers. Although she first felt pressure to adopt what she perceived to be “American” ways (e.g., dress, vocabulary, values, etc.), she found both space and power to be herself in constructing and claiming an Asian American identity.

I don't think I'm completely Chinese American, but I feel like I'm more close to that end. I'm, kind of, like, in the middle. [...] I'm kind of moving toward Asian

American. I'm not completely just because there is a little part that is missing.
(Carmen)

Carmen seemed unsurprised as she began to own a Chinese American identity as she found more distance and differences from her friends in Shanghai. While other students were looking to their roots in Asian to understand their identity, Carmen was finding new freedoms and choices in her immediate context. Interestingly, Carmen's Chinese American identity was grounded in her perspectives and desire for a sense of belonging. Her identity was in process, and unlike some of the other students, a very conscious process of integrating her changing views and present contexts while trying to leave behind the ideas that no longer seemed to fit with her ways of being. Carmen did not distinguish between being Chinese American and Asian American, using them interchangeably. She did acknowledge that finding common experiences with other Asian Americans was a new experience for her, one that had only begun at CU.

For Ruby, being Filipino American as a very personal experience, one that was difficult to describe. Ruby had a difficult family dynamic, and it was her mother's extended family and Filipino American church in Chicago that helped them through.

When I say Filipino American, it's grounded more in this very personal identity. So when I think Filipino American, you know, I'm thinking of my family, and I'm thinking of like all these experiences. Like it's tied very closely to what sort of kept my family together growing up. You know, cause if it wasn't for the Filipino community, I don't think my, I don't think things would have turned out as well as they did. So yeah Filipino American community is just like this personal cultural, it's like a glue to me. It's just very personal. I don't know if I could put words to it. (Ruby)

Ruby also identified as Asian American, and these identities were neither interchangeable nor separate. For Ruby, being Filipino American was part of her personal and family history, while her Asian American identity included her in a larger collective. Ruby

described how she understood being Asian American, and its meaning has changed for her, especially during college.

I think when I was younger and I didn't fully understand it was very easy for me to say that's Asian. That's American. That's Asian. That's American. But I think ever since I started college, I don't think about that very much. [...] The focus has shifted to what does it mean for me to be Asian American. And so instead of like separating things into these two categories like Asian and American, I'm sort of bringing together, what makes me Asian American. I feel like I'm getting a pretty good hold of, I'm very comfortable with who I am as an Asian American. (Ruby)

Although Ruby's Filipino heritage and community were very important to her, she talked about being Asian American when I asked about her racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

Like my ethnic background, where I come from culturally, and it's Asian American, the second generation. [...] I feel like I'm in a way like me creating some sort of image I had. Like not me creating but sort of like evolving from the image I had when I was younger. I sort of am the category when I think of Asian American, it's like, oh that's me. (Ruby)

Holding these identities simultaneously, and honoring her Filipino heritage, did not create any conflict for her as identity development scholars have theorized and found in the past. Ruby was able to create space for her Asian American identity and develop her own values and beliefs while remaining grounded in her Filipino (and Filipino American) roots.

Jerry and Marc also held Filipino American and Asian American identities simultaneously, although they understood Filipino American as a smaller group within Asian America. It was more than just a coalition, however. Asian American was a broader identity that is inclusive of many national, ethnic, and cultural groups. As Jerry said, "Yes [I do identify as Asian American]. I guess it's just like a bigger category."

And in the same way that Asian Americans came together for political power and had an identity imposed upon them, Marc found a new Asian American identity emerge that is uniquely American.

I feel that the Asian American identity has formed because it's almost like we've had to because, just being such a small minority within American culture as it is already. We're all kind of lumped together even though when you get, when you go to Asia and there's so much difference between them, like Thailand and the Philippines. (Marc)

While there is great diversity in ethnic and cultural groups, Marc described a singular Asian American identity forming in the U.S., independent from individual roots in Asia.

Although Nicole also understood the use of "Asian American" as a broad category, the diversity of experiences of Asian Americans made it difficult for her to recognize it as a common identity that she shared with others. She identified strongly as Filipina American, expressing it as her racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, although she did also use "Asian American" as an identity.

I guess it seems a bit abstract because while, we [Asian Americans] do share similar experiences, there's just, I guess it's kind of like the googleearth map, where at first you look at it, and it's just a solid shade of green, and then you zoom, and there's a lot of differences, and it's like that. (Nicole)

Sherry, Tanya, and Eddie noted that most of the time, they identified themselves as Chinese American when asked, but it also depended on who asked; although they each had different understandings of being Chinese American. Molly noted that it was often an unconscious choice or reflex in identifying as Asian American and/or Chinese American. For her, group dynamics or the specificity of the question impacted her answer.

Yeah, yeah, it just rolls off the tongue easier so I just say Asian American. But it's not like I consciously like think, like I don't want them to know I'm Chinese or anything. If I'm writing something down like oh ethnicity, I write Chinese American. If we're in a group, and I'll say like if I'm conscious I'll just say like oh, I'm Asian American. Like I won't say like I'm Chinese American because it's

kind of exclusive. But I don't consciously think about it. It just comes out.
(Molly)

Like Jerry and Marc, who understood their Filipino American identities to be more specific and Asian American to be broader, Sherry identified as Asian American and Chinese American, understanding one as her racial identity and the latter as her ethnic identity. Although she claimed both identities, she did not use them interchangeably. Sherry identified as Chinese American or Asian American depending on context and what information she felt was most relevant.

Racially Asian American, ethnically Chinese. [...] I think it's always been Chinese American, but however if I'm, because if I'm in, like, a position where there, like, a bunch, there are only Asian American groups, then I'd say I'm Asian American. And my, but to, to most people, to most people I'm more specific, I'm, like, I'm Chinese American. (Sherry)

In contrast, both Tanya and Eddie identified as Chinese American but emphasized their Chinese heritage. They were both born in California and grew up in strong Asian American communities. For them, being Chinese American named the context in which they lived, but being Chinese was at the core of their identity. For Tanya, being Chinese was a separate "world" from being American, and she felt strongly about learning about her heritage and participating in cultural practices.

Generally I do just say I'm Chinese, but I guess, if you want it more accurate then I'd say Chinese American. I think it just gives me more opportunities per say, because I can, I, kind of [have] two worlds that I have the keys to, you know? Um, yeah, I just feel as close as, not close, um, that I have that mindset, too, I guess, like, I've been raised to see both cultures and worlds, cause some people if you learn it one way you still don't quite understand certain things of it. [...] I don't know about Chinese American, but I know being Chinese is really important to me. Keeping that alive, because it is very easy to just become Americanized in lots of ways. I mean, retaining it and keeping some of the traditions and cultures alive is important to me. I want to say that I actively try to maintain it. (Tanya)

Eddie's Chinese identity was also very important to him, so much so that he was nervous at the prospect of having to move away from his strong Chinese community as he hoped to attend law school on the East Coast. Eddie also expressed strong opinions about interracial dating and was frustrated with what he perceived to be Asian American women's preference for dating White men. He talked about biracial children as diluting their cultural identities and was critical of Asian Americans who did not identify strongly with their cultural roots. Eddie stated simply, "[Racially, I'm] Chinese. [Ethnically,] Uh, it's Chinese, yeah." (Eddie)

Some participants held both Asian American and Chinese American identities, understanding the latter as a more specific descriptor of the former. However, they went deeper in describing their heritage, finding even "Chinese American" too broad for their respective family histories. Tamara identified as Asian American, Chinese American, and more specifically Taiwanese American. She understood that being Chinese is part of her ethnic heritage, but because her parents are from Taiwan, and given the history of Taiwan's relationship with China, it was important to Tamara to identify specifically as Taiwanese American. Tamara was also explicit about being Taiwanese American as a holistic identity; that is, "Taiwanese" reflected her family history and "American" described her own experiences. She did not talk about these as two separate worlds coming together, as acculturation theories have suggested, but rather as a way to understand and express herself and perspectives.

I guess like I identify with both communities [Asian American and Taiwanese American] so it's not like I'm not, yeah it's not like an either or. Like I do define myself as Asian American, but I'm usually a little more, specifically I consider myself Taiwanese American. I think it comes a lot from my parents 'cause they're really strong in being Taiwanese. And then but I can't consider myself just Taiwanese because I was born and raised in the US and I feel like the way I guess

I was brought up, like the schooling and stuff like that, it's very different here in the US so it's like I have to consider myself as American also. And I don't really consider myself as only Taiwanese or only American but like Taiwanese American. (Tamara)

Like Tamara, it was important to Sam to honor his family's roots. Sam identified strongly not only as Chinese American, but Cantonese American as his family is from the southern province of Guang Zhou (or Guang Dong). Sam wanted to recognize that his Chinese ethnic identity was not part of the dominant northern, Mandarin culture in China. This perspective is similar to Leslie's, who chose to identify as specifically as Ilokano and not just as Filipina (or Pinay) American.

Even to say I'm Chinese American isn't being specific enough oftentimes cause I don't speak Mandarin, well I kind of speak Mandarin cause I'm learning Mandarin. But like I don't eat the foods they eat up in the north, you know. And like I don't watch, you know it's a very different culture, but at the same time I'm not even completely Cantonese. You know what I mean? Like again this idea of born and raised in the States. I can't be completely Cantonese. So when asked about culture, if the most salient identity is this identity of being Chinese, Cantonese American, then I would say that's probably most, a lot of my culture comes from. But it definitely isn't excluded just to that. (Sam)

Sam also identified strongly as Asian/Pacific Islander American “with a slash between the A and the P, that's really important” because he felt part of the pan-AAPI coalition and also to recognize the diversity within Asian America. He also held a Chinese American identity. Like Tanya and Eddie at CU, he looked to his family's roots in China (language, cultural practices, etc.) to understand his heritage while understanding that his identity was greatly informed by being born and living in the U.S. This was not a conflict for him, but a blending of cultures. He created a space for himself between “two worlds” as he found he did not see his experiences reflected in mainstream American or Chinese cultures.

