

ASIAN AMERICAN SEXUAL POLITICS:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

A Dissertation

by

ROSALIND SUE CHOU

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2010

Major Subject: Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Asian American Sexual Politics:

The Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality. (May 2010)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Joe R. Feagin

Why study Asian American sexual politics? There is a major lack of critical analysis of Asian Americans and their issues surrounding their place in the United States as racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies. There are three key elements to my methodological approach for this project: standpoint epistemology, extended case method, and narrative analysis. In my research, fifty-five Asian American respondents detail how Asian American masculinity and femininity are constructed and how they operate in a racial hierarchy. These accounts will explicitly illuminate the gendered and sexualized racism faced by Asian Americans. The male respondents share experiences that highlight how “racial castration” occurs in the socialization of Asian American men. Asian American women are met with an exotification and Orientalization as sexual bodies.

This gendering and sexualizing process plays a specific role in maintaining the racial status quo. There are short and long term consequences from the gendered and sexualized racist treatment. The intersected racial and gender identities of the respondents affect their self-image and self-esteem. For the women, femininity has been

shaped specifically by their racial identity. “Orientalization” as a colonial concept plays a role in these racialized and gendered stereotypes of Asian American Women. The gendered and sexualized racialization process and “racial castration” has impacted Asian American men in a different way than their female counterparts. Violence is a prevalent theme in their gendered and racial formation. Asian American men begin as targets of violence and sometimes become perpetrators.

I also analyze how romantic and sexual partners are chosen and examine the dynamics of Asian American intraracial and interracial relationships. While Asian American “success” as “model minorities” is challenging white supremacy, gender and sexuality become “regulating” forces to maintain both the racial and gendered order. Finally, I offer and discuss the resistance strategies against gender and racial hierarchy utilized by my respondents. Asian Americans must be creative in measures that they take for group and individual survival. Respondents resist in intimately personal ways against ideologies.

DEDICATION

For Chuen Cheng and Li-Hsueh Chou.

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This dissertation is almost seventy years in the making. My father, Chuen Cheng Chou, was born in 1942. His hope and dream was to come to the United States and earn his doctoral degree in chemistry. It was a much more difficult task than he expected. His dream unfulfilled, he hoped one of his daughters would finish the job. My parents and I never thought I would be the daughter with a doctoral degree. I was the athlete with little concern or care for my schoolwork. Through my parents' perseverance and sacrifice, I eventually saw the value in continuing my education. I am so thankful for my two older sisters, Nina Sickler and Alice Chou. They have been incredible role models.

I am a sociologist because of my wonderful high school history/sociology teacher John Dunn. He presents American history with a critical lens. My friends in high school kept me from feeling isolated in my small hometown in the Deep South – Joshua Adrian, Greg Wolfson, Michael Peluso, and Andrew Tirrell. The coaching and mentoring I received from Regina Dooley made me a true scholar athlete. Julie DeMar was the best college friend and roommate a person could ask for.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WHY ASIAN AMERICAN SEXUAL POLITICS?

Growing up, my parents never showed affection to one another in front of my sisters and me. We were shielded from any hints of sex and sexuality. One quite vivid memory I have is when I was twenty-one. I was sitting in the living room with my twenty-something sisters (both married), and there was a kissing scene on television. My mother quickly and forcefully instructed us to change the channel. We were not allowed to watch programming with sexual intimacy or anything even remotely close to “second base.” This policing in the home created an irreconcilable dynamic with my external world beyond the walls of my home. There was the reality of being treated as a sexualized and racialized body outside of those walls. Sex was taboo in the Chou household, but I was exposed to ideas of sex and sexuality in other realms. One of my earliest memories of being sexualized and racialized body was when a good friend from middle school shared that his father suggested he get an Asian wife because she would be submissive. I remember feeling awkward in that moment, having some responsibility to either support or contest that claim. As an adolescent, I was not equipped to appropriately reply to those comments. Was I supposed to agree wholeheartedly and bow compliantly? Perhaps I should have called attention to the illegitimacy of the claim.

This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Asian American Studies*.

Ultimately, at such a young age, I had yet to form my own identity surrounding my body and my sexuality that might allow me to raise any point at all.

I share these childhood memories to call attention to the complex relationship that Asian Americans have in their intimate relationships, familial or romantic, with each other and with the outside world, as they are racially othered. Feminist scholars argue that women's sexuality is socially shaped in ways that sustain men's social and political dominance. I'm extending this feminist scholarship and arguing that Asian American sexuality is socially shaped in ways that maintain social and political dominance for whites, particularly white men. I want to set this stage with the assertions made by Patricia Hill Collins in her seminal work, *Black Sexual Politics*.¹ Collins defines sexual politics as “a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women’s treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others.”² Collins brilliantly asserts that the oppression of African Americans extends beyond race. Controlling and enforcing the gender and sexuality of African Americans maintains white supremacy. Similarly, Asian Americans have their own sexual politics as they face gendered and sexualized racial stereotyping and discrimination. However, I have a critique of Collins because she misses a major dissimilarity.

Collins lends the hypersexualization of African American men and women to the outwardly appearing “sexually repressive” nature of the United States.³ She extends her points to other people of color, yet there is an ethnocentric stand she takes. Asian Americans in the United States come from nations with different sexual mores than the

United States, and their experiences cannot be explained in the same fashion. There is a different kind of sexual repression that occurs in these nations of origin that operate differently than in the United States. There are differences in gender oppression and homophobia that should be taken into account when understanding Asian American femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. In the later chapters, these differences in nationhood and origin are explored to help explain the unique experiences of Asian Americans.

In my narrative analysis, it is apparent that the maintenance of white supremacy through controlling images and stereotypes of Asian Americans as gendered and sexualized bodies is a sobering reality for my respondents. While all people go through a gendered and sexualized process in society, the intersecting racial identity for people of color introduces racial domination into the mix. The additional struggle with defining one's own racial identity is difficult enough as a man, woman, gay, straight, bisexual, or trans person. There are societal forces constantly imposing identity on us all based on gender, sexuality, class, race, ability, religion, etc. However, consideration of *power* and *domination* must constantly be centralized in the analysis to get a clear picture of how oppression is operating. Asian Americans, while perhaps seen as “nearly white,” are not free from gendered, racialized treatment. This racialized and gendered process is not static. The sexual stereotyping of people of Asian descent has mutated throughout American history, changing based on the needs and interests of whites. Interview respondents share in great detail the present day gendered and racialized process they face as Asian Americans.

Structural factors based on race, class, gender, and sexuality have an affect on the lives of Asian Americans. It would be a naïve if I believed my own attraction to others was solely based on internal “animal instinct.” However, much research in the life sciences and psychology factor in a biological basis for my sexual desires. Pheromones, ovulation patterns, symmetry of facial features, and chest-waist-hip proportions have been determined as legitimate scientific indicators of what is attractive and beautiful. However, these factors are socially constructed categories of significance.⁴ Historically, science has been used to justify social systems of inequality and oppression. While examining, sex, sexuality, gender, and race, it would be naïve to believe that biases fail to exist in these studies. Numerous studies have indicated that racial stereotyping can affect perceptions of others and the self, the most influential and famous case being the Kenneth Clark study used during the *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁵

The terms *sex* and *sexuality* have become intertwined with our cultural understanding of gender. Race is not so intimately wed to a layman’s understanding of sex, sexuality, and gender. However, race is central to how sex, sexuality and gender can be understood in the lives of Asian Americans. While functioning in both similar and different ways for Asian American men and women, gender and sexuality act as fundamental mechanisms in maintaining white supremacy or white hegemonic ideals. Racial stereotypes crawl into bed with people of all races. White hegemonic ideologies of masculinity and femininity determine who gets to sleep with who and the characteristics of those sexual and romantic partners. The selection and vetting process of potential sexual or romantic partners is not happening outside of our social world. We

do not make choices of attraction in a vacuum. Whether we are conscious or not, ideas of masculinity, femininity and race influence our decisions for potential partners. Our world shapes our “wants” and “choices” of whom we sleep with and/or take home to introduce to our families. Hegemonic ideology becomes our commonsense notions. When we believe we find someone attractive, there is a socializing element that comes into play.

This research is a call to scholars, educators, policy makers, journalists, and any person concerned with issues of race, gender and sexuality to pay attention Asian Americans. Their experiences speak more broadly to issues of racism, sexism and homophobia in the United States, and we can learn a great deal about the tangled web of social structures through this narrative analysis. Our identities are so complexly intertwined, and the numerous social norms and hegemonic common-sense programming pulls individuals in a number of directions. This research is an attempt to begin to capture and decipher the complexity. Through the words of respondents, hopefully we can learn how to talk about how someone is sexualized and gendered while being simultaneously racialized.

These identities do not always become salient at the same time or with equal force. The complexity of intersecting identities is how their salience shifts and alters from situation to situation. Larger social structures and hierarchies remain omnipresent, but there are instances when stereotyping may seem “positive” or “negative.” Whether the difference in stereotyping awards an individual with actual structural power is

contestable and may remain to be seen. This project is an effort to begin to ask these questions and start to define and discuss the sexual politics of Asian Americans.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

First and foremost, I treat *race* as a socio-historical construction. Second, I treat *sex* and *gender* as social constructions. I define *gender* as a “social status, a legal designation, and a personal identity” and “through social processes of gendering gender divisions and their accompanying norms and role expectations are built into the major social institutions of society.”⁶ While I used the terms “men,” “women,” “boys,” and “girls” I want to clarify that I find problems with the terminology. The terms are constructed as a binary and restrict gender to just two categories. Because of the restrictive boundaries to this language, please note that my usage of gender pronouns are understood as constructed categories that are problematic. There are male-bodied and female-bodied respondents that may have different gender presentations than what present language may allow. When a respondent self-identified as something else outside of this binary gender paradigm, such as butch, boi, or trans, it is stated, and the pronoun they prefer is used. Third, I define *sexuality* as “lustful desire, emotional involvement, and fantasy, as enacted in a variety of long- and short-term intimate relationships.”⁷ I do find the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* as problematic because the origin of the terms arises from early Sexology that created a legal and medical discourse that stigmatized any sexual practices that deviated from monogamous heterosexual relationships. Jeffrey Weeks asserts that through the use of medical terminology differentiating homosexuality from heterosexuality, stigma has been

attached to same-sex loving sexualities.⁸ The mere act of labeling homosexuality as a practice creates a discourse of deviant behavior that strays from the “norm,” heterosexuality. Similarly, laws construct a discourse surrounding sexual acts, dividing them into acceptable and unacceptable categories

SYSTEMIC RACISM AND THE WHITE RACIAL FRAME

I use a systemic racism approach to view racial oppression as a foundational and persisting underpinning of this society in the United States. From the beginning, powerful whites have designed and maintained the country’s economic, political, and social institutions to benefit, disproportionately and substantially, their own racial group. For centuries, unjust impoverishment of Americans of color has been linked to unjust enrichment of whites, thereby creating a central racial hierarchy and status continuum in which whites are generally the dominant and privileged group.⁹

Since the earliest period of colonization, European Americans have sustained this hierarchical system of unjust material enrichment and unjust material impoverishment with legal institutions and a strong white racial *framing* of this society. Whites have combined within this pervasive white frame many racist stereotypes (the cognitive aspect), racist concepts (the deeper cognitive aspect), racist images (the visual aspect), racialized emotions (feelings), and inclinations to take discriminatory action.¹⁰ This white racial frame is old, enduring, and oriented to assessing and relating to Americans of color in everyday situations. Operating with this racial frame firmly in mind, the dominant white group has used its power to place new non-European groups, such as Asian immigrants and their children, somewhere in the racial hierarchy that whites

firmly control—that is, on a white-to-black continuum of status and privilege with whites at the highly privileged end, blacks at the unprivileged end, and other racial groups typically placed by whites somewhere in between.¹¹ This white racist framing is centuries old and continues to rationalize racism that has been systemic in this society.

ASIAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

While the racial demographics of the United States have shifted and continue to shift over time, they are not necessarily “naturally” occurring changes. The law has played a central role in the “racial morphology” of the country.¹² Asians in the United States comprise just over four percent of the population. This is by white supremacist design. Legislation, both racist and sexist in nature, has played a significant role in the lives of Asian Americans. These laws have shaped their racial and gendered experiences. I will identify and discuss how gendered meanings for Asian Americans have shifted and changed at different historical moments. These imposed gendered meanings faced by Asian Americans have operated to support white supremacy, the white racial frame, and hegemonic masculinity. Asian American men and women share some of the same racialized experiences; however, the racialized experiences can manifest differently for people based on gender, class, and sexuality. Asian American women have consistently been constructed as sexually available to white men. Asian American men have seen a different shift in gender stereotyping that is unlike other men of color in the United States because they, exclusively, have gone through an emasculating, castrating process.¹³

Who Moved My Manhood? The Evolution of Asian American Masculinity

David Eng has been at the forefront of Asian American masculinity research. In his book *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, Eng brings together the fields of Asian American studies and psychoanalytic theory.¹⁴ He explores the role of sexuality in racial formation and the place of race in sexual identity. Images in literature and film show past as well as contemporary perceptions of Asian American men as emasculated, asexual, homosexual or queer. Eng argues that any analysis of Asian American men's racial formation must seriously take into account how their sexuality has been constructed. His research serves as a major theoretical starting point for intersecting identities of Asian Americans.

Dana Takagi argues, "As Asian Americans, we do not think in advance about whether or not to present ourselves as 'Asian American,' rather that is an identification that is worn by us, whether we like it or not, and which is easily read off of us by others."¹⁵ Asian Americans have specific racial characteristics imposed upon them by others, but that identity does not stand alone. Race intersects gender and sexuality in a particular way. Racial stereotypes can and do change over time, but the meaning remains the same – people of color are inferior to whites. Anti-black stereotypes remain from the slavery era, but in our "colorblind" society, these stereotypes are coded or rephrased to seem less overtly racist.¹⁶ However, this relatively stable and constant stereotyping of African Americans varies greatly from the ideological transition of Asian American manhood. Historian Ronald Takaki describes the stereotyping of early male Chinese immigrants:

The language used to describe the Chinese had been employed before: Racial qualities that had been assigned to blacks became Chinese characteristics. Calling for Chinese exclusion, the editor of the *San Francisco Alta* claimed the Chinese had most of the vices of the African: “Every reason that exists against the toleration of free blacks in Illinois may be argued against that of the Chinese here.” Heathen, morally inferior, savage and childlike, the Chinese were also viewed as lustful and sensual.¹⁷

Chinese men and women faced stereotypes quite similar to African Americans. Takaki asserts that they went through a “Negroization” process as they settled into this country. The sexual stereotypes were uncannily the same.

Chinese men were denounced as sexual threats to white women. White parents were advised not to send their daughters on errands to the Chinese laundry where horrible things happened to white girls in the back rooms.¹⁸

Also mirroring the stereotypes of American Indian and African American men, Chinese men were accused of having a special appetite for white women and girls. If a white woman married a Chinese man, it was considered an act that threatened “white racial purity.” The association with African Americans was so close that the Chinese were called “nagurs” and the “new barbarians.”¹⁹

This stereotyping of Asian American men has disappeared from the discourse and, like a pendulum, has swung to the opposite end of the spectrum where they are seemingly castrated and void of all things “manly.” Even Asian American men as martial artists serve as target for mocking.²⁰ Early immigrants to the United States such as the Irish and Italian were negatively stereotyped when they arrived. As they melted into the collective “whiteness,” these men retained their manhood in the discourse, unlike Asian American men.²¹

Yen Le Espiritu argues that the types of labor assigned to early Asian immigrants in the United States were “feminizing” occupations.²² Asian American men worked in a more domestic realm, doing laundry and restaurant work. Espiritu’s point is notable as this type of reproductive labor is often labeled “women’s work,” but many Asian immigrants were doing agricultural farming and construction work (specifically, with the railroad).²³ These types of segmented labor were also assigned to African and Latino American men. Espiritu’s argument does not fully explain the shift in gender ideology of Asian American men because all of these men of color have historically shared the same gendered labor.

Asian American Femininity

The stereotyping of Asian American women has been relatively consistent throughout U.S. history compared to their male counterparts. Research exists interrogating the sexualization of Asian women in the United States. Sheridan Prasso explores the history of stereotyping and media portrayal of Asian women in Western discourse.²⁴ Those images have remained stable over time. Now, images of Asian women as sexually available have been globalized, though these images are centered mainly on women of East Asian descent. South Asian women are often invisible or lack sexuality. My respondents of South Asian descent speak openly about their lack of sexuality in the media discourse.

Scholars agree that femininity is under-theorized in the current literature.²⁵ There are some definitions of femininity that have been theorized. Scholars Pyke and Johnson and also Mimi Schippers use the term *hegemonic femininity* while Connell chooses the

term *emphasized femininity* to describe what is usually equated with white, heterosexual, middle-class women.²⁶ Pyke and Johnson, however, conceptualize hegemonic femininity in an entirely different way than Schippers. *Subordinate(d)* or *pariah femininities* are femininities associated with sexually transgressive women, such as lesbian, bisexual and non-monogamous women.²⁷ *Marginalized femininities* are femininities associated with women of color or poor or working-class women.²⁸ Using either theoretical terminology, Asian American women are either the “de-emphasized” or “marginalized” femininity. Asian American femininity is seen as attractive to men because of the stereotyping as passive or docile, but these stereotypes have different meaning in a hierarchy of women.

Intersections of Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Nationality

“Orientalism” is a useful descriptive term developed by Edward Said to describe white racism against Asians and Asian Americans.²⁹ He uses the term to describe how whites associate with the East with being “static and unfree,” and Western civilization with being “dynamic and free.”³⁰ Vijay Prashad insists that “Orientalism” is a method the whites use to negatively stereotype Asian Americans as exotic, barbaric and primitive.³¹

Theorists argue that “Orientalism” is the root of Asian emasculation. Orientalism is the ideology set in place from colonialism that the West is the protector of the East.³² A binary ideology exists which describes the West as “masculine” and the East as “feminine.” Orientalism is Eurocentric in notion and serves to “exoticize” what is seen as Eastern culture in a patronizing way. Orientalism works to create difference between East and West with power and dominance being associated with the West. However,

Takaki's historical evidence that Asian American men were initially feared like African and Latino American men complicates this theory. Asian Americans were often seen as "shifty," "untrustworthy" and "filthy," but even as early immigrants they were classified as "intelligent" compared to other people of color.³³ This early "model minority" stereotyping was not dominant in the discourse. World War II played a pivotal role in launching the "model minority" stereotype into mainstream discourse.³⁴ Japanese Americans were seen as a threat to national security and the response of the interned Nisei³⁵ generation was a systematic attempt to combat future racial assaults by pushing their Sansei children to do well in school. A dramatic shift in discourse can be traced to the relative financial and academic success of Asian Americans during this time period after World War II.³⁶ As a threat to white power and privilege by these "model minorities" became seemingly more realistic, the stereotypes of Asian American men as hypersexual, violent and dangerous seemed to subside.

Angela Davis engages the questions of intersections in *Women Race, and Class*.³⁷ Davis discusses the ways in which gender, race and class intersect in a unique way. She takes a socio-historical look at race and racism and the ways that African-American men and women have a history of egalitarian division of labor rooted to work on slave plantations.³⁸ The racist structure also had devastating effects on the class mobility of African-American men and women. Similarly, Asian Americans have faced specific labor barriers that have been gendered. Yen Le Espiritu similarly looks at how labor patterns have affected Asian Americans in *Asian American Women and Men: Labor, Laws, and Love*.³⁹ Her scholarly work was at the forefront of connecting racist

and gendered labor conditions and immigration laws to relations between and among Asian American women and men. *Espiritu* documents how the historical and contemporary oppression of Asians in the United States has (re)structured the balance of power between Asian American women and men. *Espiritu* asserts that race, gender and class, as categories of difference, are not parallel to but intersect with and confirm to one another.

Joane Nagel contends that sex is a core element of “race, ethnicity, and the nation, and that race, ethnicity, and nationalism are crucial components of sexual and moral boundaries and systems.”⁴⁰ Where Feagin incorporates of racist images as a key component to the white racial frame, Nagel adds that *sexual* images and stereotypes are imbedded in ethnic images and stereotypes.⁴¹ There is also an emotional aspect to ethnosexuality. Nagel asserts, “Sexual fears and loathing are endemic to racial terror and hatred.” Similar to Feagin’s conception of the white racial frame, strong emotive reactions from whites fearing the sexuality of people of color is fundamentally tied to racial domination. This white fear, especially of Asian American men, becomes apparent through participant narratives in later chapters.

Patricia Hill Collins has done influential groundwork on intersectionality. Collins makes three central claims in *Black Feminist Thought*. First, oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation are interconnected. Second, black women have often been restricted because of external definitions of black womanhood expressed through controlling images. Third, black women have created worldviews out of a need for self-definition and to work on behalf of social justice.⁴² I extend these points to Asian

Americans. Collins argues that theorizing the intersection of race and gender is a complex task.

Intersectional paradigms view race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age, among others, as mutually constructing systems of power. Because these systems permeate all social relations, untangling their effects in any given situation or for any given population remains difficult.⁴³

Collins suggests that because of intersecting identities, African-American women and men are engaged in unique “Black sexual politics.” These politics are defined

...as a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women’s treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others. Because African Americans have been so profoundly affected by racism, grappling with racism occupies a prominent place within Black sexual politics.⁴⁴

Similarly, Asian Americans have been affected by racism. The affects of this racism remain relatively invisible in the dominant racial discourse, even among academics.⁴⁵

Collins contends that “such politics lie at the heart of beliefs about Black masculinity and Black femininity, of gender-specific experiences of African Americans, and of forms that the new racism takes in the post-civil rights era.”⁴⁶ As demonstrated by my respondents, gender-specific experiences are a reality for Asian Americans in this now “post-racial” society four decades after the civil rights movement.

Race, class and gender intersect and affect the lives of African-American men and women in many different ways, but with similarly oppressive results.⁴⁷ A narrow sexual politics based on American ideas, ideals of masculinity, femininity and the appropriate expression of sexuality work to repress gay and straight, male and female.⁴⁸ The hegemonic racial and gender ideologies repress Asian Americans, but there are diasporic factors to consider that differ from the African-American experience.

Colonialism and Orientalism have a unique effect on the construction of Asian American gender and sexuality.

Collins' "Matrix of Domination"

While there has been great insight gained from feminist theory and the reconstruction of knowledge, a major critique of second-wave feminist literature is the flawed implication that gender operates in the same manner for women of all races, classes, sexualities and nations. When interpreting how oppression affects individuals, there is a complex collision of social identities that cannot be explained independent of each other. Patricia Hill Collins incorporates various intersections of social inequality in *Black Feminist Thought*. She argues, "The sexual politics of Black womanhood reveals the fallacy of assuming that gender affects all women in the same way – race and class matter greatly."⁴⁹ Collins suggests that previous feminist theory inadequately explains the lives of black women and that an intersectional paradigm is necessary. An historical example of the second wave feminist fallacy is the notion that the central goal during the women's movement of the 1950s and 1960s was to gain entry into the labor force and freedom to move out of the domestic realm. What is often overlooked in the feminist discourse is the continual and unfettered presence of African-American women in the labor force throughout U.S. history. The marginalized voice of African-American women in feminist scholarship was limited by racial inequality. While white feminists were failing to acknowledge the privilege of their white skin, it became evident that intersectional paradigms were necessary to account for these differences in experience.⁵⁰

Intersectional paradigms are important to understanding intersectionality because they stimulate new interpretations of the African-American woman's experience. They untangle relationships between knowledge and empowerment because they shed new light on how domination is organized.⁵¹ Collins utilizes the concept of a "matrix of domination" to better address the analytical dilemma raised by intersecting identities. Collins states, "The matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized" and "describes this overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained."⁵² Collins' matrix is a mechanism to explain how power and dominance work structurally in intersecting systems. Collins states that, "All contexts of domination incorporate some combination of intersecting oppressions, and considerable variability exists from one matrix of domination to the next as to how oppression and activism will be organized."⁵³ However, while there is variability from one matrix to another, they all share common elements. They all have at work the same four "domains of power": structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal.

African-American women lay in a particularly situated intersection of race and gender, but Collins explains that, "regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression."⁵⁴ The structural domain of power "encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women's subordination over time. One characteristic feature of this domain is its emphasis on large-scale, interlocking social institutions."⁵⁵ This domain of power includes institutions such as the

legal system, labor markets, housing and banking. African American women will have a different experience with these institutions than white women or black men. Similarly, Asian American women will have different experiences than white women or Asian American men.

The disciplinary domain of power relies on the structural domain but works a bit differently. Collins argues, “As a way of ruling that relies on bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance, the disciplinary domain manages power relations. It does not through social policy, but through ways in which organizations are run.”⁵⁶ While this type of power is not exercised by declarations written into law, institutions may limit the type of work available to an African-American woman. Asian American women who are teachers or professors may face particular surveillance by principals or university deans. If these Asian American women are recent immigrants from Southeast Asia, they may only have access to jobs in service industries that may be considered more sexually exploitative. This disciplinary domain of power is regulating their bodies.

The hegemonic domain of power deals with “ideology, culture, and consciousness.”⁵⁷ In order for hegemony to operate, coercive force must become consensual by controlling ideology and making the thoughts, feelings and values of the dominant group “commonsense.”⁵⁸ The hegemonic domain of power dangerously reinforces the form of power, structural and disciplinary, because it “aims to justify the practices in these domains of power” without force.⁵⁹ Collins contends, “By manipulating ideology and culture, the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institution (structural domain), their organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and

the level of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain)...In the United States, hegemonic ideologies concerning race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation are often so pervasive that it is difficult to conceptualize alternatives to them.⁶⁰ Media play a major role in the dissemination of hegemonic ideals, normalizing them. The interpersonal domain of power is the place where an individual finds a micro-level of agency.

Resistance to the other domains of power comes from this interpersonal domain. The resistance can take various forms, not just widespread political action, but also in the day-to-day practices of creating new self-definition.

Collins' assertion of the universality of the four domains of power in the matrixes allows for all standpoints to be recognized and evaluated in social science research. The matrix acknowledges the situatedness of individuals living in complex intersecting social structures. Collins also accounts for the transformative and mutating nature of oppression. She asserts "because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of an individual U.S. Black woman's self-definitions intermingle and become more salient: Her gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother, her race when she searches for housing..."⁶¹ This is true for other marginalized people. The salience of an identity may change over time and place, but the focus remains on the position of power and dominance. By centering Black feminist thought, the focus still remains on African-American women's position in relation to intersecting oppression as the oppression shifts. Collins' matrix of domination extends earlier feminist standpoint epistemology to incorporate intersectionality.

Collins argues that African-American men and women have unique sexual politics because of their particular situatedness in United States history. Similarly, Asian Americans have also experienced a unique history where immigration, land and labor laws had an affect on gender relations.⁶² Asian Americans also have a different relationship to nationhood in the United States compared to whites and African Americans because they face continual struggles with being perceived as foreign.⁶³

Asian American men face a particular placement on a gendered hierarchy and deal with battles against hegemonic masculinity that operate differently than masculinity has for their Latino or African-American male counterparts. Asian American women also have different perspectives and life experiences than white women and other women of color.⁶⁴ While Asian American men and women may share similar experiences facing white hegemony, their gender identity may cause differences in how that racism manifests. David Eng argues that racial analysis of Asian Americans is inadequate without the consideration of how their sexuality has been constructed.⁶⁵ Collins' matrix of dominance is a starting point for me to critically analyze the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and nationhood.

METHODOLOGY: STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY, EXTENDED CASE METHOD, AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

There are three key elements to my methodological approach for this project: standpoint epistemology, extended case method and narrative analysis. My fifty-five (55) interview participants self-identify as twenty-nine (29) women, twenty-five (25) men; one (1) self-identifies as "female-bodied gender queer." Ethnically, they self-

identify as Taiwanese, Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Korean, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Hmong, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Japanese, Thai, and multi-racial American. The umbrella term, Asian American is used to describe the participants.⁶⁶ The age range is 18 to 69. The respondents come from varying geographic regions around the country.⁶⁷ I begin my research with standpoint epistemology, where the voice of the “marginal” is the starting point. Specific to feminist theory, the focus lies on power differentials that exist in gender relations; I am extending the feminist theory to include racial marginalization. Harding asserts, “The activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought – for *everyone’s* research and scholarship – from which humans’ relations with each other and the natural world can become visible.”⁶⁸ My research addresses intersecting identities placed in overlapping hierarchies, so it will be a delicate task to describe how they operate separately and in combination. Power has been centered in scholarship from the top of hierarchy, so standpoint epistemology creates knowledge from a different perspective. The research is situated where one stands in a marginal position and investigates how a person “comes to know.” However, a person in a more powerful position in a hierarchy can also contribute, as long as standpoint position is acknowledged. The goal is to provide a look from the “bottom up.”⁶⁹

Standpoint epistemology acknowledges situatedness instead of labeling it as an “objective point-of-view” because the whole notion of “objectivity” is interrogated. Feminist scholars assert that history and knowledge labeled as “objective” produced by academics has largely been “phallogentric.”⁷⁰ Harding contends:

Thus the standpoint claims that all knowledge attempts are socially situated and that some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects challenge some of the most fundamental assumptions of the scientific world view and the Western thought that takes sciences as its model of how to produce knowledge.⁷¹

Sandra Harding asserts, “one can see these sexist and or androcentric practices in the discipline.”⁷² Much of the knowledge that has been produced has come from the standpoint of privileged white men. The situatedness of standpoint epistemology can elaborate on the experiences and contributions made by women.⁷³ The standpoint approach works to “eliminate dominant group interests and values of *successfully colonized* minorities.”⁷⁴ My research project is an exercise in elaborating on the situated experiences of Asian American men and women.

The research presented in this project is grounded in a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methods centralize the everyday life experiences of individuals. Context and human interactions become imperative to understanding greater social phenomenon at the institutional level and extended case method (ECM) allows for an exploration of the micro level occurrences. While qualitative methods are used to make meaning of social phenomenon at the micro level and highlight the relationship of these interactions to the macro level.⁷⁵ By untangling the connection of micro level incidents to the larger macro power structure, it can help us understand the impact that social structure has on individual, human actors.⁷⁶ Across disciplines, scholars identify the need for methods that can further decipher statistical information.

While quantitative methods illuminate shifts or movement of group trends, such as Asian American intermarriage rates, qualitative methods can help to explain the

phenomenon. The use of qualitative methods thus aids in filling gaps in the research that cannot be explained by quantitative methods alone. In this research, I rely on the use of the extended case method because it elucidates the link between the micro and macro by placing “everyday life in its extralocal and historical contexts.”⁷⁷ In this case, extended case method informs us how external forces shape the lives of Asian American men and women, putting things in individual context as it relates to systems or race, gender, and sexuality.⁷⁸

Narrative analysis takes as its starting point the belief that, as human beings, we understand our experiences and ourselves by telling stories. These can be as specific as accounts of particular events, or as broad as an entire life story. Meaning-making involves storying as interview participants attempt to make sense of their experiences. My task during narrative analysis is to understand those stories, examining not only their content but also their structure. Analyzing content is fundamental to any mode of qualitative research; what narrative analysis offers is a chance to expand our understanding of informants by examining how they tell us what they want us to know. Narrative structure is both holistic (the form the story takes) and particular (the language used to tell it). Narrative analysis, then, addresses both the content and the form of interview data. Although individuals are sharing these narratives, other elements of social life affect their experiences. Their story telling will incorporate larger ideologies of placement in social structure, media discourse and cultural values.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ASIAN AMERICAN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: 1800s – WORLD WAR II

While there is record of Asians in the United States as dating to the late 1700s, the first sizeable groups did not immigrate to the U.S. and its territories until the 1850s. In Hawaii, laborers were needed to work on sugar plantations; Chinese men filled that role. Chinese labor was also used for mining during the gold rush in California with 20,000 individuals entering the United States in 1852. Other Asian laborers were coming from nations including Korea, the Philippines, Japan, and India. Chan asserts, “Although these five Asian groups came under different sets of circumstances all were recruited as workers by U.S. capitalists to meet the need for inexpensive and manipulable labor in the still-developing U.S. capitalist economy.”⁷⁹ The growing strength of the United States as a nation was dependent on the stolen land of indigenous people and the free and cheap labor of people of color. Asians fulfilled the same labor needs as Africans had on plantations. The interests of the white elites who ruled the nation were to continue to find cheap labor. Asian immigration was restricted because white ruling elites had no interest in having them become citizens; it was about capitalist exploitation that was racialized in nature. Espiritu argues:

Because what U.S. interests desired was labor power, they gave little attention to the family and community life of Asian immigrants except as it related to the latter’s economic productivity. In most instances families were seen as a threat to the efficiency and exploitability of the workforce and were actively prohibited.⁸⁰

Seen as laborers, not as humans, the policies in place to restrict families, more specifically the entrance of women and children, had a profound affect on the Asian men

that entered the country. Asian men had no kinship networks and no access to intimate heterosexual partners.

These men formed “bachelor societies” creating friendships with other men as replacement families and kinship networks. Since there were no women in these arrangements to do domestic, reproductive labor, these men learned to cook, do dishes and laundry. The homosocial elements of the bachelor communities and the domestic practices of men living in them had an emasculating effect. During this time, there was a small population of women, but the majority worked as prostitutes.

...[T]he shortage of women affected gender relations within Asian America in profound ways: it prevented the formation of patriarchal nuclear families, enhanced the social and economic power of the few women in these immigrant communities and prompted men in womanless households to learn domestic skills and to develop new family structure that moved beyond heterosexual norms.⁸¹

In 1870, women made up 7.2 percent of Chinese immigrants.⁸² There was fear that Chinese prostitutes would bring in “especially virulent strains of venereal diseases, introduce opium addiction, and entice young white boys to a life of sin.”⁸³ The Page Act was introduced to decrease the number of women because they were assumed to be these amoral, disease-carrying prostitutes. Once this law was enacted in 1875, the sex ratio became even more skewed, reaching its peak in 1890 at a rate of 27 men to 1 woman. There were similar trends in sex ratios for Asian Indian, Korean, Filipino, and Japanese Americans.⁸⁴ Donald Goellnicht suggests that the targeted exclusion of Chinese women was a “deliberate agenda by mainstream (white) culture to “prevent any increase in the Chinese American population and to undermine the virility of Chinese and Chinese American men.”⁸⁵

The law was used as a mechanism to control the sexuality of Asian American men. Asian men were constructed as impotent and their women as “whores.” Controlling sexuality and creating controlling images of Asians in the United States reifies white supremacy, and these images become embedded into the white racial frame.⁸⁶ These images are both racialized and gendered; thus, hegemonic masculinity is also reinforced. The U.S. government (namely the white actors who ran it) played a central role in creating an environment of state-controlled sexuality for Asian Americans. The laws determined with whom and if Asian American men could have heterosexual relationships. Anti-miscegenation laws made it impossible for Asian men to marry outside of their race. Thus, Asian men had to create their kinships with each other, as Espiritu describes.

Institutionally barred from normative (hetero)sexual reproduction and nuclear family formations, many bachelors created viable and supportive social networks to sustain themselves in a hostile society, often by redefining and extending the concept of “family” to include new forms of “queer domesticity.”⁸⁷

With small numbers, single Asian women in the United States became highly prized and were thus empowered with some bargaining tools to pick the most financially sound bachelors. Asian women who were sex workers received offers of marriage, which allowed them to escape their exploitative work for the chance of matrimony and raising a family.⁸⁸

Men who were married before immigrating had the responsibility of sending back wages to their families overseas. The restrictive immigration laws in the United States were impacting couples and families transnationally, and “split households” left women in Asia caring for their families without the help of their husbands. Espiritu

asserts, “The split-household arrangement, enforced and maintained by racist and gendered U.S. immigration policies, made possible the maximum exploitation of male workers.”⁸⁹ The Asian male workers could be bought cheaply, and they were obligated to support families overseas. As they toiled in mines and laid railroad tracks, their wives were raising the next generation of laborers that would work in the United States. While Asian men in the United States were being exploited for their labor, they were facing contradictory stereotyping. On the one hand, they were painted as ruthless, hypersexed, violent, dangerous with strong appetites for white women.⁹⁰ Media warned of the “Yellow Peril,” worried that the “shifty” Asian man may attack at any moment. The Chinese became so detested that the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan served a similar purpose. On the other hand, at the opposite end of the spectrum, racist and sexist legislative moves were creating new stereotypes of Asian American men as impotent and asexual. Asian women in the United States, although exploited as sex workers, were gaining some independence from the disproportionate sex ratios.

The restrictive labor market limited types of work available to Asian American men. Espiritu asserts, “The racialized and gendered immigration policies and labor conditions...also forced Asian men into ‘feminized’ jobs such as domestic service, laundry work, and food preparation.”⁹¹ Chinese “houseboys” became symbols of the upper class in San Francisco.⁹² Asian men working in the domestic realm were also of Korean, Filipino, and Japanese descent. Asian men were constructed in the media as hypersexual and threatening to white women from 1850-1940.⁹³ Espiritu states:

The existence of the Chinese houseboy and launderer – and their forced bachelor status – further bolstered the stereotype of the feminized and asexual or homosexual Asian man. Their feminization, in turn confirmed their assignment to the state’s labor force that performed “women’s work.”⁹⁴

The emasculating process became cyclical as domestic labor put Asian and Asian American men in subordinate positions to both white men and white women. White women who lived in households that could afford a “houseboy” would then exercise power over him as her servant, compounding the emasculating effects.

The domestic labor performed by Asian men outside the home sometimes disrupted the patriarchal structure within their own households. Some Asian women who reunited with their husbands saw a more equitable division of labor because the men possessed skills in cooking and cleaning.⁹⁵ However, the majority of homes still retained traditional patriarchal form where women worked a “second shift.” Asian female laborers were often the most affordable, more so than their male counterparts. Asian male laborers were making much less than their white counterparts as well, so it became essential for the women to work to support the family. If women were not in sexually exploitative work, they were in factory, farming, or service work and at the bottom of the pay scale. Even Asian male entrepreneurs exploited Asian women as paid laborers.⁹⁶ The war with Japan during World War II brought a great shift in the immigration and labor patterns of Asians in the United States, which also caused shifts in gender relations. The impact of the war on Japanese Americans was much different than other Asian American groups, but gendered stereotyping remained pan-ethnic.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ASIAN AMERICAN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: WORLD WAR II – PRESENT

A more obvious change in the lives of Japanese Americans during World War II was wartime internment. Japanese Americans experienced unique racialized oppression and shifts in gender relations during internment. Relative to Japanese Americans, other Asian American groups saw “improved lives,” specifically with access to education and new work opportunities in manufacturing and professional arenas.⁹⁷ Despite different experiences among Asian American groups during the war and immediately after the war, all Asian Americans faced similar imposed racial and gendered stereotyping.

The incarceration of Japanese Americans began almost immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Executive Order 9066 had been signed, and 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were placed into concentration camps. The camps caused great disruption of the family structure. Espiritu asserts:

The interment transformed the balance of power in families: Husbands lost some of their power over wives, as did parents over children. Until the internment, the Issei⁹⁸ man had become the undisputed authority over his wife and children: He had been both the breadwinner and the decision-maker for the entire family. Now “he had no rights, no home, no control over his own life” (Houston and Houston 1973, p. 62). Most important, the interment reversed the economic roles, and thus the status and authority of family members. With their means of livelihood cut off indefinitely, Issei men lost their role as breadwinners. Despondent over the loss of almost everything they had worked so hard to acquire, many Issei men felt useless and frustrated, particularly as their wives and children became less dependent on them.⁹⁹

Women interned did not have to cook and clean up meals because the meals were prepared communally and there rarely was running water or cooking facilities. This allowed women to spend time independent of men, enhancing their friendship networks

and being involved in adult education classes and other activities. The Nisei began to spend time with peers as opposed to their own families. Many Nisei were sent away from internment camps to finish their college educations in the Midwest and East. This was significant because 40 percent of the relocated students were women.

Women's newfound independence was one major shift in the gender structure for Japanese Americans at the cost of family structure and Issei men's manhood. The Nisei men suffered as well with high rates of alcohol abuse, and 40 percent did not reach the age of fifty-five.¹⁰⁰ The loss of prime farmland worsened the situation after internment. Fathers could not pass on their land to their sons and Issei men and women who had previously owned successful farms or business were relegated to toiling in service work. Men worked "as gardeners, janitors, kitchen helpers, and handymen; their wives as domestic servants garment workers, and cannery workers."¹⁰¹ The Nisei who had greater educational opportunities than their parents still struggled with post-war anti-Japanese sentiment. They faced difficulty entering the workforce of their choice. Internment proved to further emasculate Japanese-American men.

While Japanese Americans faced overt racial discrimination, people of Chinese, Korean, Filipino and Asian Indian ancestry experienced a relatively different treatment. Their countries of origin were U.S. allies; so many men and some women joined the World War II military effort, which "dramatically changed [white] American public attitudes toward these groups."¹⁰² There was also a great need for labor in manufacturing that allowed Asian American men and women to get higher-salaried jobs than their service industry work.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, these better wages were still not on par with

white workers; Asian American women remained the lowest paid of the bunch. Even with lower wages relative to their white counterparts, the earnings from World War II manufacturing sparked the beginning of an Asian American middle class.

World War II was the beginning of a long string of wars with countries in Asia. As a result, a large population of “war brides” immigrated to the United States. Many Chinese Americans serving during World War II were eligible for citizenship. These men were also allowed to bring over wives with the passage of the War Brides Act of 1945. Women made up 89 percent of Chinese immigrants to the United States from 1945 to 1953. This was also the trend for many other Asian Americans, creating more gender parity. However, this immigration of Asian women to the United States was not without problems. The U.S. immigration service commonly detained Asian, mostly Chinese, women who were the wives of Chinese-American husbands because they were assumed to be prostitutes.¹⁰⁴ The racial stereotyping of these women was taken directly from images from the white racial frame. With the influx of these women, there was a Chinese-American baby boom. Patriarchal Chinese culture promotes a dominant ideology that prefers sons over daughters, thus, the young women of the second generation

also had to combat sexist stereotypes of Asian American women, particularly the image of the sexy, submissive prostitute popularized by Nancy Kwan in the 1960 film *The World of Suzie Wong*. Besieged by mass media images that constructed and reinforced U.S. standards of beauty as “blond, blue eyed, and big breasted,” young Chinese American women on the 1950s received a message of inferiority from the larger society as strong as that which they received at home.¹⁰⁵

Within Chinese-American households, and many other Asian American groups, gender scales tipped in favor of men. Outside the home, these women continued to face sexually

exploitative and controlling images stemming from the white racial frame, further supporting white supremacy and hegemonic masculinity. Women painted as perpetually sexually available to white men while Asian American men are constructed as castrated or impotent further reifies the hierarchical racial and gender structures.

From 1952 to the present, a split-immigration pattern has caused an ethnic and class bifurcation of Asian Americans. A mass “intellectual migration” began in the 1950s, bringing highly educated and skilled middle- to upper-class East and South Asians to the United States for work in professional industries. East- and South-Asian Americans are often deemed “model minorities” and have higher household incomes than all other racial groups, including whites. For these “more successful” Asian Americans, patriarchal authority is challenged, but there is greater equity division of labor in the home with both spouses working in highly skilled jobs or owning their own businesses. Although there is more independence for women in these homes, they still do more of the domestic labor.

Of Asians immigrating as refugees, a high concentration coming from Southeast Asia, the men have a greater loss of status. They do not have the same educational background, skill set or access to resources. Espiritu asserts,

The recent growth of female-intensive industries – and the racist and sexist “preference” for the labor of immigrant women – has enhanced women’s employability over that of men and has chanted their role to that of a coprovider, if not primary provider for families...Men’s loss of status in both public and private arenas has placed sever pressures on the traditional family, leading at times to resentment, spousal abuse, and divorce.¹⁰⁶

With the ability to exploit female Asian labor because it is cheaper than male labor, capital interest further disrupts the family structure and gender relations in these homes.

The lack of employability of lower classed Asian American men further complicates the sexual politics of Asian Americans. While I have given much historical evidence of structural factors that have shaped the racialized and gendered lives of Asian Americans, these institutionalized practices also affect ideology. One aspect of the white racial frame is the ability for it to create alienating social relationships.¹⁰⁷ Through racist and sexist laws and practices, Asian Americans experience not only alienating relationships in relation to other racial groups, but within their own relationships as men and women.