[Ethnically, I identify as] Chinese American. It means I'm caught between two worlds. It means that I'm not really Chinese and [...] I'm an American, but I'm different from mainstream white America because I'm Chinese, and that's where my roots or whatever you want to call them lie. But it doesn't mean, but on the flipside, I'm not completely Chinese right cause I've been born and raised in the United States. My Cantonese is okay. Even my like appreciation for us understanding of culture is like mediocre at best cause I wasn't born and raised there. It means kind of like this maybe a close-but-not-quite message. So for white Americans I'm close but not quite an American cause I'm not white and those are things that go along with white. For Chinese, I'm not, I'm close but not quite Chinese you know. (Sam)

While he talked about being Chinese and being American as two worlds, he also described them as “two identities fused into one as a Chinese American. So they are, they can be very distinct, but I think they are kind of pushed together, forced together like in second generation folks. I think being Chinese American is one way to be an American.” (Sam)

Beth shared Sam's multilayered approach to understanding her identity, describing herself as “Asian” in terms of her racial identity; ethnically as Chinese, and culturally as Chinese American. Beth was born in China but immigrated to the U.S. when she was two and a half.

[Racially], I guess I would say Asian. Ethnically, I would say Chinese. [Culturally], I say Chinese. Chinese American. I guess cause I kind of feel like emerging of two different worlds in my life. You know, I'm ethnically Chinese, but my upbringing has been Chinese in America so I feel like in my life, [I'm] Chinese American. I think I see ethnicity as sort of a heritage thing that might be passed down through like your blood relations. And I see race as sort of a social construction of lot of race issues, but kind of like one person could be Asian, but they don't identify with the Chinese heritage so they would just be Asian. (Beth)

Beth had a strong understanding of race as a social construction, and that “Asian” as a racial identity didn't exist in the same way in other places as it did in the U.S. She also talked about the many “types” of Asian Americans – “partiers, artists, musicians” as well as the more “bookish” types she had grown up with in the Midwest (Beth). She had also

talked about racial identities and dynamics through her community engagement and social justice co-curricular work. This informed her thinking of race a construction, ethnicity as heritage, and culture as common collective experiences that was inclusive of social context.

Like Beth and Sam, Angela had an understanding of how racial politics and constructions of “American” identities impacted her. Angela immigrated from Taiwan at 14, and had a very strong identity as Chinese American. She lived with her father first in upstate New York and later in Georgia as he changed jobs. Her mother was still in Taiwan. Angela talked about her childhood and feeling pressured to assimilate to White American norms, from her peers and her father. As discussed, it was while a student at MU that she discovered more of her own (and more political) voice as Chinese American.⁸ Unlike Carmen, however, it seemed that Angela owning a Chinese American identity developed more organically from her experiences rather than as a strategic choice to belong to a community.

[Racially, I identify as] Chinese American [now]. Just being Chinese in America. It's just, like Chinese American is part of being American. Because this is really how I am, and I feel comfortable, and I don't think anyone should have to prescribe to certain image to be American. And that image is usually you know rich, White Americans. (Angela)

Angela also identified as Asian American, understanding “Asian” as a construction of race. She also felt part of a collective experience that Asian Americans share.

Well, Chinese is part of this Asian race, construction of race. Asian race, so that's the primary reason that I'm Asian American too because of that connection. And I do share a lot of things in common with other Asian Americans. (Angela)

⁸ In the process of member checking, Angela reflected that she had actually found liberation in claiming a Chinese American identity as she had experienced emotional abuse and pressure from her father while growing up. Naming him as Chinese and herself as Chinese American gave her space to develop her own values and sense of self, distinct from though in relation to her family.

Daniel also held both identities as Asian American and Chinese American. While he recognized the diversity of ethnicities and cultures within Asian America, however, he felt their similarities were more important. He understood the conflicts between Asian countries, but wanted a more unified community amongst Asian Americans.

I would identify myself as a Chinese American. Now I look at myself as an Asian American more just because that's like a, you know, as an Asian, you know, I mean there's not too different. I mean you look at the Chinese culture like Korean, the Japanese culture like or even like the other cultures, we're in the sense our traditional culture is so similar in a sense. So it's just like, for me it's just bad to really have that separation because there was all these wars, in Asia, and it was kind of like, you know, people fighting against each other. (Daniel)

Holding on to simultaneous identities without privileging one over the other was challenging for some participants, particularly Filipina/o American students at CU. While many of them understood the ways that they identified with other Asian Americans, they could not always reconcile the distinctive experiences of Filipinos and Filipina/o Americans in terms of colonization, immigration status and patterns, class inequities, and ethnic hierarchies. I found it interesting that while students claimed power to construct their own identities and cultural experiences, they did not always feel a part of that larger collective they created. They understood it, but were not in it. This complicated negotiation between their constructed realities and lived experiences added another dimension to understanding Asian American identities.

Mary commented that “somewhere in there I want to fit in, like, that I do have an Asian American identity, as well, but I think at the forefront of my identity is me being Filipino American.” Like Mary, Henry felt that “racially, I'm Asian American,” but talked mostly about his Filipino American identity. In particular, he talked about his relationship with his Chinese American girlfriend and how they plan to raise their

children with both cultural identities. He also told me about his awareness of the hierarchy of Filipinos as lower class citizens in some Asian countries because Filipinos are hired frequently as domestic workers or nannies. Although this was a more common practice in Asia than in the U.S., Henry translated some of this “less than” status to his experiences here. However, as discussed earlier, Henry had a more strategic (and complex) approach to understanding and expression his identities. While he identified with a pan-Asian American identity and resenting the ethnic hierarchies within Asian and Asian American communities, he talked about identifying himself as Filipino and “underrepresented” when it might give him an advantage, for example in his medical school applications. He was also happy to be identified as Asian American. While he did not use Asian American and being Filipino American interchangeably, he held both identities.⁹

Other Filipina/o American students at CU were also aware of a hierarchy within Asian American (and Asia) which generally placed Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans, and Southeast Asian (Americans) more generally, at the bottom. Students often felt marginalized or excluded from Asian America because of this prejudice; indeed, Leslie and Rosa identified themselves as “brown” while describing Asian Americans as “yellow.” Leslie had a strong Filipina American identity, and more specifically as Ilokano, where her family is from, as well as Pinay American in recognition of the dominance of Tagalog in the Philippines and “Filipino” as an imposed colonial identity itself. Although she did understand the importance of coalition, she felt the experiences of Filipino Americans were distinct from other ethnic groups because of the colonization

⁹ In the member checking process, Henry noted that this was an accurate portrayal of how he felt at the time, but added that as time passed, his Filipino American identity had become a more prominent part of his identity and consciousness.

of the Philippines, as well as differential immigration patterns, racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies.

[Asian American] is more, like an overarching, like umbrella term, but for me, I know it doesn't apply to me. [W]hen I was growing up, like, I was, like, I'm not Asian, I'm Pacific Islander. Like, for me, it's like, cause like, for me, I felt like, Asian American had this own identity. And for me, I didn't feel like I really was a part of it. (Leslie)

For Rosa, a senior Asian American Studies major and Education minor, recognizing the colonial history of the Philippines, as well as the internal oppression of Filipinos and Filipino American within Asian America, were very important. Although she understood the construction of Asian American as an identity, she struggled to reconcile the unique experiences of Filipino Americans within such a generalized group.

For me, to kind of put Filipinos under there would kind of disregard what has happened in the past. And so that's why I always advocate on Filipinos first, rather than the entire Asian American community, cause like working with other [AAPI's] in this, that coalition [...] the understanding of like privilege and oppression is totally different. Like for me, like no, this whole thing especially of oppression that has stemmed from colonization of people, and that kind of thing whereas other people within the Asian American category have not necessary experienced that. [...] I do categorize Filipinos under Asian American when I see Asian American Pacific Islander, but [...] I guess to me anyways, [East Asians] fit more of the mold of an Asian American. (Rosa)

Like Rosa, Christopher did not identify as Asian American, but did understand being part of a broader coalition. As noted, Christopher felt a very strong connection to the Philippines, and talked about feeling distant from even other Filipino Americans. He did not understand why more Filipino Americans did not have as strong an identification with the Philippines.

All the Filipina/o American students at CU were very aware that their experiences were distinctly and uniquely American. As discussed earlier, Rosa described this as "translating" her Filipino heritage through an "American lens." While they sought ways

to honor their families' histories and cultural traditions, most of their struggles were centered on demanding and creating space for their experiences to be included in the American discourse. Their identities were equally informed by racial politics in the U.S. and their Filipino heritage. While many did research their family's stories and legacies, they were also well aware that their experiences were vastly different from their extended family in the Philippines, and from their immigrant parents. The U.S. social context in which they grew up had a large influence on how they saw themselves. They were also very aware of the tensions that U.S. colonization created for Filipinos and Filipino Americans, particularly with regard to the romanticization of the U.S. by those in the Philippines. Christopher, Rosa, and Leslie felt responsibility in painting a more realistic portrait of the U.S., especially to helping them to understand the racist ideology that allowed for colonization. While Christopher and Leslie were interested in carrying their family histories, Rosa, Mary, and Henry were more curious about how to claim space for themselves in the U.S. and to challenge the racism they faced here.

I found it interesting that students at MU were more likely to hold both Asian American and Chinese/Filipino American identities simultaneously. This may be related to California having one of the largest and most diverse Asian American communities in the U.S., particularly in southern California where CU is located, such that ethnic identities and differences were more widely recognized. In general, students from California had more ethnically centered experiences where communities were also larger and were also more politically active on campus. Whereas in Michigan, pan-AAPI communities were more common because there were fewer, and smaller, ethnic groups. In the 2000 census, California's population included 12.3% Asian residents, whereas

Michigan had 2.1% Asian residents. The California city where CU is located has the second highest Asian population in the U.S. (10.9%), and the Michigan city where MU is located ranked tenth (1.3%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

The Filipina/o American students at MU were more likely to identify as both Asian American and Filipina/o American. Many grew up with a strong, though small, Filipino and Filipino American community near MU, but they identified those relationships as belonging more to their parents and with Filipino graduate students. Some did attend “Filipino camp,” which they identified as a positive experience, though it did not seem to have a strong influence on their identities. In a few cases, it was only when they went to college that students became more involved with the Filipino Community Organization in the area. They also seemed to be less connected to the Philippines and less aware of the politics and tensions between Asian American ethnic groups. The smaller number of Filipina/o American students on campus may have also facilitated a stronger identification with other Asian Americans.

Chinese American students were more likely than Filipina/o American students to identify as Asian American or with a pan-AAPI community. The Filipina/o American students were actively engaged on campus and also expressed political consciousness around racism in the U.S., and also prejudices within Asian American communities and between Asian countries. Rosa, Christopher, Leslie, Henry, and Ruby all talked about the hiring of Filipino domestic workers in Asian countries, as well as the disparate socio-economic statuses of Filipina/o Americans as compared to Northeast Asian American communities. The Chinese American students did not express similar awareness of ethnic and class hierarchies, nor of the privilege that Chinese Americans may experience in the

U.S. because of their long history, nor of the different ways that Northeast Asian Americans are seen in comparison to their Southeast Asian American peers. The dominance of Northeast Asian Americans in AASO and similar pan-Asian student groups could also contribute to Filipina/o American students feeling less welcomed, or less heard in those spaces. Few Filipina/o American students at CU were active in AASO, choosing instead to concentrate their energies in FASO. Immigration patterns and statuses, as well as the distinctive relationships between the U.S. and China and the U.S. and the Philippines may also have impacted students' perspectives.

Discussion

The four themes discussed in this chapter – Asian American as a political coalition, as shared experiences with racism and racialization, as an unspoken bond of comfort and community, and as simultaneous identities – show the complex ways that students constructed their identities, as individual and collective experiences. While they understood the similarities and common experiences they had with other Asian Americans, they also recognized their uniquely individual perspectives and histories. Unlike the stage-centered models which treat Asian American as a fixed identity based on heritage, to which individuals might feel more or less affinity or comfort, I found that students constructed multiple meanings of Asian American identity. It could include having ancestors from Asian countries and having shared foods, traditions, and language; however, these were only some of the aspects students identified as part of being Asian American. What seemed more prevalent were shared experiences and common understandings, particularly around racism and political struggle. For some, being in an

Asian American community offered a sense of comfort, however implicit, unspoken, or unintentional. There was a collective identity and sense of understanding.

While shared experiences and history were a significant part of how students identified as and with Asian American, their individual perspectives and family narratives also informed how they constructed and defined Asian American identities. Almost all students understand the socially constructed nature of racial identity, yet, as in Christopher's case, they did not necessarily include themselves in their own constructions. There was a sense that Asian American, as an identity, was both something that they created yet also rested outside their beings. The political history of Asian America, as recounted by racial formation frameworks, includes dominant narratives and norms that may exclude some Asian American ethnic and cultural groups; the marginalization of some communities within Asian American is also part of the racist discourse which selects which experiences to privilege. The model minority stereotype, which supports the myth of American meritocracy, is so strong that it hides (or denies) U.S. colonization projects in the Philippines and the resulting migration of workers. Political and economic hierarchies between Asian countries also affect the experiences of Filipina/o Americans.

Within these racial, ethnic, and cultural politics, however, Chinese American and Filipina/o American students found and created space to construct their own identities and give voice and meaning to their experiences as Americans of Asian descent. The complicated and multilayered dialogue between racial, ethnic, and cultural identities – and the various ways they are taken up, ignored, owned, defined, and changed – in sometimes simultaneous moments and processes point to the sophisticated imaginations

of today's students as they make sense of an ever-changing world and claim agency to define who they are and how they choose to be in the world. Whereas the MEIM, racial identity schema, and acculturation models considered racial identity as ancestry (which could be included as a statistical variable) and participation (based on a set of values and activities identified by the researchers), students constructed and lived their identities as changing and evolving ways of being, and as means for both resistance and liberation.

Racial formation asks questions about how students are seen and treated by others. Students spoke to their many experiences of racism, discrimination, misunderstanding, and prejudice. While much of this research focused on stereotypes and their impact on students' experiences, I was surprised to find that the participants did not speak at great length about the role of stereotypes in their lives. I did ask about experiences with racism, model minority myth, and relationships outside of their families. While some noted parental expectation for professional and economic success, and a few talked about resisting stereotypes, the majority of students did not seem give much space for stereotypes in how they saw themselves, their interactions with peers, nor their future plans. They were aware of others' assumptions – the model minority stereotype, as well as the resonance of hip hop in Filipina/o American communities in California – but were confident in forging their own path and not allowing these stereotypes to limit their choices, relationships, and lives.

Racism and prejudice did center heavily in students' identities, both as a barrier to embracing their identities and also as an experience that forged unspoken bonds between Asian Americans. A few students did talk about how being teased or treated differently affected them as children; some sought ways to fit in better with their non-AAPI peers

and others considered those experiences as catalysts to developing a political consciousness about race and racism, a central aspect of many students' identities. Struggle was an undercurrent of all of the themes discussed – it brought students together and also empowered them to action. For many students, the need or desire to fight against racism and prejudice, and for social justice in its broadest sense, was part of their Asian American identities.

Having Asian American communities, whether large or small, was also significant for students. Even for those students who did not purposefully seek identity-centered organizations, AAPI Studies courses, or Asian American networks, all the participants found strong friendships and much needed comfort with other Asian Americans. These were importance spaces to explore and experiment with different identities, and also provided support and care. Students also talked about finding a sense of belonging and purpose, whether around shared interests and identities or civic engagement. I heard stories of perseverance and resilience, both in finding these relationships and in being in community with Asian American peers.

By using in-depth interviews and centering students' experiences and perspectives, we can better understand how Asian American identities are constructed, formed, and reimagined. As intersectionality suggested the importance of the interplay between individuals and systems, this study highlights the dynamic and constructed nature of Asian American and racial identities. Rather than seeing Asian America as a community to join, these students took ownership of the ways the Asian American identity had been previously perceived and defined in order to make sense of racial identity in their lived realities and to better reflect their experiences. As discussed, not all

students who might be identified as Asian American chose to take on such an identity. This did not exclude them from participating in Asian American communities, nor did it erase their contributions to Asian American identities. It does demonstrate the multifaceted and changing meanings of being Asian American and the need for even further complicate understandings of race, ethnicity, and culture.

This study sheds light on the multiple constructions of Asian American identities and communities, challenging the homogenizing discourse of racial identity politics, as well as the conceptualization of identity as a product of linear stage models. All participants had a strong sense of self, citing family practices, peer groups, co-curricular activities, and academic coursework as influential in exploring their identities. At the same time, social interactions and experiences with racism challenged how they saw themselves. Their sense of belonging in and identification with a pan-ethnic AAPI changed, often depending on how they were positioned in local, regional, and international contexts.

Their dynamic and multilayered constructions of Asian American identity/ies and community/ies created space for the myriad ways of being Asian American. Their narratives demonstrated the ways that identities are constantly in flux and in the process of being constructed, and how their identities are internally formed through personal experiences while impacted by social relationships and politics. It is a constant process of negotiation, choice, and comfort while still holding on to some core sense of self. Students' self-conceptions were constantly changing – often depending on immediate context, assumptions, comfort level, relationships, and interactions -- even when they had a strong sense of their identities. What it meant, collectively and individually, to be Asian

American (or Chinese American and Filipina/o American) was a dynamic process of constant re/negotiation and re/definition.

Chapter Six

College (Orient)ation

As studies on racial identity models have indicated, late adolescence (traditional college age 18-24) is a pivotal time in students' lives as they grow from an overwhelming dependence on external messaging to greater confidence in making autonomous and independent decisions regarding who they are and how they choose to be in the world. This process does not happen in a vacuum, but rather as a consequence and result of the myriad opportunities, choices, relationships, activities, and classes that students experience during college. It was not surprising to learn of the impact of academic and co-curricular experiences on students' identities.

Michigan University and California University both have explicit commitments to a racially diverse student body, and as public universities, both had their affirmative action practices challenged through state ballot initiatives. Both universities have strong AAPI Studies departments and vibrant identity-based organizations, including pan-AAPI, Filipina/o American, and several Chinese/Chinese American student organizations. As selective public universities, they attract ambitious, high-achieving, and self-motivated students. As discussed previously, an overwhelming majority of participants had taken at least one AAPI Studies course (only Tanya at CU and Tamara at MU had not taken an AAPI Studies class); and all students were members of identity-based organizations with many holding leadership positions throughout their collegiate careers beginning their first

year. In fact, many were so involved with FASO, CASO, and AASO that as third and fourth year students, they were concerned that their activities and social networks were too exclusive to these communities. Interestingly, even those students who were not actively involved in these organizations had mostly Asian American friends. Often, they had not intentionally sought friends with similar racial or ethnic identities, but found that they had similar values, perspectives, experiences and interests. It should be noted that because of the nature of this study and how participants were recruited, students who were strongly connected to Asian American student networks, AAPI identity-based organizations, and AAPI Studies courses were more likely to volunteer. However, while many students took AAPI Studies courses and got involved with identity based organizations in their first year, some had no intentions of doing so when they first went to college.

In this chapter, I explore the college experiences, relationships, activities, and courses that students talked about as having an impact on their identities. I organized this discussion by theme: changes in perspectives during college; academic experiences; and co-curricular experiences. I was interested in how these experiences informed, changed, or questioned their conceptualizations of race and ethnicity, as well as their identities and perspectives.