OVERVIEW

There is great variation within masculinity and femininity. Although the scope seems narrow when presented a hegemonic ideal in the widespread media. There is a white, middle-upper class, heterosexual standard that is pervasive. Any variations from these images of hegemonic masculinity or emphasized femininities occupy subordinate positions of interlocking social hierarchies. Race intersects these constructions of genders. For Asian Americans this is further complicated by the various ethnicities that are incorporated under the umbrella term. Asian American masculinity and femininity is also quite varied. There are many different stereotypes of Asian American men and women based on perceived country of origin, class, education, religion, and sexuality. There also variations in terms of physical body – i.e., height, weight, and skin tone. I do not contend that this is a complete exhaustive volume addressing all the variation. This work is an introduction to the conversation about Asian American gender and sexuality.

Coupled with white racial ideology and racist controlling media images, all Asian Americans face a reality of imposed stereotyping regardless of nation of ancestry,

class, sexuality or gender. In film, “Asian males yield to the sexual superiority of the white males who are permitted filmically to maintain their sexual dominance over both white women and women of color.”¹⁰⁸ This is eerily parallel to the social reality of Asian American men. Among all other races and genders, Asian American women have the highest outmarriage rates. The majority of Asian American women who outmarry have white male partners.¹⁰⁹ There is a strained relationship between Asian American women and men as the media construct and portray the men as the most undesirable and incapable sexual partners.

Both Western film and literature promote dichotomous stereotypes of the Asian woman: either she is the cunning Dragon Lady or the servile Lotus Blossom Baby (Tong, 1994, p. 197). Though connoting two extremes, these stereotypes are interrelated: both eroticize Asian women as exotic “others” – sensuous, promiscuous, but untrustworthy. Whereas American popular culture denies “manhood” to Asian men, it endows Asian women with an excess of “womanhood,” sexualized them but also impugning their sexuality.¹¹⁰

These omnipresent controlling images in the media exacerbate the “oriental fetishism” Asian and Asian American women face.¹¹¹ Controlling images affecting both Asian American men and women exist “to define the white man’s virility and the white man’s superiority.”¹¹² At the core of this imaging is hegemonic whiteness and masculinity. The necessity to define white male virility and superiority through demeaning images of Asian Americans is essential in retaining white supremacy. These images are not contemporary inventions of Hollywood. In the United States, Asian Americans have faced 150 years of imposed identities through racialized and gendered projects. My hope is that through my participant narratives, we may begin to understand how these socio-

historical exercises of white supremacy are affecting Asian American men and women today.

CHAPTERS

In Chapter II, I introduce my key concepts. With the use of respondent narratives, I detail how Asian American masculinity and femininity is constructed and how it operates in a racial hierarchy. These accounts illuminate the gendered and sexualized racism faced by Asian Americans. The male respondents share experiences that highlight how “racial castration” occurs in the socialization of Asian American men. Asian American women are met with an exotification and Orientalization as sexual bodies but are also awarded a unique empowerment that is not as available to their male counterparts. I argue that this gendering and sexualizing process plays a specific role in maintaining the racial status quo. The chapter is divided into three major sections as sites of socialization: Family, Community, and the Media. Each of these sites of socialization is broken down into three subsections: gender, the body, and sexuality. Respondents detail ways in which they were pressures or influenced to meet certain gendered racialized or sexualized expectations. Questions addressed in this chapter are: What methods are used to enforce these gendered and racialized stereotypes? How does gender socialization push Asian Americans into an intersected racial hierarchy? How are the experiences of men and women different?

Chapter III addresses the short- and long-term consequences of gendered and sexualized racist treatment for Asian American women. I will analyze narratives that discuss how intersected racial and gender identity affects self-image and self-esteem.

The women share their experiences as ethnosexualized beings, dealing with exotification and fetishism. The women discuss psychological and emotional wellbeing relative to racial and gender identities. Respondents discuss how femininity has specifically been shaped by racial identity.

Chapter IV details how the gendered and sexualized racialization process and “racial castration” has impacted Asian American men. Violence is a prevalent theme in gendered and racial formation. Asian American men begin as targets of violence and sometimes become perpetrators. This chapter gives possible insight to violent episodes from the Virginia Tech shooter, Cho Seung Hui, and Binghamton, N.Y., shooter, Jiverly Voong. Respondents address issues of self-image and dating. These male respondents say, "We're the ugly ones, and our women are hot," and, "I might as well not have a penis." Gay respondents discuss facing similar difficulties with emasculation in gay spaces. When these Asian American men resist their emasculating racism, it often mimics the hegemonic masculine image of powerful white male counterparts. They immerse themselves in activities such as sports to increase physical strength and join and create all-Asian groups, like fraternities, to create support networks.

Chapter V explores how sexual and romantic relationships and examines the dynamics of Asian American intra-racial and interracial relationships. Respondents balance messages from their families and external forces. There is a hierarchy of partners based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Respondents discuss relationship hardship and success. I summarize my findings and discuss their implications, drawing larger conclusions about how race and gender operate in the lives of Asian Americans.

In Chapter VI, I discuss the resistance strategies my respondents use against gender and racial hierarchy. I also address the areas in need of further research based on implications that arise from my analysis. I conclude by offering both individual and structural level strategies to combat racism and sexism.

NOTES

¹ Patricia Hill Collins *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

⁵ Clark, Kenneth, & Mamie Clark, "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children," In T.M. Newcomb & E.L. Hartley (Eds.), *Reading in social psychology*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1947); Kenneth Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

⁶ Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷ Ibid. *Homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality* are used when referring to sexuality. I also use the term *queer* if respondents self-identify in that manner.

⁸ Jeffrey Weeks, "The Construction of Homosexuality." in *Queer Theory/ Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 41-63.

⁹ In this and later sections I draw on Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 1–45 and 290–299, and on Joe R. Feagin and Clairece B. Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations* (Eighth edition; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2008), chapters 10–11.

¹⁰ Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).

¹¹ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

¹² Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996).

¹³ Much of the emasculation in the media of Asian American men is focused specifically on men of East Asian descent. South Asian men, especially after September 11, 2001, have been constructed more closely to Arab or Middle Eastern men. Southeast Asian men are less prevalent in the media, and when they are present, they are associated with military conflicts in Southeast Asia or constructed similarly to men of color or working class white uneducated men involved in crime. However, my respondents vary in Asian

region of origin, and many of the South Asian, Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian men share similar experiences with men of East Asian descent. Asian American women also have variations in gendered and racialized stereotyping by geographic region, immigration status and class. These variations are further explained in subsequent chapters of this book. Please see chapters IV and V.

¹⁴ David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Dana Y Takagi, "Homophobia: Why Bring It Up?" Pp. 99-102 in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Eds. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, Davide M. Halperin. New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 247.

¹⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

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- ³⁴ Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.
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- ⁶³ Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethic Experience* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers

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⁶⁴ Prasso, *The Asian Mystique*.

⁶⁵ Eng, *Racial Castration*.

⁶⁶ I use the umbrella term “Asian Americans” to describe my respondents, while acknowledging that the term does not fully embrace the diversity of the population. I use it to describe respondents from East, Southeast, and South Asia. I also have a few respondents from Pacific Islands such as the Philippines.

⁶⁷ We have lightly edited the interview quotes for grammar, stutter words (“you know”), and clarity. Pseudonyms are given to all respondents to conceal their identity, and some details have been omitted or disguised in the quotes from interviews to increase the anonymity of participants.

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⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hélène Cixous, “Laugh of Medusa,” in *French Feminism Reader*, edited by Kelly Oliver (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

⁷¹ Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology,” 56.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cixous, “Laugh of Medusa.”

⁷⁴ Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology,” 74.

⁷⁵ Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method,” in *Ethnography Unbound*, edited by M. Burawoy, A. Burton, A. A. Ferguson, K. J. Fox, J. Gamson, N. Gartrell, L. Hurst, C. Kurzman, L. Salzinger, J. Schiffman, & S. Ui, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 271-287;

⁷⁶ Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method.”

⁷⁷ Howard M. Bahr and Theodore Caplow. “Middletown as an Urban Case Study.” Pp. 80-120 in *The Case for the Case Study*, edited by J. R. Feagin, A. M. Orum, & G. Sjoberg. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1991), 86; Elliot G. Mishler, “Missing Persons: Recovering Developmental Stories/Histories.” Pp. 73-99 in *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*, edited by R. Jessor, A. Colby & R. A. Shweder. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

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- ⁸⁰ Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*, 19
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁸² Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
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- ⁸⁴ Bruno Lasker, *Filipino Immigration to the United States and to Hawaii* (New York: Arno, 1969).
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- ⁸⁶ Feagin, *Systemic Racism*
- ⁸⁷ Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*, 25.
- ⁸⁸ Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
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- ⁹⁰ Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*.
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- ⁹² Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
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- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁸ First generation Japanese Americans are referred to as Issei, Second generation Japanese as Nisei, and third generation are Sansei.
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- ¹⁰² Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 121.
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- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*
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¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Feagin 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men*, 104.

¹⁰⁹ Kumiko Nemoto, "Intimacy, Desire, and the Construction of Self in Relationships Between Asian American Woman and White American Men" *Journal of Asian American Studies* (February, 2006) 27- 54.

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CHAPTER II

CONSTRUCTING AND MARGINALIZING ASIAN AMERICANS

Some of my earliest gendered memories involve gendered messages and disciplining. I have very distinct images of my mother telling me that my father really wishes he had a son. Being the youngest of three daughters, I was the supposed "last chance" for a male heir in my family. I never knew for sure if it was something my father really desired or my mother. She just happened to be the one to verbalize it, frequently. In my three-year-old mind, I took this to mean I was already an incredible disappointment as soon as I exited the womb. While unable to articulate my feelings, I knew that "failing" to be born a male-bodied person was seen as inferior to being born female-bodied. So I made valiant efforts to correct it. Several times in my life, I've had to hear my mother recount a story of a phone call she received from day care. "Mrs. Chou," they told my mother, "Rosalind is a little bit confused. She thinks she's a boy. She walks around telling everyone that she is a boy." My mother found this amusing. While recounting the story to me, she always chuckled. However, she became more concerned when my style of dress and my hobbies were "tomboyish." Instead of Barbie dolls, I wanted a C.H.I.P.s¹ action set for Christmas. It was fully equipped with a motorcycle helmet, gun belt, and California Highway Patrol badge. I climbed trees instead of making crafts. I jumped off the roof instead of jumping rope. The scrapes and scratches all over my knees became something of deep concern for my mother. She would tell me, "Rosalind, no man will ever want to marry you with those scars." I

remember thinking to myself, “I don't want to marry a man anyways.” These were quite clearly early tactics of gender socialization. First, it was clear that boys were valued in my family more than girls. To lack a penis was the final disappointment. Not understanding that I couldn't just become a boy, it seemed quite logical to me to play the part. I did my best to perform masculinity. All my friends were boys, I played sports extensively, I had poor hygiene, and I refused to wear skirts and dresses. I so much wanted to be what my parents wanted, the son they've always wanted. My performance became so convincing that, for part of my life, I was referred to by family acquaintances and neighbors as Charlie (my father's name) Junior. All the nagging and complaining from my mother just pushed me further into rebellion. Every effort she made to force me into proper feminine clothing, the more I longed to be as boyish as possible.

The gender is socially constructed. Gender is performative. My attempts to be a "boy" were based on perceived external pressures. I sought to mimic what I found to be the most valued of the genders. The mimicry was based on social cues and definitions of what it means to be a boy. However, my female body did not match my performance, which resulted in policing and discipline from day care workers. At a very young age, these behaviors can be seen as playful and as stages out of which one grows. However, expectations to follow gendered scripts become more pronounced over the life course. As I shared in Chapter I, sexualized gender and racial bias expectations became more apparent. Family, peers, and teachers begin to put more pressure on choosing the gender and moving away from androgyny.

The importance of disciplining me into a distinct and clear gender category is about maintaining hegemonic masculinity. A female-bodied person performing masculinity is a disruption and an alternative masculinity.² There were other elements to this early training. First, is the transmission of Taiwanese values of boys and men over girls and women. This is seen in many countries in Asia. There are a disproportionate number of males in Mainland China because of elective abortions and overseas adoptions of Chinese girls. Korea began a major advertising campaign to show that girls are just as good as boys.³ Patriarchy operates in a different manner in the United States, but American girls of all racial and ethnic categories are given messages of gender inferiority. My experience and the public and direct discussion of the importance of a son were specifically shaped by my parent's socialization in Taiwan. These gendered values were presented to me and greatly influenced my identity and my actions. Similarly, I argue that gendered and racialized meanings can shape many aspects of Asian American lives. Gender socialization is mutable over time and contingent on geographic location. However, power and domination consistently play a key role in men's position of power over women.

The second key point from my personal story that I want to emphasize is the policing or attempted policing of my body. My mother wanted me to make sure I maintained a scar-free body, not for me to avoid pain and suffering, but for me to be able to attract a husband. I was directed to put my body in specific types of clothing and maintain a certain level of personal hygiene so that I could appeal to the opposite sex. This brings me to my third point I want to emphasize in my story: There was a clear

expectation that I would be heterosexual. The fact that the scars might scare away a potential partner that was a woman as well was of no concern to my mother. A lesbian relationship was not a plausible option.

This chapter is an in-depth look the gender socialization process for Asian Americans. It is divided into three major sections as sites of socialization: family, community, and in the media. Each of these sites of socialization is broken down into three subsections: gender, the body, and sexuality. Respondents detail ways they were pressured or influenced to meet certain gendered, racialized, or sexualized expectations.

A social constructionist perspective argues that the meaning of gender (masculinity and femininity) is neither transhistorical nor culturally universal, but rather varies from culture to culture and within any one culture over time. Asian American masculinity, for example, has moved from dangerous sexual predator to asexual or homosexual stereotypes.

I acknowledge that there are numerous masculinities and femininities. This is further complicated by the variety in cultural backgrounds of different Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans. The common thread shared by these participants is their relationship with power and domination. Their position as marginalized or subordinated masculinities, femininities, and racial status has a distinct role in shaping aspects of their lives.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Antonio Gramsci conceptualized cultural hegemony as a rule of society by a social group through imposed “common sense.”⁴ Hegemony works by normalizing ideologies or everyday beliefs (values, myths, norms, and practices). These normalized ideologies are used as the foundation for complex systems of political, social, and economic domination. Cultural hegemony is not necessarily accomplished through violence, though it could be reinforced by force and coercion or threats of violence. The key to hegemony is how the ideologies of the dominant group become the everyday common knowledge of those who are not in the dominant group. Hegemony can be visible, but it is largely invisible as it is “naturalized” into the culture through practice, language, and media.

Connell and Messerschmidt define hegemonic masculinity as a “pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue.”⁵ Hegemony is also the “ascendancy [of a social group] achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.”⁶ Sociologists and feminists equate hegemonic masculinity with white, heterosexual, middle-class men or those who inhabit positions of authority in society, which can vary across societies.⁷ Hegemonic masculinity is normative and only a small fraction of men may embody or enact it.⁸ Hegemonic masculinity is not static; it transitions and challenges.⁹ Hegemony depends on both external and internal hegemony. External hegemony is men’s domination over/of women (valorization of masculinity over femininity). Internal hegemony is men’s domination over/of other men (valorization of hegemonic

masculinity over other subordinate(d)/marginalized masculinities). Emerging from internal hegemonic masculinity, are other masculinities, marginalized and subordinated masculinities. Subordinate(d) masculinities are masculinities associated with sexually transgressive men, such as gay or bisexual men. Marginalized masculinities are masculinities associated with men of color or poor or working-class men. These masculinities do not undermine hegemony. In fact, hegemonic masculinity *depends* on the subordination of men who are members of marginalized or subordinate masculine groups and all women. The meaning of masculinity is not constant over the course of any man's life and will change as he grows and matures. Men construct masculinity in accordance with their position and social structures and, therefore, their access to power and resources.¹⁰ To achieve the greatest access to power and resources, there are many tactics used to subordinate women and groups of men.

Other mechanisms of hegemonic masculinity include “[c]ultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives.”¹¹ The delegitimation of alternatives takes the form of the subordinated and marginalized masculinities and the tacit assumption of the inferiority of femininity to masculinity. Some mechanisms of hegemony are quite visible (men slapping each other’s backs), while other mechanisms “operate by invisibility, removing a dominant form of masculinity from the possibility of censure.”¹² Maintenance involves surveillance (of men) and “exclusion” (of women).¹³ At different times, men may benefit from masculine domination because hegemonic masculinity is relational and defined through and against other genders. Even if a man is considered a member of a

marginalized or subordinate(d) masculine group, he may receive beneficial actions and behaviors, such as earning a higher salary, being a father, and having easy access to sexual partners.¹⁴

Similarly, there is a constructed femininity that allows women who closely match the ideal greater access to power and resources. Asian American men and women do not fit the hegemonic masculine or feminine ideal, just as most men and women do not. Additionally, they are unable to access all the privileges accompanying whiteness. There are tremendous pressures internal and external to closely match hegemonic ideals. The following sections of this chapter detail these pressures to meet these ideals.

EVIDENCE OF SOCIALIZATION

Taking care of one's responsibilities is one construction of masculinity attributed to what men should do. Those responsibilities include having a career or job, being educated, and having enough money to support a wife and family. This is a place of much criticism for black men. Historical and systemic racist practices explained how all those responsibilities have been more difficult to come by. For Asian American men as model minorities, these responsibilities seem to come a bit easier, though this does not afford them a higher status of masculinity. Patricia Hill Collins states that they're not as subordinated as black men.¹⁵ However, I would argue that their racial castration, in some aspects, makes them more subordinated. But this is not a competition to see who can be more subordinated. I am simply trying to point out the complexities of subordination and marginalization. It's not quite as easy to describe, and success as a model minority does not necessarily award one a higher position.

Collins argues that white women's beauty, in many ways, is based on the construction of black women as unattractive.¹⁶ How do we explain Asian and Asian American women's beauty? Is it so contrasting? The racial middle position that Asian American women occupy keeps them from the most extreme stereotyping that African American women receive. Additionally, the promotion of sexual tourism during the Vietnam War promoted Asian women as sex partners for white and African American soldiers. Physically, Asian American women are lighter in skin tone and largely have straight hair, which resembles more closely the hegemonic standards of beauty. More extreme measures are taken by Asian and Asian American women to meet these standards through skin whitening products and cosmetic surgery.¹⁷

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as what it means to not be a woman. For Asian Americans looking at their own physical and gendered bodies, there is not enough contrast between male and female in size, muscle mass, body hair, and even “perceived” intelligence. This is a key point because hegemonic masculinity is based on highlighting differences between men and women; this becomes a “problem” area that further stigmatizes Asian American men as subordinate or marginalized. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity requires control over women. The representation of East Asians, especially in the public sphere, does not portray men as heads of household. While this may starkly contrast the reality in these homes, the media portrayal is clear. South Asian representations are quite different. South Asian men are viewed as dangerous, terrorists, jihadists, and sexist oppressive, male patriarchs. In some respects, they are represented as sexually deviant.¹⁸

INTIMACY OF HOME

One key difference between the socialization that my respondents received at home versus outside socialization is that the racialized meanings of inferiority to whiteness were not present. There would be heteronormative messages and also patriarchal structure that would be enforced. Messages are built about how an Indian girl should act or how a good Asian American man or boy is someone who is responsible and educated. The messages of racial inferiority were subtler. These messages came in suggestions for partners or descriptions of some physical attributes as more attractive. There would be suggestions that, in terms of work ethic, Asians performed better than Americans. The things most commonly enforced are heteronormative expectations. Queerness was never an expectation. Regulation of sexuality was quite prevalent as well and happened to women and girls, their bodies working under more scrutiny by parents. Their movements, their friend groups, and curfews were more strictly policed than those of brothers or other male relatives. Similarly, housework was usually divided by gender.

Gender operates in a different manner than race because it involves our intimate relationships with partners, siblings, and parents. When conflict arises racially, typically the opposing force is outside the family unit, from a larger social group that you are not bedding with. Asian Americans have these home lives that are insulated from outside forces. These cultures in the home may be influenced by immigration status, culture from nation of origin, tradition, etc. These are the first sites of gender socialization. This happens before birth with the preparation of the space for the arrival of a gendered baby. The way a parent may talk to the baby in the womb sets up a gendered experience before

birth. Since there are multiple masculinities and femininities that are affected by time and place, the generation one is part of and time spent in the United States can affect how invested an individual is in hegemonic masculinity in the United States.

GENDER

For first generation Asian Americans, it can be difficult to balance the “old world” and the “new world.” There are some clear gender sanctions that existed in their home country that can be hard to negotiate due to differences in gender expectations in the United States. Common practices in their home country may shape how they raise their own children. For example, Lily, a Taiwanese American, recalls early gender hierarchy in her family:

Well girls couldn't go out and do much or do anything. You couldn't go out at night. You couldn't even swim in the river. My husband could swim in the river or creek. We couldn't do that. We weren't allowed to ride a bike. No girls were riding bikes. So I don't even know how to ride a bike. And I don't know how to swim. [My parents] told us everything was dangerous.

The gender inequity in play is not the only area in which disparity exists. The privileges awarded to Lily's brother were greater than being able to swim in a creek or ride a bike. Her brother was valued in all aspects of society. He was worth more than a daughter. Property would be passed along to him, but the daughters would receive nothing. To really highlight the great gender disparity in the home, Lily recalls how her youngest sister was traded away so that the family could have another boy:

I'm the oldest one, the second was a boy and the third one was a girl. The fourth one was another girl so my grandpa talked to someone when my mother was pregnant and he started to look for someone to trade my sister for a boy. My mother was having another girl again and he wanted to trade her with someone else. So, when my mother was pregnant with my sister, another baby was going to be born at the time. It was a neighbor's daughter-in-law and she was pregnant

the same time as my mother so they had a matchmaker at the time to make arrangements. As soon as his granddaughter was born they we're going trade. Because that family already has six or seven boys so we know this was going to be a boy again. When my sister was born and three days after, my mother, I didn't know where she was, they took her somewhere so she wouldn't be home when the parents of baby boy came over to trade. My mom was crying to get her own child back but it was already been planned and traded already. So we took care of that boy but anyway after two years my mother was pregnant again and that was a boy so actually we had three girls and two boys and a family. Then after that trade we had three boys and two girls. After the third boy was born, my grandpa was very happy.

Lily learned that boys were prized over girls. It was a normalized practice and was not something people questioned as immoral. While her mother was upset about the decision, it was not her decision whether to keep her own child. Her grandfather wielded all the power in deciding to trade her sister for a boy. When asked about her thoughts on the practice of trading children, Lily replied,

That's just how things were. We couldn't say anything about it. My sister that was traded was upset about her whole life. She was traded to a very poor family and they were good to her because she was the only girl. She was lucky like that.

In some respects, her sister received better treatment by being the only girl in the other family. However, she did not receive the benefits of Lily's more affluent family. She did not get to go to a university like Lily and her other sister. While Lily insisted that she tried to raise her daughters differently in the United States, she still had great regret that she never had a son. Additionally, she was protective of her children and disallowed them to do things because "they were girls."

Respondents shared that there was often a distinct division of labor in the home when it came to housework. While both parents may have jobs in the professional realm, "traditional" roles existed inside the home. Mothers did the reproductive labor, cooking,

cleaning, and taking care of children. Daughters we encouraged to participate in and complete these tasks as well. Erin, a second generation Chinese American, was a recipient of this gender restrictive parenting. Her parents are from the same generation as Lily, immigrating to the United States after the Civil Rights Movement. Erin noted that she was given instruction from her mother to be a good hostess and is now well equipped to offer tea and cake to guests. In addition to this domestic training, there were restrictions regarding what she could do.

There are a lot of things that I wanted to do as a child and the explanation as to why I could not do them was ‘because you are a girl.’ I got that a lot. It really pissed me off. Like why I couldn’t go out and play with some people, or do something except with my brother.

Sometimes the brother, who is eight years younger than she, could do things she couldn’t do.

It was less of an excuse then because I was older. It was kind of ridiculous. Like, I’m older than this person and I can’t do the things they get to do. There was less of a justification. It was easy for them to tell me that because my one brother was older and he’s a boy. It was easy to tell me I couldn’t do certain things because I was a girl. I don’t remember anything specific, but I do remember it being drilled into me a lot. The ‘No, because you’re a girl.’ One very specific thing I remember is when I was a little kid, I wanted to play soccer, and there were girls in town who played soccer. It was a girl soccer league even in backwoods [Southern state]. I really wanted to play. I had some friends who played. My mom said, ‘No. That is a boy thing to do. You can’t do that. That’s for boys.’ But I was like, ‘But there’s girls...’ ‘No. Absolutely no.’ So I never got to do it. I think I held that grudge forever.

To her parents’ credit, the policing of her activities were not always motivated about things girls should and should not do. There were some elements of protection. A theme that occurs throughout this chapter is a theme of parents protecting their daughter from unwanted sexual attention. There was not the same concern about sons being assaulted

physically or sexually, which had different consequences for the boys and men, which are discussed at length in Chapter IV. These Asian American parents knew that their Asian daughters would be of particular interest to potential predators because of their race. Erin explains how she understood why her parents were overprotective:

There were little things like field trips the school would go on, the optional ones. There were those trips. I fought to go on the ski trip. I fought for that one. And then my cousin who is a girl got to go so my parents thought it was really unfair if she got to go but I couldn't go. I think that's why they gave in, but they really didn't want me to go. They thought it wouldn't be safe for girls. One of the things, and this is where it starts to merge with sexuality, which I didn't quite understand until later. They said, 'It's because you are a girl and because you are Chinese. People think you are different. It's dangerous.' And even when I was a kid, I was like, 'What the fuck is that? What do you mean, I'm different?' Sure, my skin was different, I looked a little different, but I'm not really different. I'm a girl just like any other girl. When I got older I understood what they meant by that and that it was ridiculous. In their eyes it was a factor. I think if you're a parent, you get scared. When I was a kid I had no idea. I didn't understand that much.

Erin found their actions to be exaggerated and exacerbated by media. With news reports of predators, her parents, especially her father, were very concerned for her safety. While those actions seemed "ridiculous," there is plenty of evidence that Asian girls and women have been exoticized and fetishized in the United States.¹⁹ Erin saw that concern from her parents. When asked for clarification about her parent's intentions, she explained,

I think what they meant by it is that they think that Asian women are exoticized. So men or counselors or whoever... I never went to a sleepover. Never in my entire life because they were deathly afraid of what might happen to me. I went to sleepovers at my relatives' house. That's different. They totally know my parents. That was their biggest excuse: 'Well, I don't know their parents, so you can't sleep over there.' They just didn't want me to be messed with. That was why. They thought there was that chance because I was Asian., because Asian girls are exotic to non-Asian people. They're weird and people want to experience that. I think that's what it is. That is sort of too weird of a

conversation for my parents to have. The most they could say is, 'They think you are different.' That's the best they could do at explaining that. That's where race, gender and sexuality come together. And that's not anything I understood until way, way later.

Erin's understanding of her parent's protectionism was accompanied with a greater understanding of sexuality and sexual predators. In Erin's experience, she has only dated whites and has felt exoticized to an extent in most of those relationships. Men have said directly to her, "There's something different" about her. These statements directly related to the concerns her parents had when she was younger. The protectionist actions are particularly strong for First generation Asian American parents. They have had experiences with colonialism and have seen or experienced acts of war involving sexual assault that their children have not. Immigrating the United States may not erase those fears, especially when some of those criminal acts came at the hands of American soldiers. There is a greater level of protection and policing of female bodies.

Charlene grew up with similar disparities with her brother. Even though she graduated from college and works as a teacher, when she comes home to visit her parents, they are still treated quite differently.

My brother was allowed to go out with his car and hang out with friends and I wasn't. And even now when I'm visiting home, I have a curfew. I need to be home by eleven. Or else they'll freak out and like where are you and even though I don't have any real consequences for me now that I'm older, I still do it. So we're about the same age except my brother can go out with friends and I can't.

While Charlene, Erin, and Lily all come from East Asian backgrounds, there is great similarity with Asian Indian families. Indira was often pushed to achieve and be a "good Indian girl." She faced pressures to be a "model minority" that were accompanied by certain gender expectations.

There is a good way to be a good Indian girl. And you know as I think back I received messages about how to be a good Indian girl. First and foremost from my mother like how you dress, how you smile, how you greet aunties at an Indian party, how to do the superficial social graces. And when I say superficial that's not a space of judgment it's just truly on the external level. You know the social graces that mark you as a polite, good-natured Indian girl, and why that's important because you're a reflection of your family and -- and the way you behave is a reflection of obviously how your parents raised you. These are things that are important. It occurred to me I also received messages about what it means to be a good Indian girl from men. So if there was a girl who doesn't behave appropriately I mean fathers -- my father not particularly because my father's kind of a special, he doesn't fit what I would call a stereotype of Indian fathers, but it would not be uncommon for a man -- man or a uncle or you know an elder father, elder male, elder in the family to determine that this is appropriate behavior for you. You don't argue you don't argue don't talk back it's really your job to set the mood. You set the tone for the environment and so if you have messed up the tone it's your fault.

The gendering process was a communal effort. Not only did she get policed by immediate family members, but also by members of the larger Indian community. In some ways, policing gendered behavior is a method through which immigrants attempt to maintain their cultural ties. While they may be looked upon as archaic and non-Western, there is an element of resisting the colonizer. To maintain these cultural practices is to maintain agency and one's dignity. Even requests of parents to have their children choose partners from the same racial group are efforts to maintain ties to culture. Indira discusses why her parents had a preference for her to find an Indian male partner.

I think they're thing was to preserve culture, it's not for the bad things -- so when I think of model minority stereotype the thing is that my parents wanted me to be a doctor. Not just because of just the field of medicine or science but the skin color piece was a part of that conversation. My mom wanted me to be in a profession where in spite of skin color somebody would have to come to you because you save lives. So she wanted me to have a profession where even discrimination wouldn't keep me from being able to put food on the table. That has nothing to do with prestige or power, her thought was everybody is always

going to need doctors. No matter what corner of the planet you're on anybody's going to need a doctor so that was her rationale. In the same way around the Indian male partner it was this is somebody who understands the values of our community the way that you've been raised and is not going to make fun of our cultural background and you'll see why those things are important later every it's always the you'll understand later on. And it's not to make excuses for our parents but I think it's important to understand their spirit. What's ironic the way the career and the personal life intersect, I remember when I went home and finally had the guts to tell my parents and I was not going to medical school, that I had no desire to be a doctor and my mom was very disappointed. One of the first comments out of her mouth was, now how are you going find a husband it wasn't like oh I didn't realize. I want you to go to medical school so you could find to find an Indian doctor. It wasn't about me becoming a doctor.

Indira's mother has a vested interest in maintenance of culture while simultaneously trying to protect Indira from discrimination. The pressure she received from her mother was misconstrued as simply academic pressure, not necessarily that her mother wants the best life possible for Indira free from racism. This is a protective measure and the only suitable option for this Asian Indian mother. There is an intersection of class and educational expectations, with racial (model minority), and gender (heteronormative marriage) expectations. Indira's mother implies that pursuing a prestigious occupation, like a physician, may be an opportunity to have agency and access power as a racialized other. Fundamentally, to believe that "model minority" efforts will protect Indira, her mother has to hope that meritocracy will provide advantages to people of color. However, there are still very gender specific lessons in addition to these racialized strategies.

And then it also occurred to me that at no point in time did my brothers receive these types of messages either around -- around masculinity or manhood or like any sort of gender norm. So they may have received behavior like messages on you don't do bad things because we Indian people like the thing that is you do to strive to be the model minority type things but not this is what an Indian man should be....And so systemically I think that that becomes a problem because you

have all these women either fit or reject these norms. So you know when you hear things that you either radically reject them or you try your hardest to -- to reconcile a reality so you fit because you want to fit into a community. And you have men that have no consciousness or no examination of self so either way even if I passively received norms I had to think about them.

Interestingly, the respondents during my research who had quite vivid memories of gender socialization were predominantly women. Most of the early gendered messages that my male respondents shared were from peers in places such as school and work. Indira points out that the lessons and policing were focused on her, to regulate her actions. While my male respondents had more freedom and privilege to just be while at home, they had to contend with greater threats of violent policing from boys and men outside of their families.

Like Indira, Fareena had a similar experience growing up. She is also a Desi, like Indira; however, her family emigrated from Bangladesh.

In the Bangladesh community, you definitely get the message of what a proper woman is supposed to do. The ideal girl is supposed to be quiet. She's never to be touched by a man or get *ruined*. There was a period when it seemed women would go into hiding and come out when they were ready to be approached for marriage. Otherwise, they were being *cultivated*. The cultivation is learning to cook, to keep house and all of that.

Again, there is a certain ritual of creating the ideal woman to attract a male partner. For a woman to be sexually active before marriage is the end of her. However, that standard does not exist for men. Fareena rebelled a great deal from these expectations and was ostracized by other women in the community for that rebellion:

Whenever we would go to the Bangladeshi parties, I really hated them because we were the only kids our age. I knew more about sports. I had a pretty high interest in politics. I couldn't go to where all the uncles and dads were and talk about that stuff. I had to be where all the whiney crying kids and aunties talking about saris. When I would hang around and my dad would let me talk and pay

attention, I could tell that other men were uncomfortable. I got the message and I left. I would hear later from my aunties, “Maybe she should go hang out with...” People addressed it in passive-aggressive ways. My mom would compliment other girls when she hears, “So and so’s daughter does this. She’s so good. She can cook this.”On my mom’s side, right after high school all they talked about was getting married. They all live in Bangladesh. They’re all about being petite, light skinned, light eyes and all that. I just never got along with them.

There is an emphasis on lightness as more attractive. The white standards of beauty have been incorporated into the lives of Bangladeshi Americans and Fareena’s Bangla cousins still living in Bangladesh.

One male respondent had a vivid memory of gender policing in the home because it intersected sexuality. While he did not receive overt messages and lessons about how to properly behave as a man, he was discouraged from doing anything that was seen as too feminine. Daniel, who is a Vietnamese American who identifies as gay, was discouraged from doing art. His family encouraged him to be involved with sports like football and when wanting to watch television programs such as “America’s Next Top Model” his father instructed him to “turn that off, that’s stupid, only girls watch that.” Daniel was one of the few male respondents to get direct gender discipline. The discipline was a response to his attempt to behave in ways seen as more “feminine.”

THE BODY

After giving a talk about the book *The Myth of the Model Minority*, a group of young East Asian American women began sharing with me the ways in which they related to my discussion of self-esteem and standards of beauty in the media. One woman said, “I remember when I was four-years-old, my mom looked at me and she said, ‘When you get older, we can get you the eyelid surgery.’ *I was four.*” The women

explained the techniques of using double-sided tape on top of the eyelid that could mimic the more Anglican eyelids. Another woman said, “I was at the hospital when my cousin was born. She did not have the double eyelid. Her mother looked at her, this newborn baby, and said, “She’s going to have the [eyelid] operation.” Alarming, the white standard of beauty is being exported globally. While there is a history of lighter skin preference in China, Japan, and India before colonization, the inclusion of cosmetic surgical alterations like eyelid surgery has a distinct racial element.

The Asian American body becomes another site of colonization. Brown bodies have been abused and neglected. When these values of white supremacy become internalized and hegemonic, whites do not have to actively oppress because people of color can do the work themselves. In this instance, Fareena’s mother wants to keep tight controls over her body to protect from potential “invaders.” Unfortunately, Fareena had a difficult time balancing the wishes of her parents and the norms at her middle school in the United States.

I played basketball. I was pretty good at it. At a certain point, I got the lecture of, “You should stop wearing shorts and start wearing track pants.” Which is insane. We never did that unless it was wintertime. It was basketball. We didn’t wear short shorts anyway. We wore the long shorts. I didn’t get why, but it was, “Oh, we don’t show our legs. That’s just too much skin.”

When asked if her brother faced the same clothing standards, Fareena replied,

Of course not. He could be shirtless. A weird thing is my mom would wear tank tops or skirts. And I would say, “But you’re wearing a tank top.” And, she even says this now when I wear something too revealing, “Yeah, but my husband says it’s okay. You don’t have a husband yet.”

In addition to the double standard regarding appropriate clothing, Fareena’s mother reinforced patriarchal and heterosexist norms by insisting that Fareena has to have

permission from a male partner. The way Fareena presented her body was a place of much contention between her and her mother. Using metaphors, her mother often encouraged the idea of female chastity being of the greatest importance. Modesty should be exercised at all times so that a woman does not get a bad reputation. These requests from her mother to keep from shaving body hair and being fully covered clashed with what her peers were doing at school. Fareena notes:

Mom and I didn't have the best relationship until after her cancer period. A lot of it had to do with me challenging her on a lot of issues about my body, how I wanted to present myself, how I wanted to dress and all that....My mom is really weight conscious. She always was even at 18 or 19. She went through a period where she admits she was anorexic because she was going through so much stress....She's always told me, "Don't become like your Aunts. Don't get a big butt. Don't get fat legs." I think I had stretch marks at a very young age, like 10, from playing sports. My muscles just grew. It wasn't even in all the places you're supposed to get stretch marks in. but her thing was, "You have to rub Vaseline on the everyday because you'll be *spoiled*. I didn't have any stretch marks until I was pregnant and you already have them." It was all about not becoming *spoiled*. I was about 110, 115, really, really skinny. All my ribs would show, but I had wide hips and bigger thighs.

The concern voiced by Fareena's mother was largely centered on the ability to attract a male partner. Gender oppression happens at the most intimate level when loved ones and caretakers are constant enforcers of a "sexual contract."²⁰ The sexual contract facilitates male domination over women; when mothers, sisters, and aunts all participate in maintaining the contract, male domination persists.

To attract a potential partner, the physical body is a location of alteration and adornment. If an Asian American woman does not fit what has been constructed as the ideal woman, she may fall short in getting offers. Indira recalls:

I never thought of myself as tall but for my generation of Indian, the ideal attractive Indian is 5'2", ninety pounds. And you have me at 5'6" and at the time

maybe a hundred and ten, which I would argue is still very thin, a hundred and twenty pounds. I mean most Indian men are like 5' 8". So I appeared gargantuan. My physical appearance was almost a threat to an Indian male's masculinity. So Indian men weren't often attracted to that to that because I'm not an affirmation of that masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity relies on the inferiority of femininity. The masculine body must be physically larger than a woman's to maintain the order. Size becomes a central component of emasculation for Asian American men compared to other men in the United States. Further complicating the matter is the lack of size differential between Asian American men and women. If Asian American men cannot reap masculine benefit by out-sizing their female counterparts, they miss out on an aspect of male privilege. Chapter IV details the male body and size in more detail.

SEXUALITY

Michel Foucault critiques Western discourse on sexuality as scientifically sanitized with the advent of sexology and defined terminology, *scientia sexualis*.²¹ Foucault puts too little emphasis on providing evidence for *ars erotica* in regions like East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. He provides one meager paragraph as evidence. I fear that Foucault is falling into the trap of Orientalizing that Asian experience. There is much to discuss in sex work and sex practices in Asia throughout history. While the *Kama Sutra* is a widely and wildly famous text supporting pleasure and eroticism, there are regular practices of prostitution, concubines, geisha, and comfort women to insist upon the discourse other than knowledge being passed from sexual masters on to novices. And I'm certain there are additional discourses tied to religion. Sexual discourse surrounding Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam is

arguably as restrictive, if not more, as the Christian discourse in the United States. In Buddhism especially, there is an emphasis on self-sacrifice and repressing sexual desire in pursuit of holiness. Denying the body pleasure and sensuality had to have an effect on discourse and shape societies that practice Buddhism. I am certain there is discourse surrounding Islam and laws surrounding sex and sexuality in Islamic countries. Foucault romanticizes sex and sexual discourse in Asia, simplifying the Eastern world. He also dismisses rampant sex crimes in war and the large role that colonialism has played in the sex tourism industry in Asia and the Pacific Islands.

There has been little research critiquing Foucault's interpretation of Eastern sexual discourse. My respondents do not have romantically formed *ars erotica* descriptions of sex in Asia and in the Asian American community. While there is great diversity in Asia and the Pacific Islands, respondents from many different backgrounds describe a very private, and secretive handling of sex. There was very little emphasis on teaching or physical pleasure, as Foucault asserts. Yuan, a 67-year-old Taiwanese American, discusses his and his parent's perspective on public dress and affection.

People from Asia are kind of more private. It used to be that even some girls couldn't wear short sleeves or short skirts. It's different. It is just a different culture. They don't expose themselves in public. So, they think it stays in your private life you don't have to show it. People in Asia if you love somebody you don't say, "I love you, I love you, I love you" all the time. When my parents were here, we took my daughter to school, and she kissed me and said she didn't want to go to school and she kissed me before she left the car. My mother said, "Your kid's not a cat or dog." They never kissed in public.

Yuan offers no romantic version of physical affection. Foucault's *ars erotica* version of sexuality in the East is an Orientalist construction that further exoticizes Asian and Pacific Islander peoples. However there is very little research on the discourse of sexuality in

Asia, and researchers must be careful not to view the East through “Western eyes”²² as I fear Foucault may be guilty of doing.

There are various forms of sexual oppression throughout Asia with a very strong thread of sanctioning of the female body. Similar to the United States, there is a double standard regarding sexual activity for men and women. While there is not explicit instruction for sons to be sexually active, daughters directly receive messages of chastity. Charlene’s mother warned against losing one’s virginity, saying, “Every woman has a fire in them, and once you put that fire out, you can’t light it again.”

My mom would say, “Don’t get yourself in trouble.” Or don’t, in Mandarin, “make a mistake.” I guess I saw sex as a mistake. Or that’s what I knew that they wanted me to see it as, and so then I saw it as something risqué. Definitely don’t engage in, which I did. And made many, many poor choices, because of that....sexuality was suppressed in our household everything is supposed to be about school and your job and getting to that point. And even now my parents sleep in different beds. They have for ten years at least. So, sexuality is, like, really repressed. Although now, I’ve seen my mom, like, give my dad a kiss.

Charlene’s brother did not get the same messages. Her parents did encourage both of them to concentrate on school before concerning themselves with relationships.

However, men’s fires are not at risk of being extinguished. The tabooing of sex made it more enticing to Charlene. It was something she wanted to experience as an act of rebellion. Unfortunately, at fourteen, Charlene became involved with an older white classmate who fetishized her.

Fareena also faced strict rules in her house that were attempts by her parents to protect her from sexual predators and to regulate her sexual behavior. She “relied on” her close friends and “intimate” sleepovers with her female classmates. However, her

parents banned her from the sleepovers in middle school because men would be in those homes. Fareena shares:

In seventh or eighth grade, I was told you can't sleep over anymore. You can go and stay until 11. My dad said this to my mom to tell me. Which, I was thrown off by because my dad and I were really close at that time. He would tell me everything, but apparently this was a woman issue. I didn't get why it was a woman issue at that time. So she said, 'You can stay there until late at night, but then I'll come pick you up. You can't stay the night.' I didn't know why. I was crying. I threw a fit.

Fareena looked for an explanation from her family and her mother told her, "We're a Muslim family and there are men in the house. Once one of them touches you, you're *ruined*. You could get raped. If boys get raped, it's fine." Fareena clarified that her mother did not mean that it was acceptable for boys to get raped, but that if women are raped, they can get pregnant.

Additionally, the fear of the men in the household had less to do with their religion and more to do with her mother's experience with the Bangladesh Liberation War.²³ The blatant use of rape as a military strategy during the war had a profound effect on Fareena's mother:

It was the largest war crime in history. [My mother and aunts] were in hiding. They were little kids and they would be in the basement hiding while something else was going on in the next room. You were always told that once you're ruined, you're ruined. Our leadership after we won the war said, "These women are our heroes" in order to prevent the mass suicides that were going on with the women and people trying to kill off their daughters. In a lot of parts of the world, there's a lot of shame associated with that. So she grew up thinking rape is the worst thing that can happen to a woman. So it was a protective thing.

While attempts made to protect Fareena from physical and sexual harm were part of a parental strategy, sometimes it made it difficult to interact with other South Asian

Americans. There was a certain “double consciousness” that Fareena had to adopt. In some instances, she learned to adjust her behavior after making a social misstep:

I was 19. I went to a movie theater. And in [my city] there weren't a lot of South Asian people at that time. I went to a theater with my friends. Outside the theater there were two guys. They looked to be in their mid 20s, talking in Bangla, and I was so excited. There are no Bangladeshi stores here, no Bangladeshi people so I got really excited and started talking to them. I told them my dad's name, to look us up in the Bangladeshi directory. A week later, my dad asked if I had talked to someone at the mall. I said, “Yeah, I met these two dudes who were new to [my city].” He said, “Other people are saying that they think you're a loose girl and really flirty. And that you tried to get with both of them at the same time.” I remember crying after that because it wasn't anything like that, the fact that they would think of me that way. I know what the cultural standards and expectations are, how brown women are supposed to act around brown men. It's different from how we can act around non-brown people, but it's too uncomfortable for me. So I stopped going to Bangladeshi parties after that.