What Happens in College...Doesn't Stay College

Most students talked about their identities, perspectives, and understandings having changed during college. Christopher had such a strong identity as Filipino American and awareness of racial politics and racism that I was surprised when he said “if you were to ask me [to] give three words to describe my identity, Filipino probably

wouldn't have been one of them before college.” Although he was born in the Philippines and had extended family there, Christopher grew up with few Filipino Americans in his local community. At CU, Christopher took advantage of classes to learn Tagalog and Filipino history; and he was very active with FASO. Christopher chose to minor in Southeast Asian Studies because he was interested in learning more about his roots in the Philippines.

Like many other students, Christopher had not had the opportunity to study Filipino or Filipino American history, literature, language, etc. prior to college. Talking about their identities, racial politics, and racism were also limited. In college, many students discovered new lenses to examine their experiences, and also new discourses to recognize the ways race and racism had affected their lives through their academic courses, student organizations, and being in more diverse and multicultural communities that encouraged exploration and self-examination.

Although Tamara grew up with a strong Taiwanese American identity, she had been frustrated by stereotypes of Asian Americans. She made conscious choices to participate in activities that countered the “bookish” stereotype like athletics. This reaction demonstrated awareness of her identity and how others saw her, and yet, she said she had not really thought explicitly about her identity before attending college.

I guess like before I came to [MU], I never really talked about it at all. It was just kind of something that you just like took, you know, people are different whatever. But I think it's really great to be able to talk about it. Because it makes you feel more comfortable too. It's really interesting to be able to talk about these things. (Tamara)

Beth found the COO an important space for her to develop her commitment to social justice. Although she had always been engaged in many co-curricular activities, it

was not until her senior year that she began to connect racial identity and her community work. Beth had not specifically sought ways to explore her identity, but the presence of organizations and opportunities to do so prompted Beth to get involved with the AASO high school conference and literary magazine.

I think I was trying out the whole Asian thing. I was like well maybe I'm supposed to cause I am Asian and cause I never been exposed to Asian American issues before. Maybe this is the time to get exposed to them. (Beth)

The diversity of Asian Americans at MU also exposed Beth to the multiple ways of being Asian American. Beth had also grown up with the model minority stereotype, and shied away from being associated with Asian American cliques. Beth explored other interests, and yet found herself becoming close friends with Asian Americans who had similar interests.

When I first got to [MU], I was very scared. I've never seen a room of Asian Americans, like total Asians, and it was just really really changed me. [...] And then the first Asian that I met at [MU] were like the Greek Asians. [...] It was just really crazy. I'm like well it could be easy to have Asian friends, but I don't want to do that. I want to like find myself in other ways. I guess now my best friends here are Asians, but it's not because we're Asian. You know so consciously or unconsciously, but my friends and I, we all individually did not want to do [just be friends with other Asian Americans] but ended up becoming really cool friends anyway through other means. (Beth)

Marc appreciated the opportunity to connect with other Asian American students, and also was surprised by the sense of comfort and community he found.

[T]he ability to meet Asian Americans here and to like really develop that part of my identity, that has been great just because it's just like the friends I made in that community, the friends I made outside of that community, it's just like it's been amazing to me like how much of a family people have turned into for me. Like for support and just like fun. (Marc)

Nicole also found MU to be a supportive community to explore and deepen her Filipina American identity. Nicole grew up in what she described as a "very Filipino"

home, with many international graduate students from the Philippines. She had a strong foundation in Filipino culture, but struggled to find her own place in the U.S., both with her family and in school. She had heard about Filipino student organizations at other schools, and became involved with FASO in her first year. She was president of FASO in her third year when I interviewed her.

[MU] has been so positive with really fostering, I mean... I discovered...not to use really annoying words, but fostering diversity is true you know and the Filipino American community here is...I mean we're not as big as the other people are, but it's enough that I really really grew in terms of like appreciating and learning about my culture and respecting it so. [...]Um, I mean, there's always gonna be an element of exploring and developing my identity, but I'd say I've gained a lot of myself. I've discovered a lot of my identity and formulated a lot of it in these past four years. (Nicole)

Molly grew up in a large Asian American (and Chinese American) community, and described herself as very “proud to be Chinese” from a young age. However, because Molly did not fit the stereotypes of Asian Americans, she questioned her identity. Greater exposure to the diversity of Asian Americans, and more self-confidence empowered Molly to define herself.

I'm very extroverted and very assertive and very competitive, [...] I'm really hands on, and I'm very talkative. So like I feel like people didn't give me an identity of like, when I was growing up, I was always called like Whitewashed. So I kind of like internalized that a little, and I felt like I wasn't a very Asian person. But when I reevaluated like what it means to me to be Chinese, and like I learned about like Chinese culture and history. Like I was, I was really really proud to be Chinese. And I just got, it just escalated when I got to college. (Molly)

Angela also developed that sense of pride of being Asian American, which helped her confront the racism she experienced both on campus and in terms of how she saw herself. Having emigrated to the U.S. at 14, she had had a difficult time adjusting to her new home. She encountered conflicting messages from her family to assimilate to

American culture while being ostracized by her peers. Creating a space and identity for herself as Asian (Chinese) American, Angela found her voice as a writer and strength in her identity.

I mean I definitely learned a lot more about, you know, my identity or Asian American identity in general. I learned to be proud of it really, I learned to be proud of people I had worked with. Yeah. I no longer see Asian Americans as subservient to other races or other ethnicities. (Angela)

Similarly, Ruby developed a different way of conceptualizing “Asian American,” such that it was not only a group to which she belonged as a result of circumstance, but also an identity she owned and constructed for herself.

I think when I was younger and I didn't fully understand it was very easy for me to say that's Asian. That's American. But I think ever since I started college, I don't think about that very much. It just sort of I feel like the different things that I thought were that made them characteristics, like a sort of blending together. [It used to be] very easy for me to make these differences because I, those are what I perceived to be, you know, what it meant to be Asian. What it meant to be American. But now it's, the focus has shifted to what does it mean for me to be Asian American. And so instead of like separating things into these two categories like Asian and American, I'm sort of bringing together like what makes me Asian American. [...] I feel like I'm getting a pretty good hold of, I'm very comfortable with who I am as an Asian American. (Ruby)

Sherry also felt a shift in how she thought about being Asian American from high school to college.

I'm more educated and more sophisticated in the ways I'm thinking, as compared to high school when culture was about dances and celebrations. It's much more than that now. Um, it includes a lot of the inequalities, the struggles, and also how we're represented in the larger picture and a lot on racism, actually, how it still exists and it's not this color blind society. (Sherry)

Not only was being Asian American a recognition of her cultural heritage, but Sherry's growing awareness of racism and inequality raised her political consciousness as a person of color. Her racial and ethnic identities were not only important to her personally, but also mattered in how she was seen and treated by others.

Mary also talked about how she became more aware of racism and its impact on her experiences and her identity during college. Mary grew up in one of the oldest Filipino American communities, though her experiences with being teased and marginalized as a child had long lasting effects. She had been active with FASO since her first year, eventually becoming president in her fourth year.

I don't really think racism came into my consciousness until college. [...] I'd say a, a lot of the influence I've gained in developing my identity has come from, like, the people I've come across here at [CU]. Like, my political consciousness probably popped open. I just felt so much urgency in the work and, and I translated it to my academics. I translated it to my social life, to my involvement on campus; it was intense. [...] And this past year there was a big focus on working in coalition with not only Asian American specific groups but students of color in general. And I think this is, maybe, a critical part in my development. This is when I finally started connecting myself to a larger struggle beyond Filipino American. I started understanding, like, my connection to other communities of color and why, like, coalition building is so critical. [FASO] opened my curiosity, and I think it definitely motivated me to become a better student, become a better person. It inspired [me] to even think of ways to utilize my education in such a way to uplift and empower the community. (Mary)

Even growing up in a strong Filipino American community, Mary struggled to find her own voice and confidence in her identity. Taking on leadership positions in FASO and having a network of Filipina/o American, Asian Americans, and students of color greatly impacted Mary's sense of self and sense of purpose.

Another way to consider the impact of having a strong Asian American college community was students' fears of leaving such a setting. Having grown up and attended college with a large Asian American community, Eddie was concerned that he would have to leave this familiar and comfortable environment after graduation as he hoped to go a law school on the east coast. Christopher was also concerned with returning to his home community. When he first went to CU, he had approached Filipino American

community cautiously and with little knowledge. In his last year, he worried that returning home would now be the “culture shock.”

I feel like it will be this great culture shock because here I am essentially having this Filipino consciousness all throughout college, and when I graduate and go back [home], like what am I going to do when this has been my worldview for four years? Like I can't just go back and forget those four years ever existed right. So in that sense I kind of holding onto and taking advantage of learning about my culture and history here knowing that [CU] has those resources, and that I have this community here, and I won't necessarily have those things once I graduate. (Christopher)

School Is Life

AAPIS Studies.

The opportunity to take language and AAPI Studies courses was important to participants. Although many had learned their family histories, most had very limited exposure to AAPI history and contemporary experiences. That there were not only courses but entire departments devoted to addressing the erasure of AAPI's from mainstream U.S. academic discourse was not only novel for students, but incredibly salient in their collegiate career. It gave credibility to their personal experiences and centered their cultural heritages in ways that were very powerful.

Initially, I just heard about it and thought wow, it's so amazing cause you can [take Tagalog], and at the time I didn't know what I wanted to do in college. I really took classes that I liked, and Tagalog was one of them. So I took it my very first quarter when I heard about it. It was always the most amazing thing. I never imagined that I'd ever like take Tagalog in a class. It just seemed so uncanny to me to actually like be able to take in the classroom setting like with other Filipinos. (Christopher)

Leslie also seized the opportunity to take classes in Tagalog, AAPI Studies, and Southeast Asian Studies. Like Christopher, this was not only part of her academic experience but also a personal journey to locate herself and family in a broader historical context.