There is a “double consciousness” that Fareena must possess to meet the expectations for her Bangla community and the external white American community. Her religious and Bangla gender expectations are seemingly more strict, protective, even patriarchal measures compared to the “freedoms” of non-Asian environment of a Western upbringing. Even if Western discourse on sexuality is driven by *scientia sexualis*, the *ars erotica* of Eastern discourse on sexuality seems mythical and absent in my participant narratives. The discourse they share surrounding sex and sexuality is centered on protectionism and fear of colonization.

If we include the protectionist discourse with “model minority” stereotyping, we see a hybrid strategy in controlling sexuality. There are pressures for new immigrants to succeed and certain behaviors are encouraged to protect against discrimination.²⁴ When the emphasis on fitting the “model minority” stereotype is combined with concerns about preserving culture and then combined with heteronormative expectations, it

becomes a complex set of messages. Indira explains how her mother attempted to train her sexuality.

So, when I was pre-puberty it was, “Don't talk to boys,” period. Like you have no reason to talk to boys and I did not even having an understanding of why my mother was even telling me this or why is this an issue it's just that's it. “Don't talk to boys. This is nonnegotiable.” And then post puberty, obviously, then you begin to understand, “Oh, okay I get where this is going.” I'm – I, at least being heterosexual, happen to be attracted to boys but -- but I'm not supposed to talk to boys but then comes my favorite. My mom says, “Cotton and fire should not be in the same space.” And men are like cotton and women are fire and you shouldn't (laughing) silly Asian analogies. I'm sure we all have narrations. So, “Still don't talk to boys. Your job now is to study,” so that's how things were framed to me. Anything else beyond your studies is a distraction. And so it wasn't even talked about from the space of gender identity or from the space of gender norms. It was just anything else outside of school is a distraction from school. That was message number one. So, then when you then have at least heterosexual relationships -- and then, “After college, after your studies are over, we want you to get married. We don't want you to talk with boys. We don't want you to interact with them.” But after you've graduated, all of the sudden you are now fully equipped to be in a sexual relationship (laughing) and marriage with somebody because you have all of the skill sets of female communications, which I just find deeply humorous. And now no one seems to see how ridiculous that is.... I guess like as if you're gender and your sexuality is separate and a switch that you turn on at the right time is kind of how it was relayed to me.

EXTERNAL FORCES

SCHOOL

School is a central institution in the socializing young people and engraining hegemonic ideals.²⁵ There is an indoctrination of values that vary by time, region, etc. Schools are a major source of gendered policing.²⁶ Teachers, staff, and peers become central in shaping individuals in the proper social scripts for race, gender, sexuality, class, and even religion. More recent attention has been paid to school bullying and how it relates to masculinity and homophobia.²⁷ Students are being bullied for their race, gender, and how their peers perceive their sexuality. In 2009, 11-year-old Carl Joseph

Walker-Hoover from Massachusetts, committed suicide after being bullied daily for being gay (which he did not identify as) despite weekly pleas from his mother to address the problem.²⁸ In 2008, a 14-year-old classmate shot 15-year-old Lawrence King of Oxnard, California because he was openly gay.²⁹ Some targets of bullying fight back, at times with extreme measures, like school shootings.³⁰ School shootings in the past two decades have caused great panic with increased security in these institutions to prevent future tragedies. However, without addressing the bullying that goes on in these schools, based on hegemonic ideals of masculinity, the problems will persist.

While some Asian Americans are attempting to fit the “model minority” stereotype, much of their energy will be spent trying to do their best and excel. One problem that arises is that in order to keep from making waves in school, these Asian Americans must endure some of the worst treatment. Teachers and administrators when informed of racism, ineffectively deal with the problems, if they do anything at all. There has been documentation of widespread racial discrimination against Asian Americans in school.³¹ There is a clear difference in how this discrimination is carried out against Asian American boys versus girls. My male respondents report physical violence and threats as a main method of torment, while the female respondents dealt with more “othering” and neglect. Assaults against male participants included being hit with a baseball bat, getting a tooth knocked out walking down the street, fights everyday walking to and from school. The role of violence in the lives of Asian American men and boys is discussed in-depth in Chapter IV.

GENDER

Irwin Tang, a Chinese American writer who asked me to use his real name, has a great deal of experience with racialized violence at school. It has shaped him a great deal, and these experiences have been documented in his book, *How I Became a Black Man and Other Metamorphoses* (2006). Tang likens his experiences with racism to the African American experience; African Americans in school were his biggest allies against racist whites. Tang details his life in school:

[The physical assaults] happened in class, out of class, wherever...So, it's all kind of blurred together because if it happens for like three months, twenty years later you don't remember how it started. Well especially during those middle years I think it was very frequent. Like fifth grade to freshman year or something like that in high school. Yeah, there were a lot of days I didn't want to go to school. I think it really got bad in the fifth grade. It seems like every year there were these kids that were tormenting me for like long periods of time. They would hit me somewhere on the arm, or back, or back of the head and it would hurt—one punch or something like that. Or if it was on the arm, it would be more often but only a couple of times did I even just start swinging. One time these two kids grabbed me from behind and one had his hands over my eyes and they just started hitting me .

Irwin's tormenting lasted for five years, even though he told teachers what was happening to him. It was regarded as child's play. "My feeling was that it was kind of like boys will be boys," Irwin explained. The teachers in his school basically ignored the physical assaults for several years. Finally, Irwin's father gave him some advice. "I remember at one point, maybe it was the fifth grade, I think my father told me to hit them as hard as I could." A core aspect to masculinity is toughness; to be masculine is to follow the "way of the badass."³² Part of the gendering process in schools is to encourage boys to be boys, and part of that identity is to "rough house." By turning a

blind eye to the torment Irwin endured, the teachers were reifying masculinity and the racial hierarchy. Irwin's experience was racialized in his eyes.

It was usually boys [who physically harmed me]. White boys. Yeah. I mean that's not that unusual considering that most of the population is white. There's a lot of Asian guys grew up with having to deal with African American kids messing with them. I really never had that experience...I wasn't a big kid and I wasn't popular in the typical sense. A lot of kids knew me. I had a lot of friends and a lot of enemies. And the only way I could explain the fact that I had a lot of enemies is because I was Asian and I wasn't a big kid...You know like in 5th grade there were these two kids Derrick and William and they would come in pairs. Goes to show just how ruled we are by fear. Why would some kid that was bigger than me, much bigger than me, have some partner in crime?

Masculinity is unstable and must consistently be reinforced through performances.³³

Derrick and William teamed up for these assaults so there could be a witness to their masculine performance. Often times these "mob" activities occur because of the need to have an audience to provide confirmation of physical domination. Male bonding can rely on enacting domination over another person whether it is something as seemingly innocuous as jokes or physical assault.³⁴

Ray, a 26-year-old Chinese American, also experienced consistent racial discrimination in school that was, at times, accompanied by physical violence. He rarely retaliated, and if he felt a situation escalate, he would do his best to avoid further conflict largely because he knew he would be outnumbered.

I felt like, sometimes I would be by myself for some reason and go out to the park where there would be another group of kids. And I know I'm outnumbered, so I would be like, "Whatever, I'm Chinese, I'll just take it, ching chong, whatever, I'm not going to fight you guys."

This survival strategy is a safe choice for Ray, who recognizes that he cannot defend himself against a group of peers. In some ways, the stereotype of Asian passivity is

reinforced, but Ray had very few alternatives. Even if he went to school officials, he was afraid that he there would be no relief:

That stuff happened to me and I would get pissed off about it sometimes. It was really hard for me to feel like I could tell the teachers to do something about it because, later when I was in high school, I went to a different school. A private school; it was all white. Everyone was everyone else's farm neighbor or whatever. All their parents knew each other, so I never felt comfortable enough to address it to any of the administration. It just felt like there was a high degree of nepotism there. I didn't feel like I could trust them to understand what I was going through. Thankfully, by the time I was in high school, I did get pissy about it, but I was also more, I had more control over it. Like. I'm not going to do anything. I'm not going to punch him or whatever. I'd just walk it off. It also happened a couple times in church, too.

In Ray's southern town, the prevalence of widespread power of the whites was apparent to him, even as a child. This omni-present structural power in various institutions, schools and churches, prevented him from attempting to challenge discrimination. He had to learn techniques to control his anger because he would not be taken seriously among administrators. This lack of trust extended to the law and law enforcement for Ray because his family and other Chinese families were the targets of a government sting of grocery stores. His family had to battle the federal government for several years.

Earlier in the chapter, Irwin stated that plenty of Asian Americans kids have dealt with "African American kids messing with them." There is a history of conflict with Black-Korean conflict.³⁵ These conflicts often happen as a residual effect of white supremacy.³⁶ Additionally, children will adopt the white racial frame and participate in discriminatory behaviors.³⁷ However, in a largely non-white environment, Asian Americans can feel true acceptance from their African and Latino American peers. Four of my respondents who had the experience of attending a largely Black or Black and

Latino high school noticed great differences when they had to move to white schools.

Erin explains,

When I was a little kid, in kindergarten and grade school from first to fourth grade, I feel like I was fully myself. I didn't really restrict how I acted in front of people. The Erin at home, around my family and parents, and the Erin at school was the same Erin. I went to a public school that was primarily black people. I was obviously the minority because I was Asian. There were a handful of white people. I was friends with white people and black people. But really, I had more black friends because there were more black people there. But they did group Asians with whites because we were the minority overall. I was pretty free in terms of how I felt around people. I didn't restrict myself. But fifth through eighth grade was at a different school. It was a public school that was majority white. Then I encountered this feeling I had never felt before which I really didn't understand. I was conflicted with it the entire time I was in that school from fifth to eighth grade. It really messed with my head. One thing I realized was that the Erin at home and the Erin at school are completely different people. I became this very quiet, shy person that didn't talk to anybody. I was kind of afraid of other people. But I wasn't like that at all at Smith Elementary. Smith was first through fourth grade. Johnson was fifth through eighth. It perplexed me. I didn't understand it. I couldn't really break out of it until I got to high school. I don't think I really fully broke out of it until I got to college or at least late high school when I was in school with other nerds...All of the sudden, I was relegated to clearly nerd status. Clearly. I was in this group where, 'Oh. She's smart, but not social. Not able to talk and communicate with other people.' I realized at home I was not like that at all. Amongst my family, I was loud and boisterous, the person who led crazy little projects and fun games or whatever. So, it was completely different and I think it really bothered me, those times in pre-junior and junior high.

The public Erin contrasted a great deal with the Erin at home. This shift stuck out dramatically in Erin's memory and she spent many years trying to decipher what were some logical explanations. The only variable was the demographical shift racially and the type of hostile environment that was part of that shift. School integration after the *Brown v Board of Education* decision resulted in some damaging effects for African American students that began to attend largely white schools.³⁸ While allowing access to

the same education, it would not abolish issues of racial hostility in the environment from students, teachers, and administration. Erin notes:

The first few days at school I knew I was the new kid, so I knew I would be a little bit more shy. But I felt like I was the new kid the entire time. For some reason, I couldn't bring myself to be myself. It was also, in this school that was mostly white. If it was at the other school, in my elementary school, then I wasn't aware of it. But in fifth grade, there was a clear divide between who the popular kids were and who they were not. There were popular kids and then the pariah kids. Then there was everyone in the middle. I had no concept to that prior to fifth grade or that that was even present in school. It may have been because at the other school, I was in the cool crowd. But I really don't know. I felt like I talked to everybody. But in this other school I was clearly not in the cool crowd. And I was aware of this weird social structure. And how it ran everything. Not just in the kids' society, but it affected the teachers and the administration, too. It really bothered me and I don't think I had a sense of that stratification before. I didn't really understand it. I understand it now.

This is yet another example of how even at a young age, children can see the power embedded into the structure. Adults who are authority figures and who are supposed to be objective protectors are clearly seen as participants in the social stratification of elementary and middle schools. It is also naïve to think that children are too young to participate in maintaining hierarchy. However, contrastingly, they can uphold more egalitarian environments like the school with mostly children of color. When Erin went on to a magnet boarding school after eighth grade, the environment was much more comfortable. She felt on equal footing with her peers.

One of Jeremy's earliest memories of going to elementary school was when "some white kids were having a pool party and every kid got an invitation and I didn't. It was from a little girl. I never did anything to her. I was never mean to her. How was it that every kid got invited except myself, this one Arab girl, and a black kid?" He continues to describe middle and high school.

I went to an all white school for like six weeks just like try out this neighborhood. We had both gone to an all black school in [my city] and it sounds like a complete stereotype but all predominantly black schools, the black kids are more welcoming towards Indian folks. Like, the white kids were very cliquish, very stuck up. It's like the white kids that went to my all black high school they were really nice, but when I went to an all white high school I think for four weeks, my sister went for six, they were kind of mean, and when we were in elementary school we went to an all white school and then part my junior high was all black my sister and I went to an all white school. The kids were kind of mean. It wasn't like they were racist to your face, but it's more like hidden stereotypes and race you know? I felt like the "invisible man," like the book when I went to an all white school whereas when I went to an all black school...they welcomed me with more open arms. I know a few kids that go to North Creek, which is all white, predominantly very affluent high school here, and the Indian kids that have gone are pretty much just picked on by all the white kids. And they kind - - kind of struggled with their racial identity. I think, whereas me going to an all black school I felt right at home. And a lot of it had to do with me being an athlete and stuff.

Jeremy attributes his positive experience at the majority black high school to his involvement with sports. His sister was an athlete as well. While children involved in sports tend to perform better in school than those not involved, Erin was not an athlete and also felt more comfortable in her mostly African American high school.

Additionally, involvement in sports for Jeremy and his sister did not help them at the all-white school. They both were involved with basketball and were still outcasts. If they were not involved with sports at the all white high school, their experience may have been more isolating. Jeremy continues,

I felt really out of place. I felt like I had no friends. The few friends I did have were East Asian or African American. They were kind of like renegades and misfits in middle school as well because none of the white kids acknowledged us, and you know there wasn't any sport in sixth grade or fifth grade. I had joined like the recreational week at age ten event and even the white kids on the team barely acknowledged my presence. So, had I not gone to an ethnic school, I think socially I don't think I'll be the same person now. Like I work in sales, I work commission only. I work real estate. I don't think I would have the dominant personality for this kind of industry had I not gone to an all black school. Had I

not gone to that same white school where I was picked on, but I don't think people picked on me because physically I was big. But I felt really out of place because no one was really open to being friends with me.

Jeremy's college experience was very similar to his white high school. To deal with the feeling of ostracism, he joined an Indian fraternity. He admits that he is very much an "alpha male" and that his fraternity brothers are similar. There is a shared interest in sports participation and he emphasized several times that athletic ability shielded him from further ostracism. Jeremy asserts, "If you didn't play sports and went to an all white school I think socially you would be pretty awkward like those [Asian American] spelling bee kids." Jeremy was also advantaged by his physical size. Other respondents like Irwin did not have that advantage. His girlfriend's brother is small in stature and was not nearly as involved with athletics and his school experience was quite different:

My girlfriend is Bangladeshi and her brother went to an all-white private school. His graduating class was like thirty kids and his parents were like doctors were real well to do. So they sent her to a public but they sent him to this crazy ridiculous all-white private school in [Southern state] which is probably more racist than [the Southwestern state that Jeremy resides]. And I mean it's just hardcore, Confederate flag, Mason-Dixon line, Bible belt, you name it -- it's the whitest of the white. And I mean it's wrong for me to sit here and label his masculinity level or whatnot, but you know my best friend right here is 5' 2.5." On a good day maybe 125 pounds after this treat that he's put in his mouth, and my prospective brother-in-law, I guess you could call him, he's pretty much the same height maybe an inch and like a fraction of the size, super skinny, but it's not his appearance. It's more so his personality has been crushed. He didn't play sports. His masculinity level is low to none. And so it's wrong for me to say that with we consider ourselves as fraternity boys we're like alpha males or whatever. But since he was ostracized by the white kids, to the point where this guy, I think he has some serious disorders now. If you go to a mall with him he has trouble asking a security guard where the restroom is. His personality -- he's thirty-years-old and his personality -- he's real quiet to begin with but never has had a girlfriend. Never even attempted, forget girlfriend and problems with sex. He has problems talking to a stranger. Now if he gets to know you and you're friends with him and he's an extreme case, but if you're friends with him, he's a chatterbox. He's awesome.

However, athletics are not always free from racism, sexism, or homophobia.³⁹ One respondent, Annie, a Filipina American, recalls being targeted by a coach.

In high school, I did have a coach, and I really feel like he was a little prejudiced toward me because I'm the Asian girl...He would give me so much shit. He would tell me I need to lose weight, he would always call me out, and people knew what he was doing was wrong. You know he would belittle me and I'm in high school.

In the world of sport, hegemonic forces are ever present. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism are woven into the structures of sport.⁴⁰ Annie is not outside of those forces. She said she gained a great deal of self-confidence and strength from participating in sports, and many studies show that this is a positive outcome for women and girls participation in athletics.⁴¹ However, variation from the normalized white, middle-class, male, heterosexual athlete can be accompanied with the problems Annie faced.

On a final note about gender policing in school, for k.terumi (kt), gender policing was entwined with the policing of her sexuality. kt is half-Japanese, half-white American. She identifies as a female-bodied person and prefers not to be referred to as a woman. Her family really never tried to police her gender growing up. She often wore her older brothers' hand-me-down clothes, and her mother was a tomboy growing up. Her family was not concerned with her gender presentation. However, her classmates were.

I really believe that most of my gender socialization was carried out by my peers. So starting at the age of maybe 10 or 11, I started growing my hair when I was 10 because the girls stopped talking to me cause they thought I was a loser, and so I started growing my hair and wearing girls clothes because I asked a friend, "Why doesn't anybody want to be my friend?" And my friend was like, "Well, it's

because of how you look.” And I was like, “Okay, so I’ll grow my hair and wear girls’ clothes.”

The choices for kt boiled down to matching the expected gender presentation for girls or having few friends in school. Shortly after kt altered her gender presentation, she moved to Japan where there was much less emphasis on distinct gender presentation. Many Japanese girls had short hair and they wore the same school uniforms as the boys in school. The different expectations with regard to gender presentation in the United States versus Japan were abundantly clear.

THE BODY

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as what it means to not be a woman. For Asian Americans, it seems like there is less contrast in physical body between men and women. This lack of contrast is particularly evident in height, muscle mass, and body hair. Since a key component of hegemonic masculinity is based on highlighting differences between men and women, this becomes a “problem” area for Asian Americans. This further stigmatizes Asian American men as subordinate or marginalized because they seem to more closely resemble the size of their female counterparts. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity requires control over women. Especially in the public sphere, the representation of East Asians does not portray East Asian men as heads of household. While this may starkly contrast the reality in these homes, the media portrayal is clear. However, South Asian representations vary quite differently. South Asian men are portrayed in the media as dangerous, terrorists, jihadists, and sexist, oppressive male patriarchs. In some respects they are represented as sexually deviant.⁴²

These representations of Asian men are forms of sexual regulation. Patricia Hill Collins asserts, “In order to prosper, systems of oppression must regulate sexuality, and they often do so by manufacturing ideologies that render some ideas commonsensical while obscuring others.”⁴³ There are manufactured ideologies about the Asian American body that have become commonsensical to Asian Americans and non-Asian Americans. In chattel slavery, African American bodies were commodified. Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian American bodies have also been commodified, used for their labor, and discarded. In this era of what Collins calls “new racism,” these bodies are assaulted by ideologies that are projected by the media and individuals.⁴⁴ Daniel was often bombarded with these racialized fictions.

I remember swimming on the swim team. I swam competitively. I swam four hours a day....Obviously, there’s always that locker room talk. I think, in my experience with that, it was kind of negative. I think back on it a lot. I think about how it was desexualizing. It made [Asian men] asexual. I mean, obviously there were penis jokes and what not. It was just very blunt. Like, “You’re Asian, you must have a small penis.” And [teammates] would laugh at that. It wasn’t anything witty. I didn’t expect it to be anyways, but it was just stupid comments like that. And there were obviously the racial comments, accents, jokes like that.

Another respondent, Jason, disassociates the additional racial comments from the penis jokes. Asian male bodies have been the targets of disparaging stereotypes about their sexual bodies as long as they have been a threat to whiteness. The sexuality of men of color is seen as dangerous and in need of control.⁴⁵ The controlling images of African, Latino, Arab, and Desi men portray them as hypersexual, but East Asian men are seen as asexual or *hyposexual*.⁴⁶ This hyposexuality is interconnected with historical labor patterns, but there is also some discourse shift with emergence of the “model minority” myth. While the stereotypes have changed over time, the attempted regulation of East

Asian male bodies through the belittlement of their penises has everything to do with race. While “white fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism,” whites’ ridicule of the sexuality of Asian men is another ingredient.⁴⁷

Hegemonic ideologies continue to thrive because “contemporary forms of oppression do not routinely force people to submit. Instead, they manufacture consent for domination so that we lose our ability to question and thus collude in our own subordination.”⁴⁸ Collusion with one’s oppression exacerbates fighting and eliminating it. If Asian Americans adopt hegemonic ideologies as truth, the racial status quo remains unchallenged. Irwin had a very difficult time conceiving of himself as a masculine being:

That was freshman year of high school. Um, I mean I think I had a very un-masculine body. I was real thin and stuff I think I was almost like transgendered in some sense because my sense of myself was certainly not that I was macho or very masculine at all and it didn’t help that when I was very young in elementary school and middle school and stuff like that something people would think that I was a girl because I had kind of poofy hair. I think even I had a hard time conceiving of Asian men—maybe myself—as being a man. Like using that word “man.” Like I think I still have a hard time calling myself “man.”

The values and characteristics assigned to the ideal man in the United States is that of a white, middle-class heterosexual man. That construction relies on deviations being constructed as inferior. One respondent, Chance, a Filipino American wanted “to be, in the back of my mind, I just wanted to be *normal*. Just being like a white guy, like on T.V.” The normalization of whiteness affects how whites and non-whites view their own bodies.

Gender, race, and sexuality are largely presented as binary categories: male/female, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual. This binary thinking shapes our

understanding of human difference in oppositional terms.⁴⁹ Racially, this binary provides little room for Asian Americans. Chance draws from the white constructions of masculinity to try to define and understand his own identity. Similarly, for Asian American women, there are limited representations of Asian American women in the media. The images that do exist are rigid and subordinate to the constructions of white womanhood. This othering can cause internalized conflict and affect self-image. Fareena struggled with self-esteem when she went to an all white school:

I remember I hated myself in the sixth grade. Hated myself. And that was the time I went to all white, all very rich white. I remember that the type of girls that all the boys started liking didn't look like me, you know, being a brown woman. Issues of body hair came in to play. I have body hair that other girls don't have. I have to pluck my eyebrows and other girls don't have to. It looks dirty on me. And there is this concept of dirt. I had real issues of just wanting to purge, physically purge things out of me. You know, my elbows are darker, my knees are darker, when I scar I leave a brown mark instead of a pink mark that fades. And all that is looked at as dirty or ugly or scarred and not simply like a part of life. So, I felt very dirty. And I was also curvier than the other girls at the time. I started puberty in the fourth grade. By sixth grade, I didn't look a lot different from this. And I felt fat. All the other girls were skinny. I felt I didn't have muscles the way the other girls did. I was really into sports at the time. And I felt puny and couldn't athletically compete like them. And there is an attraction with athletic girls. You know, the girls basketball team or track team. There'd be this camaraderie with the boys basketball team because we had to travel together and do things like that. There are a lot of hookups. No one wanted to hookup with the lone brown girl.

In contrast to the whites, Fareena, as the brown girl, occupies the inferior half of the white/non-white binary. African Americans have greater access to magazines, books, television channels, and movies that convey the message that “Black is beautiful.” Certainly, there are still hierarchical problems with some of these media sources involving body size, skin color, and objectification of female bodies, but they do offer alternative ideologies for young African American women. Asian American women do

not have easy access and in the options they do have, largely light-skinned women of East Asian descent are displayed. South Asians Americans have fewer resources. Even with some of the anti-hegemonic resistance movements in Black-owned media, white standards of beauty pervade.⁵⁰

Charlotte, a Chinese American woman in her forties, struggled with the limited representations of Asian Americans. The prevalence of the “Suzie Wong” stereotype felt degrading, and her body type did not match. While she rejected those images, she still wanted to fit in with other students at school.

Assimilation was the name of the game. I remember my friend and I talked about it, and all she wanted to have was blonde hair and blue eyes and to be named, I don’t know, Chris or something like that. And all I wanted to have was *regular* brown hair and *regular* brown eyes and be named Janet. And so, we would just talk about how all we wanted to do was be like everybody else.

Charlotte defines “regular” as whiteness. The “blonde hair and blue eyes” and “regular brown hair and regular brown eyes” are white physical traits. By specifying “regular” brown hair and eyes, she is differentiating those features from African Americans who have brown hair and eyes as well. By internalizing racist images of the self, Charlotte becomes a conduit for perpetuating racial oppression.⁵¹ Hegemonic whiteness is disseminated through coercion. Internalizing white racist concepts of beauty is a result of that coercion.

SEXUALITY

Daniel self-identifies as a gay man. He was conscious of his sexuality in high school, but found that the task of staying closeted perpetuated stereotypes of Asian American men. By not outwardly displaying interest in women, he appeared to be an

asexual or homosexual Asian American man. Behaviors like girl watching are normalized activities in heterosexual masculine performance.⁵² Daniel did not want to participate in those performances, but also did not want to further perpetuate stigmatizing Asian American male stereotypes.

I hated high school, racial expectations mixed with trying to hide sexuality. So, it was tough, but I also think it was tough for me because I'm gay so it's kind of like something I had to deal with in high school and try to hide. I think that was an extra burden on my back then. I tried not to think about it, but of course it comes back. I did the whole closet thing where you don't talk about it. But it's almost like if someone brings it up, it turns uncomfortable. And obviously you try to protect those insecurities by trying to defend your straightness or what not. And that was really interesting being Asian American, too. It was almost like trying to balance being straight with being asexual. It was really weird. I was like, "I'm not asexual, but I'm not gay either." It's a weird game you play. In terms of my identity as a gay person, it's very interesting because I can play that privilege of not appearing gay while my race is always written on me.

For Daniel, he cannot mask his race. He must negotiate whether he feels like dealing with heterosexism in addition to racism. His dilemma demonstrates how racism and heterosexism rely upon each other for meaning.⁵³ Part of Asian American oppression is the ability for whites to define their sexuality because "sex is raced and race is sexed."⁵⁴ Daniel's race is accompanied with numerous assumptions about his sexuality.

For South Asian American women, there are also numerous assumptions and controlling images regarding their sexuality, as Indira explains.

We don't get to be who we are. We're perceived, our identities are perceived and then placed on us. So when East Asian women experience being overly exoticized, it becomes this like there's the overtone of a cunning woman who is going to manipulate you with her exotic ways. And I think South Asian women experience that as well, but it will come out in way that is intertwined with our culture identity. So, for example, I'll get the or I used to in college, "Hey do you know about the *Kama Sutra*? I can *Kama Sutra* you." What does that mean? I think that there's these notions of spirituality and sexuality get intertwined in an erotic way that kind of leads to an a hypersexualization of South Asian women.

Externalized hypersexuality of South Asian women greatly contrasts the sentiment within the South Asian community that constructs sex, as Fareena put it, as a “punishment” for women. Sex is not something that is supposed to be enjoyed. It is simultaneously sacred and joyless. Only non-Asian men, mostly white men, would use this pick up line on Indira. The use of the *Kama Sutra* is directly taken from the white racial framing of Indian women. Frames provide shortcuts and help individuals understand a social situation. It is a simplistic step taken by those who are privileged to see the racial world as simple and stereotypes as reality. The framing of Indian women in a white racial frame is that of a woman well-versed in the *Kama Sutra* who is dying to serve white men. This is a romanticized, eroticized, exoticized, Orientalizing, dehumanizing process for Indira. The *Kama Sutra*, since the colonization of India, has been the “white man’s sex manual with ‘exotic’ women.” In the mid-1800s, it was common for English men to have Indian mistresses and “in the British imagination and in their daily lives Indian women were sexualized in ways scholars recognize as the typical colonial gaze: Indian women were defined as seductive, sensual, and exotic.”⁵⁵

Charlene had an even more intimate and what she calls an “abusive” experience with being exotified:

When I was in my first two years of college, I was still in that “White Identification” if you want to use the Model of Asian American Identity. And I was dating a white man and I became really intimate with him and he really sexually exotified me and called me a “China doll” and did all these things in a way that were sexual and really pertained to my ethnicity. And during that time, I didn’t realize it was bad, I didn’t realize it was wrong, but I knew that I wasn’t happy. I was really, really unhappy for that whole two years. I was so angry and I was so sad. There was a lot of crying for no reason that I could explain during the

two years of suckiness, but I couldn't explain why I was so unhappy and I thought I really loved this person and I just didn't understand what was going on.

Charlene would dress in cheongsams⁵⁶ for fantasy role-playing. She participated because she wanted to please him. Her boyfriend's Asian fantasies were constructed from the "discourses of seduction" that defines Asian women's sexuality in the West.⁵⁷ These images of Asian women have been reproduced for centuries with little alteration.⁵⁸ These fantastical constructions play out in real life, like in Charlene's case. It plays out in a transnational sense with the popularity of sex tourism in Asia and the Pacific Islands. *Ethnosexual* is a term defined by Joane Nagel as the intersection and interaction between ethnicity and sexuality and the way in which each defines and depends on the other for its meaning and power.⁵⁹

COMMUNITY

Outside of school, Asian Americans continue to face racial and gender discipline and controlling images. Gender is constantly being enacted, embodied, performed, and corrected. While there are certainly some performative aspects of race, being surrounded by your own community in the home can allow for some breaks from being racialized. There is no guarantee for people of color that they will be free from racism when they are out in the community. The interlocking social systems of race, gender, and sexuality further complicate how Asian American may be responded to in public. In this section, my interviewees share narratives about their experiences outside of the family realm and in the community.

GENDER

Organizations like The Boy Scouts of America are designed to provide a positive, educational environment for youth. This is a major site of not only lessons on proper gender scripts, but racial and sexual scripts as well. Historically, The Boy Scouts of America has been a male-only organization with clearly masculine-oriented activities. However, as of 2009, they have opened up the organization to include girls. I begin this section with The Boy Scouts of America because it proclaims that it “is one of the nation's largest and most prominent values-based youth development organizations.” Taken directly from their literature, “The Boy Scouts of America provides a program for young people that builds character, trains them in the responsibilities of participating citizenship, and develops personal fitness.” Ray was an active scout for several years. He was a hardworking scout that moved up to leadership positions within the organization. However, it was at a cost.

My scoutmaster was this big, confederate history lover. He had these dumb notions about what black people are supposed to be. Even some of the kids in my troop were fucking racist. They didn't like black people. [The troop] was mostly white. It was advertised as white only, but it was mostly all white, middle to poor white. Then there was me...For the most part, I felt like when I was in boy scouts, for six years, I had to put on an *act*. Like, being one of those old-timey Chinese characters in one of those old movies. I disagreed with a lot of what they said, but in the end I just did my own thing...A lot of times I would just agree. Like, “Yessuh, master,” or, “Okay, I totally agree with you. You're number one. I agree with your confederate views of breaking away with the union and all this other shit.” I was outnumbered. I also felt like they didn't understand enough to be objective.

Ray's description of the type of person he had to “perform” in the Scouts sounds very much like a Chinese houseboy. While he references a fictional character in a movie, that character was based on actual Asian male laborers who attended to wealthy whites.

There are so many parallels between the Chinese houseboy and African American domestic servant. Here, Ray was a servile, slave-like appendage of the troop. This was a strategy he used to maintain peace in the troop and refrain from challenging racist ideologies. There was a sexist, heterosexist element in the troop as well.

I kind of feel like, like when I was in Boy Scouts, there were always these dumb folks just like, “I have to show my tested manhood.” And there would be hazing, to break them in, to show them manliness. They do this stupid shit. There’s no reason for me to whip out my cock and show how manly- not that that ever happened- it would be almost to that point and I’m like, “This is really stupid. I know I’m a man. I don’t have to show you guys.” And as far as the hazing went, whenever they tried, I just kicked their ass. I’m not going to take that shit. Eventually, when I started, the older kids were like, ‘Yeah, we’re not going to mess with him’. They knew I wasn’t going to take their shit. I wasn’t just going to lay there and let them duct tape me or whatever. I got respect from that I guess. They knew, “Oh, we better not fuck with him. He doesn’t play around.”

Ray would resist direct assault on his masculinity with force. However, he did not contend with more generalized racist ideology. These all-male environments are perfect breeding grounds for hypermasculine performance. Ray is one of few Asian Americans in my research that would defend himself against taunts. It is significant that he moves to action when there is a challenge to his masculinity. In school, as he states earlier in this chapter, Ray felt unable to retaliate against racist taunts, but felt more room to take action in the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts of America supposedly help youth because it “is a key to building a more conscientious, responsible, and productive society.”⁶⁰ The lessons Ray learned from while a member does not quite align with that mission.

The hegemonic ideals for men in the United States presently put emphasis on size. Physical size *does* matter. This applies to height, weight, and penis size. However, it is not all about the largest size being the best. Being too large can be too intimidating

and dangerous. Being too small is un-masculine. Black men are constructed as too physical, too threatening, and their penises too large. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Asian men are constructed as too small, too passive, with small penises if they have one at all. Glenn, who identifies as a gay Malaysian American, has run into this stereotyping from other gay men when he's out at clubs.

They usually think that you are small and that black guys are the biggest...It happened in [my city] only a few weeks ago. I went to [a dance club]. I was sitting in the front on the sofas. There was this drunk guy sitting next to me. He said "Hi," so I said "Hi." Then he said, "I heard about you." I said, "What? What did you hear about me?" (Whispers) "That you have a small penis."

Alcohol in this situation may have made these racist stereotypes enter the front stage.⁶¹

There are many examples from my respondents that show that inebriation rarely restricts comments about the lack of size of an Asian American man's penis. One white woman who's dating an Vietnamese American man shared with me that non-Asian men consistently ask her why she is with him since his penis must be small. She becomes most embarrassed by the fact that they ask her right in front of her Asian American boyfriend.

In January 2010, I ran a keyword search for "Asian" on the online classified site Craigslist for Boston, Mass., in the personals section. It resulted in almost 350 ads. The language used by individuals seeking an Asian partner was quite alarming. These words came up repeatedly: clean, submissive, foreign, and smooth. Asian and Asian American men searching for partners often assured folks that their penises were sizeable. In the "male seeking male" section, the Asian American men advertised themselves as good at "servicing" others and they were faithful bottoms. These ads demonstrate how racist

images have transferred out into the real world. These have become internalized embodied and enacted.

Like Charlene's story, she was in an abusive relationship where she was being fetishized and it took some strong Asian Americans to present her with a counter frame. Some of the terms and requests that were present in the ads include: "Asian Angel," repetitive smooth, a married couple looking for an Asian woman who "must be shy, and soft spoken," "I am into Asian women who are submissive." Here are more examples of the sexually charged, racialized ads:

Title: White Guy in search of Asian lover

I had one a few months ago and I must say, nothing beats the soft skin and warm tight pussy of a cute Asian girl. I'm not looking for something real serious, just a little treat every now and then. But I'm really only looking for Asians on here, I have a few white fuck buddies, just need some extra spice. I'm very careful with sex, always safe, get tested regularly, would hope you do too. Looking for authentic Asian, or Asian American is ok too. Even better if you're around my college! So if you're Asian and horny, put "your Asian princess" in the subject line.

Title: Man Seeking Demure Young Asian Woman

Professional man, fit, erudite, handsome, successful; seeks young Asian woman with limited sexual experience, and who wants to be introduced to the erotic world, and fully realize her sexual potential. I am gentle, passionate, experienced, attentive, and very well endowed.

Other ads were specifically looking for "foreign" woman, and the men were "tired of American women." The younger, the better as one man searched for an Asian "College age girl with daddy issues" and "Foreign exchange student a big plus." Craigslist has become a site where individuals can anonymously pursue their most secret sexual

fantasies, but it is also a direct reflection of the social inequality that exists outside of cyberspace.⁶²

Heterosexual advertisements were not the majority. Many were older white men looking for Asian men. One was seeking an Asian “House/Slave boy.” This “masculine strict daddy” was looking for a “submissive, obedient, smooth Asian or Latino boy” wanting his “slave” to be smaller in stature. There were a number of ads asking for their “fantasies” to be fulfilled. One man wanted a smooth “naturally non-hairy One of my favorite fantasies is that my friend have a naturally non-hairy tummy and not very hairy chest (like Asian/Chinese descended, a plus -but race not really that important). “Smooth” was an adjective used over and over again, one wanting a “Smooth boy to be molested,” he specifically requested Asian in the title and in the text of the ad again said that Asian was an emphatic plus. In the men for men section, many white men were looking to “dominate” Asian bottoms.

Asians and Asian Americans placed some of the ads and they utilized these stereotypes to sell themselves to potential partners. A multi-racial Hawaiian/Asian looking for a “nice sexy daddy.” One Asian poster had a fantasy to be “dominated” and “pimped out” to other men. Asian men were looking for “bigger,” “older,” and “hairier” men. One even called himself a potential “slave” for someone. When doing a search of the words “white” and “slave” only two ads came up. One was from a white woman looking to be dominated and another was a white man looking for a woman to dominate him. One Asian man advertised himself as a, “little Asian boy” looking to “service

masculine cock.” Even an Asian lesbian describe herself as “a beautiful Asian doll looking to have fun with white or Latin ladies.”

There is documented discrimination with online dating.⁶³ Where Asian American men are the last resort. The Craigslist ads are an example of the adoption of racist stereotyping by Asian and non- Asian Americans alike. The advertisements are indicative of age-old racist stereotyping of Asians in the United States. Michael Booth asserts that these types of ads on Craigslist “encourage troubled minds” framing these racist images and stereotypes as falsities only present in the mind of sick individuals. Booth’s assertions do not fully capture the widespread systemic issues that are related to institutional discrimination. Slave and “houseboy” imagery is a not-so-distant historical reality for Asian American men in the United States.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA – STRONGEST FORCE IN CREATING A GENDERED, RACIST FRAME

I think in America, the culture, men have to be muscular, macho, manly, aggressive, tough, brave. I think there’s a pressure for people to act that way no matter what.

Glenn, Malaysian American

Jean Baudrillard argues that in modern society, reality and meaning has been replaced with symbols and signs.⁶⁴ Culture and media have created our perceived reality, which has become more real than reality.⁶⁵ We have become so reliant on the simulation of reality, or *simulacra*, that we have lost contact with the real world.⁶⁶ Baudrillard theorizes that we have lost contact with the real world because contemporary media (TV, film, print, and the Internet) are proliferated, mass-produced copies of the language and ideology used to obscure reality for dominant and politically powerful groups.⁶⁷ The

warped racialized images of Asian American gender and sexuality are not coming from their homes. Respondents look to the media to help explain and make sense of their world. What they often find is that faces like theirs are lacking. When they are present in the media, they are supporting roles, or age-old portrayals of the same Asian stereotypes. The media images are so powerful in shaping what is perceived as reality in the lives of Asian and non-Asian Americans. Greg, a Japanese American, observes:

The fact that you don't see anybody in the media that looks like us. The strongest representation would be the exoticized Asian female. The Lucy Liu sex bitch. The images of the demasculinity [sic] of the Asian American males. We're still battling the Long Duk Dong from *Sixteen Candles*. Bruce Lee was fabulous, but that just opened up another stereotype, and now everyone's Kung Fu Fighting.

There is a limited representation of Asian Americans in the media.⁶⁸ These images are consumed by the viewers, defining who Asian Americans are supposed to be. White and non-whites buy into these images as real. In later chapters, we see how these images play out in real life as Asian American men and women try to define themselves and have relationships with others. These media images are not strictly racialized. There are messages about gender and sexuality as well. Brent observes:

Women fit some image of Asian in white Western society... Sure some exotic hottie. That sort of thing doesn't exist for Asian men in the western world. For the most part, from what I've seen, there are no sort of Asian men sex symbols. There might be, but I don't think there are. Asians in the media, they don't occupy that sort of role. Where as of course Lucy Liu does, you know, or any very attractive Asian female. So you might as well not even have a dick as a man here sometimes.

David Eng asserts that it is imperative to take Asian American men's racial formation into account to understand how their sexuality has been constructed. There is a racial castration process that takes place where Asian American men are stripped of all sexual

elements. Even in the porn industry, they are searching for their penises.⁶⁹ The East Asian American representation is far from complimentary, however, even more alarming is the almost complete lack of representation of Southeast, South Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in the media.

CONCLUSION

Gender socialization begins even before birth. Families made plans for their children when first learning the sex of the baby. Respondents face an ongoing, life-long process of gender discipline and are constantly pressured to conform to racialized, gendered, and sexualized expectations. The gendered and racialized experience for Asian American women and men share similarities, and also differences. In their homes, Asian American women face clear heteronormative expectations. There is more policing of their activities so that they may preserve their virginity. This is not necessarily a great deal different from the female experience for other races and across the globe. The messages are much more vague for the male respondents. My respondents have provided evidence that outside individuals and larger institutions impose racial, gender, and heterosexual norms upon them.

In the next two chapters, the effects of this ethnosexualized process are more deeply explored. Through participant narratives, the next two chapters compare and contrast Asian American men and women's ethnosexual experiences. In Chapter III, I focus on Asian American women and how their self-image, self-esteem, and identity are shaped by and in opposition to racist imagery. Chapter IV, I focus primarily on Asian American men and how they are positioned in a white hegemonic masculine hierarchy.

There has been a major shift in how Asian American men have been perceived as sexual actors. Similarly, there have been shifts, perhaps not as dramatic, for African Americans. Collins notes that there was a shift after the Civil War for African Americans. The increase in hypersexualization occurred for the men and sexualization of African American women happened in the discourse to explain African American men's mythical lust for white women. Conversely, Asian American men's inability to be sexual beings legitimizes Asian American women as sexually appealing and available to White men. Their Asian American male counterparts are "inadequate" and only "naturally" that should make other men, the obvious choice for partners. The following chapters are an in-depth look at how these historical shifts play out in Asian American sexual politics today.

NOTES

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⁷ Anthony S. Chen, "Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony," *Gender & Society* 13 (1999), 584-607.

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¹³ Ibid., 844.

¹⁴ Ibid., 840.

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¹⁸ Jiwani and Dakoury. "Veiling Differences – Mediating Race, Gender, and Nation." *Global Media Journal*. (2009) 2 (2) 2: 1-6.

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²² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes'" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (2002) 28 (2).

²³ During the Bangladesh Liberation war, the Pakistani government issued a commandment for women to be wrapped from head to toe from age eight and older. Fareena's mother and aunts were forced to be covered in an move to disgrace the women.

²⁴ Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*

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²⁷ Michael Kimmel and Matthew Mahler, "Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence," *American Behavioral Scientist*. (2003) 46 (10): 1439-1458.

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³⁶ Kim, *Bitter Fruit*; Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*

³⁷ Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2001); Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.

³⁸ Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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⁴³ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).

⁵⁰ Kiri Davis, *A Girl Like Me* (New York, NY: Media Matters, 2005).

⁵¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

⁵² Beth A. Quinn. "Sexual Harassment and Masculinity: The power and Meaning of 'Girl Watching,'" *Gender and Society*. (2002) 16 (3): 386-402.

⁵³ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

⁵⁴ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*.

⁵⁵ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 151.

⁵⁶ The cheongsam is a body-hugging one-piece Chinese dress for women.

⁵⁷ Lynn Thiesmeyer, "The West's 'Comfort Women' and the Discourses of Seduction," in *Transnational Asia Pacific: Gender Culture, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Shirley G.

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⁵⁹ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*.

⁶⁰ Taken from The Boys Scouts of America website, <http://www.scouting.org/>.

⁶¹ Houts-Picca and Feagin complete for *Two Faced Racism*

⁶² Michael Booth, "Craigslist Develops a Dark Side," *The Denver Post*, January 4, 2007, http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_7627735.

⁶³ Cynthia Feliciano, Belinda Robnett and Golnaz Komaie, "Gendered Racial Exclusion among White Internet Daters," *Social Science Research*. (2009) 38(1): 39-54

⁶⁴ Mark Poster and Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1988).

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⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* (New York, NY: Challenging Media, 1999).