I want[ed] to learn about me as a Filipino but it because personal because, you know, someone in my family was one of these pioneers that people keep talking about and I had no idea what that was. So, my first year I also started taking more Filipino classes. I was really trying to personalize my education because that was the reason why I came here. I didn't need to be taking these classes, but I wanted to just for myself. (Leslie)

In an AAPI Studies course, which many of the participants had taken, students completed an assignment to do just that – to write their family story within Asian American history.

This was a powerful experience for them as they could more explicitly see how they are Asian American history, and also to gain a better understanding of the breadth of experiences within Asian American. Christopher noted,

I took Intro to [AAPI] Studies. I had to write a paper about my family experience, and then place it in the scope of Asian American history. I remember interviewing my mom, and then, about how we came here, and I was really interested in learning like if she had ever experienced racism or these sorts of things, you know. Like these sorts, oppression, injustice, all these sorts of things. And I think it was through that project that I realized just how different my experience was from the broader Asian American experience. (Christopher)

Because of this class and assignment, Christopher not only learned about his own family's immigration story, but also developed a stronger sense of how he was similar and different to his Asian American peers. He talked at length about how he felt both his perspectives and values were different, but he also felt connected to the Filipino American community. This also helped Christopher, and others, understand the diversity within Asian America.

Henry also liked to talk with his AAPI peers about their experiences, and felt that even for students who did not take AAPI Studies classes, the presence of this field of study helped to provide a foundation for an "Asian American consciousness."

I think Asian America is aspiring to grow in its own consciousness regardless of people who don't take the classes, don't take the majors. I think it's awesome that they actually have the classes and the major cause you want to go in depth, and

you want to have some cohesiveness with what you're teaching the people. And a more cohesiveness of what issues are being pushed forth and taught at the schools, but I think once you go to places like [CU], you kind of have an idea of what the state of Asian America cause you just naturally see a lot more people who are like you and compare and contrast interests. (Henry)

Henry was particularly aware of the ethnic and cultural diversity that made of Asian America, as well as the myriad experiences of both recent immigrants and multigenerational families. He seemed fairly confident that he and his girlfriend, who was third generation Chinese American, would have a family; and he talked about how that blending of cultures added yet another dimension.

For many students, AAPI Studies courses and other classes which included conversations about race, identity, and racism raised their political consciousness about institutionalized racism and systemic oppression. This connected not only to their personal struggles, but also with initiatives on campus and in their local communities.

I think a lot of schools don't have Ethnic Studies, and so [I thought] I should take advantage of it because it's not offered everywhere. And, it's given me the [opportunity] to learn a lot more critical thinking. It wasn't what I was expecting because I felt it was just gonna be your typical "oh, we are being oppressed and blah, blah, blah" and not really any solutions to it. So then once I got into it, [they] talk[ed] about Filipinos and Japanese Americans, and Hawaiians, and all this stuff and so I think it really opened my eyes to what it really meant to be Asian American. (Sherry)

This related to their identities and identifications as Asian Americans because they began to understand their experiences were often shared by other Asian Americans and people of color. Isolated incidents of individual prejudice or misfortunate were put in a larger context, and students saw the similarities in their experiences while also developing a sense of the breadth of discrimination.

Well the first course I actually took was Asian American Contemporary Communities, and so that's more like what's happening today in Asian America in general, and I thought that was very, very interesting to me just because I was

more educated on the larger, Asian American community. It really opened my mind to what Asian Americans looked like besides you have to speak Filipino. It really began to, you know, broaden my perspective and different things and really understand truly like the struggles of AAPI's in general. (Rosa)

While Rosa had learned some Filipino American history growing up in Stockton, Marc was surprised when he realized the extent of struggle and hardship.

I took Intro to [AAPI] Studies my sophomore year. Oh yeah that was another thing I should have mentioned that was really instrumental because it's just like that was when I started to really learn about the history of [AAPI's] and society and like just, you know, between like the shit that happened in the Chinese like or like you know Picture Brides. And just like the shit that the Filipinos had to go through like every and even now, it's like almost the same issues is like the Hmong, the Cambodians and Vietnamese now, it's just like, I just feel, the whole like model minority, like oh my god. (Marc)

Dedric started taking AAPI Studies classes later in college, and he talked at length about the impact this had on him. One of the first classes he took was a service learning class in which he worked at a nearby Filipino Community Center (FCC). This was the first time that he had really learned about AAPI history and also worked with a Filipino or Filipino American community. It had such profound impact that he decided to pursue a minor in AAPI Studies and continue working at the FCC after he completed his class.

I just had recently this surge of just identity just from, you know, I'm an [AAPI Studies] minor so I'm taking all these [AAPI Studies] classes and working at [FCC] really has, you know, brought that within me. Like before I never did any community service hardly like before that. It's really, I've really opened my eyes, you know, to I guess really wanted to be part of the community and helping out whenever I can just because it's your people. [...] We work at [FCC], and we're working in this program called FYI, the Filipino Youth Initiative, which is like a working with kids ages from like middle school to like early freshman college kids. And it's really just trying to help them discover their identity, I guess. You know, dealing with stereotypes and whatever. And you try and shy away from typical, you know, "boring" you know high school classes or whatever. And you do a lot of cultural stuff, education. The big stress is really Filipino American, it's what they really want to stress. You know, when immigrants first came here and their parents and you know, how they're going to build their own future in history books. [...] it definitely made me realize, I mean I know subconsciously that there is a bigger community out there, but I was never really involved in it. (Dedric)

Dedric had spent time and energy to distance himself from Asian American peers because, like many students, he feared being stereotyped and being “lumped” together. In working with FCC and taking AAPI Studies classes, Dedric felt empowered in helping the Filipino American youth with those same struggles. Rather than avoiding or denying their identities, Dedric now felt strength in embracing his heritage while still forging his own path. He enjoyed working with the high school students, and he appreciated hearing the stories and traditions from elders in the community.

Angela also took a service learning class that connected her with the local Asian American community. It not only strengthened her identity, but also helped her develop a more critical perspective toward stereotypes and community engagement.

The service class gave me a more broad perspective about what education means. I remember when I first went in, I came with a very patronizing view [that] I was going to come in here and teach these kids about how great education is and stuff like that. But I felt like they taught me so much about being Asian American in Detroit. Being the invisible part of this model minority stereotype and maybe higher education is not the best thing [...] for everyone. And people who choose not to pursue that path, should not be slighted. [...] I feel like every time I work with other Asian Americans, I learn a lot more about our identity. And some that I can take wherever and apply to myself and think about how I’ve, you know, gone this far. I feel like I’m very different from who I was before, and I feel definitely more empowered now than before. (Angela)

These classes also exposed students to AAPI Studies scholars and mentors, as well as graduate students. These provided invaluable relationships for Asian American students who often did not see themselves reflected in the academic curriculum or scholarly community.

[AAPI Studies] are like the classes that I’ve enjoyed the most, um, in terms of likeability, in terms of connecting with my [graduate teaching assistants], connecting with my professors. And I think that, I mean [MU] is just so lucky to have programs like that. (Nicole)

For many students, their identities and courses also influenced their career paths. Christopher was determined to work in the Philippines, and a few students talked about doing “medical missions” in the Philippines to prepare for careers in medicine. Many students also wanted to find ways to continue their activism into their future plans, and connecting their identities with their professional goals provided greater clarity and commitment. Rosa had developed a keen awareness of the intersections of class and identity. Attending a selective, public university made Rosa aware of the disparities in educational resources and college access. Both Leslie and Rosa wanted to work in education to challenge the curriculum which silenced AAPI histories, and also to work toward greater equity and social justice in K-12 education.

I was always heavily involved with education. So like when, once I decided that [AAPI] Studies major, my whole plan was to be sort of an educator. I think it was more so for the high schools and to teach ethnic studies. And the curriculum -- we're not in text books that whole type of thing. So that was my goal, like goal. And now like being at, you know, the School of Ed and like their minor program is very very good. Like socially conscious, very aware of the injustices within the educational system. And there's actually like what I went through, back in the day, didn't have that much resources, low income background, urban schooling, that type of thing. Like no books stuff like that. So I can feel for the students we learned about, and feel connected to myself. So I kind of want to give that back. Right now the schools kind of help in that area and help the students too. (Rosa)

Nicole had a very strong relationship with her parents, and felt pressured to pursue a lucrative and culturally respected career. Her parents had suggested law, and though she was interested in a legal career, it was not until she connected it with Asian American communities that she felt a stronger calling to the pre-law program.

I think [wanting to be a lawyer] kind of went hand in hand with my involvement with AASO cause AASO is pretty political [organization]. And talking with just their president actually. He's really big influence on me too in terms of just being the importance of like having your voice heard politically. So that's another big factor to why I'm on the prelaw track. (Nicole)

Co-Curricular Engagement.

As previously discussed, involvement with identity-based student organizations impacted students' identities. In these spaces, students found comfort, community, support, allies, and friends. These organizations provided opportunities for students to learn and express their cultural traditions, and to re/construct cultures of their own. As with all student organizations, the focus and direction of FASO, AASO, and CASO changed under different leadership and members' interests. Both CU and MU hosted Filipino Cultural Nights, popular on many campuses, and other cultural events in which students learned traditional dances. At MU, students talked about combining some of those dances with contemporary music and choreography to better reflect Filipino American identities; and at CU, the influence of hip hop was evident. These organizations also provided a space for students to be, to own their identities, and to develop their leadership as Asian Americans and people of color. The focus of these organizations on community, identity exploration, and political awareness was very important.

Yeah I feel like more so when I got to college though. Like when you get to college, and you figure out who you are and what not, and like I became this year I'm president of [CASO]. So I feel like that helped me get more in touch with Chinese culture. (Molly)

The ethnic identity based organizations (FASO and CASO) and the pan-Asian American organizations were both very important to students. While not all students were involved in both, they were aware of all the ethnic and racial identity organizations. Both spaces were important as they provided different outlets for identity exploration and expression.