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CHAPTER III
 ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN:
 SELF-IMAGE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND IDENTITY

I have spent my life hating you
 dreaming that a knife
 could trim away the thickness
 of thighs and waist

Wishing that height
 came in a bottle
 that Pilipino whitening soap
 really worked when it burned....

please show me the beauty
 in my workhorse shoulders
 my mountain province legs
 my full moon face

Excerpt from “for body”
 Rebecca Villanueva in *Yell-Oh Girls!*¹

INTRODUCTION

“Beauty” is a normative value that is entirely socially constructed.² Oppressive hegemonic beauty standards “repress women’s freedom, inhibit personal power and self-acceptance, and promote a destructive relationship with the body.”³ These beauty standards are unattainable and are used to punish women physically and psychologically for their failure to achieve and conform to them.⁴ All women are subjected to these imposed hegemonic beauty standards and scholars debate whether women’s “body work” (through exercise, make-up, cosmetic surgery, etc.) functions as empowerment or collusion to the oppressive system.⁵ However, scholarly work that insists on individual agency (through women’s “body work”) risks complicity with “neo-liberal emphasis on

individual choice, an diverts attention from the political economy of corporate domination.”⁶ Women’s bodies are a location for patriarchal power to be exercised by using disciplining media images to encourage conformity.

For women of color this process becomes more complex. Hegemonic beauty standards are imposed upon all women, but they do not affect women in the same capacity. Women of color, when subjecting their bodies to racialized “body work” (i.e. skin whitening, cosmetic surgery to Anglicize features), are unquestioningly responding to forces of *racial* domination in addition to gender domination. Hegemonic beauty standards affect women of color in the interpersonal domain. In this chapter, my respondents detail their adoption of, responses and resistance to the ethnosexualized construction of Asian and Asian American women in the United States.

HEGEMONIC FEMININITY?

Scholars agree that femininity is under-theorized in the current literature.⁷ There are some definitions of femininity that have been theorized. In their work, Pyke and Johnson use the term *hegemonic femininity* as well as Schippers. Connell chooses the term *emphasized femininity* to describe what is usually equated with white, heterosexual, middle-class women.⁸ However, Pyke and Johnson conceptualize hegemonic femininity in an entirely different way than Schippers. *Subordinate(d)* or *pariah femininities* are femininities associated with sexually transgressive women, such as lesbian, bisexual, and non-monogamous women.⁹ *Marginalized femininities* are femininities associated with women of color or poor or working-class women.¹⁰ Connell conceptualizes emphasized femininity:

One form [of femininity] is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this “emphasized femininity.” Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance of forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance, and cooperation.¹¹

In a Gramscian conception, there cannot be a hegemonic femininity because women at the superstructural level will not possess power and dominance over men. Hegemonic masculinity can be reified by hierarchical femininities, but the dominant femininity will not undermine or overtake it. Connell places gender hegemony in the context of overall subordination of women to men. I agree with Connell’s conception. To imply that there is a hegemonic femininity, there would have to be empirical evidence of female dominance over men. Pyke and Johnson, as well as Schippers make this theoretical assumption in their conceptions of hegemonic femininity.

Hegemonic masculinity is centered on men’s global domination of women, and because there is no configuration of femininity organized around women’s domination of men, Connell suggested the notion of a hegemonic femininity is inappropriate.¹² He further argued that women have few opportunities for institutionalized power relations over other women. However, this discounts how other axes of domination, such as race, class, sexuality, and age, mold a hegemonic femininity that is venerated and extolled in the dominant culture, and that emphasizes the superiority of some women over others, thereby privileging white upper-class women.¹³

In their analysis, Pyke and Johnson call attention to intersecting identities that complicate the relationship between women. While valuable in social analysis, I have to disagree with Pyke and Johnson’s use of terminology in calling the femininity of white women “hegemonic.” Pyke and Johnson further assert:

...white women are constructed as monolithically self-confident, independent, assertive, and successful-characteristics of white hegemonic femininity. That these are the same ruling traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, albeit in a less exaggerated, feminine form, underscores the imitative structure of hegemonic

femininity. That is, the supremacy of white femininity over Asian femininity mimics hegemonic masculinity. We are not arguing that hegemonic femininity and masculinity are equivalent structures. They are not. Hegemonic masculinity is superstructure of domination, hegemonic femininity is confined to power relations among women. However the two structures are interrelated with hegemonic femininity constructed to serve hegemonic masculinity from which it is granted legitimacy.¹⁴

There are hegemonic beauty standards. My respondents speak openly about how they are constructed in contrast to white women. They internalize messages of inadequacy and inferiority. These messages are reinforced by media and in everyday interactions. In the previous chapter, it was evident that the playground behavior of girls and women to maintain hierarchy operates very differently than with boys and men. Asian American women did not face the persistent violent physical threats that Asian American men had to endure. However, the emphasis on beauty and the body is a form of symbolic violence. The bodies of Asian American women are under constant scrutiny.

All women's bodies are under constant scrutiny, but white women are awarded psychological and material privileges unavailable to women of color. I do not completely agree with Pyke and Johnson's conception of hegemonic femininity because it strays from Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony. While Pyke and Johnson acknowledge that hegemonic femininity and masculinity are not equivalent structures, they attempt to place relations among women in a theoretical vacuum *outside* of structure. Hegemony is not intended for use in a non-superstructural way because by definition hegemonic ideologies serve as the foundation for complex systems of political, social, and economic domination. White women are not dominant in any of those systems, but they do have access to resources unavailable to women of color.

Pyke and Johnson argue, “The construction of a hegemonic femininity not only (re)creates a hierarchy that privileges white women over Asian American women but also makes Asian American women available for white men. In this way, hegemonic femininity serves as a handmaiden to hegemonic masculinity.”¹⁵ Indeed, women of color face controlling images where media places a fantastical gaze upon them making them targets of white men, but white women are not exempt from that same gaze. Connell suggests within the context of male dominant gender roles, femininity is, by definition, a position of subordination in relation to masculinity.¹⁶ A term like hegemonic femininity obscures the subordination white middle class women face in relation to men.

Mimi Schippers defines hegemonic masculinity as the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.¹⁷ Schippers alters Connell definition of hegemonic masculinity by centralizing the relationship femininity has to masculinity. Using similar language, she defines hegemonic femininity as characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.¹⁸ Schippers, similar to Pyke and Johnson, argues “an ascendancy of hegemonic femininity over other femininities serve[s] the interests of the gender order and male domination.”¹⁹ However, Schippers critiques Pyke and Johnson for conflating racial hegemony with gender hegemony. She differentiates herself by stressing the relationship of femininity to masculinity.

While more research should be done to theorize femininity, it is clear that white women have access to resources and privileges that women of color do not. While constructed by white male desire, the template for the feminine beauty standard is a white woman. White men defend their honor against men of color who may “corrupt” them. Women of color’s bodies are commodified and are available for white male consumption. These hegemonic sexist and gendered ideologies have an impact on Asian American women.

SELF-IMAGE

From 1939 to the mid-1950s, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark performed experiments with black children ages six and nine. The Clarks used two dolls, one white and one black, and instructed the children to show which doll they like best or would most like to play with, then which doll is the “nice” doll and which looks “bad,” then which doll looks like a white child and which doll looks like a “Negro” child, and finally which doll the children thought looked like them.²⁰

The last question was often difficult for the children because, at that point, most black children had picked the black doll as the “bad” one. In past tests, however, many children would refuse to pick either doll and some would start crying and run away. The Clarks gave the test to children in different parts of the country and found that black children who went to segregated schools were more likely to pick the white doll as the nice one. The Clarks served as expert witnesses in several school desegregation cases, including *Briggs v. Elliott*, which was later combined into *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In 1950, 44 percent of respondents said the white doll looked like them, and

when the children were asked to color a picture of themselves, most chose a shade of brown markedly lighter than themselves. In 2005, Kiri Davis repeated the experiment in Harlem for her film *A Girl Like Me*.²¹ She asked 21 children the same questions, and 71 percent responded that the white doll was the “nice” one. The most powerful image occurs at the end of the video when a young black girl has answered that the white doll is nice. Davis asks her to show her the doll that looks like her. The girl hesitates, almost grabbing the white doll, but then she begrudgingly moves to the black doll. Instead of picking it up, she pushes it away. In 2009, after Barack Obama became president, ABC simulated the test on their show *Good Morning America*, asking 19 African American children from Norfolk, Va., similar questions but allowed “both” and “neither” as acceptable responses.²² They also asked the last question, “Give me the doll that looks like you,” first, which is a stark contrast to the Clark and Davis studies. Eighty-eight percent of the children said the black doll looked most like them. ABC added a question, “Which doll is pretty?” The boys said both, but 47 percent of the black girls said the white doll was the pretty one.²³

While the Clark data emphasized the impact of segregation on the self-image of the children questioned, the contemporary Davis study reveals that racism still affects self-image, regardless of “formal” equality awarded by civil rights legislation. The difficult task is to quantify the impact racism, sexism, and homophobia has on individuals’ psyches. The Clark and Davis studies, even the 2009 ABC version, provide conclusive data that racist ideals, messages, and images are still affecting children of color and thus affecting how they view themselves.

Post-civil rights era racism has largely shifted from blatant and direct forms to a more elusive and, arguably, more dangerous form. It appears in what Bonilla-Silva calls a color-blind discourse,²⁴ appearing less frequently in what Houts-Picca and Feagin call the “Front Stage,”²⁵ which makes up what Collins calls “the new racism.”²⁶ The media play a central role in the era of new racism. The media infiltrates our subconscious as a coercive force in enforcing and maintaining hegemonic ideals. Media scholar, Jean Kilbourne argues that

[a]dvertising is the foundation of the mass media. The primary purpose of mass media is to sell products. The media does sell products but it also sells other things like values, images, concepts of love and sexuality... but it also sells ideas of normalcy. Advertising tells us who we are and who we should be... It's part of a cultural climate in which women are seen as things, as objects.²⁷

The media is a conduit for white hegemonic beauty standards, upholding hierarchical order. My respondents get these messages directly from media and from family who have been influenced by hegemonic beauty standards, as Charlene illustrates.

When I was growing up, I always thought I was fat. I just always thought that I was a chubby kid. And I know I wasn't, and I remember getting ready for this middle school dance in the eighth grade, and putting on clothes with my girlfriends, who are all white, and they said, “Oh, Charlene! Charlene's the skinniest one.” I was like, “No I'm not. I'm fat.” And my mom would always tell me stories about when she was my age she weighed 41 kilograms, which is about 88 pounds. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, like, I'm a cow. I am huge.” And I always saw like other Asian American women and girls around me who were just effortlessly skinny. I always thought about weight, always, always thought about it. I thought that because of my mom's stories about how she looked and weighed, I thought that to be Asian American and you had to be skinny and petite. And that's what you see. You don't see any larger or even normal body size Asian American women. Like Lucy Liu is tiny. Lisa Ling, I love her, but she's also tiny. Sandra Oh, she's tiny. They're just toothpicks. And I always felt that way about my body image.

Elite, white men largely control media. Images of Asian American women are limited to the same type of women that fulfill the fantastical desires of those white men. These manufactured images influence the desires of men and manifest in real life relationships. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Charlene was involved in a relationship with a white man who fetishized her. He fueled her insecurity about her body image, telling her that her “belly got really big” after she ate. This upset Charlene even more and her struggles with body image reached a dangerous point.

All of that [struggle with body image] came to fruition in my last semester with college, because in 2007 I went on this crazy bike trip to Alaska. And I was working out and it was so fun. It gives me endorphins. In my last year [of college], I had a lot more time, so I worked out everyday. And I was really thin. I would work out just for hours. And if I didn't work out, I'd get upset and I'd blow up at people. And I saw a counselor and they said, “You need to eat.” And I was like, “No.” I thought it would change my ability. It does because you don't see any Asian American role models that are different.

Charlene, like many women in the United States became consumed with reaching an ideal body type that it became almost self-destructive. Besides body size and weight, Charlene has also had issues with her hair.

I had kind of wavy hair, and I thought that it was supposed to be straight. So, I spent the large part of my childhood straightening my hair or holding it down to make it straight, buying straightening irons. Because I thought that it was supposed to be sleek and beautiful and shiny. And even now as an adult, last year I got it straight permed Japanese style. And it's totally unnecessary because wavy hair is beautiful and Asian Americans and Asians have wavy hair it's not like that doesn't exist.

Also, her mother insisted that she be careful getting too much sun.

You know mom always wanted me to stay out of the sun. White skin is more beautiful and [she'd say], “Don't get dark, you need to wear a hat, wear a long sleeve shirt. Don't be in the sun. Because dark is ugly.” Well, she always brags about how her mom had really beautiful porcelain white skin. I was like, “Great. Awesome. Thanks, Grandma.” And now I think I don't want to be pasty - - I'm

healthy. And so I'm in the sun and so whatever feels good feels good. I don't feel that need. My mom felt that need. But I never felt the need to be white. I think I knew that was messed up from the beginning.

There is a history of favoring lighter skin in some Asian countries that affect some of the politics and hierarchies in that region, nationally and across boundaries. There are class elements as those who did not have to work long hours out in the fields, were lighter skinned and thus lighter skin denoted greater wealth. In India, there are also hierarchies of skin color. While British colonization has certainly had an impact, emphasis on lighter skin does pre-date the British invasion.²⁸ The preference for lighter skin is not reserved for South Asia. Jessica, a Vietnamese American, explains:

But you see Vietnamese people are an interesting kind of Southeast Asian. They are Southeast Asian, but they *think* they are East Asian and they really want to be, they really do. But like so many of us are really light and want to be Chinese. That's kind of a blunt way to say it, but it's true you know, like a lot of us feel that way. Because Chinese people are lighter, they have this superiority complex sometimes, you know. And they want to be part of that, you know. It's depressing to be a Vietnamese person sometimes, because the history connected to us is a war-torn people in a developing country – poor rice patties. Like that's what you think of when you think of Vietnamese. I don't blame the people for having this other kind of like, you know, “We are more sophisticated, we have more money, we have this, we have that,” and buying into that need. And when you're lighter you can fake that, you know. That's the whole lighter complex in general, though.

The singular representation of Asians and Asian Americans in the media is centered on people of East Asian descent. “Model minority” stereotyping is primarily focused on East and South Asian Americans. Southeast Asian Americans are often left out. Their circumstances for immigration are also different than the Asian Americans associated with “model minority” status. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva theorizes a tri-racial model of racial stratification where Southeast Asian Americans categorized as “collective blacks.”²⁹ For

Asian American women, the umbrella term used for then entire group does not adequately describe the racial stratification that exists with different ethnicities.

The little advertising and media images that exist of Asian American women promote one image of women of East Asian descent as the model for Asian American beauty. Kilbourne asks, “What does advertising tells about women? Most importantly it tells women how we look. It tells us that we should spend time and money to look a certain way and if we don't we should feel ashamed and guilty when we fail. Failure is inevitable.”³⁰ Fareena recalls,

I still remember looking at Victoria's Secret models in magazines and thinking, “Their thighs don't touch. I'm fat.” The cool thing about my school was the curvier you were, the more it was okay. You would get made fun of, if you had a flat butt or you were teeny tiny. It was hard for me to grasp that ideal. Because everything I was taught or had seen on TV, you never saw them match up. My school had this really alternate idea of what was beautiful. Nobody else needed any confirmation from what was in the media to believe in it. I was really conflicted between the two. I liked both. Maybe it was just about finding acceptance somewhere. Every now and then I thought, “I'm going on a diet.” I don't know why because now, looking back, 110-115 pounds. I'm 140 now and I just want to lose the chub I got in the last six months. I just want to be able to fit in my pants. So now as you can tell, I'm really comfortable with my weight, which drives my mom nuts. Nuts because my butt is now 40 inches. I'm fine with it because I work a really high stress job, I'm trying to eat healthy. I know I have to make slow adjustments. Butt still looks cute on me, so I don't have a problem with it. Every single time I come from [my city], she'll say, “Oh, you have gotten bigger.”

Note here that African Americans have a counter frame and an established community reinforcing the counter frame to help them combat the pressures of hegemonic beauty standards. Of course, there are still problems in the African American community that are heteronormative, places emphasis on lighter skin, and hair straightening, but there is at least a strong counter frame to hegemonic beauty standards. There is quite a lack of

information for Asian Americans to create alternative meanings and values about their bodies. Jessica notes,

You know what people think is beautiful and you don't know how to be that. I didn't know how to put on eye shadow right, because they only teach you how to put on eye shadow if you only have a certain shape of eye in a magazine, and if you don't have that eye, how do you put on eye shadow? And you try to look for models in the magazine that have your eyes so you can do it like them, and none of them have your eye. It was like, "Great!" And none of the make-up looks right on your skin and so it's nothing that one person does. It's that you know how different you are from them and it's hard to reconcile it.

There is very little diversity in the representations of female beauty. White women are the standard for beauty in the United States. With the emphasis on the beauty of white femininity in the media, Asian American women can feel abnormal and unattractive.

How do Asian American women deal with the controlled sexuality that was detailed in Chapter II? Parents fear their daughters will fall prey to sexual predators, but they also incorporate racialized, gendered, and heterosexualized norms into the policing of their daughters. It can be taxing for Asian American women to battle with both their family expectations and outside pressures. Fareena was able to get some say and independence,

One summer when she [my mother] went to Bangladesh and saw that her nieces were all doing their eyebrows, they looked great. They probably wore pastel nail polish, because they were grooming now. She said, "Okay, you can do a little bit but not too much. Make sure you don't have one eyebrow, but you don't need to do all of this." That was the green light for me to wear make up. (Laughs) For me to go town. I started buying little things of make-up, doing my hair. And she wouldn't catch it. I relied on her being too busy to catch it. The few times she did, she really overreacted. It was all about, "Are you trying to have sex?" Which I definitely was not. When we moved to this area, we had access to bookstores. It was a nice area. Before, we lived behind trailer parks where they used to fight pit bulls all the time. So our neighbors would give me a ride to Barnes and Nobles. This was before the Internet, right before. That was my ticket to finding out everything I wanted to know and was too embarrassed to ask or what have you. It

was all in the Barnes and Nobles self-help section. My butt was imprinted in the self-help section. I remember one book was Tyra Banks' *Beauty Inside and Out*. There were pictures of all these different women and how to do your make-up, not to wear too much and how to do it to your shape. I was like, "Oh, this is like the Bible." Nobody had taught me this! That summer, that was my stuff. When I came back the next year, I actually looked like a girl! I felt comfortable looking like a girl. I didn't know I wanted to look that way. I had access to it all. Mom couldn't give it at the time. Daddy didn't know what to do. Me and dad talk about fishing and sports. I remember those being the big things that changed. Different perceptions of myself. As far as the body image goes, I'm still conscious about body hair, but I knew what to do with it at this point. I just knew not to tell other girls about it because I didn't know if they had experienced it or not. And most of them didn't. They don't have thick eyebrows or forearm hair. It wasn't something I talked about, but I didn't need to. I was cool by then.

Luckily, Fareena was able to find some information to help her feel acceptable with peers, while juggling the wishes of her mother. Other Asian American women may not have access to resources like the Banks book. There is also a fine line between using "body work" as a source of empowerment and colluding with hegemonic beauty standards. The Banks book is an alternative resource for women of color and has a diverse representation of women, but also reinforces a certain type of beauty to consumers. The beauty industry, in which Tyra Banks participates, actively objectifies women. Women are objects and are ordered by intersecting social identities.

The Craigslist postings mentioned in Chapter II remind us that the constructions of Asian and Asian American female beauty is based on the history of racial power and dominance. Women of color are constructed in contrast to white women and are subhuman. Kilbourne states:

Turning a woman into a thing is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against a person. We see this with racism. We see it with homophobia. It is always the same process we think of the person as less than human and violence is inevitable. Now this is a problem for all women of course, but particularly women of color. Who are often literally shown as animals dressed in

leopard skins and animal prints and over and over again the message is, [they are] not fully human.

As exemplified with the doll studies of the Clarks and Davis, the message of being an “other,” being different and being physically separated, has a long-term effect on a person’s psyche. Their sense of self-worth and self-esteem can suffer.

SELF-ESTEEM

One of the areas in which gendered racism may affect Asian Americans is self-esteem. While bombarded with different messages from family, peers, teachers, and media, fragile self-image can affect self-worth. It is practically impossible for any woman to meet the hegemonic beauty standard. Some white women can get very close, and a large part of the cosmetic surgery industry is fueled by desires to meet this standard. It is absolutely impossible for a woman of color to meet those standards, because it is founded on the concept that whiteness is beauty.

Hegemonic beauty standards harm all women, as hegemonic masculinity harms all men and women. During adolescence, a dichotomy develops in how boys and girls talk about and understand their sexuality.³¹ For female sexuality women are supposed to be silent about sex; “Larger society forces of social control in the form of compulsory heterosexuality, the policing of girls’ bodies through school codes, and media images play a clear part in forcing this silence and dissociation.”³² For boys and men, their sexual organs are a “sign of male power, assertion, and achievement, a gun to conquer the world.”³³ For girls and women, they are taught to “recognize and keep a lid on the sexual desire of boys but not taught to acknowledge their own sexual feelings”³⁴ and are “emotional, submissive, and pressured “to have a boyfriend.”³⁵ Race further complicates

this developmental process. While girls lack “much say over when and how [they] engage in sexual activity,”³⁶ girls of color have must attempt to create a gendered sexual identity in a dominant cultural context that stereotypes them racially.³⁷ Marginalized racial groups have no chance of ever becoming the hegemonic beauty ideal. Like the dolls studies demonstrated, ideas of who are the “good” and “pretty” women in society become internalized in people of color. Ann describes her struggles with self-esteem in high school.

School was really hard. I’m not gonna lie. It was, you know, I wasn’t comfortable in my own skin. I really resented the fact that I was Asian, you know. When the dating phase started kicking in, I never had anyone up until my senior year of high school and all my friends in high school, even in middle school, had boyfriends or what have you. Middle school is more like “Let’s hold hands” and stuff like that. High school, it got a little more serious and they were dating each other for a long time and I was always third wheel or fifth wheel, never had a date, never had anyone and it was a very painful. High school was very *painful*. I just want to blend in and not be associated with anyone that is Asian because then that brings out “I’m different” kind of mentality. There was one other, his sister was a year below us and there was one other Asian male that was the year above me. He was a grade above so I really got to know him. High school was a really hard time because I was aware that I was different. I was very aware that other people knew I was different looking. It was just the little things like, even my teachers sometimes, when you think about in high school or even in college we get pinned as “model minorities” I hid behind my books because I was so frustrated with the fact that I was almost ashamed of being an Asian female because nobody, barely anyone, besides my close-knit friends, I didn’t feel like anyone really recognized me.

Ann was largely invisible to her teachers and peers even though she was much more than a good student. She was the co-captain of the volleyball team, which was a very competitive team her senior year. Her best friend and co-captain was extremely popular and had the “girl-next-door type look.” Ann shares,

Well, Proactiv³⁸ wasn’t invented by the time I hit puberty. I had a lot of acne at the time and that didn’t really help at all. Also, in going through high school was,

I mean I was one of the faster developing girls, but also one of the least noticed throughout high school. It was hard because all the guys I always had crushes on never had a crush on me back. They always had crushes on all my other friends around me. I kept thinking after so many crushes and so many let downs, it had to be because I was Asian. It didn't make any sense, like, why wouldn't [they] want to be with me? I'm thin and I'm smart, and fun, everything was there, except, eventually I gave up. It has to just be because I'm Asian. There's no other to explain why I don't have a date to any dance. No one would ask me. It's always I asked them, or one of my friends would convince someone else to go with me and that didn't ever feel good either.

One aspect of struggling with self-worth is toleration for people who treat you poorly.

As mentioned previously, Charlene dated a very abusive boyfriend for two years. He fetishized her sexually and was also verbally abusive. In an effort to please him, Charlene would dress in cheongsams to fulfill his sexual fantasies.

He would just make comments, like, Asian girls are the tightest or they're the most submissive, like you know how to serve, cooking and serving really, really like that...I bought [the cheongsams] because I thought it would make him happy, and it did. And I fed into it because I thought that's what he wanted. And he became really abusive because he was competitive, and I remember one time I got a 97 on a test and he got a 93. He just got so upset and that's where it started then. I was driving to the SATs. He drove me and I got the directions backwards. And the whole way there he was screaming at me. Like, "How could you look up directions wrong? You're the stupidest fucking bitch I've ever been with, you cunt!" and all these really nasty words. And I'm on my way to SATs. Prom, same thing. I got directions and he thought that the exit was sooner than it was and he was like, "We've missed it, we've missed it." He turned around. And he was like, "You're a fucking dumb shit!" Stupid yelling and cursing at me. Since he was the first person I slept with and my mom really enforced that you have one chance, I didn't break up with him for two years. And he was always like that, just volatile. I would just cry and feel like crap and I couldn't break up with him because I thought that he was the one, because I had slept with him. I had given him my fire.

The moment that Charlene no longer matched the fantasy of a submissive, inferior servant, her boyfriend erupted with his verbal assault. She had challenged the power balance by scoring higher than he did on an exam. She was younger than him, and this

disrupted the hierarchy. I do not infer that all Asian American women who date white men have this experience. Interracial relationships will be discussed at length in Chapter V. Charlene's experience is an appropriate example of how these ethnosexual images can translate to real life.

There is little research on sexual violence in Asian American communities for a number of reasons. It's hard to collect data on a population hesitant to step forward. The hesitancy to step forward maybe also be due to few available resources. Resources are already limited for sexual violence survivors in the United States in general, so even less is available to populations of color. More recent Asian immigrants may also face a language barrier that may make it more difficult to get support. Many Asians and Asian Americans have a fear of "rocking the boat."³⁹ Additionally, newer immigrants and people of color have a history of mistrust of law enforcement. There is little information about Asian Americans and sexual violence.

Another aspect to consider is the impact her mother's lessons early on and the controlling messages Asian women's sexuality. The problematic double standards regarding the sanctity of a woman's virtue is an element to consider in Asian American sexual relationships. There are some contrasting messages. A good Asian woman is sexually pure, should be a faithful partner, always giving, but is then constructed outside of that as an exotic, sexually available, kinky freak. Charlene was juggling with both messages and working hard to please both constructions of her identity at the expense of her own emotional well-being and happiness. She has done a deal of work to define herself on her terms.

While East and Southeast Asian women are largely constructed as hypersexualized vixens, South Asian women do not inhabit that same space in the discourse or media. They are exoticized, as with the *Kama Sutra*, example from Chapter II, however there is this absence of sexuality that is also pervasive. Earlier, Indira shared how she was encouraged by her family to focus on school before relationships. The way she has been socialized as an Indian American woman, she would often assume people would not be attracted to her and interested in a relationship.

Even in our own cultures we as woman are socialized to serve in our own communities. So there's something less appealing about that in general outside of our communities as well. So I think if I were to look at the way I've articulated myself in my own self I've never looked at what I want for me. It's just like, "Oh well if no one's going to be attracted to me, I'll just do what I want to do." So I still have left my faith in somebody else's hands. If somebody's interested in me and it works, cool. But I never saw myself as perhaps I'm attractive. I could ask that person out and see what happens, where I can shape my own destiny around maybe that person would fulfill my desire. So I can see that now. I can see that now in the reflection of the past and that's just kind of day in and day out realities not operating stereotypes, if a stereotype is a gross exaggeration of that and you do see that media....it's straight all women but they, I think, uniquely exploit women in different ways. So yeah, the Asian woman is seen as somebody who pleases. So I find Asian women to be hypersexualized in terms of how we serve. Bob Jensen who is super amazing and he researched pornography. You see the rising increase of hot Asian women -- we -- we are the givers of service and the givers of pleasures. We're the canvas so paint on us.

Women and girls are taught to silence their sexual feelings and desires.⁴⁰ This silence keeps them from being able to express their full personhood.⁴¹ When Asian American women discipline their bodies and curb their desires, it is a very logical and understandable way for them to stay physically, socially, and emotionally safe.

However, they "lost track of the fact that an inequitable social system, renders women's sexual desire a source of danger rather than one of pleasure and power in their lives."⁴²

Asian American women risk losing out on opportunities that bring joy and agency.⁴³

Hegemonic ideology is dependent upon the adoption of the ideals by not only agents of oppression, but also the targets.

In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant the suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.⁴⁴

When Asian American women adopt distorted images of themselves, it is a by-product of pervasive hegemony.

EXOTIFICATION AND FETISHISM

In Spokane, Wash., two white men and a white woman specifically targeted Japanese women in an elaborately planned scheme to kidnap, rape, sodomize, torture and videotape the whole ordeal. According to police reports, the rapists had a sexual fantasy about and fixation with young Japanese women, who they believed were submissive.⁴⁵ In one month in 2000, the predators abducted five Japanese exchange students, ranging in age from 18 to 20. Motivated by their sexual biases about Asian women, all three used both their bodies and objects to repeatedly rape - vaginally, anally and orally -- two of the young women for over seven hours.⁴⁶ One of the attackers immediately confessed to searching only for Japanese women to torture and rape; eventually, all pled guilty and were convicted.⁴⁷

However, Spokane is just one example of Asian and Asian American women being targets of sexual assault. In 2005, Tyreese Reed was arrested for assaulting eighteen Asian American women in the Los Angeles area.⁴⁸ Michael Lohman, 28, a third-year doctoral student at Princeton, was arrested on March 30th of the same year.⁴⁹

He admitted to surreptitiously cutting locks of hair from at least nine Asian women. He also admitted to pouring his urine and semen into the drinks of Asian women more than fifty times in Princeton's graduate student dining hall and other places.⁵⁰ Investigators found women's underwear and mittens filled with the hair of Asian women at his apartment, which he shared with his Asian wife. Police believe Lohman stole the mittens from Asian women and then used them to masturbate.⁵¹ In Northern California, there is still a serial rapist on the loose who, for the past fifteen years, has been linked to over a dozen rapes of women, all of East Asian descent and highly educated. Investigators believe that he stalks them for a period of time before he rapes them.⁵² In New York, a serial rapist targeting young Asian women in the Union Square subway station is still at large. He raped three women on one day in October 2008.⁵³ Most recently making the news, a man in San Diego assaulted six women of Asian descent before one of them fought back, eventually leading to his arrest.⁵⁴

While certainly people of non-Asian descent may be attracted to people of Asian descent, it can be difficult to discern when someone has "Yellow Fever," is a "Rice King" or "Asiaphile." White men's affinity for Asian and Asian American women is noted in pop culture. On the popular blog *Stuff White People Like*, "Asian Girls" is number 11 on the list.⁵⁵ There is a parenthetical, heteronormative blurb stating that white women are exempt from this object of liking. The blog author explains the entry.

95% of white males have at one point in their lives, experienced "yellow fever." Many factors have contributed to this phenomenon such as guilt from head taxes, internment camps, dropping the nuclear bomb and the Vietnam War. This exchange works both ways as Asian girls have a tendency to go for white guys. (White girls never go for Asian guys. Bruce Lee and Paul Kariya's dad are the only recorded instances in modern history). Asian girls often do this to get

back at their strict traditional fathers. There is also the option of dating black guys, but they know deep down that this would give their non-English speaking grandmother(s) a heart attack.⁵⁶

The blog entry, which has now been published in a book that shares the name of the blog, simultaneously makes a mockery of horrific historical acts of violence, insults Asian and black men, and reinforces the “forever foreign” sentiment toward Asian families.

A recent article published in the magazine *Marie Claire* noted that many powerful wealthy white men are marrying younger Asian women. This trend has given these Asian brides the title of “New Trophy Wives.”⁵⁷ It is difficult to distinguish genuine interest from interest rested on fabricated constructions of an othered person. Ann, who had painful memories of high school because she never had a boyfriend, experienced being pursued by a white man simply because she is Asian American.

It was senior year and I started working and I met someone at [work] and he was white. He was a year older, he just graduated and he was my first real boyfriend and he actually made a comment that, he was kinda dating a girl before me and she was Chinese, but she was in [a bordering state]. So, he said, “Well if I am interested in [the other woman], I guess Ann is a lot closer. She’s just a town away and she’s also Asian. I am sure things can work out well with her.” Convenience wise, location wise, I would be the better deal because it’s not like a two hour drive. It’s was kinda like, “Well, Ann’s Asian, so let’s see what Ann is like.” He thought [the other woman] was cute as a Chinese woman, and he thought I was cute as a Vietnamese woman, but in general, you know that type of thing “Oh, all Asians look alike.” I felt like that’s essentially what he was saying to me [laughter]. I didn’t realize it at the time because I wasn’t aware of any Asian American identity stuff so I was just like, “Oh, a guy’s interested in me, let’s give it a try.” But then I went to college and I started realizing how he stereotyped a lot of things within me because I am Asian. He would make comments, we were on the subway and he would see another interracial couple and he would go, “Hey Ann, look at them, they are another Asian girl, white guy. It’s the Asian Invasion.” And I cringed. I know, it’s horrible, it’s horrible. It’s absolutely ridiculous and I realize that now, but at the time I was just still so

young and I hadn't learned about everything yet. So, I knew it didn't sit right, but I didn't understand why.

Like Charlene, Ann quickly started a relationship with a boy that showed interest in her.

After experiences in high school with the little attention she got from her peers, his half-hearted interest was enough.

This exotification happens to queer Asian American women as well. Erin, who identifies as a lesbian, hears more benign comments from partners that her skin and hair are different. Other times, it can be hard how to interpret the attention she is getting.

So clearly it happens. Asian women are exoticized in the queer community. I don't know if people were attracted to me just because I'm Asian. I suspected. If you're a straight white male, you never have to wonder if you're something different. So you wonder if it has anything to do with your personality, the t-shirt I'm wearing, or if it has totally or part to do with my being Asian. I have no idea. Like, do you want to talk to me because of this or because of that? So, probably yes...I think it's been pretty obvious in the straight world. Like, when a guy wants to talk to me. So yes, I've been exoticized before. I guess I'm not totally sure how to approach that or deal with it. It's not the right kind of attention. Like when they ask where you are from as being the opening question. Or stuff about Chinese food. If they're trying to impress you with their Asian knowledge, then they're hitting on you because you're Asian. Or asking questions specifically about being Asian, then they're exoticizing you, while they're hitting on you. If they're talking to you about other things, you don't really know for sure. It could be that that guy is savvy. Or it could be that he really doesn't have that sense of being interested in you just because you are different.

The difficult part of interracial relationships for people of color is how to differentiate genuine interest from attraction based on preconceived notions. There is no real test to accurately determine motives that are not influenced by societal constructions. Then one has to ask, if a relationship is healthy, is there any harm in initial judgments being based on those factors? These are difficult questions that do not have simple answers.

IDENTITY

There is overwhelming pressure for immigrants and marginalized and subordinated people to fit the norm even if it is impossible for them to match that constructed image, whether it with regard to class, race, gender, or sexuality. This section addresses how Asian Americans have dealt with issues of identity. What experiences have they had with constructions of race and family and as sexual beings?

Ann shares,

Accepting it as in acknowledging that I am Asian because going through high school, I resented it. I really did not like it. I really wanted to be white. I really wish that I was born white because I really felt like I struggled in high school to really be seen by anyone. The whole dating thing was huge and also teachers and expectations and stuff. It was hard for them to see past my skin and to not see the stereotypes and not see their preconceived notions. So, the fact that I became more empowered by it because I was finally comfortable with me, comfortable with my background. I was proud of my family history and all that stuff. I was very, going through high school, very shy and hesitant to be seen in public with my own parents because it's just we are that more of a sore thumb when we go out to restaurants and when we go out shopping in the mall and stuff like that. Going through college, life, finally coming to terms with it and accepting it is essentially me, being comfortable with being who I am.

Ann struggled with many issues regarding identity and self-esteem. She was invisible to friends, teachers, and other students. While othered racially, it seems like a logical desire to wish to be white, to internalize racism and struggle with self-hatred.

Jessica is an excellent example of the powerful messages of normalcy being equated with whiteness. There is comprehensive discussion of racial identity, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian American Facing Racism*. Chou and Feagin pay specific attention to racial conformity and Asian American struggles with whitening.⁵⁸ Jessica illustrated specific examples of feeling different.

I was always more jealous of, like, white families because that what I was socialized to really appreciate, like, you know, the grandma that made cookies and like the mothers that were homeroom moms that brought the cupcakes to class and went on the fieldtrips with us, and um, you know, they talk about Thanksgiving dinner where it's like, you know, your grandparents and your aunts and uncles and ahhh... you know I don't want to see all those people. But we never had that. You know, we had a lot of parties and we saw lots of people, but you're not even sure how those people are related to you. And it's like, call everybody your aunt or your uncle or your cousin, because that's really convenient. I was always really jealous of that. Like, there's such an order about it. Like they know who they're related to. Like, I remember one year, like we had this family tree. I hate doing family trees. Because it sucks and my family's so complicated and it's like I don't know all of my mother's brothers' and sisters' names. She doesn't like to talk about them, especially the ones that passed away. She doesn't like to talk about them. And they didn't pass away like because they got in a car accident, they passed away because they were in a war. And so like she doesn't like to talk about that stuff and like my dad, like none of them here. He never talks about any of them. I don't even know their names. And so, it really sucks. And I know that not everybody has that experience. That some people are really lucky and their parents do talk about the war and talk about their brothers and sisters, or they're here and they get to meet them. But like I never got to like talk to my grandpa on the phone or anything from Vietnam. I never met any of my other grandparents. And it was really hard to get my parents to like tell me their names. And didn't really understand the concept of being retreated. Like why are you doing this and why isn't it in a tree and why does it even matter. They are just like, "It's a long time ago, it doesn't matter." And I'm like, "No, it really does matter. I really need to do this for a grade." I'm like, great grandparents, and I'm like I don't know. Like people can trace back their relatives to like famous people and I'm like, "I can't do that. I don't know."

The involvement in war in Asia and the Pacific Islands has direct, destructive effects on the family. US involvement in The Vietnam has had direct impact on her lack of family tree. Jessica feels the residual effect of the trauma of her destroyed family. The colonial projects of the United States continue to ripple down the generations for many Southeast Asian Americans. Her parents found refuge coming to this country. They felt largely isolated in the US and have made attempts to make white friends, but Jessica is concerned that they are still quite lonely. Her siblings do not have the racial history that

she has been lucky enough to gain in college. All these historical and political factors influence her life today.

Lily married before immigrating to the United States. The early messages she received about gender and sexuality were heteronormative. Lily recalls,

When I got married, at the time I was a schoolteacher, I didn't use my husband's last name. My colleagues teased me, "You don't have your husband's last name? When you die your headstone won't call you 'Mrs.' You'll be like a lonely woman."

Women are expected to marry a man and to take his name. This is a norm for the gendered order for her in the Taiwan. As discussed earlier, there are issues with sexism in Asian nations that may differ or contrast from the US. In the United States, there are also the expectations of the Asian woman outside from the home. There are identity constructions of the sexualized body. These constructions for women of East Asian descent are at times conflicting. There is the "submissive servant" and "the kink."

Charlene's identity was confused by the constructions and tried to live up to both:

I felt both extremes of, like, I should be really submissive or I should be like really adventurous and freaky and kinky. I think that kind of made me seem a little schizophrenic to people I was with. I think I would just - - I was just so moldable and I just changed myself to whatever I thought they wanted. And I didn't really assert my own needs or desires because I didn't, I guess I didn't think I should have any. I guess that kind of speaks to what I really think about my sexuality and what I want.

While slightly varied in representation, the construction of East Asian women as sexual beings fulfills the fantasy of white men. These constructions do not include independence, power, and strength for Asian American women. Asian American women adopt social constructed images that are repeatedly reinforced by the media.

Some Asian American male respondents commented that they thought Asian and Asian American women had it “easier” in school and in their media representations. The representations of Asian American women construct them as sexually attractive beings, but that does not necessarily mean they are seen as full human beings. Erin disagrees with the comments made by the male respondents.

It’s not necessarily that the stereotype about the Asian girl gives them an easier time. It’s probably actually harder to juggle. I think the nerdy stereotype about Asian guys- that still happens with Asian girls. That Asian girls are nice and nerdy. But there’s also the exotic whore factor (laughs). But that doesn’t make it easier for Asian girls. It might make you warmer and friendlier, but that’s not necessarily easier. It’s the wrong kind of attention. You’re not seen as a full human being. I don’t think Asian girls necessarily have an easier time making friends than Asian guys. I don’t think I had an easier time making friends....It’s not really the best representation -- media representation of Asians either but it’s a lot of fun in that movie. So I mean the guys, I think they had actually more positive stereotypes in the media when I was growing up than the girls did. The girls were still either seen as like these shy little people that are sort of in the background or whores (laughing).

The representations of Asian women as beautiful, while seemingly positive, are not necessarily varied from other sexually exploitative representations of other women. Just because women are displayed as beautiful does not mean they are not seen as commodities or free from racial and gender domination.

The South Asian representation is slightly different. Indira finds that East Asian women are portrayed in much more sexually explicit ways with more sex scenes. There is a slight increase for women of South Asian descent and with the popularity of films like *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, South Asian women are being incorporated in the film industry as leading ladies. However, these films were both directed by British directors, one of which is a Desi woman.⁵⁹ In the American film

industry, South Asian American leading ladies are lacking. Indira discusses her South Asian American identity formation,

Systemically I think that that becomes a problem because you have all these women either fit or reject these norms. So you know when you hear things that you either radically reject them or you try your hardest to -- to reconcile a reality so you fit because you want to fit into a community. And you have men that have no consciousness or no examination of self so either way even if I passively received norms I had to think about them. The message that I got from the that movie was, if a woman is the one who carries kind of the virtues of a community and when she pleases herself she's in fact being unfaithful to those virtues. And so women, we then operationalize that and so if I want to date somebody because I'm attracted to them then somehow I'm being unfaithful to this cultural community, to the values that I was raised with and that I'm radically rejecting that and I very well could be but I might not be. You know maybe I just, I'm just, maybe a doctor is just a doctor. You're just attracted to another person that you didn't and you know what I mean. And so I think that we tend to thematically I think in our communities we tend to thematically intertwine those things. But either way we're not the one that is define our identity.

The messages Indira has received from both her family and media is that her sexual desire is second to her family and community. Women are denied full access to the power of their own desire by silencing their sexual longings. My respondents have received messages that there is something wrong with desires and sexual feelings, while simultaneously being constructed as exotic sexually available objects. There are very few available resources for Asian American women to openly discuss their identity, bodies, self-image, and sexual desires.

LEARNING FROM OTHER ASIAN AMERICANS

While there is limited representation of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States media, it is even more lacking for Southeast, South, and Pacific Islander Americans. More recently, Asian Americans of East Asian descent have had figures present in mainstream media like Kristi Yamaguchi, Sandra Oh, Margaret Cho, Connie

Chung, Michelle Kwan, Lisa Ling and the list goes on. However, Asian Americans that do not have East Asian roots find themselves having to look elsewhere. Fareena was exposed to other South Asians after high school.

[My brother] said there were a lot of South Asian people in college. I was fascinated. I wanted to go and just people watch. I couldn't, so the next best thing was online. I looked through all the sororities and fraternities. There was National Chapter. Let me look at how other brown people my age look. I thought you had to be either absolutely firm Indian or completely white American. Not even some form of Americanization, but just white American. I didn't know how people like me, who grew up facing similar issues of identity. I don't know how they groom themselves. I don't know what they chose to wear. I don't know what they thought was funny. It was the most fascinating thing to me. It really was.

Fifty-percent of Asian Americans live in geographical regions that are not California, New York, or Hawai'i. So, the feeling of isolation is a real issue for half of the Asian American population. Even in areas like California, New York, and Hawai'i, Asian Americans can struggle with feelings of isolation and being "othered."⁶⁰ Much of the information Asian Americans garner about their identities is from media. Any interaction or Asian spotting can become significant. It can be coping mechanism against isolation. Jessica shares:

I'll be at the mall and I'll be in a parking lot and an SUV will drive by and like there's a little Asian woman inside. And I'll notice it – Asian woman in SUV. And then it's like why did I just notice that? Like who cares that she's Asian American in SUV. She has no effect in my life. But the fact that I track that. And if I walk into a restaurant and I'll notice how many Asian American are in there. Even if it's not an Asian American restaurant. But just like in McDonalds, I'll go, "Look at the little Asian family there. Or look at that little Asian kid – she's so cute! I've got to pick her up." You know. You think about it all the time and you never notice it. I always know how many Asian Americans are in each of my classes. But I always see it – you can't help it. You can't and I'm pretty sure why people don't do that. I'm fairly certain that it does not happen in a white group of mine. And I don't think I like that I do that, but maybe I'm just indifferent towards that because I know that I do it, and ... there's an Asian man right there.

I just can't help it. The guy that asked us.... He was Asian . Like stupid Asian guy, why are you doing this? You look like a dumb ass. You can't help it. It's everywhere. If I meet an administrator, like a group of them, like one of them is Asian American, that's so cool. Teachers? I never had an Asian American teacher. And every time I had a substitute that was Asian American, it was like, "Oh! Look at that!" And that's when you know that it was so covert. Because you don't even realize why you are doing it and you can't stop it. It just happens, and it's so natural, so natural.

Visibility and open dialogue are critically important for Asian Americans to create counter narratives and to combat the long-standing racist stereotypes that are part of the white racial frame. The Asian American women in this chapter battle gendered, racialized, and heteronormative pressures from their families and external forces. Providing opportunities for them to speak about their experiences and listening and responding to their questions may be an effective way to empower them.

CONCLUSION

There is some debate between the sex positive camp and what they would deem as the sex "negative" camp about demonizing some aspects of sexuality and sensuality. However, the centralized argument here and what I would argue that both theoretical camps would agree on is that there is something exploitative about an externally imposed sexuality. Asian American women are socialized in a world that defines their sexuality whether they reside in the United States outside of those boundaries. As a social being, it takes exceptional strength to define oneself. While other communities of color have already laid the groundwork for counter narratives, Asian Americans have yet to fully develop a strong collective counter narrative. Collections like Vickie Nam's *Yello-Oh Girls* are certainly a step in the right direction. In this chapter, my respondents have demonstrated that there are struggles with self-image, self-esteem, and identity

formation because of cultural and familial expectations combined with being ethnosexually defined in another capacity in the United States. In Chapter IV, my male respondents share experiences racialized and gendered experiences.

However, as one of my male respondents, Irwin, noted, there are many more voices of support and scholarly research focusing on the experience of Asian American women. In general, there are still many more gaps to fill and to understand and recover the Asian American male experience. Irwin does have a point that as an underrepresented minority in scholarly research and literary works, etc., Asian American men have been neglected. One drastically noticeable difference between the experiences between Asian American men and women is the regular threat of violence that the boys and men experience at the hands of other boys and men. While women experience the violence in a different capacity, like the symbolic violence of self-hatred because of hegemonic beauty standards and the threat of sexual violence, the Asian American men experience both of those threats in addition to the overt threat of physical violence that is central to the construction of masculinity. Ann notes this experience from high school

There was, I realize, in my sophomore year, there was a guy that was a lot bigger who was a year above me but he's six feet, he's really heavyset, plays football. I later find out that he was a racist. He picked a fight with one of the Latin American or South American immigrants that were in the ESL program. He harassed one of them one day and afterwards a Vietnamese guy that was a year above me told me, "Yeah, Mike's a racist." I got paranoid and we were in the same class together and I didn't realize. We always sat on opposite sides of the classroom, but he never said anything to me and then I realized that's why he never said anything to me. I was like, "Is he gonna do anything to me?" My friend said, "No, no, no. He doesn't harass girls. You're a girl, so you're ok." I'm like, "Ok, but I'm still Asian." It didn't make sense at that time but I was kind of relieved that he would never pick on me because I was a girl. I felt a little threatened but not extremely, where I think my friend that was Vietnamese and male kind of felt a little threatened definitely kept his distance from that guy.

Ann is not free from the psychological threat of violent racism, but her gender protects her from actual physical violence from the openly racist classmate. In the next chapter, Asian American men discuss the role physical violence plays in their intersected gender and racial identity. Their sexualities are often questioned as a means to relegate them to subordinated and marginalized positions in a white hegemonic masculine hierarchy.

NOTES

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CHAPTER IV

ASIAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY

After finishing my first draft of this chapter, I realized I had to go back to the beginning. After a long, 13-hour day of writing, I was overcome with emotion. I felt so proud and appreciative that my male respondents found a place to finally talk about fear, violence, and self-esteem. I undertook this dissertation project for them because I kept hearing the same stories again and again during my thesis work. There were Asian American men walking around everyday, disregarded, tormented, spurned by love interests, and seen as half-men with no platform on which to speak. My respondent Irwin, even at the very end of our interview, was still in disbelief that I wanted to do research and write about Asian American men. He is frustrated with the lack of attention to Asian American men, especially heterosexual Asian American men, because the little research that exists is largely focused on women. Irwin notes, “So in some ways, there needs to be a huge correction made. It just mirrors our society, sadly...the one group that is kind of lost when we’re not talking about writing history is Asian American heterosexual men.” While research is still lacking for Asian American gay and bisexual men, Irwin’s observation is also disappointingly true. In a search for scholarly social science articles about Asian American men, I was only able to find 49 articles dating back as far as 1977.¹

As Irwin notes there is a desperate need to openly talk about Asian American men, and their relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Without an outlet, Indira says,

My mom used to always say that everything, it always comes out. Whatever goes in will come out in some way. So she would always tell me, [because] I used to hold my temper. I used to hold everything in and I would never talk about things and as I got older, she would say, “It will come out. It will come out as an illness. It will come out as cancer. It will come out. If it doesn't come out now in tears or yelling or screaming – you need to get your feelings out. It's going to come out in some way later on, but you never escape what you hold.” And then if, and I also think men in general, Asian men are bullied, I would argue to a different level are socialized through media, through images to not express emotion. If you're continually bullied and you think it's your strength that you're holding it in, really it's breaking it down. I mean, in effect, you're a container. At some point, the container's full. At some point, the container overflows and what happens when you, when any individual breaks is beyond imagination. For somebody who is at the edge, it could be a response in violence.

In April of 2007, Cho Seung Hui killed 32 people and wounded 25 on the Virginia Tech campus before taking his own life. It was the single most deadly shooting by a single gunman in United States History. Cho was quiet as a child and adult. Classmates say he was bullied and women had very little interest in him.² Cho's experience as an Asian immigrant to the United States is not unique. Many of my male respondents have similar experiences, especially in all white spaces. Cho Seung Hui was “bullied by fellow high school students who mocked his shyness and the strange way he talked.”³ His peers mocked his speech even though in elementary school he was “noted for being good at mathematics and English, and teachers pointed to him as an example for other students.”⁴ Interestingly, a friend from elementary school said that Cho was “recognized by friends as a boy of knowledge... a good dresser who was popular with the girls.”⁵ However, things changed a great deal for Cho in middle school. Another classmate noted, “there were just some people who were really cruel to him, and they would push him down and laugh at him. He didn't speak English really well, and they would really make fun of him.”⁶

Cho's story is not very different from those shared in earlier chapters when respondents recall changes in self-esteem when attending all-white schools, whether they were recent immigrants to or born in the United States. Cho spoke very little after being mocked openly in the classroom in high school. He held in his anger and frustration, which grew into a "cancer" that led him to plan an attack. Reporter Sarah Baxter writes, "High on his list [of targets] were his classmates from Westfield High School, who jeered at him to 'go back to China' without bothering to check his nationality....Then there were the college girls who reported him to the police for stalking and got him carted off to mental hospital after he sent them shy love messages full of yearning."⁷ What Baxter misses is that the sting of insults from classmates is not about getting the country of origin correct. It would not be less harmful for them to have said, "Go back to South Korea!" The racial mistreatment he received is the common treatment of Asian Americans as "foreigners" who should "go back" to some far off Eastern place. Even fourth or fifth generation Asian Americans face similar insults.

While all men of color face racist, gender specific constructions, there is something clearly unique about the construction of Asian American men that makes emasculating public humiliation more common. East Asian-looking men are constructed as physically weak and non-threatening in the white racial frame. Had Cho been a six-foot tall Nigerian American man, the teasing in school may have not been so public or without fear of retribution. Cho was diagnosed before moving to the United States with psychological disorders; I want to clarify that I am stressing that there are a number of factors at play. Cho enduring years of racist taunts when he was already psychologically

unstable may have pushed him over the edge. Psychosis, if untreated can be further stressed by discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality.

An interesting factor in the tragedy at Virginia Tech is Cho's race and the stereotypes and assumptions that accompany Asian American masculinity may have had a role in his ability to "slip through the cracks," moving almost undetected as a violent threat. He was writing graphic stories and poetry in one of his creative writing courses, and his professor sought professional help for him. Cho was asked to leave the class and got a psychological evaluation: it determined he was not a threat to anyone. Having been reported to the police by female classmates and to the dean by a professor, Cho still seemed like an unlikely killer. For 15 years in the United States, Cho was largely treated as an impotent foreigner.

Elements of hegemonic masculinity are wed to nationality.⁸ This complicates things for Asian Americans because of their "perpetual foreignness." Specifically, it complicates things for Asian American men. If hegemonic masculinity is wed to nationality, then the foreignness further marginalizes or subordinates Asian American men. One of my respondents, Irwin, predicted a decade before Cho's attack that an Asian American man would go on a violent rampage. Irwin speaks from his own personal experiences, since he was bullied for a number of years in middle and high school. While Irwin experienced physical threats and harm, he notes the daily unspoken acts of discrimination that he daily received from his white classmates as an "other" or "outsider" was extremely powerful

I think what's more powerful [than physical threats and harm] are things that aren't even said. If everyone responds to you the same way or tends to respond to

you in a certain way for like 25 years of your life, this is why I think Asian men and African American men are the most, probably the most psychologically fucked up people in America because there is a sort of response that we get all the time just for what we look like. Not something that we do or say. In some ways, it is that sort of lack of interest, you know, sexually for one thing. And then fear and loathing from men. For whatever reason, you'd rather not have [the Asian American man] around. Or this is our target or, you know, so [African American and Asian American men] pick up on this subconsciously or consciously sometimes. They pick up on it consciously, but I think more powerfully if you pick up on those vibes, for instance it's a more, a more obviously thing is like African American males. I mean, starting from the age of 13 probably, they're gonna start to pick up fear from other people in certain circumstances. Yeah. I mean you can imagine what effect that has on a person over the course of a lifetime.

Cho Seung Hui experienced 15 years of repetitive responses of disdain and disinterest.

Similarly, the men I interviewed openly speak of repetitive poor treatment they received from others, largely whites. In this chapter, my respondents reveal how their self-esteem, self-image, and identity have formed as a result of and in response to their experiences.

Additionally, my respondents discuss their experiences with violence as both survivors and perpetrators.

IDENTITY

To be a “perfect male” in the United States is to suppress all female tendencies and dispositions.⁹ However, Asian and Asian American men are feminized in representations of hegemonic white Western masculinity. Men construct masculinities according to their position in social structure and access to power and resources.¹⁰ Asian and Asian American men have faced obstacles in accessing power and resources, not only in the United States, but also within the global empire. Thus, their masculinity is constructed according to their position in this social structure. By being constructed as more feminine in the Western discourse, Asian and Asian American men can never

achieve “perfect male” status. This can have a profound affect on the self-image and self-esteem of Asian American men and boys. Like the Clark and Davis doll studies mentioned in the previous chapter, living in a society that makes it clear, both overtly and covertly, that you are inferior can affect perceptions of self.

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-IMAGE

Indira, commenting on Asian American male self-esteem, says, “I think self-esteem is tied to the gender piece of identity for men, and so when you don't have your self-esteem and then that intersects with racialism that happens, there's no outlet.” To express emotion and discuss being racialized and being subordinated or marginalized in a gendered sense only further stigmatizes boys and men. Irwin illustrates how external messages about his gendered race affected his self-image; he had a difficult time identifying with masculine constructions.

I've either emasculated myself or given myself a different identity as an adult male. I've thought of myself as something other than what you think of when you think of the word “man,” “guy,” a “male,” a “dude,” whatever, but not a man. Obviously I think it has something to do with my environment. When I say that I mean that I took what was around me and believed it. I internalized all of that.

Irwin's environment is a white racist society that values hegemonic masculinity. The effects of racist oppression psychologically damage people living in a racist, white supremacist society.¹¹ Additionally, racist gender oppression also takes a toll, as Irwin further illustrates.

I definitely felt like I had to prove stuff growing up. Through college, through graduate school. You know all my graduate school. [I had to] prove my masculinity, prove my sexuality—I mean, on the most basic level, prove my heterosexuality. I think for some Asian guys it has to do with their mannerisms and such. Traditionally, you know, Asian men are not necessarily going to carry themselves the same ways as white men. You know, a lot of Asian guys don't

feel like they have anything, any need to prove anything. And plus, some of the external traits, the hairless face probably contributes to that. I think experiences in repetitive images and repetitive narrative types can be very powerful. They've created negative feelings about one's self and on the flip side positive feelings about one's self when you see Asian American heroes in your narratives or in your histories or images, pictures. Simple as that.

Irwin describes being able to be both negatively and positively influenced by representations of Asian Americans. Whites benefit from consistent positive portrayals in the media. They consistently see images of white heroes and saviors in movies.¹² There are numerous examples of whites as successful professionals, government officials, CEOs, and lead characters in books, movies, television programs, etc. People of color see these images much less often.

Additionally, Irwin observes the contrasting aspects of Asian and white masculinity. Simple body movement and mannerisms have different meanings in different cultures. There are performative aspects to these masculinities. The way a person physically carries himself is not biological; it is taught, practiced, and performed over and over again. There are biologically rooted characteristics that Irwin compares between Asian and white men. However, the values placed on facial hair are socially constructed. Imperial masculinity places higher value on men having hairier bodies. However, these are all constructions of difference to maintain dominance. Glenn also notes the contrast of masculinities in Asia and the United States:

In Malaysia. I remember distinctly growing up having adult figures in my life that were obviously questionable. But some of them got married and had children. And some of them acted as if they're not gay. I think a lot of people are like that. They're not unusual, they are everywhere. They contribute to the culture, to the sense that, 'Oh, we said that you were not gay or you're straight.' That's the underlying assumption- if you're not gay, you're straight. And it's okay to act in a feminine way. I can recall specific people who were married, but

they were very feminine in their behaviors, in their demeanor. I think that's why there is that contrast between what is acceptable. In general, a straight Malaysian man is already gentle and quiet to begin with. Plus, when gay men are being oppressed and not coming out but acting as if they're not gay, therefore assumed to be straight, it contributes to the understanding of what it is to be a man in that culture. It's okay to be feminine. It's okay to be gentle, passive, and not aggressive where in the US, people don't want to be identified as being gay, so they try to act in an overly masculine way. Then that becomes a norm. I think that is the contrast in my experience.

Both Irwin and Glenn present contrasting constructions of Asian and white masculinity.

Their constructions of Asian men emphasize smaller bodies and a gentle, less competitive demeanor. Glenn makes an insightful connection between acting aggressively and competitively with sexuality. "Real men" are constructed as tough and combative in the United States.¹³ These U.S. constructions of masculinity are spreading across the globe. Irwin and Glenn both fall short including how globalized masculinities of empire shape masculinity in Asia creating a global gender order. The self-perceptions of manhood go beyond the borders of the United States. These images are omnipresent, and Asian nations have been occupied and attacked by whites from the Western world.

This long assault has taken its toll on Asian Americans. Asian and Asian American men, in particular, have been dealt a number of blows, ideological, physical, and to their patriarchal domains. Irwin shares an anecdote about a situation that had a powerful affect on him.

I went to Atlanta for [a conference]. They invited me to speak there. Some of the facilitators and I went to the Martin Luther King museum. There were three of us, Asian American men, standing there watching this video about segregation and at the museum. And it occurred to us that two of us, we have a difficult time just physically standing up straight and looking people in the eye and physically manifesting this sense of pride or dignity or equality. And that it's taken me thirty years or whatever to get close to that, to feel like I can do that on a regular basis. And my friend here, who is 40-something, also agreed with me and then

this other guy, a Chinese American who was there, he said the same thing. And there was this guy who was third or fourth generation Asian American. One of his parents was Chinese American, one was Japanese American and he said, “Yeah, you know, I’ve always been praised for my posture. Like people look at me and see me as different somehow because of the way I stand up and the way I hold myself.” And the way he would stand is very straightforward. No sense of shame of being less than or hiding something and he would just, look at people. Didn’t have diverted eyes or anything like that. And I was like, “Yeah, that’s the first thing I noticed about you. Man, you need to be on television or something.” I couldn’t quite put my finger on why I was thinking or saying that but then I realized that this guy is lacking insecurity, lacking shame of being what he is, lacking fear. You know part of this hunchedoverness [sic] that I had for along time. This was fear.

Irwin has gone through a long process to gain confidence and overcome his fear. His fear is of white men “messaging with him,” something that will be explained in greater detail in the section on violence in this chapter. Irwin regarded his poor posture as a norm for Asian American men, something that he shared with other men in discussion, which demonstrates the unconscious effect racism can have on how people carry themselves. There are unconscious physical responses that Irwin and other Asian American men are having to racism and racist threats. There is growing evidence that racism is a factor in health disparity, but it can be difficult for researchers to tease out clear connections between mind, body, and spirit. One of my colleagues, after hearing Irwin’s discussion of posture, wondered if there might be any long-term physical problem – back or spine – due to this. Quite likely, there may be a racism-health connection that researchers have not fathomed and, therefore, have not interrogated. Earlier, Irwin stated that Asian and Asian American men have different mannerisms and body movement based on “tradition;” however, here he relates them to how he responds to racism.

IDENTITY

My respondents all spoke about forming their identities, and some struggled more than others with this process. As demonstrated in Chapter II, there is a combination of factors in identity formation. There are familial, cultural, and external expectations of personhood that collide with internal thoughts and desires. A person may struggle with whether they develop a characteristic because they are “wired” that way or if they have been shaped by society. Brent explains:

In terms of being physical, or that whole Bruce Lee thing, on one level I’m really interested in the martial arts stuff and, I haven’t had a chance to do it in [this city], but ever since I was a child, I don’t know if it’s because some crazy people think that all Asians do kung fu, but it’s something I’m in to. Sometimes the idea would come to my head: Why am I in to this? Because people have been blasting that Asians are supposed to be good at this sort of thing or is it because I really like to do it?

Brent cannot differentiate whether his interest in martial arts is something he genuinely likes or if the racial associations of Asians as martial artists have pushed him in that direction. When I teach gender to undergraduates, I often use dolls and Barbie as an example of the power of socialization and gendered norms. Female-bodied infants are not wired with a genetic code to love the color pink and to play with dolls. The color and activity has been assigned a gender. Boys who wear pink or play with dolls are at risk of gender disciplining. Similarly, martial arts are first a gendered activity in Asia. Second, it has been specifically racialized as a form of physical combat. We then see it reinforced repeatedly in the media with limited representations of Asian men as martial artists. With very few representations, it would make sense that Brent associates with martial arts if he embraces some aspects of his “Asianness.”

Ray also found very few images and role models in the media. He had to independently construct a masculine identity that was anti-hegemonic.

I know when I was growing up, at a certain point there's no model character that I could go along with. Some traits are more important. A lot of them I got from watching cartoons and reading comics. Things about being smart. Smart means being clever, understanding losing. Losing is not a total loss if you understand why you lost. And don't be a douche bag. You don't need to kick some guy around all the time. Those were things I felt like, "I'll just take these things and be myself. I'm not happy with any of these models that I've seen." I don't feel like an Asian American kid needs to grow up watching one group, they just need to be themselves. They don't need to follow one or the other, but just understand that there are a lot of things out there. They shouldn't be totally white. I don't know how to describe that in any tangible way. I knew I didn't want to be totally white.

Ray's experience with racist whites kept him from emulating whiteness. He has been put off by an aunt and cousin who worked hard to "whiten" themselves. Ray gained self-confidence and strength from his experiences with racism. While they were painful experiences, Ray sees them as character building exercises. In forming identity, my male interviewees are responding to gendered and racialized scripts. They struggle to be model minority-esque, emulate whiteness or other men of color, or try to create an original identity.

THE ASIAN AMERICAN MODEL MINORITY MAN, AKA, "THE KING OF GEEKDOM"

For a long time, Ray has fought against white hegemonic constructions of masculinity. He rejects notions that a "real man" has to be physically dominant.

For me to be a man, I don't know for an Asian American, but for me, a real man doesn't have to always physically show how powerful they are. Power isn't anything. For me, a real man is a person who has to restrain themselves more rather than showing themselves off. I developed that a real long time ago.

Ray prides himself as being the “king of geekdom and dorkdom.” He is very self-confident and comfortable in his masculinity and sexuality. While Ray is comfortable with his identity, he still becomes angry when a racist incident happens. Just a month before he was interviewed, two white men walking behind him and his family threw out racist epithets. His cousin’s wife, who is white, confronted the two men. They laughed at her, turned a corner, and screamed “White Power!” Ray shared that he was bothered by this event and became angry because he was unable to protect himself and his family from the two men. His decision to address problems by ignoring them can be at odds with constructions of men as protectors.

Samir, an Asian Indian American, jokes about Asian Indian Americans actually fitting the stereotype. Samir is very athletic and was heavily involved with a Desi fraternity in college. While studying medicine, he works to define his own masculinity even with the stereotypes.

Most Indian kids are like the spelling bee kids, to be honest with you. We're the smart brainiac guy who solves all the problems. We're the guy that's out there to make our family and our parents happy because we are, that's how our culture is. In terms of masculinity level, I don't think we're labeled as very masculine.

John, a Chinese American, said that he identified with being a “geek” before identifying as an Asian American. He hung out mainly with advanced students, largely Asian American, in high school, college, and now at work. He is in the computer software industry and lives in a “culture of computer geekdom.” He separates “geekdom” from race, while some respondents argue that they are interchangeable. Many things become “raced,” “gendered,” and “sexualized:” clothing, food, furniture, hobbies, and sports. It is arguable that “geekdom” is male, straight, white and Asian.

This construction of “geekdom” has historical roots in model minority stereotyping. The pursuit of academic excellence was and is a defense strategy against racism.¹⁴ In some ways, respondents used the “geek” route because they did not want to attempt to imitate or pursue hegemonic masculinity, while other respondents would choose to either emulate whiteness or, as respondents described, “gangster.” The geek is a safe alternative for those who do not choose to perform hypermasculinity. They feel comfortable being smart and do not choose to get in physical altercations. Their coping mechanism in dealing with racism is to assume that the assailant is just “ignorant.”

The nerd type is antithetical to the mainstream notion of authentic black male identity but accepted as an accurate representation of an Asian American man. Black buddy films portray the black buddy as asexual, but still underlining that is the assumption that he is heterosexual. There are a growing number of Asian buddy movies.¹⁵ “Traditional, Orientalist, racial prejudice is still alive and well. It is probably no coincidence that the self-effacing, sexually non-threatening Jackie Chan has made the most successful and sustained crossover into mainstream American cinema.”¹⁶ When African American men are portrayed as gay in movies, they are overwhelmingly shown as effeminate “sissies” or “Snap! Queens.”¹⁷ There's great variance in the representations of heterosexual black men versus gay black men because black masculinity is constructed as intensely hypermasculine, then black gay men, “cannot be black.”¹⁸ Thus, we see the exaggerated hypersexuality versus the exaggerated effeminate gay man. For Asian American males, there is not as much contrast in the constructions of the gay

Asian man and the straight Asian man. The Asian gay man is not as antithetical to the construction of the Asian man.

WHITE HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY OR “BAD BOY” POSTURING?

While there were very few Asian Americans at my high school, one particular classmate stuck out. His father was a successful doctor who had emigrated from China, and his mother was white. Whenever a peer would ask him about his racial makeup, he would fervently say, “I’m white.” If questioned again, because physically he looked multiracial, he would get very angry and shout that he was “not Chinese” and that he was white. At that age, I realized something seemed unsettling about it but had yet to realize that there was something he detested about his Asian heritage. When I went to college, I met another Asian American man who had Chinese parents and called himself “The Caucasian Asian.” Every time I saw him hanging outside of the dorm, he was engaged in these male performances of hypermasculinity. He was loud, walking with an exaggerated swagger, and constantly yelling out that he was the “Caucasian Asian.” Perhaps I was judgmental because he did not fit my constructions of an Asian American man. However, in both cases, I saw these two men overtly and publicly reject their Asianness.

David Eng asserts “whiteness is a social construct which acts to covertly draw the boundaries of normative heterosexuality and to exclude the non-white subjects such as the Asian male from masculinity's associated roles of power.”¹⁹ Asian American men may attempt to emulate whiteness hoping to access masculine power. This is a coping strategy for some Asian American men and women.²⁰ However, as Eng suggests, there is

a long history of exclusion of the Asian man from power and normative masculinity.²¹

My interviewee, Brent, has some animosity towards one of his cousins who has abandoned the family. Brent is angry at his cousin and feels like his cousin is ashamed of his Asianness

He's a dick mostly because he doesn't have any dealings with his family; with us. After a certain point, he just didn't want to have anything to do with us. I think it's a lot of that Chinese part [he dislikes]. He went to [a large state university]. And he's a doctor now, but from high school on he sort of got into this idea where he would be a rich kid even though his parents aren't rich. He just started to dress like those preppy [white] kids and trying to get in their circles. Eventually, he and [his cousin], they went to the same high school, same classes, same everything. They were so close, but somehow at a certain point in high school you just split off and diverge into two different people even though we would see each other. They saw each other everyday. We would have a Sunday dinner with all the families at my grandma's house yet they somehow split off. It was kind of sad but he started dating a rich white girl and I guess started to live this rich Southern lifestyle. His wife, or his girlfriend at the time, was whining to me about how he just refused for a very long time to bring her over to meet us and when he finally did he and his girlfriend didn't even stay at his mom and dad's house. They went and stayed at a hotel. I don't know if he's just ashamed of where he's from or who he is or what.

Brent's cousin's abandonment of the family hurts Brent a great deal. He continues:

His parents [moved to another city]. I think he's only come over once, maybe. They always go over to see him I don't know, but yeah, maybe once or twice. It's just like when my cousins and I and my brother go over and we're all having a great time, their kids are having a great time but I've heard her say, "Gosh, I really wish my son was here. Everyone looks so happy." I've never walked away from him. He walked away from us. I almost have zero sympathy for him now. If someone slapped money down and said, "Brent, here's your \$5,000. Have you and your cousin fight in the cage." I'm like give me that money. It's just a lot of things like that. I just feel so insulted that he doesn't want to be, he's not a part of us and the main reason is because maybe, one, we're not white and, two, we were kind of poor. And, you know, you only show up at Grandma's funeral or as some token person in my brother's marriage whatever. I don't want to have anything to do with you. That's the story with him, I don't know. This guy, he probably has great desires to be a white man.

Like some of the Asian American men I knew in high school and college, Brent's cousin is attempting to abandon his Asian heritage. He is specifically emulating whiteness as he attempts rise in class status. In addition to abandoning relationships with one's Asian family, another strategy some Asian American men use is building a larger physique.

Jackson Katz noted in *Tough Guise* that representations of the male body in movies, television, and action figures have continued to grow larger while women's bodies and dolls have gotten smaller.²² These changes in body size have become so exaggerated that a G.I. Joe action figure's bicep has reached a proportion impossible for any human being to reach.²³ Glenn describes an Asian American friend who he believes is a model of Asian American masculinity.

I have a former student slash friend now, born in Singapore and raised in the U.S., who is a personal trainer. He exhibits what I call the ideal Asian American type. He's very masculine. He's very built. He acts in a very American way. If you paint him white, he is completely American. Not saying that Asian Americans are not Americans. I think there is a misunderstanding that Asian Americans are not Americans because they're not *American*. Americans are supposed to be white. At the same time, I think black is also understood to be a part of the American model. Now Latino men are moving into the mainstream. But Asian men are lagging behind. They are not there yet. So it's the assumption that they're not quite American, yet. I think that he represents what I would say a lot of heterosexual Asian American men would like to become...He's the kind of Asian American I would like to become. I don't think I have the physical characteristics that he has. He's big, huge. He's slightly taller than me. He really trains himself to develop the physique that is competitive with other "Americans"- white, Latino, black....Bruce Lee had a great body, but he's lean, very lean. He's not really muscular. He's lean and tall. I would say the body types are a little different. Asian men are lean and toned, not muscular. Lean and toned aren't what is most desirable.

Glenn's friend is a representation of an Asian American male conforming to whiteness.

What Glenn describes is a person working hard to shape and form a body associated with non-Asian men. Glenn is arguing that to become truly American, Asian Americans

must not act Asian, something he does not clearly describe. Glenn puts a great deal of emphasis on constructions of whiteness and Asianness. Race and gender are socio-historically constructed there is no real biological basis to acting white or male, there is only performance and perceptions of those performances. Glenn's friend attempts to access whiteness by doing "body work," but instead of plastic surgery, he uses the gym to shape his body in what is perceived as white and male.

THE ASIAN AMERICAN BAD BOY?

White hegemonic masculinity relies on the subordination of women and other forms of masculinity. Appearing weak, effeminate, or gay marginalizes a man in this hegemonic structure. Asian American men, as opposed to non-Asian American men, are burdened with these stereotypes. If they whiten, they hope to reap the benefits of white masculinity. Another strategy for Asian American men is affirming their masculinity through "bad boy" posturing.²⁴ This posturing is identified with working class white men or men of color.²⁵ However, to perform this bad boy act is not without consequence. Kraus contends that "fears of appearing effeminate, hence homosexual – that is, of not being a "real man" – are common among men, and demonstrating "real" male behavior seems to put great strain on them."²⁶ Men of color are extremely vilified compared to white men who are also posturing themselves as deviant.

Bad boy posturing for Asian American men is most visible in the discourse is of an Asian gangster who is of East or Southeast Asian descent. Chance notes that the Asian bad boys he recalls from high school

like Hondas and Acuras, spiked hair. They always had these black jackets. It was kind of the Asian jacket. Before Myspace²⁷ and even before Zynga²⁸ there was

Asianave.com²⁹ and all the Asians would be on it. They would also have all these caricatures, the hair. It's all there and there are gangster Asians, guns, and the cars and stuff.

Chance says he was not particularly interested in Asianave.com, though he did try to have the Asian spiked hair but was unable to get his curly hair to stand up. Chance was not the only respondent to notice the trend of some Asian American men trying to portray themselves as “tough” or “violent,” as Brent illustrates.

It seems like now, with a lot of younger Asian males are getting more into this hip hop sort of thing trying to blend into that culture, it's somewhat okay to be Asian and in your face and try to take part of that street, hip hop sort of look even though you might live in the suburbs. That's not necessarily a single part of masculinity but it's how it's changing. Sometimes I'll be in [major city with a large population of Asians] and I'll be talking to my cousin and some of his friends and they're like, “When Asians get up in the club, someone's going to get shot!” And you would never hear anything like that! I have never heard anything like that! Wow. Not a good thing, but you're just like, “What?” I think the whole hip-hop street thing has become an alternative for a lot of Asian, I guess men, mostly men, have seen and taken as a route to get in to. [It's an alternative] to either being straight up Asian in your culture or being white. It's like now that we can get our chance to get into this hip-hop sort of thing, that image has just been elevated, then we can be part of this group. We don't have to be Asians anymore. I guess it just might be an outlet for some people like that. It's either you be a total assimilated white guy or just sort of an Asian person. I guess in some form or fashion it's trying to be a part of a group or to create some sort of identity. Maybe being Asian isn't enough or it's just not as accepted form of status.

Brent provides examples of Asian Americans having very rigid boundaries of identity.

There is this foreign, model minority construction where Asians are not the cool kids.

The normal popular kids are white, and embracing hip-hop and violence is reserved for other people of color and is largely classed. Bonilla-Silva has formulated a tri-racial model where “a few Asian-origin” people are categorized as “whites,” and largely East and Asian Indian Americans are “honorary whites.”³⁰ Southeast Asian Americans are

deemed “collective blacks” due to class stratification, method of immigration, and, in part, skin color. However, if a gender component were added to Bonilla-Silva’s model, these classifications would be insufficient. Asian American men, especially those with East Asian roots, would be in the lowest tier of the intersected order. In accepting that they will rarely achieve the status of white men, there is a move to emulate men of color.

There have been movies portraying Asian and Asian American men in this role. Recent films such as *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, *Better Luck Tomorrow*, and *Gran Torino* portray East and Southeast Asian Americans as hypermasculine criminals. The criminality is not a new portrayal of Asians in Hollywood, but the close resemblance of hypermasculinity to Latinos and African Americans has increased as rap and hip-hop have become mainstream. Like Brent observed, “going hip-hop” is an alternative to what is constructed as white and Asian masculinity. Brent attended a prestigious math and science boarding school where his roommate was “straight gangster.” His roommate would be very disrespectful to dining hall staff and would be loud and obnoxious in the dining room, threatening to harm people and being disruptive. His roommate would put on these masculine displays; however, they were just gendered public performances. While he would occasionally test his strength against Brent, he most often was very different when there was no audience.

It was funny that he would be so in your face and everything. He would rarely be that way with me when we were in our room or whatever or with our friends in the dorm. But occasionally, somehow, someway, even though he was the, I guess what you would consider, a more popular guy than me and the street thing and had the air of being more physical, sometimes he would just, for some ungodly reason, he would really want to fight me. It was just like, dude, we’re roommates, and he would get on my nerves wanting to know if I was going to hit him back. Somehow we would just kind of fight. I mean, I don’t want to just be bragging

but he would never beat me up, it's just not possible for him. He was the type the guy who lifted weights and was very body conscious, that sort of guy and I'm like, "Why do you want to do this man?"

There are benefits to bad boy posturing. Appearing more physically threatening may work to deter others from bothering you. Also, Katz asserts that women validate and support bad boy posturing by being attracted to men who act tough.³¹ Asian American men are already considered unappealing by white hegemonic beauty standards, so they may gain some attention from women with this bad boy image. It is also a survival mechanism to "survive in whatever peer culture they happen to be in. But putting on the tough guise comes with a cost and that is a cost that in terms of damage to their psyches and their ability to be decent human beings."³²

VIOLENCE

If you're a boy, it's pretty clear there's a lot of pressure on you to conform, to put up the act to be just one of the guys. Obviously, they learn this in many different places, from their families, their community. But one of the most important places they learn it is the powerful and pervasive media system that provides a steady stream of images that define manhood as connected with power, dominance and control. This is true across all racial and ethnic groups, but it's even more pronounced for men of color because there is so little diversity of images of them to begin with in the media culture. For example, Latino men are almost always presented as boxers, criminals, or tough guys in the barrio. Asian American men are disproportionately portrayed as martial artists or violent criminals. But, transcending race, what the media do is help to construct violent masculinity as a cultural norm. In other words, violence isn't so much a deviation as it is an accepted part of masculinity.

Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise*

In some ways, I agree with Katz that violent masculinity has become an accepted cultural norm, but the violent perpetrator is largely dependent on time and place. It has been normalized on playgrounds for boys to uphold a white hegemonic masculine hierarchy with little consequence from teachers.³³ In action movies, men of color are

repeatedly shown as agents of violence. However, in model minority stereotyping of the emasculated Asian American man, he is the recipient of physical, emotional, and symbolic violence at the hands of men. Patricia Hill Collins notes that black men face violence at the hands of black men most frequently.³⁴ However, Asian men in the United States and across the globe face violence largely at the hands of white men.

The violence and emasculation that Asian American men and boys face has an effect on their self-esteem and also masks the violence within the Asian American community – self-hatred, internalized oppression, domestic violence, and disdain for their own community members.

TARGETS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

“An awful lot of boys and men are inflicting an incredible level of pain and suffering on themselves and others.”

Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise*

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as what it means to not be a woman. For Asian Americans there is less obvious contrast in the physical body between men and women – size, muscle mass, body hair, even in perceived intelligence. This is a key point in explaining the level of violence and bullying Asian American men and boys face. Hegemonic masculinity is based on highlighting differences between men and women; this becomes a problem area for Asian American men. It further stigmatizes Asian American men as subordinate or marginalized because they may appear to more closely resemble the gender they are oppositely constructed against. Additionally, hegemonic masculinity requires control over women. Especially in the public sphere, the representation of East Asians does not portray East Asian men as heads of household.

While this may starkly contrast reality in these homes, the media portrayal is clear.

However, South Asian representations vary.

Six of my male respondents experienced violent hate crimes at the hands of white men.³⁵ Henry has been beaten and harassed by whites for over fifty years. Bari was hit with a baseball bat by a white assailant and called a “fucking foreigner” while biking home from his college campus. A white man jumped out of a car at a stoplight to hurl racial epithets and punch out Conrad’s tooth while he was walking with a group of friends. After September 11, 2001, Ahmed received threatening phone calls and e-mails, and white drivers on the highway forced Paul off the road. Henry verbally protests the physical assaults that continue to this day, and Guang consistently uses force because he does not want people to “assume [he’s] just a passive Asian” because “they’ll take advantage of that.” Of my respondents, the targets of violent racism have all been men. This is a notable difference that Brent mentioned in his interview. He and his male cousins received physical threats, while his female cousin and another Asian American girl in his school were able to avoid that level of conflict. Indira also notes that she receives different treatment than her brother, viewing her treatment from a historical perspective.

The terrorist stereotype is not going to affect me as much as it's going to affect my brother. Right? To the type of violence that he would likely experience in the capacity is way different than any kind of violence it's different than I would experience. When you look at every war you can think of in this century or into the 1900s, any foreign war the U.S. has been engaged in, it was with a country that has an Asian face. Whether that's a brown Asian face, whether that's Middle East, which I out of compassion tend to include in an Asian capacity. Our men, depending on the day, depending on what our foreign issue is, our men are the unfortunate beneficiaries of the impact of those stereotypes. I don't want to sound cliché, but 9-11 happened to be South Asian men, but you know post-Vietnam

war, the face was different. Post-World War II, the face was different; the treatment again was just as violent. So I can't even imagine what that's like. I can't even imagine how to have a conversation around masculinity with Asian men because on the one hand, on the grand scale conversation around our gender identities, Asian men really don't get to be "masculine" because they're not seen as manly, whatever that's supposed to be. And yet I don't think that they experience the true notions of what masculinity means, and the byproduct of that is that masculinity shows up in not the best ways internal to community.

Since the revolutionary war, white working class men have joined or been drafted into the military to enforce policies often made without their input, but Asian American men occupy a different space.³⁶ These wars have been wars against Asian faces. These wars legitimate violence against Asian peoples. School shootings are not seen as a white problem. The Virginia Tech shooting was racialized. Terrorists are black and brown people but when we analyze these events of violence a missing dimension is the preceding violence against people from these countries. More clearly, the continual wars the United States wages against people in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East seem to absent from the conscious forefront of most Americans. There is no blame assigned the United States for an assault on these people across the globe. However, in the United States, when people who seem to be citizens of or have ancestry in these regions, it becomes inexplicable why they would want to attack Americans. There is a short or selective white, patriotic memory, or *collective forgetting*,³⁷ that sees only brown and black faces as violent. We do not see whiteness as the greatest source of violence across the globe.

LIVING IN FEAR

The immigration experience can be terrifying. While many Americans worry about brown and black faces invading, corrupting, and planning to attack the United States, we miss just how difficult it is for these law-abiding immigrants. Paul explains:

My father told me one of the most scariest moments in his life was moving to the U.S. to go to school because his English was just horrible. He had a super thick -- my dad still has an accent. He was like super thick accent and the guy who has an accent tells you he had an accent. He is still very self-conscious like he won't order pizza over the phone. Somebody else has to order like one of the little kids. My sister was seven; she had to order it over the phone because he was always afraid of people just making fun of him.

Paul continues:

My dad got robbed at a grocery store one time. Got held up at gunpoint. It's stuff like that I always think, that stuff's got to really fuck with your head. Because he came over here to make money to give back to his family back home. Fly all the way over here and you go through all this shit and you almost get killed in the place that's supposed to be the place where you're supposed to make it. It's got to completely fuck with [my parents]. So there's my little immigrant dad, 5'5" just sitting with his big mustache, waiting to go to Kroger to sack groceries. I can't imagine how awful it is. Especially getting loans. Getting everything. And they never talk about it with me. I have to really prod out of them to find out -- the only reason I found out he got robbed was his friend told me. They were like, "Yeah, your dad got robbed." And then he came back in the room. "Hey you never told Paul you got robbed at a grocery store?" "Oh, yeah, I remember now." I'm like, how do you forget that? How do you forget that? But I think you know, you see them, they bought a new house. They have this new house and they're outside planting and you always wonder, how lame are your parents because they don't ever want to go out? And they're so happy sitting at home. And I think it's because of what they have gone through. They remember sitting in 1971, just struggling to make rent. And now we have this big house and I can sit here. And nobody is going to fuck with me. I can sit here and plant whatever I want and nobody is going to yell at me and I'm safe. My dad has been wanting a new house since he moved here in 1970. They've been struggling for so long.

Many immigrant men with families have the added burden of dealing with a navigating a new, racist society in addition to all the responsibilities of taking care of their families in

the United States and, in some cases, their family members living in Asia. Paul tried to imagine moving to China and trying to navigate through daily life. He has great deal of empathy and appreciation for the sacrifices his parents made coming to the United States. There is intense pressure on those heads of household.

The male breadwinner model is said to be in decline.³⁸ Employment relations still require the performance of a masculine breadwinner mentality.³⁹ The decline in the model has different impact on men and women because women often have networks centered on home.⁴⁰ Much greater threats to identity for men who are unable to be breadwinners than their women counterparts.⁴¹ Men suffer more from job loss. Indira notes a recent trend with Desi families,

I have seen at least three or four [news articles] where they're Indian families where it looks like the head of the household, being the father has shot the entire family including grandparents and children, wife, everybody. Just a family suicide and then shot himself. And so there is no definition of masculinity for our men and it does not allow for output of emotion in a way that allows for seeking of health to be seen as a good thing, to allow for expression of as a rule their ability and so it's going to come out it's going to come out in some level of harm. And then our community suffers and you know what you'll see? I would argue there's no parallel. Like I had a lot of, most of my friends were Vietnamese American growing up and it wasn't uncommon to hear that they're fathers often didn't talk about anything to them right. The stress of a father who was disengaged and shot down because of their experience of immigrating to the United States and you know what it must have been like leave everything, losing family.

Indira provided me with links to three articles of Desi American men who, after facing financial trouble, murdered their families and then committed suicide.⁴² Men's work makes up a bigger part of their identity therefore it is more difficult for them to build an identity based on home life while they are without a job, meaning they tend to feel more socially excluded.⁴³ The economic downturn is adding stress to the lives of most citizens

in the United States, however with these tragic incidents Indira finds a connection with masculinity and race.

Adult Asian American men are not the only ones living in fear of physical harm.

Asian American boys in and outside of school have that fear as well. Brent shares:

I know that in high school, the idea of a fight was always looming out there. It depends on how far this personality will take the verbal assault, you know, on each other. That's always looming.

The respondents reported very little intervention from school staff regarding these physical threats. Bullying has become normalized as an acceptable behavior to expect from boys. Jackson Katz argues that

one of the major consequences of all [the violence in the media] is there's a growing connection made in our society between being a man and being violent. In fact, some of the most serious problems in contemporary American society, especially those connected with violence, can be looked at essentially problems in contemporary masculinity.

These contemporary problems with masculinity take various forms. While there is overt physical violence that is a byproduct of masculinity, there is also symbolic violence.

Emasculation can occur in ways other than physical bullying, it can also take place with exclusion and symbolic "castration."

CASTRATION

Natural black heterosexuality is rooted to the hypersexuality of African-American men. Asian American men do not appear as naturally hypersexual because of hypo-sexuality or asexuality. Hypo-sexuality is defined as a sexual disorder, so these representations of Asian American men as hypo-sexual put them in line with having some sort of abnormality. Even in gay porn, Asian bodies are castrated, where camera

angles never show their penises and they are consistently portrayed as bottoms.⁴⁴ One male respondent, Zac, encouraged me to visit the website www.bitterasianmen.com.⁴⁵ He explains, “I didn’t make the site up, but I found out it while surfing one day. And it’s about these two highly educated med school students that are bitter because they lost their girlfriends to white guys.” On the website, there is a section titled “Rant” where the website creators have articles published like, “White Girls Don’t Want Us,” “Asian Girls Don’t Want Us,” “Western Society Hates Us,” and “Nature Hates Us.” Interestingly, the article “Nature Hates Us” details the penis sizes of various racial groups.

The authors are perpetuating stereotypes that race is connected to innate biological differences that have social value and significance. The authors use their site for social commentary that God or nature has punished Asian American men by giving them smaller penises, shorter stature, and hairless bodies. They use these physical disadvantages to explain why Asian American men are unable to court and satisfy women. The value placed on the size of male genitalia, body hair, and height is a socially constructed value. This concept of ideal body type is racialized and gendered based on hegemonic masculine ideals. Again, in Western thought, the mind and body are dichotomous. This discourse has been used to reinforce white male power and privilege.

Asian American men have not always been castrated men. Formerly, they were on the same list as other men of color accused of being sexual predators with a predilection for white women and girls. However, the discourse shifted with the rise of the “model minority” stereotype. Whites were no longer able to infer Asian American racial inferiority because of their apparent success in education and the professional

realm, so the script had to change. Racism faced by Asian Americans has changed very little throughout the history of the United States. Asian American boys and men are constantly emasculated. Judith Butler argues that masculinity is extremely fragile and must always be reproduced in performance,⁴⁶ but the gender script is different for Asian American men than for other men of color. Where African and Latino American men are attributed a hypermasculine status, Asian American men start with an assumed deficiency. The media perpetuates these images, portraying Asian American men as sexless and undesirable. These images take root in reality as Asian American men “bitterly” cope with being ignored by non-Asian women and watch Asian American women partnered with white men. The shift in Asian American masculinity demonstrates the transformative nature of systems of oppression. Political strides for African American men post slavery led to oppressive segregation laws. The advances for African Americans were met with resistance from whites in other forms.⁴⁷ African American men continued to be disempowered by Black Codes, Jim Crow laws and the prison industrial complex.