I think that well aside from my involvement with [FASO], I do, I'm active with [AASO]. That group has made me also like see similarities, similarities where like I didn't see them before. [...] My interest increased too because of [AASO] and [FASO]...like a heightened thirst, I guess, to explore that cause I mean, you know, like in my AP history classes in high school, like a chapter on the Filipino, the Filipino war with America was like, you know, a paragraph long. I really had no previous exposure to stuff like that. (Nicole)

Many students became involved with these organizations from their first semester on campus. The presence, reputation, and visibility of these programs helped to attract some students to their respective campuses. For many students, it was the first time they had an Asian American community (or Filipina/o American and Chinese American) community in which to belong.

My first exposure to the [AAPI] community was through [FASO] my freshman year. Then I went to this thing called on Filipino Americans coming together in November of 2003 where it was like a whole bunch of Filipino groups from campuses throughout the Midwest, and we would just go to workshops, and then we'd go and drink together later. And that was really awesome. You know, just being able to be around so many people and then building this camaraderie with other Filipinos. And granted, I was very apprehensive about going at first cause I'm like oh my god, there's so many Filipinos. What the hell is up with this? But then it was just so comfortable, and it was so much fun. It was like, you know, hanging out with a whole bunch of brothers, sisters, or you know, cousins and stuff. And it was just like, this is awesome. (Marc)

For many students, FASO, CASO, and AASO were ways to learn more about social justice and raise their own political consciousness, as well as a space to focus their activism and energy.

I wouldn't say that I joined [AASO] to understand what it means to be Chinese American. I think I wanted to join it because I wanted to do something that was more political. And learn more about that political element of it. And so I think and then when you, I mean you're doing like politicizing, a lot of times it relates back to this Asian Pacific Islander American sort of, so cause that's a very political term that I wanted to learn about, you know, like what the identity is. How can I, how do I fit into that? There's definitely like this very, you know, like what about me. What about me. How can I improve that community? (Sam)

Leslie, Rosa, Christopher, Daniel, and other students were also politically engaged with various issues on campus (e.g., the disaggregation of AAPI student statistics) and locally (e.g., statewide affirmative action policies). Many Filipina/o American students were particularly interested in raising awareness about the different experiences of Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander students who had different historical, social, and educational experiences; and who were often excluded from and silenced by the model minority stereotype. These politicized spaces helped to counter the dominant narratives of White American experiences, as well as the institutionalized racism and oppression that many students felt.

Discussion

While previous studies about racial identity have included traditional college-age students as participants, they did not look specifically at the impact of their collegiate experiences. Not only was late adolescence an important time in their identity development as they navigated the transition to independent adults, but also the courses, activities, and relationships they experienced in college influenced how they saw themselves and conceptualized their Asian American identities. Many students chose their university and entered college wanting to connect with Asian American (and Chinese American, Filipina/o American) peers for identity exploration and support. While many had an understanding of their racial and ethnic identities, most had not had the opportunities to explore their personal narratives or collective histories. Taking language and AAPI Studies classes, as well as participating in co-curricular organizations, provided an important space for students to develop a sense of self. Even the mere presence of these opportunities had significance for students as academic

courses in Tagalog, AAPI history, and community engagement provided legitimacy and affirmation as to the importance and centrality of students' experiences. Not only were their identities important to them, but they were also worthwhile areas of study that helped students locate their family's history and individual perspectives in a broader context of AAPI history and experiences. While previous to college, students' identities were limited to personal reflections or were not given much attention, AAPI Studies courses and co-curricular activities deepened students' understandings of common and collective struggle. It was also possible to engage the self in their academic studies. Studying "other people" rather than one's own history can be internalized so that students believe their own experiences are less important; it also continues the marginalization of some discourses in dominant narratives. Centering AAPI realities as a course of study helped students to see their experiences as part of the American landscape; as Rosa said, to translate their identities through an "American lens." In some ways, this was particularly true for Filipina/o American students because they had been ignored in both dominant American narratives and within Asian America.

Similar to Inkelas' study (2004), I found that students who were more involved with Asian American organizations or AAPI Studies classes expressed more awareness about racism, racial politics, and had more complex understandings of their identities. Most students were active with pan-Asian American organizations or Filipina/o American and Chinese American student organizations in some way; sometimes this was limited to attending events while others held leadership positions. While their participation varies, all students seemed to understand the importance of having these spaces to create a community of support and for students to engage with their own

conceptualizations of culture. For some, culture was found in language, food, and traditional dances; and culture was also conceived as political struggle and anti-racist activism. These organizations also provided a peer network for students to address both direct and indirect racism they experienced. While many diversity initiatives focus on the representation of students of color, this study demonstrated that a numerical majority (as in the case of CU) was not enough to mitigate discrimination and prejudice. As noted in the previous chapter as well, these organizations and inform AAPI networks were also important spaces for emotional well-being. Providing a sense of comfort and community, Asian American students often sought out Asian American peers to feel cared for and understood. Even students who were not active participants in formal student organizations noted that their closest friends were other Asian American students.

This study also demonstrated the importance of pan-Asian American and ethnic-specific organizations. Many students were involved in both, and they provided unique though related communities. While the Chinese American and Filipina/o American organizations were helpful in students' identity exploration, pan-Asian American groups offered the opportunity to create coalitions and develop a broader sense of how Asian American histories and identities have been constructed in the U.S. These organizations helped students make sense of the both the internal and external experiences of their identities because they allowed students to find agency to define themselves and what it meant to be Asian American.

Using a social justice lens, college experiences that centered around AAPI communities fostered greater political awareness, and empowered students to enact an activist identity related to their racial and ethnic identities. They understood better how

institutionalized racism and systemic oppression directly impacted their lives. This awareness grew over time, and for some students, not until their last year of college. Perhaps it requires at least four years of study, maturation, and experiences for students to connect their personal lives with their academic and co-curricular activities. Interestingly, even for those students who were very active in AAPI Studies and identity-based organizations, it was not until they participated in this study that they consciously reflected on their motivations and growth in college.

Chapter Seven

Re/orienting Asian American Racial Identity

I undertook this study in order to better understand how Asian American identities are constructed and the impact of college experiences on students' racial identities. What I learned were the myriad ways students identified as Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American, as well as how students found meaning in these identities. Racial identity was both personal and collective, and was constructed in ways that created community and crossed boundaries. While students' identities were grounded in their heritage and family narratives, claiming an Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American identity was an act of resistance to demand space, agency, and power. It was in recognition of their uniquely American experiences and to refute the dominant narratives of the U.S. that are traditionally grounded in White experiences. Owning their identities was also an act of liberation to counter the racism they experienced and the ways they had been rendered both silent and invisible.

Critical theory and intersectionality reminds that we exist in a hegemonic power structure which places our bodies in a raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized hierarchy which privileges and oppresses us. While these structures and identities are socially constructed, they have meaningful consequences for the ways Asian Americans (and other marginalized communities) are able to live their lives. By locating themselves at the center of the American landscape and demanding that their histories, experiences, and

voices be included on their college campuses and in the U.S., these students break free from the racial politics that hold them up as “model minorities” while excluding them as “foreigners.” Instead, they re/claim the power to define themselves and what it means to be Asian American.

This liberation to define and voice their own identities was also a marker of students’ political awareness and activism. As students moved away from stereotypes and others’ assumptions about Asian American identities, many found personal and collective power to work toward social change and greater equity – this was a reciprocal and constant process. While their political activism took on different forms and directions, students found ways to voice their own identities through and in their projects.

This study challenges previous treatments of racial identity as fixed and arrived upon. Rather, racial identity is dynamic and in flux. Although family heritage and cultural traditions were included, students’ identities were also informed by their collective experiences with racialization and a shared history of discrimination and prejudice. The unspoken sense of community and comfort in pan-Asian American communities was not based on common ethnicity or culture, traditions, or language, but rather an implicit feeling of understanding and compassion.

Stage driven models are less useful in this approach to understanding Asian American identities. I found that students were always keenly aware of their identities even at a young age, often because differences were emphasized by their peers. In some sense, they had no choice but to examine their racial and ethnic identities. In turn, then, their identities became quite salient rather than unimportant as suggested by the beginning stages of Phinney’s MEIM (Phinney, 1996a) and Helms’ racial identity model

(Alvarez, 2002) as discussed in chapter two. Furthermore, Phinney considered “identify formation” as having “to do with developing an understanding and acceptance of one’s own group in the face of lower status and prestige in society and the presence of stereotypes and racism” (Phinney, 1996a, p. 144). As evidenced in the participants’ narratives, however, students did not struggle with accepting their Asian American group “membership” in the “face” of racism, but rather suffered from racism itself. In fact, for many students, it was their experiences with racism that brought them together and emboldened them to claim ownership of their Asian American identities. Even for those students who did not express deep political consciousness around their Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American identities, they did not necessarily distance themselves from these identities. Rather, they were frustrated with the ways that racism, stereotypes, and sometimes even cultural traditions limited the ways they could *be* Asian American.

As Yeh and Huang (1996) noted, the stage models treat the final stages of identity formation as fixed and “achieved;” and this final stage often coincided with late adolescence and early adulthood (Phinney, 1996a). However, the students in this study talked about identity as a lifelong process which did not follow any linear progression or stages. I would argue that rather than conceptualizing identity as “accepted” or “achieved,” it is more instructive to consider identity in terms of salience. For different students and at different times in their lives and depending on context, their racial, ethnic, gender, or class identities, as well as sexual orientation, may be more salient at any given moment or location – and sometimes multiple identities. Students held simultaneous

identities, as well as multiple understandings, often depending on context, relationship, and need.