Asian American success as model minorities has also been met with white resistance. The sexual stereotypes have been more widely disbursed through media sources, as Irwin explains.

Well, speaking about the sexual insecurities of white men. [White men have] got to come up with something for each group in order to keep them away from white women. So, for black men it is that they are dangerous or violent, blah blah blah. And then for Asian men it's supposed to be opposite. But at the same time there's this dangerous thing that is propagated through the stereotypes of gangsters and evil villains and things like this. So you look at these contradicting stereotypes. You've got these evil bad guys who have to be powerful in order to

make good a villain for the white hero and at the same time you have these weak nerds who are sexless or asexual.

Stereotypes about people of color do not have to be logical. The contradictory depictions of Asian American men show the centrality of maintaining the image of “virtuous whites” in the white racial frame.⁴⁸ Gender stereotypes are altered and flipped to maintain the racial hierarchy.

The castration of Asian American men made it possible for Daniel to mask his sexuality. While other classmates would talk about sexual attraction to members of the opposite sex, Daniel could abstain from conversations without leading on to his friends that he is gay.

I never actually had to pretend [to be sexually interested in women] because I just didn't have to play that game. I think it's different for Asians where they don't have to play that game. You're supposed to be asexual, not interested in sex, as an Asian American...I try to seem like I'm not interested or I don't care. I think appearing to be asexual is almost like a defense mechanism when it comes to appearing homosexual. I think that was something I picked up, just trying to appear asexual so people wouldn't question [my sexuality]. The Asian stereotype overrides the homosexuality stereotype of being submissive because Asians are submissive so you have to be a bottom. And that goes into the gender stereotype of Asian males are submissive, they're mindless and they do what they're told. They're intelligent, but they're machines. It's very tough to explain, but I can definitely feel it. I can definitely feel it.

There is a racialized power incorporated in sexuality. Queer Asian American men are in a very precarious position to perpetuate stereotypes about Asian American men while trying to protect their queer identities. Within the queer community, there is a hierarchy of power. During the colonial period in Hong Kong, Asian men were largely bottoms for British men. After the colony was abolished, there was a shift in bottom and top politics.⁴⁹

The way that black masculinity is constructed, African American men can only define their masculinity with prowess and conquering "booty."⁵⁰ Conquering booty makes them authentic as men. For Asian American men, the "booty conquering" player seems like the exception. There is a push in gender and race to fit a script. Oppressed people are internally driven to meet those expectations in some fashion. Even in gay male pornography, Asian American men are castrated.⁵¹ The pornography is used to graphically affirm white men's sexual domination and power over others.⁵²

The male breadwinner is a construction of masculinity that a man should take care of his responsibilities, including maintaining a job, being educated, and having enough money to support a wife and children. This is a place of much historical and present-day criticism of black men.⁵³ Historical and systemic racist practices throughout history explained how all those responsibilities have been more difficult for African American men to achieve.⁵⁴ For Asian American men, as model minorities, these responsibilities seemingly come easier. However, this does not award them a higher status of masculinity. Patricia Hill Collins states that Asian American men, because of "model minority" stereotyping are not as harshly critiqued in the discourse as black men.⁵⁵ However, I would argue that their racial castration in some aspects makes for a harsh critique in the discourse. However, this is not a competition to see who can be more subordinated. I am simply trying to point out the complexities of subordination and marginalization and "success" as a "model minority" does not necessarily award one a higher position.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS

Jackson Katz asserts, “there are millions of male trauma survivors walking around today, men who were bullied in adolescence.”⁵⁶ There is a great societal cost to the normalization of male violence. Much of the focus of gender studies thus far has been on women and feminist theory. More recently, there has been great growth in the study of masculinities and the long-term harm of male-on-male violence. The effect of violence on Asian American men has not been thoroughly researched. As one respondent, Indira, poignantly states, “American history has isolated the Asian man in that way to not be able to speak. And I think an accumulation of that can only result in deep harm.”

Irwin was deeply affected from the ethnosexualized treatment he received growing up. He was living in fear for many years.

I would sit on the edge of a seat. I didn't want to take too much space up. And part of it was I didn't feel like I deserved to take up space and part of it was fear of someone hitting me. I had all sorts of reasons for looking down because I didn't think I was, or looking down because I didn't want to confront people in the sense that a lot of people didn't like me for what I was. And I didn't want to have to deal with that. I mean I would walk through a college campus and I just had a hard time looking people in the eye, especially men, without glaring at them because that was the way I was dealing with other men. I was like, you know, “Fuck you, don't fuck with me.” Either that or keep my head down low, I don't want anyone to bother me. So yeah, that's typical of any male who's had to deal with any sort of physical confrontations in his life.

He fought back once in middle school and it slowed the bullying for a time, but such long-term exposure to physical abuse had definite residual effects. Irwin went through a difficult time from middle through graduate school.

I really became very hateful and wanted to commit my own violence against these other kids and stuff. I think I was 11, I guess. I think on that day, like right

after that, I was really, really angry and I drew these pictures of, I don't know, I guess it was supposed to be of those two kids, like dying or being killed in some different fashion or whatever. I was actually a real. After that I was a really strong believer in non-violence. Not like any other kids. Like Gandhi was like my idol and stuff. I mean I actually read about this stuff. So I think at that point there must have been some kind of a split personality developing where one part of me wanted to actually taste the blood of people, of certain people, whoever was my enemy at that time. And the other person who abhorred violence and wanted to stop it in this world and studied politics and history to see what the best way of doing that would be. You know, study foreign policy and this that and the other. And I was empathetic to people who were victims of this and studied counseling—I have a degree in counseling and I was a big political activist. A left wing political activist protesting the war and certain American foreign policies and, but on the other side, I was this really angry person.

Irwin's inner turmoil worsened. He went from being angry at the whites who inflicted the pain, to hating men in his community.

I went into this downward spiral of everything. My anxiety about everything was jacked up to enormous levels and I had these unbelievable mood swings. I was unstable psychologically before I went to [another city], and this pretty much took me to a way, way upper level. I started having this sort of my own very twisted understanding of Asian masculinity, Asian men, and hatred [of] Asian men as people who I wish I didn't have to be associated with. I followed the Hitler complex. And it was very, very weird. It was rolled into all sorts of just extreme feelings about everything. Obsessive thoughts about my girlfriend, about my self, about news, I guess these feelings got projected onto construed people that I thought were *inferior, Asian men*. I wish that they would *all die*. Disappear or something like that and it was very, very strange. It took me a long time to get over...You know, psychological issues, I was prescribed Lithium for a while and I didn't like it. It's a combination of all those things. Certainly it was worsened by the insecurities and such that are complicated by being an Asian American male born in America and having grown up here.

Whites perpetuate and maintain white supremacy by colonizing people of color, teaching them to repress rage, never making whites the target of any anger they feel about racism.⁵⁷ Irwin never acted on his anger though it consumed him. Instead, he took it out on himself and other men that looked like him. By internalizing the rage and stress from

racism, people of color are at risk of negatively affecting their health.⁵⁸ While some will handle the stress of racism in a healthier manner, it can still be a burden.

Ray, who has done much work over the years building a strong sense of self, still carries some of the weight of racism. While he's forgiven much of the childhood racism he experienced, he has a harder time dealing with discrimination from white adults.

Sometimes, I do feel really jaded about [dealing with racism growing up], but at the same time that jadedness has helped me become better at shrugging stuff off. And at other times, I feel like I couldn't have gotten all these traits without having gone through that kind of dumb shit. Sometimes, I'm just angry and frustrated that these people were ignorant and I can't do anything about it. I'm mad, but I can't really be mad at them because they don't know...It frustrates me. Especially now, at my age, and in college. We're 18 and up, like, why are you still doing this shit? I shouldn't have to be the one to explain it to you why this is wrong. You are old enough. You are an adult. By law, you are an adult. I shouldn't have to explain to you why this is wrong. At the same time, you're ignorant of it and I'm mad, but I shouldn't be, because you are ignorant of it. But, I have to be mad at something. I get really mad at a lot of things and I don't know why. I can't focus on anything. I don't feel like its right for me to focus on being mad at these people for being stupid. That's why I feel jaded.

Where white rage is condoned by the state, there is no place for the rage of people of color.⁵⁹ Ray does not have a platform or voice to be angry at ignorant whites. He has to perform mental gymnastics to forgive "innocent," "ignorant," whites. Ray is engaging this image of "virtuous whites"⁶⁰ while simultaneously blaming himself for being the bad guy for having an emotional reaction to racism.

In addition to repression of rage, many respondents had direct instruction from family members to avoid conflict and to keep from rocking the boat.⁶¹ Brent retains some regret for not having fought back against racism when he was younger.

My mom and dad would always emphasize, "Look, don't get into fights with these people. Look how much bigger they are than you." Even back when I was young, I knew, "They're bigger than you and they're all white," or "They're

bigger than you and they're all black" just didn't sit right with me because I was under the idea of that, yeah, for some reason I'll get jumped. Just happened to be jumped in the neighborhood I live in. Just because everyone is black doesn't mean they're all going to look at me and see me, get my ass whipped. Or conceivably get my ass whipped. The idea that there's no way in hell I would ever be able to win a fistfight with anyone. And that comes from Mom and Dad. Of course that didn't feel good... just that they think of me as someone who just couldn't do it. Even though, hell, I would go to dumbass Tai Kwon Do class and they'd be like "Yeah, that's good! Oh but don't really get into a fight because you'd get your ass whipped!" You know, you're a little Chinese guy or whatever. Look at them. I do remember my mom and dad saying shit like that. And it's just like, "What the fuck are you talking about? That makes no damn sense. So what if I got my ass whipped a little bit? It's not going to be that bad." I never did get in a fight. It never happened.

While attempting to protect their son, they gave Brent the impression that he was not strong enough to defend himself. His parents, in essence, emasculated him while trying to keep him from harm.

PERPETRATORS

The stereotyping of Asian American men as "castrated," weak, and passive can mask violence and gender inequality that exists in the Asian American communities.

Irwin notes,

I mean, as an Asian man, people tend to think that I'm a decent person or I'm not gonna commit a crime against them or I'm not going to rape a woman or at the very least, I don't have the strength to rape a woman or something like that. And so in a lot of ways, I can, I use that either consciously or subconsciously to my advantage.

Irwin uses these assumptions about his character and strength to "get closer" to women.

He is perceived as non-threatening. However, Irwin notices that in some situations, he is instantly turned into a threat. This threat, either economic or sexual, happens when he changes his presentation, he gets responded to as if he were a dangerous man.

Well, you know, it's pretty subdued most of the time. You just get a sense that people aren't comfortable about something. I'm at a place maybe where they don't expect to see Asians. It's just you know this stereotype of, "You gotta watch out for these Asian gangsters because they're more violent and ruthless than the other gangsters." I've heard that from both whites and blacks. Like there's something about. So there's that fear too, the fear of physical safety. And I think that springs from not knowing us. And maybe one stereotype feeds of the other. If you can't conceive of the humanity of this sort of "inscrutable nerd," "weak" person then there's no place where that person can accept the sort of complex humanity of all Asians period. If all you're working with is two or three different stereotypes then you can't understand anyone—any of those groups. There's a bunch of Asian gangsters. Yeah, there's a bunch of Asian nerds but they're all extremified [sic]. Their images are made to be extreme in the mind of the ill exposed American. I think there are all sorts of reasons why white Americans fear other people. So I think I would expect it to be guilt. Well, they have this sort of vague understanding of history. Like we really treated those people bad so now their gonna want to get us back.

There is such extreme polarity in the perceptions and representations of Asian American men. They are totally asexual/homosexual, socially inept nerds, or degenerate gangsters, perceived to be mimicking the image of other men of color. Yet, Asian American men are still not seen as threatening as other men of color because of the associations with the body and lack of physical size, comparatively. In some cases the Asian gangster is seen as more ruthless and cunning because of their perceived greater intelligence. However, there is no middle ground, only extreme images. These are all imposed stereotypes and to be just a "regular guy" is to be white.

With years of racist taunting and physical abuse, Irwin had a great deal of anger inside of him. Irwin dealt with anger by getting into "gangster" stuff. He wrote a rap song warning that "one of these days, one of these Asian guys is going to retaliate."

Irwin speaks in reference to Cho Seung Hui and the Virginia Tech shooting.

I said that 10 years before [the Virginia Tech shooting] happened. I could see it in little ways. There was a friend of mine, more like an acquaintance, who was

also kind of this angry Asian man. And he was in the military. And he told me that him and some guys would go out and have a good time and stuff and they knew that somebody would mess with them, especially if they went to some sort of country club, country music club, anywhere where there's a lot of more right wing white people or whatever and they would be prepared for this. They would essentially be goading [violence]. And they would take this—whatever it was—out and beat the shit out of them you know and beat the living day lights out of them. That was their way of retaliating.

Irwin did not condone the actions of his military acquaintance. However, because of the cruel racist treatment he endured while growing up, he was able to empathize with him and Cho Seung Hui. The Virginia Tech shooting, while he predicted it a decade prior, was still quite rattling.

I had a hard time sleeping for a long time. And you know my attitude, I mean I was sad, I identified with this guy, just like I had identified with this Vietnamese kid at [the local University] who shot a killed one or two white guys for messing with him. It was obvious to me. American stereotypes of Asian people—East Asian people—are very distorted...I think part of the issue is that Asian people, we tend to tone it down around people but the reality is we're as fiery and ill tempered as any other group of people. A lot of Asian men out there, especially people my age, need or seek subconsciously this revenge. They either find it in some way – most of them, it has nothing to do with actual violence or death, but they just grow old and it's not such an important part of their psyche. But I think there are a lot of Asian men who do still have it in their heads that this revenge has never been – it's like the gestaltion has never been completed. It's like they're deformed—I don't know if you've studied psychology or whatever but gestalt in psychology says people need to finish their unfinished business and if they don't it stays with them.

Irwin has been able to find outlets for his anger through his writing and teaching. It is still a challenge for him to feel fully equally to other men, but he is constantly making strides.

SPORTS AS A COPING MECHANISM

Numerous studies suggest that sports builds self-esteem.⁶² Sport is also central in the construction of masculinities.⁶³ However, sport has a hierarchical structure and self-worth is conditional based on ability to excel in performance.⁶⁴ There is also growing emphasis in sport on competitive physique. The media reflect this emphasis in sports marketing. The size of body builders, athletes, and action heroes continues to exponentially grow.⁶⁵ For Asian Americans who participated in sports, they may have been able to reap some benefits by excelling in a very masculine identified arena. Jeremy notes,

I think really it boils down to what you were involved in when you were younger. If you were involved in sports if you were to be with these people, these kids your age you know bond team related activity, you're more likely to keep these friends later on because of the team. We were involved at a young age and our parents didn't always just stress education so we're well rounded individuals. I feel like if you didn't do that you would have a harder time adjusting.

Jeremy credits his involvement in sports for helping him be outgoing. However, there were differences in his experiences on all-white sports teams and teams with more people of color. The all-white environments did not provide long lasting friendships with teammates.

While Brent was not really allowed to participate in sports, he still saw it as a valuable tool to build self-esteem and protect individuals from racism.

That inclusion into social clubs like sports that helps, I think, protecting against some of the bullying because sports are the sort of things those sort of kids are into so once you become a part of that group you probably get teased less and probably be a way that they're trying to include you. You can make fun of someone in your group, but once someone outside of your group makes fun of that person, the entire group will stand with this person that got made fun of.

Brent sees the teasing culture of sports as a way to be included. Certainly, the fraternal bond can be a joking relationship.⁶⁶ However, that male joking relationship is a controlled use of aggression that maintains a hierarchical order.⁶⁷ Jason, a Chinese American, was a baseball player in high school. They consistently made fun of his Chinese surname because it sounded like slang for “penis.”⁶⁸ For years on the high school team, they defaced his uniform, hat, equipment, and school notebooks with drawings of the phallus. He knew it was “just a joke” but it often turned into repetitive jokes about his penis being inadequate. He eventually had to physically confront his teammates because they would not stop even when he urged them.

Specific sports can be racialized, perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes to maintain white hegemonic masculine supremacy. When African Americans excel at sport, the white racist response is to dehumanize them. They are described as animals, and white athletes are intelligent.⁶⁹ Often times, Asian American men are seen as too small or weak, which positions them lower in a masculine hierarchy. However, when an Asian American male athlete exceeds expectations, this can significant boost to Asian American boys and men starved of strong examples that look like them. Irwin became swept with Manny Pacquiao fever when the Filipino boxer upset the Welterweight Champion, Oscar De La Hoya. Irwin explains the significance of the win:

The last three days I’ve had a bit of Manny Pacquiao fever. I actually didn’t pay to watch this fight in part because I figured that Pacquiao was gonna lose just like everyone thought. I wanted to go watch it because this Asian guy, badass, is gonna fight and, so when I found out that he won I was searching on the web for videos and I was able to find this grainy bootleg version of the fight. I watched clips of his old fights and I was up until 5 o’clock in the morning. Then the next night, I stayed up again until like 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning just watching these old fights and reading about him. In a lot of ways it was good. I don’t know

how else to put it. There was some kind of neuro-chemical response. Some psychological subconscious, unconscious thing going on that made me feel good by watching all of that. I mean on a very conscious level I was being inspired by this guy who worked so hard and who trained so hard and made himself into this basically stone stature. Basically no one had any doubts [that De La Hoya would win] until the weigh in. At the weigh Pacquiao was standing there and he was flexing his entire torso and people were like, “Holy guacamole, what is this guy doing? You know this guy is made out of stone or something.” Pretty consciously I felt inspired by all the hard work he put in to get it and also, I think on a very subconscious level you buy into this sort of genetic thing. That’s what race is all about, we think about the other people’s genes and so I think on a subconscious level I bought into this idea that somewhere inside me is Manny Pacquiao essence. Somewhere in my subconscious, after eight hours of highlights and reading articles and stuff, you get that. I got what white boys got through 18 years of getting to watch the Lone Ranger and Superman and everything else where the heroes are white and they’re good looking and they’re good people and they get the woman. And I was usually on the opposite end of that. Because the hero usually has some sort of goofball cook or some enemy who is Asian.

Finally, in his mid-30s, Irwin found a real-life Asian bodied male figure that was in the media. It happened serendipitously, but it finally happened. While there will not be dramatic structural changes to improve race relations and abolish hegemonic masculinity, Manny Pacquiao provides a psychological boost that has been absent in Irwin’s life. The societal privileges of masculinity and manhood are withheld from Asian American men. Indira notes that in diversity training she took part in, an Asian American man in the seminar had difficulty identifying with the concept of “male privilege.”

I’ve heard heterosexual Asian American men say “it’s even hard for me to understand male privilege. In a lot of ways I experience the same level heterosexism [LGBT people].” But if a heterosexual Asian American man experiences what they believe to be the same gender treatment as an LGBT identified white man you know there’s the conversation there. I know it’s messy and complicated it does reflect levels of empowerment or levels of “I don’t feel like I have male privilege.” For most Asian American men around it’s hard for you to own your male privilege so it’s like, “How can I own something that I

don't even really feel like I have. I don't even get to feel like a man most of the time?"

Asian American boys and men need to see alternative portrayals in the media. My hope is not that the definition of hegemonic masculinity grows to include Asian American men. I urge broader and wider positive representations of races, genders, and sexualities be created. Jackson Katz urges that we must “change the institutions, the monopoly of media systems run by rich white men.”⁷⁰ If changes can be made at the institutional level, then future Irwins may not have to wait thirty or more years to find a person who inspires them instead of images that belittle them and feed self-disgust.

CONCLUSION

Asian American men are bombarded with messages degrading their “manliness” and challenging their sexuality. Heterosexual Asian American men must constantly prove their “straightness” and contend with disinterest from women. Gay Asian American men are assumed to be passive bottoms and still have to prove their manhood in queer spaces. Throughout the past century, Asian faces have been the enemy. The United States has been involved with numerous military conflicts and other imperial endeavors that further emasculate Asian and Asian American men. Men in Asia deal with the occupation of their country, exploitation of their labor, and theft of their resources. In the United States, Asian American men deal with the daily challenges of invisibility in the media, harassment on the playground, struggles with identity, and difficulty in personal relationships.

There is no outlet for their rage. So, where do we go from here? After extensive discussion of the uniquely shaped gender and sexualized experiences of Asian American

men, the sexual politics of Asian Americans will be examined at length in the next chapter. I will address topics such as how this process relates to how Asian Americans relate to other men and women, the specifics of the sexual politics, and how this process affects how they choose partners.

NOTES

¹ I performed the search on January 29, 2010 using Google Scholar. I chose “Asian American Men” for the keyword title search. Eighty-six articles were found and thirty-seven of those articles were either for gay and bi-sexual Asian American men or redundant articles or reviews.

² Alex Johnson, Petra Cahil and Bill Dedman of *MSNBC.com*; Pete Williams, Jim Popkin and Steve Handelsman of *NBC News*; and The Associated Press contributed to this report. 2007. “High School Classmates Say Gunman Was Bullied: Police Say Package sent to NBC News Between Shootings is of Little Use.” <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18169776/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Classmates Laughed at Him When He Spoke”. *The New Paper*. April 21, 2007.

⁵ Lee Hyeon-gu. “Childhood Friend Recalls a Different Side of Cho.” *Joon Ang Daily*. April 20, 2007, <http://newpaper.asia1.com.sg/error/0,6313,6,00.html>.

⁶ M. Apuzzo and . Cohen. “Va. Tech Gunman Seen as Textbook Killer” *Associated Press*. April 19, 2007, http://www.pantagraph.com/news/article_4969a4cb-4da7-5f6b-9e27-a78e3b414625.html.

⁷ Sarah Baxter. “American Psycho: Cho Seung-Hui & the Crisis of Young Men in a Feminised Society” *The Sunday Times* (UK), April 22, 2007, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1821481/>.

⁸ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁹ Beate Kraus. “Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Practice,” in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* edited by Craig J. Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, Moishe Postone. 156-176, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Michael A. Messerschmidt, “Varieties of ‘Real Men,’” in *Men’s Lives 7th Edition* edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2007, 3.

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¹² Vera, Hernan and Andrew M. Gordon. *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

¹³ Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* (New York, NY: Challenging Media, 1999).

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- ¹⁴ See Janice Tanaka, *When You're Smiling*; Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.
- ¹⁵ For example, *Rush Hour I, II, and III*; *Shanghai Knights and Shanghai Noon*.
- ¹⁶ Allen Walzem, "Asian Masculinity and Contemporary Hollywood Film," Paper presented at the *Asian Cultural Studies Association Conference* (February 2008).
- ¹⁷ Marlon T. Riggs. "Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen," *Black American Literature Forum*, (1991) 25 (2), Black Film Issue, 389-394.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ David Eng, "Heterosexuality in the Face of Whiteness," In *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, edited by David Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Brunswick, NJ: Temple University Press, 1998).
- ²⁰ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).
- ²¹ David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
- ²² Jackson Katz, *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity* (New York, NY: Challenging Media, 1999).
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Kraus, *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*
- ²⁷ A social networking website.
- ²⁸ A social networking website focused on connecting people through online games.
- ²⁹ A social networking website focused on the Asian American community.
- ³⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- ³¹ Katz, *Tough Guise*.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ellen Jordan and Angela Cowan. "Warrior Narratives in the Kindergarten Classroom: Renegotiating the Social Contract?" in *Men's Lives*. Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner (Eds.). 272-283 (New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon, 7th edition, 2007).
- ³⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).
- ³⁵ For detailed accounts of these racist incidents, please see *The Myth of the Model Minority* by Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin. Paradigm Publishers, Boulder: CO, 2008.
- ³⁶ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 190.
- ³⁷ Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).
- ³⁸ J. Lewis, "The decline of the male breadwinner model: Implications for work and care," *Social Politics*, (2001), 8(2), 152-169.

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- ³⁹ Elizabeth Kelan, "Gender, risk, and employment insecurity: The masculine breadwinner subtext," *Human Relations*, (2008) 61(9): 1171-1202.
- ⁴⁰ H. Russell, "Friends in low places: Gender, unemployment and socialbility," *Work, Employment & Society*, (1999) 6 (13), 205-224.
- ⁴¹ Kelan, "Gender, Risk, and Employment Insecurity."
- ⁴² Melissa Navas. "Father, Mother, Son Dead in Bethany," *The Oregonian*, November 11, 2009, http://www.oregonlive.com/washingtoncounty/index.ssf/2009/11/three_bodies_found_in_home_in.html; Riaz Haq. "Murder-Suicide in Silicon Valley's Indian Family," *Haqs Musings*, April 1, 2009, <http://www.riazhaq.com/2009/04/murder-suicide-in-silicon-valleys-indian.html>.
- ⁴³ Russell, "Friends in Low Places."
- ⁴⁴ Richard Fung. "Looking For My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," in *A Companion to Asian American Studies*. Edited by Kent A. Ono. 235-253 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).
- ⁴⁵ The website was shut down in the Spring of 2009, however, you can find articles about the site here:
- ⁴⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).
- ⁴⁷ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
- ⁴⁸ Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*.
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- ⁵⁰ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
- ⁵¹ Fung, "Looking For My Penis."
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 187.
- ⁵⁶ Katz, *Tough Guise*.
- ⁵⁷ bell hooks, *killing rage: Ending Racism* (New York, NY: Holt Publishing, 1995).
- ⁵⁸ See Abraham Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey, *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1962); William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1968); and Joe R. Feagin and Karyn D. McKinney, *The Many Costs of Racism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- ⁵⁹ bell hooks, *killing rage*.
- ⁶⁰ Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*.
- ⁶¹ For in-depth discussion of fear of "rocking the boat" please see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*, Chapter 5.
- ⁶² Sara Pedersen and Edward Seidman, "Team Sports Achievement and Self-esteem Development Among Urban Adolescent Girls," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, (2004) 28 (4): 412-422.

⁶³ Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities" in *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* edited by David M. Newman, Jodi A. O'Brien. (Newbury, CT: Pine Forge Press, 1990).

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⁶⁵ Katz, *Tough Guise*.

⁶⁶ Peter Lyman, "The Fraternal Bond as a Joking Relationship: A Case Study of the Role of Sexist Jokes in Male Group Bonding," in *Men's Lives 7th Edition* edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2007).

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⁶⁸ For a detailed account about the racial harassment Jason endured, please see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*, 66.

⁶⁹ T Bruce, "Marking the Boundaries of the "Normal" in Televised Sports: the Play-by-Play of Race," *Media, Culture, and Society*, (2004) 26 (6): 861-879;

D. Buffington and T. Fraley, "Skill in Black and White: Negotiating Images of Race In a Sporting Context," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, (2008) 32(3): 292-310.

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CHAPTER V

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

When I first became interested in dating, before I fully understood that I am a lesbian, my partner choices arose from my closest guy friends. There was a small group of us that competed on the quiz bowl team and took Advanced Placement courses together. I often thought of myself as asexual because of my lack of interest in boys at school, even when they showed a great deal of interest in me. It was very clear that my parents had wished that at least one of their daughters would end up with a Chinese husband, however with the population of Asians in my school being so small to begin with, it would have been very unlikely for there to be romantic “chemistry” to boot. My own complete lack of interest in the Asian American boys at my school was largely due to the fact that I did not find any of them (three total, spread across all grades) to be my type.

Reflecting back fifteen years later, the two men I was romantically involved with my junior and senior years, both white, have gone on to date primarily Asian or Asian American women. One of them had even shared with another mutual friend that he has a particular interest in Asian women. (I had been unaware of these leanings at the time.) He is now engaged to an Asian American woman, while the other has lived in Asia for the past ten years and has been dating Asian women throughout his time there.

In college I moved into the honors dorm. Within my first week of school, I befriended a man named Rob. Rob had recently split with his girlfriend who was also Taiwanese. Initially we hung out quite frequently, but he often brought up this ex-

girlfriend in a comparative way, which made me quite uncomfortable. When I began to date women in college, I knew very few lesbians of color. There was a certain type of woman that I found attractive. My ideal woman was Reese Witherspoon. A bit embarrassingly, I love the movie *Legally Blonde*. Looking back, I realize that my attraction for women was based on hegemonic standards of beauty. While those messages are recurring in the media stream, I am more conscious of them and work hard to de-program myself from those socially constructed preferences.

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE BY THE NUMBERS

Oppression has impact on gender and family identity, as does resistance.¹ Throughout the history of the United States, racial laws and practices have had direct affect on the gendering and family formation of people of color. Anti-miscegenation laws were institutionally oppressive measures that racially shaped families for centuries. After *Loving v. Virginia*, there was a steady increase in interracial marriage in the United States. However, there is a gender imbalance and it is very apparent for Asian Americans. As shown in Table 1, Almost 20 percent of married Asian American women and just over 7 percent of married Asian American men have a non-Asian spouse, 17.1 percent of married Asian American women are married to a white spouse, and 3.5% of married Asian men have a spouse woman classified as "other".

TABLE 1. MARRIAGE BY RACE IN THE US (2008)

Married Couples in the United States in 2008 ²				
	White Wife	Black Wife	Asian Wife	Other Wife
White Husband	51,338,000	164,000	520,000	565,000
Black Husband	317,000	4,309,000	44,000	39,000
Asian Husband	157,000	12,000	3,289,000	22,000
Other Husband	495,000	27,000	44,000	1,193,000

There is a notable disparity in the rates of exogamy by Asian males and females. Only 25 percent of Asian/white marriages involve an Asian male and white female and the remaining 75 percent is Asian female with white male. White hegemony has a direct affect on this imbalance. Collins notes, “Love may appear to come from nowhere, but it is profoundly affected by the political, economic, and social conditions of the new racism.”³ My respondent Lee immigrated to the United States after working in a sweatshop in Thailand.⁴ She was so happy about finding a white American husband and having a half-white child. She openly admitted that white Americans were seen very highly to Thai people over other Americans and that her half-white child would be treated as special if she returned. There are historical roots to Lee’s preference for hegemonic white Western masculinity.⁵

There was a spike in white male/Asian female marriages during and following the U.S.’s involvement with wars in Asia (WWII, Korea, Vietnam). The military industrial complex largely created the sex tourism industry in Southeast Asia.⁶ During the Vietnam War, the US Military set up sexual rest and relaxation destinations in Southeast Asia for allied soldiers with financial assistance from the World Bank.⁷ These

sexual ports were created to maintain morale so that American soldiers could maintain masculinity with the availability of prostitutes.⁸

The number of Asian American interracial marriages fell from 42 to 33 percent from 1990 to 2000.⁹ Researchers argue that the growth in the immigrant population for Latinos and Asian Americans is a major factor in the downward trend.¹⁰ On the other hand, there is an increase in intra-racial marriages, where Asian Americans are marrying other Asian Americans from different ethnic groups or ancestries. Another factor in interracial marriages that is not explicitly linked in the research is the role of racism and racial prejudice.

Asian American women are the most likely of all races to marry outside of their race and they make up seventy-five percent of the Asian American intermarriages. This introduces another cause of declining interracial marriages. There has been a significant decrease in Asian war brides as the United States Armed Forces focus their fighting forces in other locations around the globe. Collins points out that the rules about crossing the color line are very clear in the African American community. While it might be less clear than before the civil rights movement, these rules differ for the Asian American community. For though Asian Americans acknowledge the color line and unspoken rules for selecting mates, there is a long history of high rates of interracial marriages, especially between Asian women and white men. Interestingly, there have been a great deal of war brides from Asian countries, but despite the United States being at war in Somalia and the Middle East; we have not seen the same ratio of war brides from those

countries. This speaks to the exotification of Asian female bodies and their appeal to whites over black and brown bodies.

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

RACE AND CLASS DO MATTER

Many of my second-generation respondents were given explicit messages about whom they were expected to date and eventually marry. Heterosexuality was a basic assumption by parents across the board. There were also preferences by race, ethnic group, class, education level, and career. However, there were cases that regardless of other factors, race became the ultimate determinant in parental approval or disapproval.

Brent, who is married to a white woman named Ashley, recalls his parents' racial preferences for dating and, eventually a for his spouse:

As far as I can remember from discussions about dating, it would always be like they really, really, really want you to date a Chinese girl and white girls would be okay. There's no way in hell you would ever date a black girl. These sorts of things would get thrown around every so often. If it were up to my mom and dad I would never date her [his wife] until I had my job now, as crazy as that is. So, what they were trying to do was trying to force that need to date a good Chinese girl and get married and nothing else. I think when I told them I was dating this really good girl and she's white, they seemed to be okay with things after they had retired and gone out to [city in the Southwest]. I guess it chilled out a little bit. But I think the idea was that since they didn't know her personality or what she was like they were still like, "I don't know. You should just be thinking about your college thing." I would get some hints that they weren't happy. I also got the impression that if she were Chinese they would be cooler about it. But when they finally met her, she won them over completely for the most part and little bit by little bit after that.

It was common among second-generation respondents to receive explicit anti-black messages from their parents. Many of their parents had very few interactions with African Americans and largely constructed their preferences from anti-black imagery in

the media.¹¹ However, Brent's family actually operated a store in a lower-income black neighborhood, and he recounted that working and living there strengthened many of their negative racial views. This outcome becomes understandable when his parents, like most Americans, lack knowledge of systemic racism and how it has structured the geography of inequality, sequestering African Americans in areas of concentrated poverty with few resources and opportunities.

Even with all the positive portrayals in the media of whites, why would Brent's parents prefer a Chinese American for their son to date? Repeatedly, respondents mentioned a desire for families to retain their culture. Brent's family and extended family also had negative racist experiences with whites in his Southern town. So, their trust level of whites was low. Even after Brent had been dating this white woman for some time, his family hoped he would change his mind:

Some of the things you hear, even though I would be dating Ashley seriously, I would go back to [home city] and Ashley wouldn't be there. We would go out to the restaurant and sometimes we would see their old friends and they would talk "Oh is your son married." Trying to hook me up with one of their daughters. Instead of saying, "my son is not on the market. He's going out with someone right now," they just said, "oh, he's not married." They would say it right in front of me. They know I can understand but it almost seems like they were giving me the chance to opt out of the white girl relationship and go into something with a Chinese girl. I really felt disrespected and I felt really sad for my family and my relationship. When she was not around, this kind of stuff would happen. When we were in a huge setting this would be brought up, "My cousin, he needs to see a good Chinese girl he can't date no white girl." Everyone knows I'm dating a white girl, why would you say something stupid like this? I'm like, "Dude, you really have to stop saying that."

Brent's parents have come to accept and embrace Ashley as their daughter-in-law, unlike Brent's cousin, who married a white woman and abandoned the family. Brent has

remained incredibly loyal to his parents and extended family and is still very proud of his Chinese roots and does not try to hide them.

Erin describes an aunt who married a white man as “practically white.” Her aunt is wealthy and lives in a suburb, and throughout Erin’s life her parents have vocalized that they want her to have the same kind of life as her aunt. They were comfortable with her marrying a white or Asian man, and they began to set Erin up on dates with Chinese boys when she was in high school. Her father did not want her to even ride in a car with black male friends because he didn’t want people to think she was dating them. She would go on these dates to entertain her parents’ wishes, but she recounted that there were “no sparks.” Class and race were important for her parents. Erin explains, “They wanted me to marry a Chinese guy who was also a professional, a doctor, an engineer.” This attempted matchmaking continued into her late twenties, and she was forced to come out to them so that it would stop. Erin is engaged to a white woman, which her parents have not fully accepted.

Charlene’s parents also want her to marry someone of the same race and ethnicity:

They want me to find someone Taiwanese who knows a lot about the culture and who can speak Mandarin. They started in middle school, especially when I started getting boyfriends in middle school. In high school, they were like, “I don’t know what’s up with this white dude? What’s his story?” They were worried then. He was my serious boyfriend. So now, they still want me to marry this ideal East Asian man. When I told her I was dating a black guy. She flipped out. She like literally wiggled out. She just shut down, slammed the knife on the table and just said, “It’s not that I’m racist but you shouldn’t think about anything long term with those people.” And I was like, “okay.” And I could see in her face, because my mom and I are very close, and I tell her a lot now, not everything, but pretty much almost everything until it gets to sex and everything. So, I could see the struggle in her face of her not really liking that I was dating a

black guy, yet, her also wanting me to be able to talk to her about that. I was just thought that was really weird. She was going through in her mind and she was just upset. So, it wasn't serious anyways, so I was just like, "oh it's nothing serious," but I thought, "oh no." I knew that she wants me to end up with somebody Taiwanese.

Charlene's parents have had very little experience or contact with African Americans. Her father has been the target of anti-Asian discrimination throughout his entire life, getting passed up for several promotions while being over qualified. However, her mother had a much more emotive response of fear when hearing that Charlene was dating an African American man as opposed to their subtle confusion when she dated an abusive white man.

This emotional response is connected to the racialized images of African American men as dangerous predators.¹² These images have been constructed and reproduced for over four hundred years. Now, they are broadcast globally through pervasive media systems. Ann shares a similar experience:

I swear to god, if I ever dated a black man and brought him home, I would be disowned by my father. Irregardless of whether he went to an Ivy League, is a doctor, a lawyer or whatever, he could be the most gentle person, the greatest person on the face of this earth, my father would disown me because he does not believe, he thinks that every black person is on welfare and no good.

Here is a case where race and manufactured racist notions trump class, educational attainment, and career prestige. Ann's father's view of African Americans sounds like it has been taken straight out of the white racist manual. The strength of anti-black stereotypes and images are so strong that an Ivy League-educated African American man could not impress her father in any way.

These parental dating and marrying guidelines exclude African Americans outright. And Asian American parents can discourage dating other people of color, and even Asian Americans themselves. Ann, whose family is Vietnamese American, continues:

Even if I went for a Cambodian guy, I think my dad would think the same way, he doesn't think highly of the Cambodian either. My dad has that idea of a "dirty Mexican" and kind of stereotypic and racist ideals against the blacks and the Latinos. Whites of course, of course are better than any Asian person I could ever be with. My mom thinks so too. That she'll be blatant about. She doesn't think I should be with an Asian guy, I'm too Americanized, and not that that's a bad thing, but especially if I end up with a Vietnamese man, because of what her mom has gone through and what she went through with my dad. They expect you to clean every weekend, for you to be at home, and you can't really necessarily have a job, kids and family, and be a wife that the man wants. You have to cook two meals. You have to have two courses every night. She just thinks, "go for a white guy, your life would be so much easier, it would be great. [laughter] Don't go for an Asian man, they're thick headed, they're stubborn, they're hotheaded, they'll just never treat you well, as well as a white man would," essentially, is what her thought is with white men and white people. She's very anti marrying an Asian man when it comes to advice.

Asian American parents do not always encourage their children to marry other Asian Americans. Because of the diversity of nationalities represented by the umbrella term, Asian American, there are socio-political histories that may cause rifts between members of certain Asian American ethnic groups. Additionally, globalized white racial framing can lead some Asians and Asian Americans to believe that they are inferior to whites.

The response can also vary by the gender of the parent. Some Asian American mothers who have lived in "traditional" patriarchal homes may discourage their daughters to marry men of their ethnic group. Isma, a Bangladeshi American, agrees that there can be a double burden of responsibility for Asian American mothers. In her interview, she said her greatest struggle with immigrating to the United States has been

trying to balance being mother and being a working professional. All day long, as an Assistant Principal, she manages the operations of an entire school, but then must come home and be a model Muslim wife and mother.

Not all of my participants dealt with parents who voiced strict dating and marriage preferences. Latika, an Asian Indian American is “really lucky because my parents never told me they expected to marry an Indian boy. They never, ever, ever tried to arrange my marriage. They haven’t set any expectations on me.” Latika says that she would prefer to marry another Asian Indian American, but is open to any potential partner.

ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN ON RELATIONSHIPS

ASIAPHILES, “YELLOW FEVER,” AND RICE KINGS

A person may insist that they “prefer” blondes or “brunettes.” Another person may prefer tall partners to those who are short. When is physical attraction, actually physical? When do social forces influence it? Untangling the “innate” from the externally influenced is a seemingly impossible task. What is the difference between an attraction and a fetish? A white man who prefers dating Asian women began a website in the 1998 called “Sell-Outs and Asiaphiles,” trying to differentiate his “preference” from a fetish.¹³ The website no longer exists and the links all lead to “Asianwhite.com” a site that directs you to other links for dating and pornography. The web author provides definitions of “philia” (attraction to characteristics) and “fetish” (attraction to objects) to justify his preference of Asian women over other white men who just attracted to them as objects.¹⁴ However, “selective attraction to ‘Asian characteristics’ and a desire for

Asian women as objects are closely related and cannot be disguised or brushed over by romantic dressing” because the problem is “ignoring the part of societal and historical context that determine person-to person interaction *as well as* racial domination.”¹⁵ I am not arguing that every white man that dates an Asian or Asian American woman is exercising racial domination. It is just advisable for Asian American women to analyze their personal interactions when involved in these relationships. There may be patterns of practice that may indicate some form of objectification, which can be said for relationships in general.

Violet is very happy with her white boyfriend. She claims that he is “more Asian” than she is. His last girlfriend, whom he dated for a number of years, is Japanese. He enjoys rolling sushi and many aspects of the “Asian culture.” Violet, never mentioned feeling fetishized by her boyfriend and has not had some of the negative experiences those other participants, like Charlene and Ann have shared. For those two, their bad experiences with white men have left a mark.

As mentioned in Chapter III, Ann had a white boyfriend that dated her because she was more conveniently geographically located compared to his Asian American ex-girlfriend that had moved away for college. There were two significant racist incidents that happened to Ann and her boyfriend when they were out in public, on the subway and at an amusement park, where the interracial couple overtly disgusted whites.¹⁶ In each case, her boyfriend invalidated Ann’s feelings, which left a lasting impression.

I really think, nowadays, that he has an Asian fetish because everyone girlfriend since me as been Asian...I think looking back now I realize that being in an interracial couple, is really hard and it’s not necessarily the greatest thing of all time to be doing. For me now, I have to be with someone that if he is white or

Latino, or black, any other race other than Asian, it's like you have to "get it." You have to really understand your privilege or that we are what we are. It's just that with him, he just didn't want to recognize there was anything wrong. Ever since then, he kind of shaped my relationship with white men in that I am very hesitant when I go out with them now. It's hurtful when you're with someone that doesn't see your point of view, and doesn't recognize that there is a difference going on that people don't like what they see all the time.

While not completely closed to the idea of dating another white man, Ann requires a future non-Asian partner to have some critical views of race. However, the same cannot be said for Charlene. Her experience with her abusive white boyfriend has possibly shut the door for any other white men in the future. Initially, Charlene was not seeking out a white partner. In middle school, Charlene wanted to date East Asian American guys, but there were very few of them in her school. She also fears that she appeared too "aggressive" or "loud" for them, so she ended up with the abusive white boyfriend.

Charlene shares:

I really, really have become completely unattracted [sic] to white males. [Pause and uncomfortable laughter] I just don't find myself attracted to them because every time I see one or find myself partially attracted I just think about that experience and how painful that would be. When people accuse me of being "reversed racist" in that way it really irritates me because I have been through this traumatizing personal experience and why would I ever want myself to do it again? I find myself, a lot more attracted to Asian American men and men of color. It's especially attractive when they involve themselves in their own community, their own ethnic community.

Soon after Charlene broke up with her abusive boyfriend he was engaged to an Italian woman. While worried for her ex-friend's fiancé, Charlene hopes, "May, no Asian American girl suffer at his hands again."

DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS: WHITE, BLACK, LATINO/A, OR ASIAN?

The Asian American women who participated in my research have been so open and honest about their experiences. They shared some of the most intimate details of their lives. Many came from households where topics about dating and sex were taboo. It was wonderful that they were so comfortable sharing these things with a complete stranger. Fareena is very private about her relationships. However, when South Asian American men make statements assuming the “Brown women don’t like sex” she challenges these notions. South Asian American women do have sex and can enjoy it. This section of the text is dedicated to Asian American women talking about their relationships exploring what “works” and what kind of relationships have made an impact on their lives.

Indira did not date in high school. Indira is a self-proclaimed “rule follower.” Her mother did not allow her to date in high school and Indira had no problems with that. As discussed in Chapter III, because of her darker skin, tall height, and outspokenness, Indira did not fit into the Asian Indian feminine box to which her community prescribed. She did not receive much training in the social etiquette of courtship and dating. When she reached college, she often had trouble identifying when men were interested in her. Her inability to see men’s interest was related to her self-worth. She assumed that no one would be interested in her because of her height, skin, and personality. However, one man was able to initially break through:

One of the most meaningful relationships and one that shaped my life quite strongly was somebody who is white and Christian and one of my best friends in college and totally hit me by surprise and totally I think again we're trained in different ways in how we socialize in relationships so he was one of the first to

be like, “can you not see that I'm attracted to you?” I'm like, “what are you talking about? You're not even on my list [of potential partners].” And so I think that that relationship was really meaningful to me because that was the one relationship that really made me realize “wait I'm really worth something and I can ask for what I want.”

While that relationship was very pivotal in Indira's life. Looking back she realizes that she passed up on a number of men, namely Asian Indian men, who were interested in her. She is curious about why it took a white man for her to finally realize her self-worth.

Indira explains:

There was a piece of me that invalidated Indian men and held white men to a better standard. There was a piece of me that did that. Well, I think several Indian men either expressed some level of attraction, whether I chose to see it or not, but I didn't consider who they were, didn't validate they're feelings. I didn't consider they're feelings to be valid, second-guessed those feelings. And yet did not have that same level of insecurity for a non-Indian man. And so I have no intelligence around why that is, it just is. But it's something that I would say is still a point of critique. It's like, “okay I wonder why I did that.” It's a moment of, “why do I have this list? Why have I never found Indian men attractive? And why is it that the first time I'm choosing to kind of take risks and being truly outwardly social in a single capacity with a male, that it would be a white male?”

Racist ideologies run so pervasively deep that someone as self-aware as Indira still has unanswered questions about her avoidance of Asian Indian men in the past. Even when someone has a critical perspective of social systems, there is an unconscious script running in the mind connected to the white racial frame. Most of us do not critically examine our relationships. We find someone that we get along with and are attracted to. We do not always ask, “what's shapes my attraction?” Indira did not become fully immersed in critical scholarship until graduate school, which allows her now to reflect back analytically. While other participants, like Annie, have put little thought into why they prefer certain partners.

Annie is attracted to white women and when I asked her what she liked about them, she answered:

You know, I just -- I don't know. I just um -- I guess I like the athletes, and you know I'm not attracted to African Americans. And you don't see many Asian athletes. So maybe it's related to that, because there are tons of Caucasian athletes out there and they are All American.

Annie had put little thought into why her “type” is white women. She contradicts herself when saying she prefers athletes. As a college athlete, Annie participates in a specific sport that is where African American women make up 23.7 percent of the athlete population.¹⁷ A sizeable proportion of her teammates are African American women. Her tone was matter-of-fact when she said, “I’m not attracted to African Americans” as if it was an understandable given. Annie also participates in painting non-whites as un-American, with her description of white athletes as “All American.”

Fareena has been able to date men from many different races. As a Bangladeshi American in the Southwest, she did not have an opportunity to date other Bangladeshi or South Asian Americans while she was in high school. When she went to college, however, she began to meet South Asian American men. Fareena’s parents allowed her some leeway when she was in high school when it came to dating. She was allowed to talk to boys on the phone and go on group dates with friends, so she had some practice with the social graces of dating. However, the South Asian American men she met in college were not as practiced in the art of dating. The experience was not as easy as she thought it would be:

So, they didn’t really know how to date, they would say the awkwardest [sic] things. There was this one guy who hated himself. And he was a really good-looking guy...He was probably a little lighter than me. He kept on saying how

every other person in his family was so much more light skinned that they could even pass for Italian. That was the big thing- Indians who looked Italian. He was the darkest of his family. He said he used to be fat. He lost a lot of weight right before he came to college. He was so caught up on himself and his ideal was a white girl. He said, "I can only date white girls. I can't date brown girls because that's disrespectful to her." I was like, "If you're dark and you think dark is ugly, what do you think of me?" And he'd say, "But you're cute for a dark girl." I had never been called dark in my life. I know I am but I've never been caught up on it. We're both brown. He told me his ideal girl would be a little blonde actress. Tara Reid. That's his ideal girl. I look nothing like her! I never would. I couldn't even have plastic surgery and look like her! Nor would I want to.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that the "new racism relies more heavily on the manipulation of ideas within the mass media."¹⁸ Due to globalization and transnationalism there is a growth of these hegemonic ideologies throughout the Diaspora, Brown communities and individuals are buying into white hegemonic beauty standards. Fareena's date has internalized these standards. There is also a clash with traditional culture. There is an assumption that South Asian American men can only date South Asian American women if they intend to marry them. Recreational dating is not acceptable in the community. Fareena's attempt to date South Asian American men was complicated by the controlled sexuality of Brown women:

There was a lot of that, that if I date a brown girl and don't intend to marry her, that is really disrespectful. My mom told me, "They get this idea that white girls are the one they play around with, mess around with and have sex with. Then they settle down with a brown girl." But if the brown girl wants to have sex, have sex with her. Apparently nobody thought this. Brown girls are not supposed to have sex. I had no idea this was the thing. If you are trying to have sex with a brown girl, you are forcing her into it. Because remember, [Brown] girls don't like sex. And you don't want to disrespect her. You don't want to ruin her unless you plan to marry her.

The controlled sexuality of Brown women stems from patriarchal tradition that pre-dates South Asian American women in the United States. However, in the hypersexual media

of the United States, the sexless South Asian woman is perpetuated. While “black sexual stereotypes are rendered virtually invisible by their ubiquity”¹⁹ in the mass media, the almost complete absence of South Asian American women as sexual beings in the media has a different effect. Fareena notes that the first time she saw a South Asian woman in a sex scene was in a 2008 episode of ER, with actress Parminder Nagra.²⁰ Both she and her father were “shocked.” Fareena notes that when women of South Asian (and even Middle Eastern) descent are given sexual roles in TV or Hollywood movie, there is certain pattern followed. Janina Gavankar, who is half Indian and half white, played a sexually promiscuous lesbian in Showtime’s *The L Word*. However, her character Eva “Papi” Mendes was Latina. There is a dearth of strong, independent, East, Southeast, or South Asian American characters in the media in control of their own bodies and sexuality.

White women then become the obvious choice as ideal sexual partners. While there are a number of problems with the portrayal of white women in the media, where they are sexually exploited and violence against them is still prevalent in all forms of media, the upper and middle-class white women possess just the right amount of sexuality. Contemporary constructions of masculinity encourage all men to be sexual experienced. Since white women have been historically restricted and “off limits” to men of color, dating white women enhances Asian American men’s “standing within the existing system of hierarchical masculinities.”²¹

Even with all these difficulties dating South Asian American men, Fareena thought that was what she was “supposed to do.” It seemed like an “epic” challenge to find a partner that shared a similar background and cultural experience.

That’s all I was doing my first year there [in college] - that’s all I wanted to do. So I’m going to date only brown dudes because that’s what I’m supposed to be doing. All these other people are meeting brown people. Why can’t I?

Initially, one major barrier for Fareena finding a South Asian American partner was a lack of sheer number of partners. However, when she found a sizeable population in college, they were not the best matches based on personality. While other South Asian American women were finding partners, they were not close friends of Fareena’s. Her critical perspective on social issues alienated her from them, and most of her female friends were other politically active students, mostly East and Southeast Asian American.

Jessica had a much easier time finding partners with similar ethnicity, but her “sisters love white guys” which is “very annoying” to her because she believes it is a “fetish of theirs.” She grew up in a metro area with a large Vietnamese American community.

I’ve never dated somebody that wasn’t a person of color. And when I was younger, I was attracted to some men that weren’t. But in terms of relationships, even not serious relationships, like, “Oh I like you – let’s hold hands,” even that stuff, all people of color. I thought that was interesting, because when I was little I wasn’t that aware of oppression, and stuff like that. I didn’t understand symptoms of racism. So it wasn’t that. They [whites] didn’t get it. They just didn’t get it. They didn’t understand. Of all different races that aren’t Asian, I’m like particularly attracted to men that are Latino, and I think that’s because of all men that are not Asian, they’re the ones that I think that their experiences can closely parallel mine, especially if they come from an immigrant family. Right there, if they’re bilingual, if they’re bicultural, they understand it, they get it. Like having to eat your kind of food, all these little things that we so

traumatizing when you were little and now are so funny, they get it. And it's harder when they're white.

Empathy and shared perspective are the key elements that make the relationship work for Jessica. Similar to Ann, an understanding non-Asian partner is essential to Jessica. While she does not say it overtly, issues with language, food, and immigration as “traumatizing” memories from youth are connected to white supremacy. Children of color, not just children of Latinos and Asians, face stigma from white peers for the way they talk (accents and language) and eat. Jessica does draw lines of differences between African American men and Latino/Asian American men:

I guess that most black guys get the oppression. You know, they'll get that. But do they get that my family is not from here? That I have these obligations to my family that they might not have? That I grew up in a completely skewed view of what is American? They grew up wary of cops, but we were wary of cops for a different reason. If you're bad, then the cops are going to come and kidnap you. It's stuff like that, like “Oh my God! I have a fear of police for a completely different reason than they did.” Not the same. But, there's something about dating an Asian guy, that's like being at home, which is kind of nice. I think back about my past relationships, because I'm not with somebody right now. The relationships that I've had when I was with an Asian guy, it felt comfortable.

There are obvious parallels of racial profiling of Latino/Asian American men with African American men. Although the treatment of Latino and Asian American men can be disguised as a question of citizenship and protection of the nation-state, it resembles the same racist treatment that is older than the nation-state itself. Jessica identifies a common fear of police, but argues that there is something unique about the immigrant experience.

The fear of being caught is so overwhelming because the cost is so great for these families.²² Dealing with a traumatic event such as deportation (whether done legally or

illegally by U.S. government) has lasting effects on the deportee but also the family and community left behind. Hagan and Rodriguez argue that deportation can have painful psychological and emotional ramifications. Many respondents stated that family separation was the specific cause of their emotional suffering.²³

The psychological and emotional consequences are the least visible consequences of racism. These internal struggles with racism are unaccounted for when looking at the health disparities between racial categories. Latino, Asian, and African Americans all face notable health disparities compared to whites,²⁴ this psychological and emotional suffering cannot be discounted when looking for explanation. Whites do not have to live in a state of constant threat. Recent white immigrants are not randomly stopped by the INS to be questioned about their citizenship. By incarceration or deportation, the racial profiling is destructive not only to the individual, but also the families and communities in which these individual live. The white officers develop a disdain for an entire communities of color.²⁵ This antipathy is felt in the community and a fear of the law enforcement develops and immigrant communities can feel as though we are constantly on the run,”²⁶ just as Jessica describes. Her comfort with men of color is likely connected to their understanding of this complex racist relationship with whites and the law.

Jessica’s experience as a Southeast Asian Americans aligns her more closely, class-wise, with African and Latino Americans. What about the East Asian American whose image is the poster child for “model minority?” Charlene, who dated the abusive white man who fetishized her, stopped being interested in white men altogether. She has

also had difficulty finding East Asian American men who have not bought into the “model minority” myth:

I also don't find myself attracted to East Asian men much anymore. I guess I kind of feel that East Asian men are kind of self-righteous and they don't, they buy into the “whiteness.” I guess I shouldn't accuse my own community of doing that but I get that sense when there is no tie to an ethnic community. I guess that this is really unfair of me because members of our community are always typified as “honorary whites” and really we, I would like all members of my community to understand the needs and the struggle, but I realize, also that people who are buying into “whiteness” and becoming “honorary whites” are really just doing the best that they can with the path that they think will be the best for them, but again with that group of people that are buying into “honorary whiteness,” I am tired of explaining to them by background and how they feel about things.

Charlene's critical racial standpoint prevents her from buying into white conformity.

There are still many Asian Americans who believe in meritocracy and that Asian Americans have achieved many things in the United States by “pulling up their bootstraps.”²⁷ Especially, East and South Asian Americans whose immigration cohorts after the Civil Rights movement have brought highly educated and/or middle to upper class individuals and families. With this different perspective from potential East Asian American partners, Charlene found relief with a Southeast Asian American:

I dated this guy in my intern class and he was Vietnamese and that was such a healing relationship, since he was really into Asian American issues, and social justice, and community organizing. And I was like, “oh my gosh, you're perfect.” He was just so gentle and he cared about the same things I cared about. He had been through similar things, like his family was an immigrant family. He just he read me really well and so that was our summer in [a city on the East Coast] beautiful and lovely. I felt so validated in my [Asian American] identity and I learned a lot about what it means to be in a caring relationship or at least to have a partnership....I feel like he's my first love. If you can call it that, and he had no expectations about what it meant to be the female kind of our relationship and what it meant for him to be the male part, which is super nice.

Charlene and her boyfriend from the summer internship tried to have a long distance relationship after the summer was over, but it proved difficult as they lived thousands of miles away from each other. The therapeutic aspects of the relationship proved to be very beneficial to Charlene. She has not given up entirely on East Asian American men. Currently, she is interested in a man who is also Taiwanese American man.

WHEN IT WORKS WITH OTHER MEN OF COLOR

Amanda and Fareena have African American male partners. Their partners identify closely with the immigrant experience and “model minority” stereotyping because they are second generation Nigerian American. The rates of educational attainment for Nigerian Americans are higher than all Asian American ethnicities.²⁸ One respondent noted a similar “model minority” connection with Jewish American men and Asian American women. These relationships are not without obstacles. Amanda finds that she and her boyfriend often get strange stares and facial expressions directed toward them when they are out in public.

Fareena and her boyfriend, Allen, have also had problems with gendered and racial stereotyping. A manager of a local grocery store was attempting to ask Fareena out on a date. When she informed him that she had a boyfriend, he asked follow up questions to determine her race (she’s often misidentified as Latina) and the race of her boyfriend. When the manager found out that her boyfriend is black, he responded, “You’re too pretty to date a black guy.” Fareena was “furious” at the manager of the store. Fareena is mindful of how difficult the interracial relationship is for both her Asian American community and is African American community. She makes sure they do not

go to soul food or Indian restaurants together, for fear of upsetting other patrons. In the mall, a man stared at she and Allen and he pulled aside to ask if, “Does your dad know?” Fareena responded back, “I’m 26 years old,” insulted by the condescending patriarchal inquiry. Fareena elaborates on other public responses to her boyfriend:

Every time I was with him, in the beginning, he would always get pulled over. You know, you would read about it [racial profiling of African Americans], but it could have been because he was driving the car he was. I don’t know. Or that it’s [the city]. At that time, he was training to play football. He was never a football player, but he was training. So, he was really muscular at the time. He looks menacing if he’s not smiling. I can’t even try to justify it. People are really threatened by him frequently.

The fear and assumptions made about Fareena’s partner, Allen is not reserved for strangers. Her family was initially hesitant in accepting Allen. With very little knowledge about Nigerians and Nigerian Americans, Fareena’s father was skeptical.

Once my dad found out he was Nigerian, which was just a few months ago, he told my mom, ‘Why couldn’t he be a regular black guy? Why did he have to be Nigerian?’ My mom was like, ‘What’s wrong with that?’ He went and pulled up all these online scams and said, ‘Look. This is what Nigerians do.’ That’s how my dad thinks. My dad thinks he is going to be this really money-hungry scamming type of person. But he was born and raised here. But, It doesn’t matter how close to Nigeria he is. That has nothing to do with the scams.

As a first generation American, Fareena’s father has adopted xenophobic notions about Nigerian Americans. Her own brother, who knew Allen before introducing him to his sister, has stereotypical notions about him.

My brother makes a lot of assumptions about me and Allen. Those things make me more aware of how the world really sees us. He just says whatever. My brother really thinks he’s a buff, threatening dude, but he’s not. He likes computer science. He won’t tell you that of course. He reads *The Art of War* in his spare time. He doesn’t even have cable. I try to tell him that. But he [Fareena’s brother] has this perception and he’s stuck on that perception. That’s what all his friends know. Anytime he wants to tell his friends or his girlfriend how liberal my parents are, he says, “They’re cool with my sister dating a black

guy.” That’s the ultimate test. My brother was talking to his fraternity brothers about sex and South Asian women and getting used to the fact that South Asian women do have sex. It has now become normal. Apparently, it’s a declaration. He’s like, “My sister dates a black dude. I know they’re having sex.” So, without even saying it, there’s that stereotype that black men are really sexual. If you’re going to get with one, it’s going to be a really sexualized relationship. People in different ways want to know if there is a sexual fetish in that way. They dance around the conversation. For some reason, it becomes very sexualized. I don’t know why. Even with people I don’t talk about sex life with. I don’t know why. It’s the weirdest thing.

Fareena’s involvement with a black man, whether he is eighth generation African American or second generation Nigerian American is automatically sexualized because of hypersexual constructions of African American masculinity. When Fareena dated Desi men, these same assumptions were not made about the couple. On top of the racial assumptions made by her own family and Desi community, Fareena’s partner’s family also struggle with the interracial union.

No one in his family has ever dated outside their race, so dad doesn’t talk to me. His dad doesn’t acknowledge me...All his younger brothers have only dated black women and will always do so. I’m pretty sure Allen would too if not for me. I messed things up. I made him a sell out.

A black man partnering with a non-black woman, in symbolic terms, can easily be seen as a rejection of Black people.²⁹ An argument can be made that men and women should be free to fall in love with whom they please, however, it is difficult to separate notions of love as an “state independent of history, politics, and cultural conditioning.”³⁰ Sexual relationships are so intimately tied to racial identity. Fareena and Allen must deal with discomfort and varying amounts of disapproval from both of their families.

ASIAN AMERICAN MEN ON RELATIONSHIPS

After examining the experiences of Asian American women, Asian American men face their own unique experiences with courtship, dating, and relationships. The vast differences in the construction of Asian American men and women as sexual bodies are reflected in the narratives of my male respondents. Many of them express that they were ill equipped and unprepared to interact with girls and women they found attractive, whether they were Asian or non-Asian American. They compare themselves to a Western hegemonic masculine standard for courtship. When some of the men were involved with interracial relationships, it was not without difficulties. Many of the men found most success in their relationships when they could relate to a partner who did not prescribe to Western hegemonic standards.

UNREQUITED LOVE

When first embarking into a dating, there was quite an age variance when my male respondents got started. Some of them were pressured to focus mainly on school until the end of college, so they did not spend anytime going on dates and pursuing relationships. Charlene's brother met his first girlfriend at age twenty-four. Jeremy's brother in law at thirty-years-old has never dated someone. Even without parental pressure to concentrate on studies, some of my male respondents simply had a "hard time" with finding dates in high school.

Chance did not date in high school, and hardly dated in college. He largely blames his shyness, triggered by being teased a lot in elementary and middle school. With women, he finds it difficult to read whether or not he's in the "friend zone."³¹

Chance has a strong desire to be connected to Filipino culture and would want to share that with partner. He says that he may have a better connection to it with a Filipina partner. Ray is one example. He did not date at all in high school and made attempts in college and graduate school:

That was really rough man. I was pretty timid. I was just really shy. I didn't know how to talk to a girl in the way that I would want to lead up to I want to ask them out. I still have that problem now. I mean, I can make friends with girls and ladies. If my whole point was to be friends with them, that was pretty easy. A lot of times when I'd meet friends of my friends and they were girls, my whole thing was not that I should meet them because I want to date them later, but, I want to be friends with them. And, that's the only thing I knew how to do was to be a friend and I didn't know how to ask girls out. So there was definitely girls that I wanted to ask out but I just didn't know how to and from undergrad to grad school I probably asked like seven girls out and none of them ever said "yes." It was always friend mode.

Historically, African American boys and men received both overt and covert controlling messages about their sexuality. Anti-miscegenation laws were institutionalized prohibiting, specifically African American men from forming relationships with white women. These laws were not in place to prohibit white men from sexually assaulting African American women. There are residual effects from centuries of controlled sexuality. There are still emotional responses to black-white relationships in both the white and African American communities. Similarly, as discussed in Chapter I, there is a long history of specific laws and policies that controlled Asian American male sexualities. For respondents that attended schools where there were smaller populations of Asian Americans and were largely white, it was much harder to find dates.

Brent, like Ray, went to high school that was largely white. His junior year, he attended a public boarding school. That experience, while there were no problems with

racial taunting, did not exactly produce more dating opportunities. He shares his experience:

The first two years of high school I stayed in my hometown. The last two years I went to this math and science school. So those first two years I had an interest in girls but dating was just not an option. First of all, my parents just... it would be very hard for me to do that. The way they kept blasting on the education thing and not having a social life. Second of all, I guess the girls just weren't interested. The very popular [white] girls were, of course, pretty; you can't deny that but I just didn't get a sense that they were interested in who I was or want hang out more after school. Dating just wasn't really an option those first two years but then when I went to math and science school things were just a little different. No one really seemed to care that you were Asian so I was a little more accepted there. Again, even though you go to some sort of strange math and science school you would think everyone is a little smarter but once you break it down those same social cliques still emerge even on a smaller scale like that and in a math and science school of all places. Those sort of popular kids I wouldn't really hang out too much with or really be interested in any of those girls.

The construction, repetitive images and disciplining of Asian American men as hypomasculine has an immeasurable consequence on how Asian American men's self-image and how they interact with other men and women. The failure of empirical studies is to fully capture how systems of oppression affect our everyday lives. Sociologists often limit the significance of racism in their research.³² It is difficult to discern how much lack of interest that girls and women had for Brent was due to race. There are times when people have said overtly to respondents that they "never considered" them "sexually" because of their race.

Irwin is familiar with the cold shoulder from women he is sexually attracted to and the signals he picks up look, "like nothing, just nonchalance or treating someone like a friend or stranger or acquaintance, anything but interest." He's had, "a lot of white women who have told me, 'I've never even considered going out with an Asian guy.'"

As a response to women's indifference, Irwin now makes his interest very clear to women because,

It's almost like some sort of instinctual thing at this point that I've been treated as such an object of asexuality. That it's almost instinctual so if I find someone attractive, I'm going to have to do something. It's not so much that it's about homosexuality, but that I'm assumed to be asexual. Or, if I'm assumed to be heterosexual maybe the thought doesn't occur to them. Hey, you know, this guy's a potential sex partner or partner. I've actually felt the need to like tell women, "hey, you know, look I don't have a small penis." It's assumed. I don't know how assumed it is. I'm so caught up in my own feelings of anxiety and insecurity sometimes...and I just want to let them know, "hey, uh, don't buy too much into the stereotypes." I think that's one sentence that I've used. It's ridiculous that I have to say that.

Not many other male respondents who had difficulty with dating responded in this assertive manner. Irwin states that his physical height, which is taller than the average Asian American, at 5' 9" gives him some advantages with attracting women. Even with his "height advantage" Irwin still has trouble facing those same stereotypes of Asian and Asian men being homosexual or asexual and possessing a small penis.

Jeremy attributes the Asian American male dating difficulties to parenting and the community:

We lack experience dating women, and we have the whole arranged marriage thing going. So if all else fails, mom and dad are just going to hook us up. You know, so we have that. They're always networking to hook us up. Especially when we get to the age they're always looking around even for someone like myself. When I had no relationship, my mom was always looking around. I didn't want that but they couldn't help it. They are always looking around, and pretty much every person I know they're always looking you know. So with that being said, like we really don't have -- we're not really smooth with the ladies. It's the man's duty to approach the girl most the time. So we kind lack the Casanova game, so to speak. The grand, large scale the whole Indian man race.

There are certain socio-historical and cultural factors that do have some impact on how individuals approach dating and courtship. However, I fear that stereotyping all Asian

and Asian American men simply as “shy” or “unskilled” romantically inaccurately essentializes a group that is so vastly diverse. Not all Asian cultures are the same.

Sexism manifests and operates differently in different regions of the world.

Essentializing Asian American men as “shy” to explain their lack of “picking women up” removes any context of power and domination from the situation. It also implies that some characteristics are innate by race (timidity) when they are in fact, not biologically determined.

There are hierarchies of masculinities and emphasized femininities that have an affect on who individuals choose to date. There are Indian cultural traditions that may conflict with how marriage and dating is largely practiced in the United States. However, Jeremy finds the “whole Indian man race” deficient at being “Casanova.” It is unfortunate that we fail to question how a Venetian womanizer who died lonely (he contemplated suicide), with his fox terriers as his only friends, has become the paragon for heterosexual male suavity. However, the shortcut frame to a “ladies man” is a logical jump to Casanova, in contrast to the image of an asexual Asian man.

These framed shortcuts make can create obstacles for Asian American men when they seek out partners of any race. Some of my male respondents see these media portrayals and racialized stereotypes also making it difficult to relate to Asian American women. Irwin explains:

I’m attracted to Asian women more, I think I have more of a complex about Asian women now than before because it seems to me that I’ve come to this conclusion, right or wrong, that I have a harder time, hard time, trying to make a connection with an Asian American woman than other women.

Irwin argues that some of the difficulty making a connection with Asian American women has to do with a number of factors. First, there are few Asian American men for Asian American women to choose. He figures that 96 percent of the men they will meet are non-Asian American, which is pretty close according to US Census data. Second, Irwin contends that Asian American women “are less interested in foreign-born Asian men than Asian men are interested in foreign-born Asian women” so that reduces the population of Asian American men by half. As mentioned earlier, Irwin has had non-Asian American women openly stereotype him as an unlikely partner, so his work to legitimize Asian American women’s disinterest as unrelated to race is quite contradictory. However, later in the interview, Irwin implies that media constructions and racism are also factors and as demonstrated by interviewees, they do make a difference in how they choose partners.

INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING

There are a number of Asian American men who date interracially including many of my participants, however, not without disapproval from others. Asian American men, gay, bisexual, and straight, were also exoticized. Irwin has dated white, African American, and Latina women in addition to Asian American women. He details one negative experience when he was with a white girlfriend:

I definitely have come up against people who didn’t like the idea that I was with a woman who wasn’t Asian. You know and so that fear [of interracial relationships] was very palpable. I was in [a city in the Southwest] in the car with my blonde girlfriend and everything and these guys pull up and they want to start trouble. They pull up on the passenger side where she’s sitting. They started making gestures at us. These guys want to start something. If I had a gun I might have waved it at them or something but that’s why I don’t carry a gun, because I know I would have used it by now.

These public threats are impossible to predict. People of color and whites who choose to partner with them can never be sure if they come across an overt incident of discrimination based on race. While Irwin's incident happened in the Southwest, Ann's problems mentioned earlier in the chapter occurred in the Northeast in an area where the population of Asian Americans is very large. There is an assumption that racism is a problem of the South, however, racism is systemic and is a global issue.

When Irwin dates white women, dislike of the interracial union does not come just from strangers. He has had problems with their families as well:

white women have told me, one white woman told me "look, I could never take you home." At least one of them said, "I could never take you home to see my parents. It just wouldn't happen." And you know, this other women I've met with this year was like, she basically said that it would be "too difficult." That it wouldn't be "smooth." Her family used to use the word "Chink" and stuff when they were kids. Her parents probably still do.

In 1967, *Loving v. Virginia* granted *formal* rights to people of color to marry whomever they want. However, the denial of realistic opportunities to do so coupled with pernicious gender and racial ideologies that derogates Asian American manhood has meant that a proportion of heterosexual Asian American men lack opportunities to exercise this freedom of choice. My Asian American female respondents have not run into these same problems with the white families of their partners.

Brent is married to a white woman and overall they have not had any problems with overt racism from strangers. Most of their difficulties have been with family and extended family. He met them for the first time on a July 4th holiday. He was very nervous because it's, "the pinnacle of Southern white holidays of all things, so I was

kind of anxious. I treated everyone with as much respect as I could.” Brent had to be very mindful of the white space. Brent shares his experiences with his wife’s family:

We knew it was going to be difficult for both us with our families meeting each other and just getting them to accept us. She told her mom that she was dating me, a Chinese guy, and, it didn’t help when I had long hair. Not only was I Chinese, but I was some wacky looking guy. Someone in her family said, “You’re dating a Chinaman? Why can’t you date someone white?” Sometimes I would hear some really crazy shit come out of their mouths like whenever we were afraid of North Koreans. They would start talking about North Koreans and Asians and stuff like “I just don’t trust them.” And here I am, just standing there. I’m like “Man, that’s really kind of messed up.” And every so often one of her family members would stop and look at me “Oh but we don’t mean you Brent. You’re totally cool.” I’m thinking, “What the fuck, man? Probably all these Koreans are pretty cool for the most part. You don’t know anything about them!”

Brent was able to witness backstage racism because he was seen as an “exception” to North Koreans or other Asians that his wife’s family distrusts. Brent did not publicly challenge them to reconsider their racist comments. It is unclear if they fully accept that Brent is different from other Asians, or if they reassure him because they feel like they have to backpedal because they forgot he was in their presence.

His relationship with his wife’s parents and brother improved a great deal over time. However, the extended family continues to make racist comments:

But her uncles and other random aunts and uncles... there are a lot Vietnamese fisherman on the [Gulf Coast area] and it’s just somehow, whenever we would get seafood “You didn’t go to that Vietnamese guy did you?” Somehow they’re convinced the food they get from Vietnamese is somehow worse even though they fish the same bays. Another really strange thing they said, “We respect hard working people but these Vietnamese fisherman, they’re going out on Sundays and fishing and that’s not right.” What? Why can’t you fish every day of the week if they’re trying to support their families or whatever it is? I would hear things like that and here I am like dude if you didn’t know me you’d probably think I was a damn “Gook” too before I started dating your niece! Just some of the inside stuff like what I told you [earlier] they were like “Why are you dating some Chinaman?”

His wife has been an amazing support and stands up to family members when they make racist remarks. She told her family “if they want anything to do with her they need to accept that fact. That she’s going out with me.” Brent thinks after the initial meeting, her white family was not as accepting as his parents were to her, but it continues to improve.

One drawback for some Asian American families is a sense of loss when one of their family members marries a white spouse. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Brent has a cousin who has completely abandoned his Chinese family after marrying a white woman. Both of Josh’s sisters prefer relationships with white men, so he has a similar loss.³³ Josh’s prefers dating women who are not East Asian American. He has struggled with them because the ones he has initially shown interest in, “try too hard to be something they’re not.” In Josh’s experience, the East Asian American women have tried too hard to be the image of emphasized femininity, like popular, middle to upper class white women.³⁴

WHEN RELATIONSHIPS WORK – DO OPPOSITES ATTRACT?

When my male respondents found relationships that worked, there were very specific characteristics of the relationship that made them successful.³⁵ As some of the women noted, there was comfort in sharing similar background and experiences. If their partner was white then he or she had to be supportive and understanding when dealing with racial matters. John, and Henry found partners in Asia. Henry, who is seventy-three, explains his choice:

Well, at that time, let’s see, I had been working about 10 years trying to find a woman. It was rough, not enough women around at that time. [Because of] the [Chinese] exclusion act, most of the women weren’t allowed to come over. I went back to Hong Kong to find a wife. That was rough.

There were clear structural obstacles for Henry when he sought a wife in the late 1950s, early 1960s. John, while born in the United States forty years ago, feels a strong connection to China. He faced a great deal of painful discrimination growing up, and found a wife from Taiwan.³⁶

Samir met his girlfriend of six years in his first semester of college. Up until that point, he dated white women because “there wasn't anything else available.” In a partner, Samir wanted, “everything to match up as best as possible. And we're both South Indian, both come from similar families.” Jeremy also prefers a partner with similar background:

Having been born in Bangladesh and raised there the first ten years of my life and you know seeing my parents and learning from all the people that I have dated, you have taught yourself that it just *works* when you're with someone who is somebody that's South Asian or even Asian we have a different culture in the Eastern world than the Western world does. And even though we're very Westernized we're taking advantage of all the benefits America has. I'm just in a better place. If I stick to someone of South Asian descent, preferably my religion too, preferably my country which happens to be the case now, I mean I've dated some women from India and Pakistan. It was very good but it wasn't as good as it is now being with a Bangladeshi person but having dated white, Hispanic, and African American that was fine when you're young. But I guess you kind of realize that when you get old like mid-twenties -- I'm in my late twenties now -- that being with someone of your kind, practicality wise, it works out good [sic]. If you can find someone you are attracted to as well as their looks as well their personality and they're interests and it's like a double bonus. Because I don't think as Americanized as I am, I don't think I'd ever end up with someone outside my race. I mean you can never say never, but practicality wise in making sense and future goals wise it's just better to be with someone of your own race...And now I'm with someone of the same nationality, same exact religion, same exact type of Muslim, so it's pretty good.

Jeremy's honesty in selecting a partner that is the same race is antithetical to the current discourse of color-blindness and the older but still popular discourse of the United States being a “melting pot.” If we examine it further, there are many similarities with other

communities of color. This conscious choice of seeking a partner that has had similar experiences is about seeking out a partner who can understand what it is like to be racialized in the same manner. Charlene mentioned earlier in the chapter that when she admits that she prefers dating Asian Americans, to other men, she is accused of being a “reverse racist.” Terms such as “reverse racism” are problematic and are often poor attempts at masking or denying social inequality. It is unfortunate that an experience with one white man has made it difficult for her to even entertain the thought of dating another white man without a physical reaction. However, it is not simply a case of Charlene thinking that whites are inferior or that she will wield power over all whites in the future.

Jeremy has distinct memories of being an outcast when he left his all black high school for one that is all white. That left a significant impression on him, but he was still open to dating women of all races in high school. Jeremy elaborates that he would still be open to settling down with a woman who was Latina, white, or African American, but he “would definitely have to date them for awhile and be really sure.” Like many other respondents, Jeremy finds comfort with a partner who understands the Asian American experience.

THE GREAT INTERRACIAL DEBATE

In my interview with Erin, she recalls a discussion in college with Asian American male friend that was very interested in “identity politics.” He was interested in law and civil rights, but a conversation that sticks out to her as a “disgusting sexist” moment was when he insisted that Asian American men “have it really bad” and

“haven’t really arrived” until they are able to “go out with the pretty white girls.” Erin’s male friend is making a poorly delivered sociological point. Asian American women are finding white partners at a much higher rate than their male counterparts. There is a racist connection to this disparity.

The gender imbalance of white-Asian American relationships is an ongoing debate within the community. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, there are some “bitter” Asian American men. There are some geographical limitations. The migration patterns for African Americans after the Civil War affected how communities developed, having thus influenced family life and gendered expectations.³⁷ Similarly, Asian Americans have specific migration patterns and immigration patterns, which helped or hindered the development of communities. One thing to differentiate is the immigration patterns after the immigration reform in the 1960s created more isolated pockets of Asian Americans. In those areas there are less concentrated Asian American communities. Lack of close proximity to other Asian Americans can also affect marriage patterns.

However, a strong factor in these disparities is that colonial regimes routinely manipulated ideas about sexuality in order to maintain unjust power relations.³⁸ White women were objects controlled and protected by white men. White women were out-of-bounds for men of color. It was institutionally enforced. It is still very much reinforced today, ideologically. There is a similar disparity in the African American community. Black men are much more likely to have a white partner than black women. In the African American community there is a double standard regarding intermarriage.³⁹ Collins argues that,

The rule of ‘marry within your race’ is more easily enforced for black women....This double standard and the reality of so many African American women without partners is bound to lead to friction in how black men and women interpret the interracial marriages that do exist.⁴⁰

As the group that is left alone without a partner, African American women “remain the group most bothered by this situation.”⁴¹ The crux of the problem is posed in question that Collins asks, “If black women were as worthwhile as white ones, why wouldn’t black men choose them?” African American women are constructed as “ugly” and “undesirable” to define white women as beautiful and desirable.

There is a similar conundrum between Asian American men and women, perhaps not as publicly in the academic discourse. However, the gender that is most likely to partner with whites is reversed. Of the white-Asian American intermarriages, 75 percent are Asian American women with white men. This double standard (acceptability and frequency of Asian American women to marry white men) and the reality of so many Asian American men without partners is bound to lead to friction in how Asian American men and women interpret the interracial marriages that do exist. It further exacerbates the strained relationships among heterosexual Asian American men and women. African American women and Asian American men face a serious problem in this supposed “post-racial” America that cannot be resolved simply by branching out and pursuing white partners.⁴²

The real issue at hand is that gendered racism constructs African American women and Asian American men as the bottom of an “ideal partner” hierarchy. White men have to retain their position as the “normal” or “perfect” male. In order to retain that central position, two poles have to be created. African American and Latino men are

positioned at one pole as the extreme, dangerous, hypermasculine figure and Asian American men are positioned at the other pole as the weak, non-threatening hypomasculine figure. White masculinity depends on these extreme constructions. Without Asian American men, there would be no appropriate bottom for white masculinity. That hypomasculine position makes it more challenging for Asian American men to get the icon of emphasized femininity, the “clean,” virginal, upper to middle class, “pretty” white woman as a partner.

HE SAID, SHE SAID

Asian American men and women voice various reasons for the intermarriage disparities. Some respondents are more broadly critical of social constructions in their views, while others take a more micro-level look. Amanda, a Filipina American, used to be attracted to Asian American men in high school but she was “mistreated by them.” For a while, she would attribute negative connotations to all Asian American men. Alice, who has a South Asian American partner,⁴³ has had many discussions with Asian American women that have had problems with Asian American men:

You know, a lot of Asian women say from their point of view that you know Asian men raised by Asian mothers have a lot of macho expectations, especially if they are from China or from Korea or from India, wherever. Then they find that relationships with white men is much more on equal footing, meaning that there are all the things we come expected in the way men style or believe or how wife relationships are in that there are no men screaming about their wife, and that they have much more power about where they want to live, how they want to live, how they share their money, and they are treated better. So I think going back to Asian men, some of them are really angry, and they just say, well, they [Asian women] say “no” [to them]. And I say, “Look at you guys – look at what you guys do. Do you ever treat your wife or your girlfriend out?” [They respond,] “No – it’s too expensive. It costs some money.” I said, “Well, think about it. You can’t be that mad if they end up going for a white guy.” I don’t know. It’s an interesting dilemma to me because I see the seething Asian man.

You have the angry Asian man, and they are so outspoken about why, and so enraged about why. But nobody ever comes to any conclusions except that it's just happening.

There is very little research on the relationship dynamics between Asian American men and women. One study found that Asian American men who acculturate to the cultural patterns of the “host culture” had lower rates of gender conflict in their homes.⁴⁴

Basically, the more and Asian American man conformed to white American “values” the fewer spousal conflicts. However the study was never clear on how it defined

“traditional Asian values” and how they differed from “host (i.e. White) cultural values.”

The study fails to incorporate white hegemonic Western masculinity and how that constructs and defines what the researchers may deem “traditional Asian values.”

Hierarchies become intertwined with love and sexual expression.⁴⁵ Asian Americans relationships, whether inter- or intra-racial, can uphold prevailing hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality.⁴⁶

Irwin asserts that the interracial marriage disparity between Asian American men and women has a connection to white power and domination. He argues:

I do think that there's a sad thing that has occurred between Asian American men and women is that although I think that a lot of the resentment on these message boards is overblown on the part of Asian American men. A lot of the resentment, the resentment is not unjustified because just yesterday an Asian American woman told me, “yeah, I would especially treat the Asian American boys badly when I was in school because I wanted nothing to do with them, I didn't want to be associated with them. I was ashamed of [Asianness], she said I didn't like to use chopsticks either.” So the one thing that she wanted to do was, you want to avoid things that make you look bad and to her it was Asian American boys. I think that that happens on more than one occasion. And it's not a coincidence that that is precisely what historically and in the present a lot of what white men prefer. Either consciously or subconsciously, they want to separate the Asian man from the Asian woman. That's what happens with the immigration laws. Bring in the men but don't bring the women. Or bring in the women but don't

bring in the men. Someone was telling me here at [the local University] that he was at a party where they [the white men] were trying to get all the Asian men out of the party and keep the Asian women in the party. People don't want to believe this but this is history. If you're a man and you have the power, you're gonna tend to want to divide and conquer. You know if it's a black woman of the black race or whatever separating their families and the white master raping the black women as they wish and making babies that they can even keep or do whatever they want with the baby, they can set it up so they can do whatever they want to do, whoever has the power.

Irwin does specifically name whites as having a historical and contemporary role in this gender separation between Asian American men and women. However, he backs off at the end, talking about power more generally, or normalizing the "racial morphology." Colonizers have justified their oppression by making social Darwinism a "naturalized" given, justifying their exploitation. Irwin continues:

So, you get this resentment and I think what compounds the resentment is that this whole thing where I think some of us probably feel like Asian women don't feel where we're coming from or worse they think that they resent us for being these male chauvinists or sexists for pointing out certain things that we think are wrong. Maybe some of these guys are saying it the wrong way or expressing it in a way that doesn't make sense. So the same thing happens between a lot of black men and women. And yeah, it what happens when an Asian American male starts talking about this stuff, all of a sudden it starts sounding like, to some women, that Asian women belong to Asian men. Like you're being sexist and all this stuff, and a lot of Asian men are like, I'm just imagining all this, I don't know if I've actually seen this all in one place. Asian men are like, oh they've been brain washed by those white feminists and they don't care about us anymore.

Irwin's observation about how difficult this subject becomes when trying to talk with an Asian American woman is an example of how the blatant racist assault on Asian American men strains the heterosexual gender relationship between the two. Asian American men are the targets of a unique gendered racism where many feel emasculated. Seeing Asian American women with men of non-Asian descent is like a stab in the back from someone they hope will support them.

Irwin has an instant emotional reaction to seeing Asian American women with non-Asian men. He portrays this reaction as an instinctual, biologically tied response:

Because every man has that visceral response. When they see some type of woman, whether it's by genotype or phenotype, that they feel like she's part of their group, their ethnic group or class, going out with someone else. That tends to bring an automatic response. I think it's caveman-esque. If a woman of my tribe or my family or my whatever group is going out with someone else there's going to be some kind of response I don't know what it is, but there's going to be something there and I'm not going to lie to you or pretend like I'm this perfect left wing writer on race. Of course there's a response. Now I didn't have it early in life, I didn't really care. Then maybe seeing it a lot and taking note of it a lot.

Again, Irwin is normalizing this white oppression as any man would do it or anyone would be mad if that was happening to their group instead of normalizing, anger for the symbolic threat that is white men with Asian American women. While those relationships may be happy and egalitarian, Irwin's "visceral response" is really a response to how he has been treated his whole life and the deep understanding and connection he shares to Asian American history. He describes it as "caveman-esque," but oppression creates emotional and physical responses.

Even without an understanding or connection to the past, Asian American men may not even have the words to articulate the deep feelings of injustice in the act, but

that is the purpose of the message boards, blogs, and websites like *Bitter Asian Men*. These sites serve as a safe place for the strong emotional reaction connected to a systemically racist society where white supremacy is so skillfully hidden in every nook and cranny. The treatment and harassment from all social institutions is latent and repetitive but still damaging and effectively maintains the racial status quo.

Through colonial conquests, there were narratives of white men sexually exploited women of color by raping slaves and "going native." This concept of "going native" paints a romantic picture of white men assimilating into the native culture and falling in love with a native woman. When in reality, "many white sexual advances were not welcomed by native people, but were accepted as acts of desperation."⁴⁷

Sacagawea's history has been completely re-written through the eyes of the colonizer. In today's globalized economy, white men do not have to submerge themselves into the native culture and stay. Instead, they can visit sexual tourist destinations and are in control of how long they stay and if they will take a native woman home with them. They can even personally pick one out on the Internet before they travel.⁴⁸

The myth of our "post racial" world is exposed when we see the disparity in intermarriage rates. Latika, notices in her Asian Indian American community. There is a general increase in Asian Indian-white American unions, but Asian Indian American women marrying white men is more frequent. There are messages that are internalized from this. Jeremy argues that if South Asian American men do have the chance to marry white women it is because they "settle."

I just don't really see that many South Asian men with other races. There are a few of us. Most of us date East Asian women, but it's really weird because when

a South Asian man dates a white person she's below average. That's what I think. In terms of appearance. Just in shallow appearance, not in terms of not necessarily personality and what they have to offer as a person. They [white women] are not as attractive. Yeah. They're below average than your average white person. Yeah. I truly feel that way. Because for us you know some of us are darker then white is marrying up. It's acceptable. So if you're going to go against your race, you settle for a lighter skin color. I mean I feel that way. You just don't see Indian men with that many outside the races. It's pretty rare. Indian woman they're clearly way more attractive then we are on a large scale. They are. And you'll see them with all races. You'll see them with African American, white, East Asian, everything, but Indian men in our culture, there's no dating and stuff. If you're at a party, you can't go across the room and make a pass at some girl. I think Indian men don't out marry because I don't think Indian men have the confidence to approach people of another race. We feel like it's out of our league for the most part I'm talking about the race in America as a whole whereas women they get approached all the time. You know intermarriage with other races, one just like the wedding I went to a day ago, was an Indian girl marrying a white guy or less than an Indian man dating a white or Asian woman. And the white women are probably like seriously ugly. I mean I have two uncles who married white women and they're pretty gross. I have one uncle that married three times and this computer is more attractive than my uncle's wives. That's just the truth. When we pick white they're not white they look busted. That's one thing I'll give east Asians when they pick white and they're at least half way decent, I mean but when Asian men pick white just the fact that they're white because they're white so it's acceptable to marry.