Their sophisticated and strategic ways of constructing and expressing their identities complicates the developmental and acculturation approaches to Asian American identities (e.g., (Phinney, 1990; Yeh & Hwang, 2000). Students' identities were not based on traditional notions of culture (e.g., Asian values versus American values, as used in Alvarez & Yeh, 1999; Alvarez & Helms, 2001; Iwamoto and Liu, 2010; Yeh, Carter, & Pieterse, 2004). Instead, students constructed holistic ways of being that brought together their families' histories with their present narratives in the U.S. They also found imaginative and creative ways to give meaning to their experiences as Americans of Asian descent, claiming both U.S. history and their families' cultural traditions as their own. While the acculturation literature presupposes a connection to a "home" culture that was not the U.S. (Abe-Kim, et al, 2001; Phinney, 1992), yet most students in this study felt marginalized from their families in China and Philippines. Indeed, many claimed an American identity because it was where they felt the most comfort and resonance, even if they did not fit into the dominant norms and narratives. The U.S. was the only home they had ever really had or known. They altered the meaning of being American in order to include their histories and experiences, rather than trying to assimilate into or retreat from others' conceptualizations of American society and identity. What they found was not a space to be bicultural, but rather a space to be neither Asian nor American – but simply Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American.

Kim (1981, 2001) proposed in the AAID model that Asian Americans experienced some dissonance between their Asian heritage and U.S. social context. However, I found that conflict came from experiences of racism and discrimination, and not because of inherent differences in values or belief systems. Some students did struggle to reconcile the ambitions and strictness of their households with the perceived liberties of their non-Asian American peers, however, this experience may be true of many immigrant communities in which families made financial, social, and political sacrifices to come to the U.S. These challenges may also have arisen from not seeing themselves in the dominant narratives of U.S. history and social norms. While students knew or were learning about the rich history of Asian Americans in the U.S., this generally occurred in the margins of their formal educational experiences. Their struggle was to find ways to claim space and voice within the American landscape in ways that did not require a dismissal of their heritage or assimilation to White American norms; yet also afforded them opportunities to participate fully in American culture. Rather than internalize negative images as Kim suggested, students fought actively against stereotypes and oppression to find power and agency in their identities. A few students did express a desire to fit in with their non-Asian American peers as children, but never shame or self-hatred in their identities.

This study also illuminates the ways that racial and ethnic identities are differently constructed and expressed. While not all students resonated with a pan-Asian American identity, they recognized the historical and political significance of an AAPI coalition. As racial formation theory suggested, Asian American identity was constructed out of socio-political movements in response to racism and discrimination – a construct students both

understood and chose to continue. Asian American has also become a more fully developed identity with its own culture, norms, and ways of being. Although students did recognize their ethnic differences, they also appreciated the ways that their lives had been shaped collectively by living in the U.S. Some students recognized the ways that their ethnicities were excluded from pan-AAPI coalitions or held a lesser position. Prejudice occurred within Asian America as much as it did outside of it, although Filipina/o American students recognized this more perhaps because they were one of the subordinated groups. While it is convenient to group students together under an Asian American or AAPI umbrella, this racial categorization does not resonate with all students. Institutional policies and practitioners must show greater sensitivity to the myriad ways students identify and want to be seen and heard.

Interestingly, while students often used race and ethnicity interchangeably, Asian American was more commonly used to describe a racial identity than an ethnic identity, where Chinese American or Filipina/o American seemed to fit better for participants. We must be more specific in how we use race, ethnicity, and culture as they have different meanings and implications for students. Future research should consider qualitative or mixed methods to better capture students' perspectives, and to complicate and nuance conceptualizations of racial identity. Researchers who use quantitative methods must develop more dynamic ways to recruit and include racial and ethnic identity as a variable in their studies. Moreover, conceptual frameworks and survey questions should not assume and perpetuate traditional notions of Asian and American/European cultures as conflicting spheres. As evidenced in this study, Asian American students have much more sophisticated ways of negotiating and constructing holistic and new identities that

arise from their experiences as whole people. Future research should also consider how intersecting identities of gender, class, sexuality, faith, and ability inform constructs of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

The participants' narratives also suggested the ways that their universities in particular – and higher education in general – perpetuate racism and prejudice, as well as the interventions and disruptions that they found within their institutions, both personally and programmatically. Although Asian American and Filipina/o American students were a numerical majority at CU, the participants still described feeling marginalized and invisible on campus. And despite the large number of Asian American students at CU, and in the local community and California, White American culture and norms still dominated the campus culture and climate. Similar to the participants in Yoo and Lee (2005, 2008) and Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006), the students at CU and MU experienced racism and microaggressions on their campuses. I also found that students whose Asian American, Chinese American, and Filipina/o American identities were more salient and core to their being were more sensitive to overt and covert discrimination, and that these incidents had a deeper and more lasting impact. They felt individual acts of prejudice and carried an awareness of structural, systemic, and social oppression which impacted their daily interactions, academic courses, and co-curricular activities. Students need better support to combat racial battle fatigue, and campus leaders must institute stronger policies to address hostile climates and institutionalized racism.

While recruiting a diverse study body is necessary, it is insufficient to counter prevailing stereotypes and prejudices. Institutional faculty and staff need to collaborate with students to create programs that support students of color and provide space for

community building and identity exploration. Moreover, institutional policies and practices must apply interventions to disrupt the racist paradigms that normalize White student experiences and perspectives, and to create a more inclusive community that recenters academic and co-curricular experiences around students' multiple identities.

Not all Asian American students will be drawn to AAPI Studies and identity based organizations or may not find space in their academic and co-curricular schedules to participate. Opportunities to discuss racial identity in other areas are therefore necessary. Students need to see how their identities connect to their academic and professional goals, as well as their other activities. As Beth noted, she had focused her energy on social justice and community action, and did not reflect on how her Asian American identity informed both her worldviews and choices until her senior year. While students cannot be pushed into conversations they are not yet ready for, they should be challenged to connect the seemingly disparate areas of their lives. For all of the students in this study, their racial identities were at the core of their being and served as a foundation for other experiences and identities. Educators should facilitate opportunities for them to understand the multiple ways of being Asian American.

Intersectionality emerged as a helpful framework for research on identity as well as a foundation for building programs and policies. Considering racial identities within systems of power and privilege helped to elucidate the ways that race as a construct of power (or domination) impacts how students make meaning of those identities. Some students, like Henry, were savvy in understanding how their identities were read by others so as to take advantage of systems of oppression for some small gain. Other students, like Leslie and Rosa, chose to work from their subordinated identities (both

within dominant American society and Asian America) to locate sites of resistance in which they found the space to define their identities for themselves without regard for how they might be interpreted by others. Regardless of the approach, all students found themselves caught in a social system which imposed an identity on them, an identity could have profound consequences for them as individuals and as a collective group. Where students found liberation was not simply to refuse those identities, but to accept them and then redefine them according to their own perspectives, experiences, and values.

The implications for faculty and student affairs practitioners is to help students appreciate the diversity of experiences and worldviews of all Asian Americans and to incorporate them into their classrooms, events, and programs. They must work diligently to dismantle the assumptions of Asian Americans (and other communities of color) as homogenous and foster an inclusive climate that embraces difference, amongst Asian American students and with their non-Asian American peers. More opportunities for Asian American students to talk with each other across ethnic and cultural groups, as well as within ethnic and cultural groups, are needed; and where possible, should be guided by faculty and staff who can help students explore their individual identities within broader political and social contexts. Students must also be challenged and encouraged to be vulnerable and broaden their perspectives, understanding that they will change both in how they see others and how they see themselves.

Appendix A: Table of Participants

Filipina/o American Students										
Alias	School	Yr	Major	Generation	Father's Occupation	Mother's Occupation	Language	Language	Language	Language
Marc	MU	4	Political Science and Biology	2nd/Michigan	MA/Respiratory Therapist	RN/Nurse	English			
Nicole	MU	3	Poli Sci; APIA Minor	2nd/Michigan	MD/Radiologist	SC/Homemaker	English	Tagalog		
Dedric	MU	4	English; APIA Minor	1st/Michigan	BS&MBA/engineer	BS&RN	English			
Ruby	MU	3	Biopsych	2nd/Illinois	BA/Information Systems	MS/Nurse	English			
Jerry	MU	4	German; Pre-med	2nd/Michigan	HS/Auto Plant	BS/Engineer	German	English		
Mary	CU	4	Anthro; APIA Minor	2nd/California	BA/Postal Clerk	BA/Nurse	English			
Henry	CU	4	Bio/APIA	1.5/Philippines	BA/Accountant	BA/Accountant	English	Tagalog	Spanish	
Rosa	CU	4	APIA; Educ Minor	1st/California	HS/Forklift Driver	SC/Janitorial Svc Owner	English	Tagalog		
Christopher	CU	4	Intl Dvlpmt; French&Linguistics; Poli Sci/SEAsian Minor	1st. Philippines	BA/Postal Clerk	BA/Treasury	French	Spanish	Filipino	English
Leslie	CU	3	Psych; Educ/SE Asian Minor	1.5/California	BA/Engineer	BA/Nurse	English	Ilokano	Tagalog	
Chinese American Students										
Tanya	CU	3	Biochem	1st/California	BA/Engineer	BA/Dietician	Cantonese	Mandarin	English	
Sherry	CU	4	Intl Dvlpmt; APIA Minor	2nd/California		MS/Seamstress	English	Cantonese	Mandarin	
Carmen	CU	2T	Bus/Econ	1st/China	BA	BA	Mandarin	Cantonese	Shanghainese	English
Eddie	CU	3	Poli Sci	2nd/California	SC/Taiwan govt	SC/Accountant	Cantonese	English		
Molly	CU	4	Poli Sci	2nd/California	ES/Rest	MS/Custodian	Cantonese	English		
Daniel	MU	4	Poli Sci	1st/Michigan	Cook	Waitress	Cantonese	Toishan	English	
Sam	MU	3	Soc	2nd/Michigan	HS/Rest	HS/Production	English	Cantonese	Mandarin	
Angela	MU	3	Poli Sci/Creative Wrt; APIA Minor	1st/Taiwan	PhD/Research Prof	BA/Editor	English	Mandarin		
Beth	MU	4	Biochem/Public Health	1st/China	MA/Engineer		Mandarin	English		
Tamara	MU	4	Biology; Intl Health	2nd/Ohio	Grad/comp Sci	Grad/Chemist	English			