Because Jeremy has internalized the constructions of exotic Asian female beauty and the lack of attractiveness of Asian men, “attractive” women of other races are out of their league not a “safe play” to approach. He argues that Asian American men lack confidence and are not encouraged by patriarchal figures in their life to date “cute women.” Asian American women being approached by black, Latino, and white men makes sense because they are “very attractive.”

GAYSIANS?

Of my fifty-five respondents, six are openly self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In their attempts at dating and relationships, the men have had difficulty with rigid stereotypes affecting their dating possibilities. The constructions of asexuality that are imposed on straight Asian American men, and are also imposed on gay and bisexual Asian American men.

Sexual tourism in Southeast Asia effectively commodifies Asian bodies, both male and female. Transsexual Asian women, aka “Lady Boys” are hot commodity for white Western men. There is a discourse that Southeast Asian transgender women, like the Thai “Lady Boys,” are more appealing than the Asian women at these sexual tourist destinations. Straight-identified white men love the “Lady boys” because they get a “beautiful Asian female body” combined with the “sex drive of a man.” There was similar commodification of Asian American bodies in the Craigslist ads discussed in Chapter II. The commodification alienates people from their own bodies and people who are alienated “from their own honest bodies become easier to rule.”⁴⁹ My LGBTQ respondents have their own experiences with commodification and alienation. The gay men have had a more difficult time finding partners. The gendered beauty constructions are intertwined with sexuality.

“RICE QUEENS”

As discussed earlier by Glenn, he finds that Asian American heterosexual men are burdened with weak media constructions. He also sees similar obstacles for Asian American gay men:

I think Asian gay men are screwed in some way, too. Even though there is a small community of “rice queens.” Non-Asian gay men who like Asian men. They are gay. So they are called “queens” and they like “rice.” So they are called Rice Queens. There is a small community of gay men who seek out Asian men. But there are stereotypes about them, too. Some stereotypes, from when I was in California, they are usually losers. They can’t find partners of their own race. Or non-Asian gay men. That’s why they are like, ‘I’ll just be with Asians because they are easier.’ Another stereotype is that all gay Asian men are bottoms, so the assumption is that they are easy targets because they are the leftover. So if you can’t find your own type or a more-macho gay man, go to the Asian gay men. Because they are all bottoms. So if you’re a top or if you want a fuck, then just talk to the gay Asian men. They are easier. They’re submissive. Easy targets. I think these two assumptions draw gay men to Asian men, which I totally reject. That has been my experience about what has been portrayed in both the traditional mainstream media as well as in gay media - that Asian men are portrayed as feminine, weak, passive bottoms. And in a way, asexual.

Glenn has a gay friend of many years, whom he mentored as a resident assistant in his college dorm. Glenn served as a support while the friend was coming out. Even though his resident knew that he was gay, Glenn was never seen as a sexual being:

Basically, he very honestly told me, ‘I’ve always seen you as asexual. I don’t see you as anything else in the gay world. I would just walk right past you. When I go to the gay club, looking for targets, looking for a one night stand, a date, a boyfriend, whatever, I would probably just walk right by you and I wouldn’t register anything because Asian men are asexual to me.’ He’s a white American, born and raised in Nebraska.

This racist stereotyping has had an impact on Glenn’s self-esteem and his choice of partners. He colluded with the system and internalized that he was not capable of getting partners besides “Rice Queens.” Glenn explains:

You usually get a lot of attention from Rice Queens. It’s not really what I want, because I want to fit in. I’m still hoping for that ideal situation where my race and my color don’t factor in. Or the assumption of my penis size doesn’t get into the equation where they calculate, ‘What’s my chance of getting this person?’ I think things have become better. When I was younger, I was acting in a way that was still operating in that assumption. Feeding into the machine. I was consciously contributing to that cycle, to those assumptions. The cycle that the only types of people that you can date or sleep with are Rice Queens, who are

losers. So, if you can't get laid elsewhere, they come to you. I think that was the assumption. I think now I am consciously breaking out of that and having other types of successes.

While Glenn is finding other successes, he still has to contend with a LGBTQ community that may or may not see him as equal man and an equal potential partner.

Daniel agrees that his race is an obstacle in the community.

I do recognize that people see me as an Asian, so there's obviously racism intersected in the gay culture. I feel like I do get turned away sometimes because I'm Asian. Personally, I don't care. Well, I do care, but I get over it real quick. I think being gay plus being Asian, having those two together, actually reinforces another stereotype. It gets deeper and more complex.

Queerness intensifies the already negative racial stereotyping. Gay men, in general, are constructed as a marginalized masculinity; men of color are subordinate masculinities.

Asian American men are constructed as hypomasculine, so an Asian American gay man is a marginalized, subordinated, hypomasculinized man.

WE ARE (STILL) FAMILY, AREN'T WE?

The Asian American women I have interviewed share that they have more overt pressure to meet gender expectations and, their families make clear attempts to control their sexuality. The queer Asian American women disrupt cultural or racial expectations when they come out to their families. Erin explains

My mom completely freaked out. My dad didn't. So I told her over the phone and it was awkward and there was a lot of "Are you sure? Do you need to see a doctor?" Oh, and then the funniest question, the funniest and saddest question and the most indicative of them not understanding at all was, "Do you think you're a boy? And would you rather be a man?" (Laughing) Me trying not to laugh and going, "No. I am completely comfortable and accepting of being a woman. It's just that I happen to be also attracted to women." And for me to tell my parents, to tell them the difference between queer, trans, bisexual, and gay that is not going to fly. So, I didn't bring those things into the conversation at all

because the gay thing is up in their head like I'm not even going to start with like ranges and -- and you know all the basis that is the reality part.

Erin, and other lesbian or bi-sexual women I spoke with, said that their families associated gayness with whiteness. Lily and Yuan share that no language or public discourse existed when they lived in Taiwan. They were not aware of non-hetero sexualities before immigrating. The shorter history of LGBTQ social movements in the non-Western⁵⁰ (or global South) nations restricts the public empowerment of those organizations. There are public LGBTQ organizations in the global South that assert their issues openly, for example, lesbians in Nicaragua⁵¹. However, the strong public backlash makes it more difficult for individuals and organizations to work in the public limelight.⁵² Even with constitutional protections of LGBTQ in South Africa, the social stigma attached to same-sex sexuality as “deviant” and “un-African” creates great problems for openness and resistance. The LGBTQ populations in non-Western nations must deal with the added stigma of being un-authentic in their identity, as if colonialism has imposed “deviant” sexuality upon them.

Phan, a Vietnamese American, has felt discrimination because of her lesbian identity. Strangers and acquaintances have mistreated her, and her family lacks understanding.

I'm queer and a minority and a female, and I think that might be more of a problem for me. So I don't know. It's difficult to tell the reason why people would have a problem with me. I think it would be more based on sexual orientation that I've gotten in conflicts with that. With my family definitely, and they still don't accept it. I'm 32 and they still want me to get married [to a man]. So, in a way, I'm glad to be in the States, you know. I mean if I were in Vietnam, this would not even be an option. I'd be married and have kids. So, I am really happy to be in the States. And, I'm definitely glad to be in [a major metropolitan

city in the Northeast] because it's much more open, accepting, liberal, and all that. I'm sort of afraid to go certain parts of the country.

While homophobia is still a systemic problem in the United States, Phan appreciates the freedom she has in the United States.

CONCLUSION

My hope is that this chapter serves as a starting point to discuss and analyze Asian American sexual politics. Asian Americans first receive messages about relationships and sexuality within their homes and communities. Parents have partner preferences for their children. They may base these preferences on preserving culture, but also may be influenced by white hegemonic ideals.

Outside of their intimate family circles, Asian American men and women are met with an imposed gender ideology where power relations of race, class, gender and sexuality permeate individual consciousness. This ideology tells them how they should think about their own bodies, relationships, and sexuality.⁵³ In the next chapter, I discuss strategies to combat hegemonic ideology both on a personal and structural level.

NOTES

¹ Patricia Hill Collins *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).

² Table FG4. Married Couple Family Groups, by Presence of Own Children/1 In Specific Age Groups, and Age, Earning, Education, and Race and Hispanic Origin/2 Both Spouses: 2008. U. S. Census Bureau.

³ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 249.

⁴ For in-depth discussion of Lee please see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*, Chapter 5.

⁵ Nadia Kim, "Patriarchy is So Third World," *Social Problems*, (2008) 53 (4): 519–536.

⁶ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Annie Gowen. "Immigrants' Children Look Closer for Love More Young Adults Are Seeking Partners of Same Ethnicity" *Washington Post*, Sunday, March 8, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/03/07/AR2009030701841.html>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For extensive discussion of Asian Americans and stereotyping of other Americans of color, please see Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin. *Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), Chapter 5: 170-180.

¹² Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

¹³ Elena Cabutu. "I Wanned fo' Try Biore," in *YELL-Oh Girls*, ed. Vickie Nam (New York, NY: Quill, 2001), 131.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶ For a detailed account, see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*, 39-40.

¹⁷ Richard Lapchick, Eric Little, Colleen Lerner, & Ray Matthew. "The 2008 Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport," A Report presented in Orlando, Florida, published February 19, 2009 by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport.

¹⁸ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 54.

¹⁹ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

²⁰ A British actress of Indian ancestry, Parminder Nagra is most famous for her roles in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *ER*.

²¹ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 262.

²² Ibid., 198.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ LaVeist, Thomas. *Minority Populations and Health: An Introduction to Health Disparities in the United States* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

²⁵ Feagin and Sikes, *Living with Racism*, 64.

²⁶ Jaqueline Hagan and Nestor Rodriguez, "Resurrecting Exclusion" in *Latinos: Remaking America* edited by Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Mariela M. Paez (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 193.

²⁷ Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.

²⁸ US Census, retrieved from: <http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp-159/STP-159-nigeria.pdf>.

²⁹ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 264.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Friend Zone" or "Friend Mode" refers to the situation where the female has begun to view a male as a friend only and not a potential suitor, a psychological classification supposedly exceptionally difficult to undo.

³² Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 137-152.

³³ For a detailed account of Josh and his sister see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*, Chapter 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Twenty-four of my respondents are men. At the time of the interviews, only one had a white partner. The age range of this group of men is 20 – 73, with the mean age of thirty-six.

³⁶ For a detailed account about John’s experiences see Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 263-264.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 263.

⁴³ Alice and her partner have had problems with their racial discrimination from their white neighbor. For more details see Chou and Feagin (2008).

⁴⁴ William Liu and Derek Iwamoto. “Asian American Men’s Gender Role Conflict: The Role of Asian Values, Self-Esteem, and Psychological Distress,” in *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, (2006) 7 (3): 153-164.

⁴⁵ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*.

⁴⁸ Prasso, *The Asian Mystique*.

⁴⁹ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 249.

⁵⁰ I acknowledge the problematic use of Western and non-Western to describe various geographic regions with a diversity of political positions. I prefer the use of global North and global South, but there is no adequate terminology to capture the effects of globalization and colonization.

⁵¹ Millie Thayer. “Identity, Revolution, Democracy: Lesbian Movements in Central America.” *Social Problems*. (1997) 44(3): 386-407.

⁵² Thayer, “Identity, Revolution, Democracy”; Tamale, Sylvia. “Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda.” Pp. 17-29 in *Africa after Gender?*, eds. Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwa Manuh, and Stephan F. Miescher (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2007).

⁵³ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

RESISTANCE AND EMPOWERMENT

In the spring of 2009, I was taking my “day off” from my weeklong comprehensive examination. I attended a graduate student happy hour gathering here in Austin, Texas. After spending three days deeply immersed in gender and race research and writing, I was happy to enjoy some time away from my books and to see some friendly faces. However, my evening was quickly spoiled by an interaction with a bartender. My white friend and I walked up to the bar, and before I could even order anything, the bartender greeted me with mock Asian language and accent delivering a statement about female anatomy that was reminiscent of early media portrayals of Asian prostitutes in war torn countries soliciting soldiers with “me so horny, me love you long time.” Although I should be used to this by now, I was caught off guard. I very calmly told him that I was not particularly fond of the “underlying racialized tone” of his comments. Instead of apologizing, he completely dismissed my request to “knock it off” and repeated his statement, word for word. I looked at my friend, who has unfortunately witnessed similar instances like this with me before, and I suggested that we leave this place of business. My night was spoiled, and I turned in early. My friend, who was also upset about the incident, was able to carry on with other friends into the early morning. The incident still felt like a heavy weight for me this morning, making it more difficult for me to concentrate on my responsibilities. At this point you may be asking, “How is this relevant to my resistance?”

The racist and sexist incident has led me to “waste” almost twenty-four hours being upset about the incident. I have been using up my emotional energy dealing with the incident, jeopardizing the future of my Ph.D. Even worse, I am beating myself up about how I handled the incident. In true “model minority” fashion, I was polite, calm, and almost cordial to the bartender. However, the following morning, I allowed my suppressed emotions to be released. I had to deal with my sadness, anger, and tears at the most inconvenient time. I am actually a more tender person than my outward appearance and presentation, but I usually manage these things without such distress. This incident was the icing on the cake because it was the fourth racist incident in Austin in four months. I have replayed the incident over and over, making excuses for the bartender, accusing myself of being too sensitive, and wondering if an African or Latina American came to the bar, would he have said something as racially sexually exploitative? The most absurd part of the whole story is that the bartender is a gay man, and I am a lesbian woman. This happened in a gay bar, so his performance was not intended for an actual sexual proposition. He was pulling from a racial script already in place, one that constructs Asian women as “tasty treats” to be consumed (I am paraphrasing his comments).

Does the fact that I am an Asian American woman open the door for more public taunting in this self-proclaimed “liberal” island of Texas? The stereotypes surrounding Asian Americans as “model minorities,” hard working, diminutive, passive people gives license to these incidents because there is no perceived threat of resistance. I share this story because “model minority” stereotyping allows for these very public incidents to

happen with little consequence. Asian Americans have seemingly “made it” in the United States and are living the “American Dream.” While racist incidents are happening to African and Latino Americans every day, the counter-framing and resistance is publicly visible. The construction of Asian Americans as relatively innocuous compared to other people of color has made it so racist taunting and mockery is a low risk activity. Strong Asian American counter frames and counter narratives are imperative to improve our lives.

Asian Americans have not been visible resisters to such treatment compared to African Americans or Latinos. Many are happy with being considered “models” that they accept racial taunting as the “price” they pay to be treated “better” than African Americans or Latinos.¹ This acquiescence to white racism and conformity to white standards strains relations Asian American have with other groups of color. The white construction of the “model minority” has made Asian Americans “weapons” used against other people of color.² “Model minority” stereotyping is a gross exaggeration of the Asian American experience and inflation of the facts.³ All, but one, of the forty ethnic groups under the umbrella term Asian American have higher poverty rates than whites. While some East and South Asian Americans have high rates of educational attainment, strict racialized immigration laws have socially constructed this phenomenon. New African immigrants actually have a slightly higher rate of college completion.⁴ Being deemed the model minority still upholds the boundaries of whiteness. Asian Americans, even if successful, are still “othered” and “perpetually

foreign.”⁵ I want to stress, above all, model minority stereotyping provides no protection from racial discrimination.⁶

DISCUSSION

Race, class, gender, nationhood, and sexuality are tangled interlocking systems of power, domination, and oppression. Racial and gender inequality is maintained by everyday practices. For individuals, racialization and gendering begins before birth, extends and is most overt during childhood. Asian American bodies are bombarded with ethnosexualized messages and images from both their most intimate familial relations and their surrounding environment. Cultural values are built into the gendering. My interviewees sometimes deal with contrasting family values assigned to gender then from the outside world, i.e. peers, teachers, co-workers, and media. They learn very quickly that because of their race, they are inferior to whites, and assumptions are made about them not only based on race, but also gender and sexuality. These hegemonic lessons can be unlearned.

In this chapter, I offer concrete strategies on how to combat racism on both the personal and structural level. As I continue to create my own self-definition in opposition to hegemonic ideals, the more I understand that I have a responsibility in fighting back against ethnosexualized stereotyping. I hope that the strategies that I suggest may be helpful, not only to Asian Americans, but any person who wishes to fight against oppressive forces.

SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

What do we do now? I've spent the past two hundred pages presenting evidence of how racism persists. It can be disguised in systems of class, gender, and sexuality, but ultimately but the corrective discipline in the other systems ultimately reifies the white supremacist racial order. How is one person going to combat oppression that is embedded in social structure? If some Asian Americans choose to fight within these oppressive systems, are they colluding and participating in their own oppression? How can we keep from colluding in a system and keep our sanity?

When I teach undergraduates, the material in the class enlightens even the most resistant students that something is wrong with the system. Unfortunately, the most empathetic and action oriented students become overwhelmed and do not know where to begin to fight. Besides large structural change, there are a number of strategies to deal with fighting injustice at the personal and communal level. What has to be understood first and foremost is that where lies power, also lies resistance.⁷ The definition of resistance must be expanded. However, for hegemonic power to remain, resistance is constructed as "unnecessary," "illogical," "crazy," and "over-the-top." Our understanding of racial oppression in the United States is shameful. However, hegemonic ideology depends on being accepted and constructed as the "way it is and always should be." There are strategies at the larger community level and personal level.

STRATEGIES FOR BATTLING RACISM AT THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

One thing to understand about battling gendered racism at a personal level is that changing racialized and gendered behavior is very unlikely to change the organization

and structure of these social systems. People often ask me, what good does it do for me to do work on a personal level when the social forces that perpetuate racism are so dauntingly large? I agree. Doing work at the personal level will not necessarily produce the change you seek in structure. However, it is imperative to do the personal work first. You have to take care of yourself, making sure you are emotionally and mentally healthy, so that you can do work at the structural level. There are two very different approaches to fighting against gendered racism, and both require some critical understanding of oppressive social systems,

- 1) **Reformative Movement:** this method primarily focuses on altering the norms of the existing systems, usually through law.⁸ Examples of reformative organizations are The Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), The Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC), and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF).
- 2) **Revolutionary/Radical Movement:** this method focuses on fundamentally changing value systems. A major change in the structure is a major goal of revolutionary/radical movement.

REFORMATIVE MOVEMENT

One strategy is to work within the system. I have spoken with many young Asian American law students who hope to use their discipline to better the lives of all citizens. They are members of Asian American law student associations and see the law as the appropriate vessel to create for social change. While I applaud their efforts, reformative movement works within the boundaries set by the dominating hegemonic ideology.

There have been visible changes to US law throughout its history. African Americans' use of reformatory movement to "obtain freedom, justice, and dignity is as old as this nation."⁹ However, the problem with legal reform, especially regarding civil rights for people of color comes in the enforcement. Critical Race theorist, Derrick Bell notes, "a judge can manipulate the law and arrive at an outcome based upon her worldview, to the detriment of blacks."¹⁰ Bell's statement can be extended beyond the judge in the justice system. The manipulation runs deeply through an entire system that has acted to the detriment of all people of color.

Systems of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia) persist. Hegemonic ideologies shift in response to resistance against them. Hegemony is mutable and resilient. The "new racism"¹¹ and "color-blind" discourse¹² are strategies to maintain white supremacy, making racism no longer blatant and overt, but now tacitly understood. While there have been changes to policies and laws enacted to protect people of color, there has been little effort by whites to enforce them.

REVOLUTIONARY/RADICAL MOVEMENT

This method focuses on fundamentally changing societal structure and hegemonic value systems. Both Reformatory and Revolutionary/Radical Movement require community organization and participation. They also require access to resources to financially support the efforts. Revolutionary/Radical movements do not get as much widespread support because they are framed as extremist methods used by unstable, individuals or factions. These constructions of revolutionary/radical movements exist to support hegemony. Whites often praise Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of non-violence, but

he was very unpopular until the time of his death.¹³ His memory has been co-opted by whites to mythologize racial progress in the United States. Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party have become vilified. Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are portrayed as the appropriate role models for social change, non-violence in the face of even the most egregious injustice.

As far as political activists go, I have always been a major fan of Mohandas Gandhi and how his one-man efforts seemed to liberate millions of people. I always thought that his stance on non-violence was exceptionally admirable. However, I was evaluating social movements through a white (hegemonic) racial frame. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are used as “model protestors” by critics of the violent tactics of Black Nationalist groups such as the Black Panther Party. In truth, the circumstances for Gandhi were quite different than the circumstances for blacks in the United States. Martin Luther King Jr. would not have been able to succeed without the threat of violence from other groups and international pressure.¹⁴ Gandhi’s success cannot be used as an appropriate comparison to the situation in the United States. Even though he shared the same values and motives as many civil rights and black liberation leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and even John Brown, his methods would not work as effectively because of the strong white racist framing in the US. Gandhi benefited from the constant threat of Indian political groups that used other methods. Utilizing militant techniques for human rights is not necessarily a sign of deficient moral character. Whites use that charge to deflect from their own lack of morality in the

oppression of people of color. In actuality, the moral character of Gandhi and Malcolm X are much more similar than different.

Groups committed to non-violence during the civil rights movement were able to see that passive resistance was not going to be enough to change the laws of the Jim Crow South. Protestors were threatened, beaten, and murdered even while they remained peaceful without retaliating. The publicity generated from the brutality made it blatantly clear the injustice was prevalent in the South, yet it was not enough to gain immediate attention from government officials. Groups such as the Freedom Riders and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were intent on adhering to non-violent forms of protest, and after much effort with little or no results, some minds began to change and other tactics were considered necessary.¹⁵

The conditions in which Gandhi led the Indian people to liberation are not comparable to the United States. It is not well known that Gandhi also understood and benefited from the threat of violence from other groups in India that were vital to independence. Gandhi had numbers. The population he served to make such an impact was the *majority* population. He had 350 million Indian citizens who were being oppressed and controlled by 150,000 British soldiers. African Americans comprise a bit more than 12 percent of the population of the United States compared to whites comprising approximately 70 percent. The Indian people could make a greater impact on industry by boycotting British garments, making their own salt, and refusing to go to work. African Americans working within the white racial frame in the U.S. during the Civil Rights Movement had a greater difficulty garnering support from whites to impale

the business sect as severely. Some boycotts were quite successful, but were unable to cripple an entire national industry.

With the 350 million Indian citizens to pull from, Gandhi also had a great deal of financial resources that allowed him to commit all his time to his cause and pay or support a large number of advocates and assistants on his ashram. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X also had assistants and advocates, but the racial hostility in the U.S. from the white majority made it difficult for these men to be easily access resources like Gandhi. The major legislative strides during the 1960s Civil Rights movement were made possible because of a dual strategy of reformative and revolutionary/radical social movement.

DUAL STRATEGY – AFRICAN AMERIANS AS A “MODEL MINORITY” FOR ASIAN AMERICANS

Asian Americans and African Americans have similar histories and experiences in the United States. Both groups have served whites throughout U.S. history (labor needs, reifying white supremacy). However, because of the fundamentally different patterns of immigration (forced vs. voluntary), large differences exist in the discourse about each group that affects media portrayal, the construction of ideologies and stereotypes, and how resistance movements have been both carried out and recorded in the history books. Asian Americans have been constructed as “solution minorities” so the history of racial oppression is often missing in history books. Asian Americans often have little or no knowledge of racist legislation controlling and disciplining early Asian Americans. Asian Americans faced severe quite similar to African Americans and also

resisted in organized ways. Yet, the resistance movements of the past are invisible in the Asian American collective memory of racial oppression. African Americans most certainly faced brutal violence kidnapped from their countries of origin and enslaved. From the atrocities of the slave system, with widespread brutality of all laborers and institutionalized rape of enslaved women, a white legacy exists of dehumanizing stereotypes of African Americans coupled with the social reality of great political and economic racial disparity. African Americans have unceasingly resisted the racial degradation from the beginning. Their counter-framing is well established and embedded in the African American psyche.

Asian Americans still face major discrimination in all facets of their lives.¹⁶ From overt, violent hate crimes to more clandestine, subtler forms of exclusion; Asian American “success” has not provided a shield from racism.¹⁷ While being used as justification to end affirmative action, a new change in the University of California state system admissions policy is unfairly targeting Asian American students.¹⁸ The UC system has eliminated SAT subject tests, which Asians tend to do well on. On the surface, the UC administrators insist that the move will increase the African American and Latino enrollment in the system.¹⁹ However, a study at UC Berkeley, sponsored by the Board of Regents found that the only group to benefit from the change would be white students. Ignoring its own research study, the UC system has implemented the change. Asian Americans are a threat to white supremacy on these university systems with white coined nicknames such as UCLA – University of Caucasians, Lost among Asians and UC Irvine – University of Chinese Immigrants.²⁰ The new policy, while

seemingly colorblind, is beneficial to whites. More importantly, the emphasis on Asian American success masks the economic disparities and racial discrimination that they experience.

African and Asian Americans have had similar difficulties being incorporated into the United States full and equal citizens. Blatantly racist legislation has been part of the United States throughout its history. African Americans have been able to create a strong collective identity and memory of racial oppression.²¹ African Americans can rely on a community of peers to help deal with the burdens of racial discrimination. They have adopted their own “America” regardless of external pressures from whites to control every aspect of their lives. Asian Americans do not have the same collective identity. With such a great diversity of nations and ethnicities represented, the umbrella term is inadequate and externally imposed. Immigrants are coming from nations with their own unique histories in which some of these nations lumped together in the United States have been at war with each other for long periods of time. Even with varying histories from their nations of origin, Asian Americans share in the same racialized process in the United States. There are notable differences in the treatment of South Asian that is similar to Arab Americans and African Americans.²² Yet, that different experience faced by South Asians highlights the arbitrary and constructed nature of race. Asian Americans are a mish mash of peoples from similar geographic regions; collective group identity becomes based upon “model minority” stereotyping.²³ This creates great challenges in establishing counter-frames and resistance movements.

COUNTER-FRAMING AND RESISTANCE

Asian American counter-framing and resistance is often missing in racial discourse. There were numerous labor strikes, boycotts, and lawsuits contesting racial discrimination brought on by Asian Americans. Some examples include: 1867- Two thousand Chinese railroad workers strike for a week; 1870 - Chinese railroad workers in Texas sue company for failing to pay wages; 1885 - Chinese laundrymen win in *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* case, which declares that a law with unequal impact on different groups is discriminatory; 1920 - 10,000 Japanese and Filipino plantation workers go on strike; 1924 - 1,600 Filipino plantation workers strike for eight months in Hawaii.²⁴ Unfortunately, often times these strikes were broken by bringing in other Asian laborers, making it hard to coalesce as a group. Chinese men brought to Mississippi to work on plantations after the Civil War protested their practically enslaved positions, and carved their own niche opening stores in black neighborhoods.²⁵

Also missing from both Asian and African American history is the life of Richard Aoki. Aoki, a Japanese American, was one of the founding members of the Black Panther Party. He attended Merritt College with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. His family was interned in the Topaz Relocation camp in Utah from 1942-1945. Aoki became the coordinator for the first Asian American Studies program at UC Berkeley.²⁶ Interestingly, there were three Japanese Americans in the Black Panther Party and all three experiences with the overt racism of Japanese Internment. Richard Aoki was four-years-old when he was interned and Mike Tagawa was born in camp. Guy Kurose was born to a peace activist mother who suffered through internment. Kurose's mother was

unique because most Nisei who were interned chose conformity and silence after camp. Kurose's mother was vocal about the injustice, developing a collective memory of racial oppression for her son Guy. Aoki grew up in an African American neighborhood in California, where he was immersed in the resistance culture of the 1960s.²⁷ All three men were active in the movements to establish ethnic studies in Universities. I highlight these three men because there is a direct link with their overt racist treatment, development of a collective memory of racial oppression, and their forms of directly confrontational forms of resistance. In 1968 and 1969 their were student strikes at San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley, for establishment of ethnic studies programs which included many Asian American activists. The establishment of Asian American studies programs is one method to creating a collective memory of racial oppression. Interestingly, these influential Asian Americans had experiences similarly related to or with African Americans.

There was a small "Yellow Power" movement in the 1960s and the political involvement of groups on the West Coast is more prevalent than in other geographic areas of the United States, but the reality on the West Coast is that different ethnicities are having drastic class and educational differences that they also have problems coalescing.²⁸ This is key to systemic racism; these groups have been constructed as a homogenous group. They serve the same white interest for their labor and resources (not just in the Pacific Islands, but globally these laborers and resources are of white elite interest). They face the same exploitation, but differences in immigration patterns have create great different access to resources.

In the color-blind era post 1960s, we face more a more difficult challenge when fighting oppression. The question is “who’s the racist?” With model minority status, it makes it less protest becomes less attractive and seemingly illogical, because there is material benefit to being considered higher on the racial hierarchy. Asian Americans may not be in the top position, but disrupting the racial order is seen too much of a risk for many.²⁹ There are small pockets of resistance. Student groups, community centers, social justice organizations, but Richard Aoki has been called “not your typical Asian.” Some Asian American resist individually and privately by creating new self-definition and self-valuation.³⁰

However, there is a long-standing and visible history of resistance by African Americans. Mutinies on slave ships, over 250 recorded slave revolts and the Underground Railroad are all part of the collective memory of racial oppression.³¹ Famous and influential African Americans throughout U.S. history are easy to name, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, even Booker T. was a secret dissenter. W.E.B. Du Bois was a great early African American intellectual. Other historic figures include, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Kathleen Cleaver, Huey Newton, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, the list goes on, and on, and on. These names roll off the tongue because they are publicly visible and recognized figures. Their fights for racial justice have been in the public eye and embedded in the collective memory of racial oppression not just for African Americans but Americans of every color. A strong collective memory is essential in creating counter-frames.

Besides direct confrontation, there are all the tactics used by slaves on plantation, breaking tools, doing work slowly, feigned illness and developing strong kinship networks.³² These are all strategies early African Americans used to help them survive. They have used more extensive and organized political movement to fight structural issues. Additionally, they have counter-frames to ideology. The promotion of rich black culture, and slogans such as “black is beautiful” are examples of counter-framing strategy. Newer African immigrants who may see many dissimilarities culturally with African Americans, can still access the ideological counter-framing that has been strongly developed over centuries.

Asian and African Americans have been similarly exploited for their labor by white elites throughout United States history. Their different labor patterns shed light on their placement in the racial hierarchy. The selective and voluntary immigration of East and South Asian Americans explains the development of the model minority myth. Additionally, the differences among Asian Americans by waves of immigration, and nation/ethnicity of origin, create difficulties in forming coalitions. Asian Americans have been othered and deemed perpetually foreign, yet there is no strong development of shared collective identity of memory. Instances of resistance have occurred throughout Asian American history, but it is largely unknown and absent from the discourse. Arriving as captives, African Americans have faced a long history brutal racism. Yet, along the way they have continually shown strength being able to form strong kinships to battle racial oppression. Asian Americans have much to learn from African American resistance movements.

PERSONAL LEVEL STRATEGIES

At the personal level, an important strategy in fighting racist imaging and stereotypes, individuals must work diligently to construct their own identities and self-definitions. While Asian Americans are bombarded with messages of “inferiority,” “inadequacy,” and “foreignness” we must refuse to accept these images as valid. The media are consistently projecting images and messages that are false. To fight the racial framing, you must identify and understand the frame. Then construct a strong counter frame so that you have a resource to fall back on when others challenge your counter perspective. There are examples of counter frames growing in strength and gaining some foundation in social movements, like “Black is beautiful.” Be prepared, when you stand up for yourself against hegemonic ideology, or against something that perpetuates racial stereotyping, even people you consider your friends might not understand.

When asked about how to combat racism, I sense a great deal of fear from those who are asking for the advice. Now some of the fear could be linked to the model minority or to new immigrant status. There are some ideological and material benefits in the short term for those people of color who are complacent with the racial hierarchy. That is the deceptive nature of “positive” stereotyping. The fear of rocking the boat is so strong and is further complicated by gender. Women and girls are discouraged from being too aggressive. The construction of Asian women as even more passive further complicates attempts at assertion or aggression in defense of racial mistreatment. I find myself often trying to give tips. I myself struggle to stand up and fight without compromising the own constructions I have of myself, asking myself “Is this how an

Asian American woman should act?” How should an Asian American woman act and how have these constructions limited how free I feel to act?

A woman I met at one of my lectures told me that one of her “close” white friends repetitively jokes that Asians “eat dogs.” This type of teasing, which is seemingly innocuous to the white friend, has both larger socio-historical meanings (Asians as barbaric) and personal meanings (Asians being easy targets for joking). The larger socio-historical meaning may have no bearing on how hurtful this type of teasing may have on eight-year-old Asian American, the child only sees that peers at school target them for looking different. The racial connotations of this type of taunting basically go unchallenged by adults who supervise these children.³³ I often spend time talking with young Asian American adults about techniques and tactics of how to deal with racist incidents. In this era of colorblind rhetoric and the popularity of parody and comedians of color poking fun at their own race, legitimized by their membership, Asian Americans who do not find such humor funny often get accused of being “too sensitive” when they stand up for themselves against racial teasing. These experiences are deposited in the individual’s collective racial memory. When a woman in law school has a “close” white friend who continues to “joke” that she “eats dog” after her repeated objections and her attempts to explain why it “hurts her feelings,” what should she do?

I recommend a few methods in dealing with these types of situations. These methods can be used singularly or in combination:

- 1) **The “Diplomatic” Method:** Try having an intelligent conversation, or even a heart-to-heart. Suggest some readings that may enlighten them.

- 2) **The “Tough Love” Method:** Retaining a “close” friend that thinks it is acceptable to demean you, for any reason, after you have explained that his/her actions are hurtful, is not a friend worth having.
- 3) **“This Ain’t My Job” Method:** It is a burden try and “convince” people that racism exists. It is not your job to convince them, because hegemonic ideology will contradict your points, making them all look illogical. You can walk away from this discussion.
- 4) **“Structure is Bigger than the Individual” Method:** If you do care enough for the person to retain them as a friend, you think they have other retaining qualities OR hold positions of power and influence that it would be costly to be on bad terms, then to keep your sanity and maintain some forgiveness for their ignorance, keep in mind that the systemic racism and the white racial frame are so powerful, that whites *and* people of color will resist the truth about racial oppression. These ideologies are centuries strong and have been maintained because people believe them.

THE “DIPLOMATIC” METHOD

This method works for friends, family, and colleagues that are open to deconstructing both the world around them and their own personal beliefs. This method can also be effective with friends that possess a strong sense of empathy. They may have not have had opportunities or exposure to racial injustice. Hiding the truth about racial injustice is a key component to hegemonic whiteness and by educating an individual with counter framing it may work to alter someone’s consciousness whether they are a white or a person of color.

Many of my Asian American respondents who became social activists were first exposed to critical writings about racist relations in the United States. These alternative voices struck a nerve with them and helped change their worldviews. This method is not full proof, as some individuals are more invested in maintaining the white racial frame, then others. Whites, for example, benefit psychologically by believing in “meritocracy”

and “white virtuousness.” Deconstructing and destroying the myths of meritocracy and white virtuousness becomes a very uncomfortable process.

THE “TOUGH LOVE” METHOD

This method is meant to work with people you have an established relationship with. I am basically asking you to hold your friends and loved ones accountable for their actions, with out negotiating your own principles. Relationships that are healthy allow for both individuals to openly share their thoughts and feelings with each other. If a friend or loved one continues to engage in hurtful actions based on race, gender, sexuality, etc., then you have every right to draw boundaries. If they are unresponsive to your attempts at having “diplomatic” conversations, you have a right to take some space for your own health. If a woman stayed with an abusive partner that continued to beat her, most people would encourage her to leave that person. Why then, do we fail to encourage each other to leave people who are racially abusive?

“THIS AIN’T MY JOB” METHOD

Perhaps you have expended energy trying to be diplomatic and have drawn clear boundaries with tough love. Also know that you do not have to make any attempts to convince anyone that your experience is valid. People of color are burdened with a “double consciousness” performing mental gymnastics in a white supremacist society. Your experience is real, regardless of how others may try and convince you otherwise. You do not have to expend excess energy trying to validate it.

THE “STRUCTURE IS BIGGER THAN THE INDIVIDUAL” METHOD

I want to differentiate the last method, “Structure is Bigger than the Individual,” from being a white apologist. Being a white apologist is buying into a version of “white virtuousness.” Understanding that structure is bigger than an individual allows you to critique their racist stereotyping or discrimination, while allowing you to de-personalize it. Their racist beliefs, while you may be the immediate target, are about the racist scripts that have been in existence long before you. This method is a way for you to retain your sanity when individuals seem closed to critiquing their surrounding world.

ANOTHER PERSONAL STRATEGY – ABANDONING THE “MODEL MINORITY” IMAGE

For the most part, the four strategies I have suggested will not ruffle too many feathers when dealing with a racist situation. There is one last personal strategy that I urge Asian Americans to keep in their repertoire of resistance. Explode! Let your true emotions be released, unedited and uncut. Emotional management is a form of oppression.³⁴ Making fun of Asians and Asian Americans so publicly, a “friend” “joking” in your face about “eating dogs” says something about how Asian Americans will just “take it.” Asian Americans have often been silent in these situations, providing a weak counter narrative of resistance. African Americans are falsely constructed as dangerous, so a lot of anti-black statements get pushed into the backstage.³⁵ While that does not solve the problem of systemic racism, African Americans have a collective identity and a public history of resistance. I wish Asian Americans had a fraction of their counter framing.

However, Asian Americans have an underdeveloped counter frame and few examples of public resistance. Every time I allow a bartender, waiter, or whomever I'm dealing with in public a consequence free Anti-Asian jab, I do nothing but damage. I give the assailant a free pass and reinforce notions of Asian passivity. Then, I have another racial memory to add to my bucket. Instead of adding memories or racial oppression to a bucket, we can construct our own counter frame, a frame where Asian Americans are assertive and strong.

Since I have been repeatedly insulted in gay bars, I have resolved to abandon my oft cool and collected demeanor, and let the assailant learn that insulting Asian American people in public is not tolerated by *this* Asian American. When I hold in my anger and rage, those emotions do not go away. Once I have gotten home, I cry, pound the table, and am disappointed in myself for not making it clear to the assailant that he or she has messed with the wrong person. I joke with my friends that next time, they need to be ready to haul me out of the bar because I'm breaking a beer bottle on the countertop and doing everything I can to create an image so entirely opposite of the passive, submissive Asian who will just allow a person to talk to them like a piece of meat.

Perhaps you think that I have gone too far in what I am asking you to do. I do not want team of my readers to go out and get arrested saying, "Rosalind Chou said I should cut racist bartenders with my beer bottle." No, while it may seem like it, that is not what I am saying. I do not encourage unnecessary violence. Being a woman, I can be taken less seriously acting in violence, when men, especially men of color are often held to a

much different standard. I am urging disruption. There are times when injustice should be met with physical force, but more generally speaking, in this case, my goal in the bar is to disrupt the assumptions made about me as an Asian American; as an Asian American woman; as a queer, Asian American woman.

The added stress for people of color dealing with racism negatively affects their health and any strategies to lessen that stress will be essential. Often times, when I am enraged, I cry. Then I become angrier that I am crying. The rage turns to tears because I am trying to hold it in. As a woman, I have been taught that it is inappropriate for me to scream, curse, threaten, and beat when I am furious. However, this controlled rage is unhealthy. We must feel comfortable in allowing ourselves to be free with our emotions, even if they seem negative. We must disrupt oppression as it occurs.

A little disruption can go along way. As mentioned in Chapter III, there have been numerous sexual predators targeting Asian and Asian American women specifically. At one of my talks, a Chinese American woman shared this experience:

There was a time I was almost assaulted. There was someone, at that time, targeting Asian women and raping them. I was just coming home and he came onto my patio. He put on a black facemask over his head. He pretended he had a gun and said, "Just do exactly what I say." He didn't expect me to react the way I did. This rage came over my entire body. And this guy was not a professional; he was not a pro at this. I was holding all these bags in my arms and I raised my voice and said, "I do not have time for this right now!" [laughter] He was startled and then tried to pretend that he was trying to do something else. Finally, he just left.

While this woman was probably very lucky that her attacker was not more aggressive, she surprised him with her voice. She assumed that the attacker was used to women just doing as he said. Even small amounts of vocal dissent can go a long way. Guang is

angered by the assaults of Asian American women on the subway in his city and says that they are “easy targets” because it is assumed that they will remain silent.

Resistance does not always have to take the form of disruption. Paul Varghese uses his comedy as social commentary. He challenges white racism by incorporating material in his jokes. Other comedians that use self-deprecating, racialized humor in their acts bother him. Paul sees other Asian American comedians making karate and terrorists jokes as damaging. Through humor, Paul resists by wittily pointing out racist assumptions that are made about him without perpetuating racist stereotyping.

Humor is a healthy coping mechanism. Releasing rage is as well. Imagine fathers and mothers enraged when a predator has hurt their child. We empathize with their pain and excuse, even expect, emotions, which may include rage and thoughts of revenge. But, everyday, when people of color are abused by predatory and exploitative hegemonic whiteness, we call that rage pathological and unnecessary. We call that rage a product of an inferior violent culture, or culture of poverty. We praise the people of color that remain silent or collude with the system. Feeling enraged about being treated as a lesser human is not pathological. Rage is not sickness. It is “a potentially healthy, potentially healing response to oppression and exploitation.”³⁶

How does the treatment of Asian Americans in the United States relate in a global context of racial oppression? While many of us in the United States, unquestioningly, collude with white supremacy. Even those who are critical of racist relations, we fail to question the continual colonial actions of the United States worldwide. There are women and children working in factories who look like us. Our

families were selected or were able to immigrate here for the purposes of supporting the U.S. economy or because of U.S. involvement with wars in Asia. We conform and work to distance ourselves from those other Asians who have been constructed as different from us. Yet, we are oft still treated as just as foreign. Our lack of resistance, in many ways, aids in the further exploitation of Asians abroad and all peoples that are being affected by U.S. colonial projects.

I want all Asian Americans to feel comfortable having a voice, whatever that voice may be. It does not have to come in the form of a bottle breaking, shit talking, ass kicker. I urge for stronger and more numerous counter narratives from Asian Americans. These counter narratives can take different forms. Irwin encourages:

We as Asian Americans deserve and want it all. All of it. All of what it means to be American including the dignity that every, that many Americans are sort of given the right to at birth. You know I was born in the United States. I feel like that was not one of my rights—to live with dignity. Even from the second I was born, it wasn't worth their time to really analyze what to call me. The system, for instance, I was labeled white on my birth certificate. I think that was on my driver's license, up until, ten years ago. What are we, just an appendage to the white race? I'm not complaining about that in and of itself. I'm just saying that this idea that we deserve to be treated as equals, that should be an assumed, as they say, self evident, natural right. That's something that we haven't had, that's something that we don't assume for ourselves. I think that when we take that step ourselves, that's going to be a major step for our own equality in America.

The way systemic racism is embedded into the structure, whites and people of color will not simply give up hegemonic racist ideology. Racial progress in the United States has been the direct product of counter narratives, resistance, and collective movements. Be brave. Be assured that you have a voice and it deserves to be heard.

NOTES

- ¹ Rosalind S. Chou and Joe R. Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority: Asian Americans Facing Racism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethic Experience*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
- ² Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*; Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparation* (New York, NY: Routledge 2001); Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folks* (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).
- ³ Tim Wise, *Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.
- ⁴ US Census Bureau, 2000.
- ⁵ Kim, *Bitter Fruit*; Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*; Tuan, *Forever Foreigners*; Frank Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).
- ⁶ Chou and Feagin, *Myth of the Model Minority*.
- ⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1984).
- ⁸ David Aberle. *The Peyote Religion among the Navaho* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966).
- ⁹ Derrick Bell, "Racial Realism" in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, K. Thomas (New York, The New Press, 1995), 302.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005).
- ¹² Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).
- ¹³ Boyce Watkins. "Would Martin Luther King Support Obama?" *The Grio*. January, 18, 2010, <http://www.thegrio.com/2010/01/would-martin-luther-king-support-presidentobama.php>.
- ¹⁴ Bush, Rod. *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1999).
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 163.
- ¹⁶ Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Lisa M. Krieger, "New UC Admissions Policy Gives White Students a Better Chance, Angers Asian-American Community," *Mercury News*, March 27, 2009, http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_12014954?IADID=Searchwww.mercurynews.com-www.mercurynews.com.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*

²¹ Feagin, *Racist America*

²² Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ronald Takaki. *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Back Bay, 1998).

²⁵ James Loewen. *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Longrove, IL: Waveland Press, 1988).

²⁶ Neela Banerjee. "Back in the Day..." *Asian Week Magazine*. April 27, 2001, http://asianweek.com/2001_04_27/feature_richardaoki.html.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Feagin, Joe R. and Clairece Booher Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Publishers, 2008).

³² Ibid.

³³ See Chou and Feagin, *The Myth of the Model Minority*.

³⁴ bell hooks, *killing rage: Ending Racism* (New York, NY: Holt Publishing, 1995).

³⁵ Leslie Houts Picca and Joe R. Feagin, *Two-Faced Racism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

³⁶ bell hooks, *killing rage*.

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