Appendix B: Figures

Figure 1: Summary of Three- to Five-Stage Identity Development Models

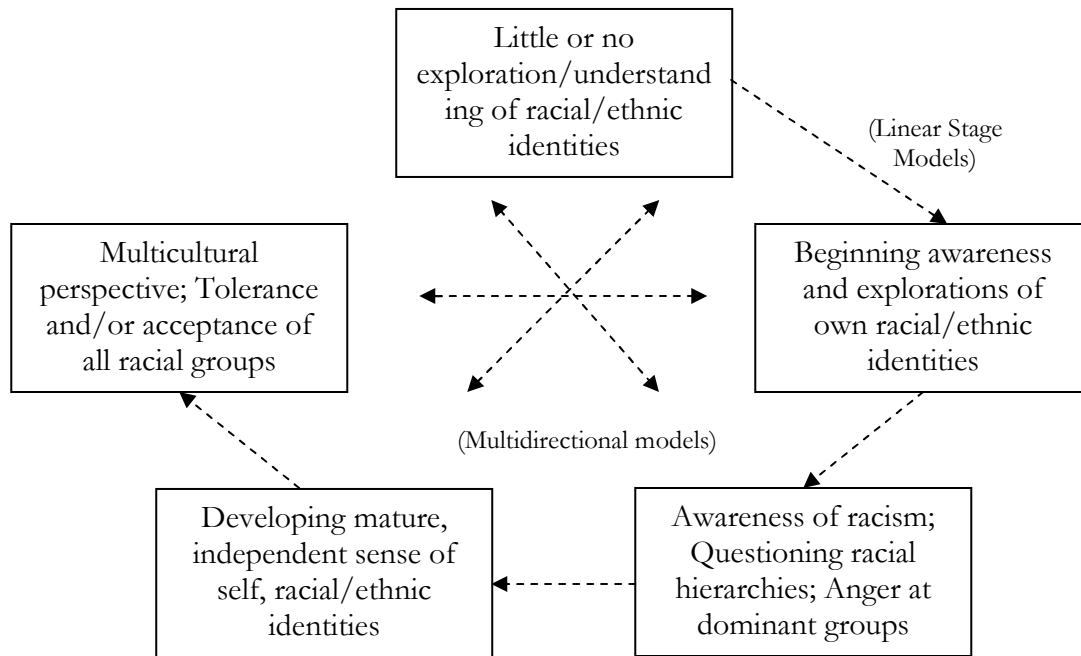


Figure 2: Assimilation/Acculturation Models

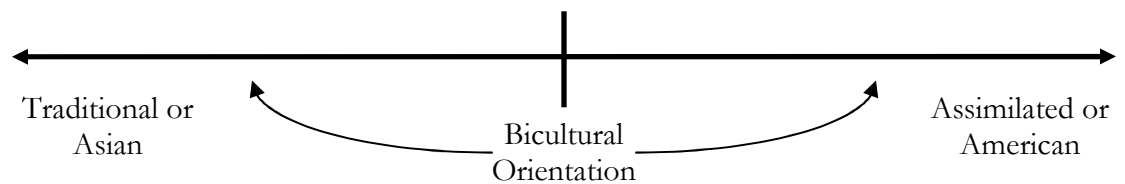
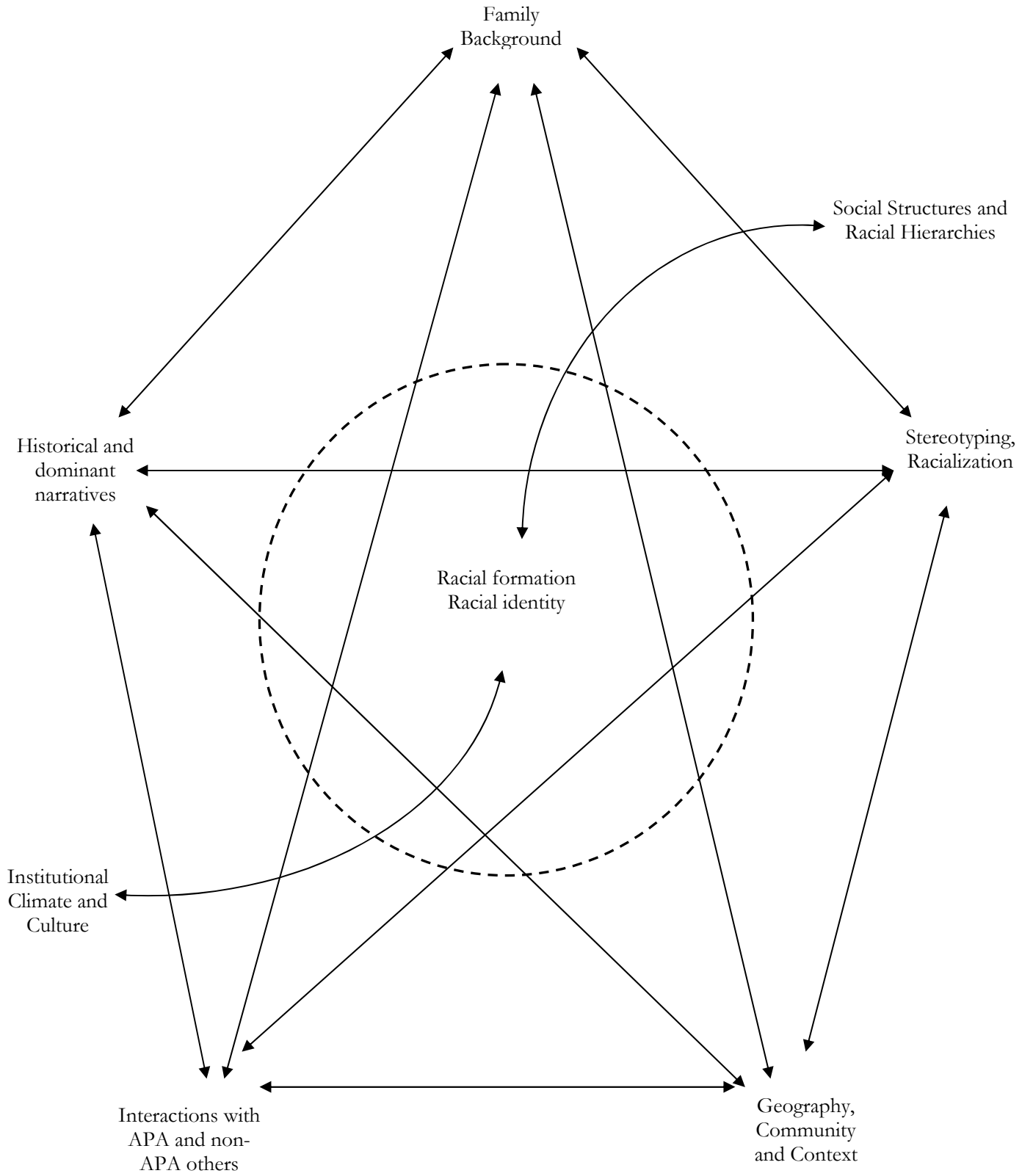


Figure 3: Racial Formation Framework



Appendix C: Demographic Survey and Interview Guide

Name:

Institution:

Number of years at this institution:

Expected graduation:

Birthplace:

Age of immigration (if applicable):

Generational status (e.g., first generation, second generation US born):

In what colleges are you fluent?

Parental education levels:

Parental occupations:

Academic major(s):

Career aspirations:

Sample Interview Guide

Individual Interviews

This interview guide is intended as a list of possible questions to ask during the interview.

I have not organized the questions in any particular order, but instead, grouped them according to topic.

Family and Home Communities:

- How did your family come to the U.S.?
- Do you have extended family in the U.S.?
- What is your parents' educational background? What do they do for work in the US?
- How would you describe the city/town in which you grew up?
- Do you have siblings? Older or younger?
- Was there a large APA or Asian community? Did you feel isolated? Was there anything you wish you had more/less of?
- Did you talk with your family about race or racism?
- Did you feel pressure by your parents to do well in school?
- How do your parents identify themselves racially or ethnically? Extended family?
 - Did your family practice any culture traditions?
- Did you feel connected to any Asian or APA community?

Institutional factors:

- How would you describe the culture and climate at your institution?
- Are there people you feel comfortable with? Who are your friends?
- What activities are you involved in?

- Have you looked for APA cultural groups?
- Do you feel your racial/ethnic identity has changed since you have been in college?
- Do you feel your racial/ethnic identity has influenced your college experiences?
- Do you feel other people stereotype you? By whom? How does it make you feel? How do you react?
- Can you name or describe a situation in which you were stereotyped? Encountered racism/discrimination?
- Do you feel pressure to do well academically? Why? By whom?
- How do your professors respond to you in the classroom? Your peers?
- Do you feel misunderstood by non-APA professors? Administrators? Peers?

Socio-cultural factors:

- Do you feel pressure by peers to fit in to mainstream U.S./social cliques? What does fitting in mean to you?
- Do you feel you act differently depending on whom you are with? (e.g. other APIAs?)
- What does “American” or “America” mean to you?
- What does “Asian America” or “Asian American” mean to you?

Individual factors:

- How do you self-identify? Does this change depending on context?
- How do you think others perceive of your identity? (Other APIAs? White Americans? People of color?)
- Do you feel it’s important to self-identify as (Asian) or (ethnicity) American?

- How do you define (Asian) or (ethnicity) American?
- Do you think there is such a thing as an Asian American ethnicity/identity? Do you feel you belong? Do you want to belong?

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